THE BETHLEHEM ICON SCHOOL

Iconography Students' Manual

by Ian Knowles

3rd Edition

The Bethlehem Icon School Iconography Manual

This Icon Manual is produced for students of the professional training course at the Bethlehem Icon School in Bethlehem.

It should be read in conjunction with Aidan Hart's "The Techniques of Icon and Wall Painting".

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The BIC Iconography Manual

Introduction: The Icon

An Icon is not a window into heaven, it is a door from heaven to earth through which Christ and the heavenly hosts enter into our world, figures of light. Heaven is wedded to earth, and the world of matter is shown transfigured.

Visit churches which have been ravaged in war between Christians and others, and it is usually the faces of the images, 'icone' in Greek, which are desecrated. Journey through northern Europe and the scars of desecrated churches still scar the landscape, collateral damage in the complete war on images in churches during the Reformation. This shows just how important icons are as expressions of Christian Faith, and the importance of keeping our understanding about them and how they 'work' alive.

The human face, when covered, cuts off the most profound means of communication – we look into each others eyes to read our honesty and intentions, we express joy and sadness with a few movements of our muscles around our mouth, we express surprise or anger with the movement of our eyebrows. We look tired or sad or happy or excited. Our face… tells everything about us.

Our faces, showing as they do our deepest selves, reveal God's presence in us, something which is at the core of the Christian faith. God is not distant but intimate with us, through the Holy Spirit living within us and filling us with the Uncreated Light.

The Christian Gospel begins with God becoming a human person, becoming flesh and blood, becoming like every human person, except for sin. 'Adam' in Hebrew means simply, 'man', and Christians call Jesus's Face the face of the New Adam - all of humanity is found in in his Face, and all human faces reflect His Face. As St Paul says, 'in Christ there is no male or female…" This is what we mean when we say that Jesus' Face is the archetype of the face in the icon.

THE ICON CELEBRATES THE FACE OF JESUS, BOTH IN ICONS OF CHRIST AND ICONS OF THE SAINTS. ALL REFLECT THE FACE OF CHRIST.

In every icon it is the faces of Christ our God and the saints that enrapt us, and a good icon is one where the faces reflect the Divine with peace and serenity.

Chapter One

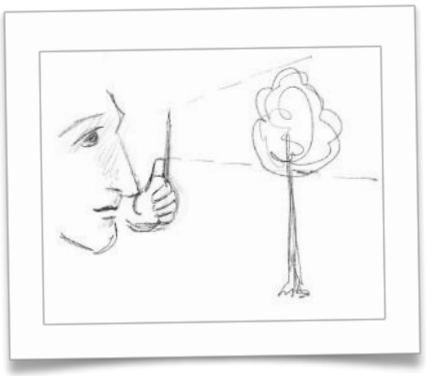
The Face of Jesus

A. How to draw

There are many good books and Youtube videos which can give you good ways to draw. There are many different ways to achieve a good likeness in pencil or charcoal, or in ink, or in paint or any other media. We all have our favourites, ones which work best with our intuition and physical abilities at holding tools.

- **Observation.**

However, whatever method we choose, the first key requirement is… to be able to look and see. This might sound a bit obvious, but too often people who want to learn to draw well just jump in and start to make lines on a piece of paper and get easily discouraged by the poor results. A good artist will spend as much time looking and analysing both the thing he is trying to draw, and then criticising the way he is trying to draw it.



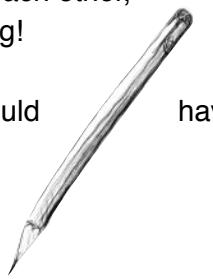
NUMBER ONE RULE OF DRAWING: LOOK TWICE, DRAW ONCE, LOOK AGAIN!

There are various tools you can use to help you really see what is in front of you, and relate it to a flat page. The easiest is using a pencil and your thumb to measure something and reproduce it proportionately. Choose one part of what you can see, and compare it to everything else, using it as a basic measure of proportion.

- **Understand your tools.**

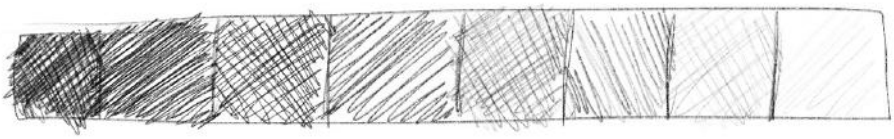
Pencils are tools, as are pieces of charcoal, or pens, or brushes. Each works in its own way. If you can use a range of brushes, or pencils, it gives you greater control over how you draw. A soft pencil (9B, 8B, 7B, 6B etc) easily draws very dark lines, a very hard pencil (4H,5H etc) needs a lot more pressure to make a visible mark on the paper. A good exercise is to try out every pencil in your box, shading from very hard to very lightly, from very dark lines to very

light ones. Lines can be made close together or far apart, or laid onto of each other, making darker and lighter shading. Control of this is key to a great drawing!



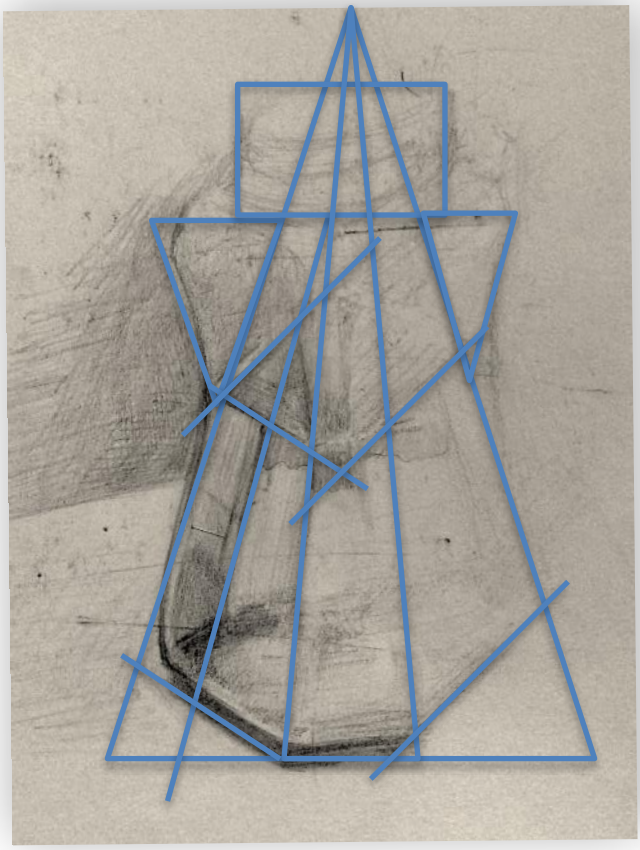
Good quality pencils enable you to do this with greater precision. You should have a range going from about 6B to 4H.

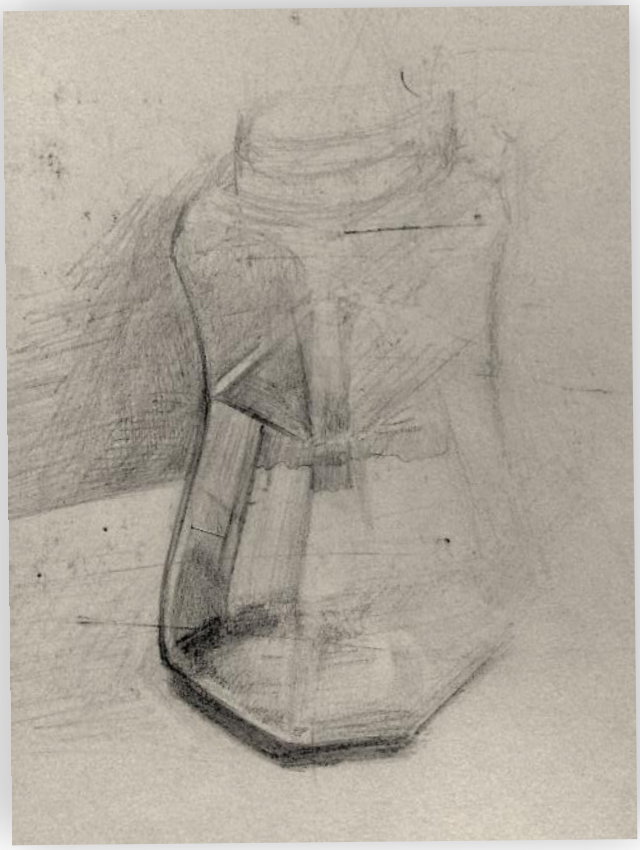
Try the following exercise for each pencil in your set:



- **Draw shapes rather than outlines.**

We can all draw a straight line- as in a stick man, and thus we can draw a square, and even perhaps draw a circle. Likewise triangles and half circles are easy to make even if we find drawing hard.





Even a very complex drawing such as a glass jar filled with clear water can be mastered by following this simple method. Draw lightly at first, with a soft pencil, arranging the basic shapes, before shading them in to a range of shadows.

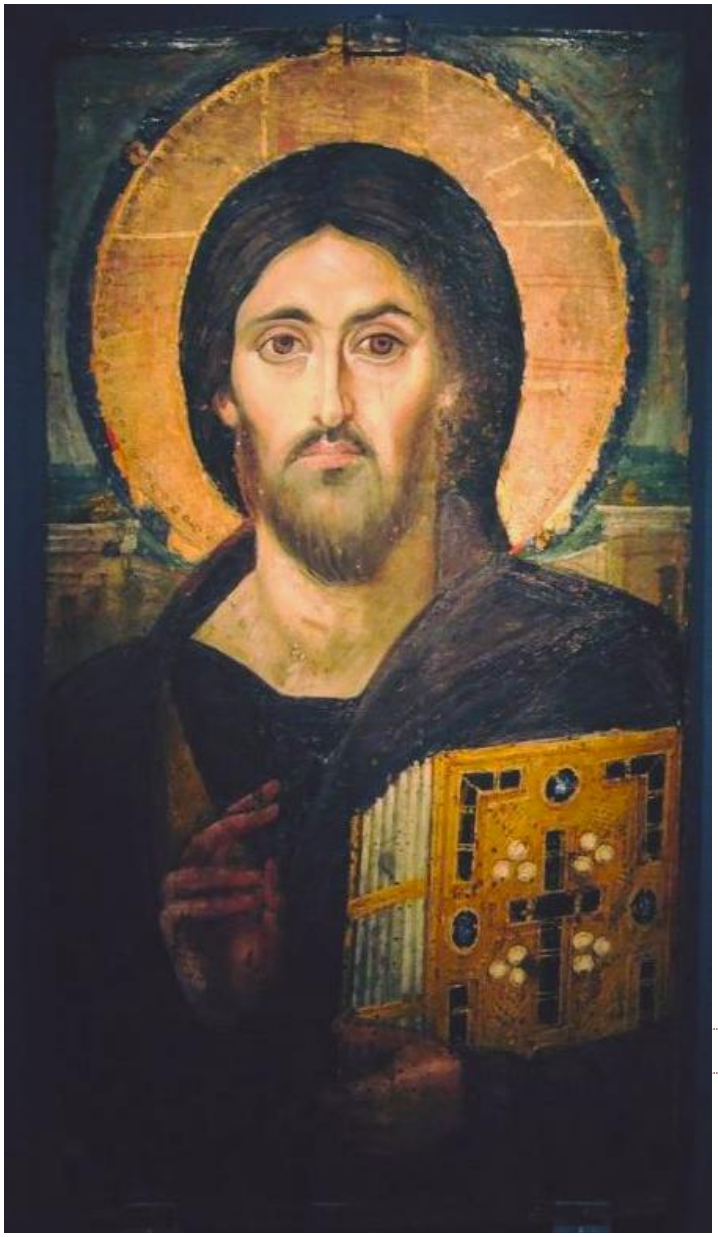


FIG. 1: ICON IN WAX OF CHRIST IN THE MONASTERY OF ST CATHERINE, MT. SINAI, 6TH CENTURY.

By breaking drawings down into these basic shapes, and putting them together carefully, we can begin to be able to draw competently.

As iconographers you don't have to be brilliant at drawing, but you do need to be competent, with a good eye and hand coordination. For some this comes naturally, but for most it requires quite a bit of effort and that means…practice. As my great grandmother was fond of saying, practice makes perfect!

A. The Human Face

INTRODUCTION

Drawing the face in the Icon is the most important thing an iconographer ever does. The face is the gateway to the spiritual depths of the human person.

However, this is a relatively new idea when it comes to what a portrait is all about, and a fruit of the Christian understanding of what it means to be human. Before Christian culture was formed, in the ancient world of Greece and Rome, portraits of emperors and empresses were made not to reveal their personal psychology but to convey their **political or social authority and power**, their interior persona hidden beneath beautiful and impressive masks.

But in the modern world art seeks to explore the **psychology** of a person, their inner person, their feelings, thoughts, emotions. The artist seeks to draw back a veil on the mystery of the persona, and to give us an encounter with what he or she sees going on within. This interest came from the revolution in the understanding of what was most important about human beings: their souls as destined for deification or theosis, that is union with God. The divine destiny of every human person was enabled by the Incarnation of God the Word as the fully human person Jesus Christ.

When Christian artists painted Jesus they began to break into a new sort of art, one which wasn't about outward manifestations of power, but which revealed something of the deeper reality of who Christ was. At first this was done by symbols but sometime in the 6th century this came to mean the whole way in which the painting was done so that the focus was on the inner person, with the eyes being understood as the gateway to the soul. New images emerged which showed not just a face, but a face that spoke of hidden depths through prominent eyes and an engaging posture. This is what we now call iconography.

Thus to draw an icon we need to first be able to draw a face. For this we need to understand what we are trying to express, and to draw in a way which gives expression clearly. To do this means we need some basic drawing skills, in both seeing and handling a pencil or paint brush.

So lets begin with trying to understand what we, as artists, then as Christian artists, then as Christian liturgical artists, are trying to do.

1.WHY ARE FACES IMPORTANT?

Faces are important. When we can't see a person's face we are excluded from knowing them, we become an unknown person, 'faceless' we say in English. In ancient Greece a slave was called 'aprosopos' – 'one without a face', a nobody, a thing, an object, something less than human. That is why slaves are treated so badly. Our beliefs directly shape our actions.

According to Christianity, God takes on the form of a human face, he shows us himself in a way otherwise impossible. God known only by words in a book or from the words of messengers remains remote, distant, however much he may love us. However, if he has a face like ours we can relate to him. Christ, fully Divine, has a fully human face. That is why through Christ we can relate intimately to God, not as slaves but as sons and daughters. That is why the Face of Jesus is so important. No wonder non-Christians often de-face icons and statues of Jesus and the saints.

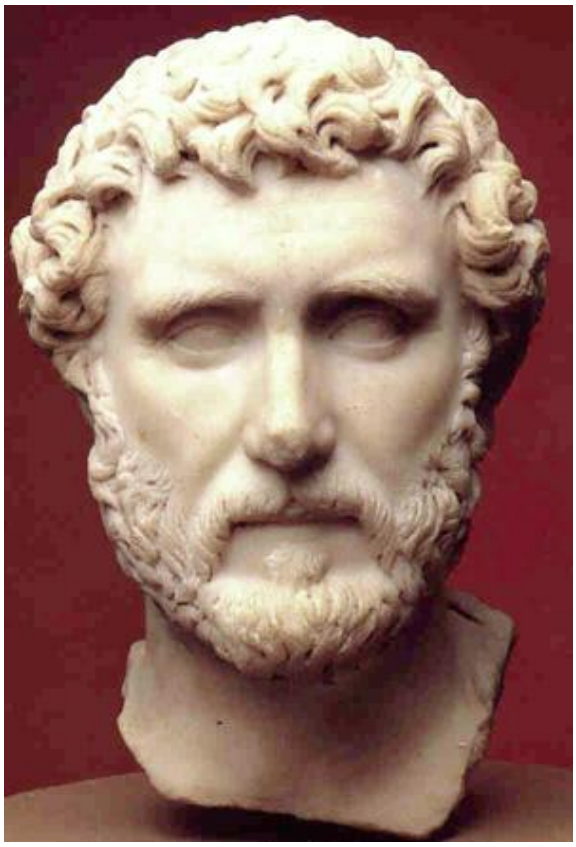
IN MAKING ICONS, WE ARE MAKING FACES OF JESUS AND THE SAINTS, MAKING THAT UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY POSSIBLE AGAIN AND AGAIN. GOD CAN BE APPROACHED THROUGH OUR SENSES.

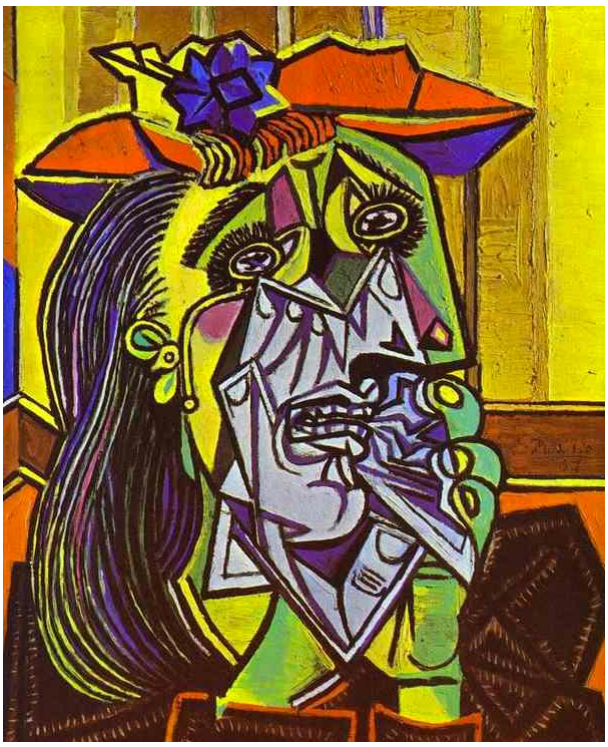
2.FACES REVEAL WHO WE TRULY ARE

Christians are changed by their relationship with God, a process called theosis, or sanctification, being made holy. This is who the saints are. They have put on the 'new person' which St Paul tells us about, and become citizens of heaven as the writer to the Hebrews tells us: 'you have come to Mt. Zion and to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem… and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven'. Heb.12.

- The saints have a transformed personality and life, people who radiate the presence of God. **In the icon we are showing saints as they are now**, in heaven, in the Presence of God, transfigured by the light of the Holy Spirit.

As Aidan Hard puts it, "in the saint we see Christ shining forth", and thus every face is based on how we paint Christ's Face. That is why we begin learning how to paint icons by studying the Face of Christ.





Take a look at the four images above. Try and think about what they are letting us see.

- On the left are two ancient images of a Roman emperor, Antonius Pius, and an Egyptian queen, Nefititi. They are beautiful, showing strength, power, almost a divine power.
- They are very famous people, whose names still resonate down the centuries.
- But the eyes are blank, hidden, removed. We don't see anything of them as private people. We are left to guess what lies beneath the exterior perfection and beauty here acts as a mask.

Now what about the two other paintings on the right? What do you see? How are they different? The first one is a 20th century portrait by Picasso, the second is by Vermeer in the 17th century.

Drawing Exercise:

Using shadow and shapes draw the Girl with the Pearl Earring. Focus on her expression, try to capture what you see in her eyes.

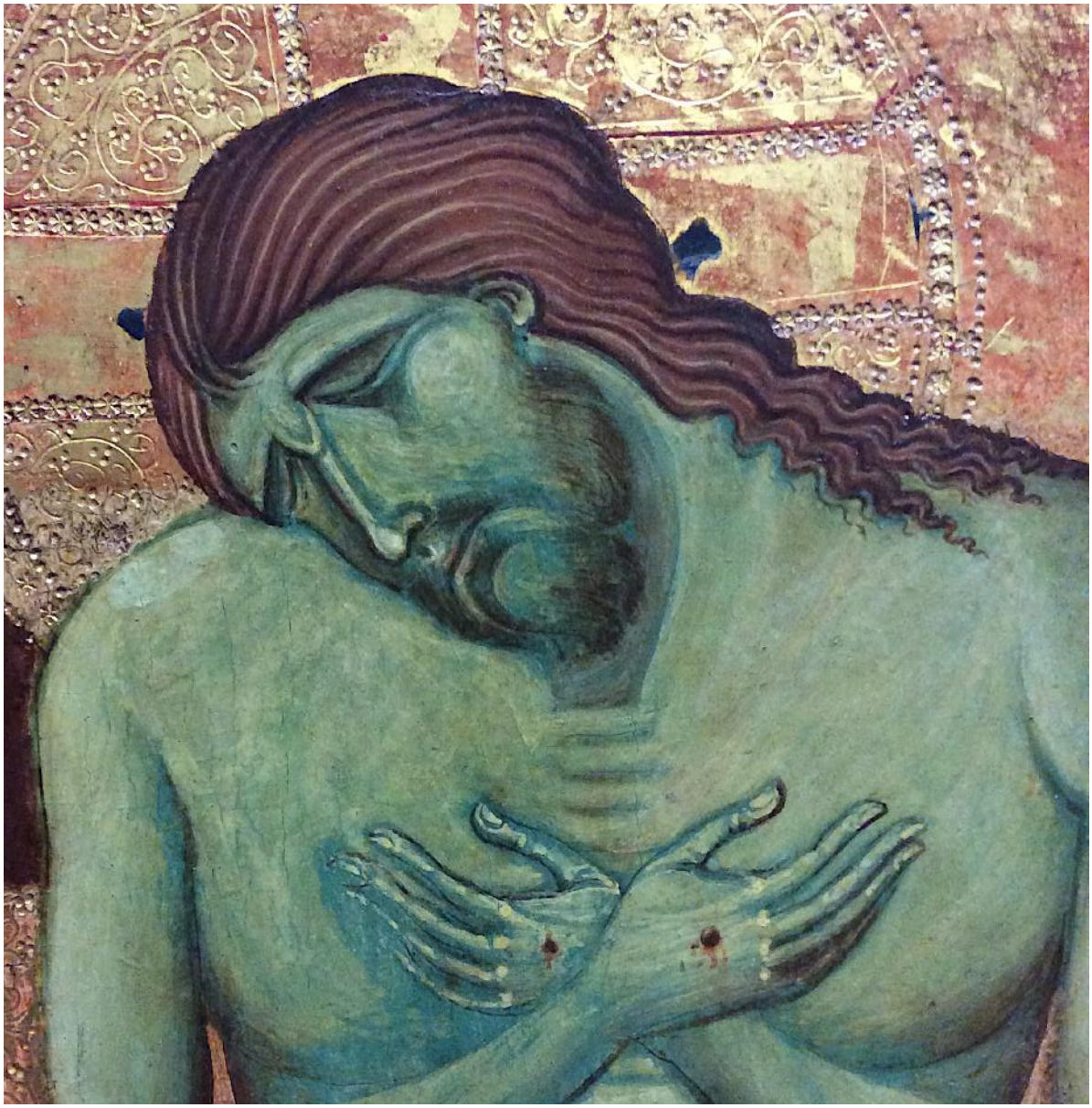
- Use a 6B pencil.
    - Create light blocks of shadows
    - Let the shape of the shadows define the features for you
- Use a 4B pencil
    - Deepen the darker shadows, introduce several steps of shadow
    - Darken the negative space to the left of the face
- Use a 2H pencil
    - Darken the key areas around the nose, mouth, chin
    - Add in subtle changes of shadow

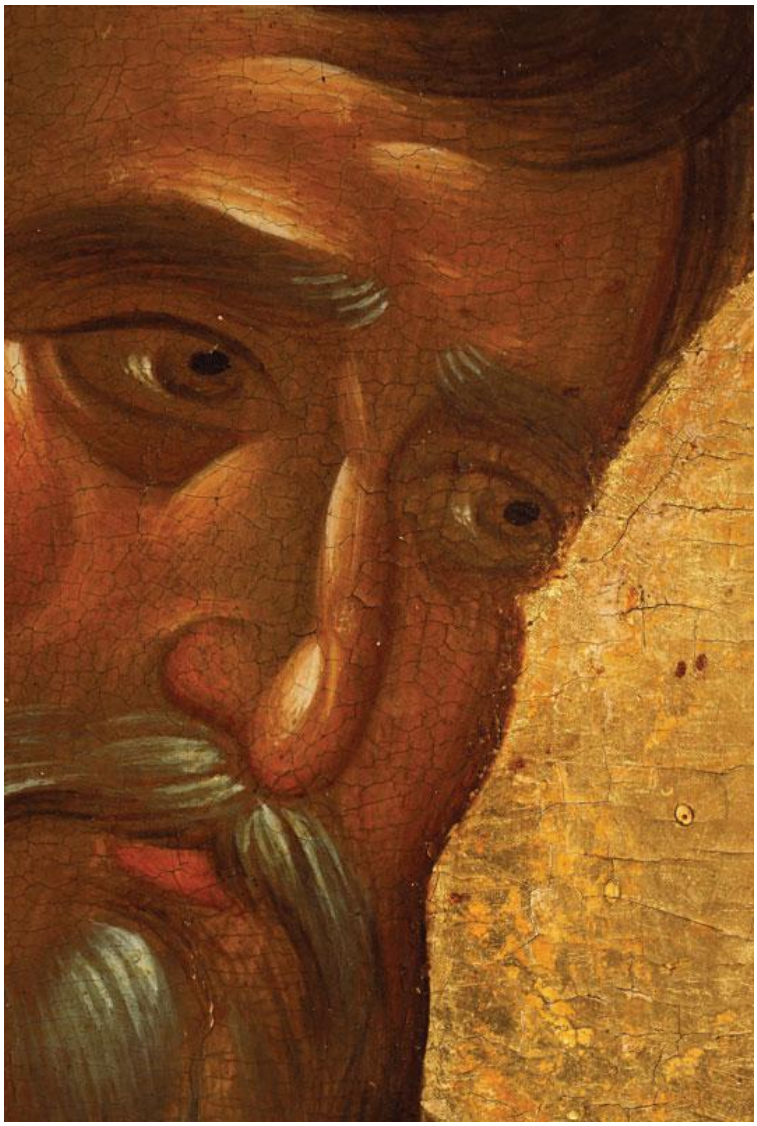
4.FACES SHOW OUR EMOTIONS

Faces are expressive of our emotions and of our deeper personalities. They show who we are. Happy or sad, angry or compassionate, at peace or afraid, our eyes especially show how we are feeling and what type of person we are.

- **In the icon we pay attention to expressing a joyful sadness**, because the saints are truly joyful being close to God but saddened because they remain close to all of humanity and see our sufferings and sins.

In the icon the eyebrows and the shape of the mouth are very expressive, and great care should be taken in drawing them.





Our faces also show our character or personality, our intelligence, humility, nobility of character, or our pride, arrogance or selfishness. In the icon we are focusing on the person who has overcome his or her defects through God's grace and become a beautiful person in his or her interior life. This transformation comes through a re-balancing of our senses, so that they are focused not on the big but passing experiences but on the deeper and more hidden spiritual ones.

In the icon we express this by making the lips, nose, ears very elegant and without being sensual. Naturalistic art focuses on the sensuality of the exterior form, but in the icon we cut out the sensuality to emphasise the interior spiritual reality.

In the icon we express the character of the person in certain ways:

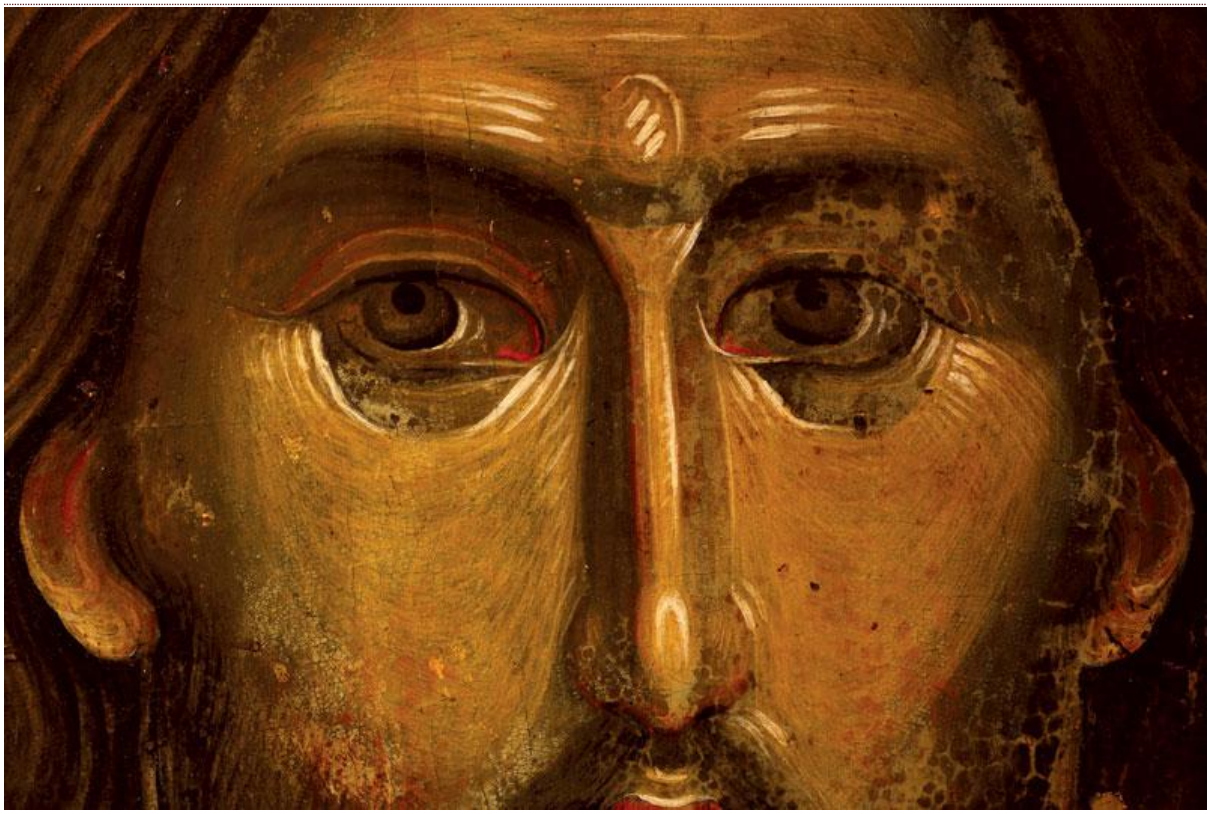
- Ascteic persons (hermits, monks and nuns) have many creases in their skin, and sunken cheeks.
- Bishops and doctors of the church have high, very rounded foreheads with deep creases.
- Virgins and the innocent ones have very smooth faces.
- In the baby Jesus he is shown as a wise man, the Ancient of Days rather than as an expressionless, helpless infant – he has a high forehead like a bishop or theologian, as well as the small nose and chubby cheeks of a baby.

6. Faces are the gateway to our deepest spiritual self

In icons the way we paint the saint draws us into their interior life through their facial expressions. As St Luke tells us, St Simeon declared when the baby Jesus was brought to the Temple, “”my eyes have seen your salvation”.

The large eyes especially draw us into their interior life, but the way the other facial features are drawn helps to make us realise we are looking at an interior, spiritual beauty, not an external one. Mastering the eyes in the icon is therefore absolutely essential.

7. Faces are how we relate to one another



Looking someone in the eyes can be a very disturbing experience, only when we have real trust in someone or love them very much does looking into someone's eyes become something wonderful. We can be afraid that people will know what we are really like!

- **In the icon the saints look directly ahead, usually fixing us with their gaze** or else looking slightly beyond us with their sights fixed on God and the deeper realities of our existence and inviting us to do the same. The head is usually turned slightly to one side so that while the look is direct, it is not harsh.

In the icons of the Pantocrator Christ is shown as the Compassionate Judge, with one eyebrow raised and another sweeping and gentle. Through looking at this icon we come before Christ our Judge and Redeemer, as we will on the Day of Judgement.

In the eleousa icons of the Virgin and Child Jesus has open and compassionate eyes, but they are fixed on his Mother, while Mary looks out of the icon towards us. In this way we the beholder are taken into the relationship between Jesus and His Mother, directly, and not as bystanders and onlookers.

B. The Anatomy of the Face

Given the importance of the face for the icon, its is well worthwhile spending some time getting to grips with the face as it is in nature, especially its bone and muscle structure, before seeking to 'transfigure it' in the style of the icon.

Above you can see the muscular construction of the face in more detail, and on the next page the relationship of the skull and the skin layer. The muscles give EXPRESSION, especially around the eyes and mouth. Understanding what muscles are there and how they work can make a more **expressive** painting easier to achieve.

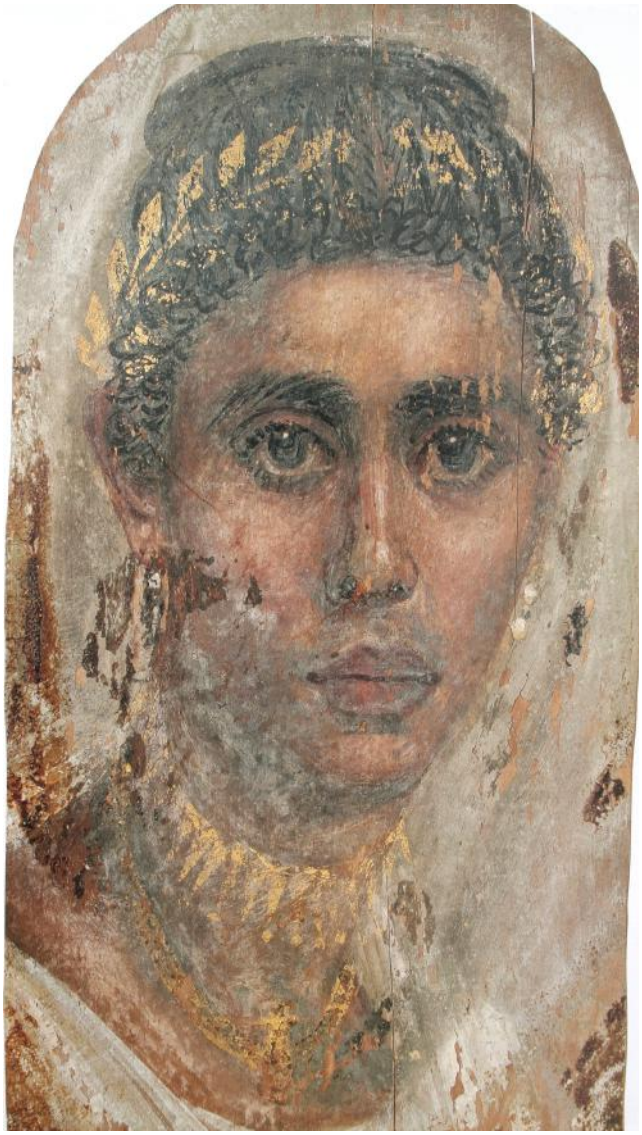
The human face – you can see how what appears on the outside relates to the bone and muscle structure underneath.

1. The anatomy gives us the basics which the artist then works with. He observes and then interprets what he sees. Even photographs are not free of interpretation, because whatever the medium artists present you with a perspective.
2. Artists express their understanding of the human person by the way in which they paint, everything from what they focus on and make more important in a picture to the colours they use. If you look at some of these examples you will see what I mean. Classical art celebrated the power of the human person through exaggerating

external features such as muscles and the curls of the hair. Some modern artists explore a lack of confidence in humanity, and its fragmentation after a century of unimaginable industrial warfare.

3. We should be careful not to assume that Naturalism is neutral, that is just shows you what is there. It only shows you a glimpse of the reality, and photography in particular can be very easily made to 'lie', airbrushing out things that we don't want to see and making all sorts of illusions.

4. Below is an example of 3rd century AD pagan funeral art from Egypt, on display in the British Museum. Here is a death mask, made of plaster, and the skull of the deceased man which it covered in the grave. The face is natural but is trying to capture something of the ***living*** person, of the anima or soul within. Notice how emphasis is given to the eyes. This is the same



in paintings of the dead on panels placed on the coffins:

5.These masks are worked in encaustic, a process of painting with hot wax now lost to us but in the early centuries of the Christian era a refined craft. These pagan Egyptian portraits interpret these faces from the perspective of death, painted in wax (called encaustic) its luminous qualities also serve to give the impression of the living soul within, and this can be seen in Christian icons painted using the same technique. That they sought to portray the inner person's soul, which survived death, fitted into the insight into

6. On page 11 is the most famous of the early icons from the collection at St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai. This

is the most important centre for early iconography, and we will return there many times during the course. This icon dates from the 6th century, and has almost certainly been in the monastery throughout its existence. Comparing this image with these other depictions of the human person, the power, authority and spiritual vitality of the Person of Jesus shine through. Here, even though the face is very close to a natural image, its execution is such that it speaks of something beyond, of a transfigured creation and the Person of the God Man. The image is anatomically sound, it is clearly a human face, but what the artist has done with this is something so sublime as to be almost beyond words.

c. Christian Religious Art

In the Christian community art has been used to express their faith from the beginning. At first it was pagan styles of art with Christian themes, such as the Bible stories. We can see this in the catacombs in Rome.

This was developed over the early Christian centuries to be heavily symbolic, to carry many meanings and not made simply to look beautiful or impressive.

In the 13th century in western Europe Christian art began to be more and more ‘realistic’ in a photographic sense. Emphasis was on the emotions, and a sense of the exterior beauty

conveying spiritual truths. This is the art we are most used to, a more sentimental art that makes us immediately feel an affinity with Jesus, Mary or the saints.

Devotional art makes much of light and shadows from an external light source, to evoke feelings of mystery. It tries to evoke feelings, for example of empathy for the Baby Jesus as a helpless babe, or a sense of wonder at the glory which surrounds the Virgin Mary as she is assumed into heaven trough a fantastic arrangement of cherubs and clouds. They are works of incredible imagination and observation of the way light works. These are very close to nature and our more immediate emotions.

Icons are very different, as we will see. They minimise the external light source and attempt to show an interior divine light, they try to show the inner spiritual nature of things and minimise the external features which change over time. They try to create a neutral emotional space so that the believer can come and pray whatever his or her situation. These are much closer to spiritual realities which lie behind material forms and appeal to the deeper intuitive sense of the Presence of the Holy, to the heart as the seat of the human person.

In Christian theology there is an important principle that grace builds on nature, a point well made by St Thomas Aquinas. In the icon it is the same, we need to understand natural form

Fig.2. Virgin Mary by Sassoferrato, 17th century.

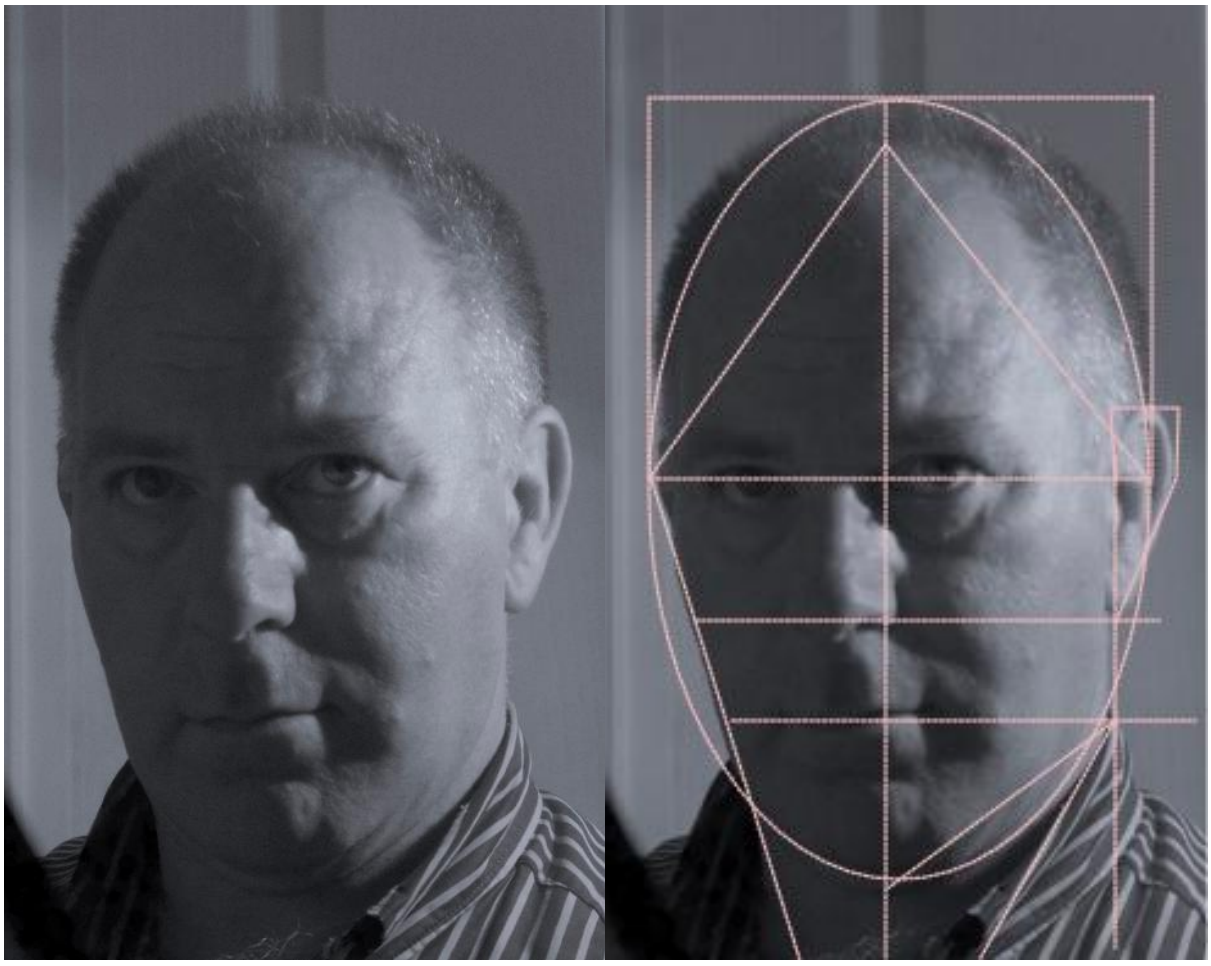
before we can attempt something much more demanding and sophisticated – using art on a flat surface to represent not just natural but spiritual realities.

Therefore it is important that we are able to draw naturalistically by observing the human form in nature, and translating that into sketches, drawings and paintings. With those insights we can then attempt the transfiguration of the natural figure through the language of Christian iconography.

Chapter Two

How to Draw the Face

A. Drawing the Natural Face



1. Most drawing is a matter of drawing some basic shapes, and looking for shadows rather than outlines. Seeing the whole rather than fragmented parts. This demands looking, and looking and looking, trying to get the brain to observe rather than interpret. The brain often sees and idea - for example a cup, and understands it has a handle, and a flat bottom,

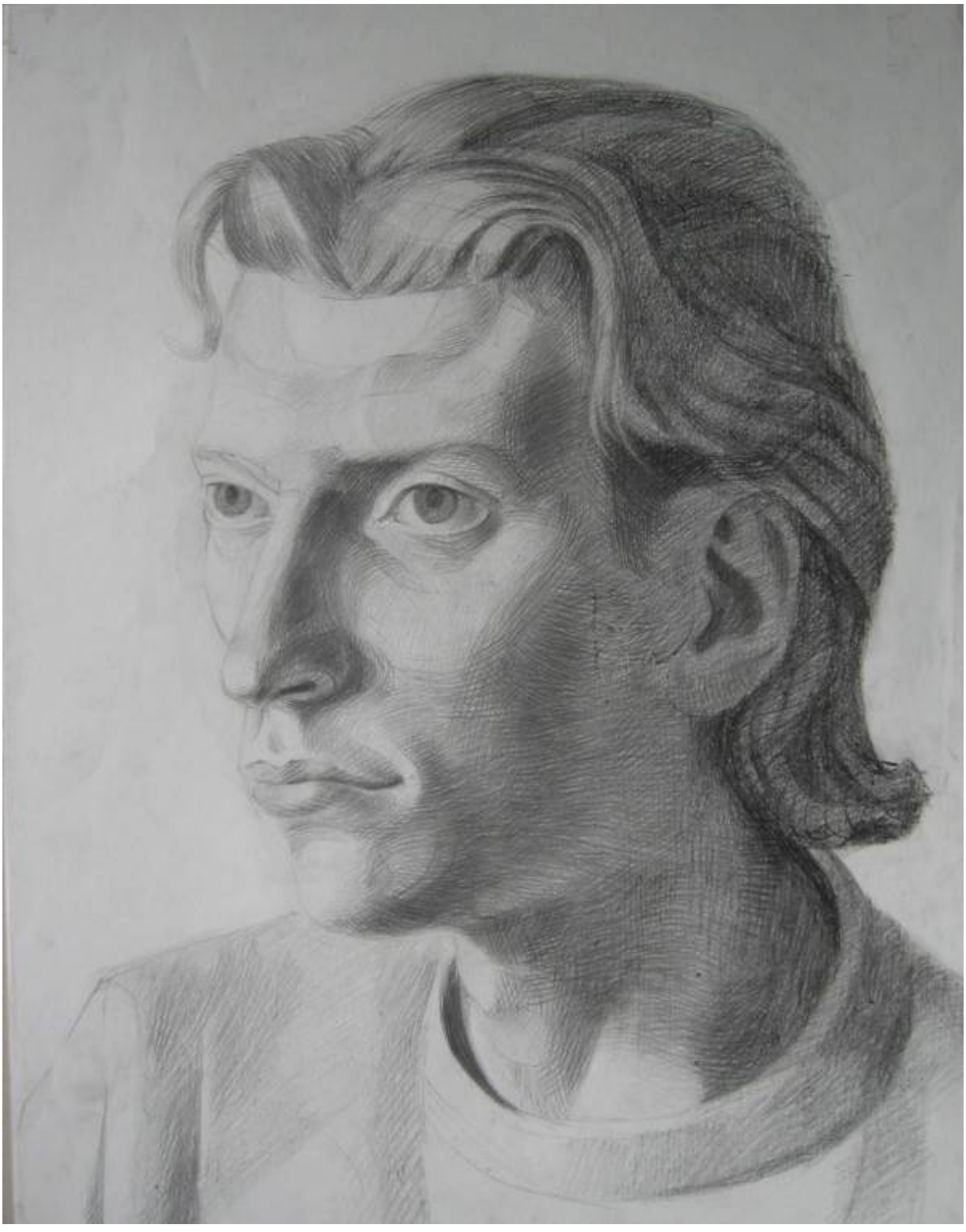
even if you can't see either. When we try and draw we often find our brain telling us to draw the whole cup, not what we actually are seeing in front of us.

2. Learning to draw means lots of basic exercises to help you look and build up shapes. In the course you will draw a white box and a white egg, as simple examples of how drawings are made up of shadows rather than lines.

3. When it comes to the face we tend to want to draw the features we look at - the eyes, the nose and the mouth. We don't tend to see the face as a whole, or how features are built up of shadows and shapes. We go for outlines, usually in solid dark lines. This really makes it hard to learn how to draw if it doesn't come naturally.

    1. Remember the basics of how to draw. You need to understand how to draw lines, how pencils work, how to see shapes rather than lines, and how to build up a drawing from the general to the detailed.
    2. Soft pencils make dark but broad lines easily, while harder pencils make lighter lines but sharper, more accurate ones. Soft pencils rub out more easily and hard pencils can mark the paper.
    3. Vary your strokes, careful to make a broad range of light strokes and darker ones, and using very dark lines rarely.Think of the darkness of the lines like a flight of steps, you need nicely spaced steps to climb easily up and down.
    4. Look twice, draw once. See shapes not outlines. Try to understand what is going on beneath the skin, where a hard bone is pushing up or a soft muscle, and that a hard point will make a different visual shape.
    5. See the big shapes, triangles, rectangles and circles, land the way your eye travels around the face. Try and see what grabs yoiur eye most, don't just assume it is the eyes. Understand how light plays on the face, casting shadows and making shapes as it plays with the skull and muscle shapes, the fall of the hair and the angle of the neck.

6. Try and sense the person, and express that in what you draw. Make use of shadows, and short, dark lines. Look at the ends of the mouth, the shape of the eyebrows and what they are expressing.



Exercise: Draw a face from life.

- Choose a good angle, with dramatic shadows and good highlights
- Begin by making the lines of the basic shape in a 6B pencil
- Establish shadow areas - various soft pencils
- Refine shadows to reveal features of the chin, neck, nose, eyes, hair - soft pencils, then 2H
- Look twice… draw once…look again…correct…stand back, look, correct. nose, mouth, chin
    - Add in subtle changes of shadow
    - Refine shape edges

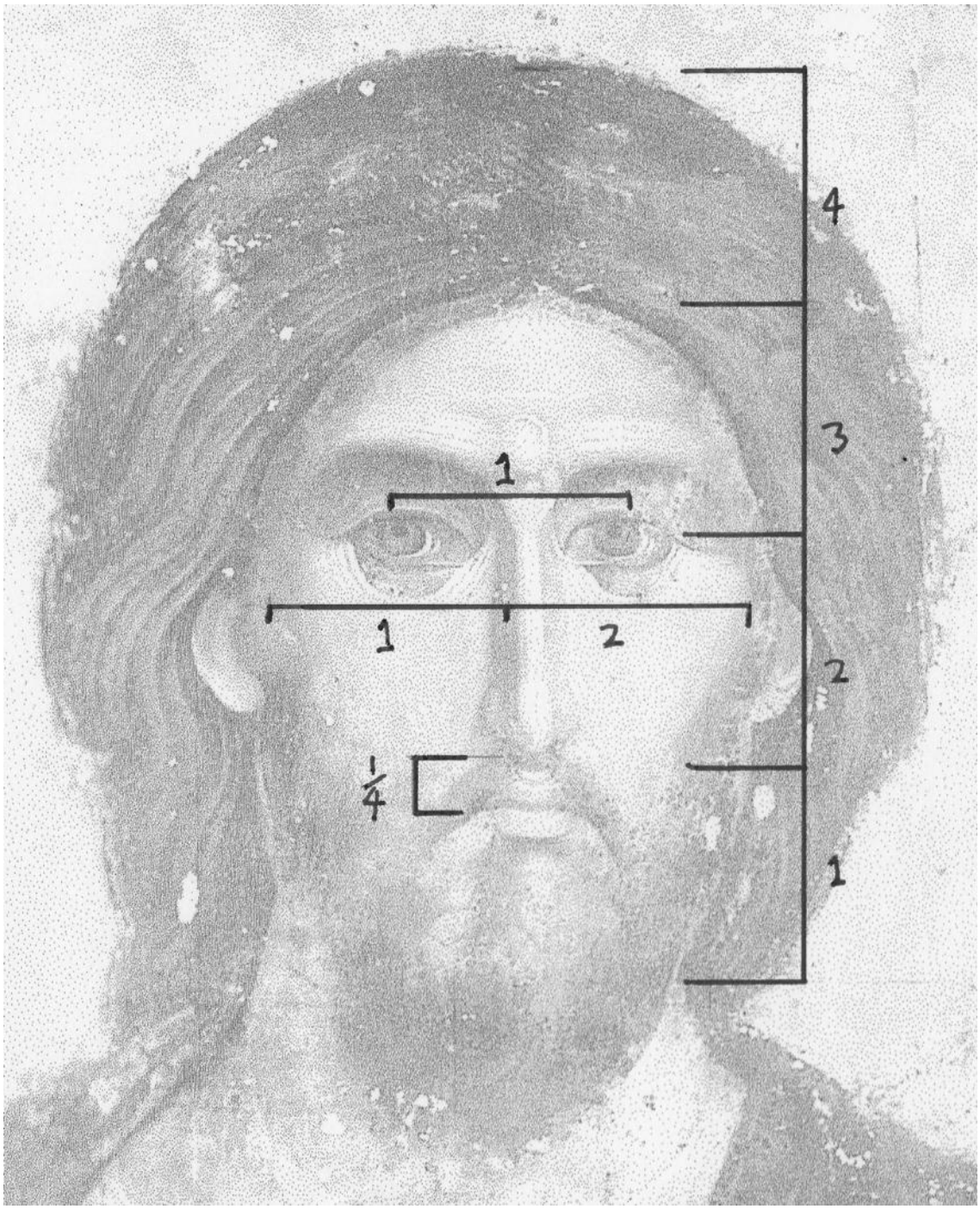
The Basic elements in every icon face

At first sight the face in the icon is puzzling. Used as we are to photographs which are 'life like' we can find the way the features of the face are drawn unnerving and difficult to understand. Here we will look at the face in detail, how the features of the face are transfigured by line, shape and light.

Iconography is a way of interpreting the human person in the light of the Christian experience of redemption. Filled with the Holy Spirit we see humanity differently, as people with a divine core with an eternal destiny. As St Athanasius said,' God became human so that humans could become gods!" And with this divine gift we live our lives against the horizon of eternity.

This experience is above something we discover in the Liturgy, the Mass, when Christ becomes present as bread and wine, and feeds his people through the Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood. This breath taking intimacy between God and humanity, indeed with each individual human person, is something which makes Christianity very distinctive, and it is what above all shapes iconography.
Our model is above all Jesus and his life. Here we have the perfect human person, and in the Gospels we see how that real, complete humanity lives itself. It is a humanity dominated not be greed, or fears, or worries or ambitions but by love of neighbour, acceptance of self, compassion for those oppressed by their animal nature and the cruelty of a fallen world, and above all a profound love for and closeness to God as a loving Father.

What we see then in the human face is a divine presence, a joy and a sadness as people live that experience of God's love in a world which is broken and suffering.



We see ourselves through the experience of the great saints who were ascetics, people who managed to live real lives but not trapped by their animal self but as essentially spiritual but incarnated beings This is what a truly Christian art seeks to express.

The process of transfiguring our animal nature and freeing ourselves from being dominated by our more superficial feelings is called asceticism. That is a word which is associate with monks, nuns, fasting and sacrificing oneself. It's a particular way of relating to our material world.

Iconography is an art, it uses material things, pigments, wood, eggs, and makes lines, shapes and plays with colour. But it does so from this ascetical attitude. And

this attitude effects even the style of how we paint.

We will explore this throughout the course, but will begin with the most important aspect of the icon, the face.
Icons respect nature but are not trapped by it. And we see this clearly in the way the face is drawn.

The first and most important rule in drawing in an iconographic way is that the length of the nose is definitive in understanding the iconic face. In nature the nose is roughly a third of the face, with the hair less than a quarter as it recedes back over the crown of the head. But in the icon the hair is sort of raised up into a quite strong cascade, as though we see the figure from above and in front.

In fact we are also show the face from the front and the side, which you can see more clearly by covering over one side and then the other. The icon doesn't make the mistake of thinking you see everything about a person from one angle, but is trying to hold before us a more complex physical reality.

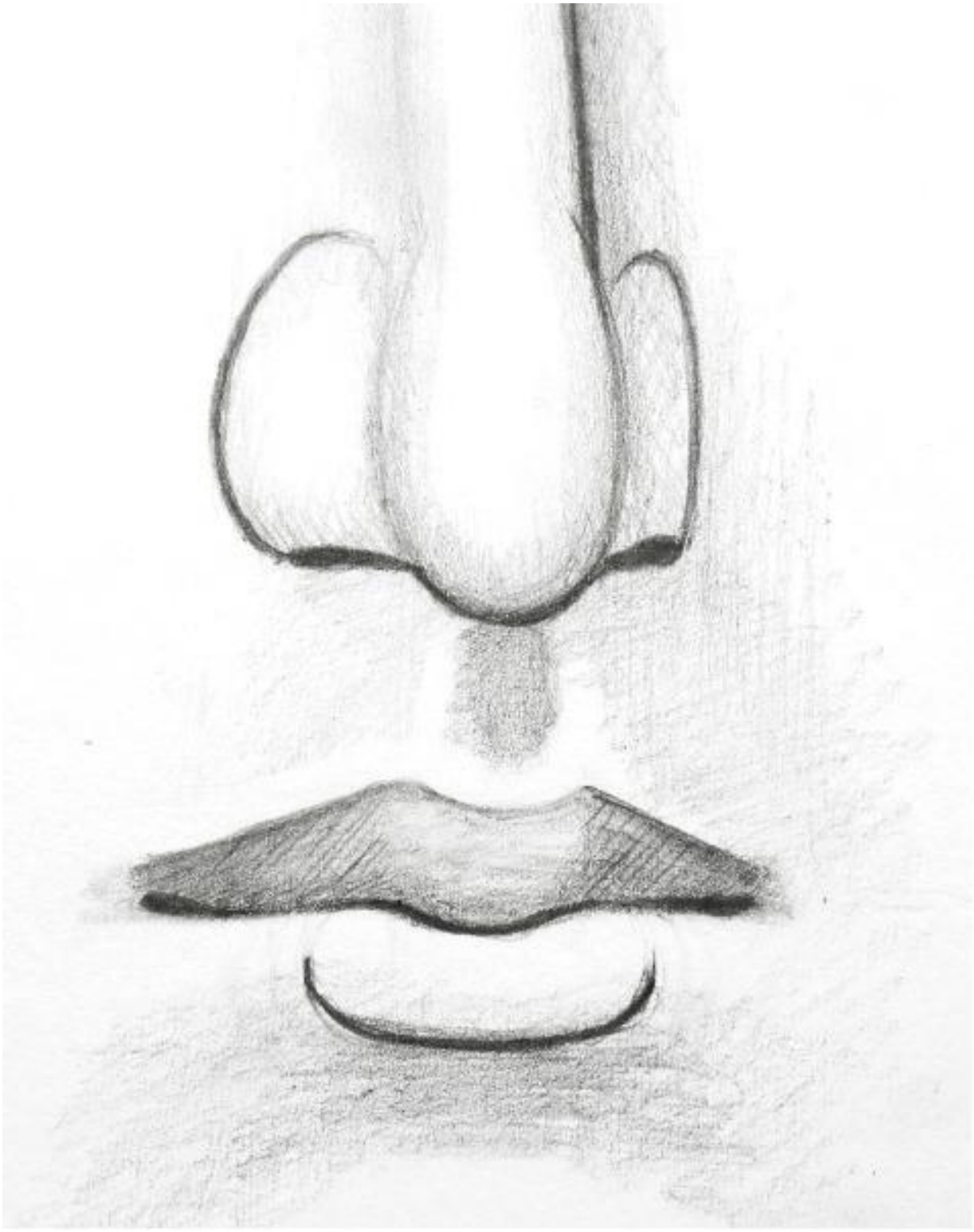
The next point is that the face is stripped back to basics, to fundamental elements, and they are drawn to express the deeper reality – so the organs by which we receive, ears, nose and eyes, especially the eyes as the gateway to the soul, are more pronounced and elegant, while the organ fo speech, the mouth, is smaller and closed.

They are also drawn in such a way as to be elegant, speaking more about the inner spiritual life than outward attractiveness. They are stripped of all sense of sensuality – so the lips are not curved and full, the eyes not fleshy and careworn even in older people, the wrinkles of old age are graceful and flowing.

The eyes are not round but oval shape, much more elegant and graceful than in nature. They are larger, more open, and fixed in a way that expresses a tranquility and lack of alarm or fear. They are also quite dark and mysterious. And crucially, they don't have that characteristic white dot of paint which in nature shows the reflection of an exterior light, be it the sun or a lamp. No, in the icon we show an inner light, a luminosity in the flesh and a absence of that reflected light in the eyes.

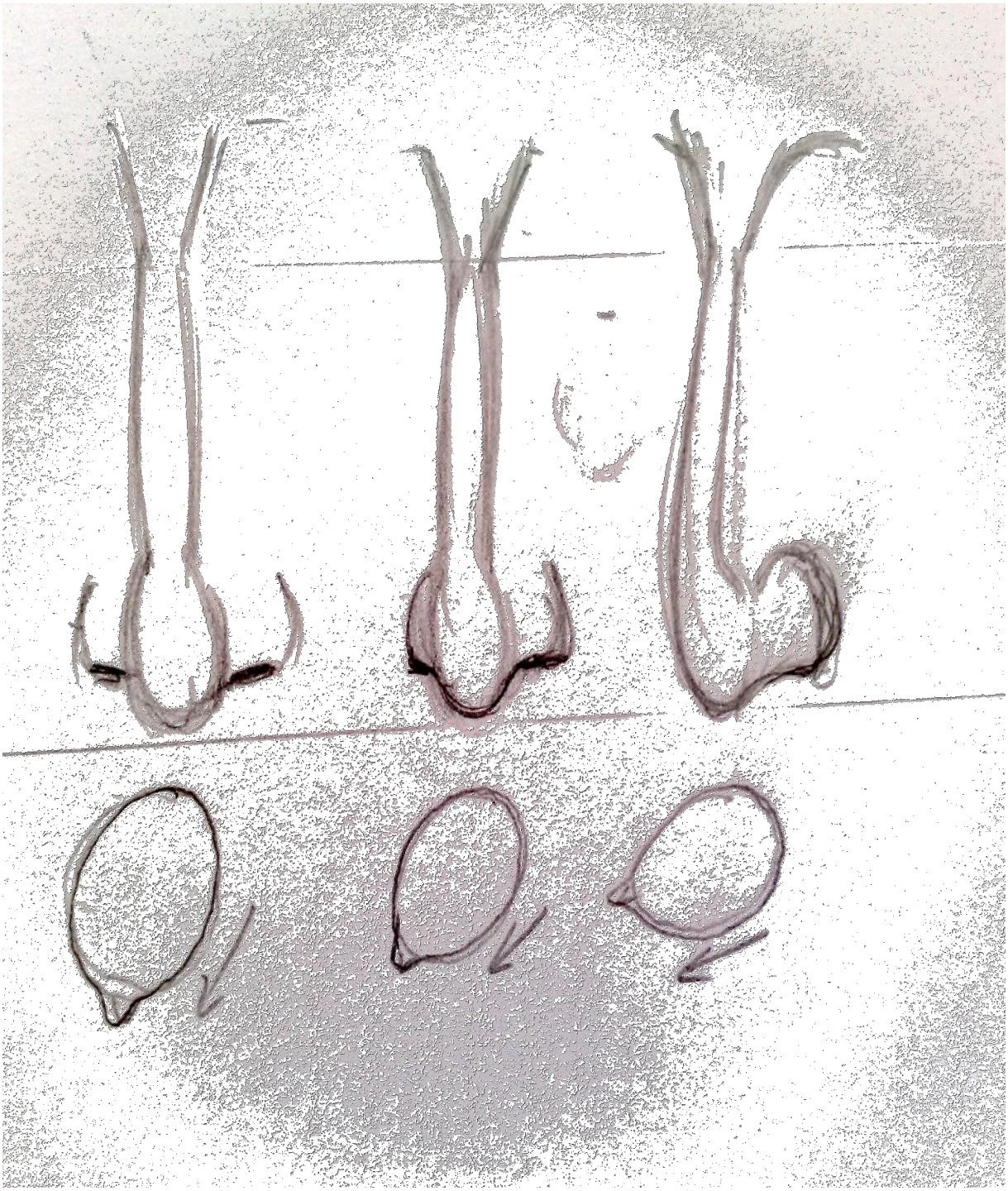
In the rest of this section we will take a look at the construction of each of these facial features. At this point you will just focus on drawing, but later you can return to these excellent examples to take a closer look at how they are painted and it would be very profitable to anyone to practice by copying these examples first as drawings, then as monochrome studies, and then finally as full colour examples.

Notice the examples begin with a rough breakdown of the basic shapes, and then gradually build up to the final stage. Don't be tempted to skip a stage but take it step by step each time.

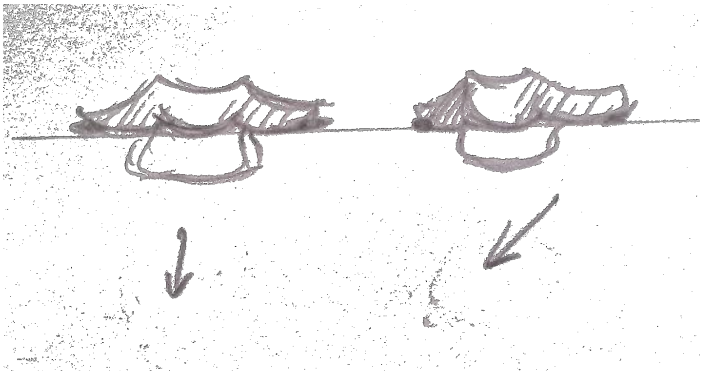


In the icon eyes are an oval, not a circle, giving spiritual elegance.

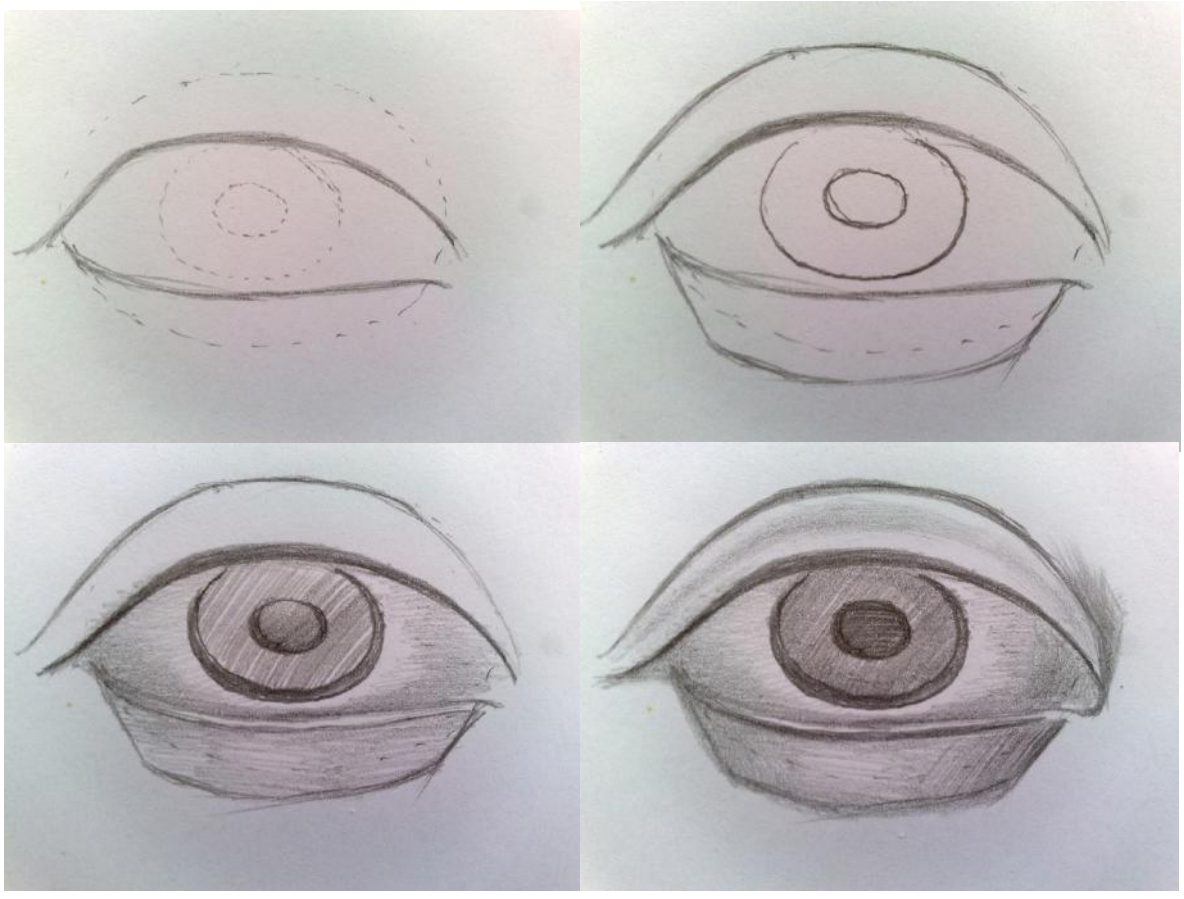
- There are no individual eyelashes, just a ‘thin-thick-thin’ calligraphic line, in a raw umber and then with black.
- The iris has no reflected light as in a naturalistic portrait, as in the icon the light is INTERIOR, shining out from within, not reflected from outside.
- The iris has a nutty brown colour, with then a circle of yellow ocher around the pupil.



Notice that the eyes have a red line on the eye lid, and the nose a red line along the outside edge, with a washy line around the bulb and nostrils.



ABOVE: ST. PAUL, BELOW THE VIRGIN MARY



The nose has three sections, with a pronounced bridge which is the legendary ‘third eye’. The elegance of the features is reflected in the shape of the end and the width of the bridge

The angle of the face, turned to the right or left, even if only slightly, affects the profile of the nose in particular. In Christ’s Face you have two perspectives - one looking straight at you, the other from the side, and even a third from slightly above, which speak of Christ’s two natures, True God and True Man, and it takes skill to make this all look convincing.

Drawing Exercise:

Look at the sketches below, which take you through step by step in drawing an iconographic eye. Don't forget that it builds on nature, but in ways which are

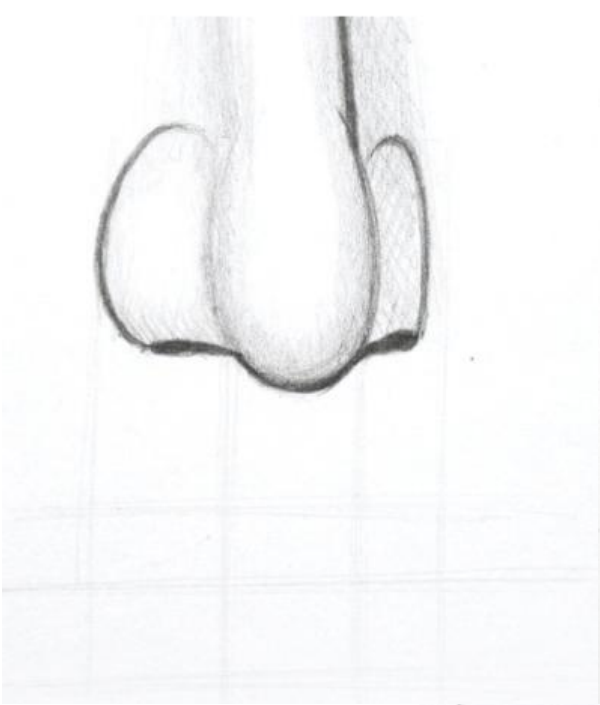
- the eye is set into the socket,
- and the eyelid curves over the sphere of the eyeball,
- and the skin pulls around the bottom, creating a shadow.

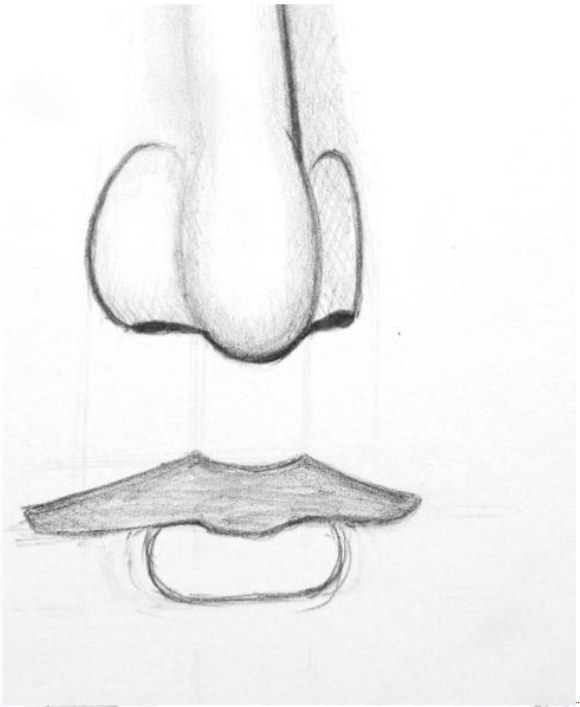
In the icon this is still the basic construction, though with elegance and important differences.

The eyeball is an oval shape rather than a sphere, lines are calligraphic with beautiful shapes.

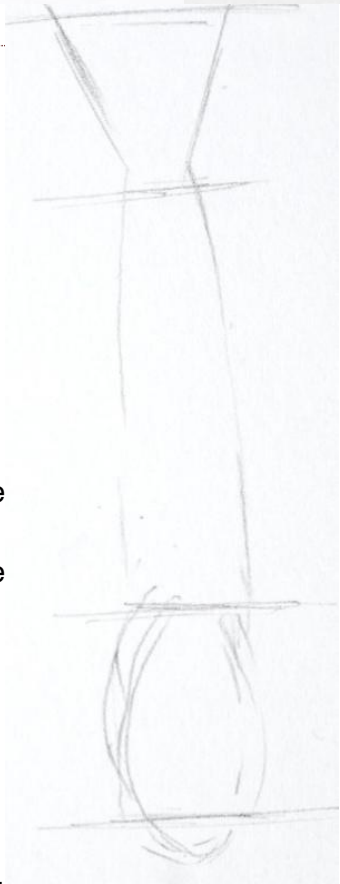
Importantly there is no spot of reflective light in the eye.

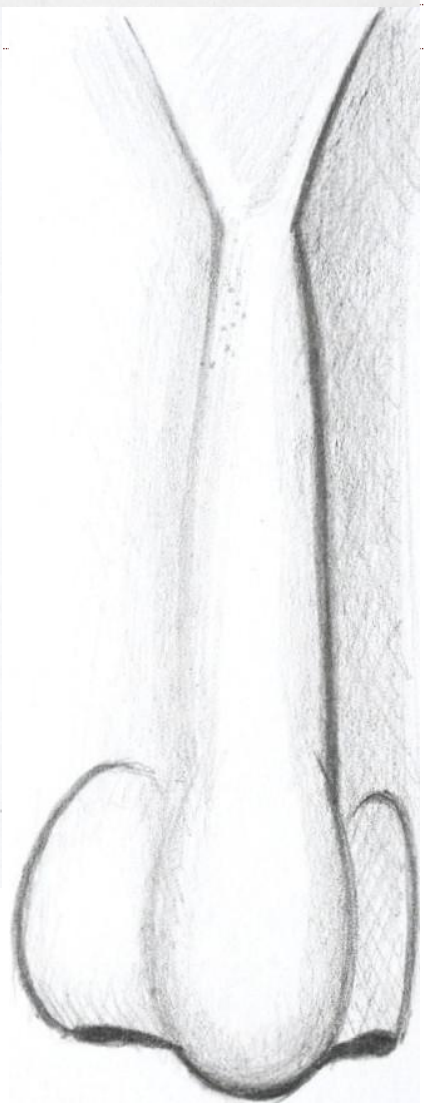
The eye looks right by having the left side of the eyeball lighter, and vice versa.





F. THE NOSE & MOUTH





The nose is elongated, thin, with three distinct parts – the top, the bridge and the bulbous end. The top ‘v’ shape is more exaggerated than in nature and refers to the third or inner eye, and the bridge is elegant – longer and thinner. This is an instrument for smelling paradise. According to the turn of the head the proportion of the nostrils and the angle of the bridge alters, as does the shape and length of each side of the mouth.

The face is never facing directly forward, but turns at least slightly to one side.

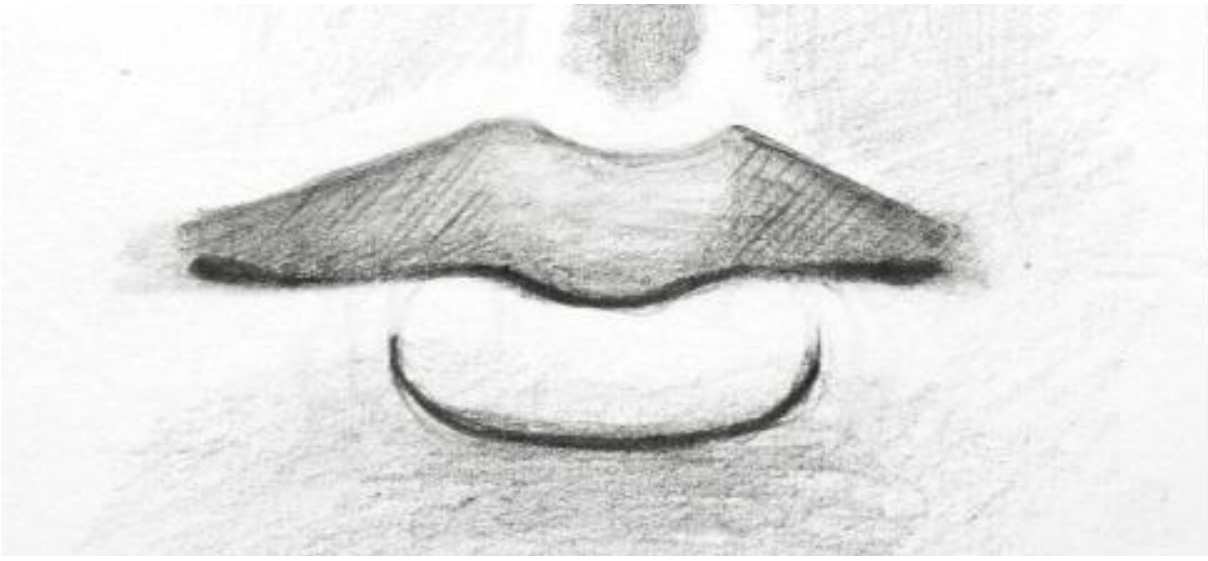
This changes the perspective of the face, so that as it turns to the right, for example, the nostril on the right becomes smaller . Likewise, this affects the length of the mouth on either side of the nose.

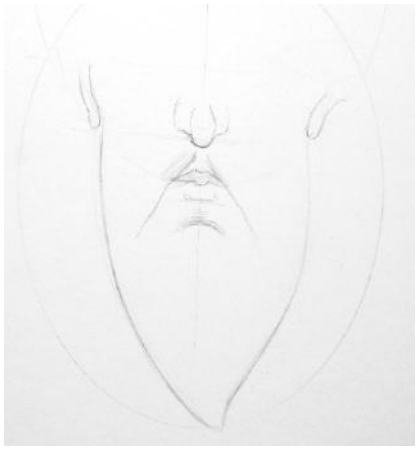
The angle of the bridge of the nose also becomes more acute as the nose moves away from you.

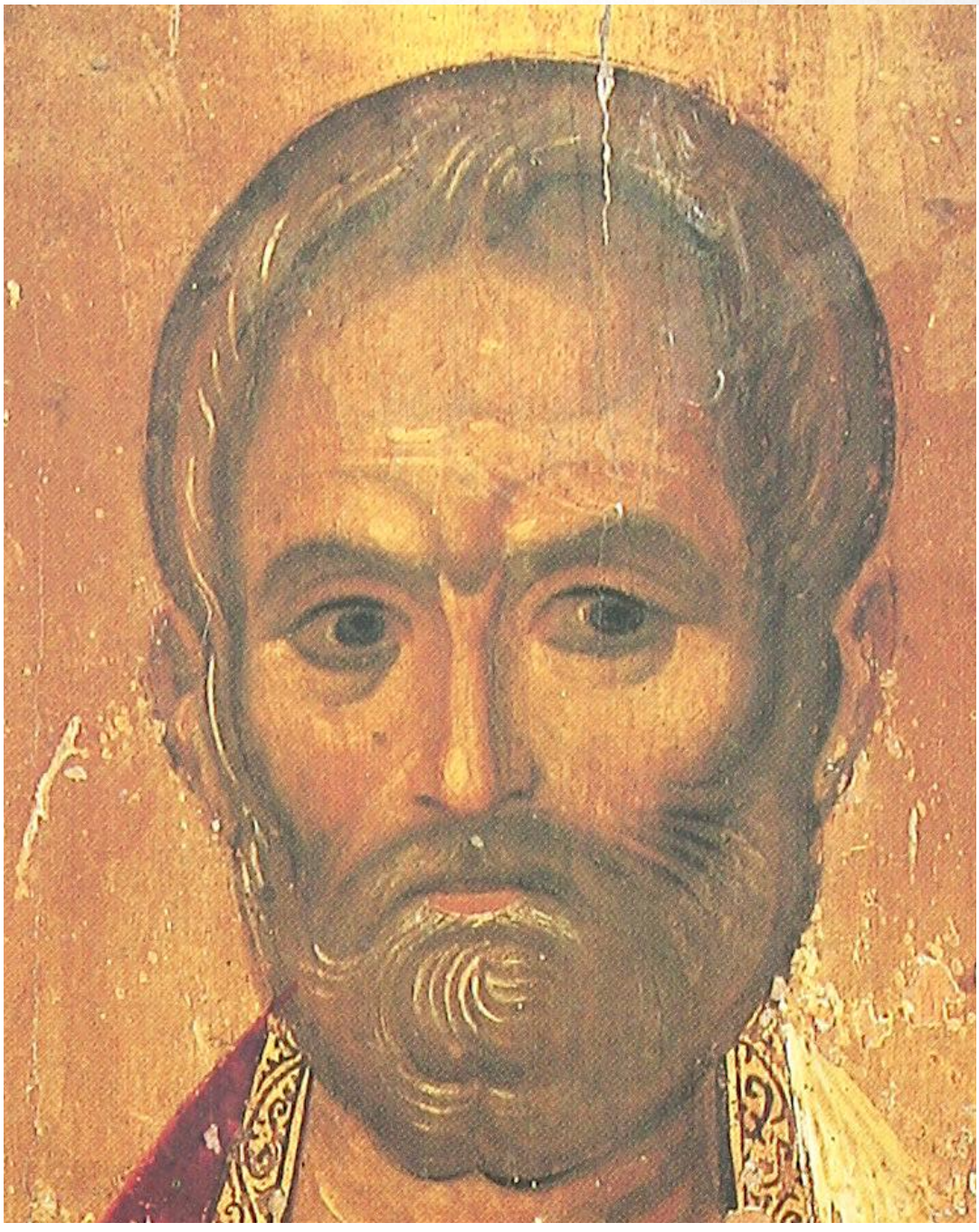
The mouth is aligned to the bottom of the nose, and is devoid of lusciousness and sentimentality. The saint listens rather than speaks, Christ is the Word that does not so much speak as become flesh. Thus it is also much smaller than in nature, and closed, with a hint of a smile but without frivolous laughter. There is slight tear drop shaped flare at each end of the lips resting on a shaded ‘v’ shape which gives an enigmatic smile. Notice where the long stem is wider and narrower.

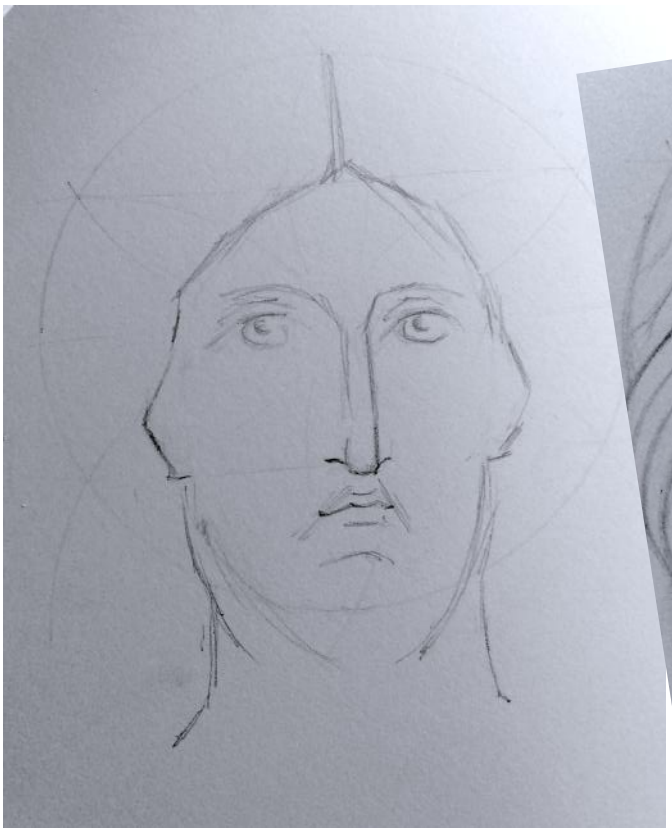
Here you can see how the mouth is built up in balance with the nose. The lower lip is flatter than you would expect, less sensuous. Also notice the lighter shading which extends all along the lower lip, and the darker shading on the sides of the upper lip.

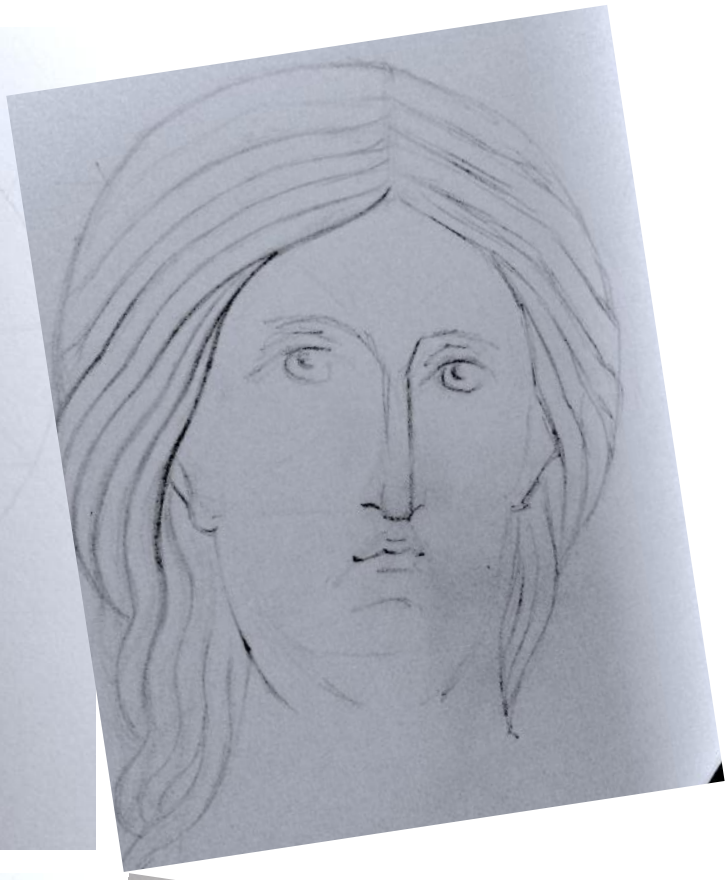
Notice that when painted the lower lip is very square and of a lighter colour than the upper lip, and the centre of the upper lip lighter than the central part.

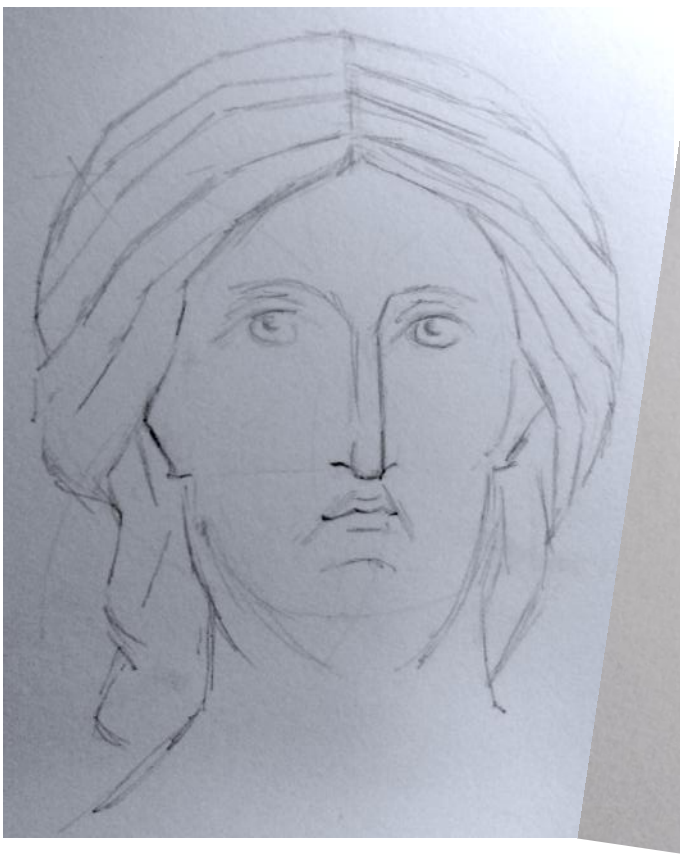


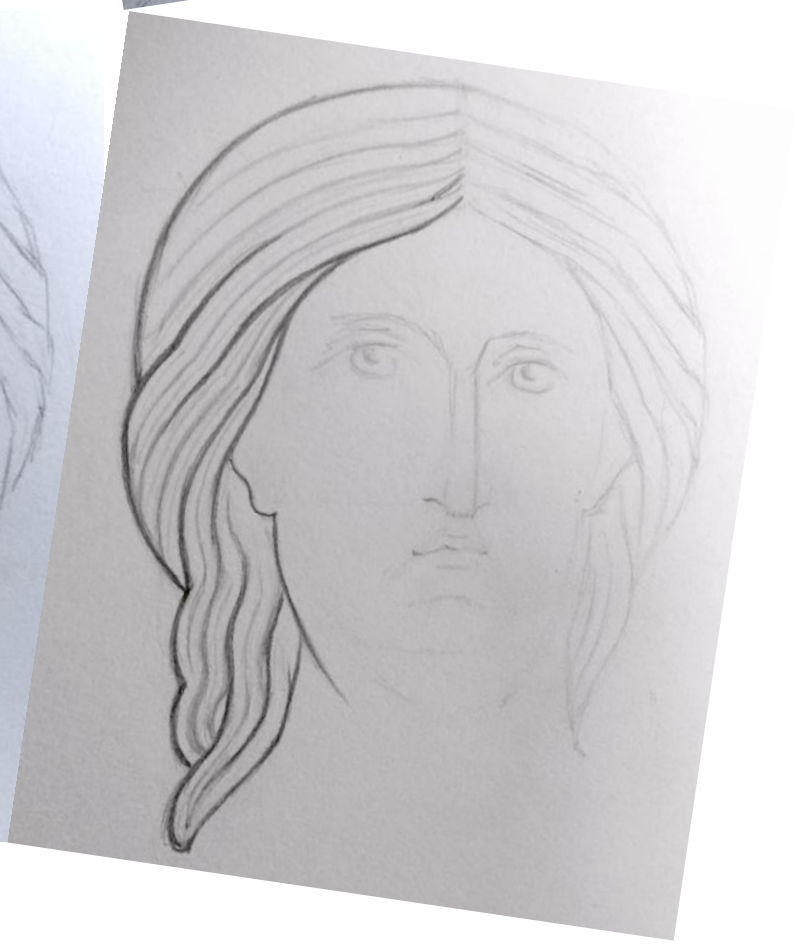










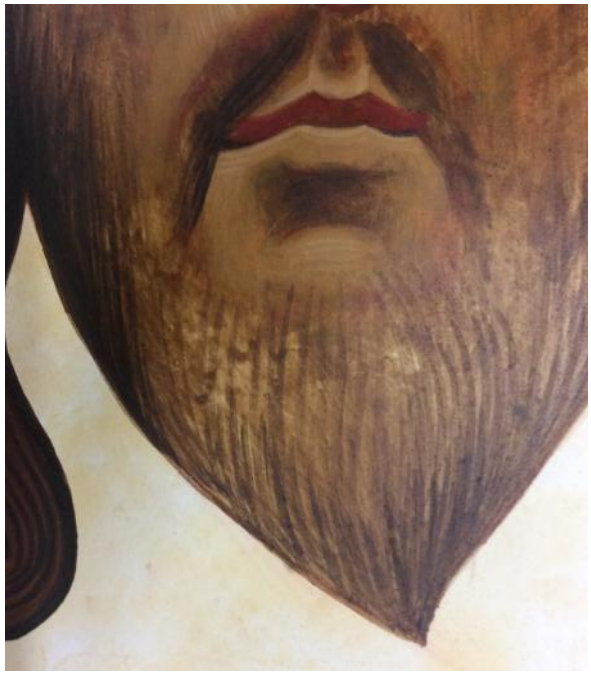


Drawing the hair takes some care and skill. The aim is to create a flow of rythmic bunches as strands which surrounds the face, enhancing it and strengthening the focus on the eyes.

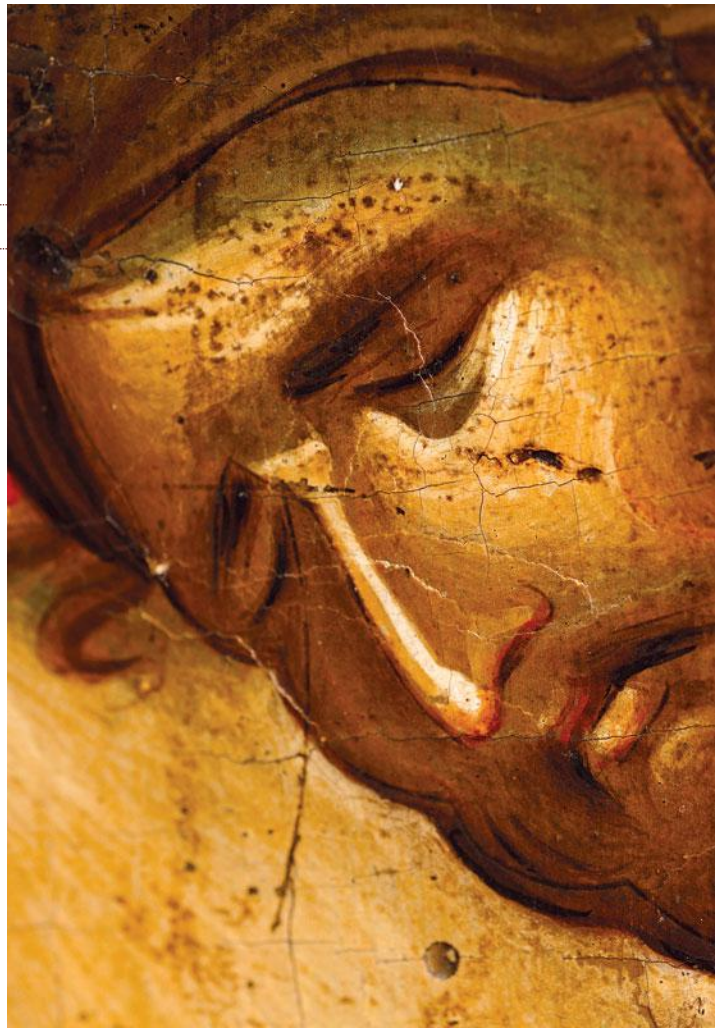
In the drawings above you can see how.

1) The main features are put in place using the geometric structure provided by the 'seed of life'. Critical here are the ears which should rest on the same line as the bottom of the ears.
2) The main bunches are quickly sketched in. The way the hair flows around the ear, coming over the top with another bunch coming from beneath help creates interest and a dynamic energy. The bunches begin with a common point and then splay outwards evenly, before curving back together. These bunches are formed around the curve of the head and over the top of the ears and gathering onto the shoulder and/or gathering behind the head.
3) The bunches are subdivided into equal strands, creating a sense of unity and order. Curves should be in parallel and taper in a consistent way. One bunch should flow into the next by taking strands from one bunch into another.
4) The final stage is to strengthen the key lines, marking the main flow of strands as they curve and flow.

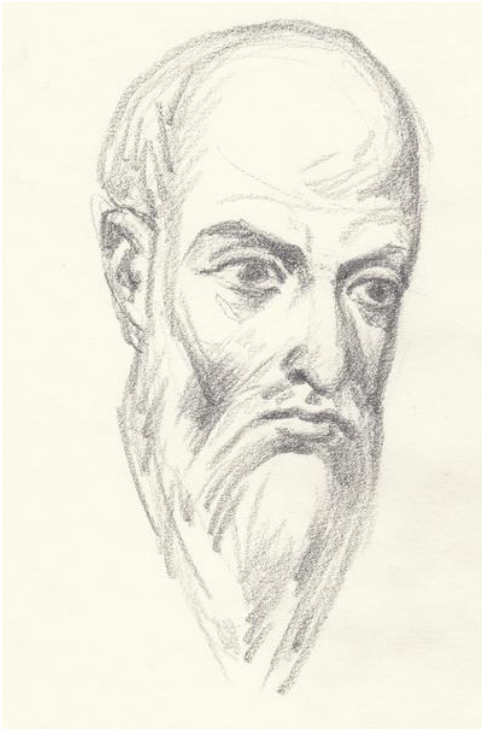
With the beard the flow is again important, adding something noble to the face. It is important to ensure is appears to emerge from the skin rather than being stuck on top like a fake beard. For this it is important to build up the shading gently from the darker outer edge to the flesh part. At the final instance dark calligraphic lines are placed at strategic points, adding life to the image you can see how the hairs of the beard are built up slowly, with a gradual gradient from dark beard to the shadow of the cheeks. When painting the beard is usually in raw umber blending against the flesh proplasmos (avana ochre). In the picture you can see the first layer of washy raw umber lines evenly spaced and nicely shaped, while to the left you can see how they have been eventually built up to make a smooth transition from beard to flesh.



In older men the beard is grey, made from a mixture of raw umber and titanium white, with highlights built up with layers of pure white.



EYEBROWS



Notice the eyebrows shape, how they show a strength and authority, or humility or sorrow. Notice how the eyebrows are first a layer of the proplasmos (first colour, Avana ochre) and then lines of raw umber and then darker firmer lines in raw umber + black. Above is an icon of St Nicholas from Russia in which the eyebrows are highly expressive.

A GOOD FACE

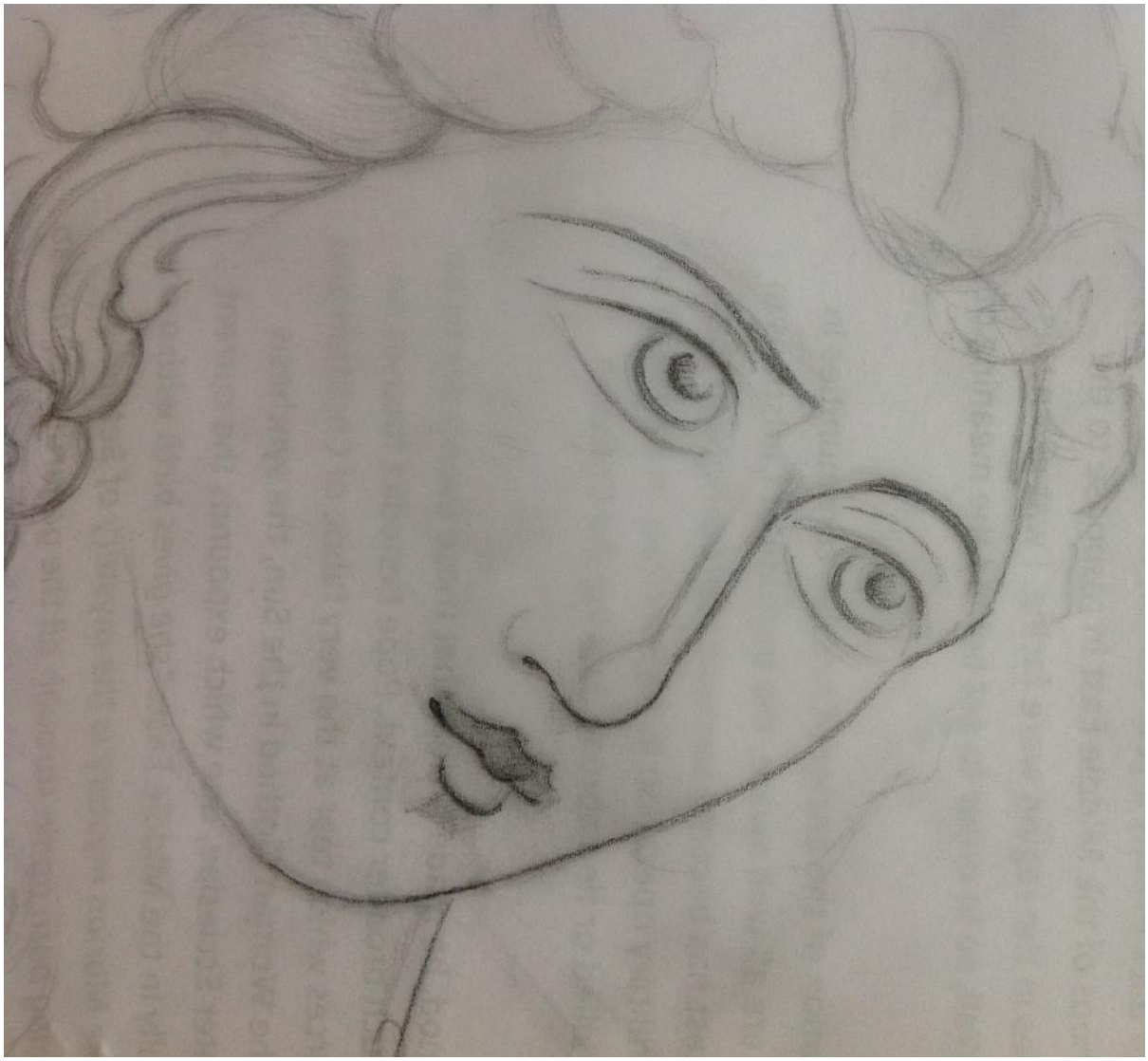
Whenever a line is places on the face, it should be built up with first a washy line and then a stronger more dense one. If you fail to do this then the lines will look rd and flat.

The Face in the icon is the most important aspect of any icon, however complex. Through slight shifts in the design of the eyebrows, the lips and the angle of the head the icon becomes highly expressive. It is as though the sound has been turned down low on a television so that you have to really be attentive to

the sound, making you much more sensitive.

All of these elements strip away sensuality, and take things to the core, to what is not just essential, but expressing it very simply and clearly. Icons are ASCETICAL ART, that means they take things to the core, to what is most important, and allow beauty to flow from those essentials, cutting away the superficialities.

That is why sentimental icons, or highly decorated ones, are really very poor and show a lack of understanding of how icons ‘work’, loosing sight of the theological profundity and the



sophistication of ascetical art and replacing it with something more immediately appealing and thus more superficial.
A good icon means a good face.

It is good practice to always be critical of your work, especially as it progresses. Be prepared to constantly improve what you have done, and don't be trapped by the drawing but allow yourself to build on the work you have done when it comes to building up the face in paint. The proplasmos method gives plenty of chances to refine the defining lines of eyes, eyebrows, nose and mouth, and you should be attentive to this at every stage.

You can see here the preparatory sketch for the icon of the Archangel Michael which appears on the following page. Notice the subtle changes to the eyebrows which give a more flowing sense to the final piece, with the eyes less cramped by the eyebrows.

B. Idols or Icons?

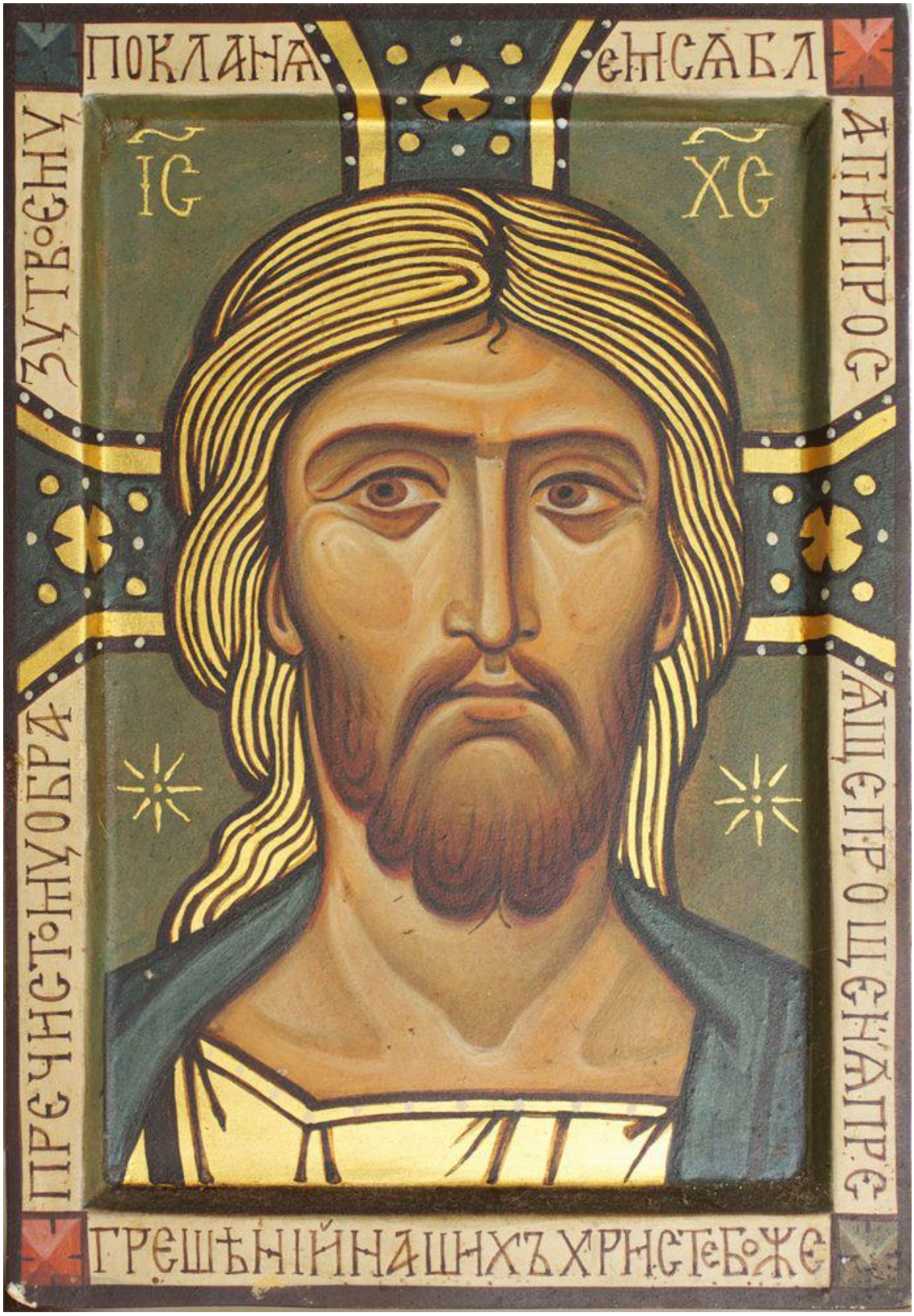
"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;" Exodus 20:4-6 (KJV)

The Bible is very clear. No idols! This prohibition included images of human beings and has been pretty rigorously applied by Jews and Muslims across time. So why do Christians insist on having icons of Jesus and the saints? Aren't we breaking the first commandment?

In the Person of Jesus Christ God provided an image/icon of Himself. The Face of Christ is the Face of God:

As Jesus said, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” John 14:9 (NIV)

Thus, the birth of Christ provides a mandate for the icon in Christian worship, for God has provided in the Person of Christ an image or icon of Himself. Indeed, it is an imperative for the making of icons, and to refuse icons is to deny the reality of the Incarnation. The Face of Jesus to which the Virgin Mary gave birth is the icon ‘not made by human hands’, a title



which is given to a particular icon, also known as the Mandylion or Veronica's Veil. It is the Face of Jesus that is the prototype of all icons, for even the icons of the saints, who in their sanctity reflect Christ, derive from this. Therefore it seems appropriate for us to start here.

1. The Shroud of Turin (left) is quite possibly the Mandylion, a precious relic of the Byzantine era first in the possession of the Armenians. It was then taken by the Byzantines to Constantinople, and vanished around the time of the Crusader sack of the city. However, copies of this precious relic were made and for example given as gifts. , earliest icons of this type are to be found in Italy, some originally gifts from the Byzantine Emperor.

2. One example is here, known as the Holy Face of Genoa (above *right*). This image is kept in the modest Church of St Bartholomew of The Armenians, Genoa, where it was donated to the city's 14th century Doge Leonardo Montaldo by the Byzantine Emperor John V Palaeologus.

3. Another example is the Holy Face of San Silvestro (above *left*) currently held in the Matilda chapel, Vatican Palace, Rome. The earliest dating for this is 1517, but it is obviously much older and conforms to the Genoa type, also found in Russia as the 'Wet beard' icon.

4. These and other examples of this type of icon are incredibly abstracted so as to make graceful calligraphic shapes. The hair especially is modelled so as to take its natural arrangement to a totally different level, as though it is water flowing,, grace flowing from the Divine Person of Christ. With the beard it leaves it looking as though it was indeed we, hence the name, ' wet beard.

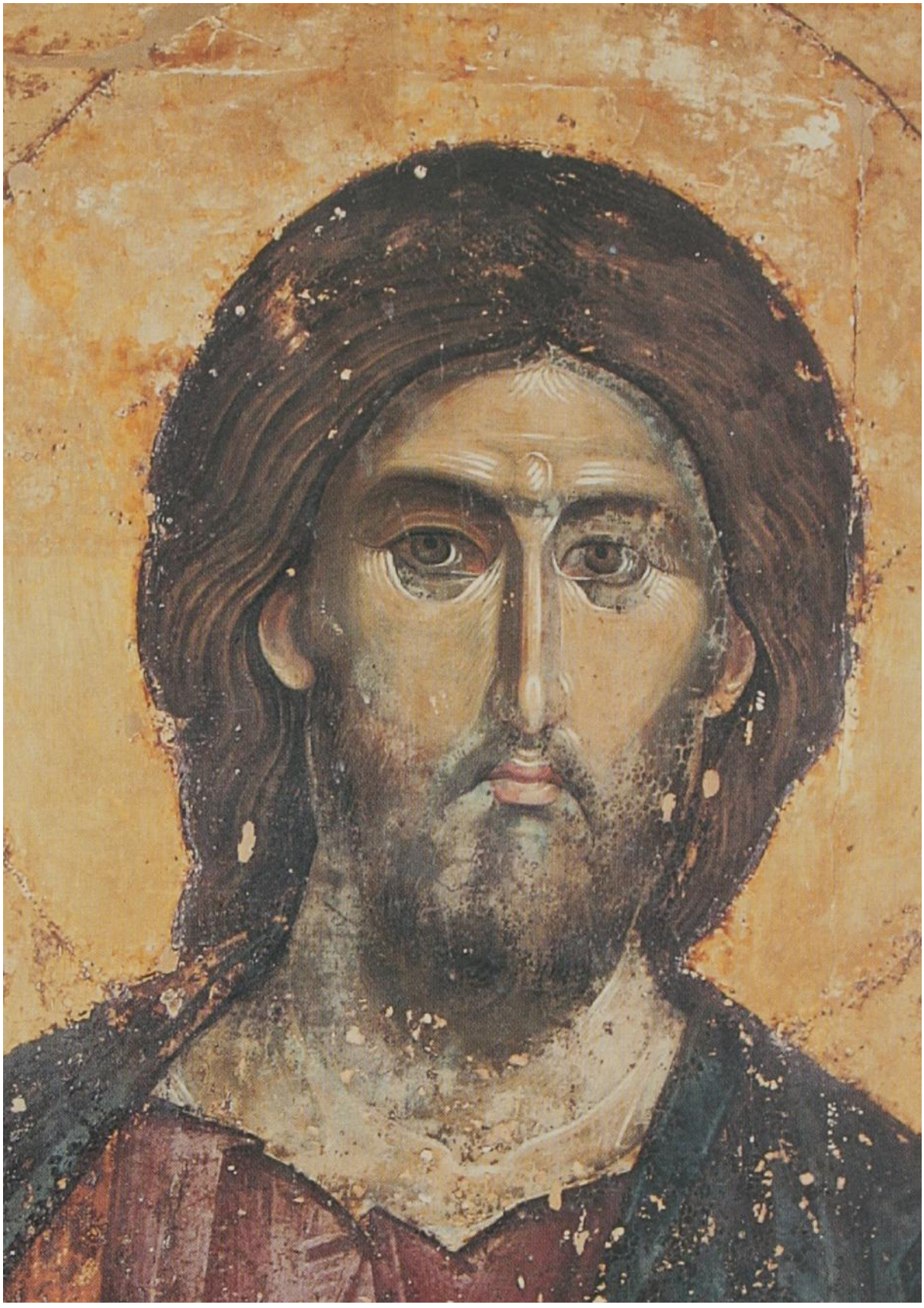
5. None of them are 'attractive' in a photo realistic sense, or in the sense of being somehow 'sweet'. Pay attention to how the face is developed form naturalism: its extended, thinner nose, its larger, almond shaped eyes, the closed, much smaller mouth, the accentuated ears, as well as the inclusion of a straight and a side view. All of these developments take the image away from an illusion of reality to something that is fundamentally honest about the truth of the image: that this is a man made creation, out of paint and glue and wood etc, but painted to tell the truth about Jesus Christ as true God and true Man, wonderfully present in the Holy Liturgy, bringing about salvation for all humankind. As an incarnational object, that is a fruit of the incarnation, it is a transfiguring of simple, created things to tell the truth about God, something that you can therefore pray with and through, and through which God Himself can be present to us as we worship Him.

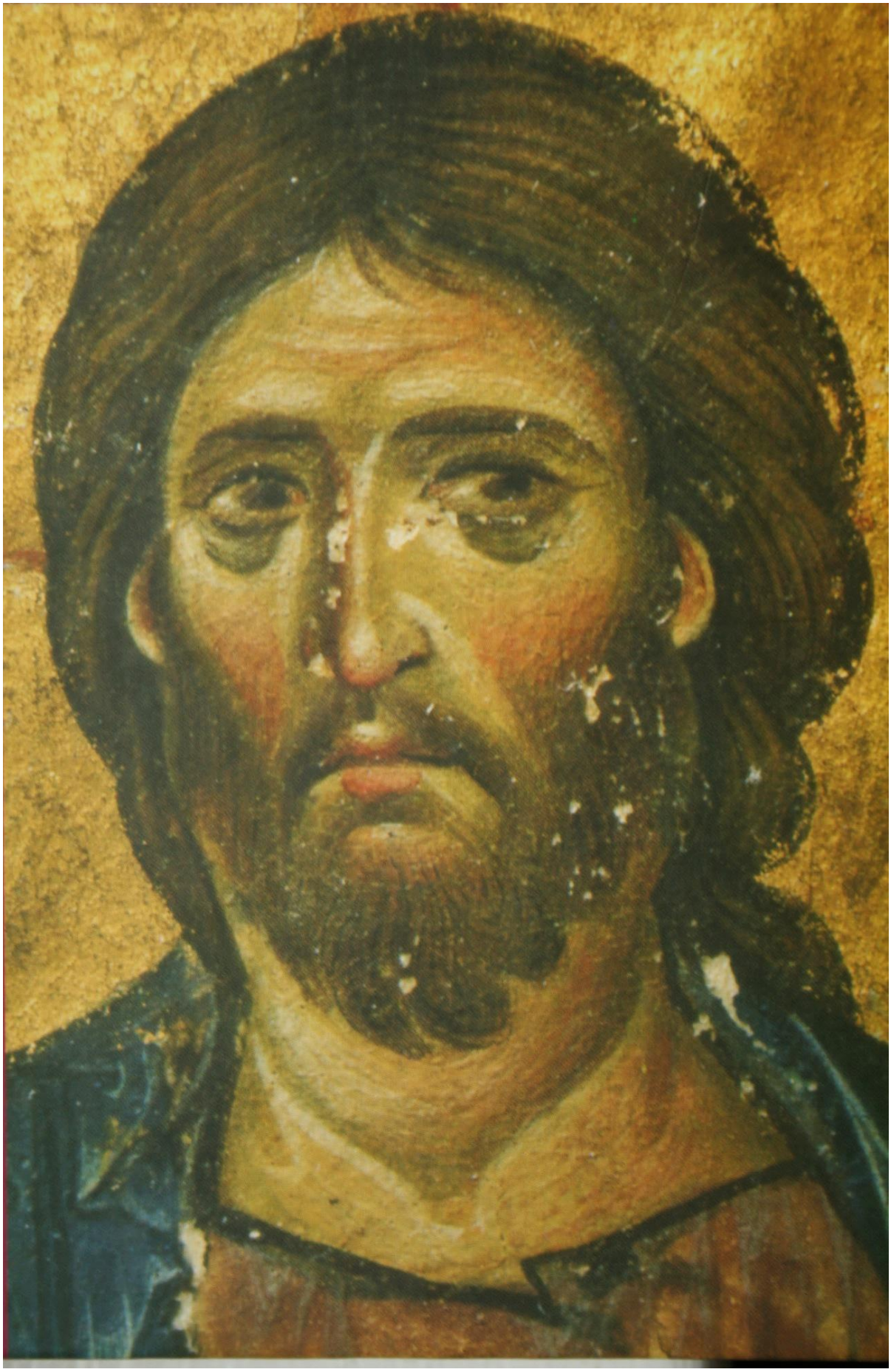
6. Here we have an early Russian example, from Novgorod: Notice the 'look' of the eyebrows, while below we have another Russian icon of the Wet Beard type, this time 16th century, on a single pinewood board, 59.2x50.7cm. We can see how this type of icon is closely associated with the Mandylion, the Holy Cloth, which in the West becomes associated with Veronica's Veil.

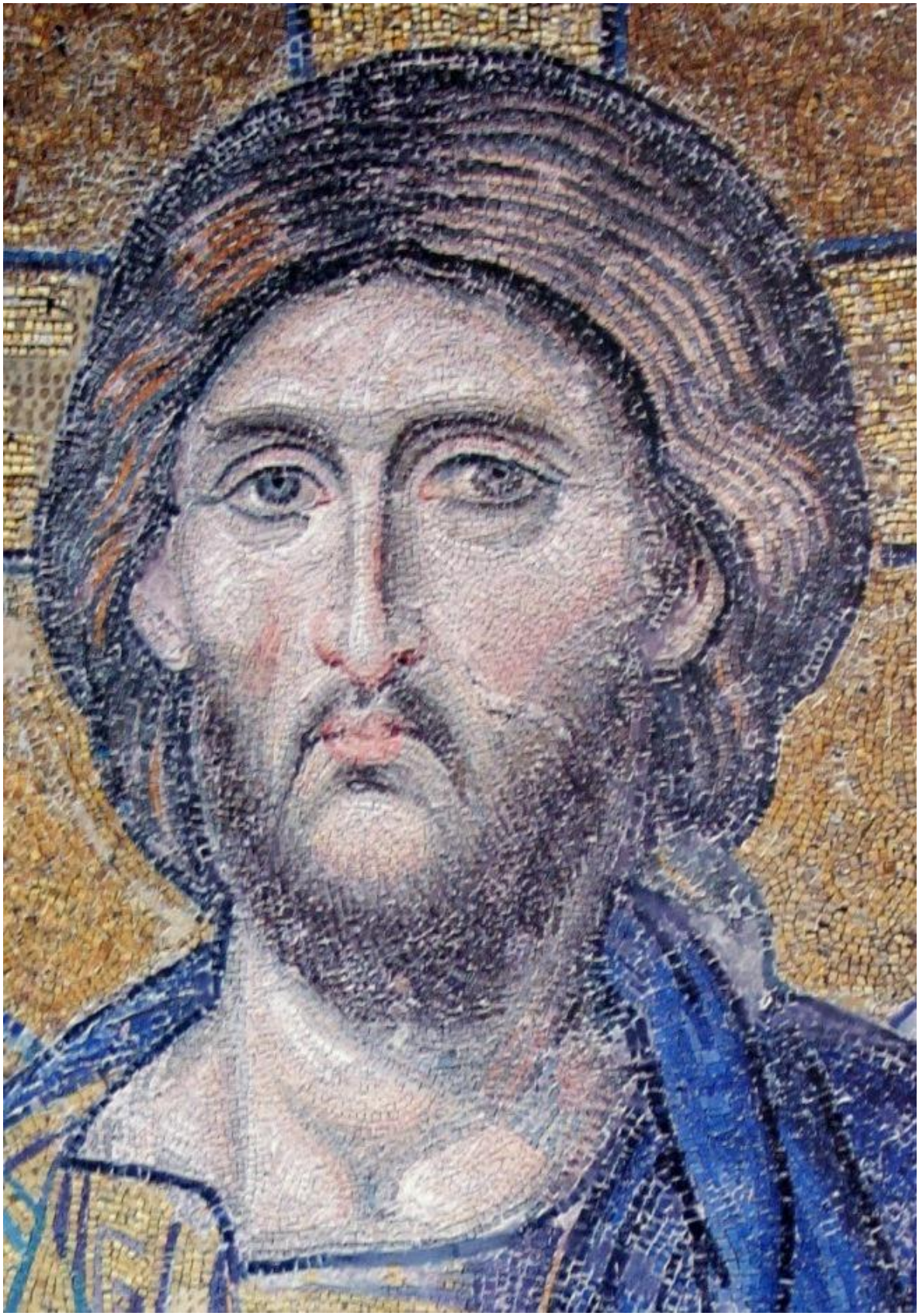
7. Notice that though clearly recognisable, each image is distinctive. Note the direction in which the different images are looking, the arrangement of the hair, shape of the moustache, the shape of the eyebrows. These are not slavish copies but living interpretations based around enduring, commonly recognisable elements, a meeting of the visual tradition and the creativity of the iconographer. They use various media: tempera, mosaic, and manuscript.

8. Here are some other images of Christ depicted as Pantocrator. Compare these with the image from St Catherine's Mt Sinai on page 8.

9. For further background to this chapter, please refer to:
   - The Technique of Icon and Wall Painting, pp. 50, 96-97, 242-247.
   - The legend of Veronic's Veil, the legend of King Agbar – see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_of_Edessa
   - The legend of St Luke's Hodregita icon,

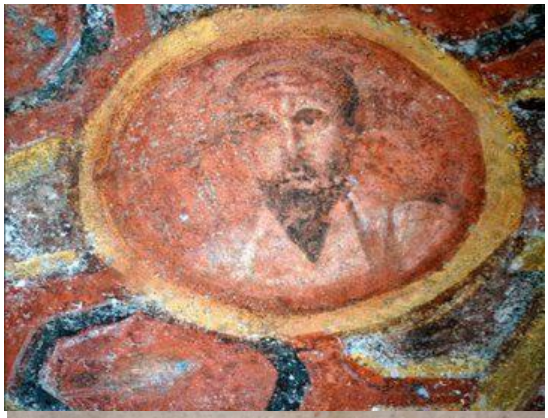






Chapter Three

A FIGURATIVE ART

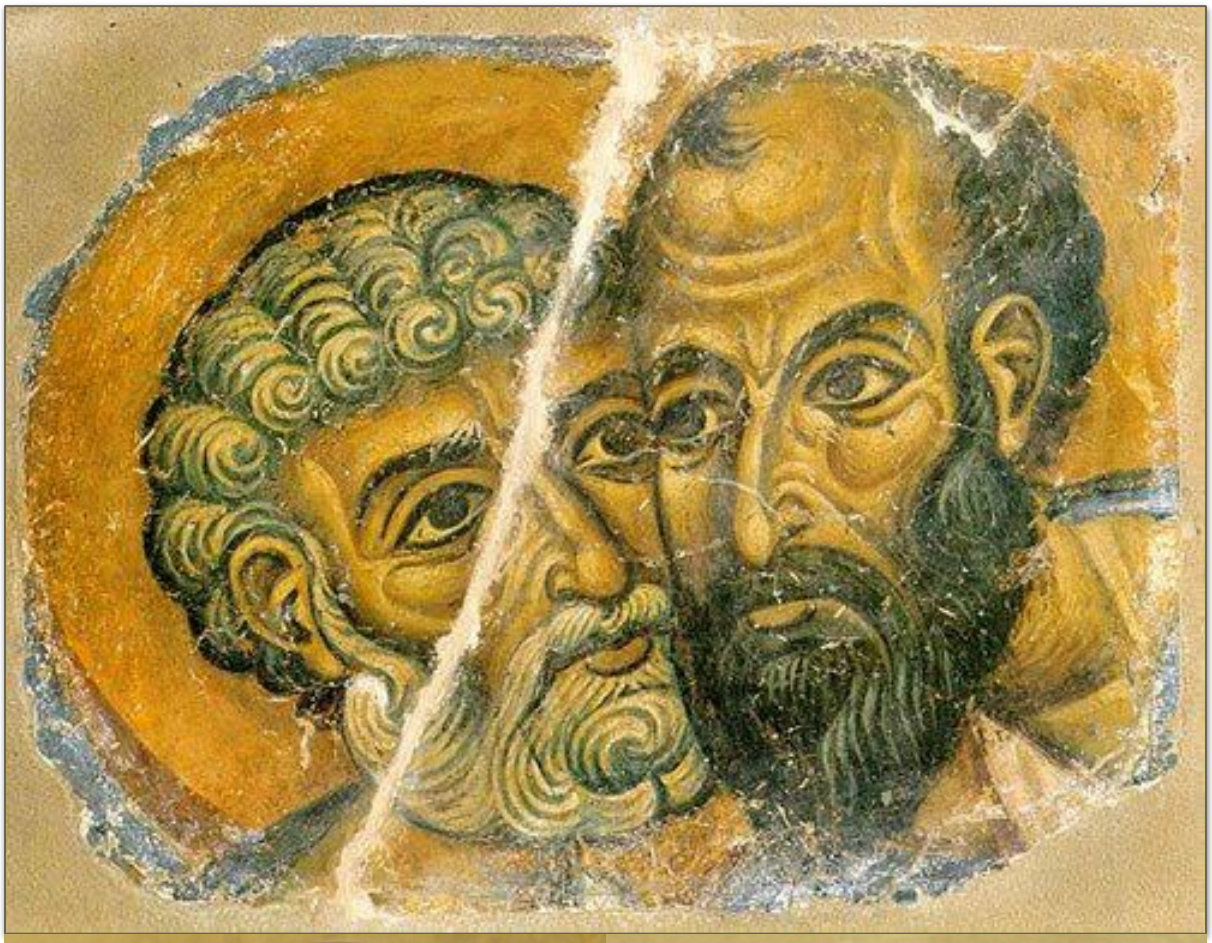


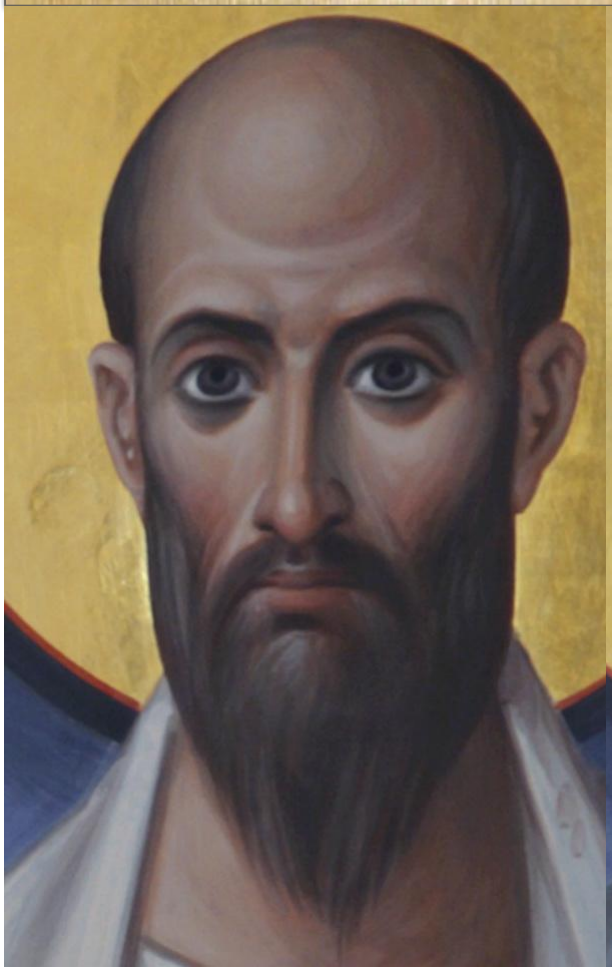
In contrast to Jewish prohibitions on religious imagery, and Islamic religious principles which restrict art in worship to decorative patterns, albeit with theological meaning, Christianity positively embraces figurative art as a way of walking in intimacy with God.

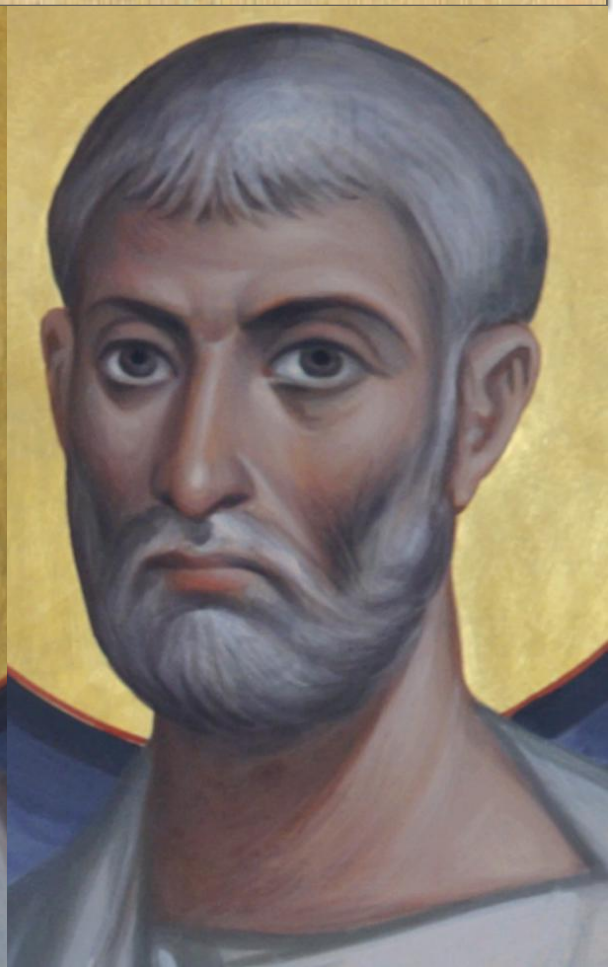
On the other hand a purely secular art explores the human person in something of a vacuum, perhaps more comfortable with dissembling humanity and exploring its degradation rather than proclaiming the beauty and nobility of humanity, a mixture of protest or interior angst.

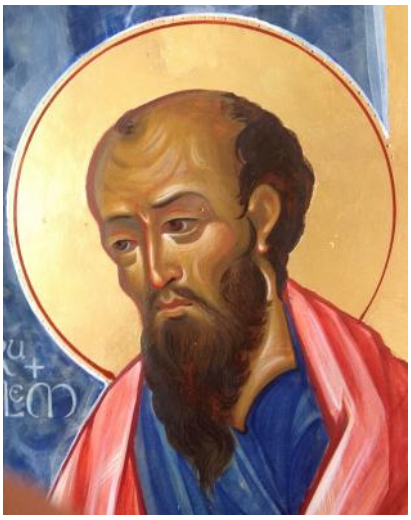
Christianity, focused on the Person of the God Man Jesus, has a profoundly optimistic and noble vision of what every human being can become and this is made absolutely clear by the inclusion of the human figure in the most holy of holies. The priest stands as an icon in the liturgy of Christ, and through his words and actions the Flesh and Blood of Christ become revealed, as the physical matter of bread and wine are transfigured by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. And around the altar figures of saints are depicted standing.

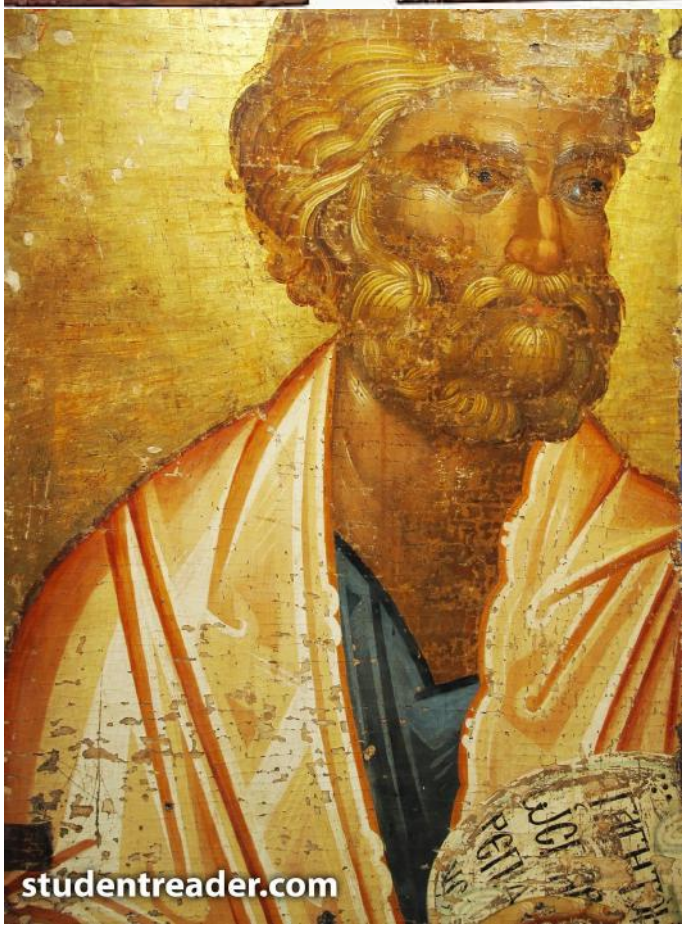
These images visualise what is happening invisibly, showing the saints joining in worship of the Divine Presence, co-participants in the Divine Liturgy. This is the fountain from which a completely revised vision of humanity flows, shaping the way we see each other and ourselves, in turn shaping the way we understand how we should and can live alongside each other as neighbours. It also shapes the way we explore the human person in sacred iconography. Iconography seeks to be true to the natural features of a saint, i.e. icons are never generic but particular, while at the same time using a code of interpretation which







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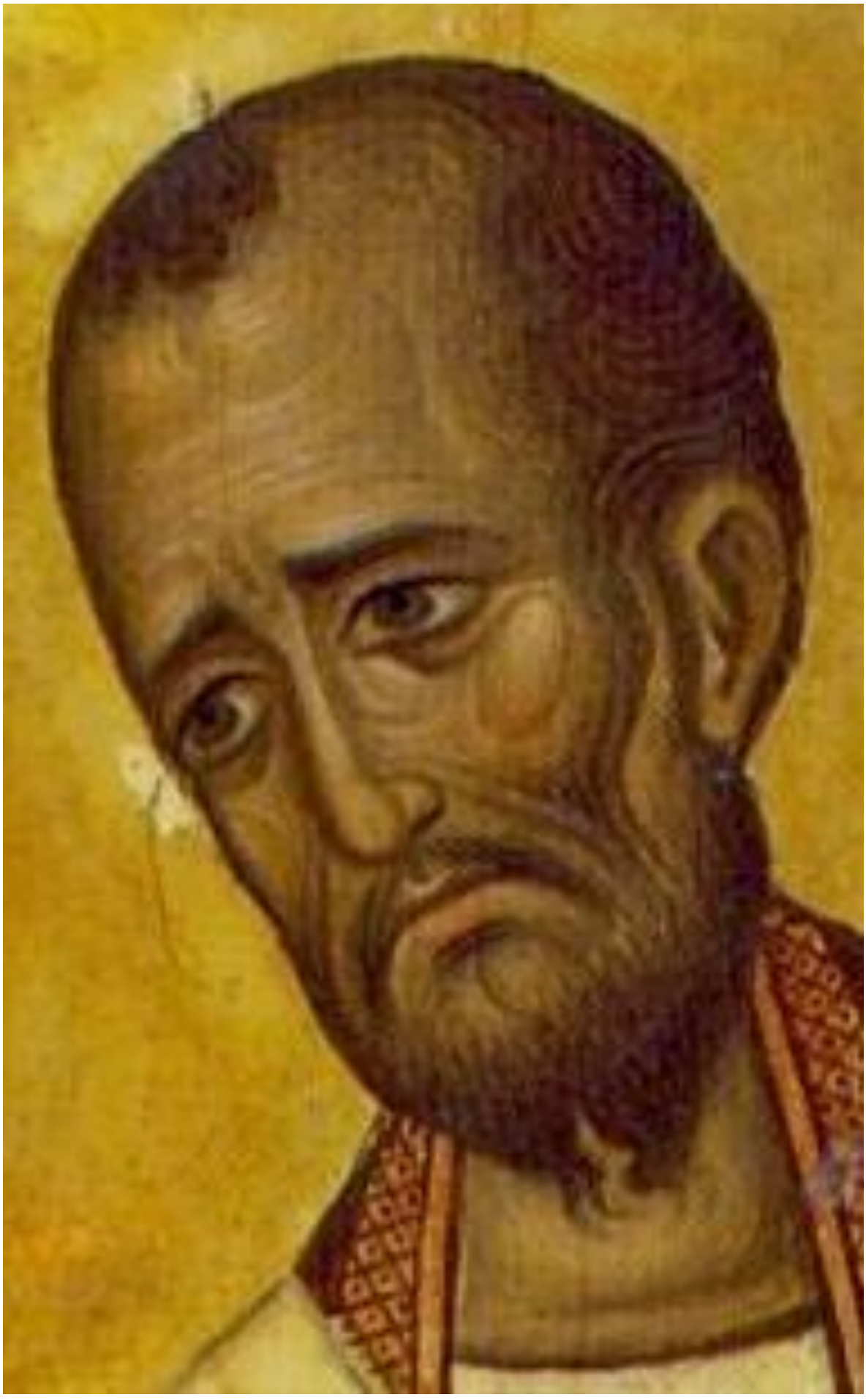
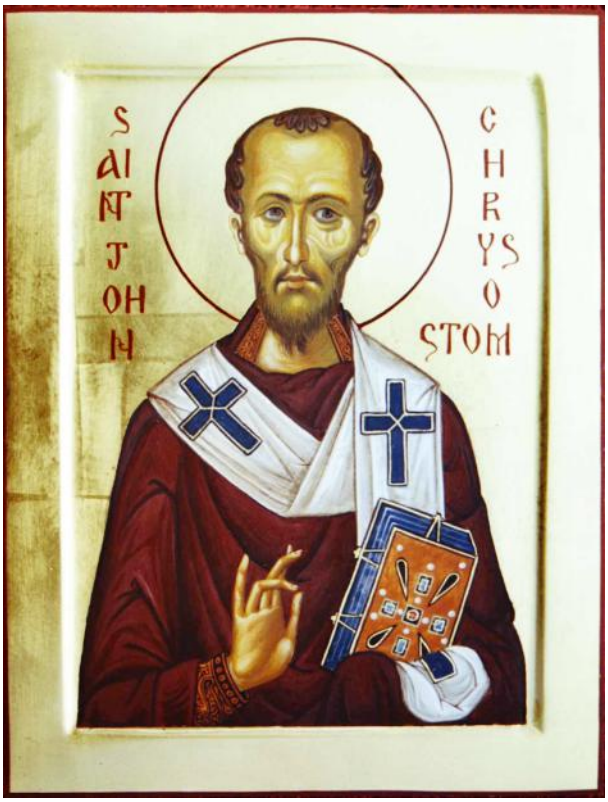


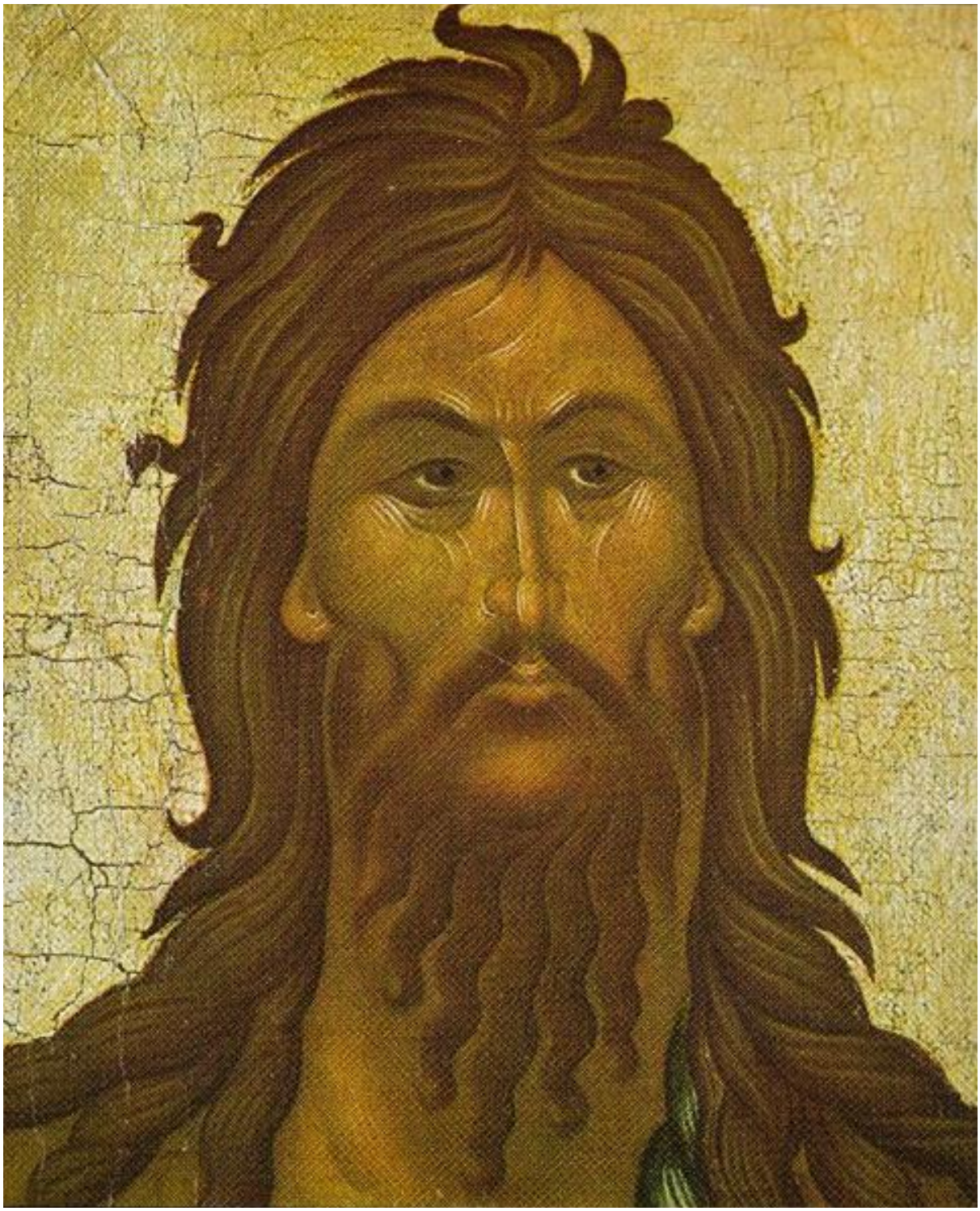
highlights the spiritual light of the Holy Spirit with which they are invisibly endowed. Christ's face is the archetype, as He is the Perfect Man. So, we have already looked at how the basic features are drawn, and these remain true for all iconographic faces. However, we now need to look at certain general varieties: women's faces, ascetic faces and elderly faces.

Icons are not general pictures, but pictures of specific people. This is made clear by the writing of their names on the icon, and also by following certain traditional characterisations associated with particular saints.

Over the previous few pages you can see many examples of St Peter and St Paul, from many different times and place, both distinctively represented since the earliest centuries. These likenesses derive from life and from visions. These characteristics need to be carefully observed. Above on page 49 is a very early fresco of St Paul, the earliest we have, in the catacomb of St Thecla. The features of the high, bald forehead, long nose and the dark, pointed beard are readily identified, and have been so at least since the 2nd century. On page 50 St Peter, again showing the grey, curly short trimmed hair, broad nose and distinctive short, rounded beard that has endured since the earliest centuries, one Russian and one Greek. Above you can see those features clearly in the icons of the two saints.

You can also see, how the faces display the wrinkles of old age. While the wrinkles are clear they are not disfigurements. They are drawn in a rhythmic, almost playful way. The saints are filled with joy, transfigured whatever their age by the Holy Spirit.



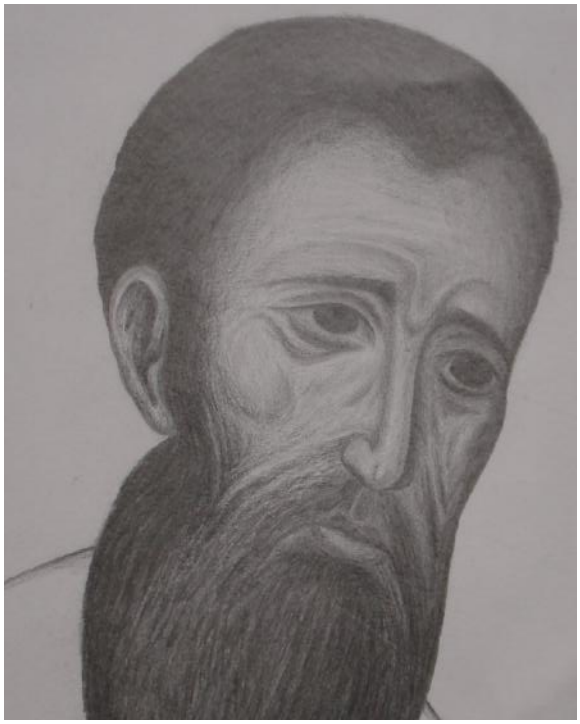


The high forehead became characteristic of theologians, such as St John Chrysostom (below right) and St Basil (below) who, while retaining their own distinctive characteristics nevertheless conform to the archetypes for theologians. Here they are in two modern icons.

Again we can see how these faces are wrinkled with age, but in rhythmic, flowing patterns that suggest a joyful playfulness, not decay or disfigurement. When painting such faces it is important not to break the skin up too deeply. The wrinkles should by creases not slashes,

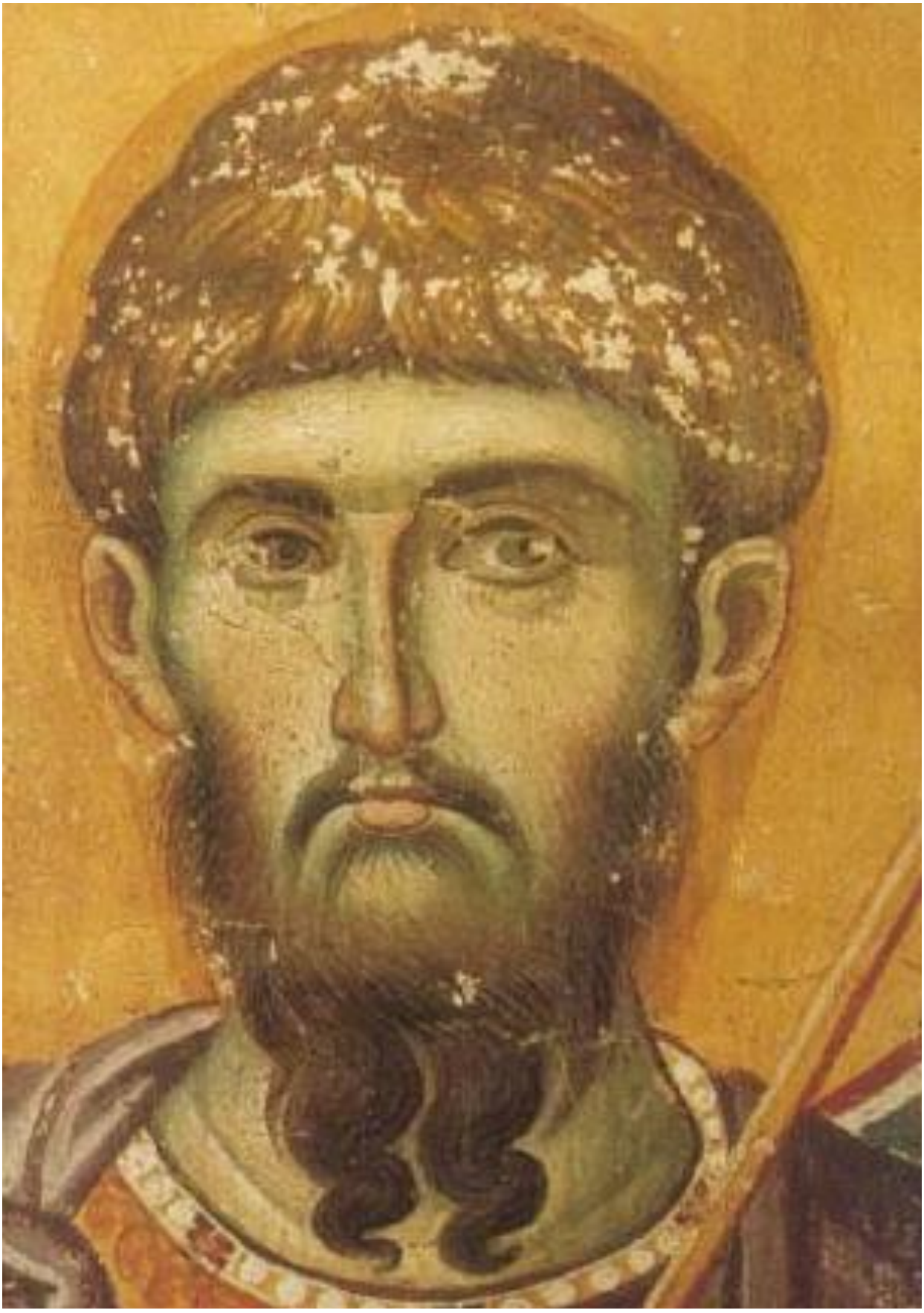
and should flow out of the skin without dividing up the face into fragments.

Below we see one of the Evangelists, St Matthew, sat as a scribe, a wise, old face with its wrinkles and grey beard. However, while wise and elderly, he is not an ascetic - notice he wears brightly colored garments, not like a monk or nun (ascetics). Below you can see an example of a study drawing based on the icon of St Basil on p.52. This gives you an example of the quality of drawing you are expected to have reached before you move on to working in paint. Drawings can also be done in charcoal, pastel, coloured pencil and on coloured paper.



Notice how the creases are modeled with subtle changes in shading tone, not sharp, hard lines.

Above we have two examples of an an ascetic face, that of St John the Baptist. Notice the wild hair, the sunken cheeks, the sorrowful eyes. These are not faces of old men, so there are not many wrinkles, but the harshness of the ascetic struggle is expressed by the hair and the eyebrows and strong muscular development of the area above them.



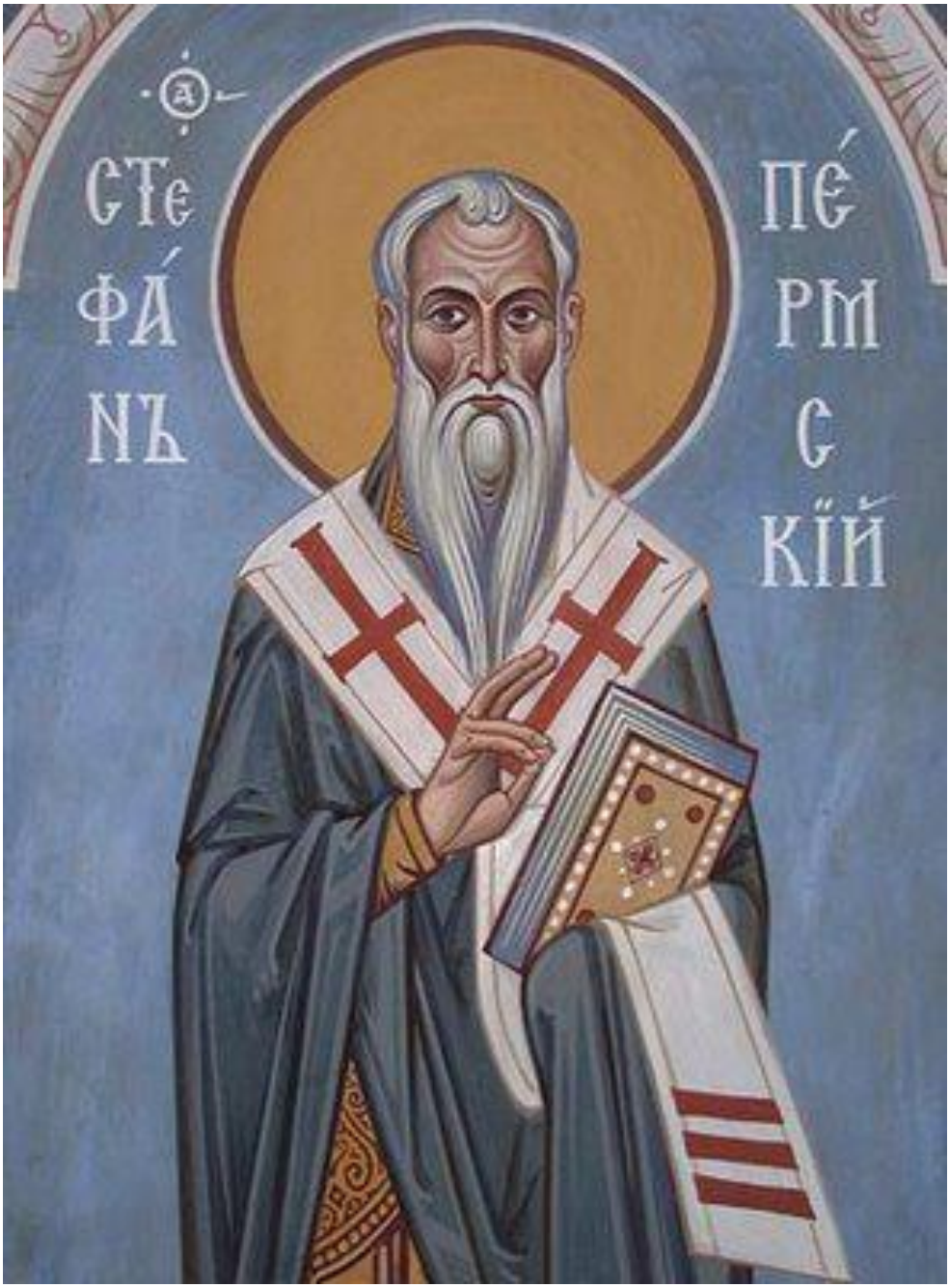
It displaying just a few wrinkles appearing below the eyes, not making him old but ageing, not a man in the freshness of youth. They also suggest tears of repentance having worn

away the skin much as water does stone.

Ascetics are usually older or elderly, very still and self-contained, dressed in the muted earth colours of monastic dress, and usually somewhat gaunt.

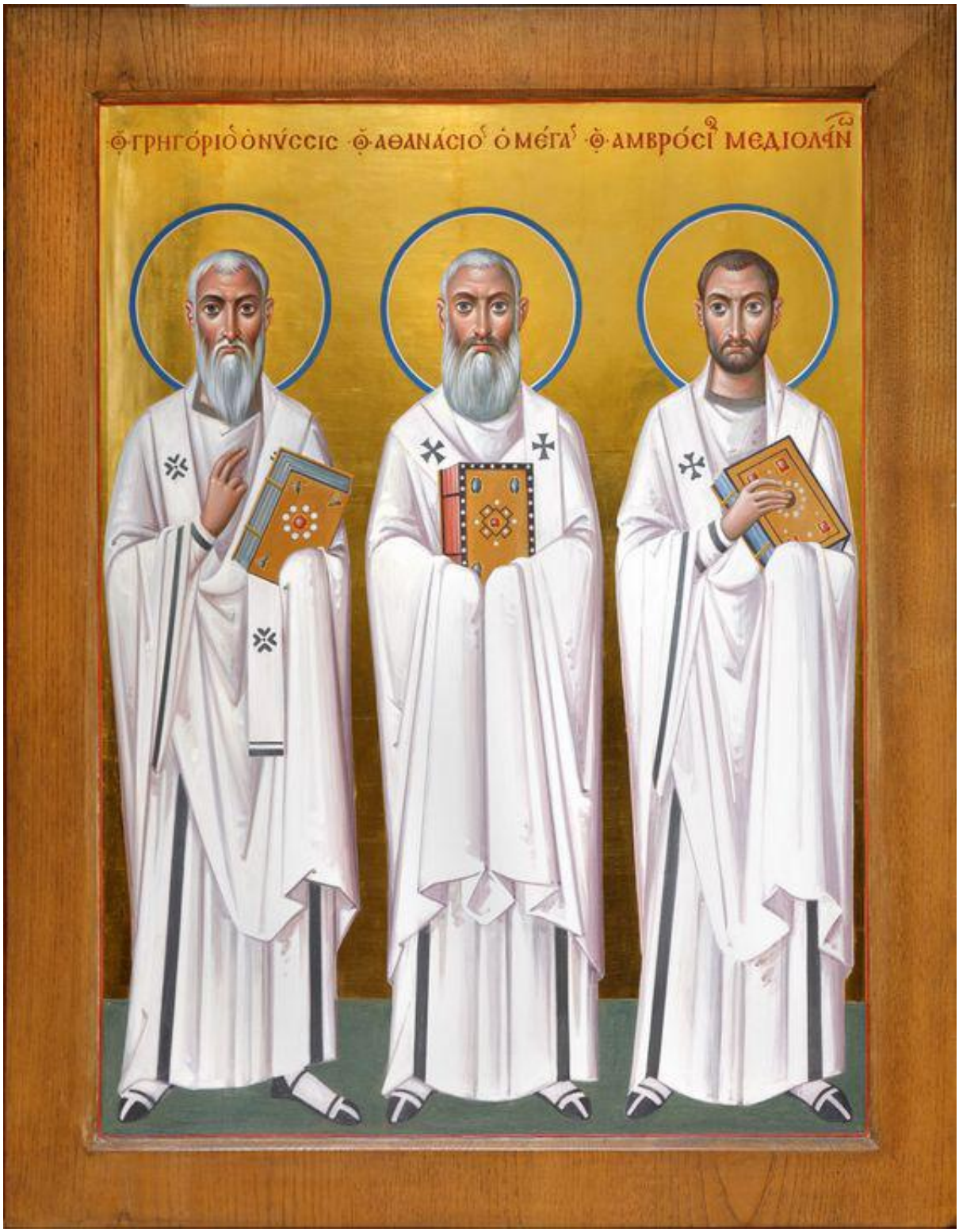
By way of contrast we have two young warrior saints (above), youthful, vigorous, courageous. Warrior saints are usually depicted as very energetic, drawing their swords, brandishing a spear, riding a horse. They are very much princely figures, well presented, with neat beards, with a noble bearing and rich regalia.

Below is Saint Stephen of Perm. Notice the full, rather wild bear, the sunken cheeks, the high forehead, the priestly vestments. He is a wise, elderly priest bishop, and has the

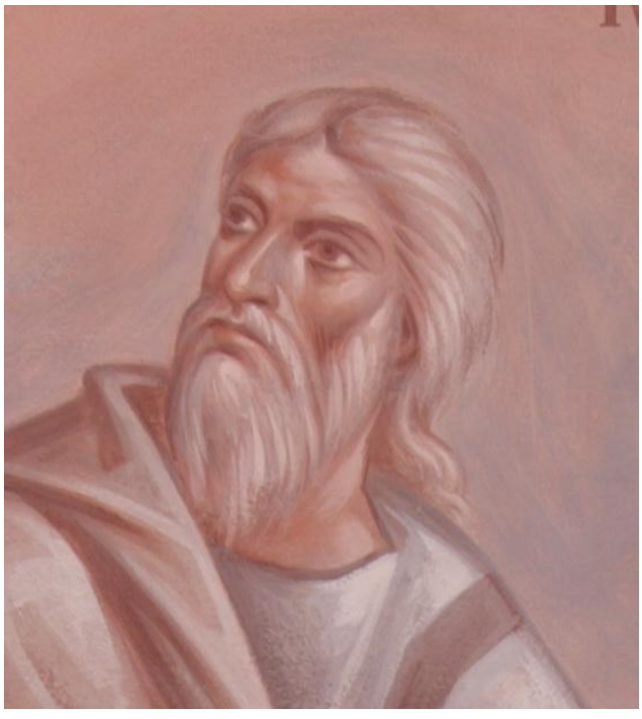


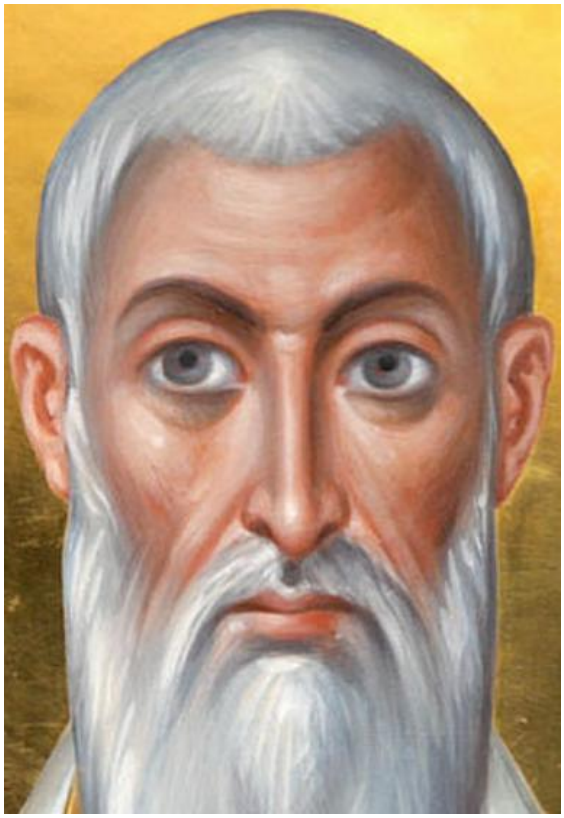
stillness of the monastic while the princely dignity of his office, and the high forehead of the wise teacher.

And here are three of the great teachers of the Church, St Gregory, St Athanasius and St Ambrose.



Here are various other faces, an angel (previous page), the Christ Child (above), the Holy Prophet Abraham and a teacher bishop (below)






ΜΡ
ΘΥ

Chapter Four

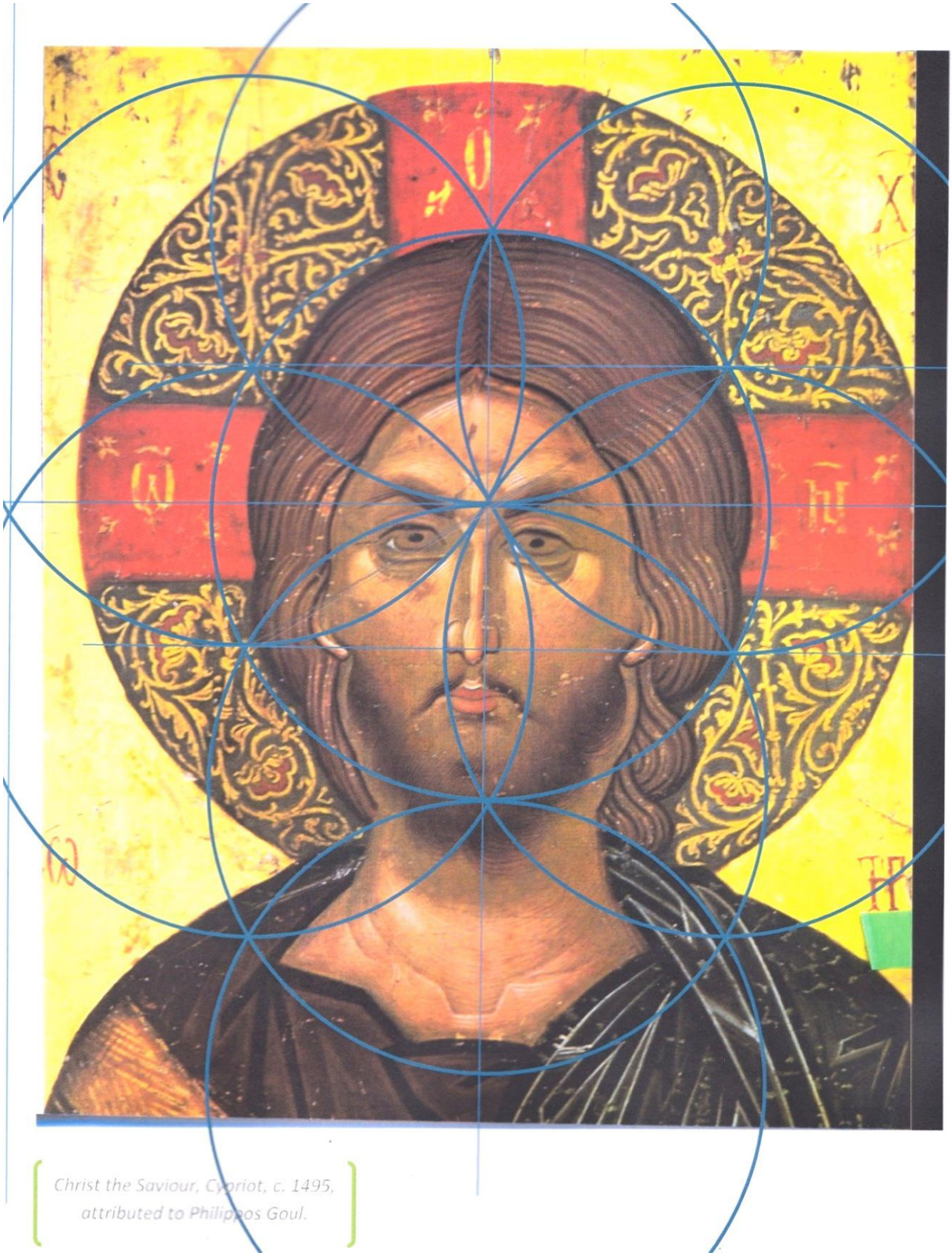
The MAKING of an ICON

The Design

A. SACRED GEOMETRY – THE 'SPIRITUAL SKELETON'

From the analysis of Christ's face, above, you will see how a simple geometric arrangement of circles gives you the key length of the nose, the shape of the top of the head, as well as the placing of the hair, eyes, ears etc. Geometry has been an essential part of icon design from the earliest times and you will need a working knowledge of geometry in order to understand and analyse the harmony and balance of iconographic design.

The Byzantine's wrestled with the dilemma of how to make a two dimensional image that could adequately represent the spiritual nature of the human person transfigured by grace, and sacred geometry was a tool which they used to help them transcend the limits of nature in the art they produced.



Christ the Saviour, Cypriot, c. 1495, attributed to Philippos Goul.

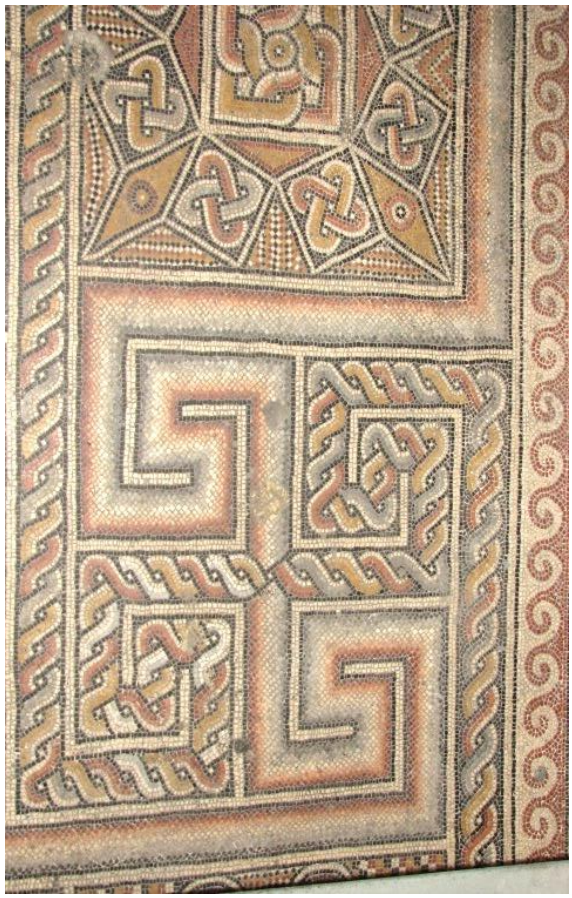
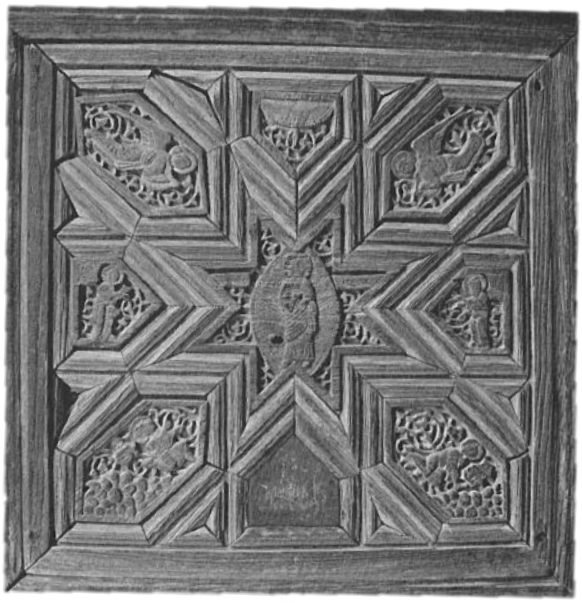


FIGURE 2: OSSUARY FROM JERUSALEM, FIRST CENTURY AD; MOSAIC FLOOR FROM THE FIRST BASILICA OF THE NATIVITY, BETHLEHEM CIRCA 330AD, NARTHEX DOOR PANELS FROM ST CATHERINE'S MONASTERY.

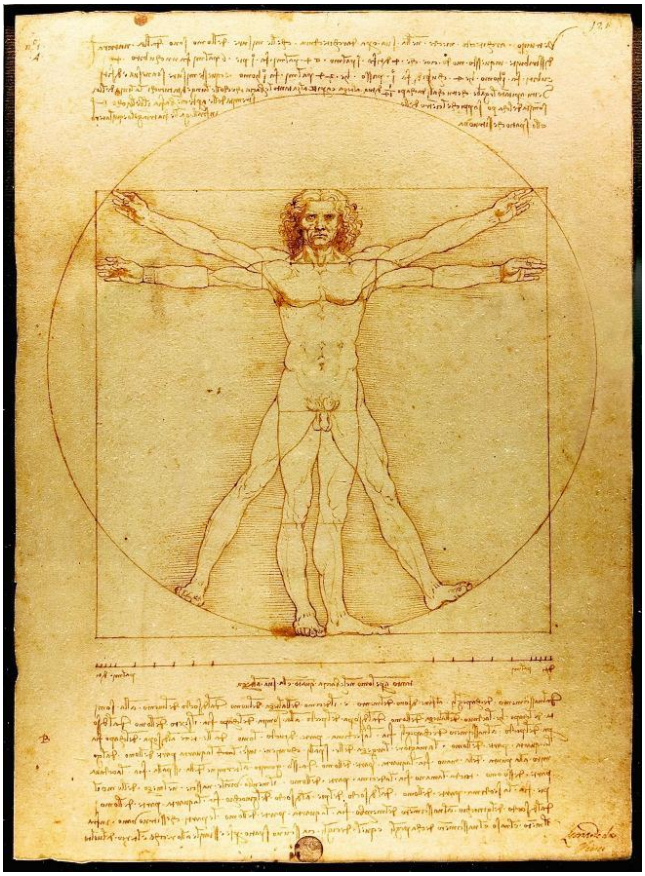


The ancient Greek world perceived order in the cosmos, and order which they understood and expressed mathematically. This order was understood as a **sacred geometry**, something which the ancient Greeks explored through the use of a straight edge (ruler) and

a piece of rope (compass), a process described by the Greek mathematician Euclid in his ‘Elements’ around 300BC. They observed nature, as we do, and saw in it patterns which repeated themselves perfectly, like you see in a piece of honeycomb or a snow flake under a microscope. This geometric pattern was the order which prevented chaos and death. It was a perception of the very life at the heart of the universe. It was something not simply scientific, as we understand it, but also something mystical.

“Geometry is primarily a philosophical and therefore, to many, a sacred art/science. It was one of the four obligatory educational studies for those who have contributed most to the great civilisations of the human family.”

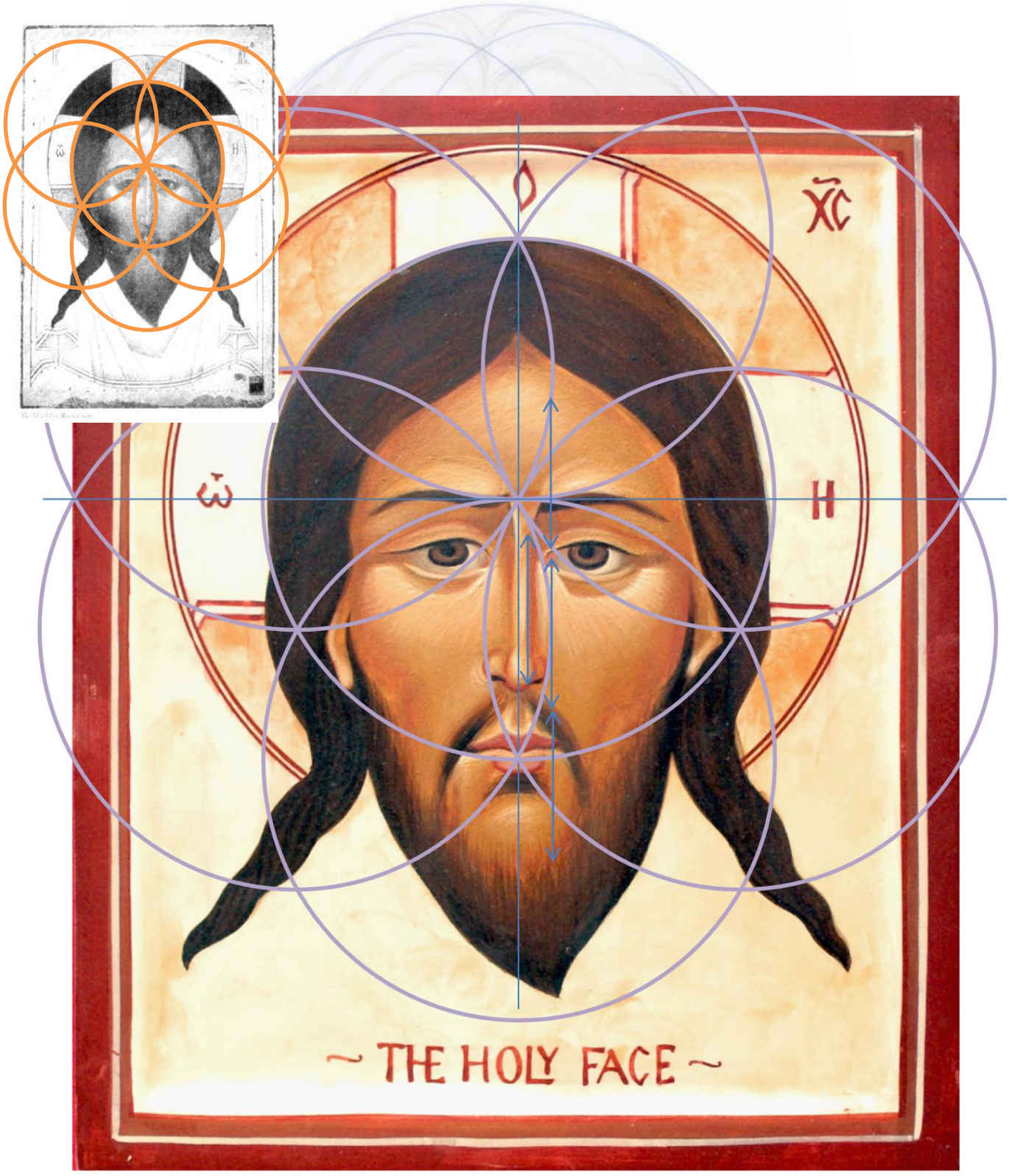
Keith Critchlow, 2007 Forward to ‘Drawing Geometry’ by Jon Allen.



In the ancient world geometry was employed in architecture, and the human body was seen as a geometric paradigm. Leonardo da Vinci’s famous sketch of Vitruvian Man was inspired by the correlations of the ideal human figure and geometry as explained in De Architectura, a book written by the ancient Roman Architect Vitruvius.

The Renaissance became obsessed with the ideal human form, and abandoned the Medieval search for expressing the ideal man as ‘spiritual’, in relation to the Spirit, instead focusing on the wonders of ‘the flesh’. However, we don’t have to make the assumption that the flesh and the spirit, nature and grace, are opposites. Rather, Christian theology has long maintained that grace builds on nature, and so in iconography we see the spirit gracing the material person, giving order, nobility, personhood, ordering us into the image and likeness of God Himself. In this context geometry is a ‘sacred science’, a tool which helps to root the chaos of the material into a Divinely appointed order, which is what a religious artist attempts to do when he seeks to create a thing of beauty. The human figure in art and anatomy is understood to be proportionate.

The following illustrations show you how to construct the basic geometric shapes needed in constructing designs. These can be used to analyse existing icons to reveal their geometric harmony and ‘flow’, as well as creating the ‘skeleton’ for the design of new ones.



You can also use these together with the section of the Golden Mean and its associated

Exercise: **Here you can see a slight variant in the use of the Seed of Life applied to the construction of the Face of Christ. You can see the original Russian one at the top, and this is a modern version based on it.**

Draw the circles on a piece of plain paper, and place tracing paper over it. Then make your own version based on this example.

shapes to create complex scenes and board sizes that are naturally balanced and pleasing to the eye.

B. SACRED GEOMETRY AND EARLY ICONOGRAPHY

I am sure that anyone even vaguely familiar icons is struck by the circular heads found in every icon. It is the one universally distinct geometric shape that is found from the very earliest icons (see that of Christ from the 6th century, St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai). Not only is it always surrounded by a circular halo, but the dome of the head is invariably a circle or close to it.

This universal element got me thinking why? Then when I began to spend time in the Middle East I began to take a look at Islamic art, and discovered that its origins were closely tied to Byzantine artists, that is to those who under the Christian Byzantine rulers were building Christian churches and decorating them with icons.

Islamic art, as you will no doubt be aware, is a celebration of geometry, seen as having divine significance and symbolism. My suspicion is that when the Christians were conquered by the Islamic armies the Christians had to find a way of using their skills and knowledge, and I speculate that they simply used their geometric patterns and applied them to foliage and so forth as they had always done, just leaving out the figures.

It is unthinkable that the Byzantines, having adopted geometry in the construction of their temples and sanctuaries, would have abandoned it in their figurative work, which was in many ways an extension of their architecture. However, the way it was used is a little different than the way we do today, because they lacked the Arabic numeral system. Simply put, they didn't have rulers marked off in centimetres.

Instead geometry was a practical science based around the intersection of circles and straight lines, very much as we find in classical Arabic geometric patterns, inherited from the Byzantines in the 7th century. We have clear evidence of this in Byzantine stone carving, both in the design of flat patterns, but also in preparation for elaborate decorative carvings such as the capitals of columns - the seed of life pattern can be seen inscribed into the tops of the columns and the patterns carved with that presumably as a guide.

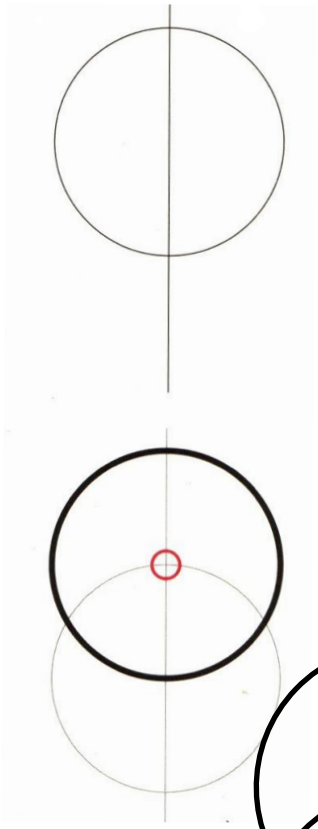
Robert Hourton-Smith explains that "using…the straightedge…and the compass, unlettered but carefully trained craftsmen could efficiently produce sophisticated decorative patterns in stone, and for that matter in wood and other media as well." Evidence of this is to be found in the Holy Land. This certainly included mosaics, where pattern books are believed to have been widely used for the regular patterning which is such a feature of mosaic floors found across the region, as for example in the first Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (see

above). And if they were using it for the design of floors, they are likely to have been using it for the creation of icons on the walls.

Furthermore, the 'seed of life' easily establishes the key nose length, a key consideration when you realise there were no easy measurements such as rulers with centimetres or millimetres on them.

A. SOME BASIC GEOMETRIC CONSTRUCTIONS

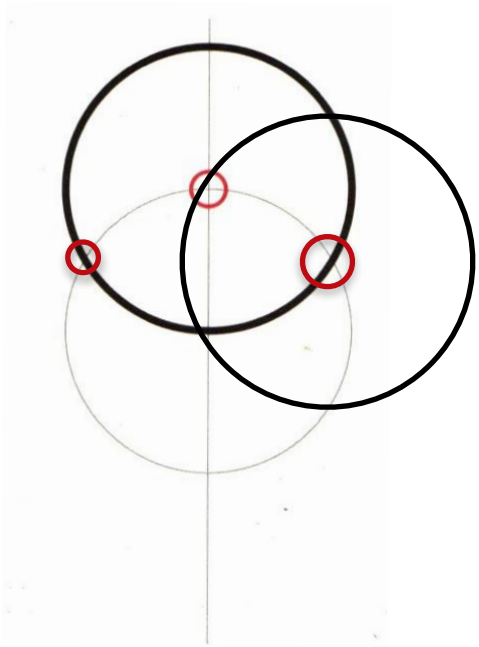
Here is the basic geometric construction known as the 'Seed of Life':

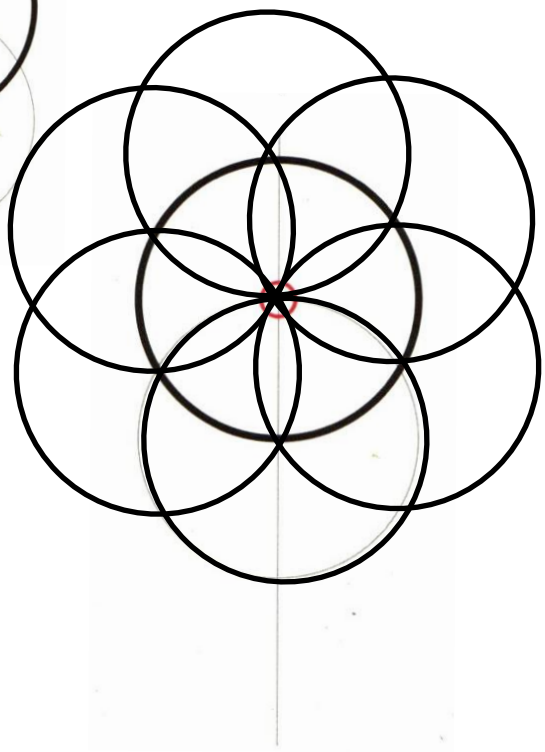


•Begin with a vertical line, then draw a circle at one point on it.
•Then keeping the circle the same size, put the compass point on the spot where the vertical line and the circle cross.

•Draw another circle.

•Repeat where the circles cross, until you have gone all around the centre circle.

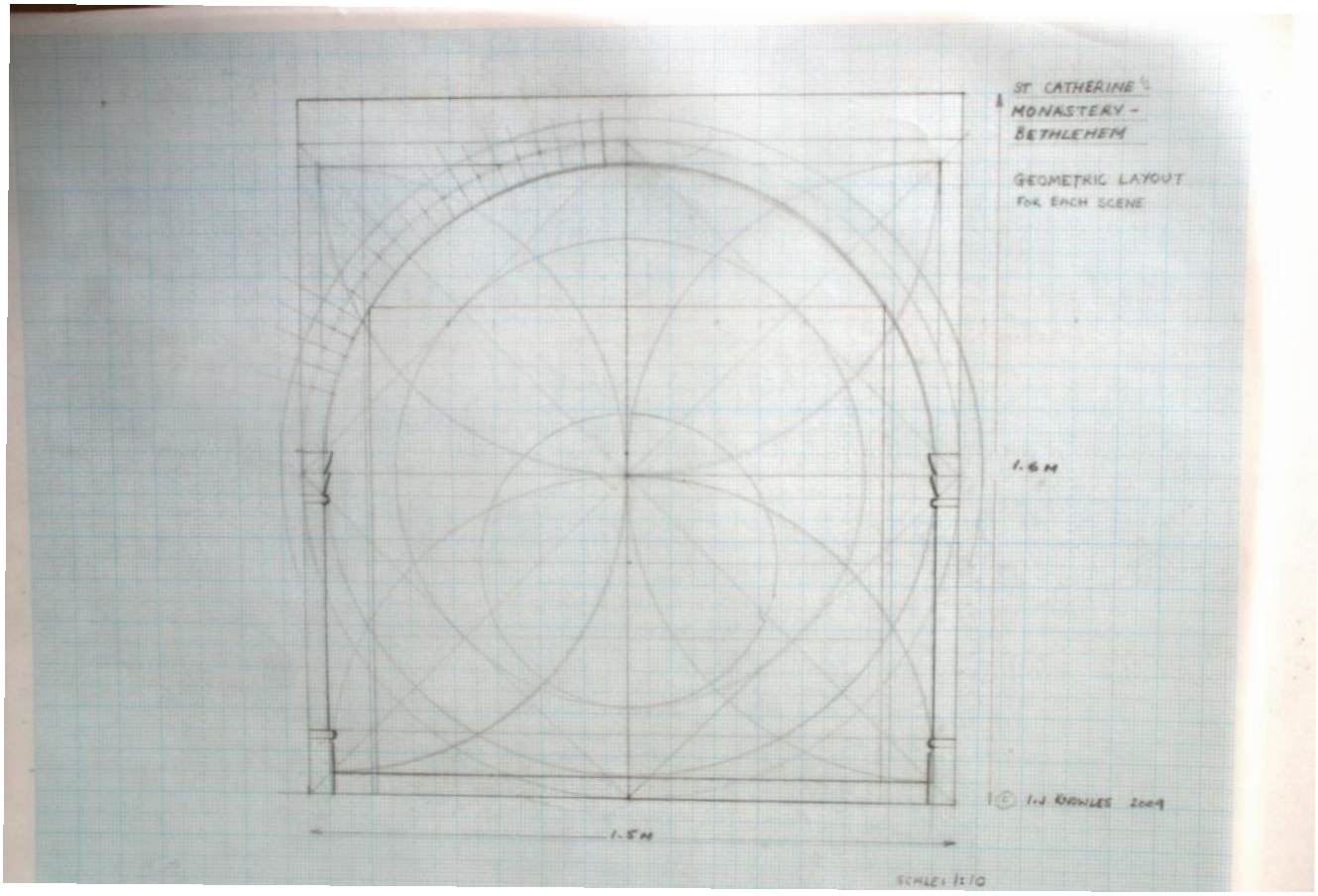




This construction can be applied to any head, and will reveal the proportionality of its design. It can also be used to establish the proportion of the figure and half figure. It removes the need for careful measuring with a ruler and gives a range of proportionate possibilities for posture.

" Proportion is a correspondence among the measures of the members of an entire work, and of the whole to a certain part selected as standard. From this result the principles of symmetry.

Without symmetry and proportion there can be no principles in the design of any temple; that is, if there is no precise relation between its members as in the case of those of a well shaped man. "—Vitruvius,[1] *The Ten Books of Architecture* (III, Ch. 1)



So **proportio**n considers the whole in relationship to itself, and considers individual parts in relationship to the whole.

Here you can see the seed of life revealing the proportionality of the face in relationship to its the key feature: the nose, which is 1/4 the length of the head.

B: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The basic construction of circles can, as we will see, be used to analyze most icons revealing their inner geometric balance and proportion. From this a geometric skeleton can be re-created as the basis for a new icon design, as in the Mandylion icon above. It can also be an easy way to scale an image larger or smaller. It is a simple process which also gives, as we will also see, the basic proportions of the head to the figure as a whole.

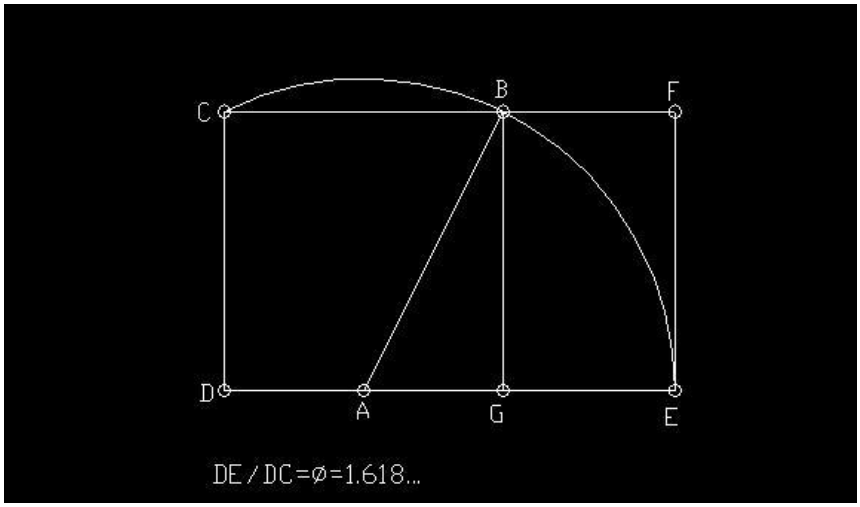
Geometry can seem very confusing, all those circles look the same and you can get into a real muddle if you don't concentrate. However, it is a very easy way to ensure that the face

is constructed proportionately without having to worry about accurately measuring from a ruler. And the Seed of Life pattern, once mastered is very straightforward and quick to make.

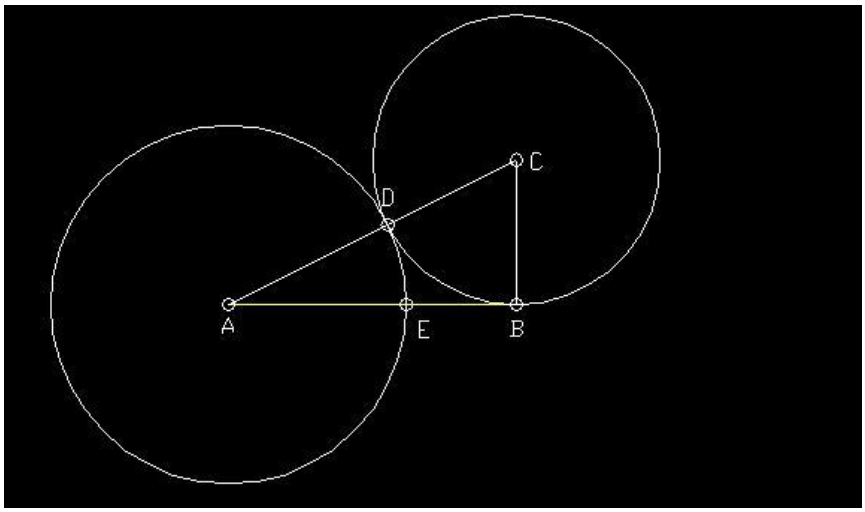
However, for those who just love messing about with patterns and a compass, there is a whole world of geometry which can be put to use in creating harmony and movement within the design of an icon. It is, in fact, a whole subject of study in and of itself, and there is not the room or need to go into it here. However, for those with some aptitude for this, there is one other area worth mentioning and that is the Golden Section, Triangle, and Spiral all of which can be useful not least in creating **boards** of a pleasing dimensions.

Golden Section

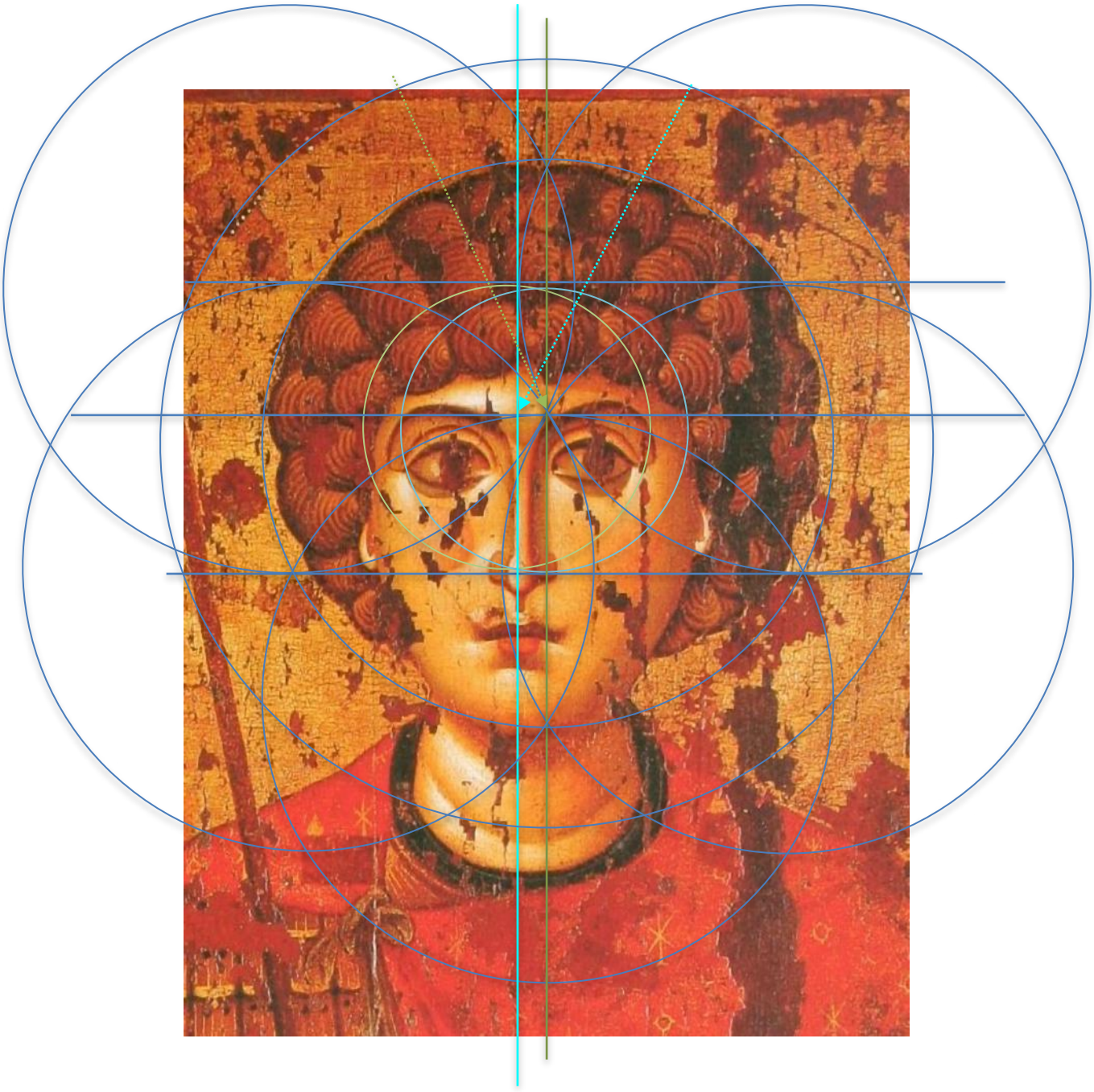
1. Construct a unit square.
2. Draw a line from the midpoint of one side to an opposite corner.
3. Use that line as the radius to draw an arc that defines the long dimension of the rectangle.



The Golden Triangle:



Here you can see an icon of St George, from Kiev in modern day Ukraine, from the 11th-12th century a time when Russian iconography was coming into its own. As you can see it is a very sophisticated construction, with the face area contained within two interlocking circles whose radius is one quarter of the face, that is the length of the nose. In the icon the face is always slightly turned, an affect achieved through the two centre lines, one (green) at the absolute centre of the head (green arrow), and the other resting on the line drawn on the curve of the two circles (blue and blue arrow).



Here is an icon of the Archangel Michael, a masterpiece of Byzantine art, Byzantine Icon with the Archangel Michael (early 14th century) from the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, Greece. It has a power of composition which immediately grasps us, one filled with nobility and strength.

Exercise:

Take time to see how the circle pattern, which underpins the face in quite a remarkable and sophisticated way, gives sense to the composition of the icon as a whole. It is not about joining the dots, this would make it flat and dead. Rather its more like points which the image flows around.

Making an analysis is not easy, and takes some practice.

- Identify the circle in which the face is composed, using the nose length as a key (1/4 of the length from chin to crown of the head.
- Use a compass and trial and error to find the centre.
- Let the Seed of Life reveal the composition of the face, using it as a guide to open your eyes.
- Once you have a size of the Seed of Life that fits the face, repeat over the rest of the image.


Ο ΑΓ
ΟΜΙΧΑΣ
ΜΙΧΑ
ΤΑΓΓΑΧΗ
Α
Κ

And here is another icon of a half-figure, beautifully poised, this time from St Catherine's

Monastery, 13th century.

Exercise: try to make an analysis of this icon.

Don’t forget that photographs often distort an image, so be prepared to take that into consideration. They may need a small rotation, as in this example.

chapter five:

THE FIGURE

Having looked at the face, we now move to considering the human figure as a whole. Like the face the iconic style transfigures nature, so our first step is to take a look at drawing the human figure as it appears in nature.

Posture is of crucial importance in iconography, creating a sense of balance, tranquility and gesture. Getting a convincing pose is essential for icons which are truly beautiful and worthy.

Pose is based on the skeleton and muscle structure, which in turn effects the vestments in which a figure is dressed. The precise shape and placing of muscles in relationship to bones and joints creates the correct pose and great attention should be paid to exactly where the muscles on the legs and arms are, the shapes they make, how muscles interweave, and what difference is made when muscles are flexed.

Key things to master:

- The proportion of limbs to body and head.
- Setting a posture which looks convincing and natural.
- A clear centre of gravity so they don't look as though they are falling over.

A. Proportion of the figure

As I mentioned before, there are only hints about how geometry plays a part in early iconography.

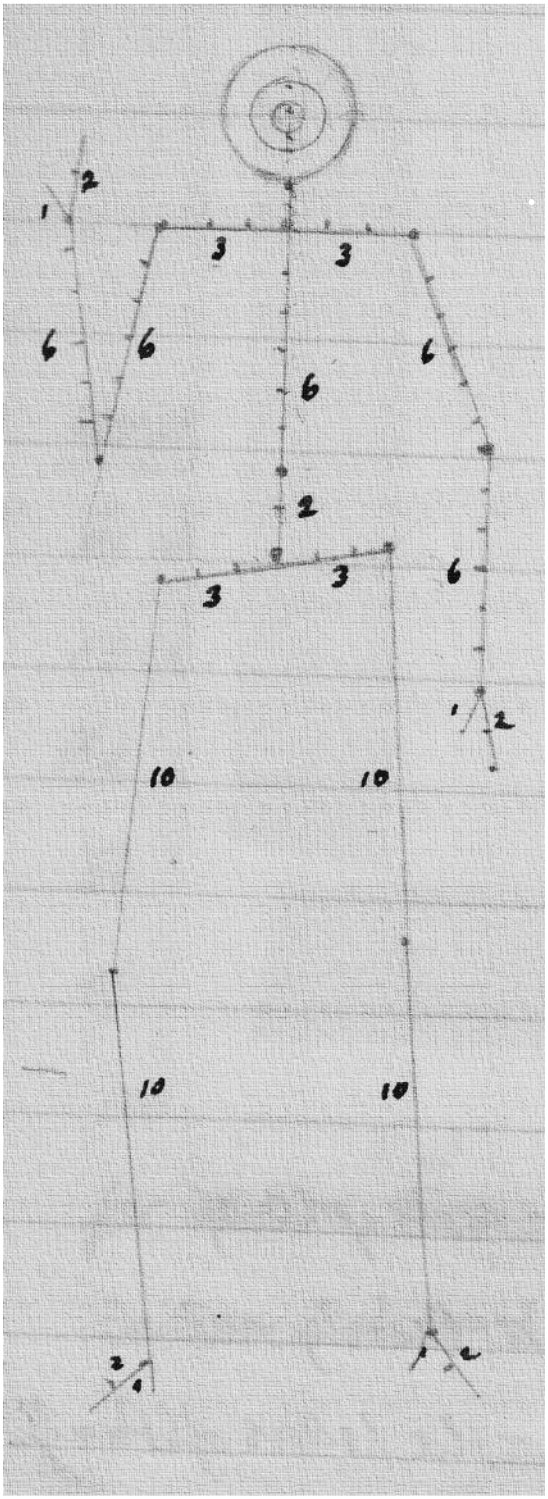
However, all theories agree that
the length of the nose =
¼ of the face

and is the key measurement, relating **all parts of the figure**.

There are various attempts to do this, such as Egon Sendler's analysis (left) of the human figure in the icon based on nose lengths. and another showing an analysis of the Face of Christ.

Another is much older, found in the 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fourna, trans. by Paul Hetherington, 1989 edition.

Below you can see the canon relating nose length to the overall figure. Dionysius' system is a little crude, a matter of measurements rather than elegant constructions, but it makes clear the mathematical basis of icon design.



The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna, an iconographer's handbook written on Mount Athos between 1730-34. This is the earliest such manual to come down to us, though we know that from the earliest times artists and artisans widely used 'copy books' of standard patterns. This is just like the Byzantine mosaicists.

Here on the right is a reproduction of Dionysius' canon relating nose length to the overall figure. Dionysius' system is a little crude, a matter of measurements rather than elegant constructions, but it makes clear the mathematical basis of icon design.

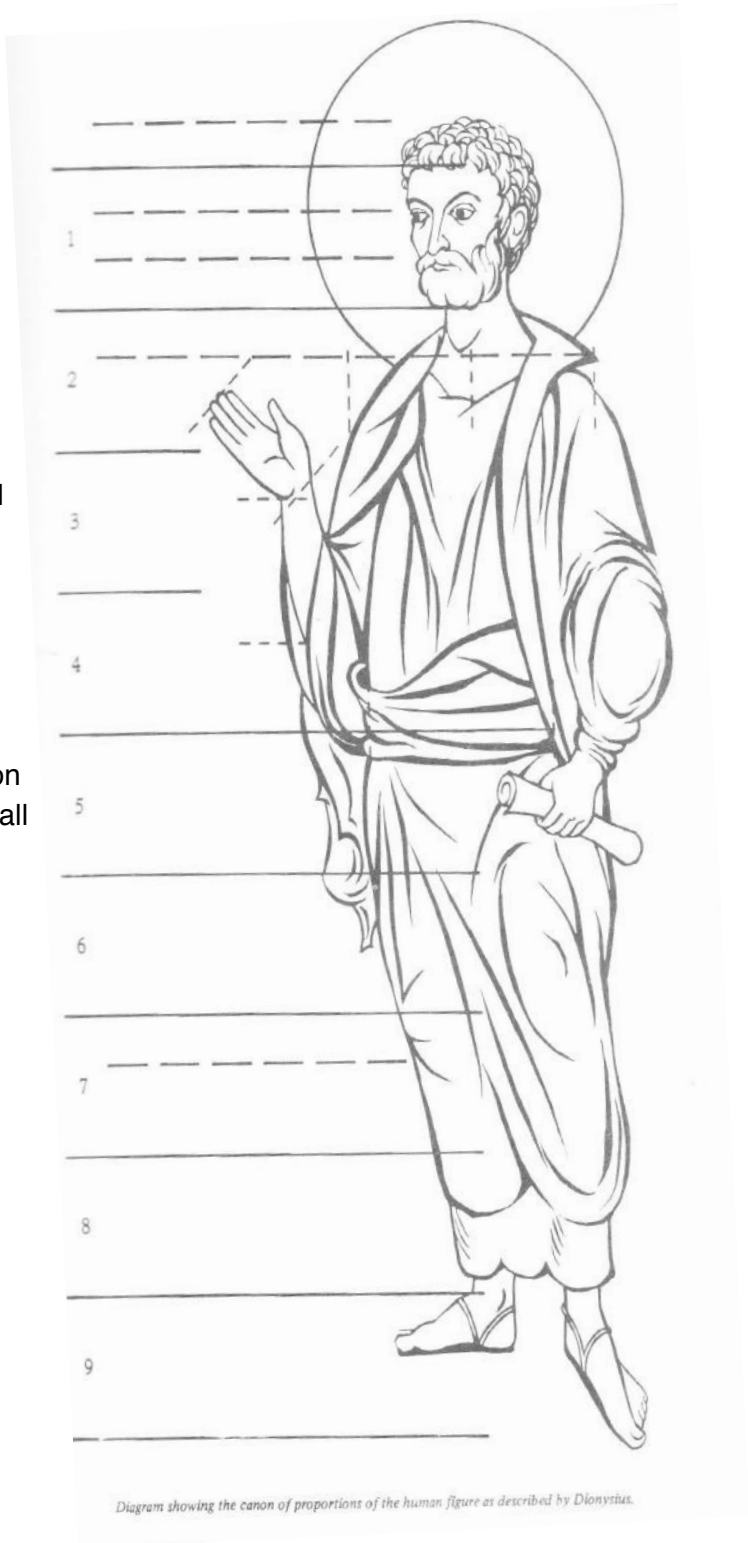
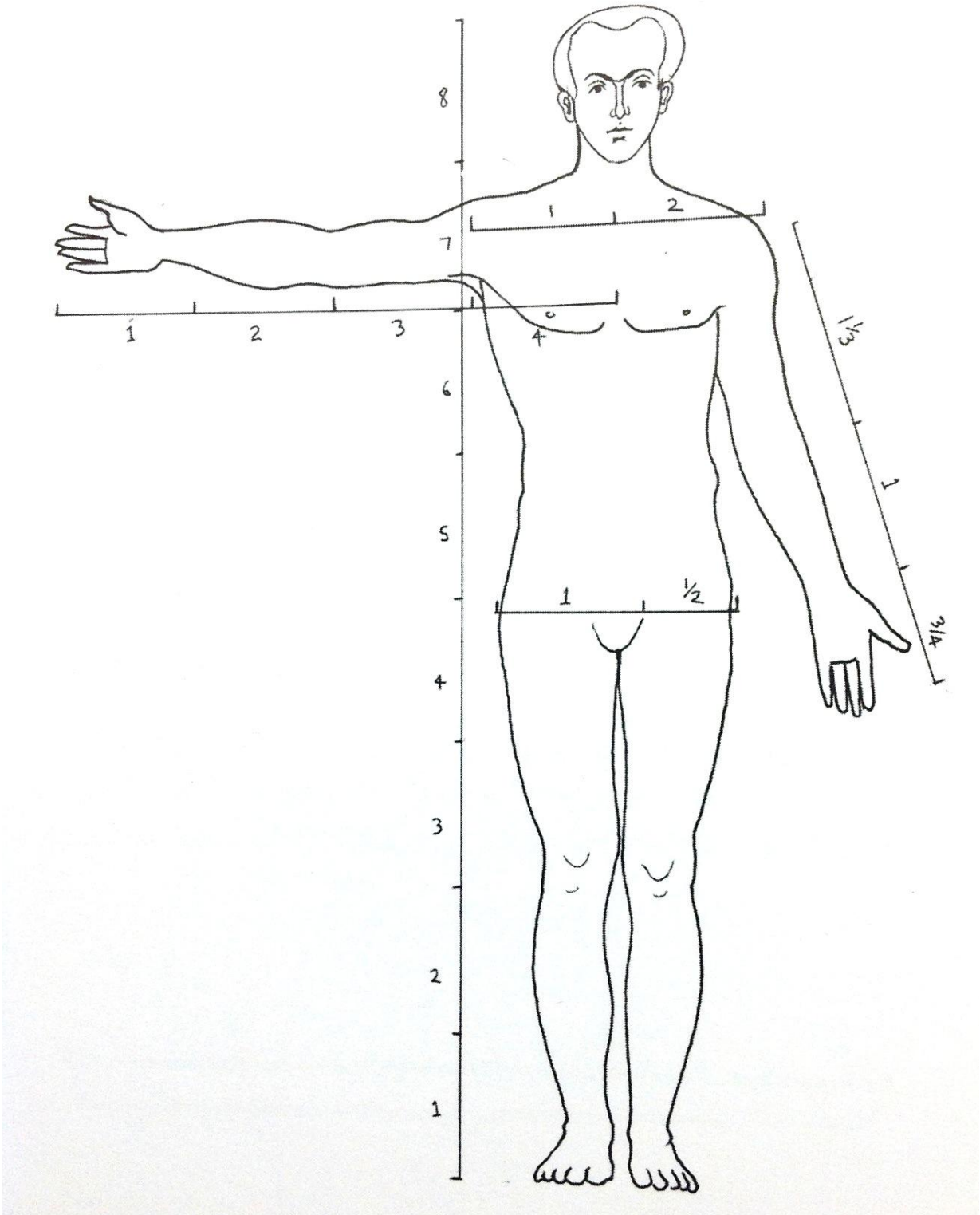
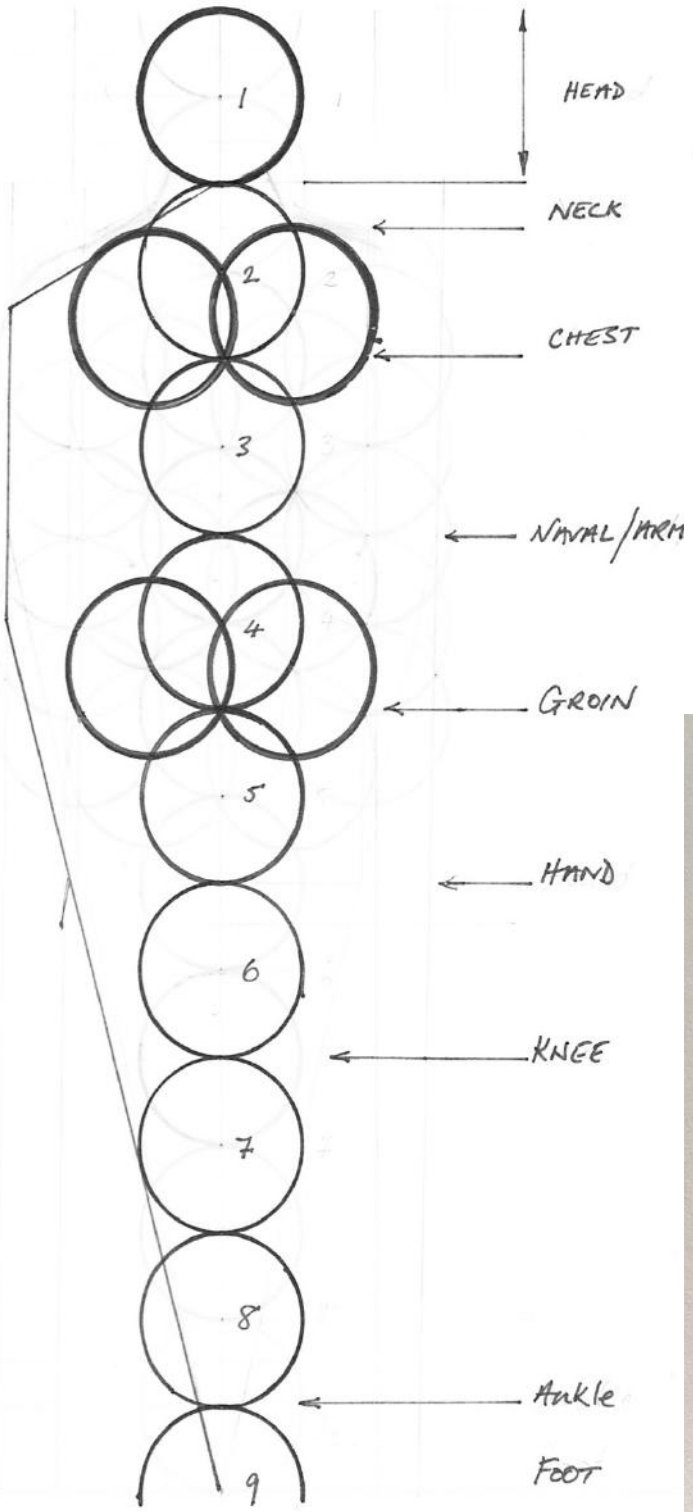


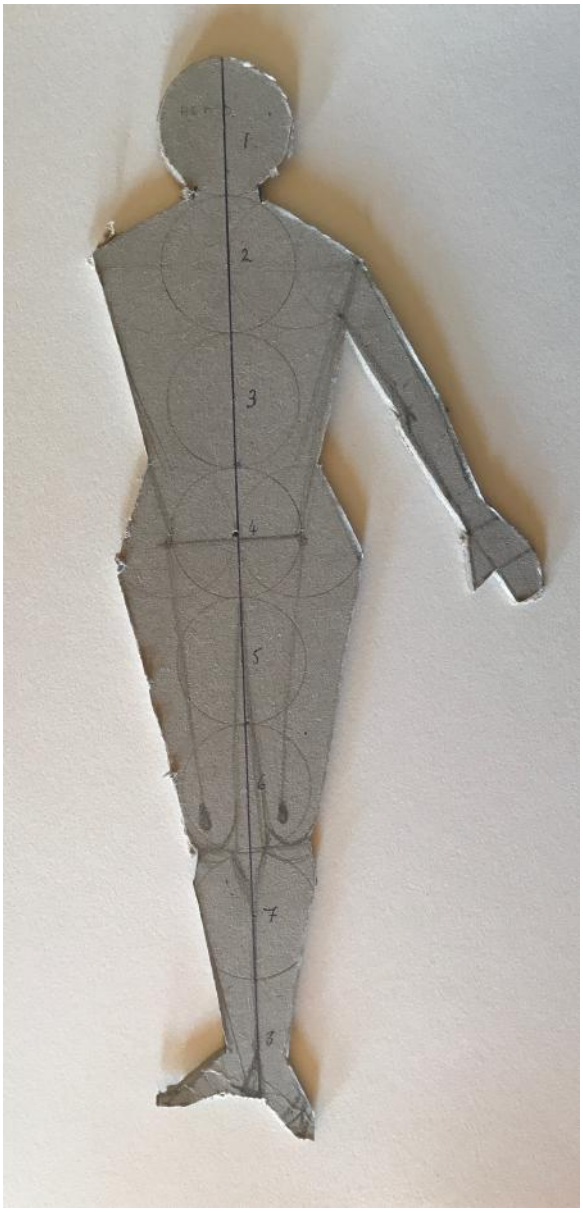
Diagram showing the canon of proportions of the human figure as described by Dionysius.



Above is an analysis by Aidan Hart: *See Chapter Five of 'Techniques of Icon and Wall Painting', p.84ff* for the approach currently used by him, which is in many ways a simplified version of a more detailed speculation that has been put forward by Fr Egon Sendler SJ in his book 'The Icon'. (See illustration on p.81).



Here you can see my version, and how by simply using a construction of circles a whole figure can be given good proportion. This expresses the basic insights of Sendler etc., but through a much more straightforward geometrical construction, giving the whole figure an easy reference to the size of the head.



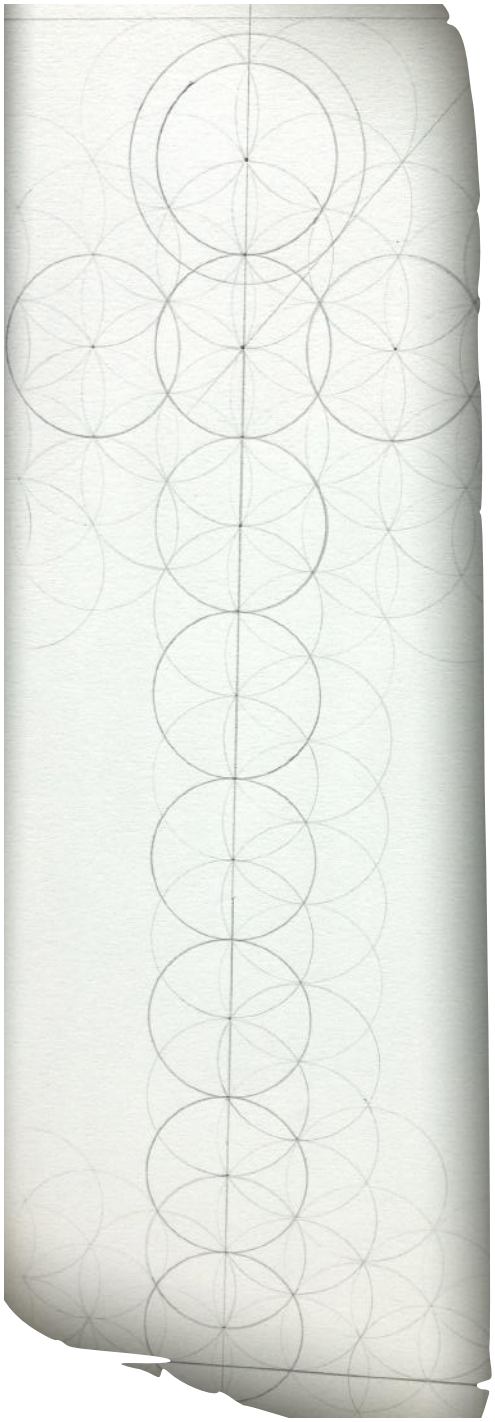
Also notice that you can have 7, 8, 81/2 or 9 head lengths, the more elongated proportions being less naturalistic but more graceful.

When it comes to the muscles of the body they are somewhat reduced in mass, especially so when it is an ascetic figure, such as St John the Baptist we see here. This speaks of the transfiguration of the flesh which serves the spirit in the New Creation.

The human figure takes its form from the skeleton and then the muscles built around it (called the muscular system). It is a good idea to take a close look at this in order to understand poses and gestures in the icon, which can easily look unconvincing if you forget the basic construction of the human body.

Even when the person was strong and healthy, rather than thin and ascetic, the flesh has to still speak of the transfigured world, and so is somewhat reduced in details, with muscle shapes refined into elegant ones, and highlighted with a radiant, spiritual light, as in this example of St.Peter by Fr. Zinon.

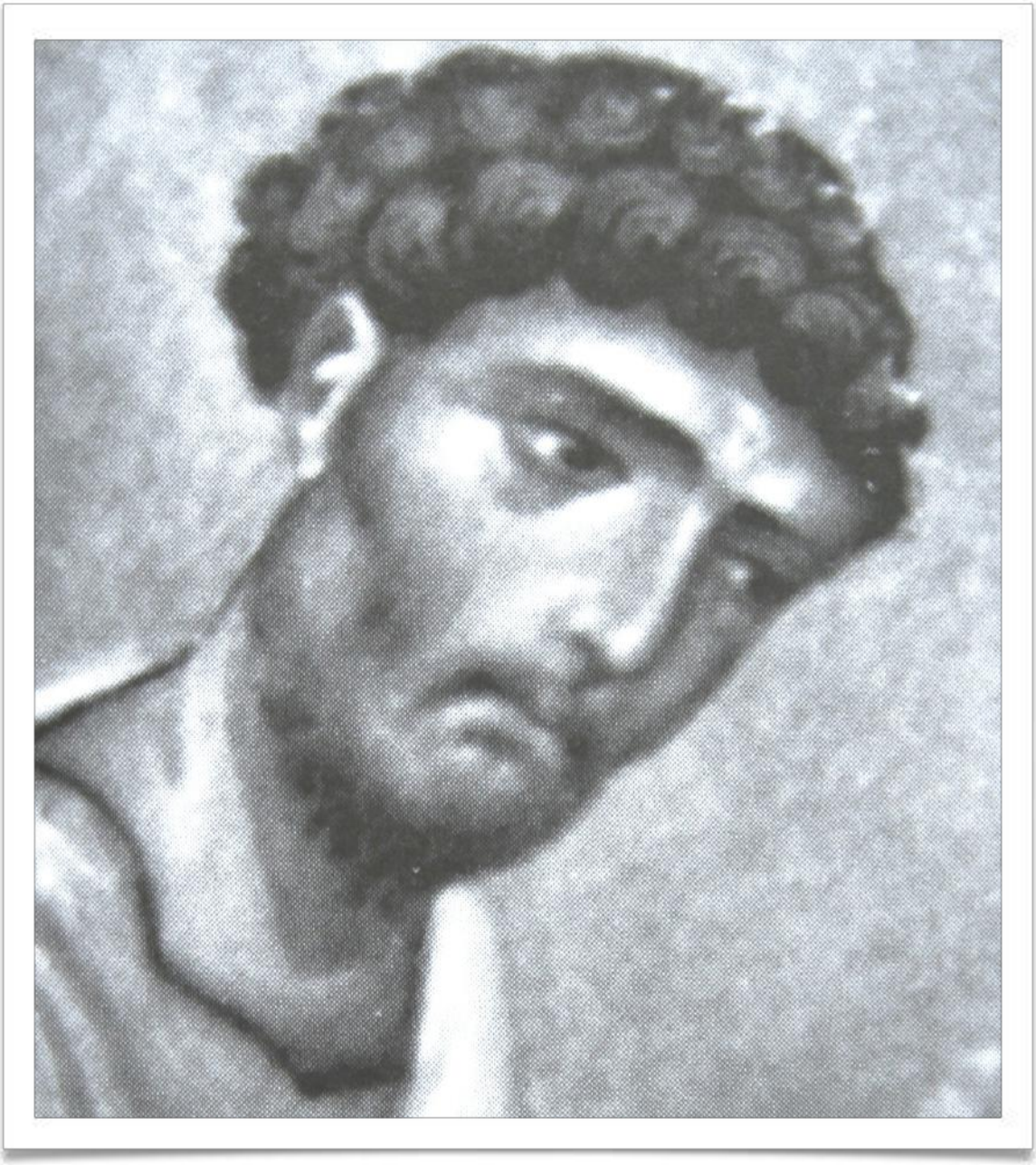
Exercise: Draw the figure of St Luke from this image using a geometric construction.



You can see how the proportions are easily applied to a figure by a geometric construction.

Having decided on the size you want for the head, you simply extend out the circles to make the pattern of blue circles.

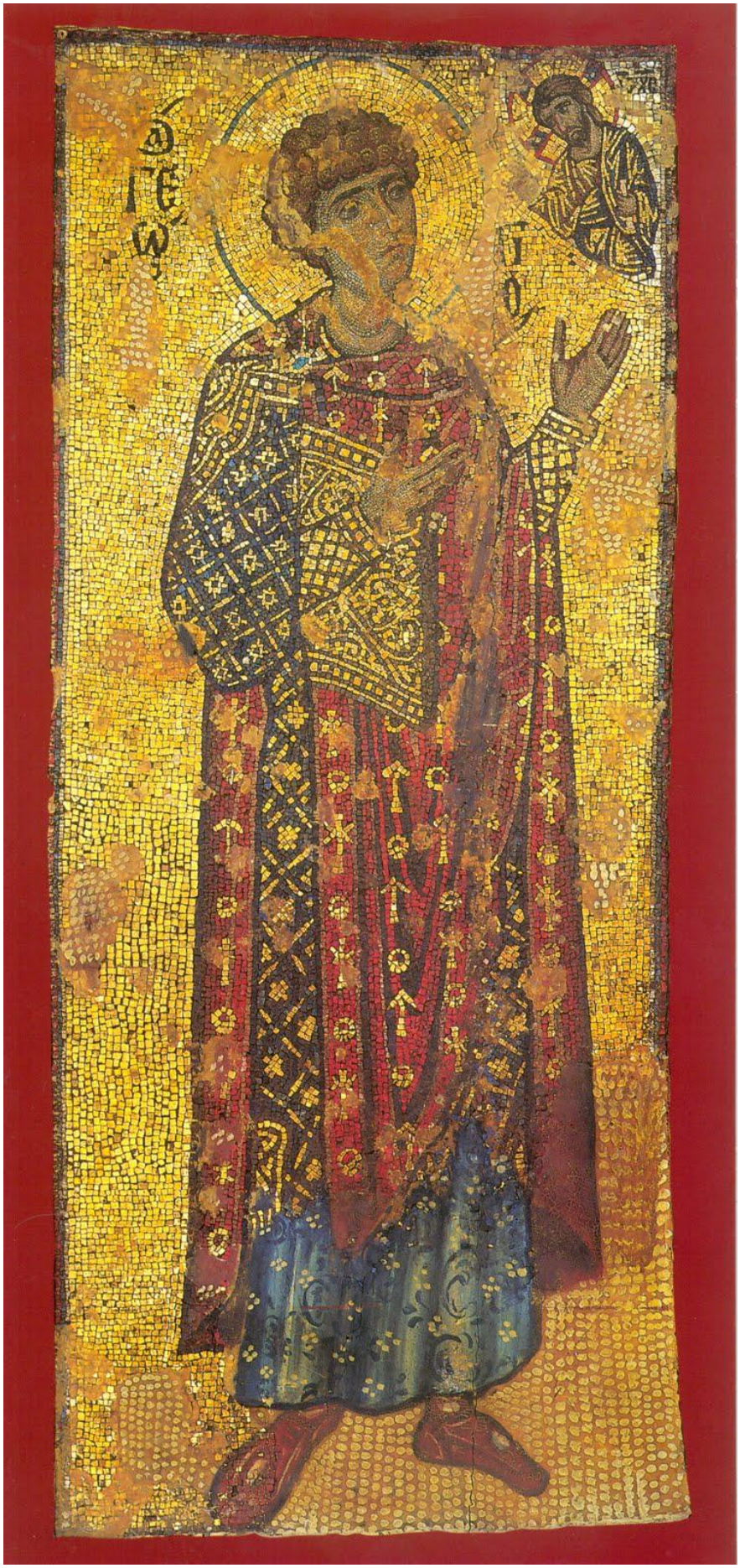
This then enables you to establish the size of the board, and the size of the borders.



The geometric pattern ensures everything is in harmony, with a balance and tranquility.

You will notice the figure is 7.5 head height. While the original may or may not have been constructed along this exact pattern, icons are usually drawn in a geometric way, with some basic geometric structure, and this flower of life pattern neatly flows from the size of the head.

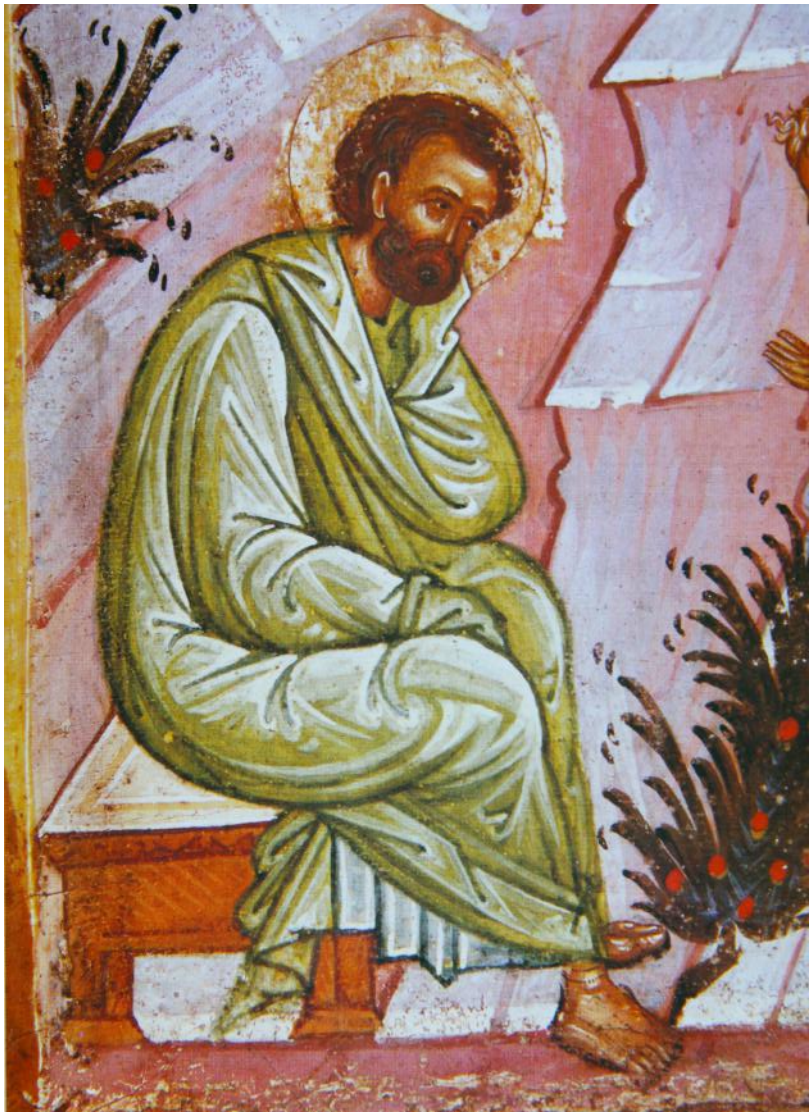
The head size is the key measurement in iconographic geometry, so this is an easy method for analyzing old icons for new designs. You can compare these two images if St John the Baptist to see how one era can inspire another, without shackling creativity or originality.



Different era and cultures have evolved different painting techniques to express what we have explained above. Some are more like cartoons, others more ‘painterly’. This has to do especially with the paint layer rather than just the drawing of lines. As Maguire says, “colour, lighting, and modeling, together with other formal elements such as perspective, motion and frontality, were used by the Byzantines after iconoclasm, and especially from the tenth century onward, to convey differing degrees of corporality or immateriality, appropriate to the holy person in the image”

However, whatever ones it is there are certain basic principles to be observed.

The figure should appear elegant and tranquil, balanced and proportionate. While iconography spiritualizes the



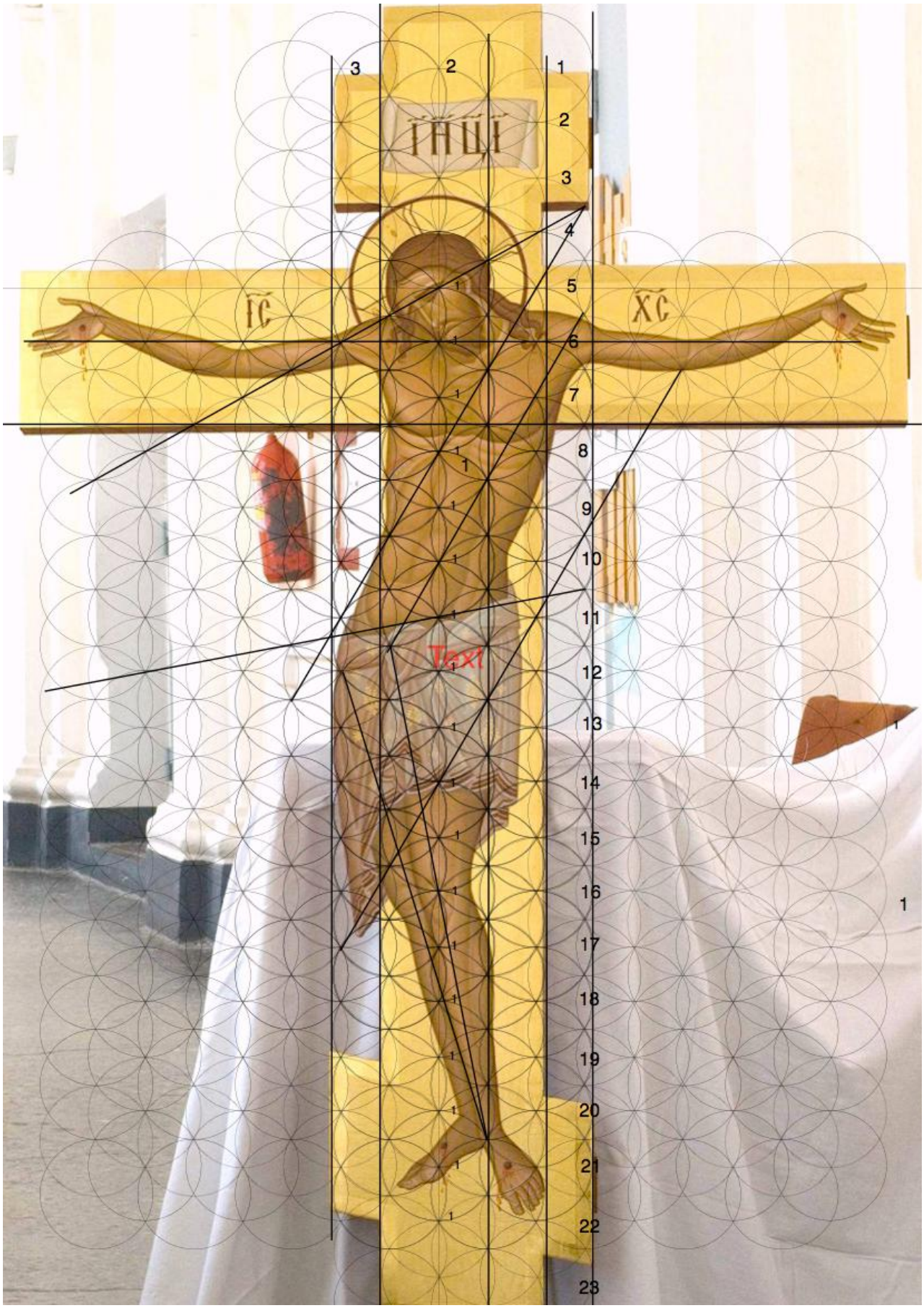
body it does not violate the natural form. Grace builds on nature, it doesn't obliterate it.

The body is like a relic, possessing spiritual power, which in iconography is expressed as luminosity, a glow of light from within the saint. This minimalizes the use of shadow cast by an exterior light. Garments are drapery lain over spiritualized matter, and reflect not just the form of the limbs etc beneath them, but the spiritual power in them that radiates through them.

Sentimentality and sensuality are alien concepts in ancient Christian iconography, as they belong to a more exterior view of existence. Thus garments are drawn in a minimalistic fashion, with curves flattened and creases sharpened. Likewise, decoration should avoid being over dramatic, not to become an end in itself or to make people think of the amazing skills of the artist. Rather they are there to enhance the spiritual dignity and honour of the sacred person being depicted.

Gestures are somewhat exaggerated at times to emphasizes some spiritual characteristic, for example, the gesture of the hands is smooth and flowing, giving a sense of grace and dignity in the act of praying or teaching.

Arms, legs, hands, joints all need to work in harmony to create a convincing and graceful, grace-filled pose.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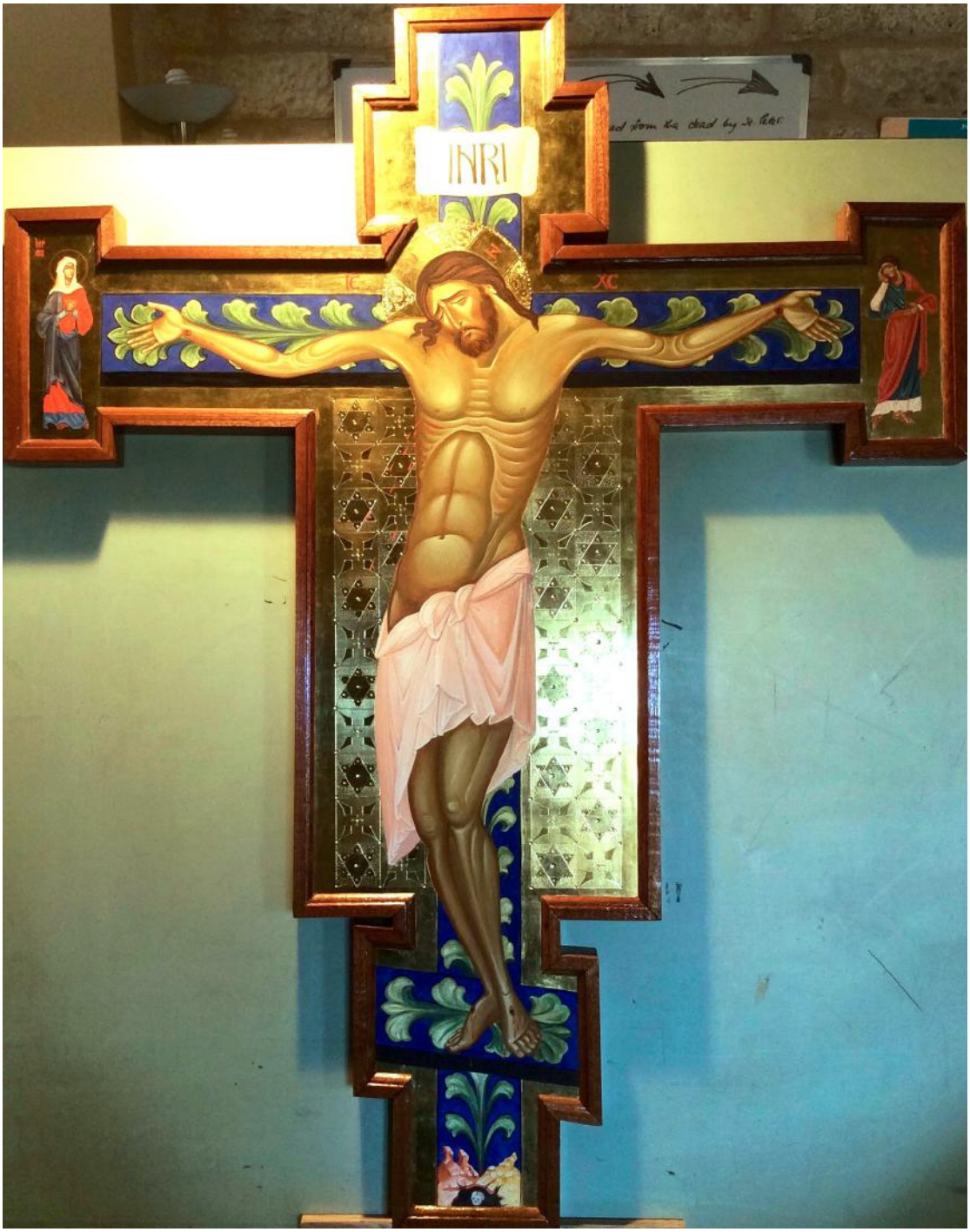
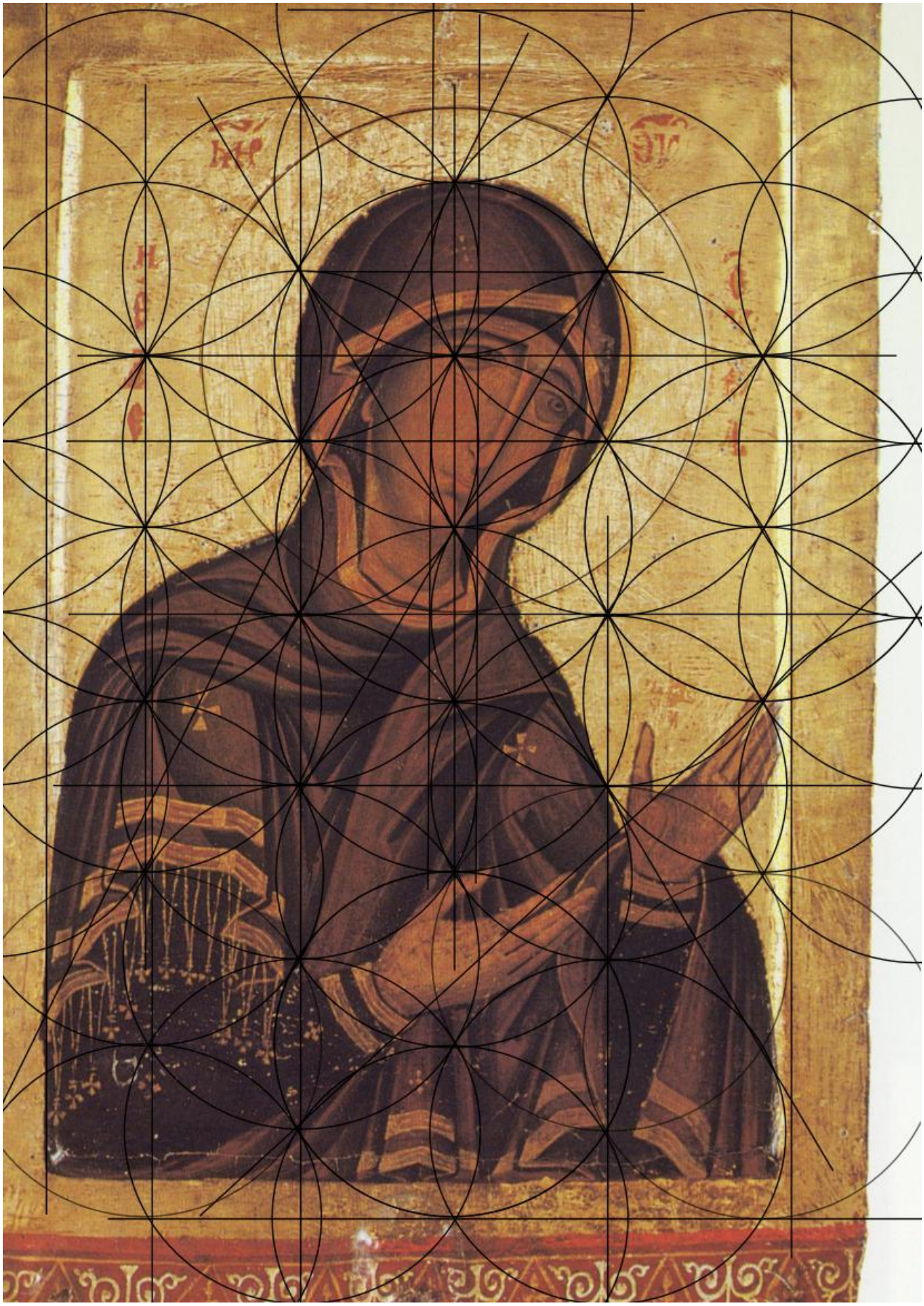
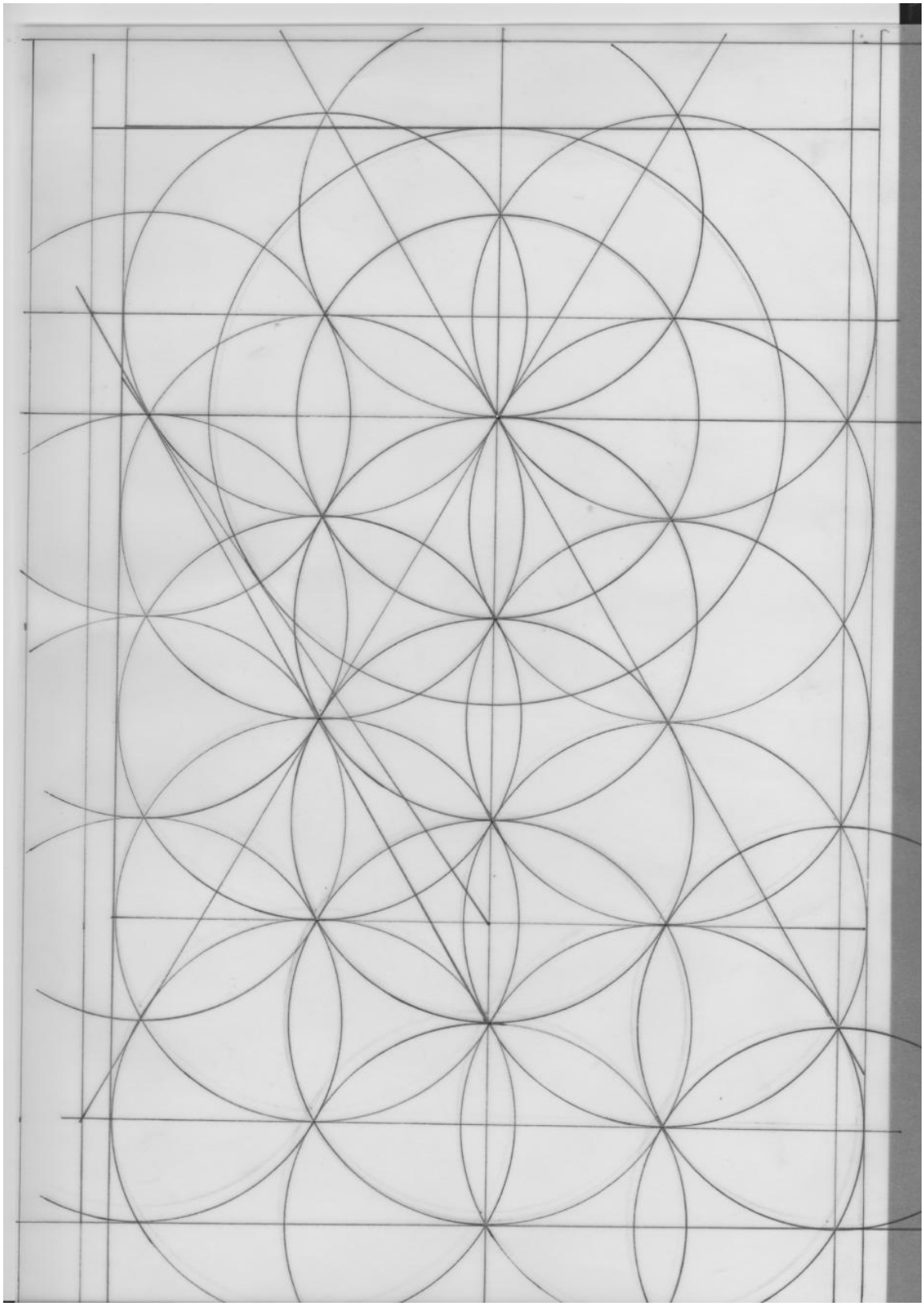


Here you can see how a new cross emerged from the original Russian one, combining elements from old English manuscript illustrations, and medieval gilding patterns.

Next page: analysis of a standard diesis icon of the Theotokos.



In this example of the Archangel Gabriel, you can see the original and an analysis made on tracing paper over the top. This patter is then made on a normal piece of paper, to whatever scale is wanted, and then a drawing made over that on another piece of tracing paper.




ΟΑΡ
ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ

St James, Brother of the Lord. The inscription is in Aramaic.

B. Details of the Figure

HANDS AND FEET

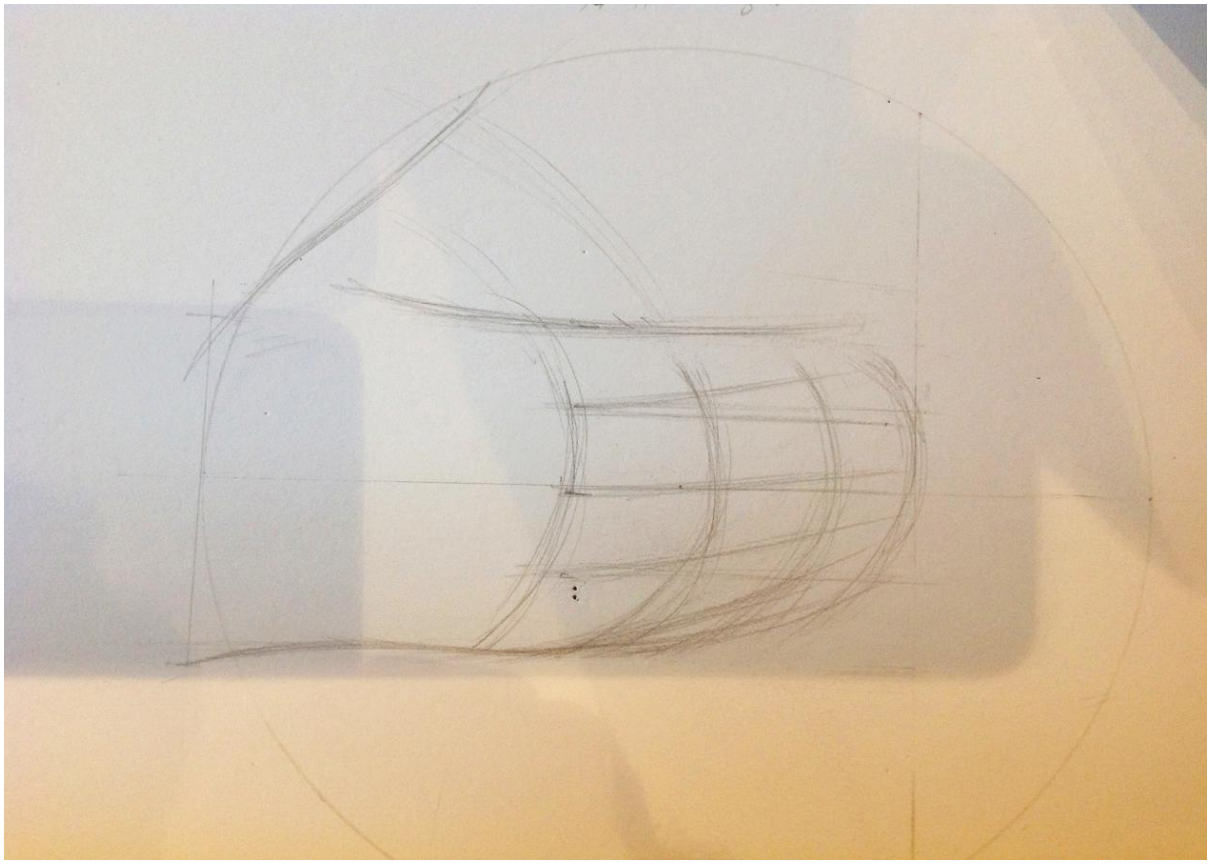
Constructing a finger. Note how each joint marks a tapering point of each section. Hands are important in the icon, as they point to what is significant and important, or

indicated speech. They should be elegant and give a sense of movement, not be a block where the eye ends its look.

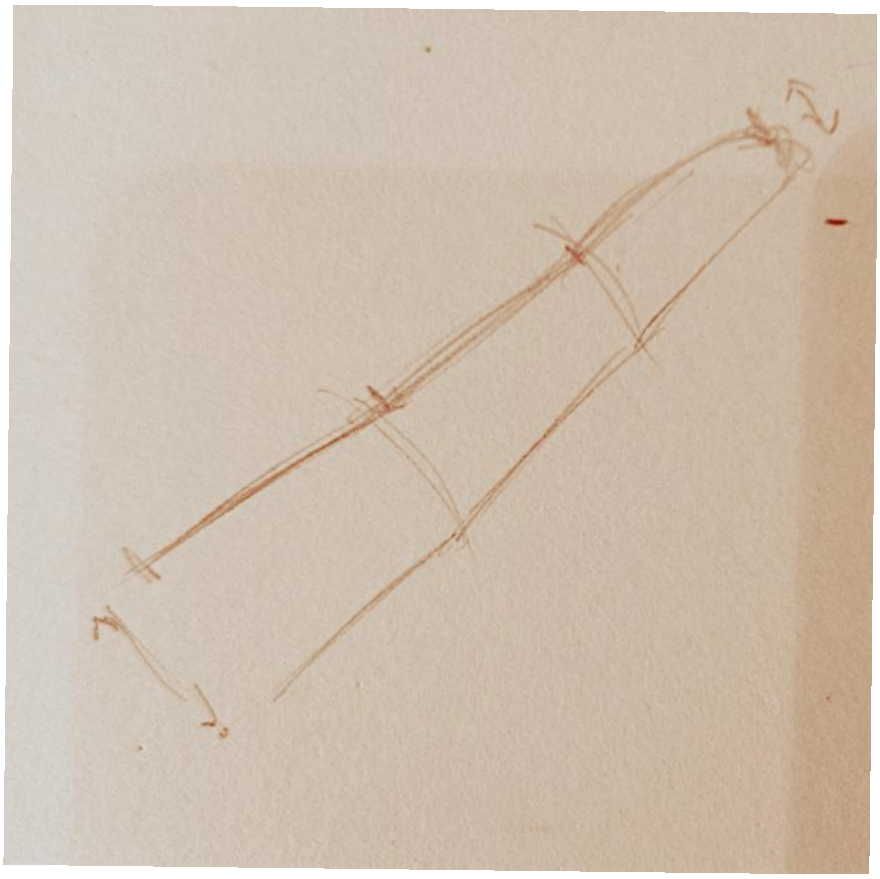
Below you can see how to draw a basic hand. You should make lots of studies of hands from a variety of icons.

- Begin with two squares end to end,

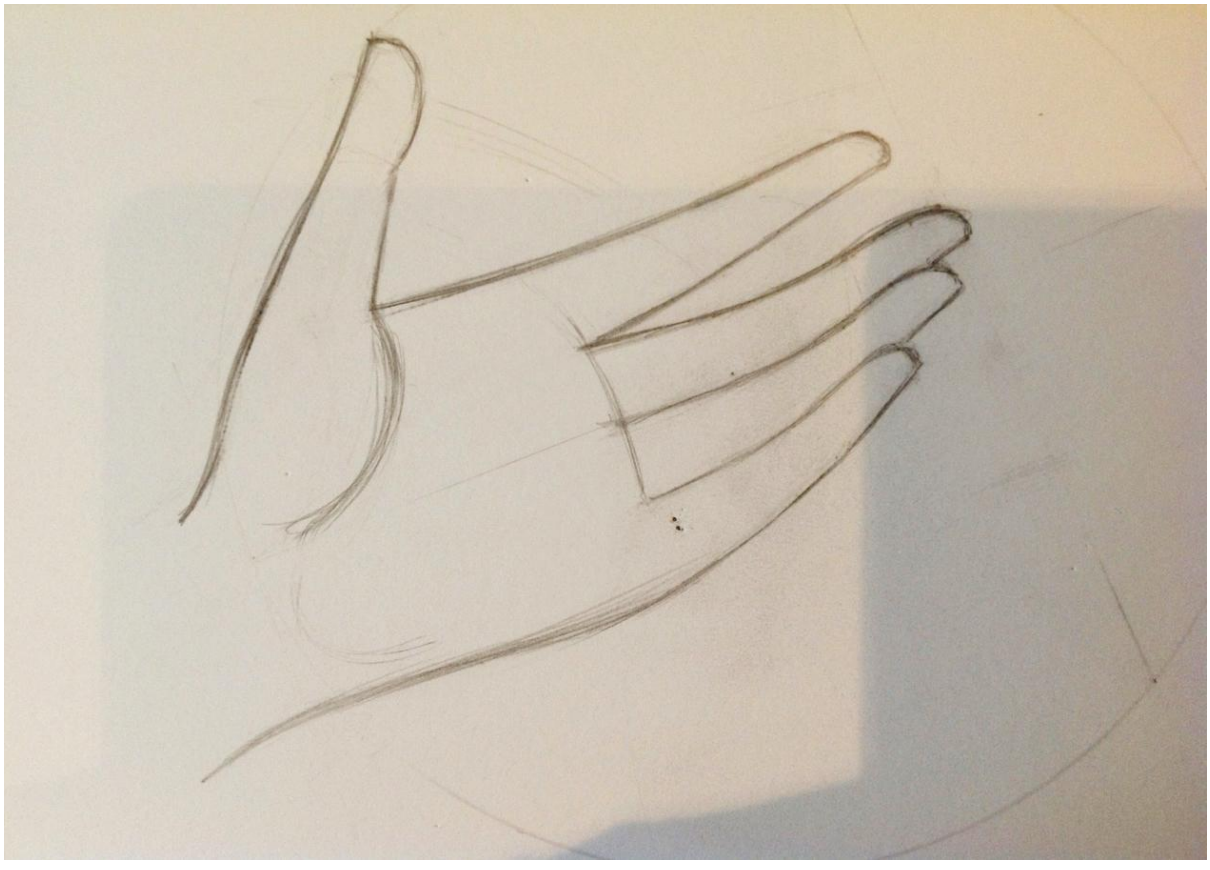
- then divide one into four equal parts,
- add the **curved** knuckle lines
- Add the thumb up to the second knuckle line



- Make the fingers into three narrowing parts, rounding the end carefully.



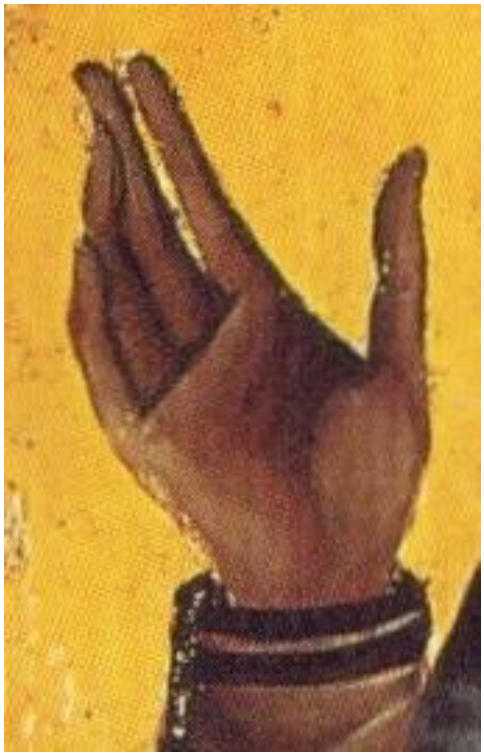
The hand is ¾ of the length of the head. Fingers and palm are roughly equal in length, though a woman's hands tend to have slightly longer fingers to palm, giving it a certain elegance and femininity. The fingers are divided up into three decreasing lengths, and taper. A slightly open first finger helps avoid a certain 'clunkiness'.



As in life, so in the icon, the hands make gestures of important. They point, for example in the John the Baptist icon which is part of the deisis layer. In this type of icon he is gesturing with his hands, arms and fingers towards Christ who would be the central icon of that layer of the iconostasis. This sense of pointing and honouring is reflected in the whole pose. In icon of St John the Baptist, the incline of his head, the lowering of one shoulder, as well as the overall composition which moves clearly from right to left, the whole composition ‘speaks’ very clearly: it points to Christ.

Hands also hold things, in the icon what they hold is always significant, such as the Gospel book or their writings, or signs of their witness to Christ such as the cross.

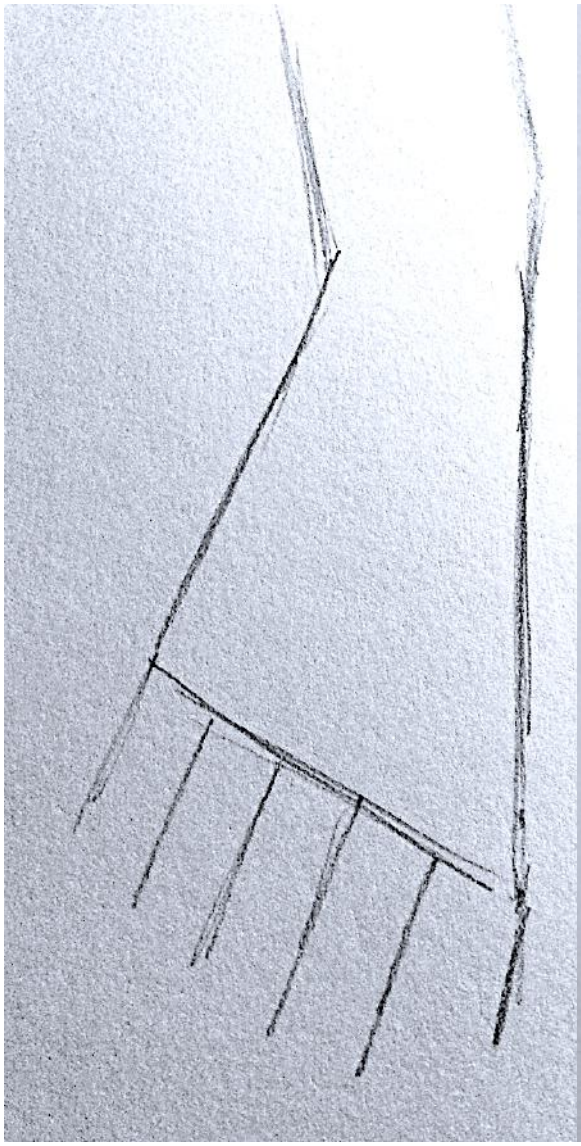
Hands also bless, as in the icons of Christ, and of many priests and bishops. The hands should be constructed very carefully, to retain their natural characteristics, for example the arrangement of the joints and draw out their elegance, for example careful rounding of the ends and a rythmic tapering towards the ends.

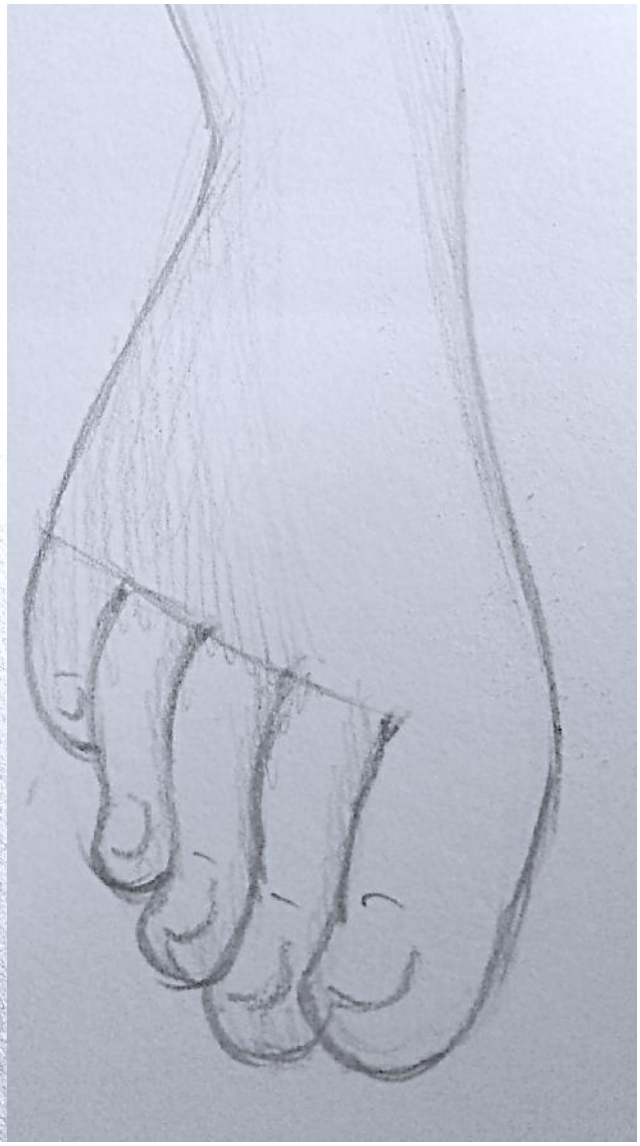


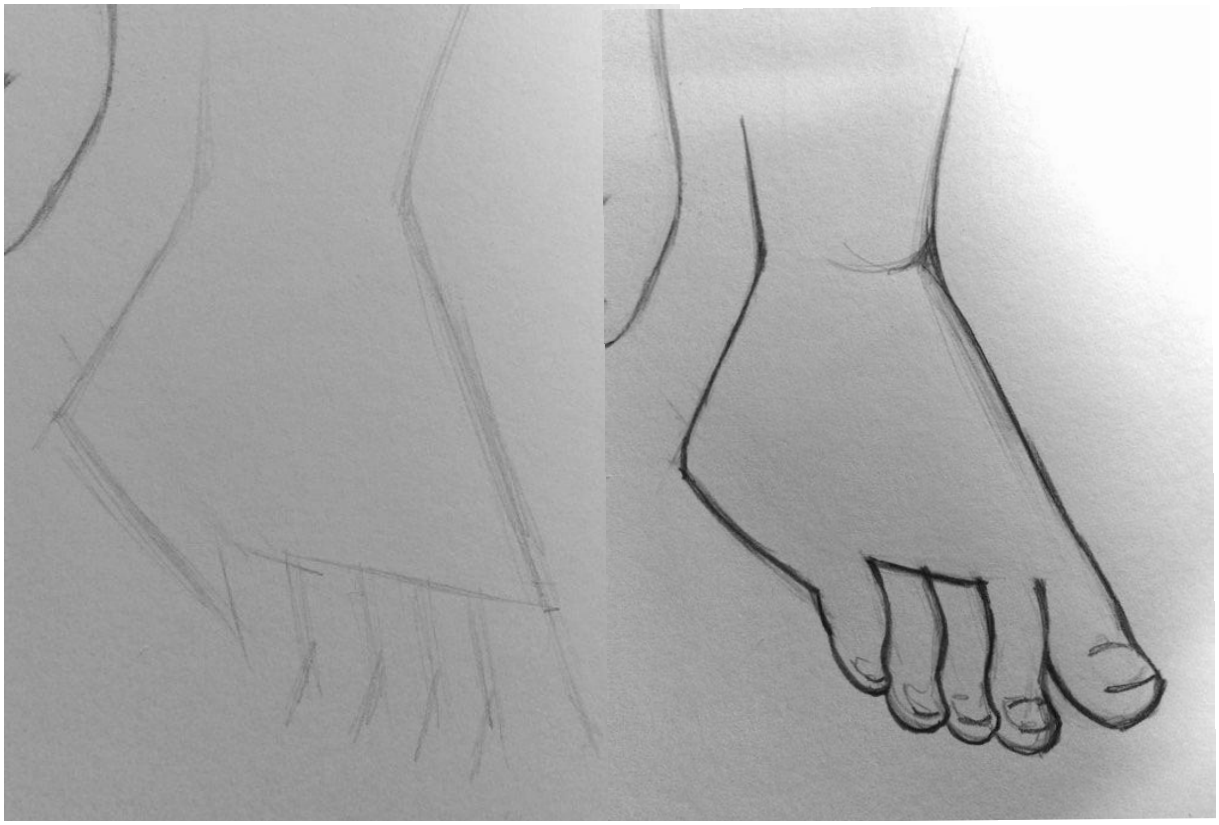
The general pose in the icon is crucial for giving a sense of life and spiritual energy.

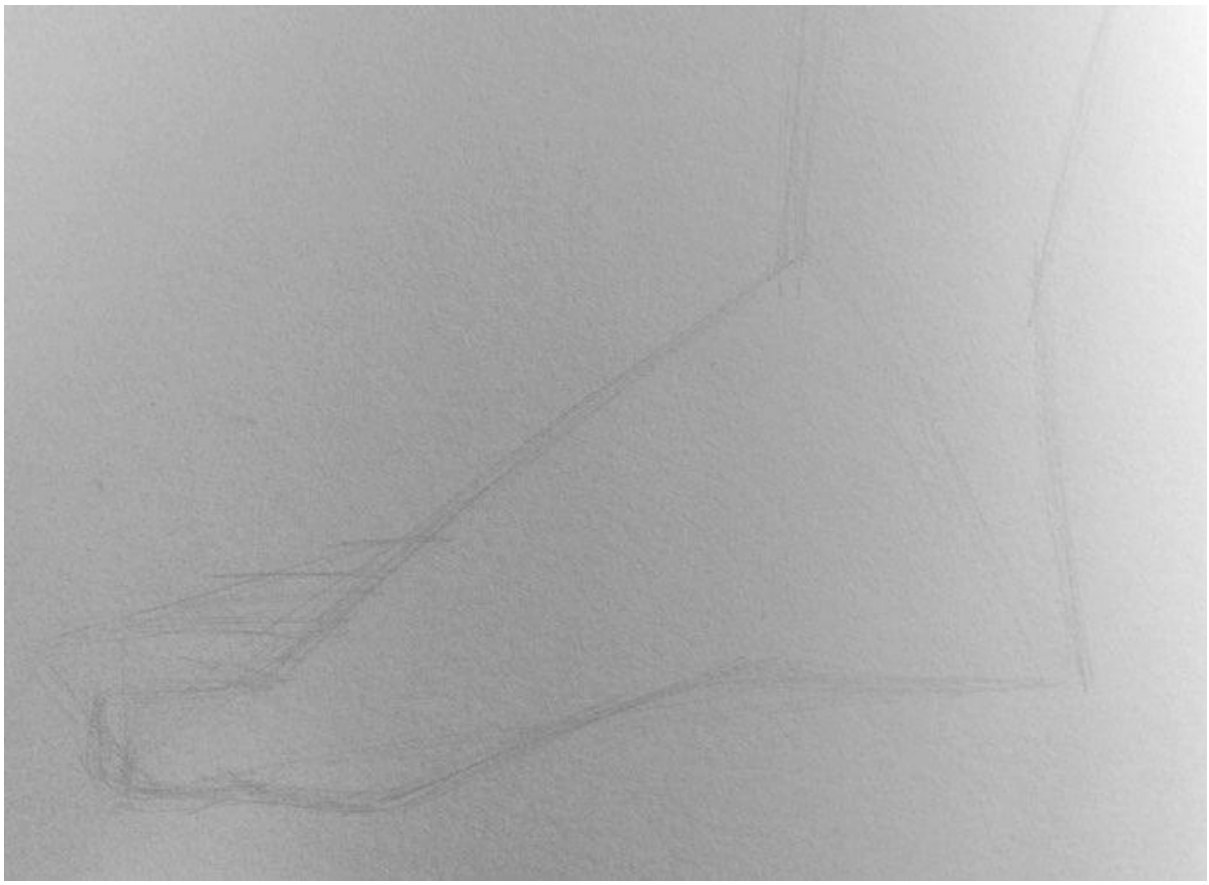
A stiff, stilted figure looks empty of life, and looses any sense of spiritual elegance, let alone inspiration. Clumsily drawn hands and fingers are often found in amateur icons and the leave the whole piece wounded and distracting.

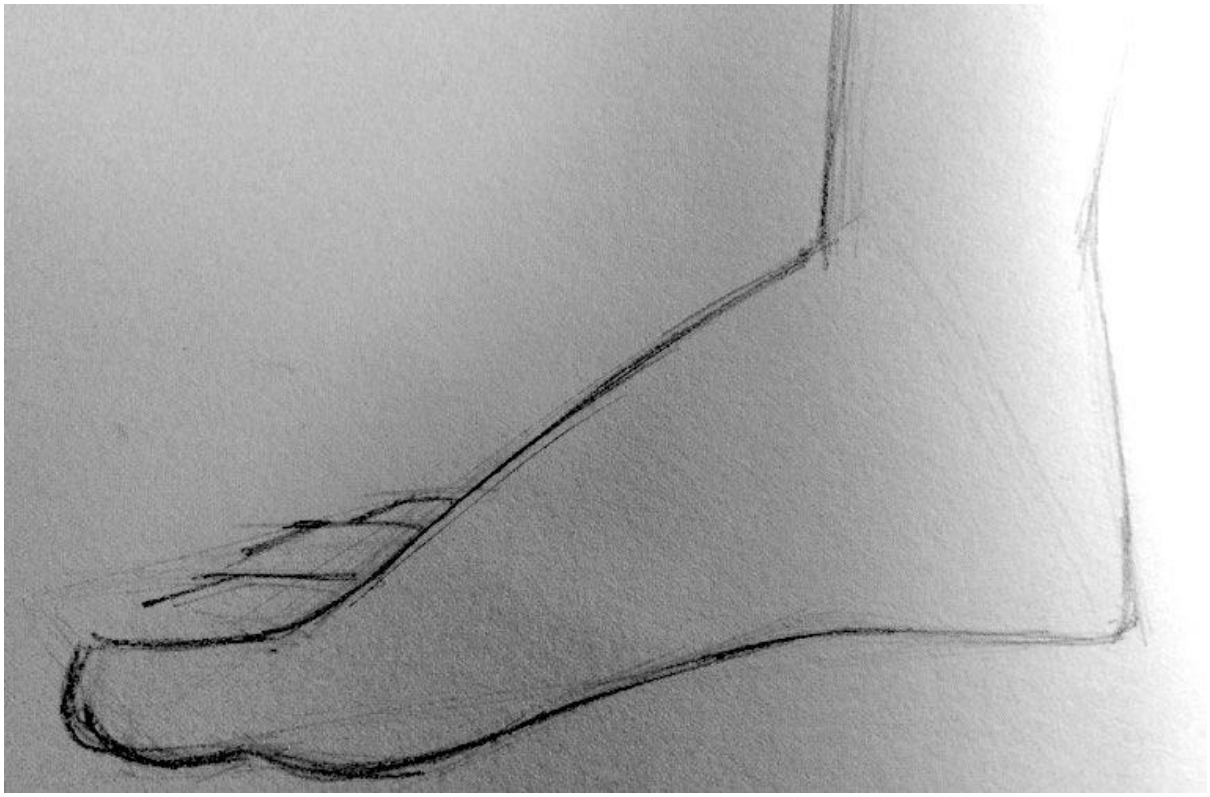
The foot is constructed much as the hand, The basic construction is formed by a triangle to which a set of toes are attached, each of an equal width.

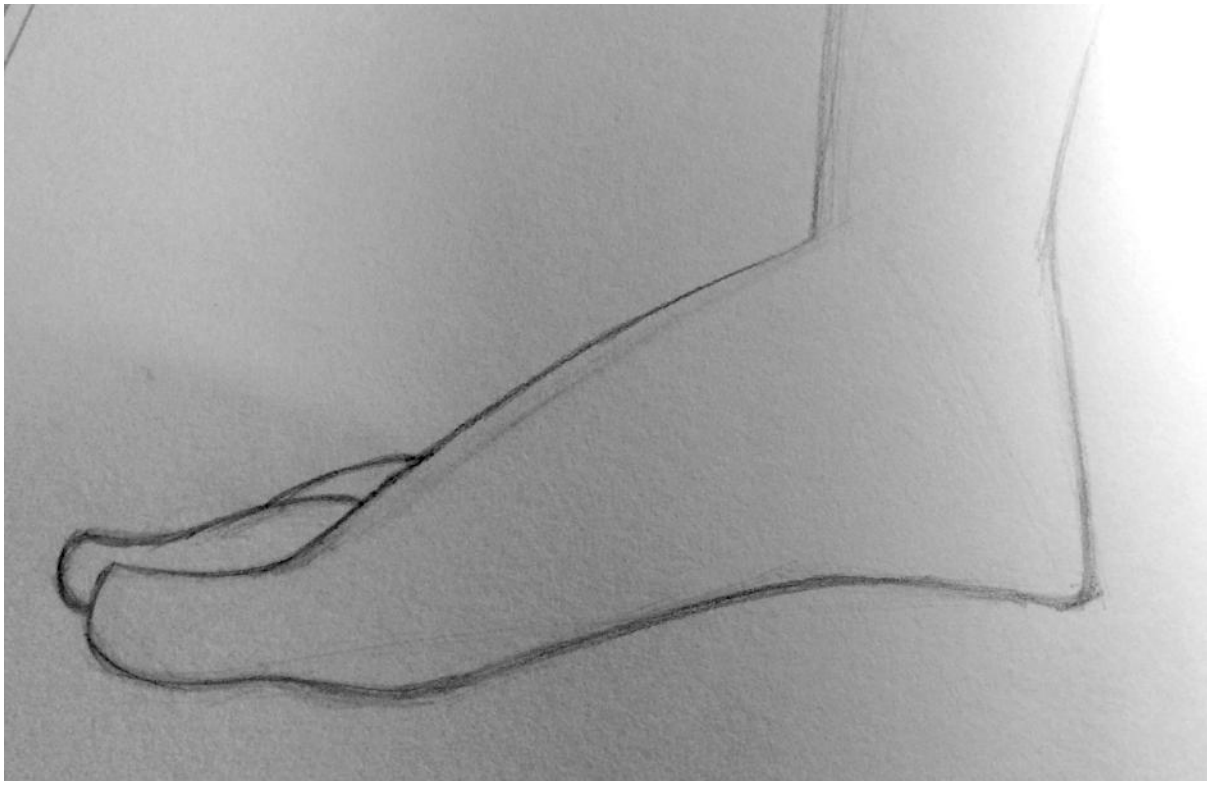


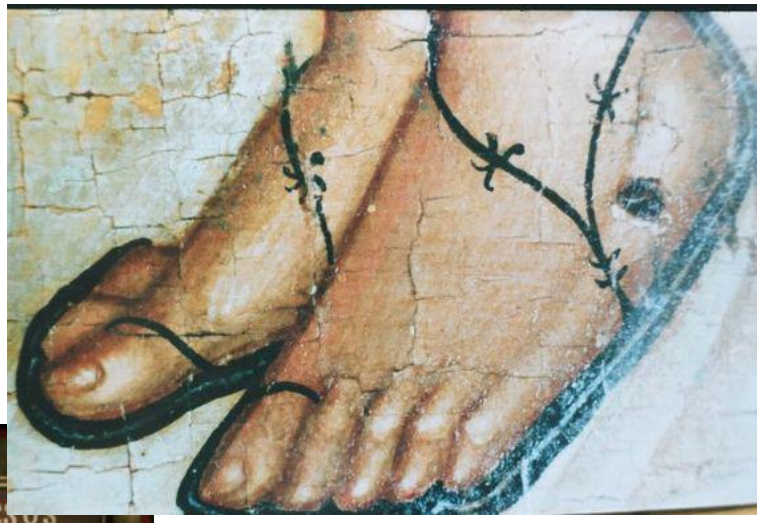













THE MERCI-
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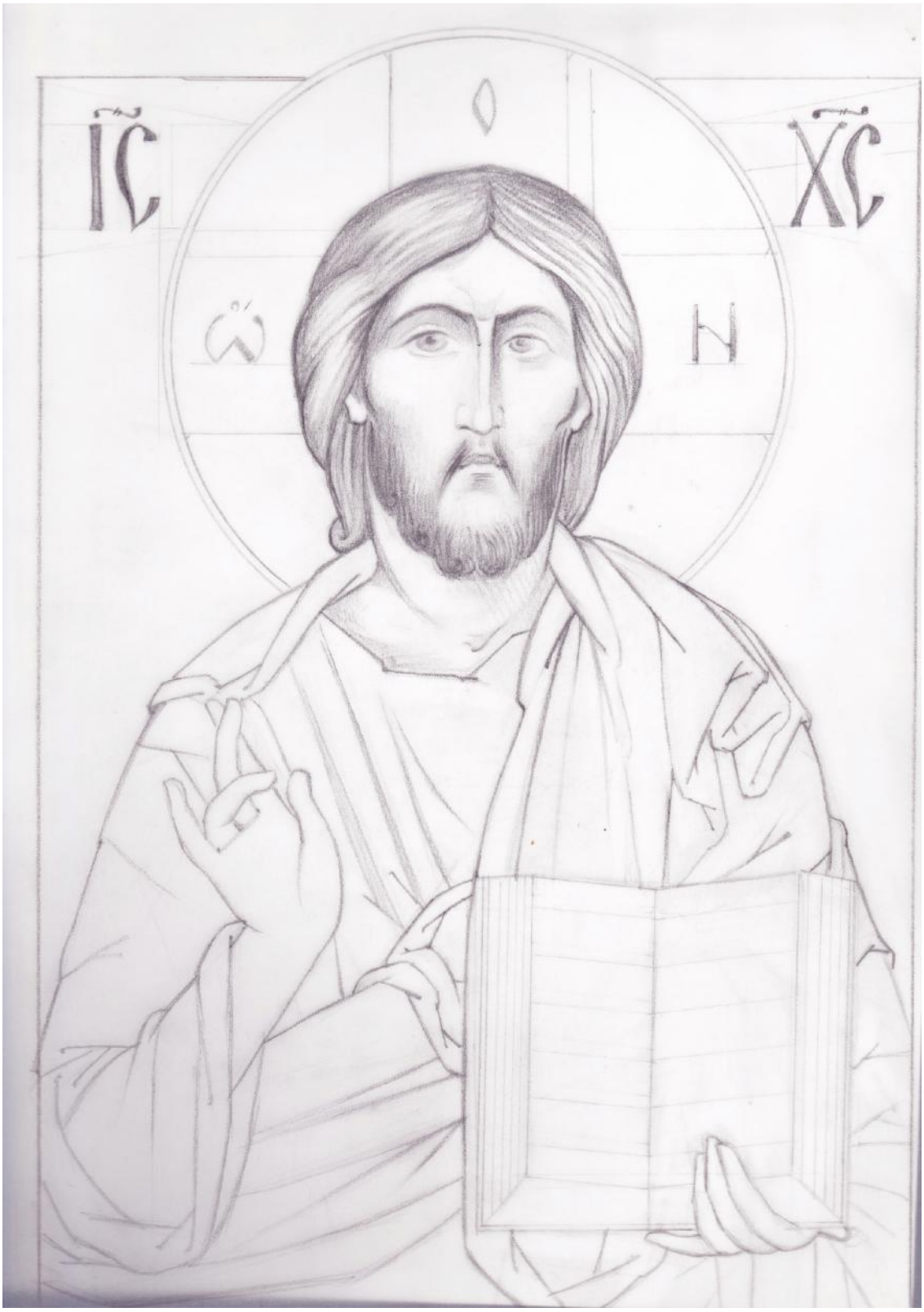


An example of a preparatory sketch, with clear lines and sufficient shading to give form without becoming overworked. This can be done on drafting paper or good quality smooth tracing paper, thus removing the necessity of drawing onto the geometric pattern directly.

Chapter 6:

The Technique of tempera painting

WHY EGG TEMPERA?

Egg tempera is:

- water based
- non-toxic
- permanent - color doesn't change over time, unlike oil paint
- ecologically friendly
- allows colours are clear, bright and pure.

- very fragile, and needs to be painted on a solid base such as wood
- needs an absorbent surface, such as a chalk gesso
- only be applied in thin layers as thick layers will easily crack
- a quick drying paint but continues to ‘cure’ for a considerable time.

Tempera refers to water based binders such as hide glue, casein, gum resin, etc. though mainly to egg yolk.

Egg tempera is one of the oldest, and most enduring, forms of making paint. The egg yolk hardens over many years to eventually form a totally waterproof and tough covering, not unlike egg shell. Icons painted with egg tempera have survived hundreds of years, even after the wooden panel they are painted on has been eaten away by insects! The earliest reliably identified egg tempera painting is a mummy portrait from the 4th c. AD in the Petrie Museum in London.

It was popular for Church paintings, in east and west, and not just on wooden panels but statues also, until the Renaissance, when oil painting eventually took over especially in the West.

Tempera is a very delicate paint, layering colours in very thin layer that let the light penetrate the layers of colour and bounce back through them. This makes it ideal for spiritual imagery, where you are trying to capture the inner light with a sense of luminosity, rather than reflected light and deep shadows found in natural painting. This is difficult to achieve with oil paint, and almost impossible except for the most adept artist with modern mediums such as acrylic where layers are dense, even and have a plastic like quality.

Tempera is very time consuming to apply and takes a lot of skill to master, in contrast to acrylic which not only is quick drying like tempera but is quick to apply in strong layers and without the demands of having to make your own paint.

As a result many iconographers, esp. in Greece, use this medium but with results that, quite frankly, are somewhat harsh and lack the mellow radiance of traditional icons. This is an important point, and I would like to take a closer look at the issue. This is especially because in Palestine access to pigments is difficult and the temptation to use acrylic is ever present, especially as it is widely used among iconographers here.

2. TRANSFIGURATION, THEOSIS AND ICONOGRAPHY

Below: Icon of the Transfiguration, 12th century, Sinai.

Icons seek to be an expression of the transfiguration of matter by the Divine Light, a process called 'theosis' in eastern theology. This is not a symbolic but literal meaning. In the west it is called 'sanctification' but perhaps misses some of the nuances which have come through such theologians and mystics as St Simeon the New Theologian and the Hesychast saints. The key Biblical foundation for this understanding is the Transfiguration.

This occurs in three of the Gospels, and is referenced to in the first letter of St Peter. In some strange way the Divinity of Christ was mediated visually via light - the voice of God proclaimed that this was Christ the Son of the Father, while Jesus whole physical person, together with his clothes, radiated a pure, intense, bright but visible light. At the same time a cloud of golden light surrounded Christ and enveloped all those present. This was an intense physical experience.

It is paralleled in the book of Acts when St Paul experiences Christ as a blinding light, literally so intense that it frightened his horse and left him temporarily blinded. So profound as this experience that Paul was converted to Christ.

We should be careful here to make the distinction between a physical manifestation of the Divine as light and the metaphor of light often used about God, the holy, inspiration, etc.It is quite clear that we are here talking about a direct physical manifestation perceived by the human eye.

This experience has been claimed by men and women who have come after the apostles. In the eastern Church, especially since the time of St Gregory Palamas, it has been an important element of perceiving a saint's life.

The monastic movement in particular adopted the metaphor of light, and that of the Transfiguration in particular, for their ascetic experience, and this appears not just in the writings of the Desert Fathers, but also in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and

Saint Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century, and later Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Evidence for the representation of the Transfiguration during this period is poor to non-existent, but there are two sixth century representations that are clearly dated to within 25 yrs of each other, one in a late Classical symbolic style in the apse of the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe and the other an icon in the apse at Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, one of the very earliest icons that emerged from Roman art in the mid sixth century.

St Maximus the Confessor was a monk on Mt Sinai, and he worshiped before this icon several times each day, including that amazing moment every morning when the rising sun cast a bright beam of radiant light into the cold interior of the church. Undoubtedly the transformation of the existing symbolic expression of the Tranfiguration that is to be seen in the Classe basilca could only have taken place in situ. For the monks it was their faith in Christ that drew them to that remote and inhospitable location and to enter into a life of extreme deprivation. They did so in a place where God had already manifested himself first to Moses at the burning bush, and secondly to Elijah as the 'still, small voice'. Indeed, just on the other side of the church's apse is what the monastery identifies as the Burning Bush.

The moment when these three people are presented together in the Bible is at the Transfiguration, vividly marking the significance of what the monks experienced daily in the Liturgy. Hence, the apse mosaic doesnt present an intricate weaving of symbols but a direct manifestation in image and colour of what the monks themselves hoped to experience following in the footsteps of Moses and Elijah and entering into the Presence of the Divine Christ.

Thus it is more than likely that Maximus' writing were shaped by his contemplations on the katholikon at Saint Catherine's Monastery – not the first time theological ideas had been nurtured by themes first appearing in icons.

In the 7th century, Saint Maximus the Confessor had an interesting insight when he focused on the way not only Christ, but the senses of the apostles were transfigured so they we able to perceive Christ in his true glory. This concept of the transfiguration of the believer is explicit in the Sinai icon, where the figures of the apostles are caught up within the emanating rays of light, and their expressions show their reaction to what they clearly perceive, even if it shakes their sense to the point they tumble to the ground in awe. This was in a very real sense a reflection of and commentary arising from the monks' own experience of living with Christ, Moses and Elijah on that Holy Mountain. Thus the icon was not a symbolic theological discourse, nor a historical aide memoir, but an articulation in line and colour about the lived experience of the Transfiguration in the present as experienced directly in that basilica.

The understanding of this theosis or transfiguration of the believer went through further exploration in the life and writings of St Symeon the New Theologian ('new' to connect him with the 'old' theologians such as St Basil and St Gregory Nyssa whose

theology he is understood to have developed). He began to explore how the human person could 'know' God and in his own life the experience of the Divine Light as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit played a central part in his coming to know God in a deep and personal way. This tradition of prayerful transfiguration continues as the central ascetical way found in Orthodoxy, in such contemporary saints as St Seraphim of Sarov (above), St Silouan the Athonite and St Paisios.

This understanding of the transfiguration of the saint in many ways is at the essence of what the icon seeks to express: the interior Divine light that bursts through the created order, supremely in the person of the saint but reflected in the whole created order. Relics are expressions of this, physical objects understood to be imbued with spiritual power that can transform the world about them. However, theosis isn't limited simply to saints, but is a way of perceiving creation as a spiritual reality rather than simply a temporal one. All of the creation is in the process of 'giving birth' to the children of God, as St Paul puts it, and awaiting being transfigured into the new heavens and the new earth, just as we await the transfiguration of our bodies as Christ's was in the resurrection.

Theosis is thus something that affects the whole created order. As iconographers we are articulating this understanding of the transfiguration of the world of matter, and in particular the way in which the saint is transfigured by the Divine Light. We are, in a way, articulating the Transfiguration in every icon we make. This is why we don't paint naturalistic landscapes but spiritualised ones... that doesn't mean something up in the clouds, unreal, but rather something hyper real. Perhaps the best contemporary description of this comes in the 'Great Divorce' by C.S.Lewis who describes people arriving in heaven and finding the grass 'too real', too firm under their feet and too intense to their eyes.

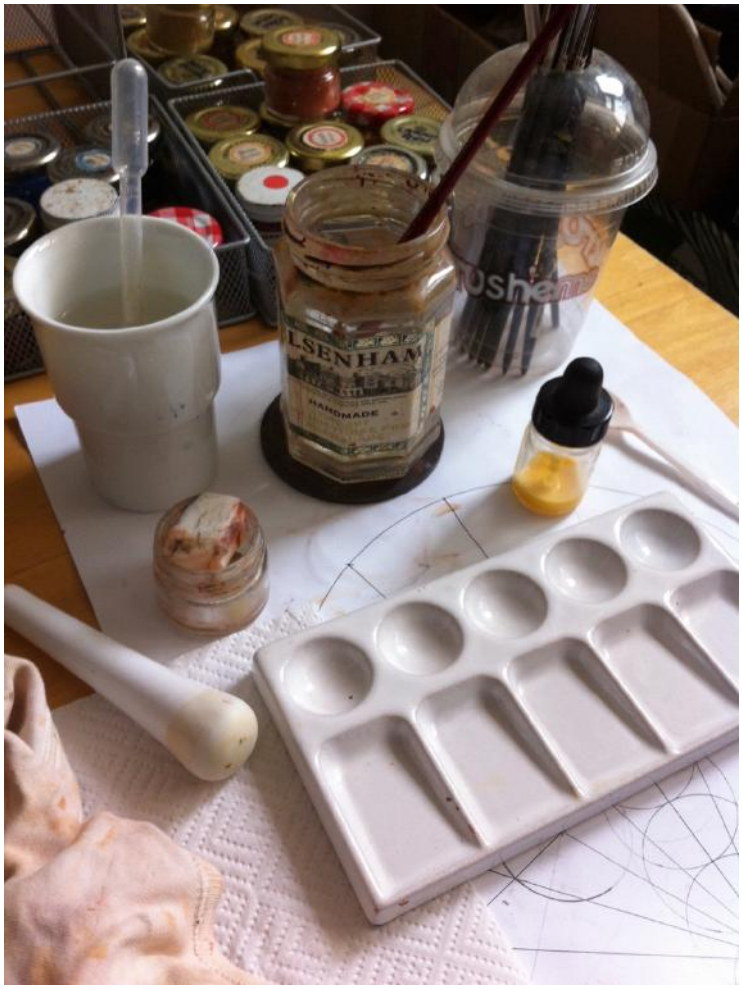
3.TRANSFIGURATION, TEMPERA AND ICONS

Thus in iconography the way we handle light and luminosity is critical. Whatever the medium we use should be assessed in terms of its compatibility with the purpose of expressing this.

Tempera is now a very rare technique, even among professional artists. However it has qualities which make it the ideal medium for painting icon panels.

It is a water based paint, that needs water to make it adaptable and varied in the transparency of its application. It is more like water colour in this.

• However, it has more 'body' than watercolour, which gives texture and more depth. The brushes used for watercolour are ideal for use with egg tempera.



• The way tempera works is to make very, very thin, transparent layers of colour that the artist builds up patiently, layer upon layer. The light is not reflected from the surface colour, but rather the light penetrates to the base layer on which the paint has been applied, bouncing back up through the layers creating a sort of luminosity. Learning to work with this capability is what makes for a great and talented tempera artist.

Various effects can be achieved depending on the balance between: EGG SOLUTION + PIGMENT PROPERTIES + WATER

Understanding how these three elements work individually and in relation to each other is the key to tempera painting.

EGG SOLUTION

This is the basic ingredient. Get it right and you have great paint, get it wrong and the paint becomes harder to apply, even useless, damaging paint already applied and making it very difficult to apply subsequent layers of colour.

The key is to have the right strength mix of egg emulsion.

- Use good, free range eggs that have yolks that are a good colour and thick. Avoid cheap supermarket eggs from farms where the chickens are not fed well, not exposed to sunlight and good living conditions as their yolks are weak, sometimes like water. It is also unethical and a poor stewardship of creation as entrusted to humanity by God Himself.
- Add about 1/3 – 1/2 of water to the yolk, until it is fluid rather than sticky, and a few drops of vodka as a preservative, which also helps break down very gritty pigments. (Other recipes exist, for example using two parts dry white wine instead

of water and vodka). Don't let this mixture get too old as the yolk starts to harden from the moment it is released from the yolk sack

- Keep refrigerated.
- Make the right mix of emulsion and pigment. It should be like single cream. This is the basic paint, such as you would get inside a tube of paint. NEVER add water until this combination is right.
- This paint can be then diluted to taste, depending on the effect you want.

Learn by experience how different pigments react to the egg solution and the varying amounts of water. For example, ivory black needs a lot of water, relatively speaking, to attain the right fluidity while obtaining an intensity of colour. Some pigments will work well in a stronger egg mix, while others will become slippery and drag, even pulling up previous layers. As each pigment has its own way of reacting with the tempera emulsion you have to learn this mostly by trial and error.

PIGMENT PROPERTIES

Pigment is what gives colour to paint. It comes in lots of different forms, many naturally, though through chemistry many pigments are now synthetic, that is directly made chemical compounds rather than processed from nature.

This makes a very small but significant difference. Synthetic pigment at the molecular level is spherical, whereas naturally sourced pigments are multi-faced. The key to colour is the reflection of light. A sphere reflects light evenly but a multi-faceted molecule varies the direction at which light reflects. Thus synthetic colour is very intense and overwhelming, while naturally sourced pigments tend to be more mellow and subtle.

Generally speaking synthetic pigments are easier to mix and more consistent in their behaviour, while naturally sourced pigments are much more erratic! Natural pigments thus demand more care and knowledge in handling them, more skill in the artist. For use in paint it comes in powder form. You should keep it safe in a screw lid container so the damp doesn't affect it. Also, some pigments are HIGHLY POISONOUS and need to be kept in a safe place. Always wash your hands after using them. More on pigment colours later.

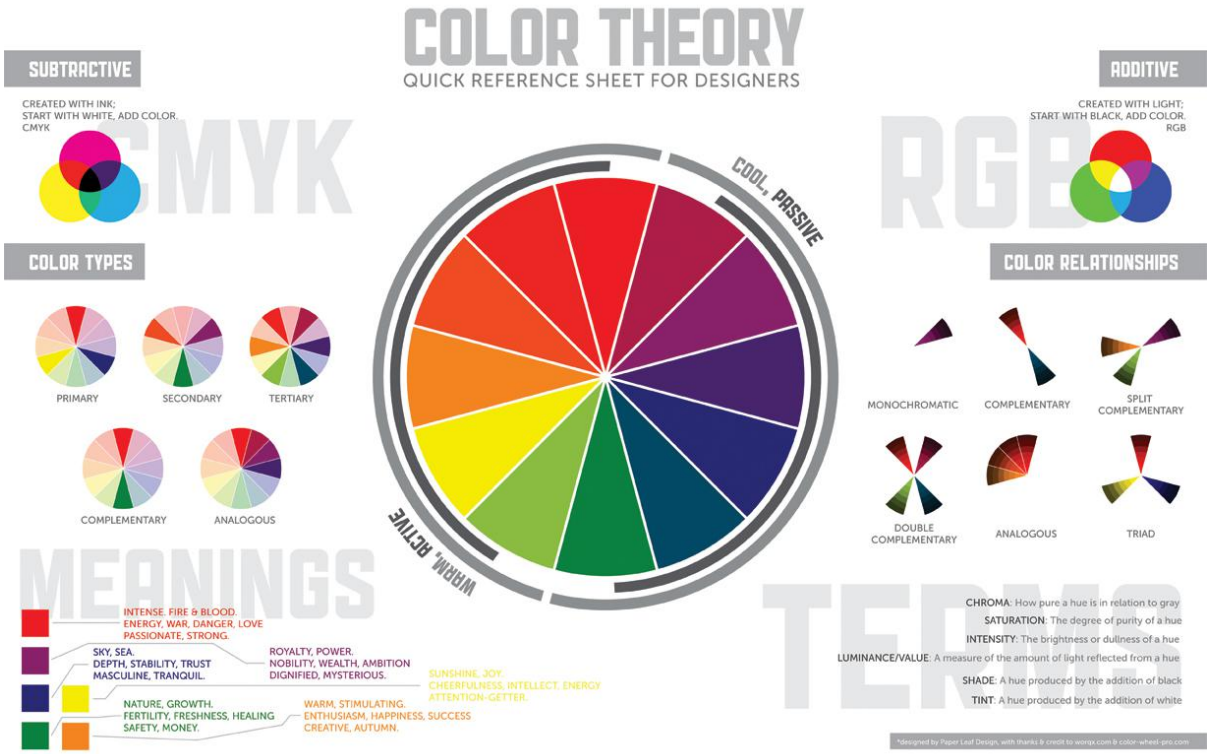
Each pigment reacts differently to the egg solution and to further dilution.

Some pigment is very gritty and needs extra time to mix it, or even to grind it further (though be careful as the colour can be lost). You can use a pestle and mortice for this (see left) or a muller and glass (below).

Otherwise, mix the pigment with the emulsion using an old brush. A ceramic container such as Arabic coffee cups or ceramic mixing palette are ideal. These not only clean easier, but the little grains of pigment don't cut into the surface as with plastic, which can muddy your colours.

Some pigment mixes quickly with the egg while others take more care to get a good mixture. Always make the pigment into a paste like single cream. Too much egg and the paint becomes sticky and tricky to paint with, too little and the paint dries dusty and can brush off the board.

Some pigments need a certain amount of water to get them to flow well from the brush and to cover the surface evenly, others need hardly any. You need to get a feel for the right consistency and use a sheet of scrap paper to test the mixture from the brush.



YOUR PALETTE

Colours come in all sorts of shades, even when they have the same name. You need to fall in love with your colours, and get to know how they mix and how they behave when made up into egg tempera.

To this end I recommend a very limited palette of colours. If you have a wide range they will always remain strangers.

The following is the basic palette I use:

1. Ivory black

2. Titanium white

3. Yellow Ochre

4. English Red Ochre

5. English Red Ochre Light/Venetian Red/Palozzi Red

6. Terre Verte

7. Avanna Ochre

8. Havanne Ochre /Italian Warm Ochre

9. Raw Sienna

10. Burnt Sienna

11. Raw Umber

12. Burnt Umber

13. Real vermillion (NOT synthetic)

14. Real lapis lazuli or azurite (NOT ultramarine)

15. Real indigo

16. Buff titanium

17. Green umber

18. Caput mortem

(If you cannot afford real vermillion and real lapis, then you can use the synthetic varieties BUT you need to learn how to tone them down using, for example, yellow ochre.)

Each of these pigments reacts differently to the egg. Some absorbs more, some little. Some absorbs it quickly, others remains more resilient. Some mixes very smooth, others remain gritty. All of these qualities you need to master if you are to use them well and consistently.

Also, as these are based on organic products found in nature, each batch of the same colour pigments will not be exactly the same as one batch might come from a quarry in the UK, another in Mongolia. Learning to be sensitive to each colour you have is an essential element of an iconographer's skill. Each pigment has different

qualities of intensity. Some is very dense, such as caput mortem, others are very translucent, such as terre verte. Again, understanding how each colour works enables you to paint with sensitivity and confidence.

Exercise: Make color charts for your icons (like this one) experiment with combinations before committing yourself on your board. Its a great way to get to know how your colours work with each other.

PAINTING WITH EGG TEMPERA

Brushes:

A good brush has

- a good point
- a good bowl
- a well made handle and ferrule (the metal holding the bristles to the handle)

When looking for a brush then the following give a rough sense of acceptable quality:

1. Good quality water color brushes
2. Good quality sable brushes
3. Good quality Kolinsky sable brushes (the very best)

The Russian technique and the Greek techniques differ considerably. I use a bit of both depending on the effect I am looking for.

Basically the Greek technique ends up with solid blocks of colour, while the Russian is more translucent.

The icon is a manifestation of the Divine Light, and light is all about colour. Without light there is darkness and no colour can be reflected to the human eye. Egg tempera is a transparent medium, which allows the light to penetrate through several layers and 'bounce back' from the colours beneath the surface, even down to the white surface of the board. Learning how to handle this quality enables icon painting in egg tempera colour to have a vibrant spiritual quality.

Mixing the paint:

Step one: Add a LITTLE pigment to your palette. You don't need much as it goes a long, long way.

Step two: add two or three DROPS of egg tempera emulsion.

Step three: mix with a small, old brush or a small pestle. Make the mixture as smooth as possible.

Step four: the mixture should be like SINGLE CREAM. If it is too thick, add more egg emulsion. If it is too runny add some more pigment until you get the right consistency. DO NOT go to step five until this is correct.

Step five: Add some drops of water to give it the consistency you want for painting. For the Greek technique of laying down quite solid colour you paint shouldn't be too dilute. For the Russian 'puddling' technique, which gives a cloudy look, you need it very dilute.

Common Problems:

The paint is slimy and dries very shinny: Too much egg.

The paint dries like dust and brushes off easily: Too little egg.

Greek technique

• Your paint solution should be dilute but not watery.

• Apply it with the brush quite dry in a herring bone pattern (crossing brush strokes) to cover large areas. Allow each layer to dry before applying the next. If you don't you risk lifting the layer beneath.

Russian technique

• Your paint solution should be very watery.

• Load your brush with the solution, having first wetted your brush in water.

Swirl the paint liquid onto the surface of the board without the bristles touching it. Keep your board flat so that the liquid doesn't all pool at one edge. Keep your brush full of paint and be careful to keep it under control. Allow each layer to dry thoroughly before adding the next.

Paint Layers – some tips.

There are various ways of painting an icon with tempera. The process I usually use is that of laying down the darkest colours first, and gradually adding lighter ones.

The first layers are called the proplasmos in Greek. These should be laid down very evenly and as a flat layer. This doesn't mean SOLID! Try to lay down the layers without making them too dense, so that they reflect light from the board through them. This makes the layers much more vibrant and alive.

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Layers are applied as BLOCKS of colour. These blocks define shadow areas and highlighted areas, which in turn give the shape of the face, garments etc. Think of blocks with edges rather than lines.

The subsequent layers should be laid over the lower layers, but allowing some of the lower areas still to show at the edges. The edges can either be sharp or blended, depending on the effect you want.

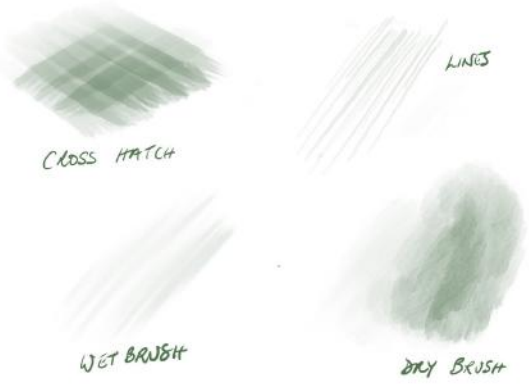
The lighter the colour, the less area should be being covered.

Blending If you apply the layers carefully, then colour moves from darkness to light gently but dramatically. You want this effect especially for the face.

If you don't, then they look like layers that have been stacked up on each other. You want this effect sometimes with garments.

Blending can be done in different ways:

- Cross hatching
- Lines
- Dry brush
- Wet brush



BRUSH TECHNIQUE

TIWP has an excellent chapter going into this in great detail. However, this is such a crucial area and skill that I want to underline here the importance of developing a real relationship with your brushes. You will need to build up your hand and arm muscles to enable you to hold the brush with confidence and make good hand and arm movements that produce the lines you want where you want them!

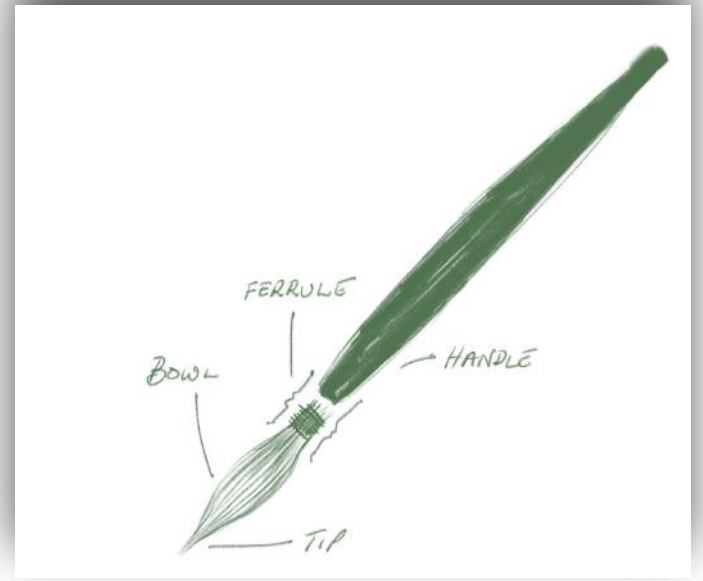
Brushes create shapes – a line, after all, is just a thin shape. The shape of the bristles enable thin, thick, thin lines to be made, which make calligraphic shapes. That is lines with flow and elegance that lead the eye on a 'dance' around the image. If you master your brush, that is how much weight presses down on the tip and hence the shape it makes, you can make such things as eyelids in a single stroke, making the 'flow' of the image much tighter and inspiring. Certainly the combination of a few strokes can express key shapes in the icon much more easily than drawing by pencil.

There are certain key shapes which are repeated time and again in icons, and it is well worth the effort of practising these until they flow naturally and smoothly.

Here are two key brush strokes: An eyelid shape and a tear drop, such as makes the end of the nose.

A good brush has an excellent point, with a good bowl to hold enough paint to enable you to make long, flowing lines.

A well made brush has hand tied hairs and a good ferrule holding them in place so you have a minimum of hair loss. Sable brushes are made of real hair, and so need to be washed in special brush soap if they are to remain supple and the hairs aren't to be forced apart by particles of paint drying close to the ferrule.



Chapter 7

Painting

Painting with egg tempera demands many skills and great patience, and even more so when it comes to icon painting.

There are several methods for painting icons with egg tempera. Here I will show you the proplasmos technique which builds color in thin layers from the darkest to the lightest.

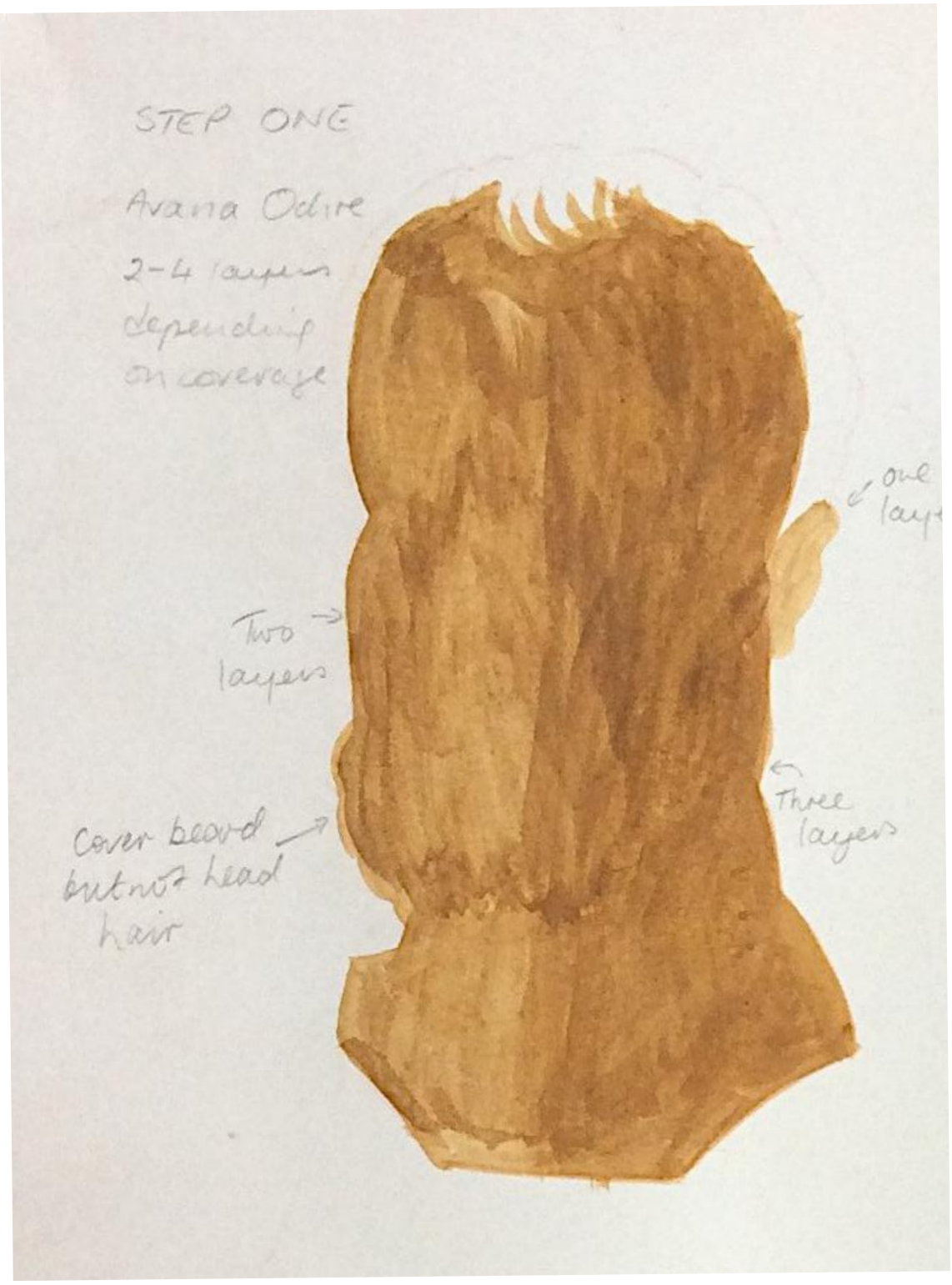
It is best to master one method before trying others, as it is quite possible to get confused, and practice makes perfect. We are not interested in who can paint in lots of techniques. We are interested in who can paint well, and consistently. This makes great icons!

There keys to a well painted icon in egg tempera:

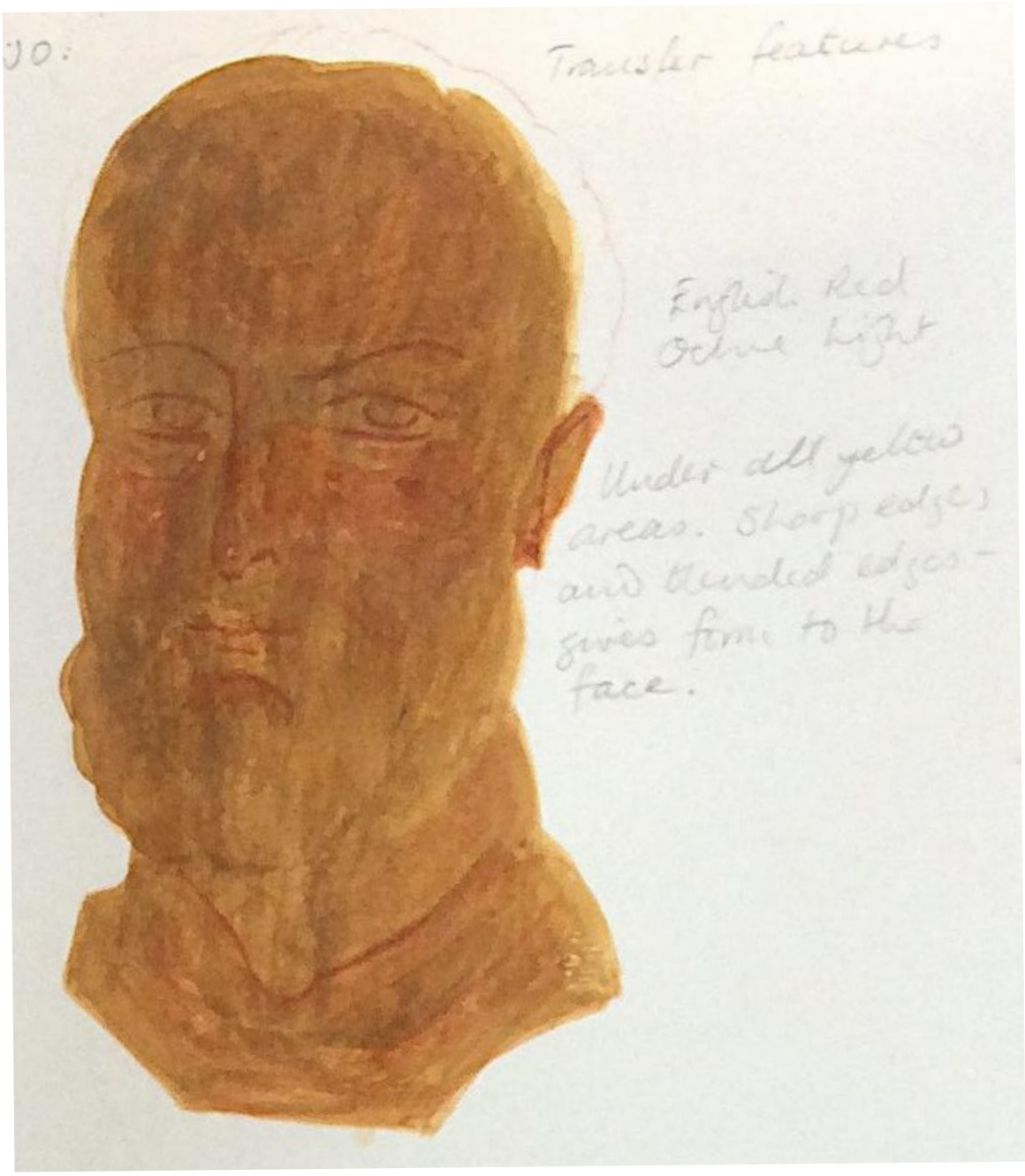
1. Good mixing of the paint. Is the egg + pigment + water ratio right?
2. Calligraphic brush strokes - are lines flowing, with nice thin pointed ends to the strokes?
3. Thin layers applied consistently - Is the paint showing through the layers?
4. Blends between layers - does a highlighting layer blend sensibly with the darker one below it?

IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO HAVE MASTERED YOUR BRUSH, AND A LOT OF PRACTICE OF MAKING LINES WITH YOUR BRUSHES IS FOUNDATIONAL TO EXCELLENT ICON PAINTING.

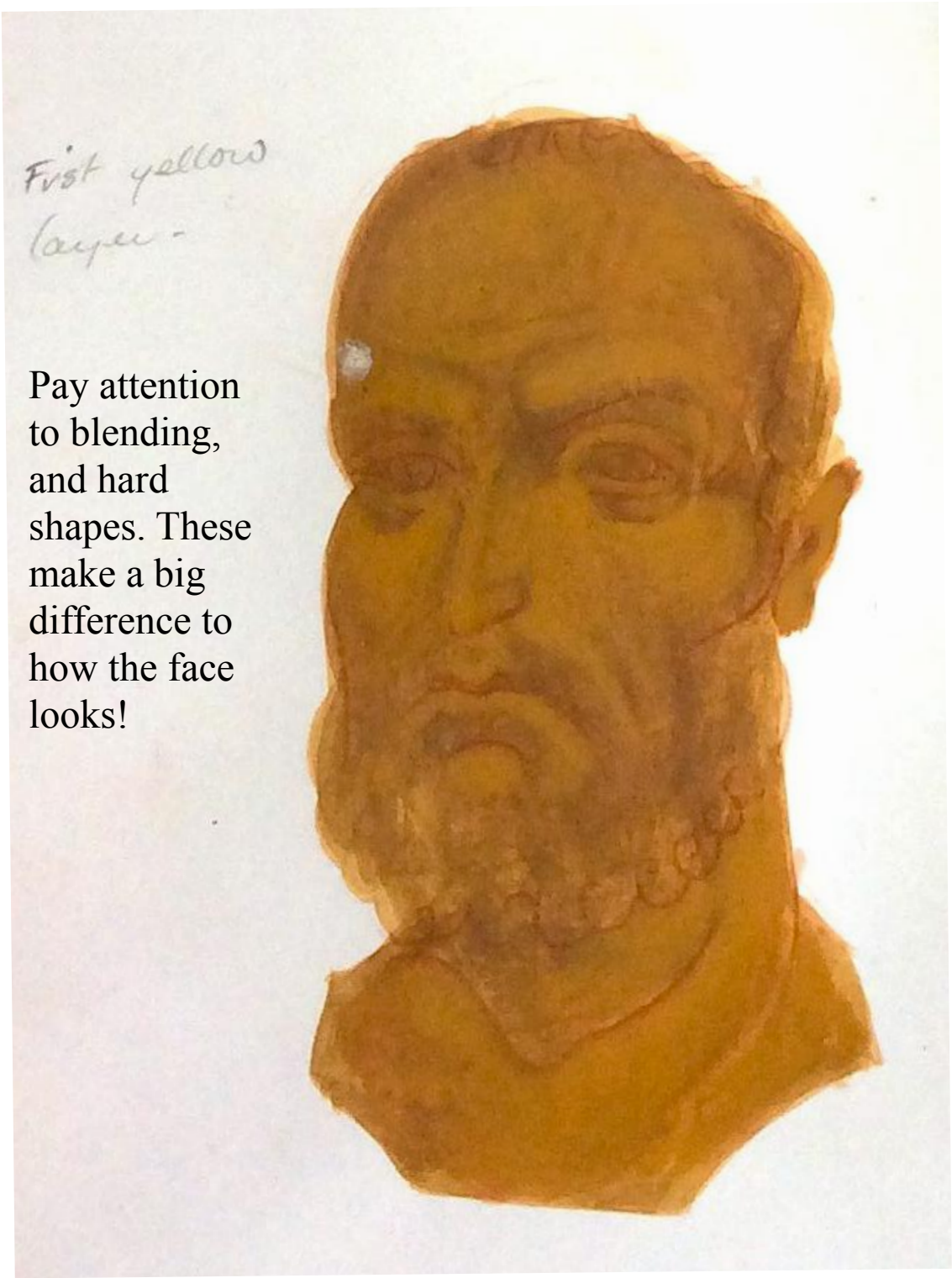
In class we will go through painting a face stage by stage, but here is a summary for you to refer to. This is the process for any face, of Christ or any saint or angel.



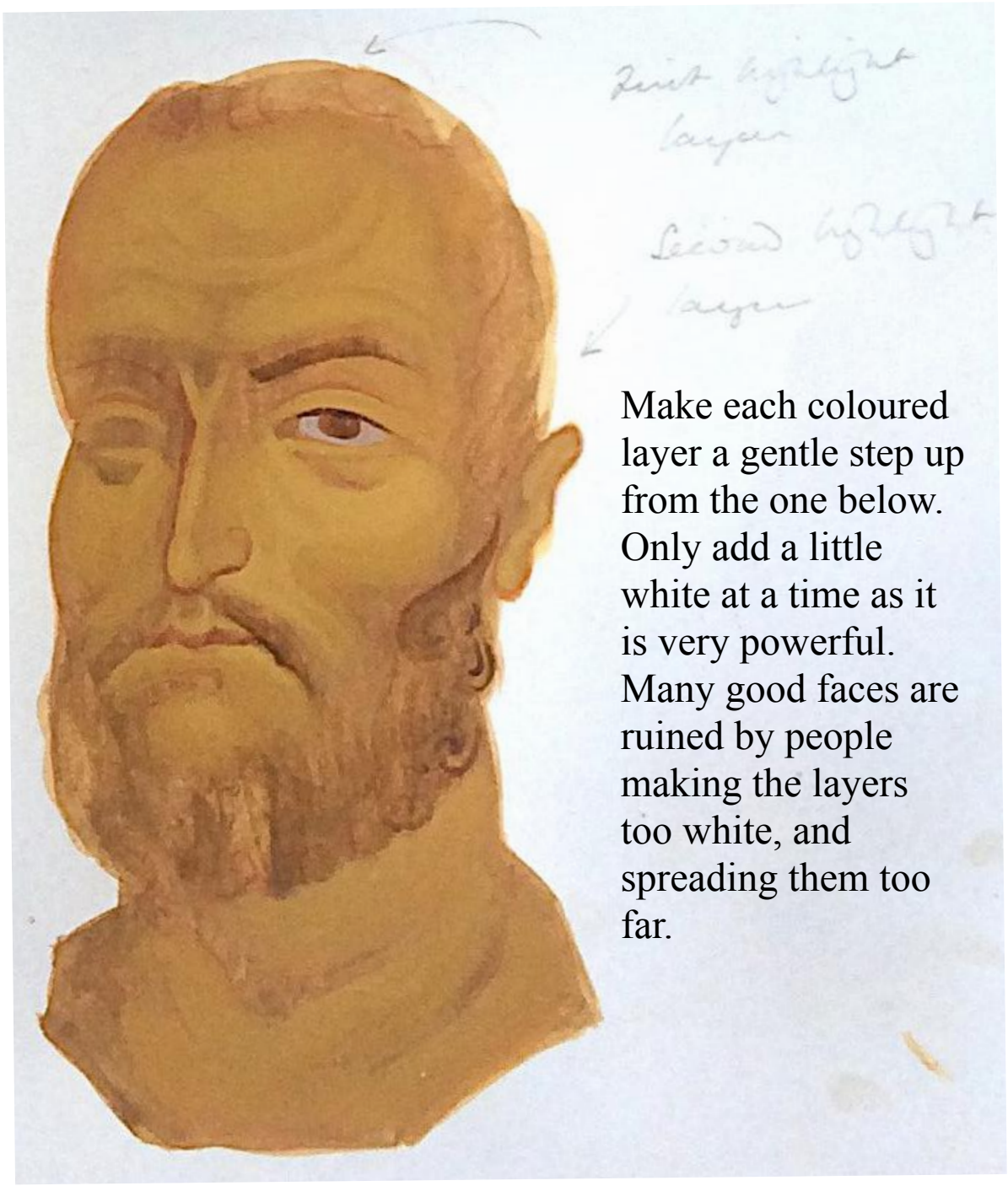
Step One: Apply the proplasmos of Avanna Ochre. Three thin layers are ideal, giving a density of cover but without becoming like a solid mud layer! You can see the difference each layer makes in the example above.



Step Two :
Building the features of the face with a reddish under painting. If necessary re-establish the feature outlines, before applying a thin layer of a red ochre, ideally a light ochre rather than a dense one. If the red layer is confusing, you can always mix it with some yellow ochre so as to make a more orange layer.



Step Three:
Continue to build the shapes of the face with yellow ochre. The proplasmos layer acts as the shadow layer, which gives shape to the features of the face. Blending some edges will give curves for cheek bones, the cushion under the eye, side of the nose etc. At the same time some shapes are made with sharp edges with no blends, such as the edge of the nose, the eye lid etc. Handling these blends and shapes is crucial.



Step Four:
Adding a little titanium white to the yellow ochre, continue to build up the shapes of the face. The areas covered will be less than the pure yellow layers, in some cases considerably less. Look at model you are working from at every stage, and now especially to see where the light in the face is radiating from.

Step Five:
In red ochre draw in the calligraphic lines around the nose, above the eyelids, and the upper lip of the mouth.

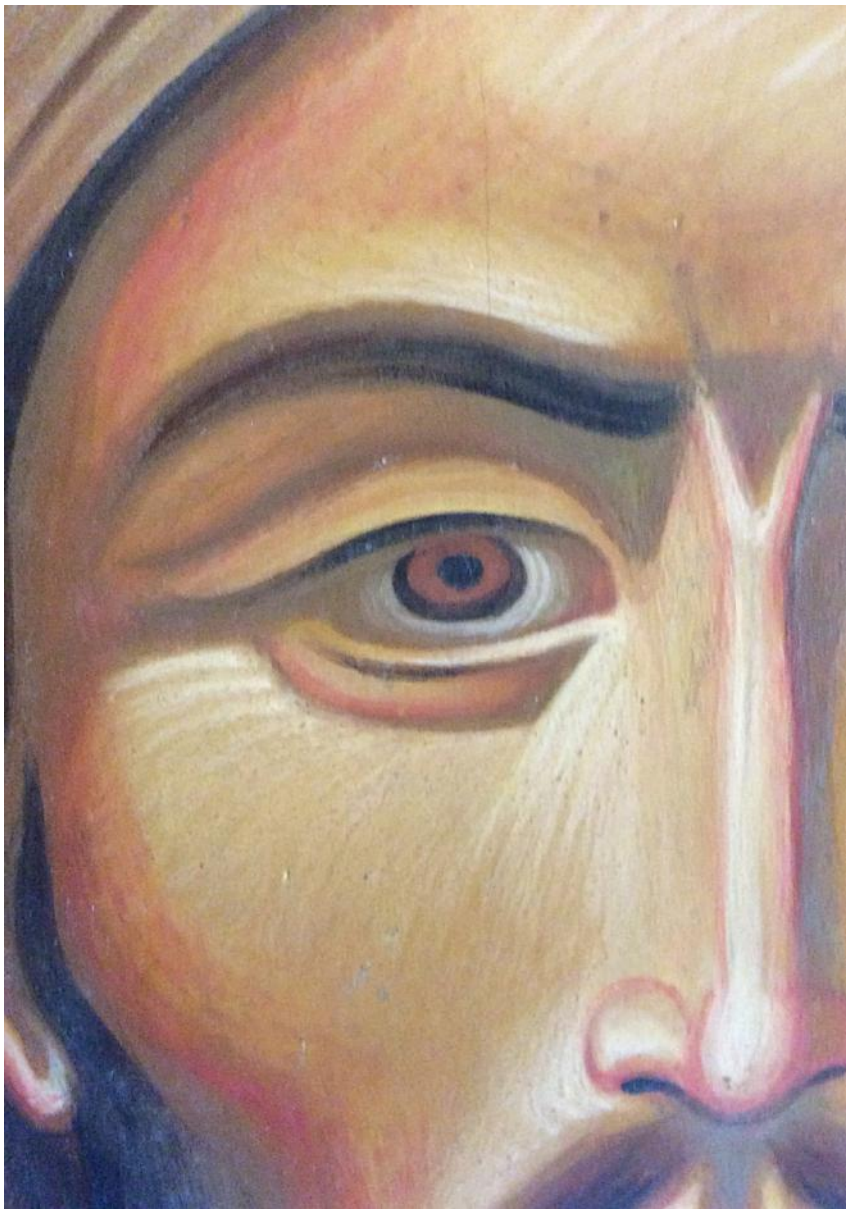
The eyelid, eyebrow, pupil, nostril are established with raw umber, and the white of the eyes with raw umber plus white. Using a mixture of red ochre and raw umber (to make a hazelnut brown) paint in the iris.

Using a mixture of raw umber and a little white draw in the eye balls, making a solid line around the iris, but blending out into the corners.

To make the eye look to the left put the whiter side to the right, and vice versa.

A darker line should be drawn around the iris, a light raw umber line for the lower eyelash, and the eyebrows built up as two parallel lines on the lower part of the eyebrow.

Add lines in IVORY BLACK to the upper eye lids, the pupils, the outer edge of the iris, the nostrils and the ends of the mouth. Add rather weak BLACK lines to the beard, building up strokes at the base of the beard giving shadow and form.



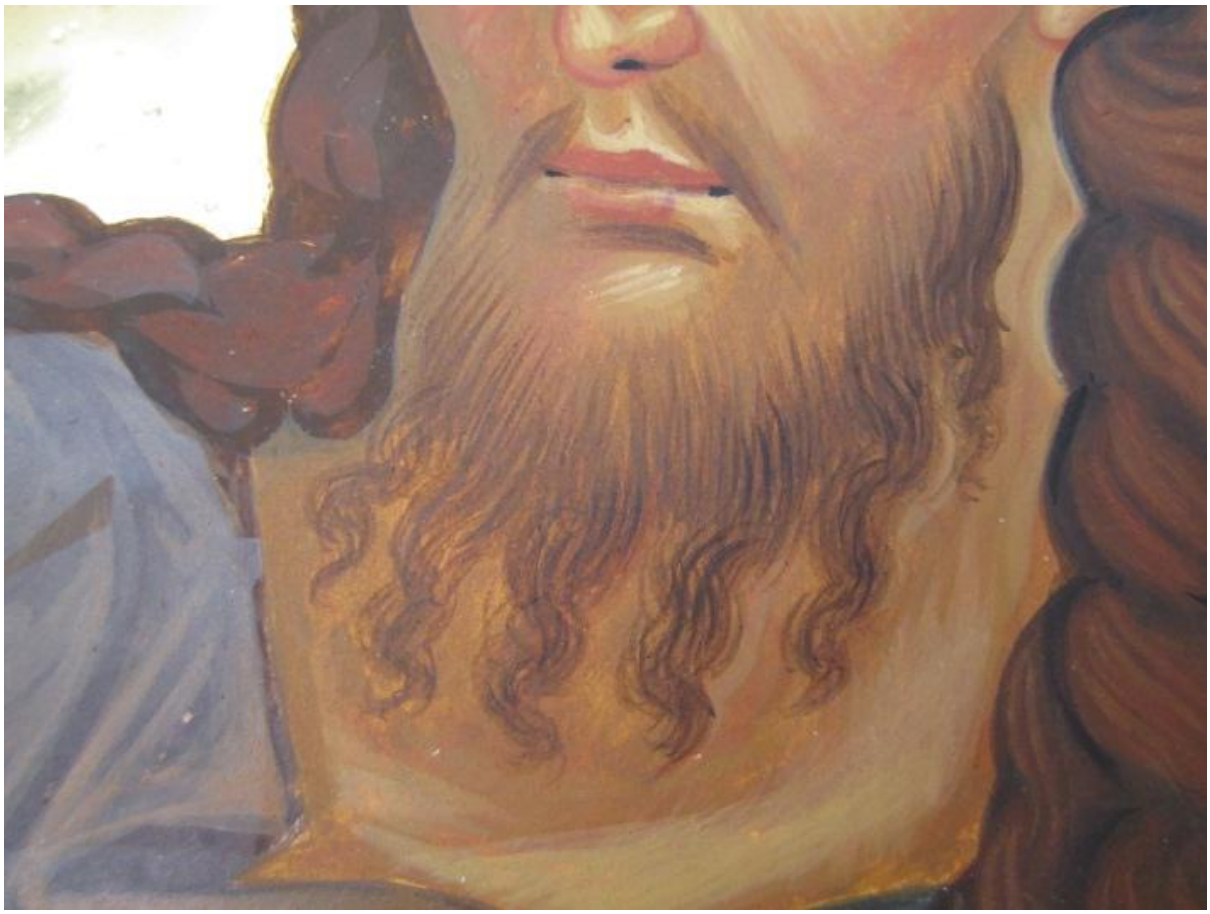
Step Six:
Add lines in IVORY BLACK to the upper eye lids, the pupils, the outer edge of the iris, the nostrils and the ends of the mouth. Add rather weak BLACK lines to the beard, building up strokes at the base of the beard giving shadow and form.

To the eyes add a little TITANIUM WHITE + RAW UMBER, and to the highlighted areas of the flesh a little TITANIUM WHITE + YELLOW OCHRE

Step Seven:

Add WASHES of RED OCHRE and TERRE VERTE to add depth of shadows, for example around the cheeks.

FOR THESE FINAL STAGES THE QUALITY OF YOUR LINE IS CRUCIAL. THIN - THICK - THINK GIVES ELEGANCE AND EXPRESSION. MAKE THE CLUMSY AND YOUR WORK APPEARS THAT OF A REAL AMATEUR.



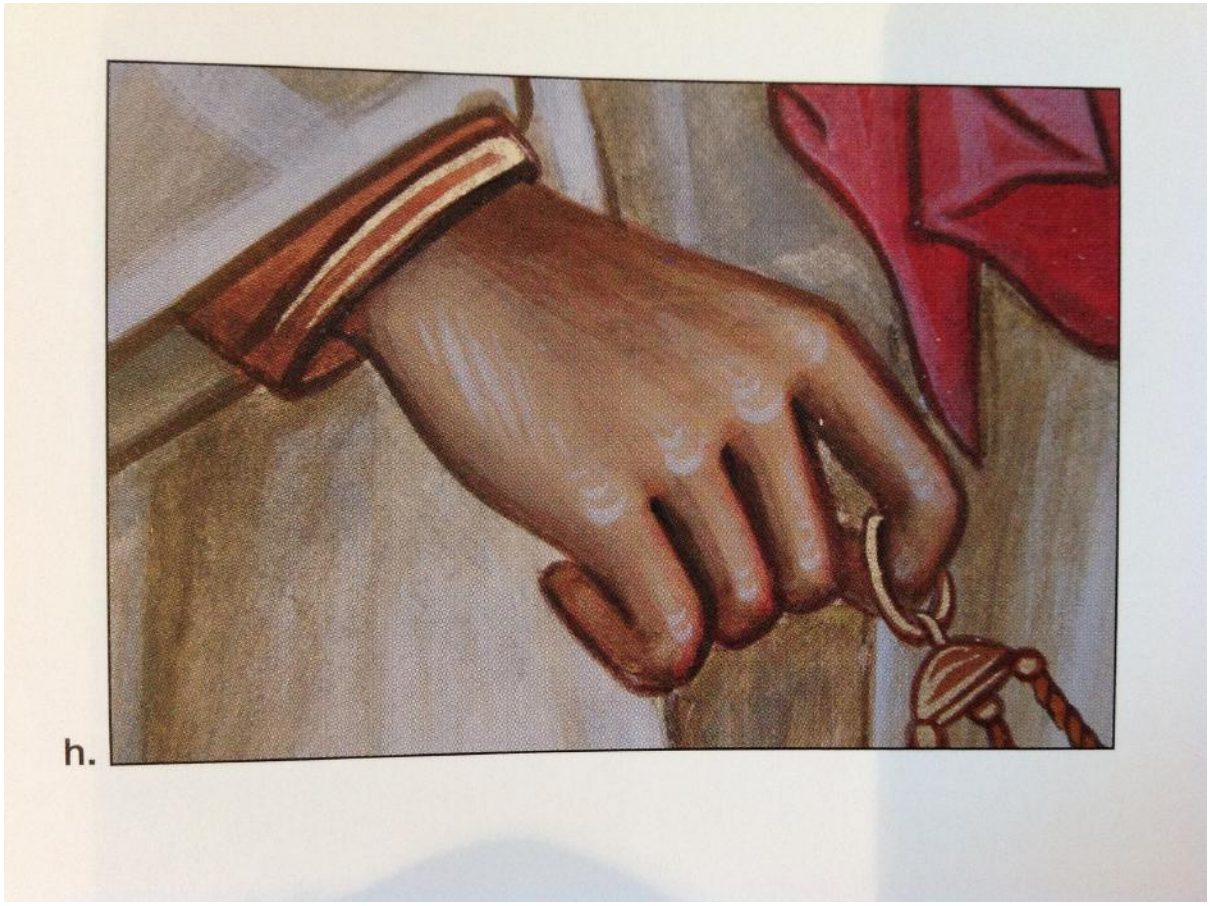
Step Eight: Beard. Using raw umber (or raw umber and white for an old man's beard) make a washy shape where the bunches of hair are to go, repeating until you get the desired depth of colour. Make sure these are translucent to some degree. Then make washy lines for the hairs, shaping according to the model. Repeat shorter lines over the previous ones in a less washy mix of paint.

For the hair: make bunches, then refine with parallel lines along the shape of the bunch of hair in a lighter colour, for example yellow ochre, havanne ochre (NOT avanna ochre!) or burnt sienna. Then highlight the lines on the upper curves with yellow ochre.

If you look closely at the hair of the Archangel Gabriel on the next page you will see how the hair is shaped into bunches, and lines, set rhythmically and in parallel each other, are built up gradually. Some of the head is in partial shadow, as the head is rounded part of it recedes into shadow, and so the hair oat the back is not so highlighted, and indeed is washed with a black/raw umber mix.

Painting Hands:

Using the same colours as for the face, and the same building up of layers, the hands appears to glow with light. The fingers are washed with red and green to give shadow and definition, and a reddish line, for example burnt sienna, will define at least one side of each finger and palm.



h.

GARMENTS AND POSTURE

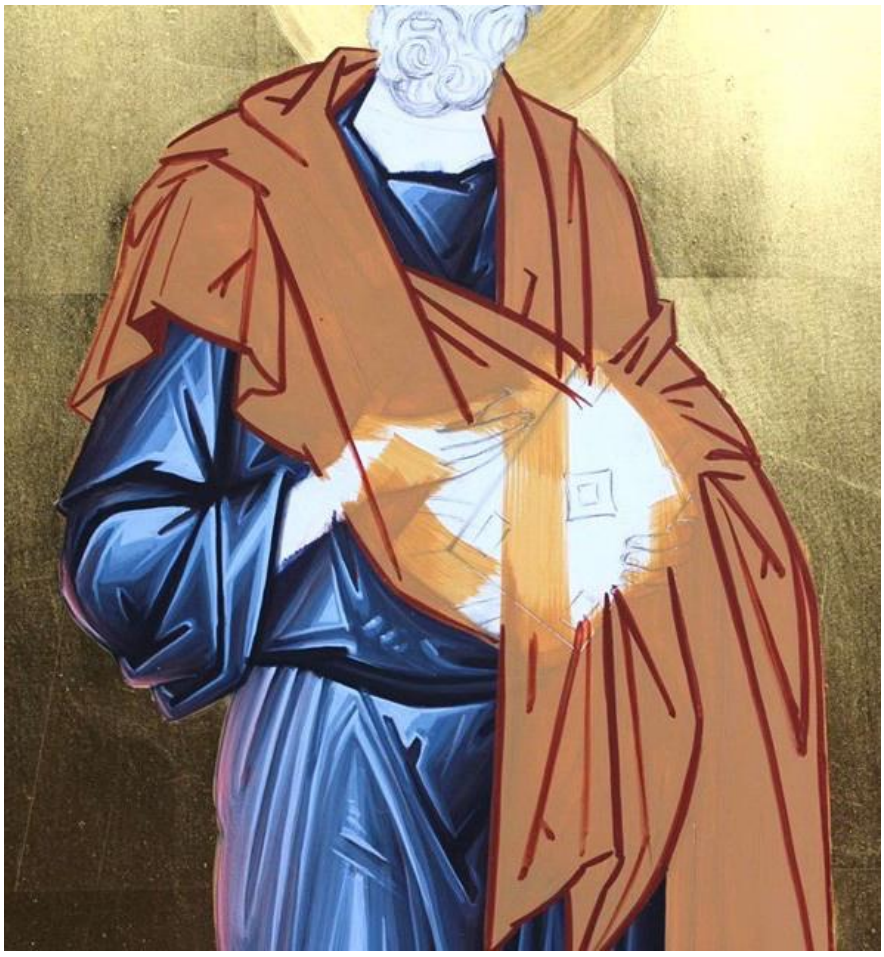
Comparing the next two images, we can see how Daniel Neculae, a contemporary iconographer, has based his icon of St Timothy on a manuscript image of St Mark. The

manuscript, the Codex Theodosianus, dates from the 10th century from St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai,. These are excellent models to use.

1.Havanne ochre + little white base

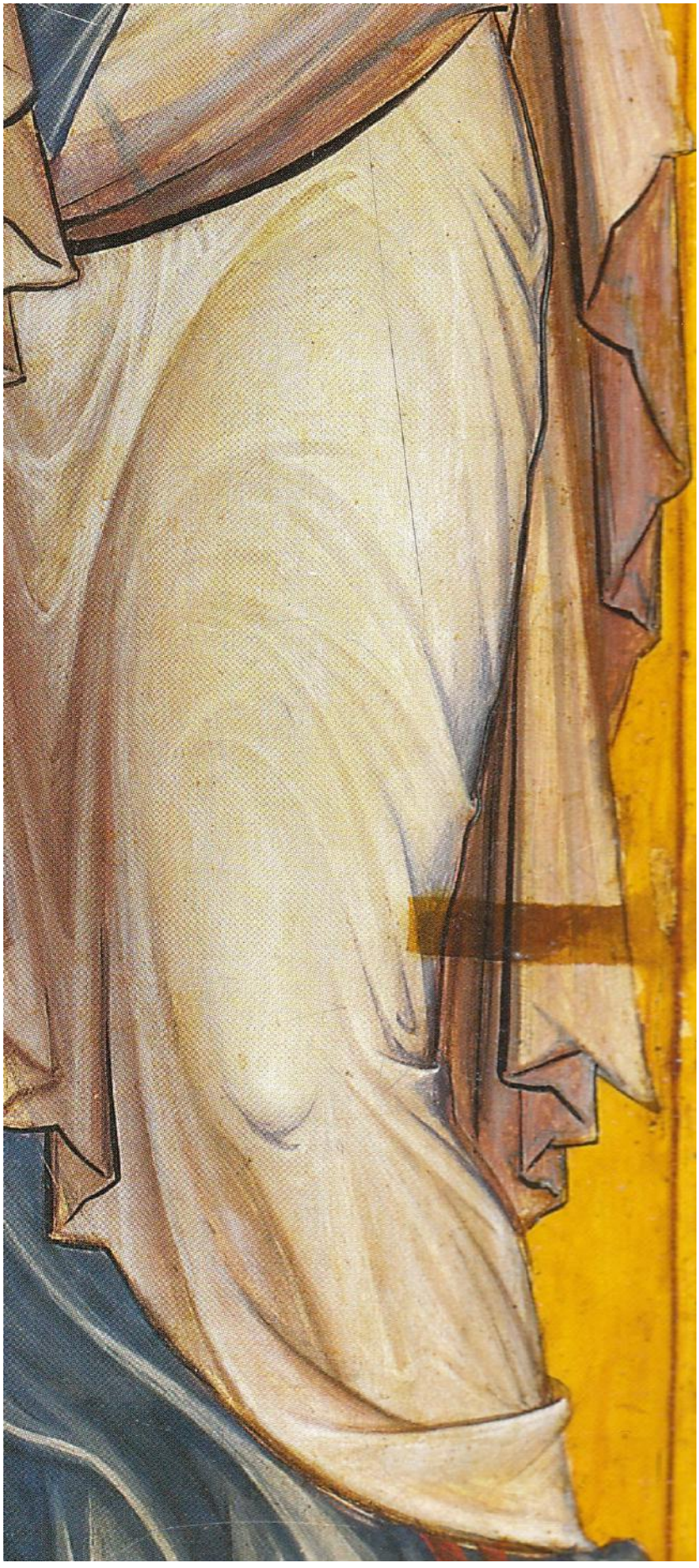
2. Red ochre lin 2 es . Red ochre lines

These pictures show you how to build up color layers step by step.






A pose often reflects some characteristic of the particular saint, be it holding a book in the crook of his arm, or ascending the mountainside while carrying tablets of stone, as in Moses' icon. Though subtle, these elements are essential in ensuring that the icon is really alive with the power to communicate, but in a gentle way which is not designed to overwhelm the beholder but rather to allow him or her to go deeper as their spritual life deepens and comes alive.



Understatement is a useful tool to enable the icon to fit wiithin the praying life of the Church rather than becoming a ‘show piece’ of the artist’s abilities.

Even Christ is Gethsemane is presented with an understatement of hand gestures which enable the person of faith to sense and then enter into the truth being pointed to in this icon.

Here you can see a variety of white garments, some shaded to red, some to green (complimentary shades). They are modelled ascetically, folds are sharp creases, layered with a rythmn to enhance the poise of the figures and the way they relate to each other.

Here you see a minimum of modeling on the vermillion cloak. This color is very difficult to highlight, and so often it is more a matter of calligraphic lines.

Chapter 8:

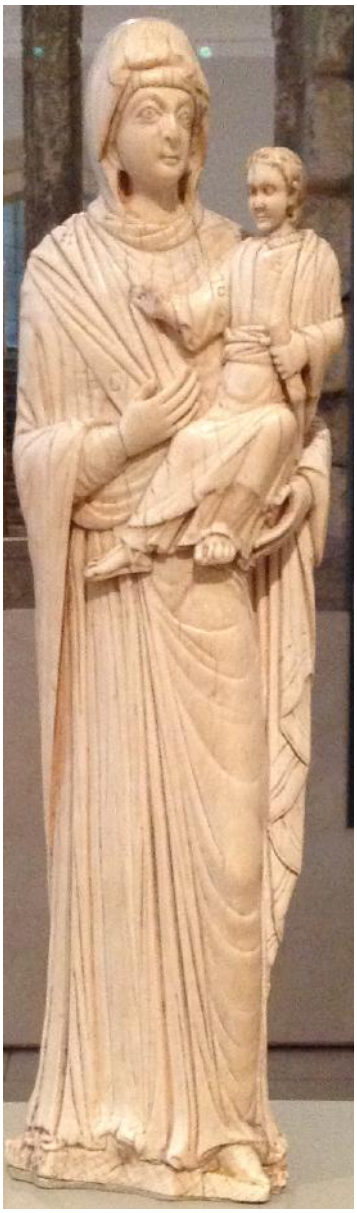
The Icon & the Theotokos

According to the *Menaion* of Sergius (a Russian work) there are over 700 different types of icons depicting the Virgin Mary. The Russian Church notes 260 icons

reputed to work miracles and celebrated in the liturgy. No other icon subject has such variety. Why is this and what is the significance?

"If the icon of Christ, the basis for all Christian iconography, reproduces the traits of God who became man, the icon of the Mother of God, on the other hand, represents the first human being who realised the goal of the Incarnation: the deification of man." *Leonid Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon, Vol.1 p.60*. Deification or *theosis* is the fruit of the union of humanity with God, a possibility opened up with the Incarnation. It is the perfect union between God and humanity, first realised in Jesus Christ, and extended through our relationship with Him to all of humanity. Sick, broken humanity was transformed into perfection through the indwelling of the Logos, the Word of God: What He assumed from the Virgin Mary is healed.

Mary is also part of our broken, sinful humanity and as such the first beneficiary of the redeeming grace of Christ. In her are all the promises made to Israel fulfilled - as a daughter of the royal house of David and of the priestly line of Aaron. She is thus more than a vessel in which the Divine Infant lies, but she is also the first person who is part of fallen humanity to benefit directly from the transforming grace of His Divinity shared with us: she is the one whom 'all generations' call 'blessed'. She is thus the archtype of redeemed humanity, one who fully accepts and co-operates with the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ, and fully fruitful of all that this grace means for the human person.



East and West define this differently, but in essence they are both pointing to the unique place of Mary as the first to benefit from the redeeming grace of God. All of this is a fruit of the Council of Ephesus that proclaimed the ever-Virgin Mary ‘Theotokos'.

Thus Mary has found herself at the centre of Christian iconography from the earliest times. Early mosaics and tomb carvings in Rome show Mary as the 'empress', dressed in the royal purple, and as the 'throne' or 'ark' upon which Christ sits to be adored. Almost all icons of the Virgin Mary include the Christ Child, so in reality they are primarily icons of Christ. Very rarely do we have icons of the Theotokos alone, because in the Church's understanding the pre-eminence of Mary is because of her unique relationship as the first intimate of Christ, as she who 'contained the uncontainable God' (Council of Ephesus 431AD) and as such a prototype of all Christians and hence as the embodiment of the Church. This role is also reflected in the description of Mary as being the Bride

of Christ (authoritatively proclaimed as such by St Ambrose in the late 4th century).

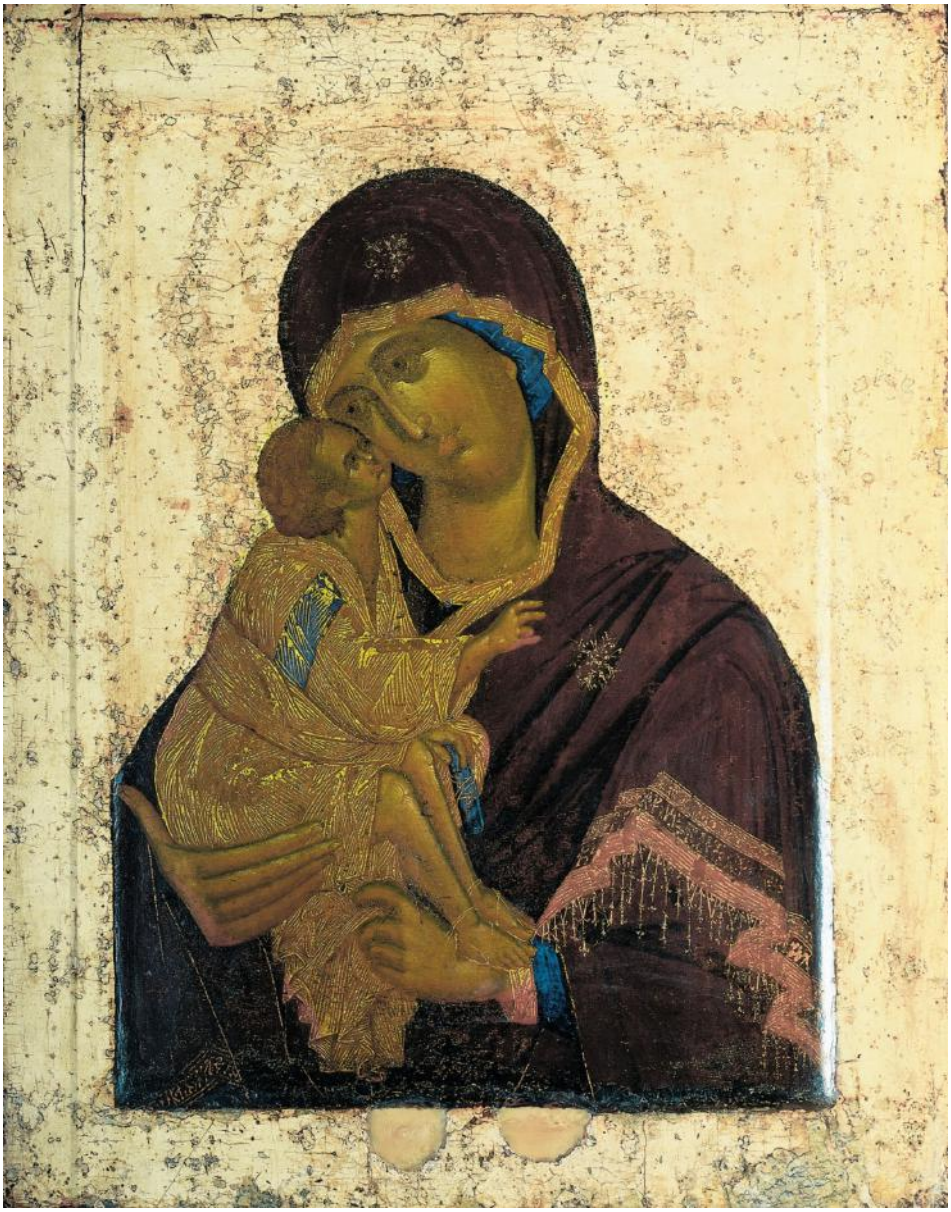
In the 6th century icon from St Catherine's monastery in Sinai (p.152) you can see Mary as the first among the saints, higher (=of greater importance) than the angels, and as the Mother of God (acting as a throne for the Christ Child and dressed in the royal purple). You can see that Mary points to Jesus and in this we can see a pre-cursor of the Hodegetria icons (Greek: Οδηγήτρια, literally: "She who shows the Way"; Russian: Одигитрия).

In the West these icons are often called 'Our Lady of the Way'. Above is a Russian version of this type, by the iconographer Dionysius in the 15th century, based on an older version known as the Smolensk Mother of God which, tradition said was one of the three that had been originally painted by St Luke, but which was destroyed by fire during the German invasion of Russia during WWII.

The most venerated icon of the Hodegetria type was a full length figure (unlike the Smolensk Mother of God), regarded by many as the original, for which in the Monastery of the Panaghia Hodegetria in Constantinople was purposefully built to house it. It was said by Theodore the Lector (c.530AD) to have been brought back from the Hoy Land by Eudocia, the Empress of Theodosius II (408-50), and to have been painted by Saint Luke, the first recorded attribution of an icon to the Evangelist.The icon was double-sided with a crucifixion on the other side, and so likely to have been in processions.

On the previous page is a very rare Byzantine carving of the Theotokos Hodegetria from Constantinople, 11th century and this gives us a possible idea of what that icon would have looked like. The second icon-type of the Virgin Mary attributed to St Luke is the Eleousa, or Our Lady of Tenderness (Umilenie in Russian). While the Hodegetria is a very hierarchical image emphasising the majesty of Christ, the Eleousa is very different and an image if intense, reciprocal tenderness between the Mother and her Divine Child. It is filled with the suffering of the Mother who looks in silence upon her Child knowing the sufferings He must bear. Our Lady of Vladimir and Our Lady of the Don are famous Russian icons of this type, the first being a Byzantine icon sent as a gift to Russia but which subsequently become the supreme national symbol of Russia during many centuries of tribulation.

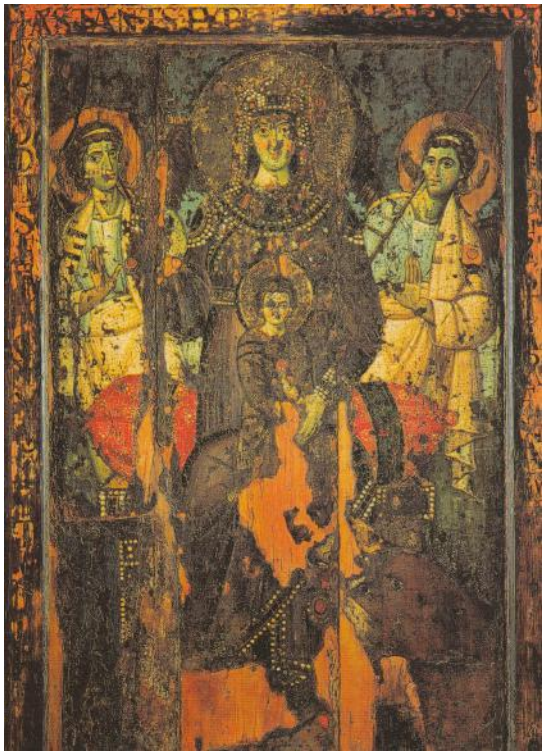
However, while the tradition speaks strongly of a Lukan authorship for the icons of Our Lady, for example of the Umilenie type non pre-date the 10th century while for the Hodigitria type none pre-date the 6th century (according to Ouspensky, one of the greatest authorities on iconography). Indeed, in Russia there are scores of such attributed icons, on Mt Athos there are 21 and 8 in Rome. It is thus impossible to assert that any icons of the holy evangelist Luke have come down to us. Yet the tradition of the Church, not least in the liturgical feasts of the Russian Orthodox, attests clearly to a Lukan authorship. What are we to make of this? Firstly, let us place icons in context: the Liturgy. According to Ouspensky we should think of Lukan authorship for icons in the same way we think of the 'apostolic liturgy' or the



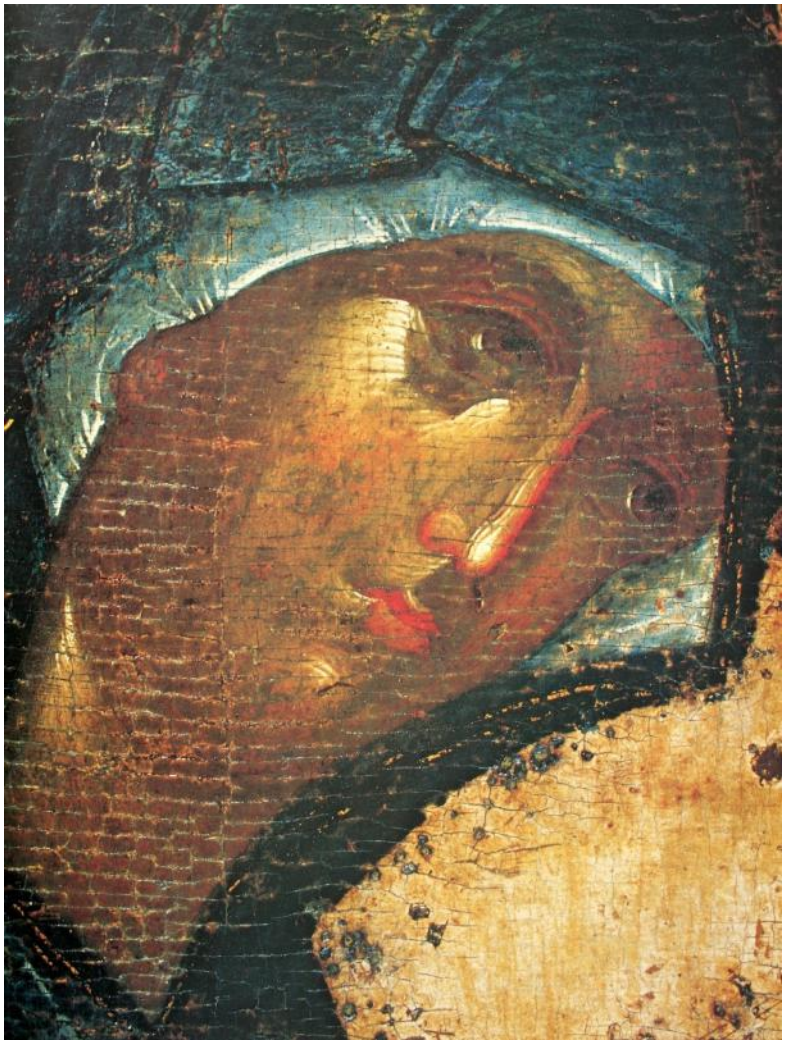
'apostolic canons'. "These date back to the apostles not because they were written by their hand, but because they have an apostolic character and are covered by apostolic authority. The same is true for the so-called "St. Luke icons"."

We should also note another thing here. St. Luke gives us a portrait of the Virgin Mary unlike any of the other evangelists. He shows us the Mother of God in the Annunciation, and develops her presence in terms of the hymn of the Magnificant and the details surrounding Christ's birth. In words he draws a portrait which has entrusted the Mother of God into the very heart of the Church's liturgical life. Also, we should not forget that the iconographer merely attempts to put into shape and colour what the Evangelists give us in words. We could say that the Evangelists paint in words as iconographers write in colours.

The most literal translation of the Greek word εικονογραφία (eikonographia) is "image writing," leading many English-speaking Orthodox Christians to insist that icons are not "painted" but rather "written." From there, further explanations are given that icons are to be understood in a manner similar to Holy Scripture—that is, they are not simply artistic compositions but rather are witnesses to the truth the way Scripture is. Far from being imaginative creations of the iconographer, they are more like scribal copies of the Bible. While the explanation of the purpose and nature of icons is certainly true and consistent with the Church's Holy Tradition, there is a linguistic problem with the insistence on the word written rather than painted. In Greek, a painted portrait of anyone is also a γραφή (graphi), and the art of painting itself is called ζωγραφική (zographiki) while any drawing or painting can be referred to as ζωγραφιά (zographia). Ancient Greek literally uses the same root word to refer to the making of portraits and the making of icons, but distinguishes whether it is "painting from life" (ζωγραφιά) or "painting icons" (εικονογραφία). Thus, from a linguistic point of view, either all paintings—whether icons or simple portraits—are "written" or (more likely) "painted" is a perfectly usable English translation, simply making a distinction between the painting appropriate for icons and that appropriate for other kinds of painting, just as Greek does.



Red was a very costly colour in the ancient world, as was purple, a colour reserved to the imperial family. Hence its use for the Virgin Mary in the Byzantine world was a sign also of the high honour afforded to her as the Theotokos. Later, in the Middle Ages in the west, blue became the most expensive and desirable colour, hence its adoption then by the kings of France for their royal robes. At the same time the Theotokos was vested in the same colour, making the same point as had originally been made in the Byzantine world. However, in the east in some icons of the Passion the Virgin was also dressed in a dark blue, and in the West the Black Death brought a renewed focus on the Passion which again underscored the use of blue. Thus by the late Middle Ages blue was the universally accepted colour for the Virgin in the West, while in the east red or purple still endured.



In the face of the Virgin attention should be paid to the expression of the eyes and mouth. Mary is always shown with a 'joyful sadness' - joy at her Son, sorrow at His sufferings or those of the people of God. The nose and lips should be a little more slender than in icons of Christ, and the eyes somewhat more oval and graceful, more ‘feminised'.

The above icon of The Madonna of Clemency in Rome is from the 7 th century and shows the Virgin Mary clearly robed as a Byzantine empress,

as you can see from this much later mosaic showing an empress, Eirene, with the Virgin in a mosaic at least five centuries later.

OUR LADY OF VLADIMIR

One of the most famous of all icons, this is a classic Byzantine icon given to the Prince Vladimir of Kiev in In the first half of twelfth century by Luke Chrysoberges, Patriarch of Constantinople, Kiev). It has become the most revered of all icons in Russia, and a deep, rich mythology has grown about it. Some claim it was brought to Constantinople in the 5th century, having been originally painted by St Luke and kept in Jerusalem.

Whatever the truth of this, from a scientific point of view the icon has been repainted so many times, and often with real damage to the preceding painting, that it is impossible to verify and certainly the image we see is much later.

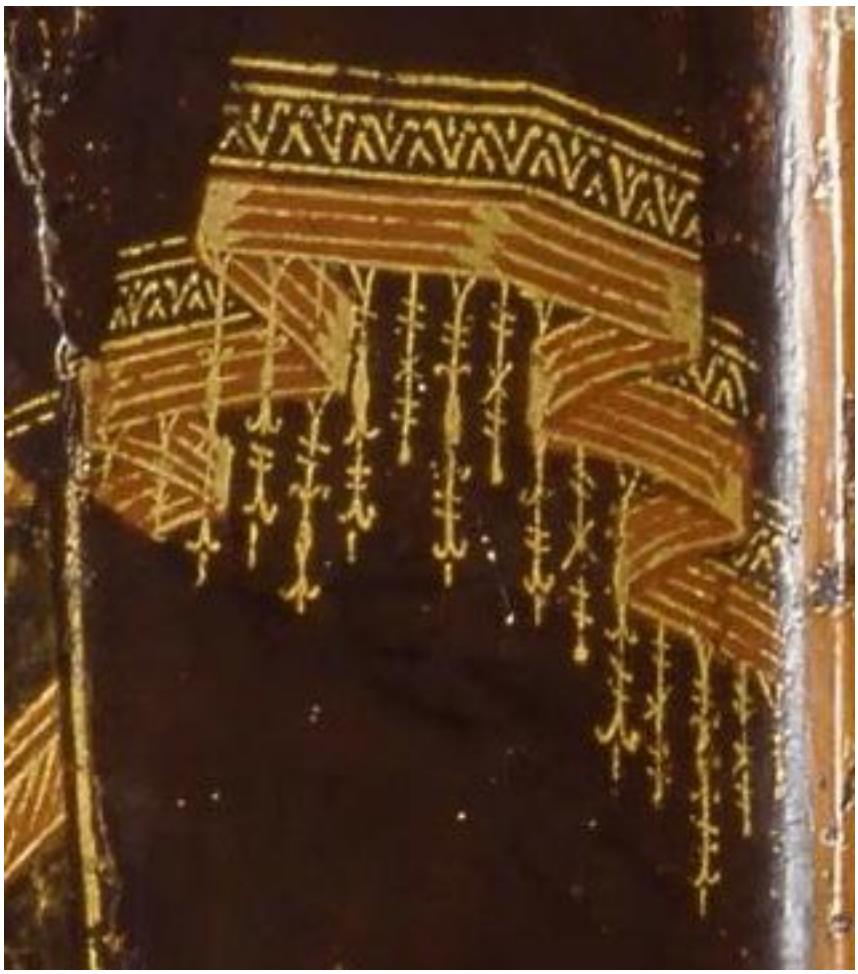
In 1521, the khan of Kazan, Mehmad-Girey, advanced toward Moscow with Kazan and Nogay Tartars. Metropolitan Varlaam prayed with the people before the Vladimir Icon as Moscow faced siege. On the night of the siege, a nun from Ascension Monastery saw a group of saints coming through the closed doors of Dormition

Cathedral, carrying the miracle-working Vladimir Icon. They prostrated before the icon and pleaded the Most Pure One not to abandon the Dormition Cathedral and the people of Moscow. The Intercessors then returned through close doors into Cathedral. Meanwhile the Tartars again saw a vision of “a huge regiment in shining armor,” and ran away from the walls of the city. This and many other miracles have given the icon a reputation as of great national significance. In a way you could say Russia and this Icon have a shared history and identity.

Assiste is the name given to the application of fine gold adornments to vestments. In this icon these cover the clothes of the Christ Child, as well as the fringe of the Virgin.

There are various ancient methods, using garlic juice, reduced beer etc., but there are now very good commercially available glues. Whatever glue you use, the skill is to get the lines as fine and well shaped as possible.

Gold is set on a reddish orange background.This gives a good basis for the gold to shine, giving it warmth and clarity. I usually use Havanne ochre, or Italian Warm ochre, or a mix of red ochre and yellow ochre. Try to make sure the paint is well mixed and not grainy, as the smoother the surface the easier it will be to make fine lines of glue.



You can use loose leaf or transfer gold. However, with the transfer gold you will need to apply some pressure, with cotton wool, to ensure the gold adheres to the glue. If there is an excess of moist glue

this will spread outwards and so produce a thick, ugly line. Loose gold can be lightly transferred but it is more wasteful.

Pigment list:

When learning to paint icons its a useful thing to make colour lists, especially when mixing pigments. Sometimes you discover wonderful combinations, only to forget how you managed to achieve them!

Flesh: Avanna Ochre English Red Light
Yellow Ochre Vermillion Terre Verte Burnt Sienna Raw Umber
Mary's cloak: Caput Mortem English Red Light, Havanne Ochre
Mary's headdress and undergarment: Terre Verte Ultramarine
Jesus' garment: Havanne Ochre

(Expanded and adapted from an original article by Aidan Hart)

Remember: icons are a feature of the liturgy, the public worship of God. They emerged out of the decoration of the early tombs and churches as extensions of the prayer and worship offered there.

During the first centuries the early Christians developed a whole new culture, one which centred on the experience of Jesus present in the Eucharist. This included hymns/poems and sacred writings, music and chant, architecture and art. To understand icons we need to begin with the sacred space around the Eucharistically Present Jesus because this was the defining experience which Christians had in common, week by week, even day by day and that continues to be so into our own era. The cultural aspects which grew up around that to give it more depth and expression continue to develop even until today, not just in the West where change in recent times has been very dramatic (and not always helpful) but also in the East where liturgical fashion changes, as for example in the development of the iconostasis.

Veneration

Sacred images of sacred persons in the sacred space where the faithful gather to pray naturally get venerated. It is a way of greeting the saints already gathered for the worship of Christ, worship which we 'pop into' during the liturgy and other times of prayer, both communal and on our own. In the icon we find ourselves in the presence of the saints or of God Himself, not as a voyeur looking through a window frame, safely detached and 'on the other side' of the people we see, but rather the door is thrown open and we find ourselves confronted by the Divine Presence. What can we do but bow down and worship Christ and venerate His saints!? Through veneration of the person depictTheed on the icon, an icon acts as a door or window between heaven and earth. It allows us to use the whole body in our worship and expression of love for God.

Procession

Liturgy is dynamic, and ceremonial is an essential element of worship. Processions are part of every liturgy, the moment when the People of God are called to gather together and enter into the Presence of God, to come on pilgrimage and walk further along the way into union with the Lord. Thus icons, as liturgical instruments, are carried around on special occasions, just like the Book of the Gospels or the chalice and paten. This affirms that all places are suitable for prayer. This influences the way some icons are made - processional icons need to be robust, and as they may be seen from both back and front can be painted with images either side, or more usually an image of a saint on one side and some symbolic decoration on the reverse. Processions can be inside a church – as part of the liturgical ritual, as with

the plashanitsa or epitaphios during the Good Friday service – outside, as in processions of icons around Greek villages on holy days.

In the West processions are also an ancient custom, for example in Holy Week in Spain or feasts of the Virgin Mary, and the use of icons in these would be a good and reasonable development. However, as we will see time and again, in the West the understanding of icons and sacred statues is poor, even among clergy and their use is often neglected.

Teaching

Icons can teach us. Icons are written theologically, that is with a grasp of the theological meaning of the saints and their place in the life of the Church and its liturgy. Thus the icon is filled with meaning, as a visual meditation map. A well written icon will be easily understood, while at the same time constantly making new insights possible. A good example of this is Andre Rublev's 'Trinity' icon.

This can be done simply through the subject matter, and also through the style or way the subject is depicted. The key is the way the elements 'connect'. In small icons this is less obvious, but when you see a whole church painted with an icon schema the teaching value can be immense. Wall paintings serve this role to the greatest extent, as the greater wall space and the ability to place images in three dimensional space offers a greater depth of theological expression.

Sometimes in panel icons saints' lives are included around the figure. The feast icons are perhaps the biggest expression of the didactic role of the icon. They comment on and are commented on by the hymns of the relevant feast. Initiation into a spiritual way of seeing. The way icons are painted e.g. the inverse perspective, help the viewer to pass from a carnal or merely cerebral way of perceiving the world into a spiritual or noetic vision.

Decoration/Embellishment

Liturgical objects such as chalices, the scriptures, censers etc can and usually do have icons on them, be it in enamel, embossed metal, or cast metal. They serve to sanctify and bring out its noble use the object.

The iconscreen

The iconostasis is the distinctive liturgical innovation of the east, and is a rich source of liturgical depth in the celebration of the Eucharist. We will learn more about this in the future. Icons here act as a mediator between heaven and earth. Their arrangement emphasizes this e.g. the Royal Doors have either the Annunciation, the Evangelists or the two liturgists, and helps to make clear the sacred significance of what takes place in the sanctuary.

Other Uses

At home in icon corners. As an extension of the liturgy into the domestic sphere, this helps prayer, and reminds the dwellers to keep God at the centre of their lives, to
keep alive the remembrance of the Eucharistic Presence. These corners are called the beautiful corner in Russia.

Icons can be worn on the body - These are usually enamel or cast metal icons. Icons can respond to contemporary events e.g. counter heresy. We see this for example in the type of icon of the Virgin and Child that predominates
As instruments of contemplation: Icons create a beautiful atmosphere conducive to prayer and worship. When an icon is well written, the natural flow of the icon draws a person into a deeper communion with the Divine, and opens up the whole person, body as well as soul, to the work of grace. Icons can thus increase a nostalgia and longing for union with God - they are holy, evoke the holy, and remind us of the intensity of God's love for us experienced perhaps in fleeting moments.

Icons when painted with spiritual vision in turn foster in the viewer the desire for this same spiritual vision.

God works miracles through some icons
Just as Christ healed the blind man through mud, as the shadow of the apostle Peter brought healing, as the blessed handkerchief of Saint Paul healed people, so icons can be used to convey healing grace e.g. there exist myrrh gushing icons and weeping icons.

Chapter Nine

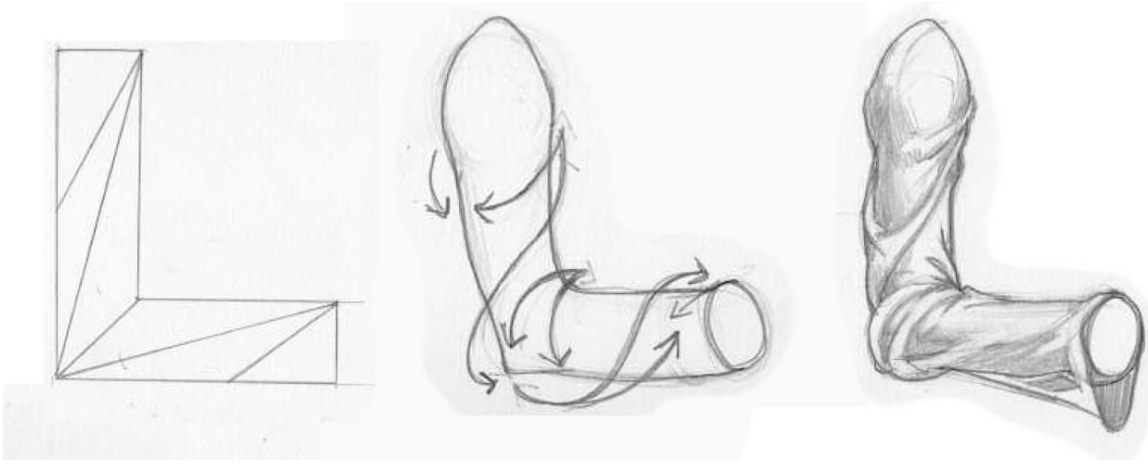
Garments

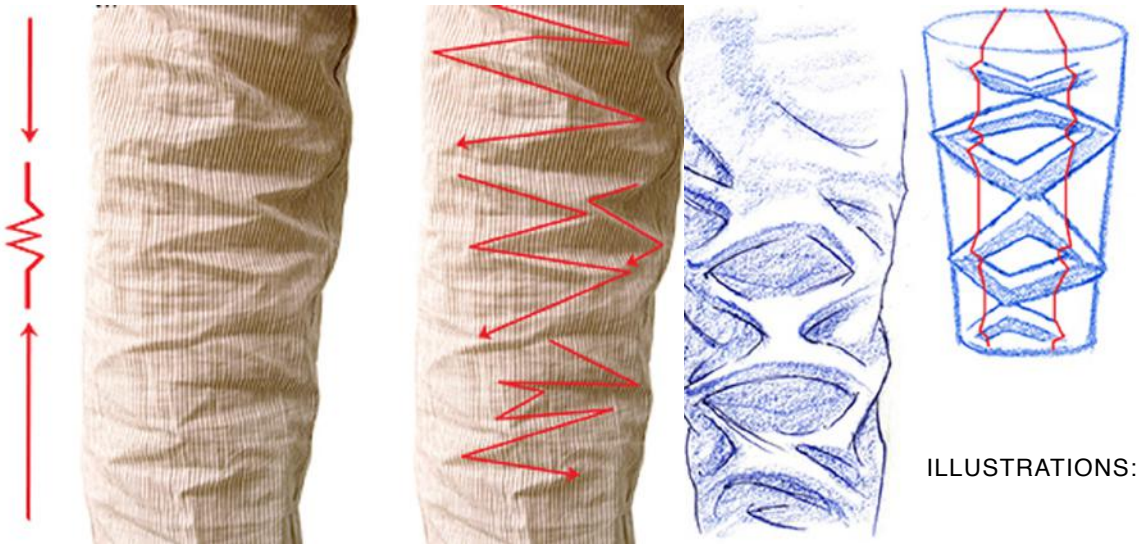
Garments and Light

In the icon garments clothe figures full of grace, full of the Divine Light of the Holy Spirit. The garments clothe the saint, pointing to their saintly qualities as beings living in the very Being of God and through their holy way of life being a source of blessing for those who turn to them for their prayers. The power within them to do this is the Holy Spirit and in the icon this power is shown as light.Light, how it is handled, is thus crucial in making garments iconographically.

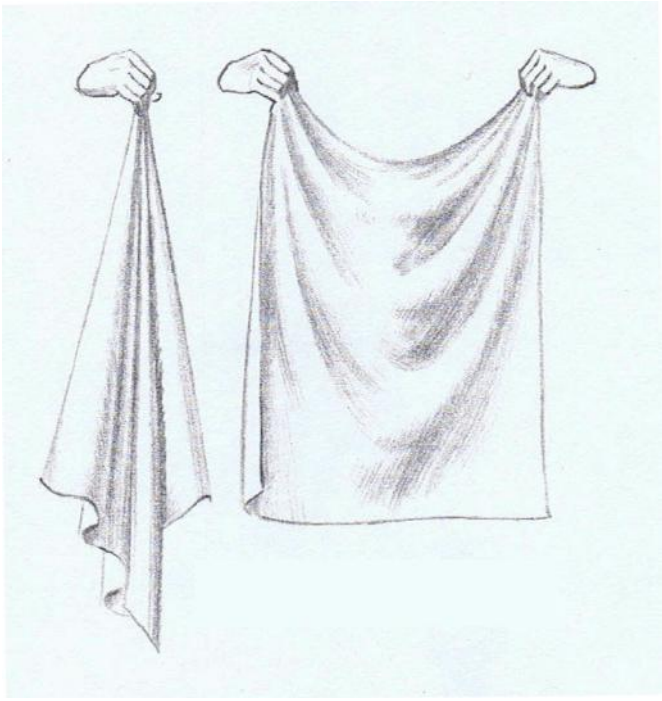
Light shapes how a garment looks, through the shadows which are formed. This shows the form of the body underneath, for example a round shoulder or a skinny figure. These shadows are created by an external light source, for example the sun.

Here you can see a plain white shirt and dark trousers. The dark trousers show little light and so appear flat and without form . The white shirt, however, clearly shows the





ILLUSTRATIONS: LEE HARVEY

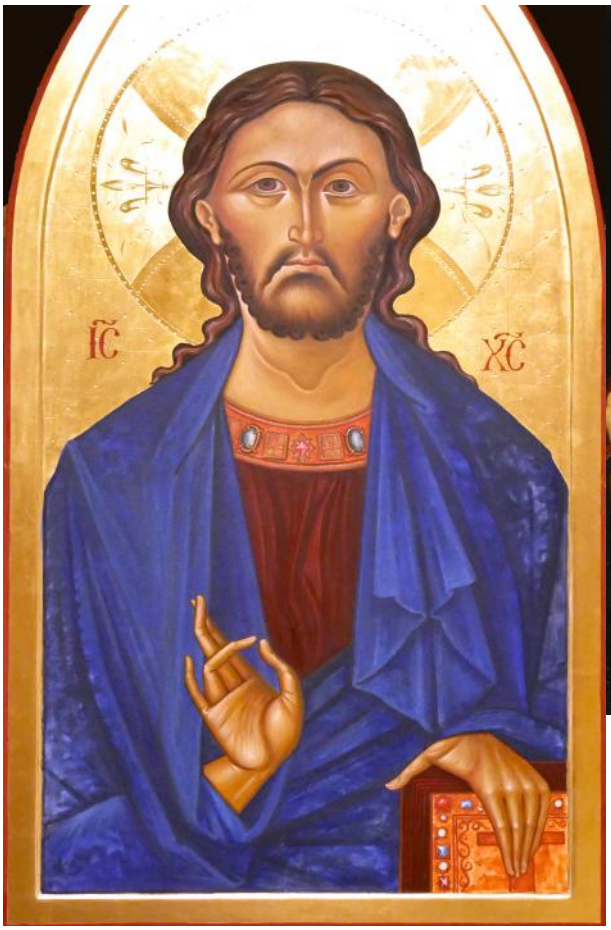


chest, shoulders, arms and stomach through the shadows made on the white surface.

Notice some shadows are lighter, others darker, telling the eye whether a fold is a deep wrinkle or a light one on the surface.

These shapes in the cloth are formed by the pull of gravity on the cloth and the resistance of the shape of the object underneath.

There are also ‘pull points’ where the construction of the garment pulls around a shape. Look at the complex series of creases around the point where the arm meets the



chest area inside the sleave.

The darker the shadow the deeper the area beneath.
The brightest areas are where the area underneath is pushing up.`

However, for an icon there is no obvious external light source as the light comes primarily from within the saint. This is the challenge for the icon painter in handling the shapes and forms of a garment without making it look like the light is coming from outside the person.

If you compare the two images above you can see how the one on the right is bathed in an external light source, creating very deep shadows and gentle highlights. It also has rounded, full folds. The one on the left is much flatter, the lights and darks are not so contrasted, and the light comes as a radiance through all of the clothes, but with certain

points of intensity. This is very obvious in these two photos:

In this example, above, of a two coloured fresco, we see very clearly the way in which the forms of the saints body are shaped with a light appearing through the garments. The light defuses all through the garments, flowing through the shapes, respecting them and forming them, but from within rather than from without.

Take a look at the right shoulder, how the highlight echoes the round top of the shoulder and blends down. If you look at the cloak below the strong fold coming across the breast, if this was a natural, external light it would be casting a shadow not just on the lower side of the fold but on the cloth coming from beneath it. Here though it is as though the light is pouring out from below the fold and out over the shape of her breast. Likewise the knees are shaped as though pushing through the

cloth.

Highlights are often in sharp, angular shapes, laid one on top of the other, the lower shapes thin washes of colour and blended out, while the final highlights are stronger and with clear edges and thin thick lines.

Notice on the left that there is also a darker side and a side filled with light, a convention in most icons, symbolising the way in which God is both known and unknown in the mystery of our lives.

The two former examples are painted in two very different styles, the first Russian with very thin, translucent layers and simple forms, the second Cretan with very strong shapes and solid layering, but used to the same end. Below you can see another example, by Aidan Hart, this time using more folds but in a less angular form, and with a subtle glow coming through the white garment and a more vivid and intense brightness with the blue garment.

A garment should thus glow, with light flashes on some of the surfaces as though the light is radiating through. This is done either by choosing a contrasting colour to that of the garment itself, for example placing blue on a reddish garment which is then lightened with white, or by gradually lightening the base colour until certain points are almost pure white. And notice that often a ‘white’ garment is actually composed of various colours, with the shadows cast in yellows, reds, greens or blues. See the examples of Archangel Gabriel below and above to see how different the same while garment is coloured.

Ascetical forms

At the same time this has to come from

a body, which has a very particular shape. The light is going to be most intense where it is in touch with the body that is radiating the light of the Holy Spirit. Its going to be darkest however, where the folds are deepest.

However, even though there are more folds in this latter example, and they are less angular and stark,

nevertheless there is a lack of sensuality, with the folds taken back to their essence. They ‘do the job’ of showing how cloth folds in nature in relation to the shape and pose of the person wearing it.

Gravity , push and pull

The shape of the body underneath the garment determines its shape by pushing agains the pull of gravity, which is always downwards. When a leg pushes up against the gown or cloak the force of gravity pulls the cloth around the shape of the thigh, the knee and the ankle. Likewise, if the figure is moving forward, the push of the body cuts through the pull of gravity which still catches it and pulls it in the opposite direction. Understanding how these basic pulls and pushes work is essential to creating a figure in an icon which makes sense and isn’t distracting because it looks wrong.
Other factors to take into consideration are the weight of the cloth and its texture. A thick cloth will fall in bigger folds, thin cloth will make much tighter folds and be less ‘pulled’ downwards, while heavy cloth will fall more directly towards the ground.
So in the angel Gabriel on the left, the white cloak falls down over the right leg and gathers between the legs while pulling up over the left leg. The downward pull on the garment is interrupted by the movement of the legs, one pushing up and forward, the other pushing forward but extended. The garment is stretched between the legs and pulls around the lower part of the right leg. It is a complex pattern of the pull of gravity and the push of the body underneath.

Compare how the basically same posture can create various folds in the cloth by looking at the second picture of the Archangel Gabriel, while small differences in posture are reflected in different angels at which the cloth falls downwards.

Where the body part is more rounded, for example the thigh, the creases are less acute, and point to the top edge but without reaching that point. Where the object underneath is more sharp then the creases come almost to the point.

Ascetical folds

Garments are also to be drawn ascetically, that is taking out the sensuality of rich folds.

Garments are not drawn to try and create the illusion of being real cloth. The icon is an honest painting, a representation of a saint using wood, cloth, egg, ground rock etc. It is not the saint but a door from the saint through which he or she can come close to us. The door should not be mistaken for the person coming through it. For this reason the icons have rather flattened garments, with regular, rhythmic folds, as you can see very clearly in this modern icon on the left. By creating folds in pairs or threes, by making sweeping lines which connect to other lines in the composition, the harmony and beauty of the icon is constructed and enhance.

At the same time garments follow how they ‘hang’ on a body in nature. They have to look like they are on a human person in a realistic way. They shouldn’t distract us by looking awkward, but create a sense of peaceful harmony that enables the viewer to focus prayerfully on the saint. They should be neat and ‘constrained’, serving to enhance the presence of the figure of the saint and not used as a means of getting carried away with painterly cleverness and a material impressiveness.

So there are some conventions in the way the folds in garments are constructed. If you observe the folds of the loincloth of Christ crucified on the left, you can see how the edges have regular curves and double curves on the down edge, settled in a neat regular pattern (red arrows). This is a very distinctive iconographic look, found often in cloaks draping Christ, for example. Look at the Christ enthroned icon above (p.174), and at the way in which the cloak wraps around St Luke's leg and hangs down (p. 175).

Folds sweep in pairs, or threes, making arrow shapes from the pull points, and settle into wide Vs when cloth comes round objects such as thighs and hips (purple arrows). Resolving the way these pulls and pushes work requires careful thinking and logical construction.

Lines also have regularised endings, either coming to a sharp point, or to a flared end. When there is a flared end there is a matching slight bulge of cloth around it (yellow arrow). Bunching is regular and rhythmic.

Curved sweeps are made of a series of straight lines rather than continuous curves.

Folds often make triangles set one within another. The points of the triangles create 'pointers' within the composition, taking the eye from one part to another. This creates a dynamic stillness.

Whatever the iconographic style there is the iconographic rhythm of lines and folds, the logic of construction, the sense of radiancy all elements which should appear you your icons, no matter what particular style you might be painting in.

Folds are part of one continuous piece of cloth, and so the trickiest part is making the different pulls and pushes affecting one fold relate intelligently to the those around it. Understanding the shape of the body beneath the folds is key to this. So take a look at the first chapter of Part I to refresh yourself on the essentials of the human figure, such as bone structure and muscles.


wrinkles!
http://jjohnson.deviantart.com/

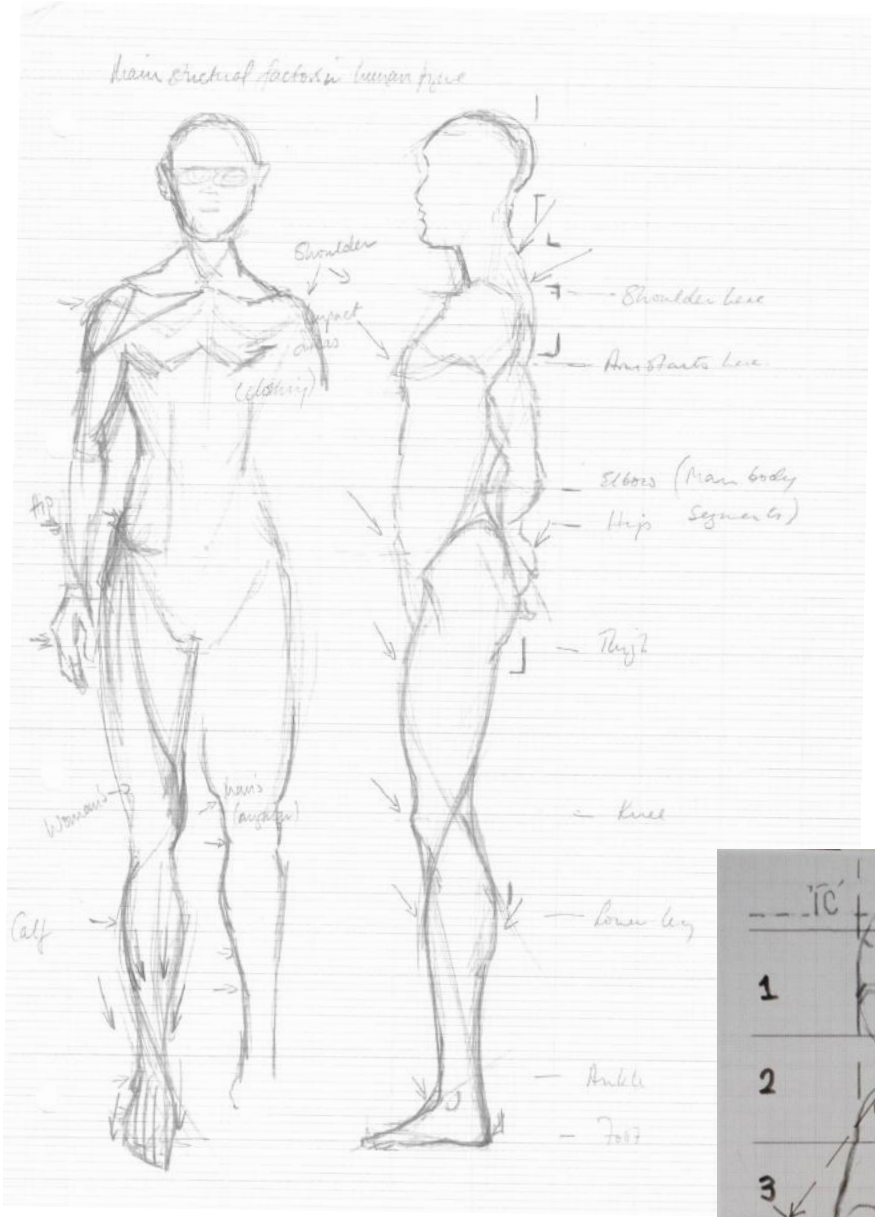
Drawing the Figure

Pose, balance, and flow – building up a well dressed figure from scratch.

Once you have constructed the geometric pattern, draw the centre line around which the figure will balance. Make a rough skeleton – legs, arms, shoulders, hips, hands, head – to establish a correct pose. Then you can begin to develop the clothing around the body. It will help it look ‘convincing’.

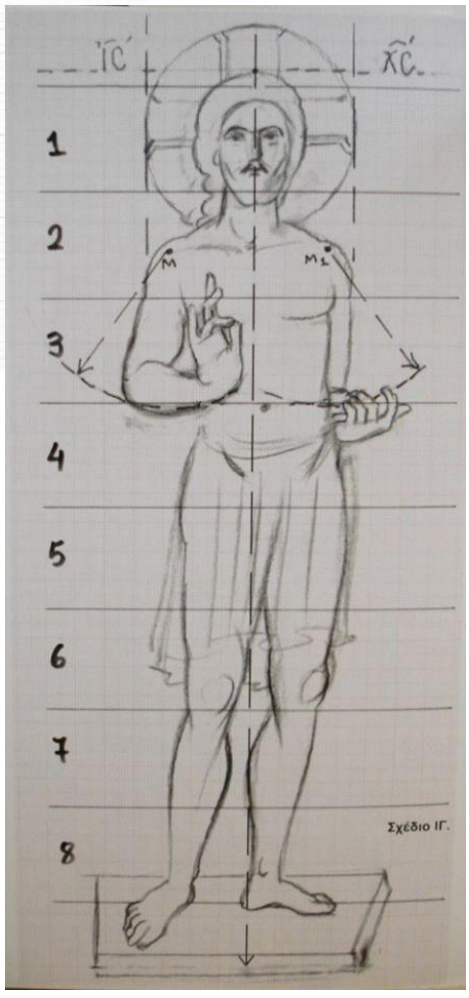
Establish the main pull/push points – shoulders, arms, hips, knees, neck. Lines should be drawn straight between them, and curves should be a series of short lines.

Establish the minor pull/push points; establish the folds where the cloth bunches up. Join the areas of cloth together making sense of what is pulling on and around what.



Make good use of thin/thick/thin lines, making calligraphic shaped lines giving more nuance to the forms beneath.

Wrap the cloth carefully around features, making sure the edges are ‘stepped’ and not simply a single line. Make sure the fold lines meet intelligently, thinking through what piece of cloth is on top of another.
Remember that cloth bunches up and creates both shadow areas and staggered lines.



Colour

Garments also require a knowledge of colour and its symbolic meaning. Having said this, there is a rather broad variety of ‘traditions’ regarding this.

A purple-red is the colour of Christ’s undergarment, symbolising blood and earth, that is his humanity. Purple is the Roman Imperial colour, and only the

81. The Presentation of the Virgin. Work attributed to the painter Angelos (39.4×33 cm.). Tempera. Around the middle of the 15th century.

imperial household were permitted its use. Thus it became attributed to Christ as the Lord, and to Mary as the Mother of God.
However, a radiant red such as Vermillion is also a symbol of Divine Energies, that is the power of God to create and redeem etc., and as such it is sometimes used as an alternative to gold in the background of an icon. A radiant red undergarment could thus be also interpreted as speaking of Christ's Divinity.

Blue is the colour of the sky and water, of the heavens and of baptism. Thus it is a sign of Christ's Divinity, and of the Presence of Grace, of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Blessed Mother and all of the saints. Thus Christ's cloak and the under garments of the saints are invariably blue. But this can vary from a greenish blue to an intense pure blue, and can be almost white or a deep colour.

In medieval France a particular blue dye was reserved to the French Royal family, and so to honour the Virgin Mary as Queen she began to be dressed in blue rather than purple red, but for the same reason that she had been dressed in the Imperial Purple in Byzantine times. Hence the difference between western and eastern church traditions about the colours worn by the Theotokos.

Other saints have various colours usually attributed to them, but always you will find variations. Usually St Peter and St Joseph are dressed in yellowish outer garments. St Michael the Archangel is often dressed with a bright red outer cloak, as is St George. Its important when designing an icon to research the colours usually associated with them, and where possible to understand if there is any particular reason why. Simply be aware that is someone writes that this is the ONLY colour for

this and that, they are overstepping the mark a bit. Colour in iconography is not such an exact rule book.

PAINTING GARMENTS

There are various methods to build up the sense of light and luminosity, and often people combine various styles according to what works best, is most convincing.

A method which I find works well for me is to first transfer the lines of the garment's folds, then go over them in calligraphic brush strokes in a colour deeper than that with which it will be subsequently overpainted. For example, a blue garment might have an under structure painted in a mix of blue/green/black, or blue/yellow/black, while a red garment might have Burnt Sienna as a construction colour. Then the shadows are worked in using the same colour, but less intense and blended to the highlights, as you can see below in this example of the Virgin Mary with Christ.

This is similar to the membrane technique used by some iconographers for the face. See Aidan Hart's book for more on this.

Chapter Ten

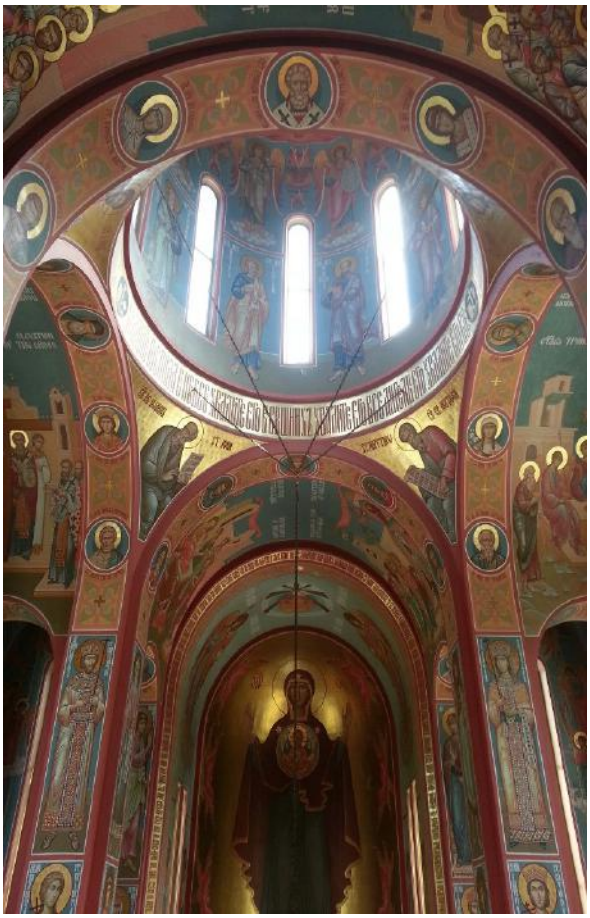
Layout & Landscapes

THE CHURCH BUILDING

An icon is an item destined to place a visual part in the Christian Liturgy. In doing so it sits in the liturgical context of what is read, prayed and sung, in the movement and ceremonial, and in the visual context of church architecture. It also has its own inner logic of design which is to aid contemplation of the Truth of Christ and the 'things of heaven'.

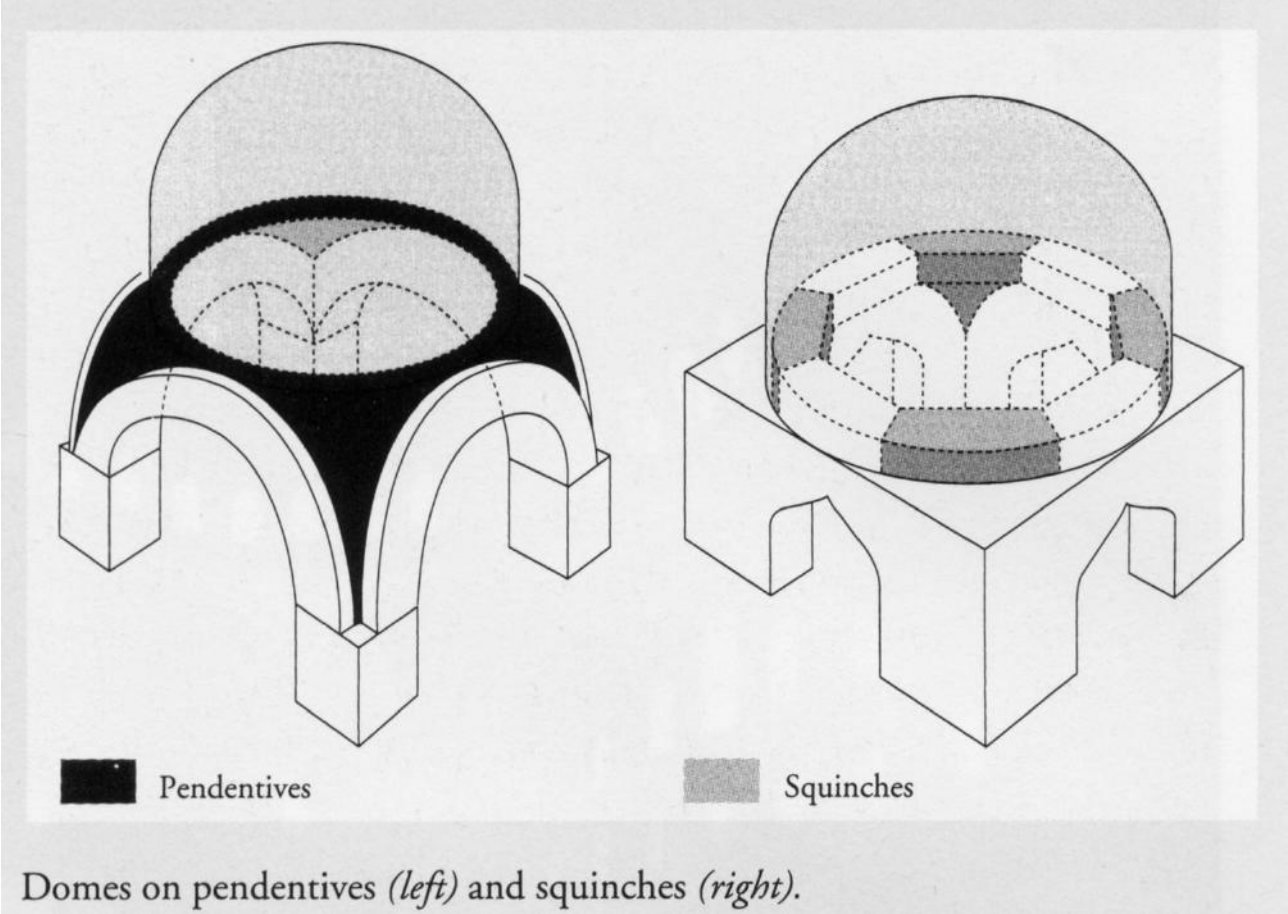
Visually our eyes go on a journey, from one thing to another, and as they pass from one visual point to another our mind makes connections and derives meaning.

The obvious place for icons in an eastern church building is the iconostasis, but this is a late innovation really. Rather, from the earliest times, the walls of the church have been the normal place for icon painting. After the 9th century the church in the East developed very sophisticated arrangements of themes which create the first visual reference point for appreciating how an icon 'works'.

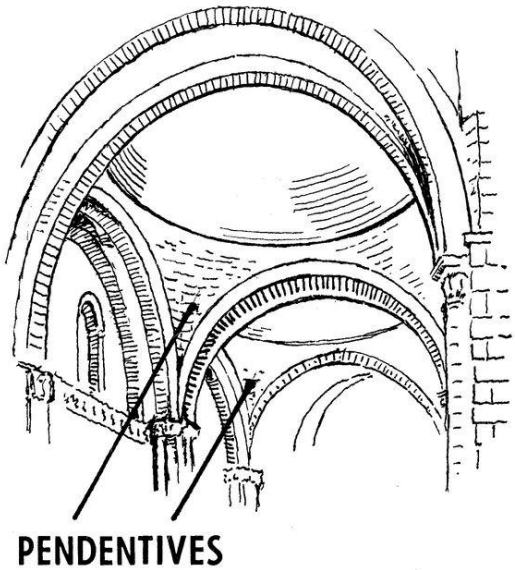


The layout of the eastern church building is based

on the idea that a circle, having no beginning or end, represents God who has no beginning or end, and so speaks as a symbol of the spiritual or heavenly realm. A square, on the other hand, is constructed of lines which have beginnings and ends, and thus speaks symbolically of the creation which is born and dies.



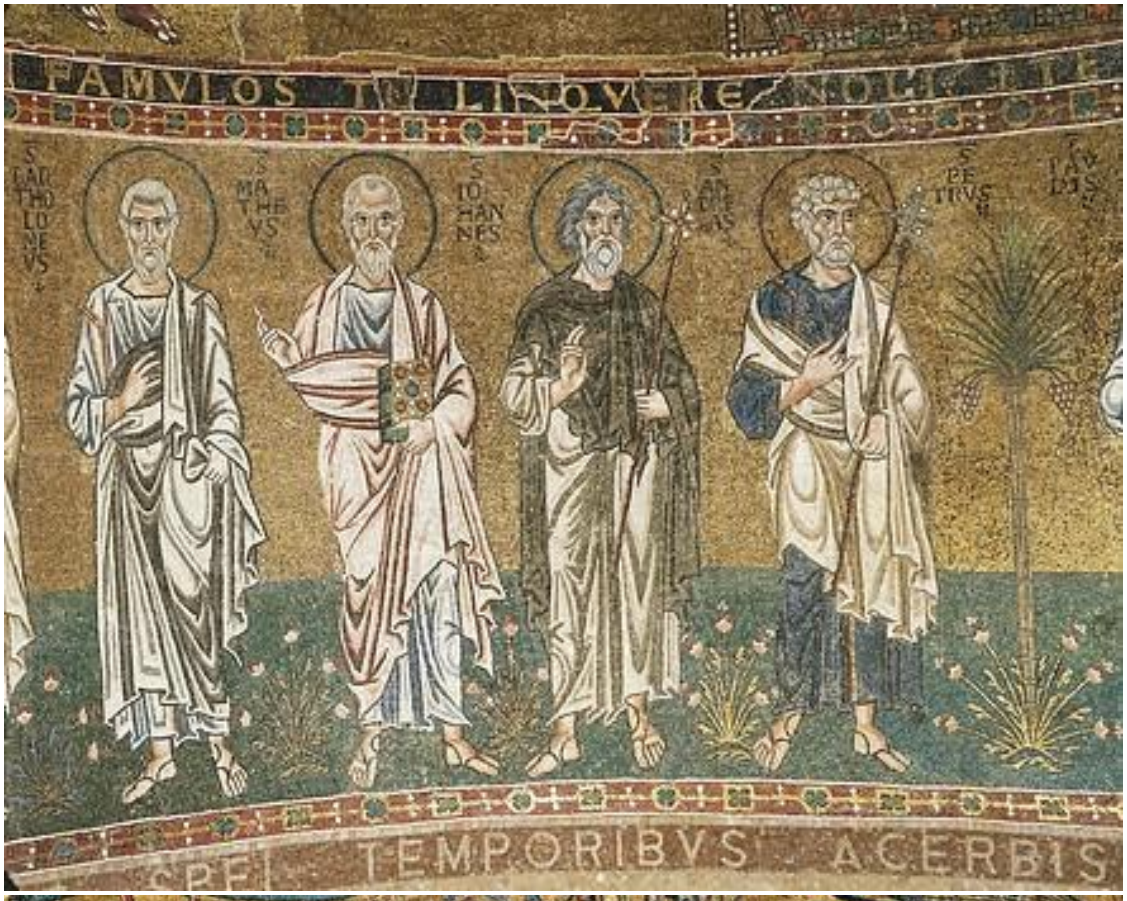
Domes on pendentives *(left)* and squinches *(right)*.



PENDENTIVES

Thus a church building has a dome set in a square, and under this the congregation assemble. At the entrance an area is set apart, and this was traditionally the place where unbaptised people assembled. At the opposite end there is a semi-circular addition where the altar is situation.

The icons are arranged with this understanding behind it. So Christ Pantocrator, Ruler of All, is at the apex of the dome, beneath him the Virgin who is 'higher than the angels' surrounded by the archangels, the cherubim and seraphim. Beneath them are the apostles, then Old Testament prophets often with scrolls, who proclaim that the Lord would come and dwell among us. Beneath them, where the dome meets the square, are the four evangelists who wrote down the Gospels which testify to the Incarnation of the God the Word in the flesh as Jesus Christ. On the walls of the square or rectangular nave are found the men and women saints, who have 'gone before us' and with whom we are 'one in the household of faith'.


FAMVLOS TVOS
S BARTHOLOMEVS
S MATHEVS
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TEMPORIBVS ACERBIS


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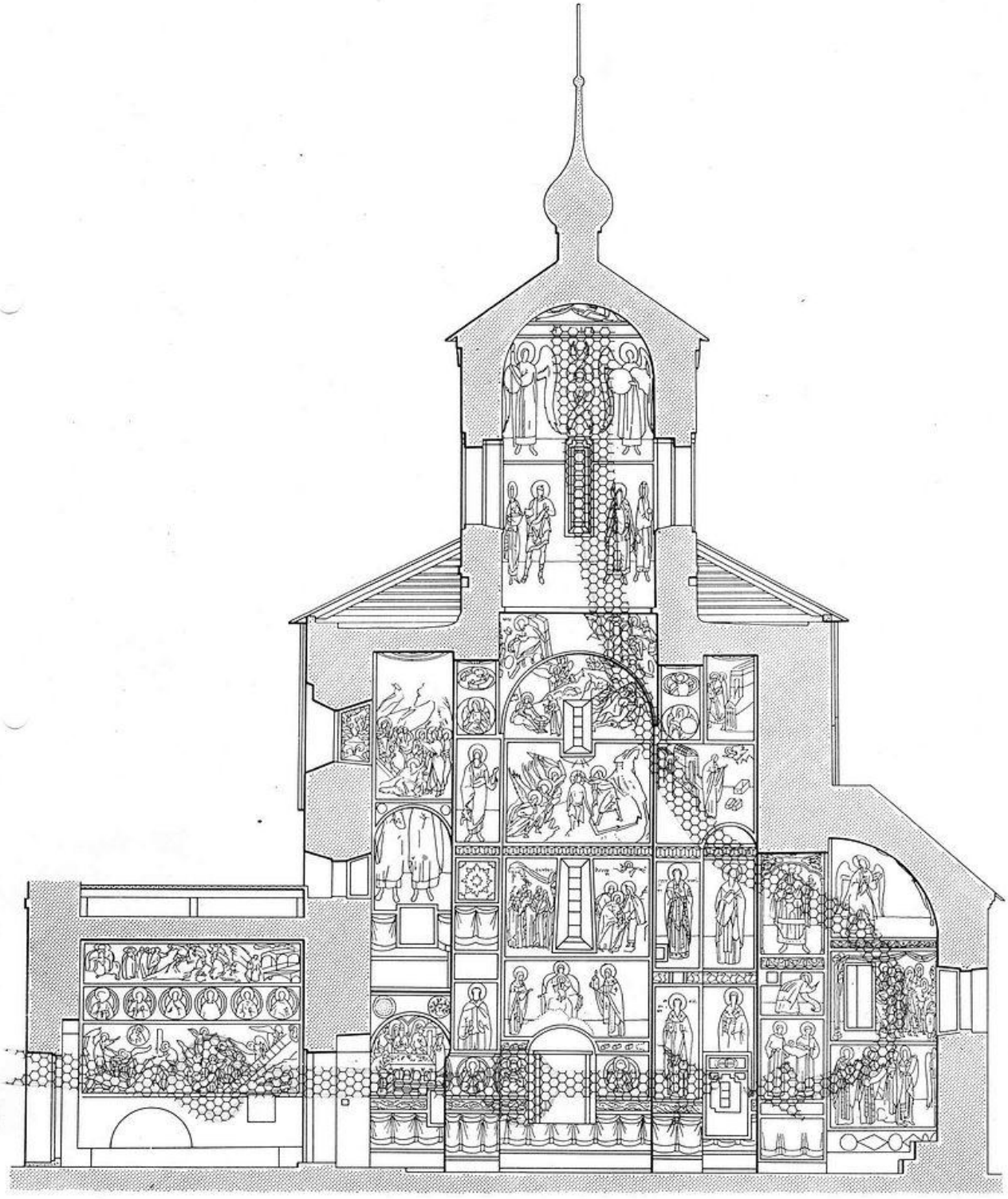


Around the altar in the sanctuary are found the four great bishops who contributed to the shaping of the Christian liturgy, notably St John Chrysostom and St Basil. They have the posture of priests offering the Liturgical prayers, concelebrating in heaven with the priest standing at the altar on earth. Some have the Communion of the Apostles above them, with the Virgin of the Sign sat with her Divine Son enthroned within a mandorla or disc, just as Christ is enthroned on the altar beneath, in the

apse roof. However, there are endless variations, there is no one way it should be but a myriad ways of expressing the truth of what is taking place in the Liturgy.

In a basilica church, which is an older type and more dominant in the West, the same symbolic meaning is utilised, with the nave a rectangle where the people of God gather, while the altar is set in a semi circular apse that cuts into the nave, raised up on a platform with steps that lead from one to the other, symbolising the union of heave and earth. In these arrangements Christ sits enthroned as Pantocrator or on the lap of the Virgin in the dome of the apse, while angels and apostles or other saints flank them.

There are varieties of arrangements but this is a very common one, and it makes sense of the whole liturgical space. It also helps make sense of the icons and what is being represented not as an individual painting, but as a part of a greater, visual whole.

This should be born in mind when designing icons. Often a piece is commissioned for a particular church or chapel, and its design should be rooted in the existing liturgical sense of the building.

FLOW IN DESIGN

Secondly, each icon will have a prayerful flow within itself. Even if it is a simple bust of a saint, the arrangement of the arms, folds of the cloth, incline of the head, will all contribute to the sense of visual flow which should culminate in contemplating the eyes of the saint or to the person of Christ either within the icon itself or in the church setting, for example in the Deisis tier of the iconostasis.

In more complex icons, such as those containing several figures or a landscape, this rhythm and flow is more complex and needs more careful attention. The flow is not just a matter of lines, but also a hierarchy of persons and things making a visual harmony.

So, two figures need to fill a space intelligently, not appearing crowded in, nor lost in a vast empty space. They need to speak to each other visually so that the image appears as a whole, not two separate pieces that happen to be put together by accident.

Hands and arms are vitally important in achieving this harmony and flow. Hands and fingers generally point to something important or significant, or else are positioned in blessing or speaking. Thus the person looking and the persons within the icon are united to one another in the moment of beholding the image. The whole point of the icon is to open a door of encounter and communion between the heavenly and

earthly realms, in this way working as a true sacramental, opening another way into the Mystery of the Eucharist.

At the same time as there is unity in the composition, there needs to be variety to create interest. A simple repetitive series of postures easily becomes heavy and uninspiring, even monotonous. It is an opportunity to bring out the individuality of the saints, angels etc, their role in the heavenly scheme of things. One may hold a scroll, another an implement of martyrdom, another gesture upwards, another bless. In a procession there might be a variety of subtle differences of posture, while figures can face each others in pairs, creating a sense of an ongoing heavenly conversation.

NEGATIVE SPACE

Also, in creating a proper prayerful arrangement, we need to think about *negative* space. By this we mean the area that is unfilled by anything, the they gold plane against which the figures or the landscape are placed. Its shape is as integral to the design as that of the individual figures. For example, if the figures are too small or the board too high, the sense of balance is lost as the negative space dominates and makes the figures seem diminutive and inconsequential. Likewise, the gold makes a silhouette of the outline of the figures and features, especially important where lighting is low and the gold will dazzle. This silhouette needs to be incorporated consciously into the overall impact of the icon.

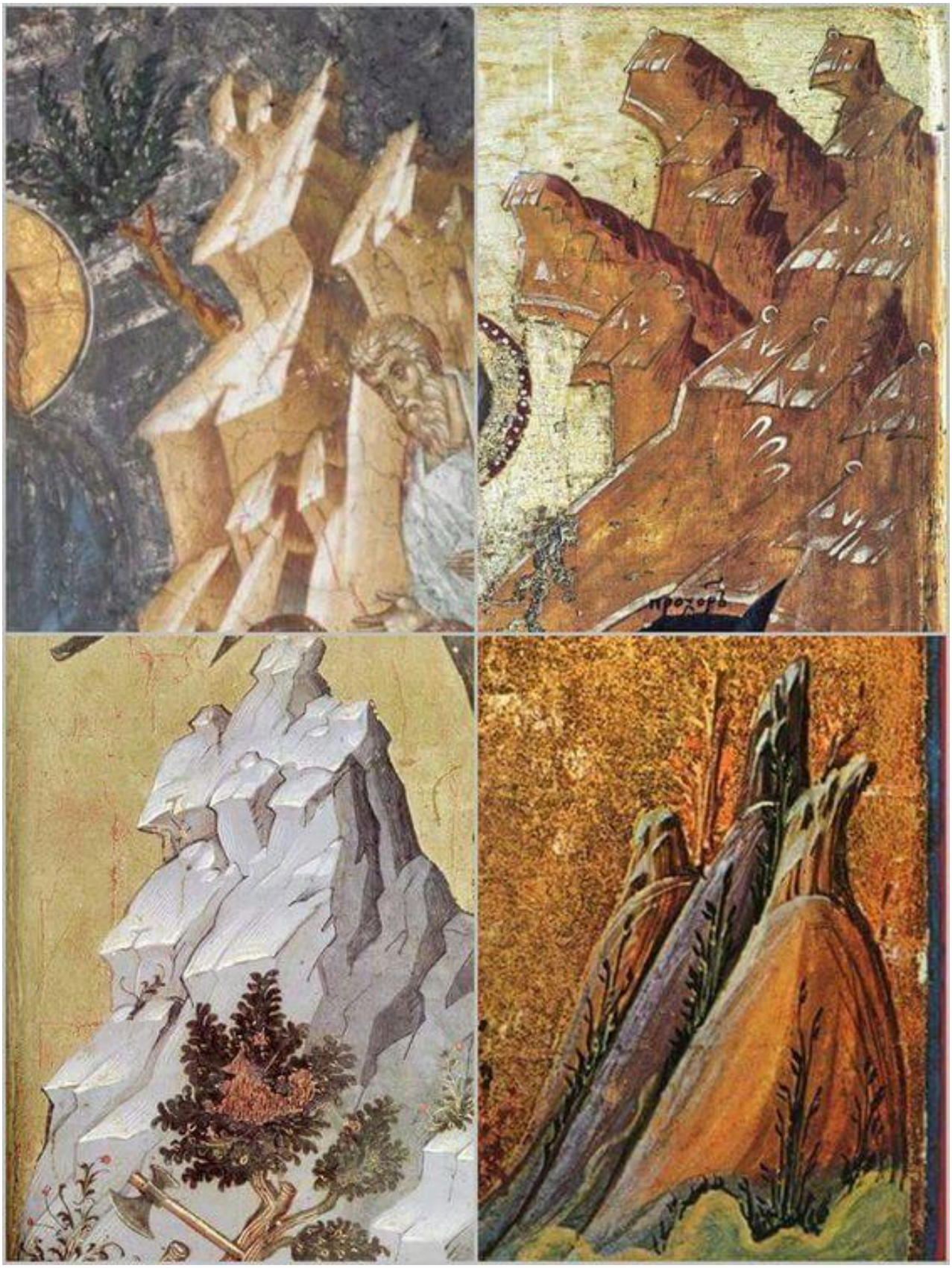
They are also constructed to reflect a heavenly landscape, for example some mountains seem molten, reflecting what the Psalmist describes as the mountains melting like wax, but all are highlighted with a bright, joyful light that bathes the whole scene.

TRANSFIGURES LANDSCAPES

The paradigm for the depiction of a divine, transfigured landscape is the Transfiguration itself. There are various descriptions of light and nature in the Old Testament from the pillar of fire through to the face of Moses so bright that he had to wear a veil. In the Gospels we aregiven a description of Christ's body being transfigured by a bright, divine light which the three apostles could see with their own eyes, as well as a bright golden cloud and the manifestation of the OT prophets Elijah and Moses. Painting an icon of the transfiguration is a must for any budding iconographer because it contains all the essential elements of the icon and roots them in the Gospel itself.

Landscapes show nature caught up in the divine blessing that is the Incarnation of the Word into matter. Thus mountains should be in a certain way joyful, shown particularly by the colours used.

It is also especially true of trees and vegetation, which should be composed as though dancing in praise of the Creator, bursting with light.

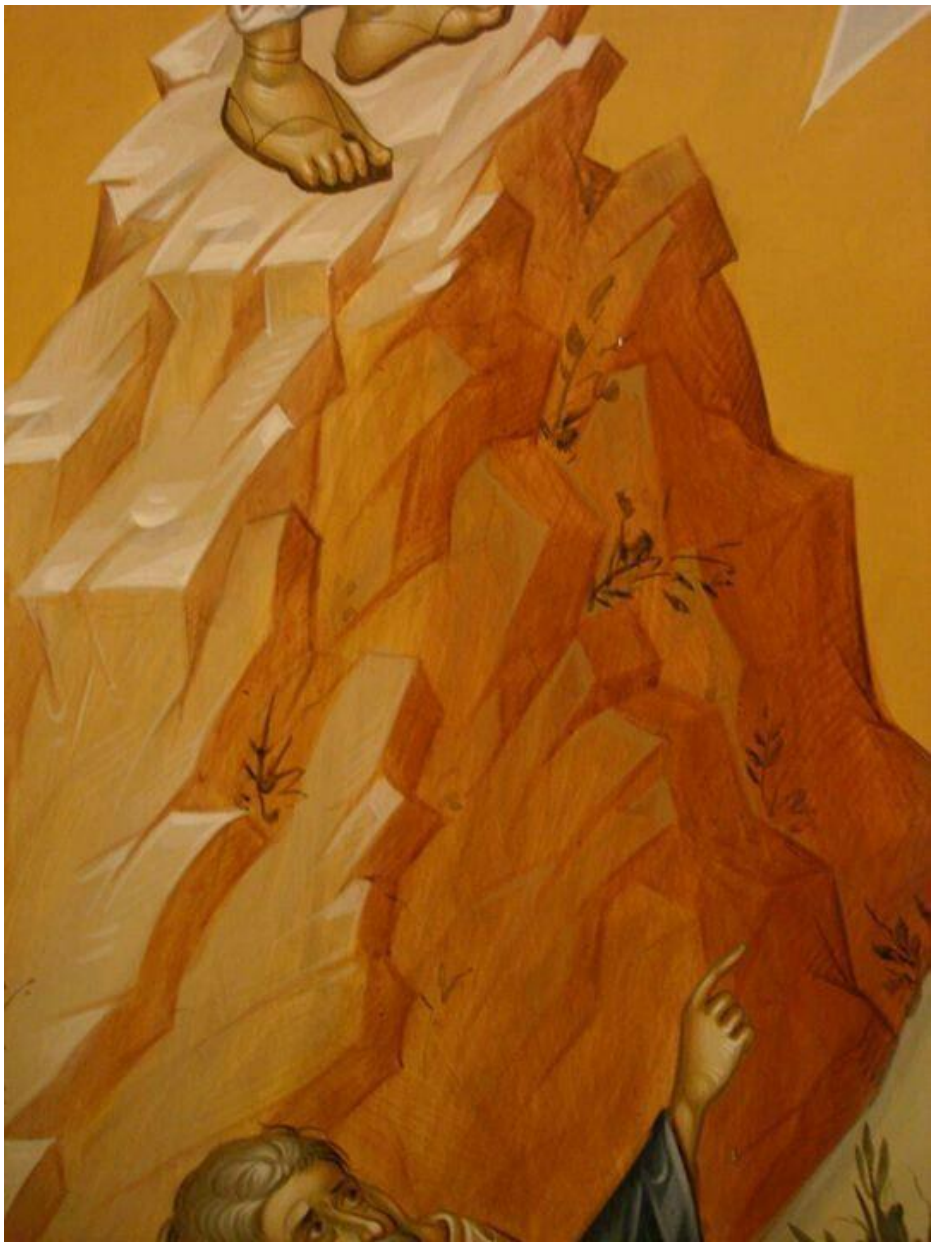


In the icon of the Transfiguration by Aidan Hart (previous page) you can see how the mountains are ‘flowing’ upwards to honour the figures on top of them, for which they act as pedestals. They are arranged rhythmically giving a sense of joyfulness. They are also bathed in light emanating from within the picture. They are also far from

being in a natural perspective in comparison to the figures, which are themselves arranged hierarchically, with Christ taller than the others who are arranged around him.

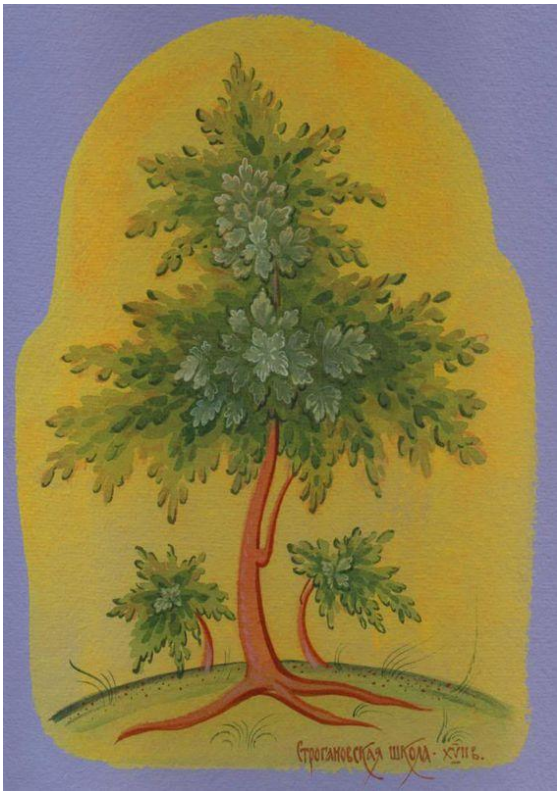
Below you can see how the mountains are built up of quite translucent layers of tempera, with a bright and a dark side, and minimal vegetation adorning it.

In this icon we see the baptism of Christ, where the desert scene is almost upended, so as to stand vertically behind Christ and the Baptist. The mountain is often associated with the spiritual life, with its ascent from earth to heaven, sometimes also described as a ladder.



Here the mountains are arranged like steps, and are presented as though split apart as the dove descends from heaven upon Christ. The edges of the mountain and the river bank are highlighted with that same divine light we saw in the Transfiguration icon, though not so all pervasive. Everything is minimised and reduced so as to be a stage which presents what is most important. The water is a series of rhythmic lines, the landscape pretty barren and without details, the vegetation lively and again

rhythmic, but lacking the sensual richness we might associate with a riverbank scene. The scenery is simply there to be faithful to the Biblical account and to give the setting of this theophany, that is a ‘showing’ of the Divinity.



Vegetation can be painted in various ways, but with rhythmic branches, enlivened by variety, so the leaves and branches are seen to radiate and dance. A combination of contrasting light and dark green colours enhance this joyfulness further. With its roots planted in the earth and its branches directed towards the sky, the tree embodies, like man, the unity of both worlds.
In Christianity, the tree is the symbol of the blessed life of God while the dead or fruitless tree speaks of sin and death. It is

with the wood of the tree of knowledge of Paradise in legend said to have provided the from which the Cross was made, becoming for believers the tree of life, also

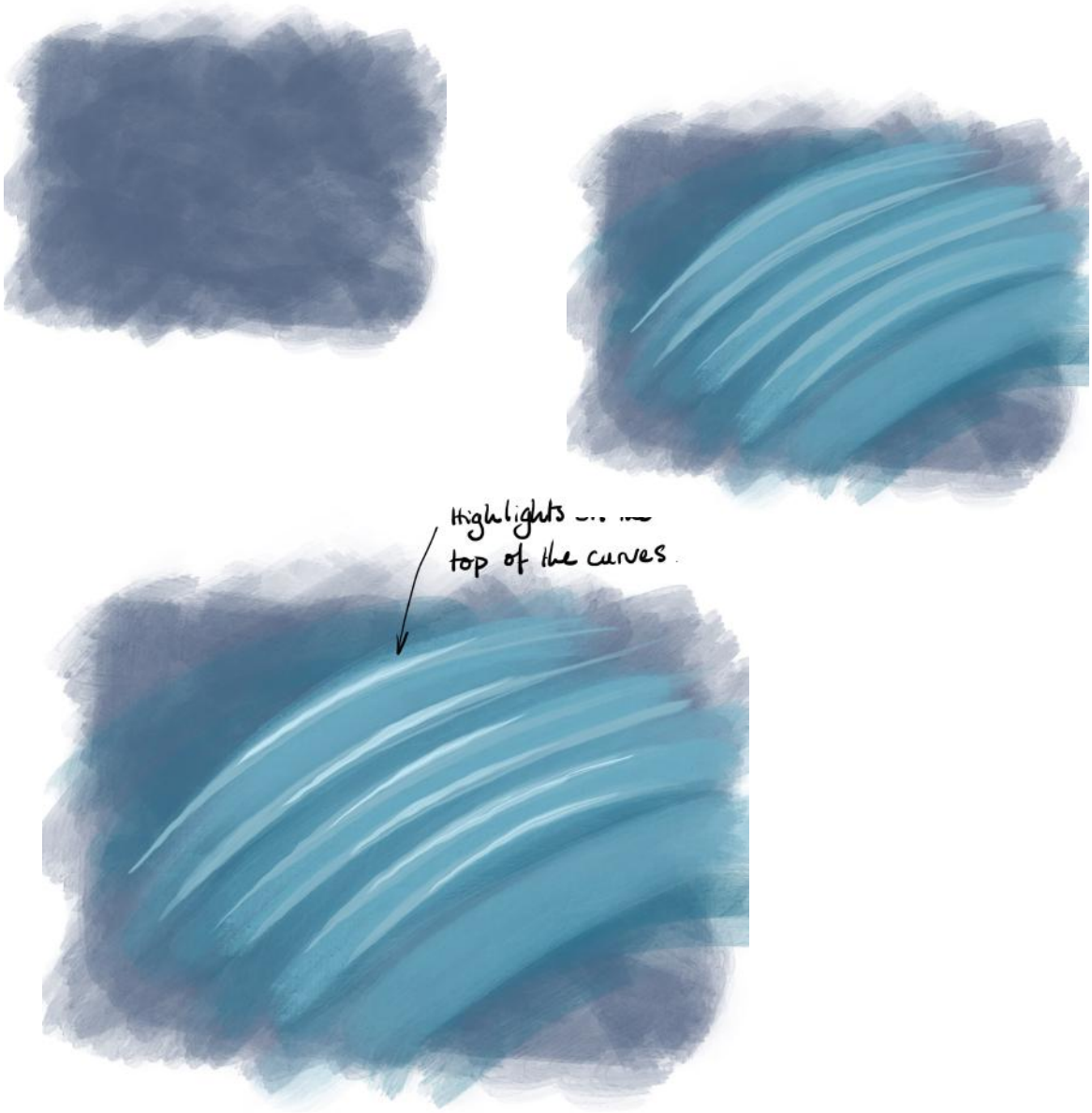
In this Greek icon of Pentecost you can see how perspective is used, how the furniture is illumined, how groups of figures are arranged, how architecture serves the composition and colour is used intelligently.

considered as the tree of Jesse.

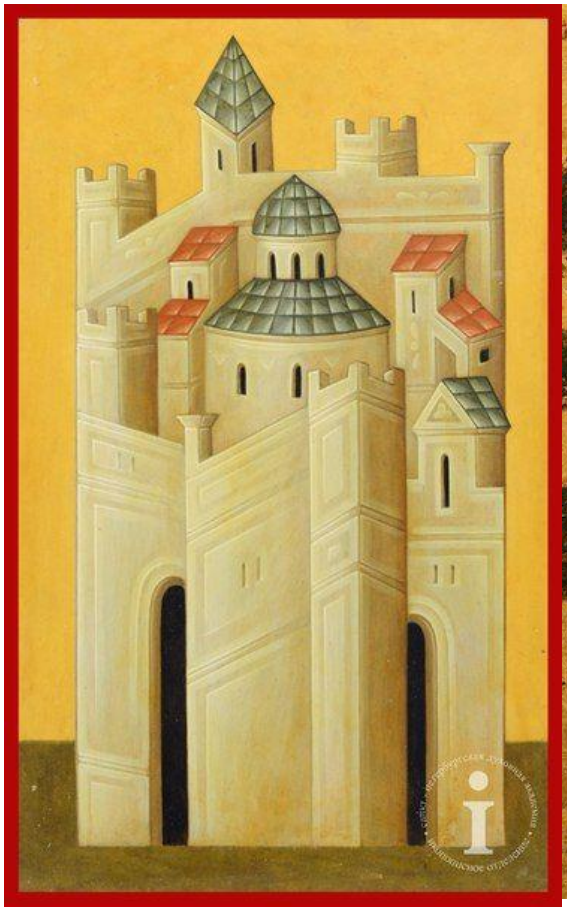
Water is shown ‘idealised’, something with flow, harmony and reflecting light. On p. 197 you can see the way in which the water is constructed, and much like hair is painted.

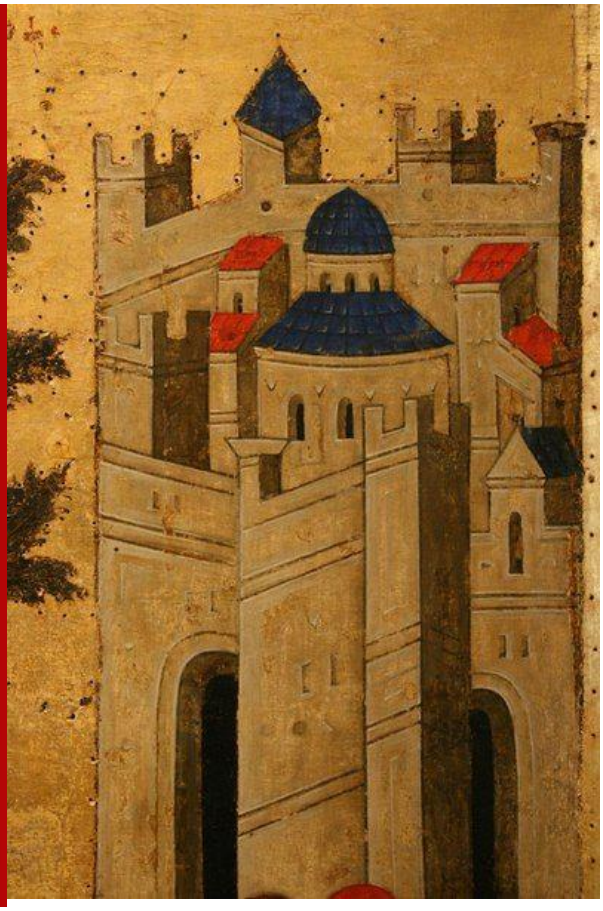
How to paint water:

1. Lay down the dark base colour of blue and yellow ochre.
2. make thin, thick, thin curved lines in parallel and in groups with a lighter greenish blue.
3. In a slightly lighter (2 plus a little white) put thin, thick, thin lines on the edges of the curved lines you made in 2.



In this unusual icon notice the beautiful arrangement of all three figures, and the powerful 'negative space' that flows around them. There is real grace and beauty in the outlines, the gestures, the posture and in the harmony of a very simple but rich palette of colours.





Chapter Eleven

Perspective, Buildings & Objects

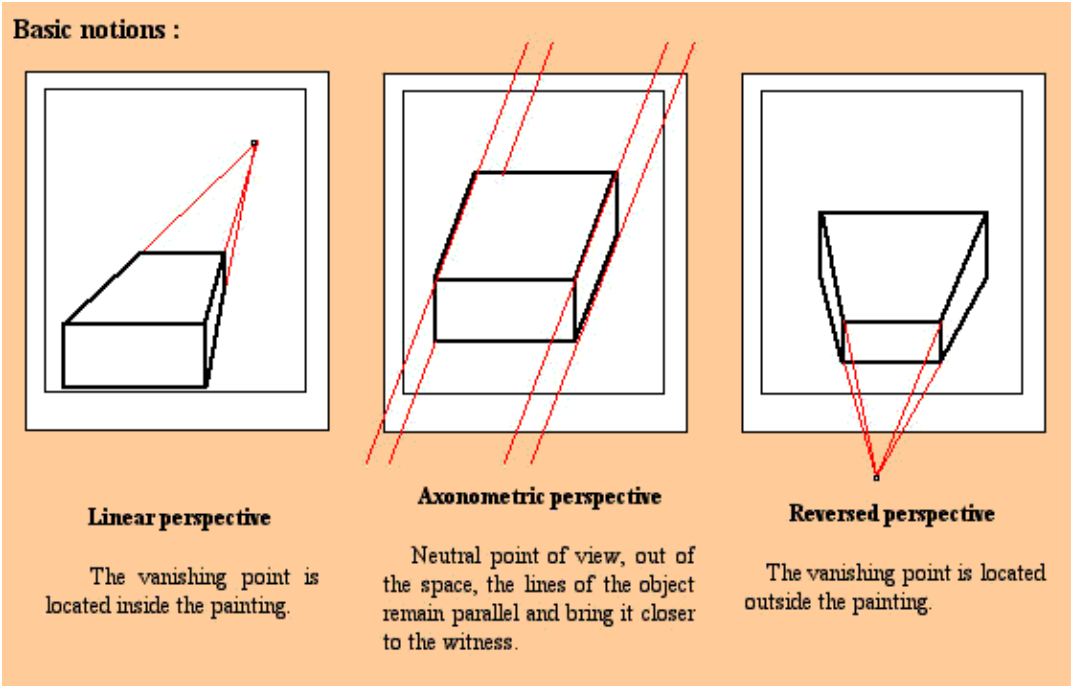
Multiple Perspectives

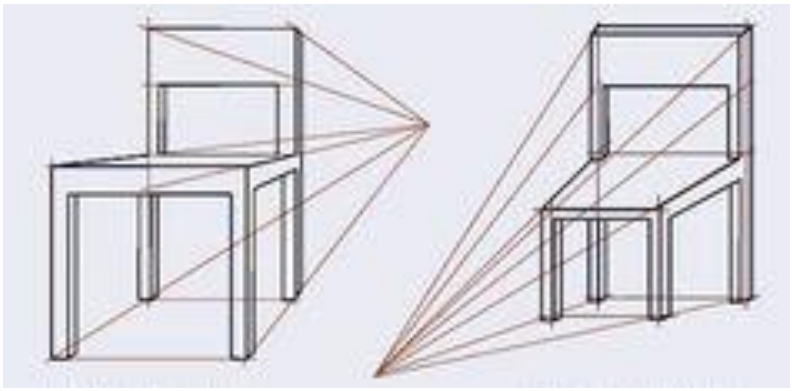
We have seen how mountains and vegetation are giving a symbolic meaning, one which supports the key focus of the icon – Christ or the saints. These secondary elements are also reduced in size and scale, in this way serving to enhance the importance of the saints rather than dominating in their own right.

They also have to conform to the principle of encounter and honesty that lies at the heart of the icon. The way in which perspective is constructed means that the vanishing point is reversed - to become the **encounter** point. This results in the position of the person viewing the image being reversed from the usual one, where the viewer remains detached, a voyeur, who looks into a scene from a safe distance, on the other side of the frame. Rather the place where the person stands to pray becomes the place were

the visual construction lines converge, propelling the image out of its border and making the person praying intimately connected to it. It dissolves the space between what is being represented and the person seeing it. Its a radical, dynamic use of perspective and part of the genius of the iconographic style.

This is called inverse perspective. In the diagram (*above*) you can see natural perspective as used in standard landscape painting above, and below how inverse or reverse perspective shapes the same object, which is clearly seen in depictions of

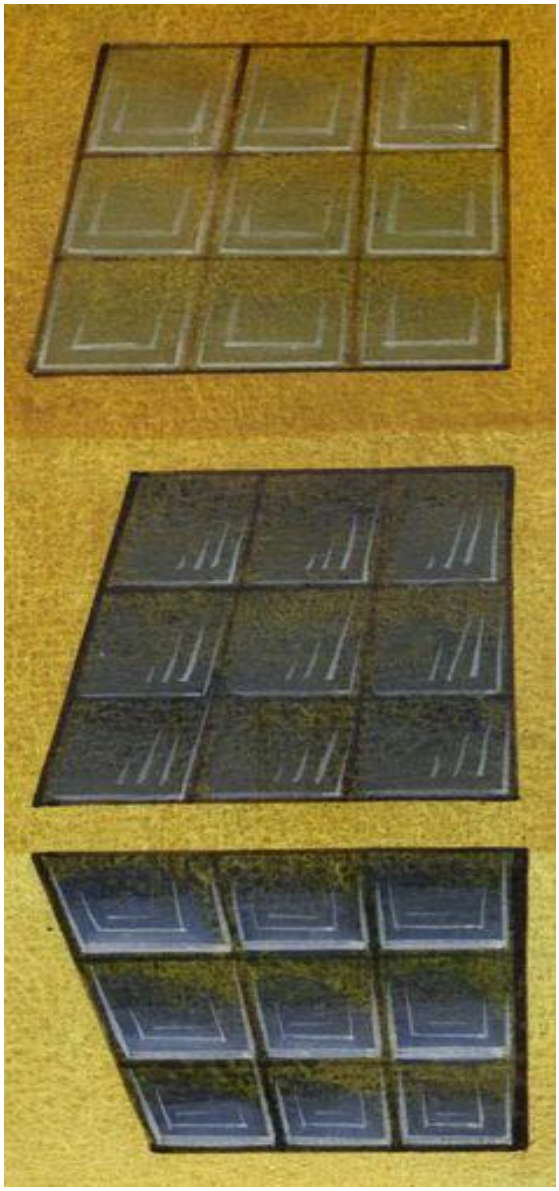




buildings for example (see next chapter). The best example of this is the Rublev icon of the Trinity, where the communion of the Three Angels, is projected to the viewer who is themselves caught up into the dynamic circle in which the Three Angels are place.

Perspective is thus used to convey encounter. It is also used to present a hierarchy of meanings. By this I mean that it shows the relative importance of things and places and people within the living encounter between God and humanity. Thus the mountains, reduced to a caricature, point towards Christ or the saint, acting as pointers along the way to what lies at the heart of the composition. They are diminished greatly in scale and composed to present the saint or Christ with dignity and respect.

The buildings point to a transfigured world of truth and light. As you can see from the examples here, in a very loose way they draw together several perspectives at one time, and are constructed to point attention to the persons presented in the icon and to enhance the sense of the painting coming out of the frame around the beholder. Space is flattened and pulled to tell us about the truth about space and what is taking place there without showing volume. One of the most distinctive elements of icons is

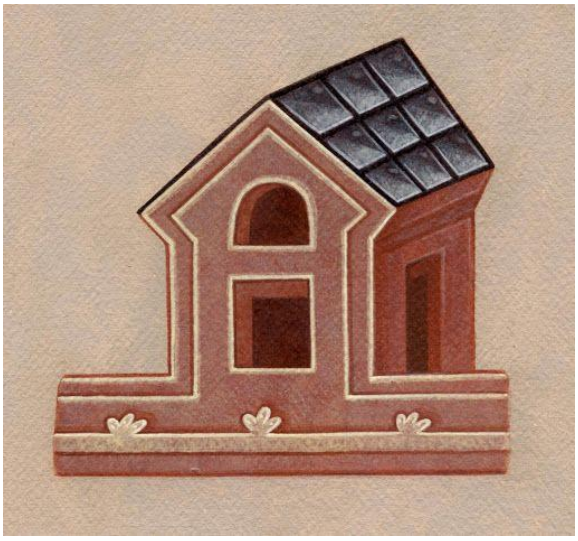


the treatment of volume. Everything is flattened, and 'tipped up' so that the events shown are in effect tipped out into the space immediately before the icon.

The problem with presenting volume in the icon is that it immediately creates a receding line of sight, and thus beings to make the icon like a simple painting, with the content receding away from the viewer and leaving him or her visually detached from Christ. It reduces the icon from a doorway toa window, one where we subject what we see to our sight, rather than ourselves coming into subjection to Christ.

Perspective is thus flattened, with groups of buildings grouped in ways which suggest the typography of the actual place but without allowing it to dominate. On the previous page we can see an example of Jerusalem, represented as a series of walls and symbolic interior buildings, chief among them is the Holy Sepulchre with its domed roof. This is the liturgical Jerusalem, where the Holy Sepulchre replaces the Jewish Temple even in icons showing Christ's earthly ministry.

This is the *idealised* Jerusalem, Jerusalem in its essence, not tied to any particular accidental historical moment.



Buildings serve inverse and multi perspective, with roofs especially pushing several perception points into one object, showing the building seen from front, side and above.

Shadows are also minimised as the icon is the source of a supernatural interior light rather than bathed in sunlight. Just as in garments, shadows are allowed just to give form rather than making anything to sensual and that might want to trick us into thinking we are really seeing a real place.

Buildings also, like mountains, play with light. They show a transfigured landscape, and so the buildings are somewhat playful, and rhythmic and decorated in a simple way.

The light is reflected in a stylised way, rather than cast as sensual casts of light. It also helps create a sense of rhythm, order and joyfulness. The play of light is also to be found on the walls and windows and doorways. (Notice that windows and doorways use direct perspective giving a sense of walls have thickness).

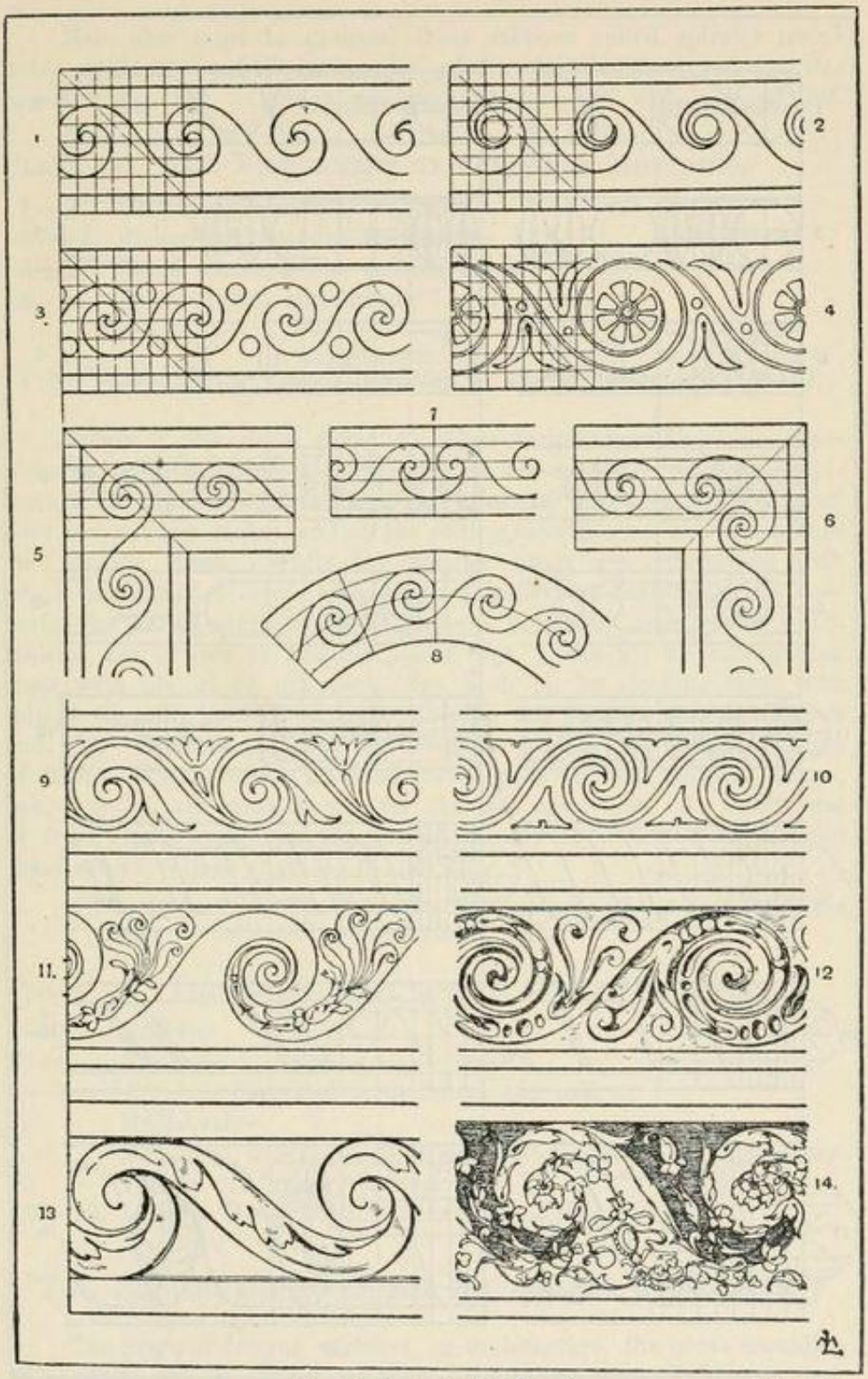
Though these are humble things, walls, masonary etc, nevertheless something of the joy of the Incarnation comes to them, so that they too are joyful. Often there are little squirls and embellishments which give a celebratory aspect. This is also to be found on furniture.

These are built up gently, with first a light layer of colour building up to peaks of light, painted more thickly. A big mistake is to try and just make single layers of lines, which results in a heavy and lifeless decoration. If you look at the decorations above you can see how they 'glow', with dark and light areas juxtaposed to create high contrast, while others fade away gently.

To do this:

- begin with the almost darkest colour,
- build up thin washes of lighter color covering less and less areas,
- finish with sharp, bright lines.
- wash in the darkest colour against these bright white lines.

For pearls and jewels, put the darker colour first, then add a highlight in a thin white, then stronger white washes, then finally a strong white point. For pearls place a yellow- white semi colon on the grey-white base, with a pure white point.

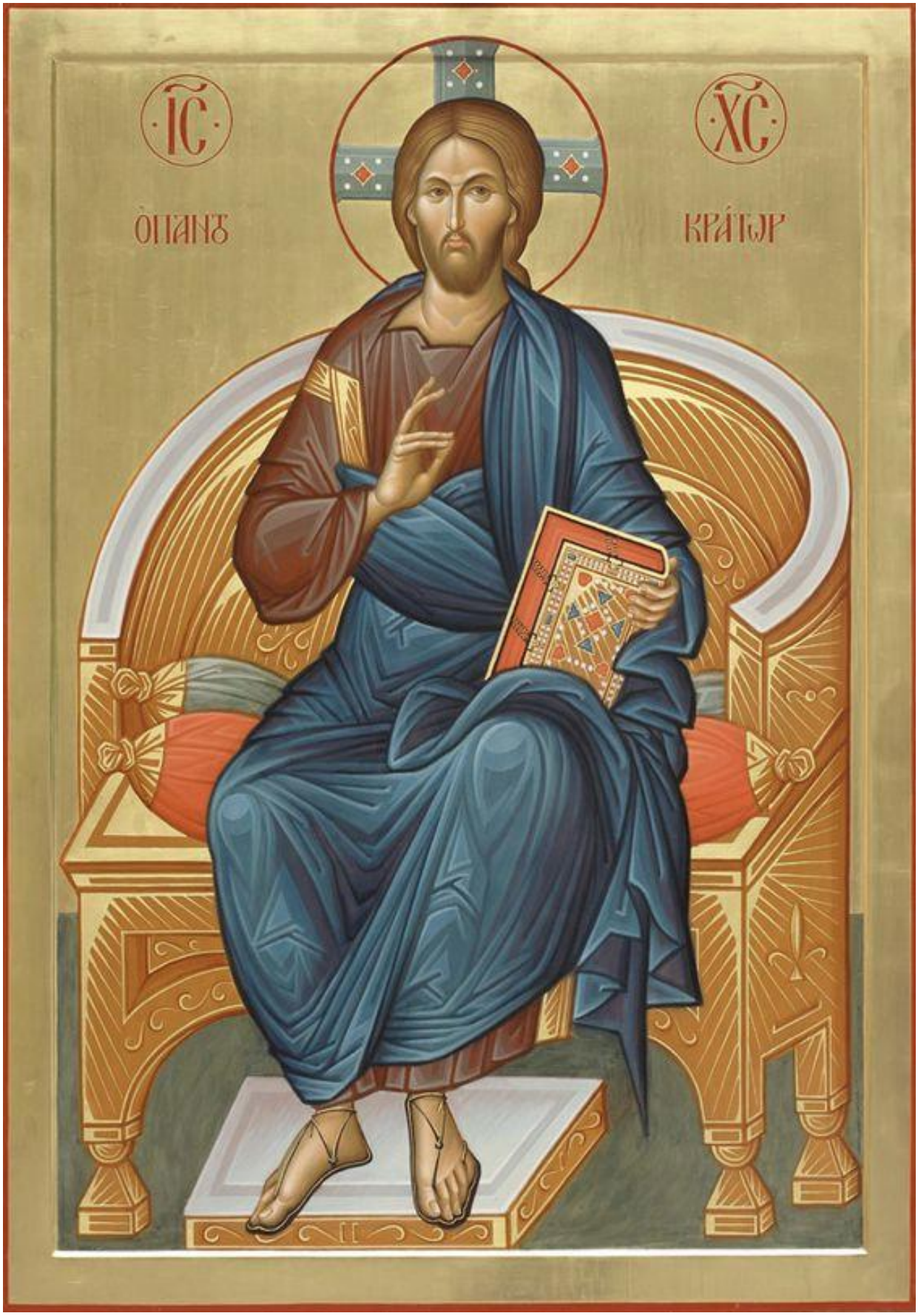


The Evolute-Spiral Band. Plate 97.

Colours play with the contrasts of reds, greens and compliments of ochres, not to cause a distraction but to lend interest, movement and harmony.

Other objects, such as thrones, foot rests and book stands, are also ‘humble’ things, which would normally just be bits and pieces on a stage, or ornamented to look grand

and impressive. In the icon, which is a humble art because it is the true spiritual art,



these humble things are, like the plants and the mountains and the buildings, made

The highlighting however uses a process called ‘assiste’, the application of very fine gold lines. This is also used for garments, usually those of Christ as you can see below.

This technique demanding, especially of very good brush strokes. It is important to get the right balance

to sing a joyful hymn to the God of all things.

So they are often embellished with gold lines, as though radiant with the most glorious light. Its not so much fancy carvings or plush inlays of previous stones to impress with ostentation, but rather they are being transfigures with Divine light.

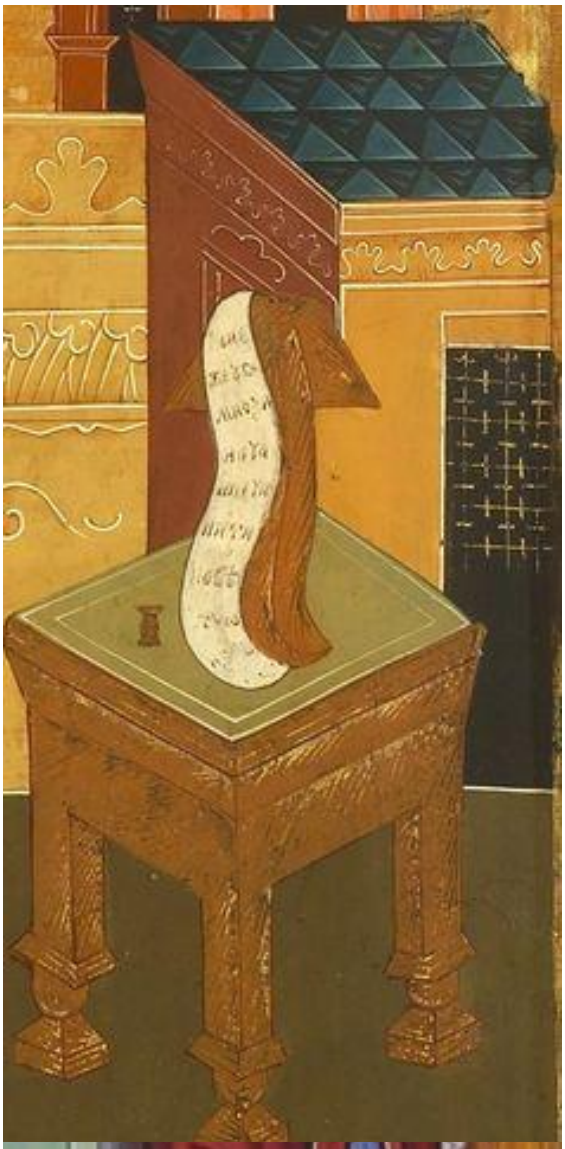
Again the perspective is multi-formed, showing volume through a complex deformation of planes, so for example the bath for the infant Jesus in the Nativity icon shows both the side and top views, conveying the content as well as the existence of the bath, and pressing us to engage with the entire reality of the things as well as their existence.

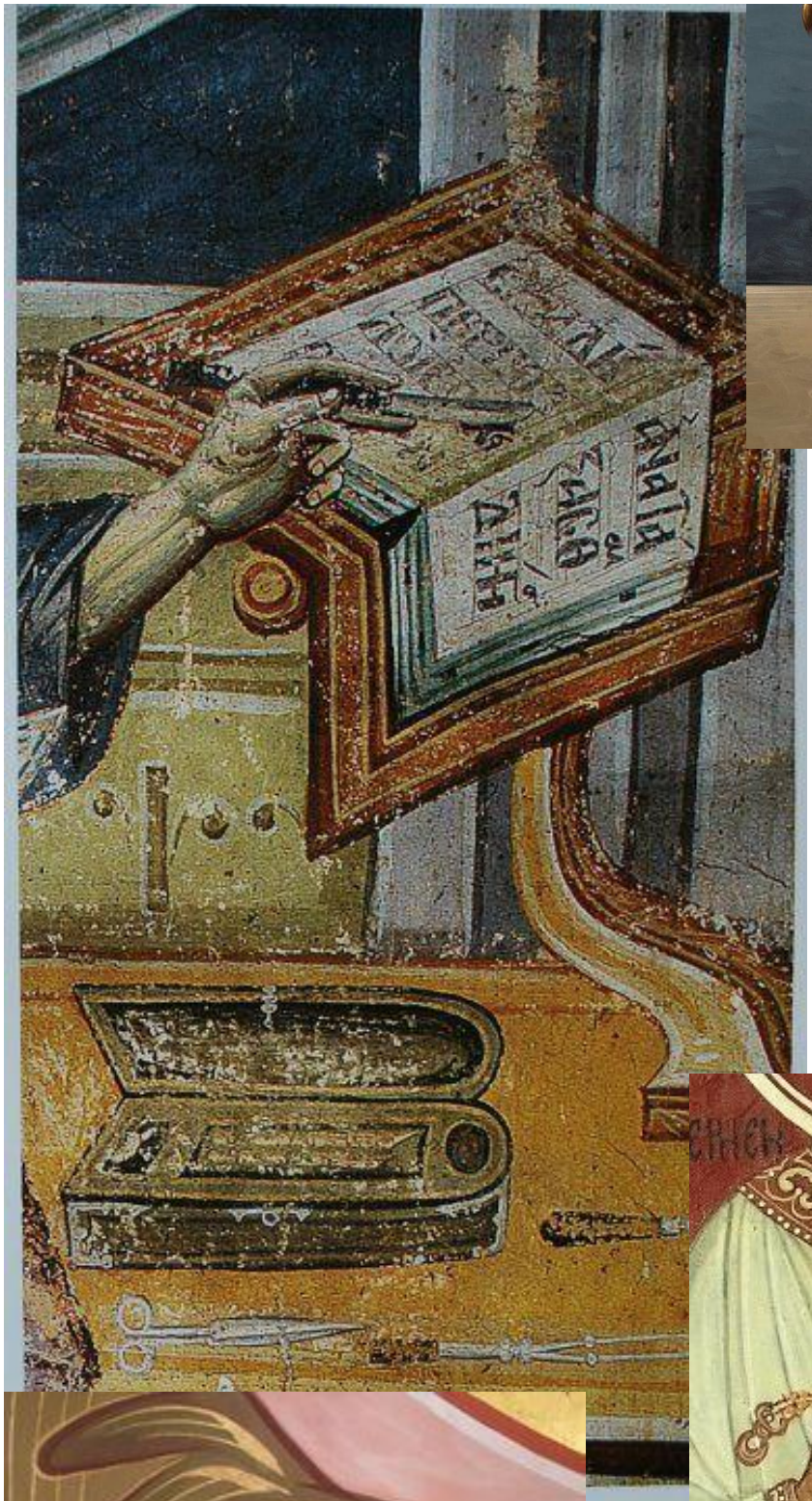
between the gold and the background, so that there is a luminance not just gold.

Decoration should be rhythmic and joyful. It should not be too elaborate as though showing of the ability of the artist, and should be proportionate to the whole com-position so as to add to the general balance and tranquility of the design. Nor should this be thought of as added onto the design, but integrated with it, so it all forms a single whole. There many, many patterns to choose from, and it is a useful took for giving a piece a ‘local’ feel as you can use patterns derived from local art and crafts.

These can adorn clothing, ornaments, furniture but its important to make them servants of the piece rather than dominating it or being something ‘stuck on’.


ὁ ἅγ ἰω θεο λο ς
ὁ ἅγ πρό χορ ος





Many books – Gospels or the Book of Life - are decorated with golden lines and painted jewels, which helps to establish their significance of holding the words of the Saviour, the words of Life. These are modelled on Byzantine liturgical books: Missals etc.

Chapter Eleven

Festal Icons & Design

All of these design elements come together in the Festal icons. These are icons based on the key events of Christ's life and saving work, including the life of the Mother of God. They usually appear on the festal tier of the iconostasis, but also on the walls of the church usually on a large scale.
Each of the festal icons is a lesson in itself and it is important that you research each one thoroughly as you continue. Here we will address some basic principles to be used in the design and making of these important thematic icons.

ICONS AND TIME

The festal icon presents an event rooted in the Gospel from within the perspective of the continuous now, the eternal present in which we meet and know God. God is outside of time, even if as part of the incarnation he enters into time. Thus the figures are not presented in their historical context but according to their now constant state of existence – as the saints, angels and Mother of God. So, for example, the Virgin Mary is dressed as an empress as Queen of heaven, Christ is dressed as the emperor and the apostles as Roman senators as those who now sit on the twelve thrones in judgment. Likewise hierarchs are dressed in the vestments of the liturgy, because this is the art of the liturgy and in so far as they open the doors of heaven at that time, so they are drawn.

For the same reason, an icon may have various 'moments' in one scene. For example in the Nativity icon wise men and shepherds appear at the same time, while sometimes Joseph is shown in his doubts and the Infant Christ twice – in his manager and at the bath.

Secondly, these events are shown in a very stylised environment. They buildings and landscape simply serve to give reference to the place which is recoded in Scripture or the Tradition, but they don't define the event, they are more of a detailed note to root it in context. In this icon (left) they bend and take shape to express the central theological nature of the events. So, for example, Christ is born in a cave where the mountains spread apart to contain him, while the mountains above are split by the descending light of heaven, which reminds us of the Annunciation icon. The various elements of the icon are presented each in its own section, the board divided up by the various pieces of landscape yet still giving a sense of unity and wholeness.

People are presented as either key individuals, for example Mary and Joseph, or as a crowd, and drawn as such: the wise men appear as a single mass, as do the angels particularly those to the right of the centre, even the animals are grouped rather than presented randomly in their own space. Likewise size of figure relates to their theological significance, with the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child dominating the centre, while the peripheral human figures really shrink.

The colours too respond to a hierarchy of theological points being emphasised. So the Theotokos is in her royal purple robe and lain on a bright vermillion cushion, so the rocks on which she is lain take on a complementary greenish hue.

These incidental elements of the festal icons are themselves built around some basic but important geometrical patterns. The Circle intersects with the square – heaven is wedded to the earth. Triangles speak of ascent and descent. A well worked out geometrical base provides a solid key to enable creativity without loosing the groundedness of the composition. If you look at the myriad examples you will see that there is no one dominating arrangement and therefore a great range for creativity, but at the same time the danger is that an icon will become unbalanced, over fussy, make mistakes in terms of hierarchy of spiritual truths etc.
The general points about landscapes, buildings, object and pose/garments all still apply, but in the festal icons there is a complexity to handle that takes some practice and a reasonable amount of theological knowledge.

PROCESS OF DESIGN

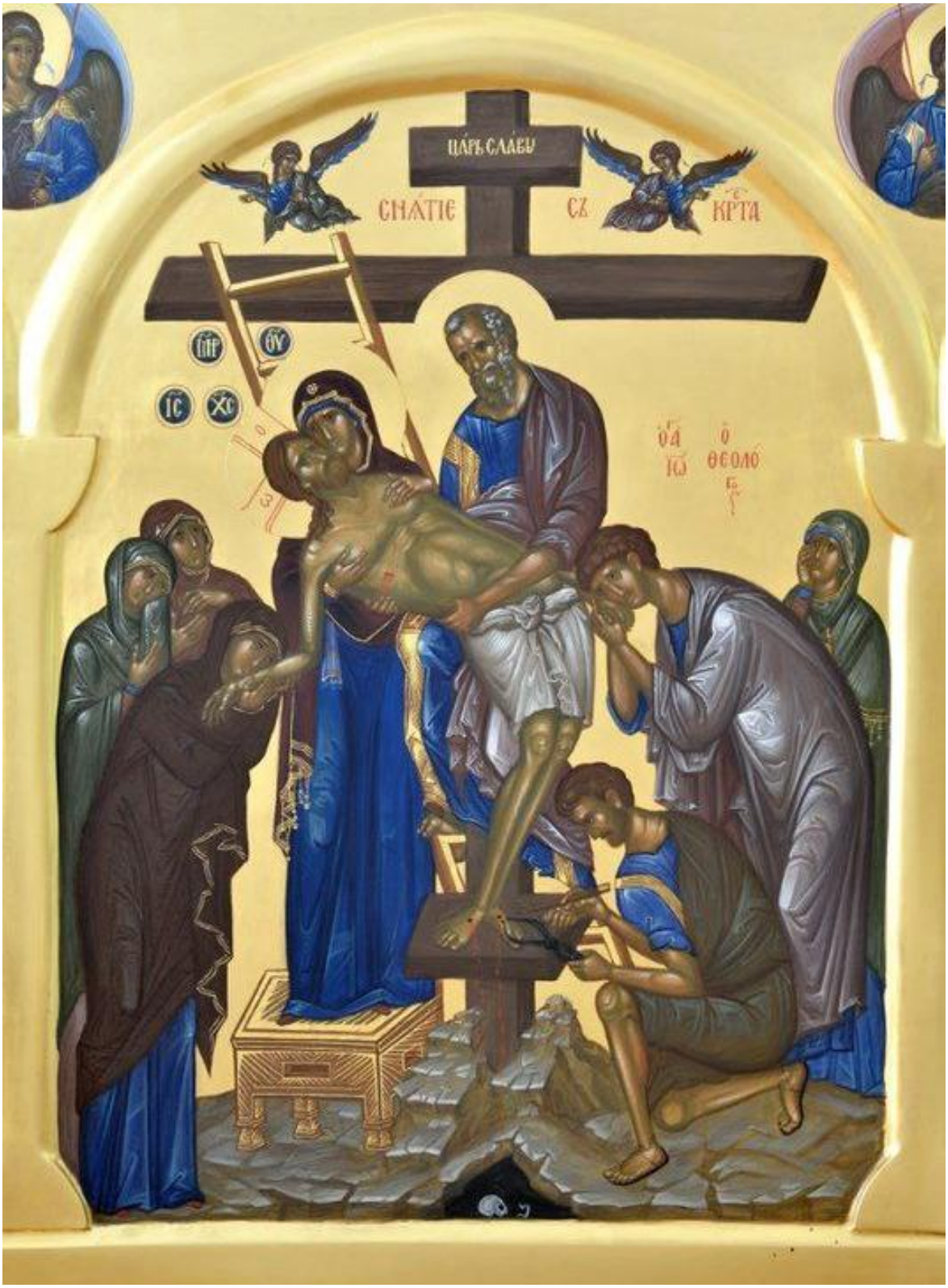
Therefore it is important to do **research**!
1. Identify key Scriptural passages. Note any that appear in a liturgical setting, not just as the readings set for the feast, but also influencing the words of prayers and hymns. Reflect and meditate on them, and try to sense what emphasis is speaking to you.
2. Identify key elements of any liturgical celebration, such as hymns, prayers and rituals. Read through and bring what you are reading into dialogue with the reflections you have made on Scripture.
3. Identify the key theological ideas based on the events being shown. Christmas is the Incarnation, for example. Read up on what the Church teaches about these, and even if they seem very complex, try to get a grasp of the essence of what the Church is saying. Even if this is a bit beyond you, try to get the Church's basic teaching clear in your head about what each feast is celebrating.
4. Gather examples of icons on the theme, trying to spot the essential elements. As you do so try to sense which ones speak about the insights that spoke to you so far in your research. Make copies of those that do. It might not be a whole icon which speaks but certain elements from, others from another. Keep notes about which one links to which icon example.
5. Try to make your search prayerful, ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and seek to serve.

Design

Once you have got some of the basic ideas and elements identified, the next stage is to think about the overall composition. Each festal icon presents a basic scene from Christ's saving work, and the overall composition should clearly speak about that. What shape(s) will best express that? What arrangement of those shapes will be strong symbols of that insight. Having identified those, roughly sketch what possible ways they might come together.

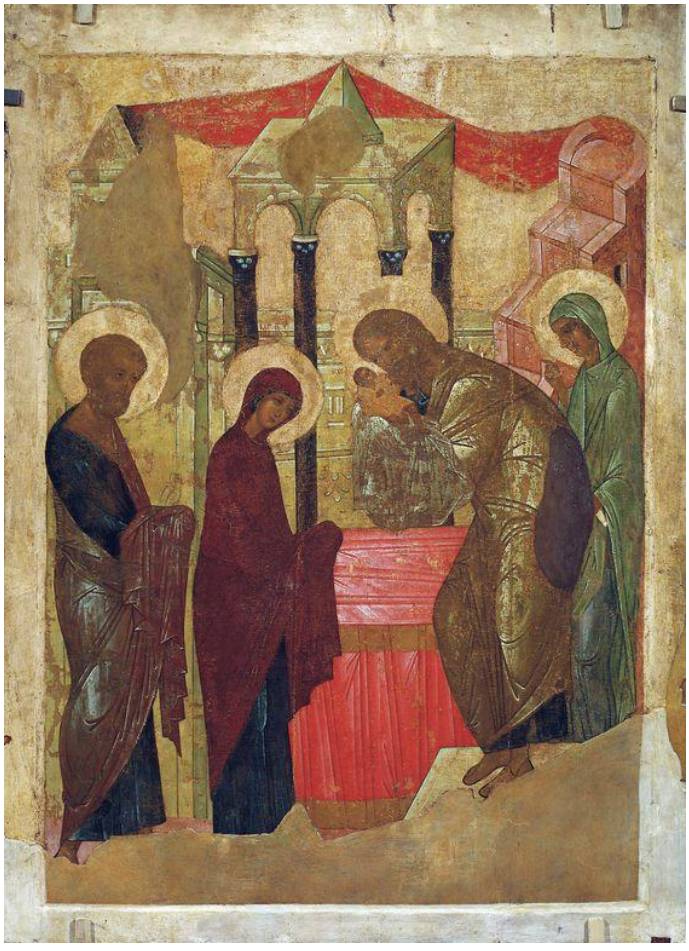
It is worth trying to see how different icons are expressing similar ideas, that is in the basic geometrical constructions you can see. This will give you a good sense of what works, and a sound basis for your own final design.

It will be helpful to have identified two or three main theological elements you want to focus on. You can't capture the full spectrum of insights into these great works of our



salvation, and it could become confusing and even heretical if you aren't very careful. This is why the Orthodox community insists on an Iconographer being blessed by a bishop and that all new designs be approved by him. In the Catholic community the situation is much more relaxed, but even during the Middle Ages it was the bishops who supervised the artistic creativity of church artists and work for a Catholic church needs to be approved before it can be installed. In other words, you have to be careful to work within the guidelines of the Church's Tradition.

In working on the design, be careful about the basic flow of the picture that you want to create. Where does your eye end up when you look, where does the composition take you? What is the journey that the icon is taking the beholder on in meeting and having union with Christ?



In this icon there is a sweep from the top left to the right centre, with a smaller curve on the other side. It echoes the sense of Christ pouring out his life onto the earth and the grace flowing to the dead. It is like a fountain, with Christ's pierced side at the centre of it. The arched bodies of the Mother of God and St John echo that of Christ's own body. There is a strong triangle made by the ladder, and Christ's body sits on that as though sliding to the earth and to be buried in the

earth. The Cross makes a powerful vertical accent which sets off the diagonal of the ladder, making the composition strong yet allowing the body of Christ to slide, and

25. Two sections of an iconostasis beam with scenes from the life of the Virgin and the Dodekaorton (41.5×140 and 41.5×159 cm.). Tempera on wood. Last quarter of the 12th century.

giving greater emphasis to the broken feel of Christ's corpus.

The structure of the icon usually reflect the action taking place. At the Annunciation the movement is downward and sideways, reflecting the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin Mary in a non linear fashion, while in the Baptism icon the descent is direct and central, and action that seems to cleave the ground letting the water flow, much like in the Descent into Hades where the rocks part allowing Christ to enter. The Presentation in the Temple moves from left to right as Christ enters the Temple, as it does in the Entry into Jerusalem. Indeed the theological motif/movement beneath many of the icons are linked, for example the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Baptism/descent of Christ into Hades, when we are baptised into Christ's death we participate in the hope of His resurrection and are rescued from our sins which we have 'in Adam', while in the Descent into Hades Christ rescues Adam from the grave and raises him to new life. The one echoes the other theologically and it does so in the construction of the icons.

In the two icons here, of the Presentation of Mary above and Jesus left in the Temple, you can see two Russian uses of the Temple motif and the idea inherent behind 'presentation', a movement of the family to the priest, of the subject to the Temple. The complex of buildings and objects, the sense of flow within the composition, the use of colour are all worth exploring.

Its important not to get over fussy, because too much complexity reduces the design to an incoherent mess which doesn't speak clearly. Thought must also be given to the size of the icon, and how it is to be viewed. A wall painting high up on a church wall is going to need a different treatment than a small icon which will be used in private prayer and from close up. Whatever the size however, all the different elements, from the pose, groupings, architecture, landscape, folds of the drapery and so on all need to be worked into a coherent whole where there is a good, uninterrupted flow with a deep theological meaning.

Any artist will tell you that the space you leave is as important as the space you fill, that ‘negative space’ speaks as

loudly as filled space. In many icons we find two or more figures, arranged together, and this makes the space between them vitally important in enabling a harmonious connection to be established visually between them.

Take this Sinai Annunciation. Here the relationship between the Virgin Mother and the Archangel is quite breathtaking, as the posture of each profoundly connects with the other, with complimentary gazes, hand gestures, knee inclinations and the things they hold.

At the same time we can clearly see here iconic flatness, the reduction of a three dimensional setting into a two dimensional one. No attempt is made at all to re-create a natural space as though we were looking through a window frame, as became the norm in Western secular art.

Indeed in this icon the reduction of any sort of proportional realism has created an 'impulse' within the composition which seems to push the two figures forward so that they almost come tumbling out of the scene and we stumble over them. Within such compositions there is often a hierarchy of figures, for example in the Nativity icon the Virgin Mary is much bigger than any of the other characters, and the shepherds and wise men shrink before the angels. People appear in theological perspective, according to their importance in the history of salvation.

In naturalistic scenes of the Nativity the emphasis is upon re-entering a moment in history, to sense what happened at the time through the stimulating our imagination. In this sense it is fantasy. In the icon the events of the past are approached from their enduring significance and meaning, in other words what is true for all time. Mary thus appears not as a poor young woman but as a Byzantine empress, the Mother of God; the shepherds and wise men both appear around the crib though they took place many months if not 2 years apart.

Notice also that the landscape is not realistic at all. Not only flattened but stylised and completely reduced in size to the figures. The landscape and its vegetation as backdrops to the main events, and appear according to a spritual hierarchy, where the creation is transfigured matter and infused with Divine Light, shown through the translucency of the layers of egg tempera and through the highlights on the mountain peaks. Here the mountain are –reshaped to emphasise the breaking into temporal space by the Divine, and to radiate out from the Person of Christ. The mountain represents many things, but especially the idea of spiritual ascent – a place of ascent as in Christ's crucifixion on Calvary, as in Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law and Elijah the mystical vision of the Presence of God, both on the mountain of Horeb.

Likewise the vegetation is stylised, and almost dancing in the presence of its creator. It is a landscape which is alive as in Paradise, that is having fulfilled its

potential. As we read in Scripture, the whole creation is yearning for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Rather than natural space, we have a flattened space. In the Nativity icon the mountains and the cave are stacked on a single plane, with any sense of depth of

field minimalised. The use of gold also creates a non-realistic context in which a saint or scene is presented, a ‘bright darkness’ which speaks eloquently of the Presence of God who is both known and Unknown. Here the saints are presented in the reality in which they now exist, the Presence of God rather than trapped in a single moment of time.

As an ‘ascetic art’ the icon seeks to transcend particular moments of time and touch into the eternal. It is very much like the Book of Revelation where prophecy and the

eschaton all meet in a vast, liturgical moment as angels, archangels and the saints all gather around the throne of the Lamb to offer worship and adoration, just as we do in every Liturgy or Mass.

INVERSE PERSPECTIVE AND ENCOUNTER

A transfigures space is one of encounter. Perhaps the most acclaimed icon of all time is that of the Old Testament Trinity by Andre Rublev, a Russian iconographer and saint, who brings the process begun in the 6th century to its fulfilment in St Sergius' Monastery in Russia 800 years later.

In this icon you see how an Old Testament prefigurement has been re-worked to bring out the timeless reality that is now known in the 'epoch of the Spirit' (above you can see a contemporary version of the original, made for Keble College Chapel, Oxford.).

This theme was popular in the writings of the Fathers of the early Church, and over the centuries the hospitality of Abraham to three mysterious angelic visitors features in iconography. Rublev draws on many different theological and iconographical strands and creates masterpiece of iconography. Among the many fine elements there is the concept of space and the arrangement of the three angels. The geometric dynamic creates a profound circularity, with each figure seeming to blend into the other through gestures, poses and the sense of interlocking curves. At the same time the icon emerges out of the icon border into the present moment where the beholder stands, through the use of inverse perspective. Here the icon is clearly a place of encounter, where we don't look through a window as spectators, somewhat detached and analytical of what is before our eyes, but doors through which the Divine enters our world. In this sense this is Incarnational art, where the divine and the secular are united and in harmony around all that is good.

So much is woven into this icon that here we can only just briefly touch on this one aspect, but it is well worth taking the trouble to look more closer and in greater detail at this magnificent example of the icon.

THE BIRTH OF ICONOGRAPHY

I should say at the outset that what is written here is my own theory theory as to how iconography as we know it came about. Art historians would disagree, but I believe thte evidence, while circuymstantial, is compelling.

The breakthrough into this ascetical and eschatological dimension of liturgical art took place, quite possibly, in the monasteries of 6th century Palestine. We can see the shift and the energy behind the change by comparing the icon of the transfiguration in the apse of St Catherine's monastery in Sinai with the representation of the transfiguration in St Apollinaire in Classe, both executed under imperial directive and within maybe 20 years of each other.

Here we see the emergence of classic iconography. Devoid of any naturalistic setting, the work is pure theology, with shape, size, proportion and ground all worked into a profound manifestation of the liturgical realities found in the monastery. The contemporary image of the Transfiguration comes from St Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna. Here there is movement towards iconography but it is yet to 'break through'. Both images have the gilded background, but in Ravenna it is a golden sky, rather than the spiritual vastness of the icon which is what we see in the Sinai mosaic. Both have moved beyond a naturalistic scene, Sinai reducing it to strips of gradated colour while Ravenna has a paradise setting of fantastic tress and shrubs. Both are located to the liturgical celebration of the place – St Apollinaire dominates the mosaic in the apse of the church dedicated to him, while the transfiguration brings together the figures of Moses and Elijah both of whom had theophanies prefiguring that of the Transfiguration at the site of the monastery. However, the

TOP: ST APOLLINARE IN CLASSE, BELOW: ST CATHERINE'S MONASTERY, SINAI

Ravenna mosaic is highly symbolic, with sheep to represent the apostles, and the

glorified Cross the Transfigured Person of Christ.

This symbolic representation, added to the plethora of fantastic vegetation and the relatively sparse figuration of two angels and the saintly bishop give it a definitely late Roman rather than iconographic feel. There isn't yet the theological confidence to deal with the figurative element which is essential in iconography.

The theology of iconography was codified and synthesised long after the emergence of this profoundly Christian art form during the Iconoclastic controversies that raged through the Byzantine empire more like a civil war that a debate for more than a century. In the course of this it was the Image of Christ, the Face of the Saviour, which helped define iconography as an incarnational art form. This was because in giving Himself a human face, God had abrogated the injunctions against making images of the Old Covenant. What had been previously impossible without degenerating in idolatory was now made possible in the act of God incarnating Himself as a human person. Thus iconography was an art that sort to humbly re-present what God had presented in the face of Christ; in this it was an essentially figurative tradition, one which spoke directly to and through the human person. It was this which so troubled the iconoclasts and brought the condemnation of Muslims who would later take the Byzantine iconographic tradition, strip it of the figurative and hence the incarnational, and develop merely the geometric elements that spoke of God's unutterable properties.

Thus the minor part played by the figures of St Apollinare and the angels, and the predominance of the abstract and symbolic mean that the Ravenna work has not yet emerged as a fruit of a culture rooted in the reality of the incarnation but still ill at ease in an older culture whose roots lay in pagan Rome and Greece, which results in a certain constraint and restraint.

However, with the Sinai mosaic we have a bursting forth of the glories of the Incarnation. Here the human figure is monumental, dominant and yet transformed to speak of higher truths than simply naturalistic form. Christ dominates as a human figure, resplendent in majesty, who looks out confidently from a face devoid of sentimentality. He dominates the whole composition, as all the other figures radiate out from Him, and they 'melt' around Him. The use of the nimbus adds a theological statement of the divine Mystery within which Christ is presented to the worshipper. Perspective is manipulated to proclaim truth as found in the Person of the Christ. The golden background is not a gilded sky but an endless work of beauty, reflecting the Divine Glory first seen among the Hebrew tribes as they passed through Sinai as a pillar of fire, which came as the 'glory' upon the mountain of Sinai that the monks now worshiped on, and which filled the Tent of Meeting first erected beneath the shadow of the mount of Sinai which was itself a sign of Christ's incarnation when God in Christ 'tabernacled' among us full of grace and truth.

The particular associations of Moses, Elijah and the Transfiguration have been profoundly worked in the Sinai mosaic with rich theological and spiritual reflections which break open the events of the Old Covenant in the Person of Christ. It is hard to imagine how such a flow of theological coherence could have been easily produced anywhere but among the monks who lived in that place and reflected on its profound theological significance, a reflection that reached its zenith in the celebration of the Christian Liturgy in that monastic church where the mosaic was erected as its dominant image above the altar, at which point those truths became known. This is an ascetical Christian image, the fruit not of artistic observation but of a spiritual journey into the Mystery of God.

This is in marked contrast to the Ravenna image, which while a work of great grace and workmanship, lacks that profound sense of interior vision. It is a theological work, and not a simplistic or superficial one, but the image doesn't in itself make Christ known as it does in the Sinai icon. It lacks a certain mystical reality. It simply sends you on a mental journey to Text the Truth known in Christ; it doesn't enable you to encounter something of it in itself.

That the Sinai mosaic was the work of the local monks, and not some imported theological schema from Constantinople, is not only reasonably conjectured but is evidenced by the inscription of two names along the border of the mosaic, one of whom was the Abbot of the community.

The remarkable survival of the apse mosaic of St Catherine's monastery gives us perhaps the earliest icon, and not just as a devotional piece but still in its original setting and fulfilling its original purpose. Given the ravages of iconoclasm, war, conquest, re-building, neglect and indifference that so often filled the annals of the history of the Holy Land that in itself is quite, should we say, miraculous. The existence of other early icons helps to place that in context and gives substance to our observations about the nature of the transition from Christian religious art from late Antiquity to the iconography of the Byzantine era.

Maybe the process had already begun in other monasteries in the region but certainly we can see that the time of its execution, in comparison to other fine works such as the Transfiguration mosaic in Ravenna, puts it on the cusp of that transition from an art based on a pagan culture to one that was rooted in the world view of Christians who believed in the incarnation of God and that reached its apex in the celebration of the Liturgy. Undoubtedly Christians, especially monastic, were yearning and searching for forms of artistic expression that could best tune into the growing insights of the Church into the nature of Christ, the saints, salvation, heaven and the meaning of the Christian liturgy. That they should be doing so more in the Holy Land than elsewhere is self-evident given the particular fervour of pilgrimage, and monastic life lived so close to the historical well-springs of the Christian faith.

It is a fitting tribute to the cultural vitality, spiritual energy, economic abundance and intellectual rigour which reached unique heights during the Byzantine period, that

the birth of Christian iconography should be found in Palestine during this period. This marked the first art form truly at home in its Christian context. Christian art was no longer a pastiche of pagan concepts infused with Christian dogmas but an art form which itself was a product of the incarnation. It is Palestine's greatest contribution to world history, apart from Christ Himself, an enduring legacy that has inspired art in the west from the dark ages until modern times, being as it were the tap root of European and even Islamic art (which was to borrow so much from it).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