The Christian Icon as Information Object

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Abstract

Information studies, from the discipline’s origins in the field of documentation, has long been concerned with the question, What Is a Document? (See, for instance, the work of Paul Otlet, Suzanne Briet, Michael K. Buckland, Ronald E. Day, and Bernd Frohmann). The purpose of this paper is to examine Christian icons—typically paintings, usually in tempera, on wooden panels—as information objects, as documents: documents that obtain meaning through a formula of tradition and standardization, documents around which a sophisticated scaffolding of classification and categorization has developed, documents that highlight their own materiality. Theological arguments that associate the icon with Incarnation are compared and contrasted with theories on the materiality of the document and “information as thing.” Icons are also examined as exemplars of visual and multimedia information objects—all icons are graphic and pictorial, many also incorporate textual information. Through this examination emerges an understanding of the icon as a complex information resource, a resource with origins in the earliest years of Christianity and evolved over centuries with accompanying systems of standardization and classification, a resource at the center of theological and political differences that shook empires, a primarily visual resource within a theological system that places the visual on an equal footing with the textual, a resource with continuing relevance to hundreds of millions of Christians, a resource that continues to evolve as ancient and modern icons take on new material forms made possible through digital technologies.

Keywords: Information, documentation, religion, icons, images.
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And crist was all, by reason as I preve,
Firste a prophete by holy informacion,
And by his doctryne, most worthy of byleve.
—John Lydgate, _Life of Our Lady_. IV. ll. 309-11

We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images.
—Kontakion of the Sunday of Orthodoxy

**Introduction**

Icons are a centuries-old tradition of visual information and documentation integrated into Christian religious worship, particularly in the Christian east and among the adherents of Orthodox Christianity. Icons tell stories; they represent God, angels, saints, people, and animals; they serve as evidence in support of philosophical positions and theological teachings. Why should information scholars be interested in icons? For centuries before the modern phenomenon of widespread literacy, icons and other visual, pictorial documents were the primary “written” or inscribed documentary artifacts, bearing religious and other information among the literate and illiterate alike. So for centuries, textual documents, the primary focus of modern information scholars, were meaningless to the vast majority of “information consumers,” who instead acquired knowledge and information visually, from pictures, or aurally, through speech. This icon is a specific type of visual document that fulfills a special role in many forms of Christian worship and faith, both public and private. The icon functions as liturgical, theological, and spiritual document on the iconostasis and along the walls of a church. Then the icon becomes a different sort of document in a museum, where the liturgical and spiritual potential is diminished, if not eliminated, and the artifacts function instead as examples and evidence of aesthetic or historical matters.
For scholars interested in the role of information in society, icons and the iconoclast controversy of the eight and ninth centuries in the Byzantine Empire provide a fascinating study. In iconoclasm we find a controversy about material documents, moreover visual documents, which caused great upheaval in the world's longest lasting empire. Certainly documents of all types, especially religious texts, play a role in many cultural and social upheavals, conflicts, and controversies, but the iconoclast crisis is noteworthy in the extent to which an entire class of material documents became the focus of the conflict. There were, of course, complex political as well as theological dimensions to this crisis (Ladner, 1940; Mondzain, 2005; Cormack, 2007; Ivanovic, 2010).

Tradition dates the origin of icons to the time of Christ. Historical evidence indicates that “figurative art in the Christian religion only began in earnest in the third century, but from the fourth century onwards icons became more and more part of the everyday life of the faithful” (Cormack, 2007, p. 9). Early Christians debated the legitimacy of representational art and icons, but the debate became an acute crisis when the emperor took a stand. As related by historian Ladner (1940), the controversy over religious images was not a peripheral or secondary issue but “the matter” of intense struggle:

The Byzantine iconoclastic controversy, the great struggle against religious images in the Eastern Roman empire which began between 724 and 726 with measures of the emperor Leo III against the images and ended finally with the institution of the Feast of Orthodoxy in 843, was one of the greatest political and cultural crises of Byzantium.... The question arises very
naturally how this controversy about the religious images could assume such an outstanding importance and lead to such serious convulsions; for iconoclasm was then not only a secondary trouble as in the 16th century Reformation, but the matter of a great conflict. (1940)

By considering the icon as document; analyzing the bundling of image, text, and context; surveying the participation of the icon within a system of indexical relationships, theological, material, philosophical—by doing these things we hope to offer suggestions for why images might assume a role of “outstanding importance and lead to ... serious convulsions.”

A stunningly, often chaotically, visual twenty-first-century information environment offers another motivation for examining the icon. Many have observed the increasingly visual nature of information, most apparent in the prominence of pictures, graphics, and icons on the Web, in computer interfaces, in our iPads and iPhones. The Christian icon is part of a centuries old faith tradition, practiced by hundreds of millions of faithful, in which the icon, a visual resource, shares equal prominence and place of honor with textual documents, including Holy Scripture. When the Byzantine state took away people’s freedom to make, display, and venerate images, many resisted; some died, or were martyred, in the defense of these images. Such a phenomenon would seem a likely object of study for information researchers seeking to understand an increasingly visual information environment.
Theological Information

Ronald E. Day's study *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power* (2001) opens by looking at the entry for “information” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and observing that the use of the term “as a substantive, as a synonym for fact or for knowledge, is relatively new. Until very recently, ‘information’ had the sense of imparting knowledge (in the sense of telling someone something) or of giving sensory knowledge (in the way that our senses inform us of some event)” (2001, p. 1). If we dig down further into the *OED* entry for *information*, we find an explicitly theological and religious definition: “Chiefly Christian Church. Divine influence or direction; inspiration, esp. through the Holy Spirit” (2011). The illustrative quotations for this theological meaning of information include the epigraph from Lydgate that begins this paper and date from *circa* 1450 (Lydgate. *Life of Our Lady*) to 2000, indicating that such usage remains current.

An acknowledgement of at least the possibility of a divine information is not new in information studies. In his 1991 essay “Information as Thing,” Michael Buckland writes

Some people would say that some of their knowledge comes from paraphysical sources, notably from divine inspiration. Others would deny any such nonphysical source of information, but, to the extent that it may exist, information science would have to be incomplete if it were excluded. Not knowing what to say on the subject we merely note it as a possible area of unusual interest within information science. (Buckland, 1991, p. 353)
It is not at all clear that we know what to say on the subject, but we take to heart Buckland’s concern that information studies is incomplete if it excludes the possibility of the paraphysical, the divine, or the sacred, and we find this an unusually interesting area of unusual interest, and one worth pursuing to survey the further boundaries of a complete information studies.

Buckland also turns to the *OED* in his investigation of the concept of *information*, and he identifies in the extended *OED* definition three principle meanings: (1) *information*-as-process, (2) *information*-as-knowledge, and (3) *information*-as-thing. The *OED*’s illustrative quotations for the theological definition demonstrate divine information illustrate all three possibilities: the *process* of exchange between God, especially the Holy Spirit, and the faithful; the *knowledge* (including inspiration, grace, prophecy) received from God; the *thing* of the text, the material documents of Holy Scripture.

**Materiality and the icon**

Many theories and definitions of the document and of information emphasize materiality (Otlet, 1990; Buckland, 1991; Buckland, 1998; Briet, 2006; Frohmann, 2009; Buckland, 1997). First, information exists in many material forms. It is not abstract. It is not disembodied. Even in the digital—so-called “virtual”—realm, there are complex physical material properties to the information that we perceive as intangible bits and bytes traveling through the air to our wireless devices or on beams of light through fiber optic cables. And in most cases this information is, like textual documents, written or inscribed, on the spinner platters of hard drives or other physical media.
The icon presents a special case of material document, insofar as the icon’s materiality is its very raison d'être, the icon’s ability to participate in and represent the divine in a material object is made possible by the Incarnation and the Word taking on flesh. The iconoclasts attacked icons based in part upon their materiality, and the iconophiles defense of icons was based upon the materiality of the icon. The justification of the iconoclasts for their attacks on the holy icons “was their aversion to idolatry” (Ladner, 1940, pp. 133-134) based upon Old Testament prohibitions against making “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” (Exod. 20:4, Lev. 26:1, Deut. 5:8).

The Incarnation, God taking on human nature in the person of Christ, is the “great fact” (Ladner, 1940, p. 134) which allowed iconodule theologians to invalidate the Old Testament prohibition against representational art and icons. The most influential of these theologians is Saint John of Damascus. Byzantine iconoclasm originated from the Byzantine emperors. Saint John, living in Islamic Damascus, was outside the reach of the iconoclast Byzantine emperors, and so free to write his treatises against the emperor and the iconoclast position, and in support of "holy images." Saint John's defense focuses on the Incarnation:

Of old, God the incorporeal and formless was never depicted, but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God. I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and
through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing
matter, through which my salvation was worked. (John, 2003, p. 29)

St. John continues, singing a paean to matter, and significantly, non-textual objects
are placed in positions of equivalence with the written word, the Gospel even:

Is not the thrice-precious and thrice-blessed wood of the cross matter? Is not
the holy and august mountain, the place of the skull, matter? Is not the life-
giving and life-bearing rock, the holy tomb, the source of the resurrection,
matter? Is not the ink and the all-holy book of the Gospels matter? Is not the
life-bearing table, which offers to us the bread of life, matter? Is not the gold
and silver matter, out of which crosses and tablets and bowls are fashioned?
And, before all these things, is not the body and blood of my Lord matter?
Either do away with reverence and veneration for all these or submit to the
tradition of the Church and allow the veneration of images of God and friends
of God, sanctified by name and therefore overshadowed by the grace of the
divine Spirit. (John, 2003, pp. 29-30)

St. John’s list of significant and sacred material objects includes both natural objects
(Golgotha, the rock, unfashioned gold and silver) as well as the work of human
hands (the cross, the tomb, the table, metal works, and the Gospels). The material
form, the ink and paper, of the Gospel is highlighted as much as the content.

**Icon, evidence, and indice**

Ronald Day’s reading of Suzanne Briet’s *Qu’est-ce la documentation?*

highlights two important “events” in Briet’s text. These two events bear directly on
the status of the icon as document:
First is that Briet chooses to talk about documents by beginning with a live animal [Briet’s antelope] instead of a paper text (Buckland, “What is a Document?”). If a live animal is a document, then nonpaper materials such as film, statues, paintings, and the like must have documentary status as well.

With this gesture, Briet effectively breaks the trope of the book as the dominant trope for both documentation and the age of documentation; documentation in the modern age must found its future upon other figures or principles than that of the book. (Day, 2001, p. 23)

Icons are not books; they are, materially, paintings, mosaics, and the like. And yet they retain an intimate connection to the textual. Many icons contain textual as well as pictorial elements: “It was a recurrent feature of icons to give names, combining often stereotyped imagery with clearly signified identities. It is a matter of modern debate to ask why writing was considered such an integral part of the pictorial icon, particularly in a society where less than ten percent of the population was literate” (Cormack, 2007, p. 10). And the text of an icon can much more extensive than simple identifying names or labels discussed by Cormack. Often figures in an icon may depicted holding scrolls or books on which can be read words of scripture or other diegetic text relating to the subject of the icon. See Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.
Figure 1. Icon of Saint John the Forerunner. Cretan, sixteenth century. British Museum.

Figure 2. Icon with the Koimesis (Dormition of the Virgin). Greek, seventeenth century. British Museum.

The relationship of text to image is a frequent topic in the writings of the defenders of icons, particularly Saint John of Damascus, who repeatedly compares
image to text and continually affirms the legitimacy of the image as a complement to the Word—both image and text as a holy documents: “For the image is a memorial. What the book does for those who understand letters, the image does for the illiterate; the word appeals to hearing, the image appeals to sight; it conveys understanding” (my emphasis) (John, 2003). This legitimacy for both word and image is bound to the phenomenological emphasis on distinct (and God-given) senses, with hearing (words) and sight (images) privileged in Christ’s blessing as the means by which He is experienced by the apostles:

The Lord blessed his disciples, saying, “Many kings and prophets longed to see what you see, and they did not see, and to hear what you hear, and they did not hear. Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” [Lk 10:24, Matt 13:16-17]. Therefore the apostles saw Christ bodily and what he endured and his miracles and they heard his words; we also long to see and to hear and to be blessed. They saw face to face, since he was present to them bodily; in our case, however, since he is not present bodily, even as we hear his words through books and are sanctified in our hearing and through it we are blessed in our soul, and venerate and honor the books, through which we hear his words, so also the depiction of images we behold the form of his bodily character and the miracles and all that he endured, and we are sanctified and assured, and we rejoice and are blessed, and we revere and honor and venerate his bodily character. Beholding his bodily form, we also understand the glory of his divinity as powerful. For since we are twofold, fashioned of soul and body, and our soul is not naked
but, as it were, covered by a mantle, it is impossible for us to reach what is intelligible apart from what is bodily [my emphasis]. Just as therefore through words perceived by the senses we hear with bodily ears and understand what is spiritual, so through bodily vision we come to spiritual contemplation.

(John, 2003, p. 93)

Sight and hearing are privileged, and physical, material experience is a requirement for understanding or intelligibility. John’s three treatises in defense of icons are all accompanied by extensive florilegium, quotations and citations of patristic texts interspersed with John’s own running commentary. The florilegium and John’s comments remark on the co-equal nature of the textual and the visual document. Comments in the florilegium include “It is clear that we continually behold [him] through word of mouth and images” and commenting on a Homily by Saint Basil the Great, “Do you see how the function of image and word are one? ‘As in a picture,’ he says, ‘we demonstrate by word’” (John, 2003, p. 45)

In theology and especially in the Eastern Church, tradition has an authority similar to scripture. How we understand icons has as much to do with received tradition as with any Biblical text or historical fact. Traditional history of the icon asserts another connection between word and image. The evangelist St. Luke is regarded in Church tradition as the first iconographer, having painted from life one of the most famous of icons, the Hodegetria, which depicts the Virgin holding and gesturing toward the Christ child. (Cormack, 2007, pp. 14-17) The Virgin may be said to have a look of sadness that signals her Son’s passion and death. Revealing St. Luke as both gospel author and iconographer—inspired to write, inspired to paint—
tradition asserts another union of the poet and painter that is a type, image, or icon of the hypostatic union of the divine and human, the Word and the flesh, in Christ.

The iconophile argument is one, like Briet’s, that “breaks the trope of the book” and expands the possibilities of the document. The relationship between word and image is one of many relationships that obtain in the world of the icon. The second important event identified by Day in his reading of Briet is that she defines documents by their status as evidence. Evidence, though, can be thought about in different ways. Most commonly, evidence is taken in a positivist sense of being an object or event that is proof for the existence of some factual question. Briet, however, subverts this tendency by appealing to philosophical and linguistic approaches to the problem of evidence, suggesting, in the context of her time, that what seems to be a more semiotic approach is appropriate for thinking about documents as evidence. Central to her argument is the use of the term “indice” in the beginning of Qu’est-ce que la documentation?, which suggests the importance of defining documents by their indexical relationships to other documents and, moreover, to other documentary representations (such as bibliographical records and metalanguage). (Day, 2001, p. 23)

Icons are all about relationships and indices. Icons depict relationships among the Persons of the Trinity with One another and with the Virgin Mary, the angels, the saints, and the faithful. Relationships between Old and New Testaments are made explicit in icons. The three angels that visit Abraham in Mamre in Genesis are depicted in icons as a type or model of the holy trinity. Adam and Eve become
present in the New Testament as they are depicted, retrieved by Christ from hell, in icons of the resurrection.

The icon generally provides indexical connections to other documents. The other documents can be other icons that served as the model or that share the same or related subject or motif. The other documents could be the prototypes, the person(s) or Person(s) who are the subject of the icon.

One of the main voices invoked by defenders of the icons, particularly St. John of Damascus, is Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a medieval Christian Neoplatonist of the late fifth or early sixth century. Pseudo-Dionysius represented himself as Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian converted by St. Paul (Acts 17:34). Although not involved in the iconoclast crisis himself, Pseudo-Dionysius had much to say about images, symbols, and his major works are concerned, albeit from a philosophical and theological perspective, topics of particular relevance to information studies: naming (The Divine Names) and organization and classification (The Celestial Hierarchy and The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy):

St. John of Damascus, the great theologian of the iconophiles in the first phase of the controversy, quotes beside St. Basil chiefly Pseudo-Dionysius as his authority; he interprets Dionysius’ conception of the hierarchical structure of the universe as a hierarchical series of prototypes and images: Christ as image of the Father, the προορισμό or ideas as prototypes in God of the things, men as images of God, the Old Testament events as prototypes of the New Testament, and last but not least the holy icons as images of Christ and the saints. (Ladner, 1940, pp. 143-144).
Spatial Relationships

The indexical relationships are not only conceptual but also physical and spatial, and thus visual. In his “Revisiting ‘what is a document?’”, Bernd Frohmann explores “cabinets of curiosities of sixteenth-century English and European virtuosi” as documents. Drawing on Otlet and Briet, Frohmann emphasizes the importance of place and space in the conception of the document:

Briet wrote that an antelope in a zoo was a document because a zoo is a place where the antelope is available to support, or document, a claim....The importance of place for counting as a document, or for its having documentary properties, is not so strange when we think of museum objects. The idea that things are documents when located in places where they are readily available to provide evidentiary support for particular propositions casts a very wide net, as Buckland’s meditations on “information as thing” has shown by leading to anything at all counting as a document (Buckland, 1991). Yet providing evidence is not the only kind of documentary power wielded by things exhibited in specific places. (Frohmann, 2009, p. 297)

The icon is a potent illustration of the impact of place upon an object’s documentary status. Icons are frequently found in three distinct places: churches, homes, and museums, and the icon’s documentary qualities are site-specific. In the church or home, the icon functions as a, respectively, public or private liturgical document. The museum confers another sort of documentary legitimacy on the icon, and in the space of a museum, the icon is no longer a liturgical document but an example of a certain style and period of art, or evidence of a particular cultural or
historical period. As we move inside the architectural structures that contain these icons, place and space continues to impact the icon. In churches and monasteries, icons may appear throughout, but most prominently on the iconostasis, the wall of icons between the nave and the sanctuary in a church. The iconostasis serves as both barrier and bridge: “Although, on the one hand, it is a screen dividing the Divine world from the human world, the iconostasis at the same time unites the two worlds into one whole in an image which reflects a state of the universe where all separation is overcome, where there is achieved a reconciliation between God and the creature, and within the creature itself. Standing on the boundary line between the Divine and the human, it reveals by means of images as fully a possibly the ways to this reconciliation” (Ouspensky & Lossky, 1969, p. 60). The iconostasis is a visual index to a vast scriptural, theological, and hagiographic construct. Like an index, the iconostasis has a very formal structure, with prescribed placement for different representations of Christ and the Virgin, the four evangelists, scenes related to the major liturgical feats, the prophets, and patriarchs, and other saints (Ouspensky & Lossky, 1969, pp. 59-64; Kenna, 1985, pp. 359-362; Cormack, 2007, pp. 39-41).

There are elaborate guidelines or rubrics that govern the placement of icons on the iconostasis. These rubrics are an index to the indexicality of the iconostasis and reflect the relationships, hierarchical and theological, in which the icons participate.

The spatial clutter and visual busyness of the iconostasis is shared by the curio cabinets that interest Frohmann, who claims that these cabinets “lack, or at least constrict” the characteristic of indice, or indexicality (Frohmann, 2009, p. 297).
This claimed lack of indexicality is based on a perception that these collections policed discourse and provoked speechlessness:

Their power was directed elsewhere, towards policing quite specific discursive exclusions. Facing Briet’s antelope in a zoo, the visitor is invited to speak, to affirm connections between this document and others, whereas, facing the objects collected in cabinets of curiosities, “[w]ide-eyed with wonder and open-mouthed with surprise, the admiring visitor paid the collector the sincerest compliment of speechlessness” (Daston, 1988, p. 458). (Frohmann, 2009, p. 297)

Certainly wide-mouthed wonder and open-mouthed surprise cannot have been the only acceptable or polite reaction to the cabinets of curiosities. No doubt the cabinets often provoked the curious to inquire and speculate, leading to conversation and debate in which the collector was only too happy to indulge. Curiosity cabinets might even highlight religious artifacts, rather than, or in addition to, the more familiar natural history artefacts. Regardless of whether or not the cabinets imposed silence or provoked conversation, there seems in the cabinets, like the iconostasis, a quality of indexicality conferred in part by spatial arrangement.

Frohmann's major source for information on the sixteenth-century curio cabinet is Daston. In one of the her essays cited by Frohmann, Daston notes notes “a picture of the Crucifixion done in hummingbird feather” (Daston, 1988, p. 453) and traces the origins of the cabinets to “the treasuries of medieval monarchs and churches.” In terms of spatial arrangement, Daston highlights the use of “juxtaposition” (Daston, 1988, p. 456), “heterogeneity,” “deliberate hodgepodgery,” and she observes
“aesthetic ... of cornucopia-like bounty and startling variety” (Daston, 1988, p. 458).

A different sort of arrangement is many respects, than the iconostasis, but one that nonetheless, like the iconostasis, invites and suggest a cornucopia of indexical relationships. Theologically and liturgically the icon functions not to inspire “wide-eyed” or “open-mouthed” awe but, quite the opposite, to invite the worshipper into dialogue with the prototype made present in the image on the physical artifact.

The Uncreated Icon

Among the many motifs for Christ in the language of icons, one of the most important is the uncreated icon, an uncreated document:

The icon “made without hands” (ἀχειροποίητος) or “the icon of the Lord on the cloth” (μανδήλιον), known in the West under the name of the “Holy Visage” [or Shroud of Turin], occupies the central place among the images of Christ. The expression “acheiropoietos” receives its true meaning in the scriptural context (Mark 14:58); the image “made without hands” is above all the incarnate Word, which “shewed” Itself in “the temple of the body” (John 2:21). From that time the mosaic law which forbade images (Ex. 20:4) had not more meaning and the icons of Christ become irrefragable witnesses of the Incarnation of God. Instead of creating according to their own inclination, “with their hands,” the image of the God-Man, iconographers must follow a tradition that attaches them to the original “acheiropoietos.” This tradition acquired, at the start of the Vth century, a legendary form in the story of Abgar, king of Edessa, who was said to have had a portrait of Christ painted. According to the Byzantine version, the Edessa image would be an
impression of the face of the Savior on a piece of linen, which Christ had
pressed to His face and sent to the envoy of Abgar. Thus the first images of
Christ, the “mandilion” [or “mandylion”] and its two miraculous
reimpressions on bricks—the “keramidia”—would have been documents
“made without hands,” direct and, so to speak, material testimonies of the
Incarnation of the Word. (Ouspensky & Lossky, 1969, pp. 69-70)

The idea of the uncreated icon, the documents made without hands,
encourages us, regardless of religious beliefs, to consider the possibility of the
document “made without hands,” i.e., the found object, like Briet’s antelope, created
not by human agency, but by nature or the Divine, and made a document through
site-, time-, and culture-specific contextualization.

**The Triumph of Orthodoxy**

The iconoclast crisis ended decisively with the “Triumph of Orthodoxy” over
iconoclasm in 843 when the church declared iconoclasm to be heresy. This event is
celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent as one of the twelve great feasts of the Eastern
Orthodox Church year. Here we have a major religious feast that commemorates the
restoration of icons to churches and the “defeat” of an ideology that circumscribed
the possibilities of visual and pictorial expression, suppressed images of the Divine
while patronizing the production of secular and imperial art, destroyed existing
visual documents, and prohibited the creation of new documents.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy and the procession of icons through the streets of
Constantinople is itself a traditional subject of iconography. See Figure 3 below. The
compositional center of the icon is devoted to another icon, the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, painted, according to tradition, by St. Luke. Other key figures in the defense of holy images also appear in the icon, some holding books, scrolls, and still more icons. The “Triumph of Orthodoxy” icon is a fascinating recursive metadocument, a classic picture within a picture, a frame within a frame, and icon within an icon. The feast and the icon are celebrations of the document, both visual and textual. The Hodegetria is the dominant compositional element in the icon, but it is a picture drawn by the wordsmith St. Luke the Evangelist, so the icon also brings us back another way to the Gospel and the Word. The other figures hold a variety of visual, textual, and hybrid multimedia documents.
With the defeat of iconoclasm, the material document is raised to a new level of prominence. The painted picture, rather than the conceptual prototype, is the subject of the document. The prototype may still be accessible and present in the icon within the icon. Or has the icon itself, the document, become or become recognized as a living thing as the other more common and recognizable prototypes—the Trinity, the Virgin, the angels, the saints.

References


