

Student Questions on Byzantine Art

Kristina

Colleagues,

As a modernist teaching the survey, I am all too frequently stymied by questions from my students. Here are two on Byzantine art. I wonder whether anyone might be willing to share their expertise?

In the apse mosaic of the virgin and child from Hagia Sophia, the virgin is sitting on a pillow decorated with symbols that resemble clubs (as in playing cards). What is the significance of this design?

In the apse mosaic from San Vitale in Ravenna, Christ's mantle is decorated with a figure that looks like a Roman Z, but which I assume is Greek. What is the proper term for this letter, and what does it mean?

Thanks,

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Reference:

Q: Student Questions on Byzantine Art. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 7, 2002 (accessed Apr 3, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/25302>>.