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Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium

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Within his hymns, the sixth-century liturgical poet Romanos the Melodist gave voice to a wide range of biblical characters.¹ He composed dialogues, imaginatively reconstructing the interactions of biblical personae. In his Christological hymns, his audience might witness Christ's interaction with Mary, Peter, Thomas, or the sinful woman.² In hymns on Old Testament themes, his listeners attended the narratives of Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, and Jonah. Keying his hymns to the events of the liturgical calendar, Romanos gave psychological depth to biblical heroes and villains, modelling a whole range of possible interactions both with the sacred stories and with God himself. Andrew Louth has written, 'For Romanos the kontakion is a form of liturgical story-telling. In each case, an event, as related in the Scriptures and celebrated in the Liturgy, is retold in such a way as to enable those who hear it to enter into it'.³ And Georgia Frank stresses the hymns' articulation of the place of biblical narrative in early Byzantine ritual drama, arguing that 'Romanos's hymns ... represent the emergence of biblical epic in the context of Christian worship'.⁴

Biblical characters, however, are not the only persons who sing in Romanos's hymns. The poet often gave voice to himself. In approximately 40 per cent of the indisputedly genuine

¹ The Greek text of Romanos used here is P. Maas and C.A. Trypanis, ed., *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford 1963) (hereafter, Romanos, *Hymns*). I have also consulted the Sources chrétiennes edition of J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed., *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 5 vols, SC 99, 110, 114, 128, 283 (Paris 1965–1981). Because the numbering in that edition differs from the Oxford edition, I have supplied the SC hymn number in parentheses at the first citation of each hymn. The poems also appear with emendations in R. Maisano, ed. *Canitici di Romano il Melodo*, 2 vols (Turin 2002). Where possible I have employed the fine translations of Ephrem Lash, trans., *On the Life of Christ: Kontakia* (San Francisco 1995), occasionally modified. Translations of other hymns are my own, although I have consulted R.J. Schork, trans., *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist* (Gainesville 1995); and M. Carpenter, trans., *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, 2 vols (Columbia 1970–73).

² On the dialogic qualities of the hymns see G.W. Dubrov, 'A dialogue with death: ritual lament and the *Threnos Theotokou* of Romanos the Melodos', *GRBS* (1994), 385–405; G. Frank, 'Dialogue and deliberation: the sensory self in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist', in D. Brakke, et al., eds, *Religion and the Self in Antiquity* (Bloomington 2005), 163–79.

³ A. Louth in Lash, *On the Life of Christ*, xvi.

⁴ G. Frank, 'Romanos and the night vigil in the sixth century', in D. Krueger, ed., *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis 2006), 59–77.

hymns, the cantor sings in the first person singular in the first or the final strophes.⁵ (The first person also occurs in many of the preludes, or proemia, to the poems as they have been handed down in the manuscript tradition, although these proemia do not always reflect the original composition.) The frequency with which Romanos sings himself within his poems prompts inquiry into the construction of the poems' 'I'. What is on display in these first-person passages? J.H. Barkhuizen took a formalist approach to the proemia and final strophes, cataloguing a variety of prayer types employed, including doxology, confession, and exhortation.⁶ In their adherence to standard forms, these passages offer an important window on early Byzantine piety and self-expression.

Romanos's first-person passages also reveal the liturgical formation of the singer's identity. In the final strophe of the hymn *On the Ten Virgins I*, for example, Romanos turns to himself. Singing in his own voice, he situates himself within the divine drama, taking the role of a supplicant in need of God's help. He prays to be able to carry out the Christian teachings that he himself advocates.

Release me, release me, Saviour, condemned as I am by all men,
For I do not do what I tell the people and advise them to do.
And therefore I fall down before you, grant contrition, Saviour,
both to me and to those who hear me,
so that we may uphold all your commandments in our lives.⁷

Performing before congregants at the vigil preceding the Tuesday of Holy Week, Romanos presents himself as an imperfect teacher, confessing that he does not practice what he preaches, in need not only of pardon, but even of contrition.⁸ He rhetorically prostrates himself before God, verbally enacting the posture of penance. While the poet addresses God, his primary audience for this prayer for salvation is the gathering of lay Christians that has come to church to hear him chant. He prays not only for himself but on their behalf as well. He presents himself not so much to confess himself, but to model such a confessing self for his listeners.

⁵ The cantor sings in the first person in the first or final strophes of *Hymns* 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 21, 29, 30, 31, 34, 37, 40, 41, 44, 47, 48, 49, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57. The sample expands if we add the first person address in the proemia of 7, 21, 50, 51. See also J.H. Barkhuizen, 'Analysis of the form and content of prayer as liturgical component in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 75 (1991), 91–102.

⁶ J.H. Barkhuizen, 'Romanos Melodos and the composition of his hymns: prooimion and final strophe', *Hellenika* 40 (1989), 62–77. See also J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Liturgie et hymnographie: Kontakion et Canon', *DOP* 34/35 (1980–81), 31–43.

⁷ Romanos, *Hymns* 47.31 (= SC 51). The manuscript tradition preserves multiple versions of the hymn *On the Ten Virgins I*. The first strophe appears in all manuscripts, and the final strophe is secure even in variant forms of the hymn. See Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 3:303–23.

⁸ Maisano (*Cantici*, 1:99–102) has produced a useful table indicating the place of each poem within the liturgical cycle.

The openings and closings of the hymns engage in the production of Romanos the Melodist. His persona emerges as an effect of these strophes. In their presentation of an ideal piety, the hymns of Romanos offer important evidence for the history of the self in Byzantium. With reference to another early Christian author, Averil Cameron has written that 'the self-conscious Christian creates his own self, and does so through the medium of texts, which in turn assume the function of models'.⁹ The 'I' of Romanos's poems participates in self-presentation and self-disclosure. It engages in introspection and divulges its interiority. It identifies itself as the subject of interrogation and accusation. Generated through processes of confession, it names itself as sinner. Romanos's 'I' is the product of a particular knowledge of the self, formed within a Christian narrative of fault and redemption. The poet, moreover, does not claim exclusive right over his conception of the self, but rather presents it with generalising force: all those who hear him need God's assistance; all must inevitably acknowledge their sins. The exploration of Romanos's use of the first person thus involves the investigation of not only the persona of Romanos but also early Byzantine models of the self.

The consideration of the self within the hymns of Romanos does not, in fact, entail the search for the biographical or historical Romanos within his corpus. Despite the frequent appearance of the 'I' in the poems, Romanos left few traces of his life-story in his works. Nearly anything that might qualify as historical information about Romanos derives not from his poems, but rather from brief notices in middle Byzantine service books. It is here that we learn that the poet was born in the Syrian city of Emesa and served as a deacon in the Church of the Resurrection in Beirut before arriving in Constantinople during the reign of Anastasius I, that is, before 518. These sources inform us that he served as a cantor and composer at the Church of the Theotokos in the Kyrou district in the northwest corner of the capital, where he was eventually buried.¹⁰ Romanos wrote hymns for a wide variety of liturgical feasts during much of the reign of Justinian, of which at least sixty survive. He died sometime after 555. Attempts to situate Romanos within the political and religious contexts of Justinian's reign depend, albeit often quite reasonably, on inference and conjecture.¹¹

The hymns, termed *kontakia* only in the ninth century, are chanted verse sermons, keyed to the events of the liturgical calendar and were performed during the night-vigils that

⁹ A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: the development of Christian discourse* (Berkeley 1991), 57.

¹⁰ For the discussion of the sources for Romanos's biography, see J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris 1977), 159–98. See also Schork, *Sacred Song*, 3–6; Lash, *On the Life of Christ*, xxvi–xxviii; Maisano, *Cantici*, 1:9–11, 33–8; J. Koder, 'Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum: Überlegungen zur Beeinflussung des kirchlichen Auditoriums durch das Kontakion', *Anzeiger der philoso.-histor. Klasse* 134 (1997–99), 63–9; H. Hunger, 'Romanos Melodos, Dichter, Prediger, Rhetor – und sein Publikum', *JÖB* 34 (1984), 16; D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: the practice of authorship in the early Christian East* (Philadelphia 2004), 166–69 (= Krueger, 'Writing and redemption in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist', *BMGGS* 27 [2003], 2–44).

¹¹ See for example, J. Koder, 'Justinian's Seig über Salomon', in *Θυμιάματα, στρημνήμη της Αναστασίας Μηνός* (Athens 1994), 135–42.

preceded principal feasts.¹² They consist of a short prelude and approximately eighteen to twenty-four stanzas of identical metre. The last line of the prelude introduces a refrain that is used at the end of each of the subsequent stanzas. While some of the more complex refrains were almost certainly sung by a choir that had practiced in advance of the vigil, it is possible that the entire congregation joined in some of the simpler ones.¹³ In each of Romanos's hymns, the initial letters of each stanza form an acrostic, usually some variant of the phrase, 'BY THE HUMBLE ROMANOS'. Through these acrostics, of course not heard in performance, Romanos attached his identity to the texts and identified himself – tacitly – with a principle Christian virtue, namely humility.¹⁴ While the poet encrypted his identity as 'the humble Romanos' into the hymns' acrostics, he scripted other aspects of his persona into the audible text, generating a performable identity, the subject of the poems' first-person singular speech.

In some sense, then, the first-person passages in the opening and closing strophes are autobiographical, scripting the self, but not because they provide historical details about the poet. Despite an outward display of inner turmoil, Romanos reveals no coherent individual narrative of the self, no story of Romanos. Here Romanos does not so much give evidence for the interior religious life of the Melodist, as provide a repertoire of performances of the self at prayer. As in his treatment of biblical figures, these passages present characterisations. Romanos proffers a style of Christian self-presentation with its implied patterns for Christian self-understanding.

The Prospect of Judgement and the Formation of the Conscience

One place to look for the self in the works of Romanos is in his characterisation of the conscience, the interior dialogue about right and wrong. Romanos's performance of conscience-stricken self-regard animates his hymn *On the Second Coming*. Composed for the first Sunday in Lent, and thus introducing the entire penitential season, the poem engages in a sustained meditation on the end of time. In the first strophe, singing in the first person, Romanos frames a sinner's response to the prophecy of the last judgement:

When I think of your dread tribunal, O Lord supremely good,
and the day of judgement,
accused by conscience [συνείδησις], I quake and tremble.¹⁵

¹² A. Lingas, 'The liturgical place of the kontakion in Constantinople', in C. Akentiev, ed., *Liturgy, Architecture, and Art in Byzantine World* (St Petersburg 1995), 50–57.

¹³ On the form and metre of the hymns, see Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines*, 3–37; on the refrains see Koder, 'Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum', 70–94.

¹⁴ See Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 169–74 (on Romanos's acrostics) and 94–109 (on authorial performances of humility).

¹⁵ Romanos, *Hymns* 34.1 (= SC 50), trans. Lash, 221.

Here Romanos becomes the exemplar of a penitent Christian, wracked with guilt at the prospect of eternal punishment. Already here on earth, his conscience makes its accusation in light of a juridical process to come:

When you are about to take your seat on your throne [see Matt. 25:31] and make examination, then none will be able to deny their sins,
where truth is the accuser and dread the warden (34.1; trans. Lash 221).

In the present, interior reflection acts as a stand-in for the principle of 'truth', which will prosecute the sinner in the divine court of the age to come. Romanos dramatises how the fear of judgement effects the formation of conscience.

Romanos depicts the Christian conscience as an interior courtroom. As the first strophe of the hymn indicates, the conscience convicts the self in anticipation of eschatological judgement. Toward the end of the poem, Romanos once again interjects himself, identifying as the subject of divine wrath:

At the home of judgement, how great and how many the lamentations of the condemned,
of whom I am one and the first (34.22).

And in the final strophe, Romanos models for the congregation petitionary and intercessory prayer in light of his conscience's judgement:

All-holy Saviour of the world, as you appeared and raised up nature
that was lying in offences,
as you are compassionate, appear invisibly to me also, O Long-Suffering.
Raise me up, I beg, as I lie in many sins,
because what I say and advise for others I do not observe.
But I implore you, give me time for repentance,
and, at the intercessions of the Ever-Virgin and Mother of God, spare me
and do not cast me away from your presence,
Judge most just (34.24; trans. Lash, 230).

Here Romanos echoes the language and tenor of the penitential psalms, especially Psalm 51:11 (LXX 50:13): 'Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me'. Following a biblical model, Romanos performs a troubled conscience praying for mercy, instilling practices of introspection and fear in preparation for judgement. Romanos thus cues not only a reaction to the biblical predictions of the judgement to come, but to his own hymnographic explorations. Romanos's hymn should incite pity and fear and trembling in the members of his audience as a sympathetic response to his own self-performance.

Perhaps the most elaborate performance of the self in the surviving corpus of Romanos's hymns is the *Prayer of Romanos* (56 = SC 55), assigned to the fifth Wednesday in Lent.¹⁶

¹⁶ See J.H. Barkhuizen, 'Romanos the Melodist, Kontakion 55SC: a prayer of penitence', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 74 (1992), 107–21.

Rather than reflecting on a single biblical text or liturgical event, Romanos uses the poem to take stock of himself in a season set aside for the cultivation of introspection. Once again, eternal punishment prompts the searching and exposure of the soul. Romanos inscribes the conscience within an elaborate juridical model, one that operates in the present in anticipation of divine judgement and sentence. 'Secretly I forever flog myself, for my own conscience condemns me [τὸ σκευδὸς γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ καταδικάζει με] (56.12), he declaims. His conscience takes the parts of both prosecutor and magistrate in an interior court. He declares,

I have as tribunal [κρίσιον] my own reproach [ἔλεγχος] that punishes me
before I will reach and suffer eternal torment.

Subjected to his own trial and self-conviction, Romanos is vividly wracked with guilt.

In the context of the night vigil, Romanos's performance of anxiety models outwardly and liturgically what he believed should happen interiorly, within the conscience of each person who heard him. Our poet-deacon models this interiority not for his own sake, but rather for the sake of his audience. The hymns of Romanos demonstrate that early Byzantine lay Christians witnessed and were expected to apply models for articulating the self through reflexive scrutiny. Romanos's discursive and performative presentation of the self suggests ways that early Byzantine Christians might regard themselves, indeed how they might be present to themselves as the products of their own self-reflection.

Early Byzantium and the History of the Christian self

The use of the term 'self' to describe the 'I'-speech and its interior operations in Romanos's poems requires some clarification and nuance. As Patricia Cox Miller has explained, contemporary critical theory understands that the 'self' is 'not an autonomous source of meaning but rather a construct, the product of systems of cultural convention'. She continues, 'The discourses of a culture not only set limits to how a self may be understood but also provide models or paradigms that are used to classify or represent that culture's understanding(s) of "selfhood"'.¹⁷ The self on display in the hymns of Romanos is not a trans-historical self, but rather a style of self-presentation rooted in early Byzantine religious culture. Moreover, rhetorical criticism in the study of Mediterranean late antiquity has challenged the idea that the textual record provides unmediated access to Christians' interior realities. Indeed, it is now widely accepted that early Christian literature

¹⁷ P.C. Miller, 'Strategies of representation in collective biography: constructing the subject as holy', in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau, ed., *Greek Biography and Paganism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 2000), 221, n. 5.

represents authorial visions of reality, refracted through a variety of ideological lenses.¹⁸ The poems of Romanos display a contingent self, both a product of and a paradigm for early Byzantine cultural norms and values. The poems enact models for how listeners might understand themselves, by presenting a culturally sanctioned image of the self, the subject of a particular style of self-regard, or subjectivity.¹⁹

The significance of this production of self-knowledge in the corpus of Romanos becomes apparent in the light of scholarly study of the emergence of supposedly distinctive Christian styles of the self. In a broad generalisation about the Christian self, Michel Foucault wrote, 'Each person has a duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognise temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself'.²⁰ The obligation to an inner truth requires ritualised operations on the part of the Christian. The first involved the recognition of oneself 'as a sinner and penitent', while the second involved the verbalisation of one's thoughts and desires to another.²¹ For Foucault this second technique developed initially in the fourth and fifth centuries in monastic circles, where a disciple received spiritual direction from an elder.²² In later centuries, and in the West particularly, Foucault believed that these technologies spread to the laity in sacraments of confession and penance.

The first-person monologues in the corpus of Romanos display such an introspective subjectivity, attesting that such styles of the self were also available in the East and, furthermore, beyond the monastery. In the hymn *On the Second Coming*, Romanos offers a performance of himself engaging in precisely these technologies: self-accusation and verbal confession. Moreover he does so not in a monastic sphere or for a monastic audience, but rather at the urban night vigil, displaying this interior self-recognition before a primarily lay audience. Within the hymn, Romanos models the formation of the Christian subject. In the singing of his hymns, Romanos divulges his knowledge of an inner truth through public display; he declares himself a sinner. God and congregation witness the performance and see, in Romanos's expressions of conscience, something we might call a self.

¹⁸ See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*; E.A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes: dilemmas of a feminist historian after the "linguistic turn"', *Church History* 67 (1998), 1–31; eadem, *Reading Renunciation: asceticism and scripture in early Christianity* (Princeton 1999).

¹⁹ On Romanos and the formation of subjectivity, see also Frank, 'Dialogue and deliberation', 174–5.

²⁰ M. Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in L. Martin, H. Gutman, and P. Hutton, eds, *Technologies of the Self: a seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst 1988), 40. See also, M. Foucault, 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self', in J. Carrette, ed., *Religion and Culture* (New York 1999), 158–81, esp. 171–4.

²¹ Foucault termed the first operation 'exomologesis', and the second 'exagoreusis'. Romanos uses ἔξομολόγησις (23.8.1; cf. 34.17.9) to mean a 'verbal declaration of faith'. See also his uses of ἐξομολόγω at 4.8.6; 50.1.4.

²² For a critique of this model, see D. Brakke, 'Making public the monastic life: reading the self in Evagrius Ponticus' *Talking Back*, in Brakke, ed., *Religion and the Self*, 222–33.

In another context, Stephen Greenblatt has defined the self as 'a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires'.²³ In Romanos, one finds styles of expressing the self that through their reiteration constitute a 'characteristic mode of address'. If, in his confession of inadequate bounds on his own desires, Romanos seems to present a sense of personal disorder, this is because sanctioned styles of self-display dictated the performance of a disordered self. The discursive structure that we may regard as the early Byzantine Christian self involved the manifestation of humility. The valuation of humility urged Christians to regard themselves as greater than no one and to attribute all virtuous action to the work of God. The script for the self included a requisite declaration of inadequacy and disarray.²⁴

Posing questions about eastern Christian conceptions of the self present in the work of Romanos disrupts characterisations of early Byzantines that distinguish them from the trend toward increased interior anxieties among western Christians, especially in the wake of Augustine and John Cassian. For various reasons, the history of the Christian self has bypassed or ignored Byzantium. That Romanos offers such a model of a guilty conscience as normative to a lay and Eastern Christian audience may come as a surprise. Many scholars have held that the 'introspective conscience' developed primarily – or even exclusively – in the Latin West or that it was a distinct product of late antique monastic culture.

Within the New Testament, the conscience [συνείδησις] features as an introspective capacity for moral discernment that can be either clear or troubled. For the most part, the assumption is that the Christian conscience is clear.²⁵ A passage in Romans 7 provides the most significant exception. Here, Paul illustrates a state of guilt-ridden interiority:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good that I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my innermost self [καρὰ τοῦ ἔσω ἀνθρώπου], but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind [νόος], making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! (Rom. 7:15, 18–24; NRSV).

In a landmark essay entitled 'The Apostolic Paul and the introspective conscience of the West', Krister Stendahl argued that in this passage, Paul was not speaking in his own voice, but rather impersonating the interior life of a gentile convert to Jesus when confronting Torah, thus presenting a fictive 'I'. Subsequent scholarship in New Testament studies has generally confirmed that, in this portrayal of interior moral turmoil, Paul employs the

²³ S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago 1980), 1. The problem of locating ancient religious selves is handled particularly well in the introduction to Brakke, ed., *Religion and the Self*, 1–11.

²⁴ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 2–3, 97–104; idem, 'Hagiography as an ascetic practice in the early Christian East', *JR* 79 (1999), 216–32.

²⁵ See for example Romans 2:15; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16.

rhetorical technique of 'speech-in-character' [ἠροσωντοεῖα] common in ancient rhetorical training.²⁶ Models for representing the self-convicted mind abound in ancient tragedy, and students strove for the eloquent vocalisation of a character's ἦθος. But while Paul could imagine the guilty conscience, he did not claim it for himself or assume it to plague his converts. In most of Paul's writings, Paul exhibits what Stendahl called a 'robust' conscience, confident that he was 'blameless' with regard to righteousness under the law (Phil. 3:6).

Stendahl suggested that the introspective conscience, so typical of Roman Catholic and especially Protestant Christianity, did not originate with the letters of Paul, but rather with Augustine's interpretation of Paul, particularly Augustine's reading of Romans 7.²⁷ Although in his conception of an 'inner' human, Paul calls on traditions already present in Plato, for Stendahl and others, it was Augustine who 'created from Romans 7 a normative model of the religious self that in Western culture has become the archetype for inquiry into the individual'.²⁸

This genealogy of the self was not without consequence for views of Byzantium. Stendahl himself wrote that,

Judging at least from a superficial survey of the preaching of the Churches of the East from olden times to the present, it is striking how their homiletical tradition is either one of doxology or meditative mysticism or exhortation but it does not deal with the plagued conscience in the way in which one came to do so in the Western Churches.²⁹

This view has persisted in histories of the Western self. Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: the making of modern identity*, located in Augustine the origins of an 'inner person' and a concomitant 'reflexivity' with respect to that inner person which he claims is 'central to our moral understanding'.³⁰ There are some problems with this account of the self. On the one hand, it is unclear whether Augustine's characterisations of interiority accurately reflect his own self-understanding, or, for that matter, of late ancient Latin-speaking Christians generally, or whether it too is a form of 'speech-in-character' presented as normative. On the other hand, sufficient evidence survives in the Greek patristic tradition to depose claims

²⁶ See S. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven 1994), 1–4, 258–73; idem, 'Romans 7:7–25 as a speech-in-character', in T. Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in his Hellenistic Context* (Edinburgh 1994), 180–202. J.A. Harrill, 'Paul and the slave self', in Brakke, ed., *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, 51–64.

²⁷ K. Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the introspective conscience of the West', *HTR* 56 (1963), 199–215.

²⁸ Harrill, 'Paul and the slave self', 52. See P. Fredriksen, 'Paul and Augustine: conversion narratives, orthodox traditions, and the redemptive self', *JThS*, n.s. 37 (1986), 3–34; E. TeSelle, 'Exploring the inner conflict: Augustine's sermons on Romans 7 and 8', in D. Paitte and E. TeSelle, eds, *Engaging Augustine on Romans: self, context, and theology in interpretation* (Harrisburg 2002), 111–146. For Paul's debt to Plato, see H.D. Betz, 'The concept of the "inner human being" (*ho esō anthropos*) in the Anthropology of Paul', *NTS* 46 (2000), 315–413.

²⁹ Stendahl, 'Paul and the introspective conscience', 205.

³⁰ C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of modern identity* (Cambridge, Mass. 1989), 139.

of western distinctiveness regarding the development of Christian ideas about conscience and the self. Byzantium has much to offer to the history of the self in Christian cultures.

A less superficial survey of Greek Christian literature shows agony over a guilty state of mind in early Byzantine texts. Public sermons and ascetic instruction encouraged Christians in the eastern Mediterranean to discern the movements of their souls and to develop a discourse within themselves about their desires. Significantly, Athanasius and John Chrysostom encouraged their audiences, monks and lay people respectively, to keep a written diary of their sins, revealing that the act of introspection was conceived as an act of representation, the representation of the self to the self.³¹ The role of the conscience, both *συνειδόξ* and *συνείδησις*, in the formation of Christian self-conception features prominently in John Chrysostom's sermons and commentaries, where the preacher accords the conscience an authority only second to God's for judging the Christian.³² A single passage from a sermon *On Lazarus* illustrates the vividness with which Chrysostom conjures the guilty conscience:

Even before the punishment to come, those who practice wickedness and live in sin are punished in this life. Do not simply tell me of the man who enjoys an expensive table, who wears silken robes, who takes with him flocks of slaves as he struts in the marketplace: unfold (*ἀνάρουσον*) for me his conscience [*συνειδόξ*], and you will see inside a great tumult of sins, continual fear, storm, confusion, his mind approaching the imperial throne in his conscience as if in a courtroom, sitting like a juror, presenting arguments as if in a public trial, suspending his mind and torturing it for his sins, and crying aloud, with no witness but God who alone knows how to watch [these inner dramas]. The adulterer, for example ... even if he has no accuser, does not cease accusing himself within. The pleasure is brief, but the anguish is long lasting, fear and trembling everywhere, suspicion and agony ... He goes about bearing with him a bitter accuser, his conscience; self-condemned, he is unable to relax even a little. ... There is no way to corrupt that court. Even if we do not seek virtue, we still suffer anguish when we are not seeking it; and if we seek evil, we still experience the anguish when we cease from the pleasure of sin.³³

Opening and inspecting the conscience divulges secret torment. In Chrysostom's juridical model, the conscience performs the work of informant, witness, juror, judge, and gaoler. Although he describes this model in the third person, from the outside, his rhetorical performance encourages his audience to consider themselves within this model. The dramatisation of the guilt-ridden conscience functions as an opportunity for his listeners' self-recognition.

The writings of late ancient Greek Christians also include first-person expressions of conscience, including sophisticated models for its operations within the self and in the formation of the self. In a study of the discourses of the self in the letters of Theodoret

³¹ Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 55; John Chrysostom, *Hom. on Matt.* 41.6 (PG 57.540).

³² See J. Stelzenberger, 'Conscientia in der ost-westlichen Spannung der patristischen Theologie', *Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift* 141 (1961), 174–205.

³³ John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus* 1.11 (PG 48.979); trans. C.P. Roth, *St. John Chrysostom: On Wealth and Poverty* (Crestwood, NY 1984), 34–5.

of Cyrillus, Philip Rousseau has observed the fifth-century bishop's use of the word *συνειδόξ* in the literary display of the author's inner world. Rousseau points to Theodoret's 'inherent capacity for self-criticism'.³⁴ Although it is impossible to bridge the gap between the presentation of the self and the interior subjective experience of the self with certainty, Rousseau shows how, for Theodoret, his conscience represented both his moral action of self-reflection and the knowledge derived from introspection. Conscience thus functioned as an epistemological tool for knowing the self. Conscience participated in his ruminations as a witness of his actions both external and internal, and participated in a dialogue with God, in which God was able to see Theodoret thinking. As in Chrysostom, conscience is the interior double of the divine gaze.

The poems of Romanos, therefore, do not *initiate* new conceptions of the self. Romanos was not the first Byzantine writer to model patterns of conscience-stricken interiority, nor was he the last. Indeed, such first-person performances of the conscience occur with some frequency in Byzantine religious poetry, including the eighth-century *Great Canon* of Andrew of Crete and the eleventh-century *Hymns of Divine Love* of Symeon the New Theologian. Thus, in his practice of vocalising interiority, Romanos provides evidence for a Byzantine Christian aesthetics of the self that further research may determine was relatively common. The corpus of Romanos contributes an important chapter in the development of an introspective conscience in Byzantium because it exhibits a cultural moment in which the 'speech-in-character' of the guilt-ridden Christian had become normative speech. Romanos's 'I' voiced a generalised model for Christian self-understanding.

The Typological Self

The early Byzantine self on display in the poems of Romanos, while affording little access to Romanos the individual, grants a view of the Christian person embedded in and responding to the liturgical cycle. The self that emerges is a trope of the self, at once a generic Christian self and a self listening to biblical narrative. Typically, Romanos contrasts himself to the biblical exemplar discussed in a hymn, modelling self-consciousness as an appropriate response to the sacred story. As a by-product of biblical exegesis, Romanos constructs this self in dialectical relationship with the biblical lection.

In the first strophe of the hymn *On the Ten Virgins I*, possibly written for the Tuesday of Holy Week, Romanos models for his audience how to meditate on the meaning of the gospel passage:

When I heard the sacred parable of the virgins, which is in the Gospels,
I stopped, stirring up reflections and thoughts (ἐνθυμήσεις καὶ λογισμούς).

³⁴ P. Rousseau, 'Knowing Theodoret: text and self', in D. Martin and P.C. Miller, eds, *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: gender, asceticism, and historiography* (Durham, NC 2005), 278–97, quotation at 285.

How was it that the ten possessed the virtue of immaculate virginity, and yet for five virgins the suffering remained fruitless whereas the others shone with lamps of humanity? (47.1; = SC 51)

Such passages have a hermeneutic function, as the poet guides his audience to contemplate the moral point of the passage. Romanos models devotional life in the moral exegesis of scripture. Scripture itself functions dynamically, able to effect 'reflection' and 'thought', not merely on the lectionary passage, but on the self. Scriptural readings thus have a reflexive function for the listener.

Romanos's self-insertion, his reflexive view of himself, usually consists in his recognition that he does not compare favourably with biblical exemplars. He expresses desire to imitate biblical models, and implicitly forms such desires in his listeners. But he fails to make the mark. In his liturgical reflection on the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, a story that appeared in the lectionary for the fourth Sunday of Lent, Romanos sings:

I, a young man, [ὁ νέος ἄνθρωπος] wish to imitate you, old man [Abraham] as you climb the mountain, but my legs are numb.
Even if the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak (41.1; = SC 3).

Quoting Jesus' warning to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:41; cf. Mark 14:38), Romanos invokes the same passage that for Augustine prompted reflection on divergent wills within the human person.³⁵ Like Augustine, Romanos eschews a dualistic dichotomy between spirit and flesh, locating the problem in the soul, which needs encouragement to follow Abraham's example, even as it will fail to do so. The typological contrast between the 'I' of the poem and patriarch Abraham thus sets up the exegetical project not only as an exploration of the biblical story, but also of the failures of the self.

The exposure of truths about the self through biblical exegesis means that the self consists in an intertextual relationship with scripture. Stitched along the borders of the fabric of biblical narrative, the 'I' in the initial and final strophes laments in self-knowledge. Exegesis affords an epistemology of the self, a tool for self-recognition. More than a simple instance of the moral interpretation of biblical lessons, the interrogation of the self frames and guides the exegesis within the poem. The goal, or σκοπός, of the dialogic exploration of the Bible is a typological knowledge of the self.

The power of contrasting the self with biblical types in the formation of a knowledge of the self is acutely manifest in Romanos's hymn *On Joseph II* (44; = SC 6), written for the Monday of Holy Week.³⁶ Here, Romanos dramatises Joseph's steadfast rejection of Potiphar's wife's increasingly lurid sexual advances. In its emphasis on virtues of prudence and self-control, the hymn, in fact, presents an extended discourse on conscience and its

³⁵ See *Confessions* 7, 8.

³⁶ For discussion of this poem, see Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 1:247–50; J.H. Barkhuizen, 'Romanos Melodos, On the Temptation of Joseph: a study on his use of imagery', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 1 (1990), 1–31.

relation to God's omniscience. The refrain stresses the subjection of all people to divine surveillance: 'Because the eye that never sleeps sees everything'. The refrain resembles the sentiments of Proverbs 15:3, 'The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, observing the evil and the good', and also echoes Basil of Caesarea's formulation that 'The unsleeping eye sees everything'.³⁷

As the poem progresses, and the audience observes Joseph persistently rejecting his would-be seductress, Joseph also is watching himself internally, observing his own thoughts:

Even if those we live with do not see our act,
for they are human and do not see what is hidden,
yet I have my conscience [τὸ σκεπτικὸν μου] for an accuser³⁸
if I should dare to do this lawless deed (44.16).

Joseph's conscience is thus able to see what is hidden within himself and has prosecutorial power to accuse him of sin.³⁹ The conscience thus functions as an aspect of the self that mirrors or replicates the vision of God with respect to the self. Moreover, this conscience does not work independently of God, but rather functions entirely on the assumption of God and his divine knowing. The strophe continues,

And even if no one would convict [ἐλέγξει] me of adultery,
I have a judge who needs no proof [ἐλέγγου].
Always when I think of him [ἐνθυμούμενος], I shudder
and I flee from shameful pleasures,
because the eye that never sleeps sees everything (44.16).

Joseph's conscience thus acts within the context of the contemplation of God. Romanos presents Joseph as a moral model because of his double subjection; he lies under the purview of both his conscience and God. Both the conscience and God are able to see what is hidden, and the conscience acts upon the soul in order to avoid divine opprobrium.

While Joseph's conscience remains clear, Romanos's does not. At the end of the hymn, the authorial voice engages in pointed self-accusation. Romanos contrasts himself with Joseph:

When the lewd woman flattered him with word and deed,
[Joseph] spurned all her shameless promises.
He chose death rather than the dungeon of lust.

³⁷ Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7.5.29: Πάντα σκοπεῖ οὐ ἀκοίμητος ὀφθαλμὸς. Edition: S. Giet, *Basile de Césarée. Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, 2nd ed., SC 26bis (Paris 1968). The 'unsleeping eye' also appears in a number of homilies spuriously attributed to John Chrysostom that could either pre- or post-date Romanos.

³⁸ For this reading see Maisano, *Cantici*, 1:90; 2:260.

³⁹ For the forensic images in the poem see Barkhuizen, 'Romanos Melodos, On the Temptation of Joseph', 12–14.

But what shall I do, miserable and condemned I [ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ κατακρίτος ἐγὼ], since sin always clutches me in her hand? (44.22).

The first person pronoun, employed with emphatic force at the end of the line, underscores the gap between Romanos and Joseph. Furthermore, the poet hypostatizes Pourphar's wife as sin itself in all its seductive force. Even as the refrain posits the power of an external observer to shape the behaviour of the observed, and even in light of Joseph's ability to employ internal observation to control himself, Romanos confesses a much more complicated relationship with his conscience. He is not like Joseph, who according to the proemion:

because he feared lest he sin [δέδοικός μὴ ἁμαρτήσαι].
was seen as righteous

The repetition of the refrain through the following twenty-two strophes persistently reinforces the idea that the theatre of human performance plays out in a divine panopticon. Within this context, the love of wisdom, φιλοσοφία, teaches humanity the virtues of 'mindfulness ... courage ... prudence and justice' (44.1). Although the Melodist offers Joseph's habits of mind as a model for achieving self-control, he presents himself as an illustration of failure.

In the corpus of Romanos, conscience, like exegesis, both guides and convicts. As Romanos sings at the end of in his hymn *On Doubting Thomas*:

I am frightened, for I know your counsels,
I know my works. Conscience [συνείδος] troubles me.
Spare me, my Saviour (30.18; = SC 46; trans. Lash, 190-191).

In contrasting himself with biblical exemplars, Romanos presents a subjectivity different from the subjectivity that he ascribes to the holy men of the past. In doing so he offers a typology of the Christian self. Responding to scripture, the 'I' of the poems models typical styles of early Byzantine religious compartment, not the heroic patterns of the saints, but the reflexive subjectivity of the ordinary Christian, one who recognises himself as a sinner in need of redemption. In this self-characterisation, Romanos echoes trends among the authors of early Byzantine hagiography, who often employed their prologues and epilogues to contrast themselves with the saints they narrated.⁴⁰ In some sense, Byzantine selves succeeded not when they achieved the unattainable level of the saints but rather when they exhibited the compunction of the hagiographer.

If Joseph's heeding his conscience exemplifies the good, Judas's disregard for the dictates of conscience instantiate an all-too-present evil. Romanos's treatment of Judas suggests that Romanos's regular performance of moral imperfection was considerably better than some alternatives. Romanos's hymn *On Judas* thematises the consciencelessness of the apostle who betrayed Christ with an extended invective, addressed directly to Judas in the second person:

⁴⁰ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 94-109.

The receipt of the money in the purse, he gave to your trust, and ungrateful [ἀσυνείδητος, literally 'without conscience'] for all this you suddenly appeared against him (17.5; = SC 33; trans. Lash, 117).⁴¹

The cantor rants at Judas in the vocative,

you ravenous, profligate, implacable,
shameless, and gluttonous, conscienceless [ἀσυνείδητε], lover of money!
(17.15; trans. Lash, 121, modified).

He declares to Judas, 'Your conscience condemns you [τὸ συνείδος σου κατακρίνει σε]' (17.22). Although the poem's refrain calls on God to be merciful and patient with the congregation, Romanos does not, in the course of the hymn, connect Judas's condemned conscience explicitly with his own or that of his congregants. On the surface, Judas stands beyond the pale. Nevertheless the hymn's performance on the Thursday of Holy Week suggests that Judas functioned not only as a powerful counter-example but also as a horrifying opportunity for Christian self-recognition on the eve of the crucifixion. Although Romanos never identifies with the arch-villain in *On Judas*, Judas's conscience functions much like his own. His words to Judas recall his self-condemnation in the *Prayer of Romanos* (56), 'my own conscience condemns me [τὸ συνείδος γὰρ ἐαυτοῦ καταδικάζει με]' (56.12).

Judas's role as anti-exemplar would be underscored in the decades after Romanos's death when in either 565 or 577, the patriarch Eutychius added a new *koinonikon* to be chanted during the communion on Holy Thursday: 'At your mystical supper, Son of God, receive me today as a partaker, for I will not betray the sacrament to your enemies, nor give you a kiss like Judas, but like the thief I confess you: remember me, Lord, in your Kingdom'.⁴² The chant encouraged congregants to enter into the liturgical moment by identifying with the thief, the redeemed sinner, and to reject the model offered by Judas. When their lips made contact with the host, the body of Christ, communicants hoped to do so with a kiss of devotion, not betrayal. Judas offered the classic case of the negative type.

The Sinful Romanos

In contrast to Judas, whose betrayal of Christ lies strangely beyond Romanos's empathy, repentant sinners elsewhere in the New Testament provide Romanos with ample models for

⁴¹ On this poem, see the remarks of J.H. Barkhuizen, 'Narrative apostrophe in the kontakia of Romanos the Melodist with special reference to his hymn on Judas', *L'Antiquité classique* 29 (1986), 19-27; A. Louth in Lash, *On the Life of Christ*, 21.

⁴² R. F. Taft, *The Precommunion Rites* (Rome 2000), 307-13; T.H. Schattauer, 'The Koinonikon of the Byzantine liturgy: an historical study', *OCP* 49 (1983), 109-10; D. Krueger, 'Christian piety and practice in the sixth century', in M. Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (New York 2005), 292-97.

self-understanding. In relation to them Romanos articulates his identity as sinner: biblical typology and self-disclosing confession combine. The hymn *On the Sinful Woman* (10 = SC 21) illustrates ways that reflection on the biblical lection can contribute to a typological construction of the self.⁴³ Tradition conflated the sinful woman of Luke 7:36-50 with the woman who anointed Jesus during the supper at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Mt 26:6-13, Mk 14:3-9). Written for the Wednesday of Holy Week, the poem calls listeners to self-examination and repentance in light of the biblical narrative.

Romanos explains his interest in the harlot, offering a key both to his exegesis and his authorial practice:

I would like to search the mind of the wise woman
and to know how Jesus came to shine in her (10.4; trans. Lash, 78).

Romanos frames his reflection on the repentant harlot, or πόρνη, of the gospels with a twofold self-accusation. In the first strophe, he both identifies with her by confessing himself to be a fornicator, one of the πόρνοι, and contrasts himself with her in his failure to repent.

Seeing Christ's words like sweet drops of fragrance
raining down everywhere, and granting breath of life
to all the faithful, the harlot once
came to hate the foul stench of her actions,
as she considered her own shame
and thought over the pain that had been brought about by them.
For there is much affliction there [in Hell] for the fornicators,
of whom I am one, and ready for scourges,
which the harlot quailed at and remained no longer a harlot.
But I [ἐγώ], though I quail, I remain in
the filth of my deeds (10.1; trans. Lash, 77).

By contrasting himself parenthetically with the sinful woman, Romanos stresses how he does not emulate her model of repentance, despite sharing her identity as fornicator and her terror in the face of eternal punishment. He contrasts her response to the words of Christ with his own recalcitrance. Through self-consideration, the woman was moved to conversion. But despite his own reflexivity, Romanos is stuck in his ways. The poet thus stands accused by the biblical narrative that the sinful woman represents.

While Romanos offers the woman as a model, he presents himself to his audience as a counter-example, as one who hears the biblical verses, but does not properly respond. Both of the proemia to this hymn connect the model of the harlot's compunction to the poet's call for forgiveness or deliverance. If only he could imitate the harlot. The poem's second strophe continues the confessional mode of the singing self:

⁴³ On other aspects of this hymn see Frank, 'Dialogue and deliberation', 169-171; and S.A. Harvey, 'Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: biblical women in the Syriac tradition', *JECSS* 9 (2001), 120-24.

I am never willing to abandon my evil deeds.
I do not remember the dreadful things that I am going to see there [in Hell].
I do not consider the compassion of Christ (10.2; trans. Lash, 78).

To his audience, Romanos offers himself as a mediating point between the successful penitent and the self-accused sinner who has, as yet, failed to reform. The character 'Romanos' functions as a stand-in for all Christians. Those singing the refrain, 'the filth of my deeds', engage in self-accusation as a step toward repentance. The story of the penitent signals a path to righteousness for the self-accused. Within the course of the poem, Jesus commands, 'Do not condemn the one who has condemned herself'. And he offers the harlot as a model for all the faithful:

Look at this harlot in front of you, as, like the Church,
she cries out, 'I renounce and I blow upon
the filth of my deeds'. (10.17; trans. Lash, 84).

The singer encourages the congregation not only to model themselves on the sinful woman, but, at least initially, on the poet himself, who reflects the image of the harlot, if imperfectly.

The liturgical function of Romanos's performance of self lies in his presentation of interiority. From the outset, Romanos entwines biblical interpretation with self-regard. In the final strophe, he seals his call to repentance by modelling Christian prayer. First, Jesus commands the penitent harlot and Simon the Pharisee, now shrun:

Depart. You have both been released from the rest of your debts.
Go. You are exempt from every obligation.
You have been freed.

Romanos then returns to himself and prays to have debts forgiven as well.

Therefore, my Jesus, say the same to me,
since I am quite unable to pay you back what I owe ...
as you are compassionate, pardon, forgive
the filth of my deeds (10.18; trans. Lash, 84, modified).

The poem thus effects the formation of the self-accused subject, an identity that the singers of the refrain repeat for themselves. In scripting such a Christian self, Romanos constructs a model for piety in response to biblical narrative, a voicing of an imperfectly biblical self.

Beyond Identity

At the night vigil, Romanos instructed the faithful to keep watch on themselves. Through surveillance, they might come to conform to prescribed styles of Christian self-knowledge.

By his own flawed example Romanos guided his audience to a generic model. Typology tends not toward individuality, but toward varieties of sameness.⁴⁴ Identity is relational; it is always a matter of identity with something else. Romanos supplies a biblical and confessional context in which listeners can identify themselves as just like him, as sinners in need of redemption.

In Romanos, we observe the dissemination of monastic epistemologies of the self among the early Byzantine laity. This discovery should not surprise us: Romanos composed many of his hymns for the seasons of Lent and Holy Week. These were times in the year when Byzantine Christians perceived themselves more acutely as the subject of God's gaze. Romanos's performance of an introspective conscience coheres with the temporary asceticism of Lent. Although ordained a deacon, Romanos himself was apparently never a monk. In his hymn *On Life in the Monastery* (55, = SC 53), assigned to the Saturday of the pre-Lenten cheese-fare week, Romanos positions himself outside the monastery looking in. He praises the monastic life and offers ascetic renunciants as encouragement to lay Christians embarking on the practice of the Lenten fast. He imagines his audience interrogating him, 'if not in mouth, at least in spirit' (55.9), about how he is able to teach about the virtues of asceticism if he himself has not renounced the world. Like the examples provided by most of his biblical characters, the monks present Romanos with a model against which to measure himself.

Early Byzantine monastic models for the self similarly tended toward conformity rather than individuation. In his *Letter to Marcellinus*, Athanasius promoted the chanting of the psalms in part because they provided a script for understanding the self.

These words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul, and thus affected, he might recite them. ... Each psalm is both spoken and composed by the Spirit so that in these same words ... the stirrings of our souls might be grasped, and all of them be said as concerning us, and the same issue from us as our own words.⁴⁵

The singing of psalms both expressed and shaped an interior life. Thus, far from charting a trajectory toward an inner self or the revelation of a core identity, the practices of the monastic life proceeded according to biblical patterns. With specific reference to the great ascetic theorist Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), David Brakke has questioned the Foucaultian model for the formation of the interior self in late ancient monastic life. Rather than ~~the~~ finding the verbalisation and renunciation of an interior self in Evagrius's monastic program, Brakke stresses that for Evagrius, the thoughts that entered the monk's mind came not from within, but rather from exterior demons; indeed, in some important sense, they 'were not in fact his thoughts at all'.⁴⁶ Moreover, the remedy for these thoughts was

⁴⁴ For consideration of this point with respect to hagiography, see Miller, 'Strategies of representation', 209–54; Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 17–27, 191–7.

⁴⁵ Athanasius, *Letter to Marcellinus* 12; trans. R.C. Gregg, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York 1980), 111.

⁴⁶ Brakke, 'Making public the monastic life', 231.

not further introspection, but rather the recitation of biblical verses to ward off the evil demons. Evagrius's ascetic instruction thus moved away from the development of a distinct self and toward the construction of a biblically scripted generic Christian identity.

Romanos's hymns exhibit a similar technology for the formation of identity. Despite his interest in redemption, he shows little interest in the details of a sinner's life. In the hymn *On the Sinful Woman*, Romanos does not dramatise the woman's conversion as such. The story lacks the enumeration of deeds that one receives in Augustine's *Confessions* or the seventh-century *Life of Mary of Egypt*, where the author has the heroine recount her life before conversion in remarkably shocking detail. Instead Romanos portrays the sinful woman only after she had 'come to hate the foul stench of her actions' (10.1). He limits himself to creating for her an interior monologue that occurs after she has determined to approach Christ as a penitent. This allows for an elaborate performance of contrition, but it does not engage in a narration of her life in sin. Romanos is less interested in what she did than in the structure of her interior self-regard once she has resolved to seek forgiveness. In this way, the sinful woman's performance mirrors Romanos's own. He too gives no specifics about his transgressions, but merely supplies the names of sins and the types of sinners with which he identifies.

Instead of specificity or individuality, Romanos proffers something both public and generic. The self on display is both broadly applicable and broadly applied. The performance of self-identification functions as a species of typology: The sinful woman compares herself to Rahab, the harlot who gave refuge to Israelite spies within the walls of Jericho (10.7), and Romanos compares himself to the sinful woman. Romanos models a strategy of biblical interpretation and response to biblical narrative that precipitates his self-designation as sinner. He draws his listeners to self-recognition through biblical narrative, ascetic models, and the preacher's own example. His Christians come to knowledge of themselves through conformity to types. In accord with early Byzantine discourses on virtue, this self was inflected by humility: that is, by patterns of Christian self-regard that valued the effacement of self.

In part because Romanos had produced himself as a generic Christian, his persona detached easily from his person. Cantors other than Romanos sang his hymns and thus not only gave voice to his wide range of biblical figures, they impersonated him as well. Three papyrus fragments and one parchment, all dating from the late sixth or early seventh century, together with a poem by Dioscorus of Aphrodito that employs the name 'Romanos' in an acrostic, attest to the dissemination and popularity of his compositions during and shortly after his lifetime.⁴⁷ The *Miracles of Artemios* (18) reports that during the reign of Heraclius (610–641), one of the recipients of that saint's miracles was 'a certain man who from a tender age used to attend the all-night vigil of the Forerunner and who sang the hymns of the humble Romanos among the saints, right up to the present day

⁴⁷ See J. Koder, 'Romanos der Melode: Der Dichter hymnischer Bibelpredigten in Dokumenten seiner Zeit', in H. Froschauer, C. Gastgeber, and H. Harrauer, eds, *Ein Buch verändert die Welt: Älteste Zeugnisse der Heiligen Schrift aus der Zeit des frühen Christentums in Ägypten* (Vienna 2003), 59–71.

[probably c. 660].⁴⁸ This cantor, whom the text explains had lived on his own for more than 52 years, appears to have had a very long career performing Romanos's hymns. Such ongoing performances of Romanos – in a different church from the one where Romanos had originally performed – strongly suggests that by the seventh century the hymns of Romanos had achieved canonical status. Manuscript evidence indicates that at least some of the kontakia continued to be performed in their entirety during the vigils of the cathedral liturgy, and thus before lay audiences, into the eleventh century.⁴⁹ The subsequent truncation of kontakia in the monastic office to the proemion and the first one or two strophes in many cases preserved the sections of the kontakion where the cantor sang in the voice of Romanos.⁵⁰ From the moment that the historical Romanos sang his hymns, and for centuries thereafter, Romanos became one of the characters in the liturgy and one of the classic Christian selves.

The first-person passages in the hymns of Romanos form the cantor as Christian subject, producing identity through exegesis and ritual. Sung in the course of the public liturgies of the night vigil, they disseminate an early Byzantine conception of the self.⁵¹ In their confession of sinfulness without personal narrative, they engage in technologies of the self without disclosure of specifics. Before a captive audience, Romanos the Melodist becomes a Byzantine Christian Everyman. In the first-person singular, he models styles of interiority and presence to self in the operations of his conscience, thus providing a template for how Byzantine Christians might know themselves. Romanos presents himself as an imperfect icon, the image of a Christian who recognises his failings while celebrating and depending on God. Such an introspective self had become typical in Byzantium.

⁴⁸ V. Crisafulli and J. Nesbitt, ed. and trans., *The Miracles of St Artemios* (Leiden 1997), 114–15.

⁴⁹ Lingas, 'The liturgical place', 54–56.

⁵⁰ On the contents of *kontakaria*, see Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines*, 67–93, 98–118. See also Lingas, 'The liturgical place', 56.

⁵¹ This contrasts with Augustine's *Confessions*, a work that initially circulated only among other learned readers. For the perplexity of one early reader of the *Confessions*, see Augustine, *Letter 12**, ed. J. Divjak (Paris 1987).

THEME V: TEXTS

Chairs: Martin Hinterberger and Ruth Macrides
Commentator: Antony Littlewood

Athanasios Markopoulos: Roman Antiquarianism: Aspects of the Roman Past in the Middle Byzantine Period (9th–11th centuries)

Diether Roderich Reinsch: Zum Edieren von Texten: Über Zitate