



ICONS: THEOLOGY IN COLOURS

Text and image in early Byzantine hagiography sixth and seventh centuries

By Matthew Dal Santo

Wednesday 9 December at 15.00 in room 110 (building 1441)

In recent years, the existence of a 'cult of icons' in early Byzantium has been increasingly questioned: several prominent scholars have argued that the veneration of religious images played a role in contemporary patterns of piety so marginal that there is reason to doubt even the widespread existence of such images before the iconoclastic controversies of the eighth century. Indeed, it is a hallmark of such studies to emphasise the very limited dimensions of whatever actual dispute the modern use of the term 'Iconoclasm' has come to denote – or, as it were, 'mask'. The current paper attempts to re-assert both the positive existence of a cult of religious images in the period before 'Iconoclasm' and its amplitude, especially as a fundamental aspect of the culture of Christian pilgrimage in early Byzantium. The paper does this by rehabilitating a number of 'icon stories' found in hagiography from between 550 and 650, which sceptics of a contemporary cult of images have taken to reflect iconophile interpolations of a later date. Crucial evidence for the rehabilitation of these stories (and the images they describe) comes from two overlooked sources, the one textual, the other archaeological.

Biographical Information

Dr Matthew Dal Santo is a Research Fellow in Medieval History at Trinity College in the University of Cambridge, UK. He was awarded his doctorate in 2009 for a dissertation that explored the existence of a significant debate about the nature and propriety of the Christian saints' cult in early Byzantium, which focused particularly on Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogues on the Miracles of the Italian Fathers*. The revised version of this is expected to appear shortly with Oxford University Press as *Debating the Saints' Cult: Devotion and Doubt in the Age of Gregory the Great*. He is married to Gitte Lønstrup.



The Research Group of the Priority Area: Theme 1 (The discursive fights over the religious texts in antiquity)

and the Department of Systematic Theology are organizing the series of lectures on the topic: Icons: Theology in Colours