This paper examines Kassia’s use of patristic sources and earlier hymnography in some of her authentic poetic works. Her use of the sources is scrutinized in relation to three main themes developed in her poetry: a) the imperial theme, b) the anti-iconoclastic polemic, and c) the ascetic ideal of life according to nature.

**Key words:** Kassia, hymnography, patristic sources.

The personality of the Byzantine poetess Kassia (b. between 800 and 810 — d. between 843 and 867) and her liturgical poetry have been the subject of research of many scholars since the end of the nineteenth century.¹ All of them rightly noted and underlined that biblical citations and allusions abound in Kassia’s hymnography. However, her use of patristic sources and earlier hymnographical works has been less extensively studied.

graphical works has not received much scholarly attention.2 The absence of such
an inquiry is characteristic of the scholarship on Byzantine liturgical poetry in
general, although this body of texts is commonly considered “a compendium of
Eastern patristic theology”3 and one of the primary sources for the study of By-
zantine piety.4 The aim of this article is to shed some light on this topic. Kassia’s
handling of the patristic and hymnographical material is of vital importance for
the understanding of the ideas articulated in her hymns and also for the proper
evaluation of her hymnographical oeuvre within the historical context in which
she wrote. The following analysis will address both the content of Kassia’s poems
and the rhetorical devices she employed. Due to the limited space at my disposal,
the article will consider only several of her genuine works, the authenticity of
which is beyond dispute.5 Kassia’s use of the sources will be scrutinized in rela-
tion to three main themes developed in her poetry: a) the imperial theme, b) the
anti-iconoclastic polemic, with a stress on two motifs — the paramount impor-
tance of the Incarnation and the equation of the iconoclasts with Jews, and finally
c) the ascetic ideal of life according to nature.

a) The imperial theme

In the first sticheron on the Nativity of Christ—When Augustus reigned—Kassia develops the imperial theme, drawing upon the works of several theologians from late antiquity, particularly upon Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 340). Correlating the notions of Roman and Christian universalism, these theologians argued that the Roman Empire had a place within the larger framework of the divinely conceived unfolding of human history. In order to facilitate the understanding of the analysis that follows, I cite the sticheron almost in its entirety:

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2 On occasion, scholars make general remarks on Kassia’s use of patristic sources. For instance, Karavites draws attention to Kassia’s use of Gregory of Nazianzus’ works in her hymnography without giving specific references. Cf. P. Karavites, Gregory Nazianzinos and Byzantine Hymnography, The Journal of Hellenic Studies 113 (1993) 97. He was most likely referring to Kassia’s second sticheron in honor of St. Eustratios and his companions (December 13). The idea contained in its first lines, 'Ὑπὲρ τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων παράδειγμα / τὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων σωφράν προέκρινεν οἱ ἀγιοι μάρτυρες (Tripolitis, Kassia, 16–17), is undoubtedly borrowed from Gregory’s Homily 23: Ταῦτα ὡς ἐν βραχέσι δογματικῶς, ἄλλος ὡς ἄντιλογικῶς ἀληθευτικῶς, ἄλλος οὖν ἀριστοτελικῶς (“I expounded this concisely, and without the intention to argue, in order to develop the doctrine, following the fishermen (from Galilee), and not Aristotle”’. Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 20–23, ed. J. Mossay., (SC 270), Paris 1980, 304. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Greek citations are of my own.


4 Actually, only the kontakia of Romanos the Melode have been studied in relation to their patristic sources. Cf. R. Maisano, Romanos’s Use of Greek Patristic Sources, DOP 62 (2008) 261–273, with the literature.

5 Cf. catalogue of Rochow, Studien zu der Person, 32–72. An exception to this are the heirmoi of her Tetradion for Holy Saturday, whose authenticity has been questioned by some scholars. Cf. G. Schirò, La seconda leggenda di Cassia, Διπλωματ 1 (1979) 300–315 and Th. Detorakis, Κοσμάς ὁ Μελωδός. Βίος καὶ έργα, (Ἀνάλεκτα Βιλατάδων 28), Θεσσαλονίκη 1979, 169–177, who ascribe them to Kosmas the Melode (d. ca. 752).
When Augustus reigned alone upon the earth,
many Kingdoms of men came to an end,
and when You assumed the human nature from the Pure One,
the many gods of idolatry were destroyed.

5 The cities came
under one mundane Kingdom
and the nations came to believe
in one divine dominion.
The people were registered by the decree of Caesar;
10 we, the faithful, have been inscribed in the name of Your divinity,
when You, our God, assumed the human nature. 6

Christian writers had begun very early to attach peculiar importance to the
establishment of Octavian Augustus’s sole rule in the areas across the entire Medi-
terranean. They drew a parallel between this event and the emergence of Chris-
tianity, underlining the role played by the emperor Augustus in the Economy of
Salvation. In their view, the establishment of relative peace in the Roman Empire
(Pax Augusta) and the first census had prepared the Empire as a cradle where, dur-
ing Augustus’ reign, Christ would be born.7 A fragment from the Apology of
Melito of Sardis (d. 180) addressed to the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180),
preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea stresses the concurrence of Augustus’ reign
and the rise of “our way of thought,” i.e. Christianity:

Our way of thought first sprang up in a foreign land, but it flowered among your
own peoples in the glorious reign of your ancestor Augustus, and became to your
empire especially a portent of good, for from then on, the power of Rome grew great
and splendid.8

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6 Tripolitis, Kassia, 18–19. There are several editions of Kassia’s hymnographical works, al-
though none of them critical. In this article the edition of A. Tripolitis (see the note 1) with the parallel
English translation will be used. Some changes are occasionally made in her translation.
8 ἢ γάρ καθ’ ἑαυτός ἠμίς φιλοσοφία πρότερον μὲν ἐν βαρβάροις ἤχυμασεν, ἐπανάβαλα τῇ τών ἁπλῶν ἐξούσιαν κατὰ τὴν Ἀγαθότατον τοῦ σου προγόνου μεγάλην ἁρχήν, ἐγεννήσας τῇ σῇ βασιλείᾳ αἰσθόν ἁγαθόν. Ἕκτοτε γάρ εἰς μέγα καὶ λαμπρόν τὸ Ρωμαίων πολέμων κράτος, Ἐυσεβίῳ
de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique, IV, XXVI, 7–8, ed. G. Bardy, (SC 31), Paris 1952, 210. For the
Melito further contends that the most convincing proof that Christianity flourished for the good of the Empire is the fact that “from the reign of Augustus the Empire has suffered no damage; quite the opposite, everything has gone splendidly and gloriously, in accordance with the prayers of all.”

Hippolytus of Rome (d. 236) also emphasized the flourishing of the Roman Empire in the wake of Christ’s birth: “When in the forty second year of Caesar Augustus’ reign the Lord was born, from that time the kingdom of Romans flourished.”

Origen (d. 254), on the other hand, underlines the practical side of the Pax Romana and the establishment of one kingdom by Augustus. He sees divine providence in this, arguing that, in this way, God prepared various nations for His teaching, and thus facilitated the future apostolic mission among the peoples of the earth. Otherwise, it would have been more difficult for the apostles to accomplish the task with which Christ entrusted them, since the existence of multiple kingdoms would have caused constant warfare:

The existence of many kingdoms would have been a hindrance to the spread of the doctrine of Jesus throughout the entire world; not only for the reasons mentioned, but also on account of the necessity of men everywhere engaging in war and fighting on behalf of their native country, which was the case before the times of Augustus and in periods still more remote.

Building upon this tradition, Eusebius developed these ideas further, and it seems that his elaboration of the theme was particularly relevant for Kassia’s sticheron. Describing the political situation in the world before Augustus’ establishment of his sole rule, Eusebius underlines inter alia that in the preceding era each area and each nation had its own government. This situation Eusebius des-

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ignates as *polyarchy* (πολυαρχίας), which was the cause of incessant conflicts among various peoples, which “in city and country and everyplace, just if possessed by some truly demonic madness, kept murdering each other and spent their time in wars and battles.” But this situation ceased when Augustus, exactly before the birth of Christ, established monarchy: “Immediately all the multitude of rulers among the Romans began to be abolished, when Augustus became sole ruler at the time of our Saviour’s appearance.” According to Eusebius, Augustus’ monarchy and Christ’s birth, i.e. the emergence of Christianity, had the same importance for humankind, because these two events brought peace to the divided world:

But two great powers — the Roman Empire, which became a monarchy at that time, and the teaching of Christ — proceeding as if from a single starting point, at once tamed and reconciled all to friendship. Thus each blossomed at the same time and place as the other. For while the power of Our Savior destroyed the *polyarchy* (πολυαρχίας) and polytheism (πολυθείας) of the demons and heralded the one kingdom of God to Greeks and barbarians and all men to the farthest extent of the earth, the Roman Empire, now that the causes of the manifold governments (τις πολυαρχίας) had been abolished, subdued the visible governments, in order to merge the entire race into one unity and concord.17

The temporal congruence of the establishment of Roman monarchy and the foundation of Christianity represents a miracle for Eusebius, i.e. these two events should be considered in the light of the economy of salvation:

This, if nothing else, must be a great miracle to those who direct their attention to the truth and do not wish to belittle these blessings. For at one and the same time that the error of the demons was refuted, the eternal enmity and warfare of the nations was resolved. Moreover, as One God and one knowledge of this God was heralded to all, one empire waxed strong among men.18

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14 …πολλῆς γὰρ οὖσης πρὸ τοῦτο πολυαρχίας… Die Demonstration Evangelica, VII, 2, 22, p. 332.


17 ἄλλα γὰρ ἀθρώς ἀπαντα ὅπερ ἡπό νύσης μιᾶς δύο μεγάλαι προελθοῦσα δυνάμεις ἡμέρασθαν τε καὶ εἰς φιλίαν συνήγαγον, ἢ τε Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ μοναρχος ἢ ἕκεινον φανθεῖσα καὶ ἢ τοῦ Χριστοῦ διδασκαλία, ὅμοι καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ συνακαλμάσασαι ἄλληλαις. Ἡ μὲν γε τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν δύναμις τὰς τῶν δαιμόνων πολυαρχίας τε καὶ πολυθείας καθελε, μίαν βασιλείαν θεοῦ πάσιν ἄνθρώπως Ἑλλησι τε καὶ βαρβάροις καὶ τοῖς μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων τῆς γῆς κυρίτουσα. Ἡ δὲ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ, ὡς ἄν προκαθηρημένων τῶν τῆς πολυαρχίας αἰτίων, τὰς ὀρμομένς ἐξειροῦτο, εἰς μίαν ἐνώσιν καὶ συμφωνίαν τὸ πάν γένος συνάπτειν σπεύδοισα.

Tricennatsrede an Constantin, XVI, 5–6, pp. 249–250. For the English translation see above, note 15.

18 Tricennatsrede an Constantin, XVI, 7, p. 250. For the English translation see above, note 15.
Several decades later, Gregory of Nazianzus also draws a parallel between the development of Rome and the emergence of Christianity: “he [Constantius II] clearly knew the fact [...] that the development of Rome coincided with that of Christendom and that the Empire began simultaneously with the arrival of Christ (upon earth), because never before that time could rule be stabilized in the hands of only one man.”

These views found their official expression in Justinian’s famous Sixth Novella, in which the ideal of “symphony” or the harmonious coexistence of Church and State is formulated:

There are two greatest gifts which God, in His love for man, has granted from on high: the priesthood and the imperial dignity. The first serves divine things, the second directs and administers human affairs; both, however, proceed from the same origin and adorn the life of mankind. … if the priesthood is in every way free from blame and possesses access to God, and if the emperors administer equitably and judiciously the state entrusted to their care, general harmony (συμφωνία) will result, and whatever is beneficial will be bestowed upon the human race.

In the first part of her sticheron on the Nativity of Christ, Kassia thus summarizes the early Byzantine tradition which highlighted temporal parallelism between the establishment of the Roman Empire and the emergence of Christianity, recognizing the work of divine providence in these events. Her insistence on this parallelism should undoubtedly be seen in the context of the Byzantine idea of “symphony” between Church and State as well. This ideal was seriously undermined during the iconoclastic disputes. The Emperors, overstepping the boundaries of temporal power defined by this theory, tried to enforce the prohibition of the veneration of icons, thus opposing the position of the Church hierarchy. Accordingly, following the established tradition, in this sticheron Kassia differentiates between these two authorities, relating the emergence of the unified Roman Empire to the political benefits it brought to humankind, and the Incarnation of Christ to the religious ones.

b) The anti-iconoclastic polemic

Besides, it has already been noted that, by emphasizing the notion that with Christ’s birth, “the many gods of idolatry have been destroyed” (line 4), the poetess implicitly advances an argument against the iconoclasts. As is well known, the iconoclasts rejected the veneration of icons as a form of idolatry. Many

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21 The interest in this theme during the ninth century is also attested in the Chronicle of George the Monk. Georgii monachi Chronicon, ed. C. de Boor, vol. I, Lipsiae 1904, 294–295.
sources attest to this view, and I will mention only one of them, namely, the testimony of Theodore of Stoudios (d. 826) with whom Kassia obviously had close spiritual relations. Theodore states the following: “[Iconoclasts] blasphemously branded the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ as an idol of deceit (εἰδωλον πλάνης).” Against this accusation, Theodore, like other iconophile theologians, invokes the familiar argument based on the Incarnation of Christ, a momentous event that allowed the figure of the divine Logos to be depicted: “Just as [Christ is] κατὰ τὸν πατέρα uncircumscribable, he is κατὰ τὴν μητέρα circumscribed in a panel, and his circumscription, that is, the image, ought to be venerated.” He also adds that Christ, through His Incarnation, “destroyed every idolatrous representation” (καταργήσας τῶν εἰδώλων θαυμάτων, both in terms of content and phrasing, indicates a direct borrowing from Theodore.

The explicit association between the Incarnation and the veneration of icons is found in the theotokion of the fifth Ode of her Canon for the Dead as well. Kassia, however, did not compose this theotokion herself. She borrowed it, with some minor modifications, from the fifth Ode of the Canon for the archangels Michael and Gabriel (November 21st), whose author is the hymnographer Clement (before 765 — after 824). Clement’s authorship of this theotokion is indisputable.

23 For the theoretical basis of equating icons with idols see Ch. Barber, Figure and Likeness. On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm, Princeton — Oxford 2002, esp. the chapter: Icon and Idol, 39–59, with literature.
25 Theodori Praepositi Studitarum Antirrheticus II adversus Iconomachos, PG 99, 352C. Cf. also the following phrase from an influential eighth-century anti-iconoclastic pamphlet, falsely ascribed to John of Damascus: “when Christ came down (in His incarnation) … He set us free from the madness of idols” (ο Χριστὸς κατελθὼν … τῆς τῶν εἰδώλων μανίας ἠμᾶς ἐξελέλατο). Adversus Constantinum Cabalimum, 18, PG 95, 336B. Gero dates this pamphlet to sometime between the death of Constantine V (775) and 787, and suggests that it was written by John of Jerusalem. S. Gero, Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources, (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 346, Subsidia 41), Louvain 1973, 63 and 66.
26 See e.g. the statement of the Patriarch Nikephoros (d. 828) that Christ with His Incarnation redeemed the humankind from “the deceit of idols” (τῆς εἰδωλικῆς πλάνης) and from “the madness of idols” (τῆς τῶν εἰδώλων μανίας). Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitanī Apologeticus pro sacrific imaginibus, PG 100, 553C. Cf. also the following phrase from an influential eighth-century anti-iconoclastic pamphlet, falsely ascribed to John of Damascus: “when Christ came down (in His incarnation) … He set us free from the madness of idols” (ο Χριστός κατελθὼν … τῆς τῶν εἰδώλων μανίας ἠμᾶς ἐξελέλατο). Adversus Constantinum Cabalimum, 18, PG 95, 336B. Gero dates this pamphlet to sometime between the death of Constantine V (775) and 787, and suggests that it was written by John of Jerusalem. S. Gero, Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources, (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 346, Subsidia 41), Louvain 1973, 63 and 66.

29 The attribution of this theotokion to Kassia has been proposed in the already quoted article by Tsironis, The Body and the Senses, 150.
given the fact the first letters of all the *theotokia* form an acrostic giving his name in the genitive case — K(λ)ήμεντος.31

The parallelism between the “historical” event of the census by order of Emperor Augustus32 and the “inscription of the faithful in the name of Divinity” (lines 9–10) is also very old and goes back to the early Christian period. We find the first traces of this idea in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215): “through Christ a believer has like an inscription the name of God.”33 The aforementioned Hippolytus of Rome uses a wordplay to draw a parallel between the census of the people during Augustus’ reign, after which they were named Romans, and the people’s belief in Christ, the celestial King, due to which they were named Christians:

> And for this reason the first census (ἀπογραφή) took place in the time of Augustus, at the time when the Lord was born in Bethlehem, so that the people of this world could be registered (ἀπογραφόμενοι) by the terrestrial king so they could call themselves (κληθῶσιν) Romans, and that those who believe in the celestial King can be named (ονομασθῶσι) Christians.34

The same idea is also articulated in some hymnographical works. For example, we find it in the *sticheron* after the Glory at the Praises (at the Orthros), which is attributed to the Patriarch of Constantinople Germanos (d. ca. 740):

> Ὅτε καιρὸς τῆς ἐπί γῆς παρουσίας σου πρώτη ἀπογραφή, τῇ οἰκουμένῃ ἐγένετο, τότε ἐμελλές τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπογράφεσθαι τὰ ὄνόματα τῶν πιστευόντων τῷ τόκῳ σου.

When, in the time of Your earthly sojourn, the first census was conducted in the world, then You set out to register the names of the people who believe in Your birth.

Because of the use of the composite words ἀπεγράφησαν and ἐπεγράφημεν derived from the verb γράφω, which means both to write and to depict, N. Tsironis believes that lines 9–10 of Kassia’s *sticheron* should be also seen in the light of her anti-iconoclastic struggle:

> the use of the words ἀπεγράφησαν and ἐπεγράφημεν brings to mind the vocabulary used in numerous homilies and hymns of the period which refer to the act of “writing” in its various literal and figurative senses, insinuating nonetheless the circumscribability of Christ and hence referring to the cult of images.35

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31 The absence of the letter λ indicates that this Canon initially included the second Ode which was later removed.
33 ὁ πιστὸς ἐπιγραφὴν μὲν ἔχει διὰ Χριστοῦ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Clementis Alexandrini Excerpta ex scriptis Theodoti, PG 9, 697B.
34 Hippolyte, Commentaire sur Daniel, IV, IX, 3, p. 278.
35 Tsironis, The Body and the Senses, 146.
It is well known that the notion of circumscription played a significant role in the later stages of the dispute over images, particularly in the writings of Theodore of Studios and the Patriarch Nikephoros.36 Both of these writers refuted the iconoclastic argument that Christ could not be depicted in art because, as God, He could not be circumscribed.37

Kassia’s extended use of hymnographical and patristic sources can also be found in her eight other stichera on Christmas,38 which are not chanted in the liturgy today. The first of them builds upon a paradox that occurred at the birth of Christ: on one hand, He was lying in a manger as the new-born (lines 4–5), on the other, angels from above praised His great concession towards mankind (lines 6–7). A similar antithesis occurs in the refrain at the end of each stanza of the first Christmas hymn of Romanos the Melode: παντιδίον νέον, ὁ πρὸ σιών Θεός.39 This sticheron, as well as the subsequent three, concludes with the following refrain:

> ὁ διὰ σπλάγχνα οἰκτιμωῦν
> σάρκα περιβαλλόμενον
> καὶ τὸ πρόσλημα θεόσας
> τῶν βροτῶν, Κύριε, δόξα σοι.
> you who through the deepest compassion
> put on a body
> and deified the acquisition of the mortals
> Glory to You, Lord.

The main message of this refrain is that Christ deified human nature through His Incarnation. The same idea, complete with the phrase καὶ θεόσας τὸ πρόσλημα is encountered in the first sticheron of Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638) chanted at the Great Hours of the Christmas Office.40 Since this phrase occurs in both excerpts, though in a different word order, there can be no doubt that Kassia borrowed it from Sophronius. A comparable reference to the deification of the human nature in the person of Christ is also encountered in the first systematic exposition of the dogmatic precepts of Orthodox Christianity of John of Damascus (d. 749). In his An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith John uses similar phrasing, stating that Christ “deified the acquisition” (θεοῦντι τὸ πρόσλημα).41

The first five Christmas stichera refer to the offerings (gifts), which are presented to the newborn Christ by His creation. The first sticheron speaks about the

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37 See, especially, Theodori Praepositi Studitarum Antirrheticus III adversus Iconomachos, PG 99, 392B–393D and Nikephori Constantinopolitani Antirrheticus primus adversus Constantinum Cronynum, PG 100, 236C-D, 237A-B, 244B-D; ibid., Antirrheticus secundus, PG 100, 356A–357A; ibid., Antirrheticus tertius, PG 100, 425C.

38 Tripolitis, Kassia, 19–27.


40 Sophronii Hierosolymitani Troparium horarum (PG 87, 4005A).

angels who praised His great concession towards mankind. In the second, the accent is placed on the Theotokos, who gave flesh to Christ and nourished Him with milk. The main theme of the third sticheron is the adoration of the Magi, who having been led by a star, offered Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. The fourth sticheron summarizes the preceding three. While the first three stichera enumerate separately the parts of the creation which admired Christ’s birth and offered gifts to Him—angels in the first, the Theotokos in the second and the Magi in the third, in the fourth sticheron all of creation is offering “a hymn of thanksgiving.” These four stichera, as well as the fifth, in which, in addition to the angels and Magi, the poetess also mentions the shepherds who worshipped Christ, have many common elements with the fourth Christmas sticheron currently chanted at Lord I Have Cried and ascribed to Anatolius:

Tί σοι προσένεγκωμεν Χριστέ, ὃτι ἀφθής ἐπὶ γῆς ὡς ἀνθρωπος δι’ ἡμᾶς; What shall we offer to You, Christ, now that you have appeared as a man on earth for our sake

ἔκαστον γὰρ τῶν ὑπὸ σοῦ γενομένων κτισμάτων, tihn εὐχαριστίαν σοι προσάγει, brings a thank-offering to You,

οἱ Ἀγγέλοι τὸν ὠμον, the angels the hymn,
oἱ οὐφανοὶ τὸν Άστέρα, the heaven the star,
oἱ Μάγοι τὰ δώρα, the Magi the gifts,
oἱ Ποιμένες τὸ θεόμα, the shepherds the admiration,

η γῆ τὸ σπήλαιον, the earth the cave,

ἡ θέρμος την φάτνην, the desert the manger,

ημεῖς δὲ Μητέρα Παρθένον, and we the Virgin Mother,

ὁ πρὸ αἰῶνων Θεὸς ἔλησον ἡμᾶς. O God before ages have mercy on us.

It would seem that Kassia drew upon this sticheron by Anatolius.

Kassia’s three stichera on the Forefeast of the Theophany (sung at Vespers) are similar to her first four stichera on the Birth of Christ in terms of structure and metrics. Here, historical, theological, and dramatic elements are also emphasized. This is especially true of the first sticheron, which almost has the same metrics and structure as the first four stichera on the Nativity of Christ. This sticheron represents Kassia’s first-person address to Christ, in which she refers to His baptism in the same manner in which she praises His birth, mentioning, instead of Bethlehem, the Theotokos, the swaddling clothes, and His lying in a manger, the waters of the Jordan, to which Christ and the Forerunner are coming. In both instances Kassia mentions the presence of angels admiring the event.

42 These four stichera have the same beginning, the same refrain and the same metrics. An exception to this is the second sticheron, which has twelve verses.

43 It is more probable that these stichera belong to the feast day of John the Baptist on January 7. A transcription of the hymns (from the Cod. Paris 13) is found in S. Eustratiadis, Kas(σ)ιανὴ ἡ Μελέθως, ‘Εκκλησιαστικός Φάρος 31 (1932) 106–110. See Tripolitis, Kassia, 30–33.

44 A reference to angels occurs in the second Romanos’s hymn for the feast of the Theophany as well: τῶν ἀγγέλων αἱ τάξεις ἔξεπλήσσοντο. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, L’Épiphanie (II), Προοίμιον, line 5, p. 270.
Through this reference to the angels and their presence not only at the moment of Christ’s birth, but also during His baptism, the poetess highlights the cosmic dimension of these events. M. Cunningham has pointed out that this increasing interest in angels and in “the encounter between the earthly and heavenly spheres of existence” is a feature commonly found in works of liturgical writers and hymnographers from the sixth century onwards, including Romanos the Melode too.45

The second and the third sticheron constitute a unified whole in which dramatic elements are emphatically underscored. Here, the poetess elaborates upon the dialogue between Christ and John the Forunner, as it is described in the Gospel of Matthew (Matth. 3:13–15), simultaneously dramatizing and theologically amplifying it. Christ’s words are preceded by an introduction spoken by the narrator, i.e. Kassia, who introduces the person of Christ in the drama. Christ asks John to baptize Him in the waters of the Jordan, where He wants to regenerate human nature that is “enslaved by the serpent’s cunning” (lines 9–10).

In the third sticheron, in which John responds to Christ, his hesitation to perform the baptism is dramatized. John expresses his hesitation through rhetorical questions featuring antitheses and parallels. He likens Christ to fire and himself to grass (line 1); then, he asks how the waters of the river could receive Him who is the great sea of divinity and the inexhaustible source of life (lines 3–5), and in the end, how he could baptize Him who is not polluted and who takes away the sins of mankind (lines 6–7). In the conclusion to his address to Christ, John stresses that He is in need of baptism himself (lines 10–11). Towards the end of the sticheron Kassia draws a parallel between Christ and John, emphasizing that the former was born from a chaste woman (ἐκ τῆς ἁγνῆς), and the latter from the barren one (ἐκ τῆς στειρῶς).46 A similar parallelism is present in Romanos’s hymn on the Birth of St. John the Baptist (found among his dubious kontakia):47

τὸν Ἰωάννην στείρα ἐγέννησεν
tὸν Ἰησοῦν δὲ […] παρθένος ἐτεκεν ἁγνῆ.

John was born from the barren woman
Jesus […] was born from the chaste Virgin.48

Theodore of Stoudios, in his dramatized homily on the same feast, puts into John’s mouth the following phrase: “I am a child of a barren stock, because a child will be born from a virgin.”49

46 Cf. Luke 1:7, where it is referred that Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, was barren — ἡ Ἐλίσαβετ ἤν στείρα.
48 On the Birth of St. John the Baptist, α’, 5–8, p. 10. A similar parallelism occurs also in the others lines of the same kontakion, See, e.g., γ’, 1–2, p. 14.
49 ἡ στειροφυής γόνος τυγχάνω, ὃτι παρθένικος ὃ τόκος προελέυσεται. Theodori Studitae In nativitatem sancti prophetiae Praecursoris Baptistae, PG 99, 757B.
The dramatic effect would have been greatly augmented, particularly in the second and the third sticheron, by the antiphonal performance of these poetic works by two choirs. The alternating chant would bring the choirs in a dialogue; they would assume the voices of the protagonists, with one choir performing the role of Jesus, voiced in the second sticheron, and the other performing the role of John from the third sticheron. The faithful assembled in the church, who were not part of the alternating choirs, would also participate in the dramatization of the Gospel narrative through the repetition (in the form of a refrain) of the final words of each sticheron: Κύριε, δόξα σοι.

This dramatization, which is reminiscent of the Byzantine liturgical drama, should be seen against the background of the earlier patristic homiletic works, in which έθοποιοί or characterization was employed as a rhetorical tool. This represents a vivid elaboration of a biblical passage, where the preacher quotes conversations from the Gospels and then builds on these texts, “sometimes inventing monologues or dialogues which may appear either as direct speech or framed in his own commentary: for example, ‘Christ, John the Baptist, or Mary might have said…’ (and the invented speech follows).”

Byzantine homilists did not employ only dramatic dialogues, i.e. real or invented conversations between the protagonists, but also monologues, the characters’ internal soliloquies, as well as “extra-textual” dialogues between the preacher and the congregation. Such rhetorical devices are very common in both Greek and Syriac homiletics. They were commonly employed by Romanos the Melode as well. Under the influence of the homiletic tradition and Romanos’s kontakia, rhetorical characterization was also adopted by the authors of kanons, but to a lesser degree. One of the best examples is the kanon of the feast of the

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51 According to J. Kecskeméti, Doctrine et drame dans la predication grecque, Euphrosyne 21 (1993) 31, Amphilochius of Iconium (d. ca. 400), and Severian of Gabala (early fifth century), were the first Greek preachers who employed dramatic dialogue in their homilies.


54 For this cf. Cunningham, Dramatic device, 101–113.


56 Cf. M. Cunningham, The Reception of Romanos, 251–260, with the literature.
Annunciation of the Theotokos (25 March), a work of Kassia’s contemporary, Theophanes Graptos (d. 845). Based on the *pericope* from the Gospel of Luke (1:26–38), the *kanon*, except for the first stanza of the first Ode and the whole ninth Ode, is composed in the form of a dialogue between the two protagonists of the biblical event, the angel and the Theotokos.57

M. Cunningham, analyzing the function of dialogue in Byzantine homiletics, singles out two functions: one rhetorical, because “both intra- and extra-textual dialogue reinforce the authority of the preacher and render his message more effective,” and the other theological or exegetical.58 In the case of hymnography, the function of the dialogue is mainly theological and exegetical, as hymnographers use it to elaborate upon the episodes from Christ’s life in which He manifested both His divine and human natures. Thus when in the aforementioned *stichera* on the Theophany, Christ addresses John and invites him to baptize Him, he sets forth a dogmatic teaching about the regeneration of “entire mankind,” which was the ultimate goal of His Incarnation. On the other hand, John’s response formulates a Christological message by underlining the divine nature of Christ as well as the fact that He is the source of life; that He is sinless; that He cleanses the sin of mankind, and, finally, that He was born by a virgin.

Kassia’s three *stichera* on the Presentation of Christ in the Temple59 are very similar to her stichera on Christmas and the Theophany in terms of structure and metrics. They are also dominated by historical, theological, and dramatic elements. Besides, their similarity with Romanos’s *kontakion* on the same feast should not be ignored either.60 The similarity concerning the vocabulary and the ideas expressed is such that Kassia’s dependence on Romanos is beyond doubt.

Addressing Christ, in the first *sticheron* Kassia describes the moment when the Theotokos handed her Child over into the hands of Symeon the Elder.61 The sticheron is pervaded by the reference to a verse from the Book of Isaiah: “And there was sent to me one of the seraphs, and he had in his hand a coal, which he had taken off the altar with tongs” (Isa. 6:6),62 which the poetess interprets allegorically,63 comparing the Christ-child with the coal that did not burn (line 5).64

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58 Cunningham, Dramatic device, 104.
59 Tripolitis, Kassia, 38–41.
60 For the text of the *kontakion* see Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, 172–196.
61 In the Luke’s Gospel the word πρεσβυτής — old man does not exist, but it occurs several times in Romanos’s *kontakion*. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, Προοίμιον II, 2; α’, 7, p. 176; ιδ’, 2, p. 192.
62 Is. 6:6: καὶ ἀπεστάλη πρὸς μὲ ἐν τῶν σεραφίμ καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ εἶχεν ἄνθρακα ὃν τῇ λαβίδι ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου.
63 For allegory as one of the two principal exegetical methods—typology being the other—employed in Byzantine hymnography, see Ch. Hannick, The Theotokos in Byzantine Hymnography: Typology and Allegory, ed. M. Vassilaki, Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium, Aldershot 2005, 69–76, esp. 76.
64 In Romanos’s *kontakion* Christ is compared with a lamp which illuminates, but does not burn: πᾶς γὰρ ὁ βαστάζων λύχνον ἐν ἀνθρώποις φωτίζεται, οὐ φλέγεται. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, η’, 8, p. 184.
and His Mother’s hands with the tongs (line 2). Like Kassia’s first four stichera on the Nativity and her first Theophany sticheron, this poem ends with a quatrain (lines 8–12), in which Symeon’s hymn from the New Testament (cf. Luke, 2:29–30) is paraphrased. Simultaneously, the hymn places an emphasis on Christ’s human nature:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{νῦν ἀπολύεις με τὸν σὸν} & \quad \text{now You release me, your servant,} \\
\text{δοῦλον, κατὰ τὸ ἰημένον} & \quad \text{from this world to eternal life,} \\
\text{τῆς προσκαίρου πρὸς αἰώνιον} & \quad \text{according to your word,} \\
\text{ζωήν} & \quad \text{for I have seen you in the flesh.}
\end{align*}
\]

At this juncture, it is important to note the similarity between the first four stichera on the Nativity of Christ, the first sticheron on the Theophany and the first sticheron on the Presentation in the Temple. All of them have the same incipit—Ως ὁ ἐμὰς Χριστός (or Σωτήρ), the same number of verses, and a similar ending in the form of a quatrain-refrain. The four Christmas stichera have the same refrain:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ὁ διὰ σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμῶν} & \quad \text{[You] who through the deepest compassion} \\
\text{σάρκα περιβαλλόμενος} & \quad \text{put on a body} \\
\text{καὶ τὸ πρόσλημα θεόσας} & \quad \text{and deified the mortal being;} \\
\text{τὸν βροτῶν, Κύριε, δόξα σοι.} & \quad \text{glory to You, Lord.}
\end{align*}
\]

The refrain of the Theophany sticheron reads as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ὁ βαπτισθήναι δι᾿ ἡμᾶς} & \quad \text{[You] who accepted} \\
\text{σαρκὶ καταδεξάμενος} & \quad \text{to be baptized for our sake in the flesh} \\
\text{καὶ τὸς σπίλους ἀποσμῆξας} & \quad \text{and wiped clean (of sins)} \\
\text{τὸν βροτῶν, Κύριε, δόξα σοι.} & \quad \text{of the mortals; glory to you, Lord.}
\end{align*}
\]

Although these three quatrains differ in their content, given that each of them is adapted to a particular feast celebration, there is a common thread that runs through all of them. It is the emphasis on Christ’s human nature evident in the use of the word “flesh” (σάρξ). In the concluding quatrain of the Christmas stichera, what is underlined is that Christ, out of His deepest compassion, “put on a body” (σάρκα περιβαλλόμενος). Likewise, in the sticheron on the Theophany we read that He accepted to be baptized “in the flesh” (σαρκὶ καταδεξάμενος). Finally, in the quatrain from the Presentation sticheron, Symeon rejoices in the fact that he has seen Christ “in the flesh” (σαρκὶ γὰρ εἰδόν σε). The last phrase occurs in Romanos’s above-mentioned kontakion for the same feast, in which instead of the word σάρξ Romanos uses the word σῶμα: ἐν σώματί σε εἰδόν. Kassia’s choice of the word σάρξ should be seen in the context of her polemic

65 In Romanos’s kontakion Symeon says to the Christ child: Νῦν οὖν προσκαίρων χωρίσών με, κτίστα, and Christ answers him: Νῦν σε ἀπολύω τῶν προσκαίρων, ὁ φίλε μου, πρὸς χωρία αἰώνια. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, iε', 8 and iζ', 3, p. 194.

66 An exception to this is the second sticheron, which is twelve verses long.

67 The same refrain for a couple of stichera alludes that it was probably sung by all the congregation, like in the case of Romanos’s kontakia. Cf. J. Grosdidier de Matons, Liturgie et Hymnographie: Kontakion et Canon, DOP 34 (1980–1981) 41.

68 Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, iζ', 7, p. 194.
against the iconoclasts. The iconophile authors commonly stress the material aspect of Christ’s human nature by using this term. The same term figures prominently in the writing of those Church Fathers who engaged in a polemic with the proponents of docetism and Apollinarianism. Accordingly, I would argue that in stressing the unity of these three feasts commemorating events in which the reality of Christ’s human body (flesh) was revealed, Kassia implicitly advanced an anti-iconoclast argument. Highly indicative in this regard is the recurrence of the same incipit containing the word ὄραθης (from the verb ὄραω — to see). The Iconophiles repeatedly invoked the visibility of the Incarnate Christ in order to vindicate the legitimacy of pictorial representations of Christ. The fact that, contrary to their opponents, they stressed the primacy of sight over writing, should be seen in this light. Typical of the iconophile insistence on the faculty of vision is Patriarch Nikephoros’s claim that “sight is the most honored and necessary of the senses.”

It should be noted that other hymnographers of the iconoclastic period also invoke the Incarnation in the refrains of their stichera in order to associate it with the veneration of icons. For example, this connection is stressed in the refrain of the first three stichera on “Lord, I have cried” for the feast of the Presentation in the Temple, which are ascribed to Patriarch Germanos I. In the following refrain, the link between the Incarnation and the veneration of icons is established through the use of the verbs σαρκώω and προσκυνάω:

ο̣ σαρκωθεὶς δι’ ἡμᾶς, He who assumed flesh for our sake,
καὶ σώσας τὸν ἀνθρώπον— and saved the mankind;
Ἀὐτὸν προσκυνήσωμεν. let us venerate Him.72

These examples from the poetry of Germanos and Kassia demonstrate that rhetorical devices such as dialogues, repetitions, and refrains were instrumental in conveying doctrinal teachings to the congregation.

In Kassia’s second and third stichera on the Presentation dramatic elements are also stressed. Here, the protagonist is the Theotokos who carries Christ in her hands and gives Him to Symeon. In the second sticheron, which opens with an introduction spoken by the narrator (lines 1–4), the Theotokos is presented delivering the Christ Child to Symeon. She invites the aged priest to receive the One

69 For this sense of the word σάρξ see G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, Oxford 1961, 1225–1226.

70 Cf. for example the following statement of John of Damascus (d. 749): ἐν πίναξι χάρατε καὶ ἀνατίθει πρὸς θεωρίαν τὸν ὄραθηνα καταδεξάμενον. Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos III, Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres, I, 8 and III, 8, ed. B. Kotter, Berlin — New York 1975, 82.


72 Menaion for February 2.
“whom the teachings of the prophets proclaimed” (lines 4–6) and who as “the holy lawgiver fulfills the law” (line 7).

Finally, the third sticheron features a monologue of the Theotokos addressed to Christ, in which she expressed her marvel in a series of antitheses: she holds Him as an infant, He who holds everything together (lines 1–2); she brings Him to the temple, He who is beyond goodness (line 3); she delivers Him into the arms of the elder, He who sits in the bosom of the Father (lines 4–5). He endures purification, He who purifies the whole of corrupt nature (lines 6–7). As in the sticheron on the Nativity and the Theophany, Kassia in this sticheron underscores the greatness of Christ’s condescension (συγκατάβασις) (line 10). This term, which occurs several times in her authentic works, refers to God’s accommodation of and concession to the limitations of humanity, particularly evident in Christ’s Incarnation. The word is used in this sense in Byzantine homiletics and hymnography alike. For example, Basil the Great writes that the joining of God the Logos with human flesh and His condescension to human weakness is a testament to God’s utmost power. Romanos the Melode in the first prooimion of his kontakion for the feast of the Presentation sees God’s ineffable condescension in the fact that the One before whom the powers of Heaven tremble, is now embraced by the hands. The term συγκατάβασις, I should add, is closely associated with the word κένωσις, which has a similar meaning, and which Kassia uses twice in her authentic works — in the Tetraodion on Holy Saturday and in the sticheron on Holy Wednesday.

The content of Kassia’s Tetraodion on Holy Saturday reflects the theology of Christ’s Descent into Hell developed in late antiquity. This can also be seen in the context of her anti-iconoclastic struggle, if we keep in mind a statement from the aforementioned pamphlet *Adversus Constantium Cabalinum*, that “the lawless ones”, as its author calls the iconoclasts, “did not perceive that, after Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, the veneration of idols gradually started to be driven away from the Earth”. The main message of the Tetraodion is that Christ, following His death on the cross, descended into Hell, from where He released and

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73 Romanos’s kontakion of the same feast expresses a similar idea: “All the prophets preached your Son” (Πάντες οἱ προφήται τὸν υἱὸν σου ἐκήρυξαν). Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, θ’, 3, p. 184.

74 Romanos also names Christ the “guardian/keeper of the law” — φύλαξ τοῦ νόμου. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. II, ζ’, 9, p. 182.

75 Lampe, op. cit., 1268.

76 ἐπειδὴ μὲλλει τῇ ἁσθενείᾳ συνάπτεσθαι τῆς σαρκὸς ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος, καὶ ὁς πρόσκειται τὸ, ἄνανετο διὸτι μεγάλης ἀπόδειξις δυνάμεως ἔχει τὸ δυνηθῆναι Θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ φύσει γενέσθαι. Οὐ γὰρ τοσοῦτον ὑπάρχοντο καὶ γῆς σύστασις ἢ τὴν δύναμιν παρίστησι τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου, ὃσον ἢ περὶ τὴν ἐνανθρώπησιν οἰκονομία καὶ ἢ πρὸς τὰ ταπεινὸν καὶ ἁσθενὲς τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος συγκατάβασις, Basilii Magni Homilia in Psalmum XLIV, 5 (PG 29/2 400B).


79 καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν οἱ παράνομοι, ὅτι τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σταυρωθέντος καὶ ἀναστάντος, ἀπὸ τὸν εἰδωλικὴν προσκύνησις κατὰ μικρὸν ἤρετο ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀποδιώκεσθαι. PG 95, 336B-C.
raised those who had died. The Gospel texts that describe Christ’s death and resurrection, do not explicitly refer to His soul’s sojourn in Hell after His death on the Cross. However, this idea is present in other books of the New Testament, e.g., Act. 2:24–31 and 1 Ptri. 3:18–20; 4:6. Having as the starting point these New Testament’s accounts as well as the Old Testament’s prophecies (cf. Ps. 15:10; Ps. 138:8, etc.), Christian theologians developed this teaching further, drawing simultaneously upon the ancient Mediterranean traditions of the descent of deities and heroes into the underworld. Some apocryphal books exerted significant influence on the development of this teaching as well, including the Odes of Solomon, written at the end of the first or at the beginning of the second century. Aside from the Odes Christ’s sojourn in hell is also mentioned in the hymn On the Passover (Peri Pasch) of Melito of Sardis. In the course of the fourth century, this theme was incorporated in church poetry, as well as in the Creed and the liturgy. The belief in Christ’s descent into Hell received a doctrinal definition in the ninth canon of the Fifth Ecumenical Synod of 553. Soon afterwards, the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus was composed (after 555), containing the most detailed account of the event. Crystallized during the first six centuries, the theology of Christ’s descent permeates the hymnographical works written for the liturgical celebration of Holy Saturday. This is also true of Kassia’s Tetraodion as well, in which there are many conceits and allusions borrowed from the earlier sources.

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80 It is mentioned, however, that at the moment of Christ’s death the graves were opened and many bodies were raised (cf. Mt. 27:52–53), an occurrence that George of Nicomedia (d. after 880) associates with the salvation of the dead from the underworld: τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνέφεξε, καὶ νεκροὺς ἐκ τῶν καταστροφῶν ἀνείλκωσε (“Christ opened the graves and drew the dead out of the underworld”), Georgii Nicomediensis Oratio VIII. In sepulturam divini corporis Domini nostri Jesu Christi, sancta ac magna die Parasceve, PG 100, 1485B.

81 E.g. Attis, Dionysus, Heracles, Orpheus, Persephone, Odysseus, Aeneas, etc.


83 Mélión de Sardés, Sur la Pâque et fragments, (SC 123), ed. O. Perler, Paris 1966, lines 775–785 (pp. 120–122).


85 I. Karmiris, Η εἰς Ἀδων κάθοδος τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἐπόψεως ὅρθοδοξοῦ, Αθῆναι 1939, 33, 44 sq. Cf. for example the Creed of the fourth Synod of Sirmium (359), usually referred to as the Fourth Confession of Sirmium: …καὶ εἰς τὰ καταστροφὰ κυτελθόντα… Fidei formula synodi Sirmiensis, Athanasius Werke, vol. 2.1. ed. H. G. Opitz, Berlin 1940, 235–236.

86 Karmiris, op. cit., 34 sq.


89 For the catalogue and the analysis of all Byzantine liturgical hymns reflecting the teaching about Christ’s Descent into Hell see P. E. Yevics, Lazarus Saturday in the Byzantine Tradition: An Example of Structural Analysis of the Byzantine Tradition, (PhD diss.), Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, 1997, 385–436 and Appendix 7 (Byzantine Hymns Reflecting the Theme of the Destruction of Hades), 709–735. It should be noticed that the author took into account only the hymns currently used in the liturgy of the Eastern Church.
In the first *troparion* of the first Ode, Kassia addresses the “senseless, old and insatiable Hades” (lines 9–10), inviting him to receive “the life of all (man-kind)” (lines 11–12), i.e. Christ, who will destroy him and force him to vomit the souls, which he had swallowed: καταπιτῶν γὰρ ἐμέσεις ἄς προπέπωκας δικαίων ψυχάς (lines 13–14).

Parallels to the conceit expressed in the quoted excerpt are found in the above mentioned Odes of Solomon, as well as in two *kontakia* of Romanos the Melode. The Odes states the following:

O Hades saw me
καί συνετρίβη,
the death vomited me
καί πολλούς μετ' ἐμοῖ.

Romanos’s fourth *kontakion* on the Resurrection declares:

οτι κατελθὼν τῆς γαστρός μου
since in His descent He has attacked
καθύπατο
my stomach
οθέν εξεμέσευσεν οὐσπέρ κατέπιεν
I vomit forth those whom I formerly

In the fifth *kontakion* we read the following:

Οὕτως Ἰωάνναν τριταίον τὸ κῆτος
Just as, on the third day, the whale
ἐξέμεσεν.
disgorged Jonas;

νῦν κάγω ἐμέσω Χριστῶν καὶ
now I disgorge Christ
πάντας τοὺς ὄντας Χριστοῦ.
and all of those who are Christ’s. 91

A similar idea is expressed also in a *troparion* sung at the *Orthros* of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14th September):

ὅν γὰρ κατέπιεν πόθῳ ὁ Ἀδής,
for the One, whom the Hades had swallowed

ἄπημεσε τρόμῳ.
he vomited with horror. 93

The *heirmos* of the third ode emphasizes the created world’s compassionate response to the Passion of Christ (lines 25–29):

Σὰ τὸν ἐπὶ ὑδάτων
When the Creation observed you
κρεμάσαντα πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἄσχετος
hanging on Golgotha,

ἡ κτίσις κατιδύσασα
You who without hindrance hung

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90 Ode 42, lines 15–16.
91 Oikos 20, vers. 4–5. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. IV, (SC 128), ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons, Paris 1967, 524. For English translation see Carpenter, op. cit., 304, slightly modified. In the Khludov Psalter (the middle of the ninth century) there are some miniatures with the representation of Christ’s Descent into Hell, in which He pulls out Adam from the belly of Hades. See M. V. Schepkina, Miniatyry Hludovskoj Psaltyri. Grečeskij illiustrirovannij kodeks IX veka, Moskva 1977, sq. 63r, 63v and 82v.
92 Oikos 9, vers. 1–2. Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, t. IV, 560. The English translation is taken from Carpenter, op. cit., 278.
93 See this *troparion* in Le Typicon de la Grande Église, Tome I: Le cycle des douze mois, (OCA 165), ed. J. Mateos, Rome 1962, 30. The *troparion* is currently chanted as the second *kathisma*. See Menaion for September 14.
The compassion of the created world is a prominent theme in the liturgical poetry of Good Friday and Holy Saturday, as well as in the homilies of the ninth century, composed to be delivered on these feast days. The Patriarch Photius (d. ca. 893) in a sermon pronounced on Good Friday, says: “The earth quakes, the sun is darkened, the veil of the temple is rent, because they see the Lord crucified for us.” In a similar vein, George of Nicomedia asserts: “His passion amazed the angels; the elements stood in awe; the ever-shining lights tremble and with fear cringed”.

The paradox that the One who hung the earth, hangs on Golgotha, appears frequently in hymnography, beginning with the hymn On Pasha of Melito:  

ο κρεμάσας τὴν γῆν κρέμαται. He Who hung the earth, is hanging.

Another term from Kassia’s Tetraodion that resonates with the patristic tradition is the theologically charged term κένωσις (“emptying”). It occurs in the *heirmos* of the fourth ode:

Τὴν ἐν σταυρῷ σοι θείαν κένωσιν  

The term κένωσις comes from the verb κενόω. In the New Testament it is used to designate the abasement in the Incarnation (Phil. 2:7). Many patristic authors imply the term in this sense. Theodot of Ancyra associates κένωσις with the aforementioned συγκατάβασις: διὰ κενώσεως συγκατάβασιν. This terse formulation encapsulates the entire divine economy of Christ’s Incarnation. This meaning of the term is also attested in Byzantine liturgical poetry. For instance, in his Canon on Good Friday Kosmas the Melode writes: “I wake up before dawn to You, who out of mercy emptied Yourself without change to the fallen [man].” In the later Christian sources the term refers to Christ’s Passion.
as well, and Kassia employs it in this sense in the quoted *heirmos*. However, in her most famous work, the *sticheron* on Holy Wednesday, she associates the word *κένωσις* with the Incarnation:

> ὃ κλίνας τοὺς οὐρανοὺς
tē ἀφράστω σου κενώσει.

You who bowed the heavens
by your ineffable humiliation.

(lines 17–18). 102

Anti-iconoclast allusions can be also detected in Kassia’s *sticheron* for the feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. 103 She begins this work by praising the role of the two princes of the apostles in the spreading of the Gospel, naming them “the great luminaries of the Church” (line 1), just as they are called in the apocryphal *Acta Petri et Pauli* (second century): τοὺς δὸν φωστήρας τοὺς μεγάλους. 104

Then follows a reference to the ways in which they were martyred. Following the early Christian tradition, the poetess states that Peter “was nailed to the cross” (line 7), and that Paul “was cut by the sword” (line 11). 105 She further notices that the apostles rebuked the Jews for raising their hands against the Lord:

> καὶ ἀμφότεροι τὸν Ἰσραήλ
cataγγέλουσιν,
> ὃς εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν Κύριον,
> χείρας ἀδίκας ἐκτείνανα.

And both accuse Israel
for having stretched out its hands
unjustly against the Lord.

(lines 14–16).

Already in the New Testament the Jews are considered responsible for Christ’s death (cf. Math. 27:1; 20–23; 1Thes. 2:14–16). Melito of Sardis further developed this view. 106 Beginning with the third century, some Christian writers, Tertullian among them, placed the responsibility for the deicide squarely upon the Jews. 107

In Kassia’s *sticheron*, however, Israel is also, implicitly, a designation for the iconoclasts. That this is, indeed, the case is indicated by the fact that the mention of Israel’s “stretching out” of hands against Christ is in no obvious way related to the theme of the feast. Kassia’s image is reminiscent of a marginal minia-
ture from the Khludov Psalter,108 dated to between 843 and 847. The miniature shows Christ’s Crucifixion as a visual gloss on Psalm 68:22: καὶ ἔδωκαν εἰς τὸ βρῶμα μου χολήν καὶ εἰς τὴν δίψαν μου ἐποτίσαν με ὀξὺς (“They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink”), and below that, two iconoclasts whitewashing an icon of Christ. The image condemns the iconoclasts by equating them with the Jews who tormented Him on the cross.109 This theme was first developed in the above-mentioned pamphlet Adversus Constantinum Cabalinum, from where the inscriptions accompanying the miniatures are taken.110

The equation of the iconoclasts and Jews is very common in iconophile writings.111 Such comparisons are frequent in the works of the most prominent anti-iconoclast polemicists of the ninth century — the Patriarch Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios. Nikephoros, for instance, calls the iconoclasts νεοφανεῖς Ἰουδαίοι (“recently appeared Jews”), and adds that their doctrine is not Christian but belongs to “the Jews who slew the Lord.”112 Nikephoros’ branding of the Jews as “slayers of the Lord” (κυριοκτόνοι), especially in the context of his anti-iconoclastic polemics, may well have inspired Kassia’s sticheron.

The four concluding verses of the sticheron seem to support this interpretation. Here, the poetess addresses Christ, imploring Him to “cast down those who are against us” and to “strengthen the true faith”:

Δίῳ ἐν χάρις σύντον, Therefore by their prayers,  
Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός ἡμῶν, τοὺς καθ’ Christ our God, cast down those  
ἡμῶν κατάβαλε, who are against us  
καὶ τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν κράτων, and strengthen the true faith  
ὡς φιλάνθρωπος. as a lover of mankind  

(lines 17–19).

108 Schepkina, Miniatyury, fol. 67r.
109 For the description and the explanation of this miniature see Corrigan, Visual Polemics, 30, and 162, notes 20 and 21.
112 οὐ Χριστιανόν τὸ παρ’ αὐτῶς πρεσβευόμενον φρόνημα, Ἰουδαίων δὲ τῶν κυριοκτόνων. Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Refvtatio et eversio, 92, p. 163. Nikephoros, like other iconophile writers of the eighth and ninth centuries (see Corrigan, Visual Polemics, 30–31), regularly calls the iconoclasts Judaizers. Cf. Refvtatio et eversio, 82, 90 (p. 143); 161, 18 (p. 258); 164, 6 (p. 264); 184, 2 (p. 291).
c) The ascetic ideal of life according to nature

A final work by Kassia that will be considered here, is her *sticheron* for the Feast of the Nativity of John the Forerunner (June 24), in which she subtly expresses a set of ideas concerning asceticism. Since I have analyzed this *sticheron* in detail elsewhere, I shall only review the points that are pertinent to the theme of this article. In this hymn Kassia praises John as “a man by nature” and as “an angel in his [way of] life,” who “truly made straight (εὐθείας) the paths of our God” (lines 7–8). Clarifying and further developing the idea of John’s angelic way of life, the poetess states that, having embraced complete purity and chastity and having struggled beyond nature, John held on to that which is according to nature, avoiding that which is contrary to nature:

εἶχε μὲν τὸ κατὰ φύσιν,
ἐφυγε δὲ τὸ παρὰ φύσιν,
ὑπὲρ φύσιν ἄγωνισάμενος
(lines 10–11).

The idea expressed in the quoted excerpt as well as its ascetic terminology, suggests that Kassia drew upon a similar idea from the *Vita Antonii* as her primary source. According to his biographer, Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), Antony said the following to his disciples in a discourse on the subject of virtue:

For when the soul has its intellectual part in its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν) virtue is formed. And it is in its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν) when it remains as it came into existence: and when it came into existence it was good and very straight (εὐθής). For this cause Joshua, the son of Nun, exhorting the people, said to them: ’Make straight (εὐθυνατε) your heart unto the Lord God of Israel’, and John: ’Make your paths straight (εὐθείας)’. For the straightness (τὸ γὰρ εὐθείας) of soul consists in its having its intellectual part in its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν) as created. But when it swerves and is perverted from its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν), this is called vice of the soul. Thus the matter is not difficult. If we remain as we came into existence, we are in the state of virtue; but if we think of bad things, we shall be accounted evil. If, therefore, this matter had to be acquired from outside, it would indeed be difficult; but since it is within us, let us guard ourselves from foul thoughts; and having received the soul as something entrusted to us, let us preserve it for the Lord, that He may recognize His work as being the same as He made it’.

In the passage that, it should be noted, makes direct reference to John the Forerunner, Antony defines virtue as the life of the soul that is “according to nature” (κατὰ φύσιν). He arrives at this conclusion through the allegorical inter-

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113 For the Greek text and the English translation of this *sticheron* see Tripolitis, Kassia, 50–51.
115 Jos. 24:23.
116 Mt. 3:3.
118 For a brief interpretation of this passage, see M. J. Marx, Incessant Prayer in the *Vita Antonii*, Studia Anselmiana 38 (1956) 110–113.
pretation of a verse from the Book of Joshua (Jos. 24:23) and another verse from the prophet Isaiah: “make straight (ἐυθείᾳς) the paths of our God” (Is. 40:3; Cf. Mt. 3:3; Mr. 1:3, and Lc. 3:4), which, according to the Gospels, allude to John the Forerunner. However, assigning a specifically ascetic meaning to these verses, Antony introduces an important change. He says: “Make your paths straight.” Then he proceeds to connect these verses with the state of the soul, stating that the soul is “straight” when it has its intellectual part in its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν). Antony thus defines the original state of human nature with the phrase κατὰ φύσιν, which in his language has the sense of “according to genuine human nature,” exactly as God created it in the beginning. Due to primordial sin, however, man, who had been created ἐπὶ θη, lost his original state of being κατὰ φύσιν. For this reason, the aim of human life is to return to that original state “as it was created in the beginning.”

With the use of the adjective ἐπὸθης, which in the quoted excerpt has the same meaning as the phrase κατὰ φύσιν, Athanasius obviously wants to give biblical grounding to his ascetic doctrine, since this word is used in both the Old and New Testaments. This adjective, as well as the noun ἐπὸθυτίς, were also used by John Climacus (died around the middle of the 7th century), who imbues these words with an ascetic meaning by defining ἐπὸθυτίς as the virtue which is, above all, opposed to πονηρία.

The distinction between the genuine and the fallen nature is characteristic of ascetic literature in general. By the genuine nature, human nature before the fall is understood as a nature free from evil. By contrast, evil is present in the nature of the fallen man, which accordingly can be and, in fact, is subject to passions. For this reason, an ascetic has to struggle against his nature. This is one of the dominant ideas of the Ladder. Following the tradition of the Vita Antonii, the Ladder exhorts an ascetic to seek that “pure nature of the soul, as it was created”.

The phrases παρὰ φύσιν and ὑπὲρ φύσιν, do not appear in the Vita Antonii, but we find them in other ascetic works. Included in the Apophthegmata Patrum is

120 The Septuagint uses the alternative form ἐπἰθη.
121 The phrase is one with a veritable tradition in ancient philosophy. To live according to nature (τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ζήν) was a well-known Stoic ideal, which is found, for example, in Zenon (ca. 335–263 BC) and Cleanthes (ca. 330-ca. 230 BC). See fragments of their works that have been preserved in Stobaeus, 2, 7, 6e and 2, 7, 7b, and Clemens Alexandrinus, Stromata II, XXI, 129 (Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 15), ed. O. Stählin, Leipzig 1906, 183. Cf. Marx, Incessant Prayer, 112–113.
122 Cf. the Book of Ecclesiastes 7:29: “God made man upright (ἐπὶ θη, literally, “straight”), but they sought many notions”.
125 Trevisan, II, grad. XXIV, p. 85.
a saying attributed to Abba Poemen, in which he states that: “God has given to Is-rael this way of life: abstention from the things which are contrary to the natural state (τὸ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν παρὰ φύσιν)”.126 The ascetic interpretation of this phrase is found also in Anastasius the Sinaite (seventh century): “Contrary to na-ture (παρὰ φύσιν) is that which God has not created as it is now or that He has not created at all, i. e. sin and death.”127

Finally, the idea contained in the third formulation — ὑπὲρ φύσιν, points above all to the Ladder of John Climacus. In his definition of purity (ἀγνεία), John emphasizes that this virtue aligns a monk with bodiless angels and represents “beyond nature (ὑπὲρ φύσιν) the supernatural denial of nature”.128 Speaking about the importance as well as the difficulty of overpowering nature, by which the fallen nature tainted by sin is understood, John Climacus says that “he who has conquered his body has conquered nature; and he who has conquered nature has certainly risen beyond nature (ὑπὲρ φύσιν ἐγένετο)”.129

In view of these observations, it can be said that Kassia’s sticheron in honor of John the Baptist as the role model for the monastic life, represents a compendium of Byzantine ascetic teaching articulated in some of the most influential ascetic writings of the Byzantine monastic tradition.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to shed new light on the creative use of patristic sources and earlier hymnographical works in the liturgical poetry of the Byzantine poetess Kassia. In the foregoing analysis, I have considered both the content of Kassia’s poems and the rhetorical devices she employed. Her use of the sources was examined in relation to three main themes developed in her poetry: a) the imperial theme, b) the anti-iconoclastic polemic, and c) the ascetic ideal of life according to nature.

The imperial theme Kassia develops in the first sticheron on the Nativity of Christ —When Augustus reigned — in which she draws upon the idea of several theologians: Melito of Sardis, Hippolytus of Rome, Origen, Gregory of Nazian-zus, and particularly upon Eusebius of Caesarea. Highlighting the temporal paralle-lism between the establishment of the Roman Empire and the emergence of Christianity, she recognizes the work of divine providence in these events. Her insis-tence on this parallelism should also be seen in the context of the Byzantine

idea of “symphony” between Church and State, famously articulated in Justinian’s Sixth Novella. In the prohibition of the veneration of icons, which the iconoclast emperors tried to enforce, Kassia obviously saw their overstepping of the boundaries of temporal power defined by the idea of symphony. Following the established tradition, in this sticheron she differentiates between the sacred and secular authorities, linking the emergence of the unified Roman Empire to the political benefits it brought to humankind, and the Incarnation of Christ to the religious ones.

The anti-iconoclastic polemic, based upon the established Christological teachings and common iconophile argumentation, permeates the majority of Kassia’s authentic poetic works. Elements of this polemic can be also detected in the aforementioned Christmas sticheron. By emphasizing the notion that with Christ’s birth, “the many gods of idolatry have been destroyed”, Kassia refutes the iconoclastic understanding of the veneration of icons as a form of idolatry. The quoted line is reminiscent of a phrase by Theodore of Stoudios, in which the great iconophile argues that Christ through His Incarnation “destroyed every idolatrous representation”.

In her eight other stichera on Christmas, as well as in the stichera on the Forefeast of the Theophany and the Presentation in the Temple, she also invokes the Incarnation as an argument against the iconoclasts. Through the repetition of the verb ὑπάρχειν in the incipits and the noun σῶρος in the refrain, Kassia underscores the visibility of Christ, and, therefore, the legitimacy of His pictorial representations. In the development of her argumentation she also builds upon the works of John of Damascus, the Patriarchs Germanos and Nikephoros, and others.

The fact that, in her sticheron on the feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Kassia states that the two princes of the apostles rebuked the Jews for raising their hands against the Lord, should be seen as yet another anti-iconoclast aside. The equation of the iconoclasts and Jews is very common in iconophile writings of the most prominent iconophile polemicists of the ninth century — Patriarch Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios.

Kassia’s ideas concerning asceticism are expressed in her sticheron on the Nativity of John the Forerunner. The statement that John ἔφυγε δὲ τὸ παρὰ φύσιν, ὑπὲρ φύσιν ἀγωνισάμενος, both in terms of its terminology and the ideas it succinctly articulates, suggests that Kassia particularly drew upon Vita Antonii, the Ladder of John Climacus, and the Apophthegmata Patrum. All these works, one should recall, were an essential component of the monastic curriculum during the Byzantine period.

In order to convey her ideas most effectively to the congregation, Kassia employed a number of rhetorical devices, including dialogues among the biblical protagonists, repetitions, and refrains. In doing so, she followed a tradition well-established in the works of several patristic authors and earlier hymnographers.

Through her purposeful and inventive use of the sources, Kassia implicitly aligned herself, as well as the iconophile group she represented, with a centuries-old tradition that came to embody the very notion of Orthodoxy. The poet-
ess’s marshaling of authoritative exempla served to define her position as Orthodox vis-à-vis the novel and, therefore, heretical teachings of the iconoclasts. For Kassia, liturgical poetry was a potent instrument of theological argumentation and religious polemic. In her ingenious handling of the sources, the poetess ultimately participated in a larger discursive practice that was widespread during the iconoclastic era. As is well known, both the iconoclasts and the iconophiles were engaged in collecting texts and compiling *florilegia* with the aim of supporting their arguments. Peppered with borrowings from and pointed allusions to a range of texts from the corpus of venerable Christian writings, Kassia’s hymns staked a claim to a similar kind of authority. The weight of the arguments advanced in these poetic creations in no small part stemmed from their rootedness in a tradition.

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Касијина химнографија у светлу патристичких извора и раних химнографских дела

У византијској литургијској поезији сумирено је богословско наслеђе ранохришћанског и рановизантијског периода. Полазећи од те опште конституције, у чланку сам жељео да истражим на који начин и у ком степену је византијска песнициња Касија користила патристичке изворе и химне старих песника у својим поетским делима. Коришћење извора сагледано је у контексту три главне теме Касијине литургијске поезије: а) истицање временске подударности између оснивања Римског царства и настанка хришћанства, б) антиikonокластичка полемика и б) аскетски идеал живљења у складу с природом. Прву тему песнициња разрађује у божићној стихири Ађуоостоу мοναρχήσαντος, у којој повлачи паралелу између Августовог успостављања јединствене власти (μοναρχία) на простору читавог Средоземља и Христовог рођења. Док је успостављање владавине цара Августа означило крај многих локалних управа (πολυγραφία), Христовим рођењем укинуто је многобоштво (πολυθέσια). Касија на тај начин следи раније утврђену традицију повезивања римског и хришћанског универзализма. Схватање да Римско царство има своје место у божанском плану развоја људске историје присутно је код Мелитона из Сарда, Хиполита Римског, Оригена, Григорија из Назијанза, и др., али на њему нарочито инсистира Јевсевије Кесаријски. Према Јевсевију, настанак Римске империје и хришћанске религије су донели човечанству мир, пошто су уклоњени узроки сталних сукоба међу народима, односно πολυγραφία и πολυθέσια. Касијино наглашавање ове идеје треба такође довести у везу и са византијским концептом симфоније цркве и државе, који је током иконокластичких спора био одбачен. У поменутој божићној химни Касија строго раздваја световну и црквену власт: појаву јудијењеног Римског царства она доводи у везу са политичким добровитима за човечанство, док Христова инкарнација, која означава почетак хришћанства, за њу има само религијске импликације.

Касијина фразеологија употребљена у овој стихири, као што је израз „многобоштво идола би укинуто” (ст. 4), упућује такође и на њену антиконокластичку полемику. Познато је да су иконоборци оптуживали иконофиле за идолопоклонство. Побијајући такве оптужбе, поштоваоци икона су се позивали на Христову инкарнацију. Оваплоћење је било један од аргумента и Теодора Студита, чији се израз да је Христос својом инкарнацијом „укинуо сваки идолски лик” очигледно налази у основи четвртог стиха дате стихире.

Антиконоборачком полемицим прожето је и осталих осам Касијиних стихира написаних за празник Христовог рођења, као и стихире претпразништва Богојављења и Сретења. Прве четири божићне стихире завршавају се истим рефреном, у коме се истиче да је Христос својим оваплоћењем обојио смртну људску природу. Употребљена фразеологија упућује на утицај Софронија Јерусалимског и Јована Дамаскина. Понављањем глагола οράθης у
инципитима и именице σάφεις у рефрену, Касија истиче материјалност Христовог тела и, према томе, легитимност Његовог приказивања на иконама. У својој аргументацији Касија очигледно развија идеје из дела Јована Дамаскина, цариградских патријарха Германа I и Никифора, и др.

Осуда Јевреја од стране апостола Петра и Павла, због тога што су подигли своје руке против Бога, коју су срећемо у Касијиној стихири у част ове двојице апостола, треба такође да буде посматрана у контексту њене антииконоборачке полемике. Изједначавање иконобораца и Јевреја представља опште место у делима патријарха Никифора и Теодора Студита, као најистакнутијих иконофилских писаца IX века.

Касија је своје аскетске идеје изразила у стихири за празник рођења Јована Претече, у којој хвали његов анђеоски начин живота. Употребљена терминологија и истицање да је Јован својим натприродним подвизима и кроз удаљавање од онога што је противприродно, задобио оно што је у складу с природом (κατὰ φύσιν), упућују на утицај Житија Антонија Великог, Лествице Јована Лествичника и Патерика.

У циљу ефективнијег преношења идеја на свој аудиторијум, Касија користи разне реторске фигуре, међу којима су дијалози између библијских протагониста, понављања и рефрене најзначајнији. Песнициња и у том погрегду следи традицију, која је утврђена у делима ранијих писаца и песника.