

This is an extract from:

*Holy Women of Byzantium:  
Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*

*edited by Alice-Mary Talbot*

No. 1 in the series Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation

Published by

*Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection  
Washington, D.C.*

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Trustees for Harvard University

Washington, D.C.

Printed in the United States of America

[www.doaks.org/etexts.html](http://www.doaks.org/etexts.html)

## 5. LIFE OF ST. ELISABETH THE WONDERWORKER

*translated by Valerie Karras*

### *Introduction*

Elisabeth, a holy woman of the fifth century,<sup>1</sup> was born to wealthy and prominent parents who had been barren for many years. Her father held a high honorary title of the Byzantine Empire, and the family owned an estate in Abydenoi, a village near the Thracian provincial capital of Herakleia. During the week-long annual festival for St. Glykeria in that city, her parents had a vision from the saint promising them a child. This promise was fulfilled and, true to the vow the father had made in return, the child was baptized with the name Elisabeth by the archbishop of Herakleia.

After the death of her parents, Elisabeth gave away her wealth to the poor and traveled to Constantinople, where she entered the convent of St. George, whose abbess was her paternal aunt. There she distinguished herself by her asceticism. When her aunt died two years later, Elisabeth became the superior of the monastery. Many miracles are attributed to her, including the slaying of a dragon said to have haunted the area of Hebdomon, the restoration of sight to a man born blind, and several healings of women suffering from menorrhagia (in fact, she appears to have been a “patron saint” of women with profuse menstrual bleeding). In addition, she is credited with having received premonitions and visions, such as that of the catastrophic fire that engulfed Constantinople in 465,<sup>2</sup> and a vision of the Holy Spirit descending on

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth was a contemporary of Gennadios I, patriarch of Constantinople from 458 to 471; Leo I, Byzantine emperor from 457 to 474; and Daniel the Stylite, who arrived in Constantinople in about 451. Thus her *floruit* can be placed in the 3rd quarter of the 5th century. There is no precise information on her dates of birth and death.

<sup>2</sup> The saint’s foreknowledge of the fire of 465 not only mimics the prophetic gifts of her contemporary St. Daniel the Stylite, but puts her in a superior position: according to the *vita*, she reveals to *him* that the fire will occur. Significantly, Elisabeth’s *vita* has none of the specificity of the *Life* of Daniel. For an English translation of the *vita* of Daniel, see Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byz. Saints*, 1–84.

the altar during the Divine Liturgy. Returning to Herakleia for a last visit, she had a vision of St. Glykeria, who warned her of her imminent death. She returned to her monastery and was stricken by a fever following the feast of St. George, dying the following day. Several more miracles were attributed to her by pilgrims visiting her tomb after her death.

Two versions of the *vita* of Elisabeth survive. The one presented here, written by an anonymous hagiographer, is preserved only in a fourteenth-century manuscript from Florence (Bibl. Naz. 50 [Conventi soppr. B.1.1214]). It is written in a simple straightforward style, with a fair number of scriptural citations. Only in the brief *prooimion* does the author insert a few rhetorical flourishes. A second *vita* of Elisabeth, by the monk Chariton, is partially preserved in a fourteenth-century Athenian manuscript (Bibl. Nat. 2104).<sup>3</sup> Its editor, R. Criscuolo, suggests that it may antedate the anonymous *vita* of Elisabeth edited by Halkin.

Dating the composition of the anonymous *vita* is problematic. While the fourteenth-century date of the Florence manuscript provides a *terminus ante quem* for the *vita*, a more precise dating is debatable because the internal elements suggest various possible chronologies. For instance, the story of Elisabeth's vision of the Holy Spirit during the liturgy cannot have been written earlier than the late sixth century, because, according to the historian Kedrenos, the emperor Justin II introduced the Cherubic Hymn into the Constantinopolitan liturgical rite in about 574.<sup>4</sup> Halkin favored a late sixth-century date of composition, because he believed that the hagiographer's reference to Herakleia<sup>5</sup> as a "large city" (μεγαλοπολις) and the detailed description of the annual pilgrimage for the feast of St. Glykeria place the writing at a time prior to 591, when the city was devastated by the Avars with the attendant destruction of the church of St. Glykeria.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> R. Criscuolo, "Vita di santa Elisabetta di Costantinopoli, la taumaturga, scritta dal monaco Caritone," *Annali della facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell' Università di Napoli* 14 (1972), 49–68.

<sup>4</sup> *Georgius Cedrenus. Historiarum Compendium*, ed. I. Bekker, I (Bonn, 1838), 685.3–4; Eng. trans. in Taft, *Great Entrance*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> Herakleia (formerly Perinthos) was a city on the north shore of the Sea of Marmara.

<sup>6</sup> F. Halkin, "Sainte Elisabeth d'Heraclee, Abbesses à Constantinople," *AnalBoll* 91 (1973), 249–50. Halkin believed that the *vita* was probably written fifty to a hundred years after the saint's death.

On the other hand, the church was rebuilt by the emperor Maurice (582–602). The seventh-century historian Theophylaktos Simokattes dates Maurice's visit to Herakleia in 591, while John of Antioch believes he visited the city in 610.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Halkin's argument that the reference to Herakleia as a large city implies an early date is not convincing because the Russian pilgrim Daniel, who visited Herakleia in the early twelfth century, wrote that the city was called "the great Herakleia."<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the *vita's* description of the procession through the city involves only the head of St. Glykeria, not her whole body.<sup>9</sup> According to Delehay, <sup>10</sup> the inscription on the marble reliquary that contained her head, from the church dedicated to her in Herakleia, dates to just after the ninth century; the body of St. Glykeria had been in Lemnos since at least the eighth century.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore unlikely that the description of the festival procession could have been written earlier than the eighth century. The anonymity of the pilgrims healed by Elisabeth is another factor pointing to a date of composition well after the time she lived.

Alexander Kazhdan has suggested that the *vita* could not have been written before the eleventh century, and that it possibly dates as late as the thirteenth century. He points out that "[t]he image of devastated Hebdomon hardly could be produced before the eleventh century," since it was frequented by the imperial court from the fourth to tenth centuries.<sup>12</sup> He has also commented on the relationship between St. Elisabeth and St. George, especially with regard to the dragon incident. The hagiographer emphasizes the importance of the namesake of Elisabeth's monastery, even attributing some of her healings to the oil from the lamp that hung in front of the icon of the soldier saint. The cult of St. George was imported to Constantinople in the fifth cen-

<sup>7</sup> *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor, rev. P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972), 6.1, pp. 220–21; for John of Antioch, see *Fragmenta historicorum graecorum*, V.1 (Paris, 1883), 38.

<sup>8</sup> C. Wilson, *The Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel in the Holy Land, 1106–1107 A.D.* (London, 1895), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. p. 124, below.

<sup>10</sup> H. Delehay, "Saints de Thrace et de Mesie," *AnalBoll* 31 (1912), 249–50.

<sup>11</sup> *AASS*, Sept. 5:277.

<sup>12</sup> A. P. Kazhdan, "Hagiographical Notes, 16. A Female St. George," *Byzantion* 56 (1986), 169–70. The references to Hebdomon are conveniently collected in Janin, *CP byz.*, 139 f, 446–49.

ture, and the monastery where St. Elisabeth lived was one of several in the city named for him. The episode of the dragon is generally assumed to have been added to the story of George's life in the twelfth century; therefore, Kazhdan believes that Elisabeth's *vita* may be a thirteenth-century work.

On the other hand, the tradition of Elisabeth's killing a snake (here called an οφις rather than a δράκων) is found as early as the tenth century in her notice in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*.<sup>13</sup> Another argument for an earlier date is that the title δισυπατος held by Elisabeth's father was used only between the ninth and eleventh centuries.<sup>14</sup> In view of the conflicting evidence, one might suggest that the original text of the *vita* was written sometime between the ninth and eleventh centuries, and perhaps was subsequently redacted and embellished in the thirteenth century. In any case, the date of composition seems to be substantially later than the era in which Elisabeth supposedly lived.

The cult of Elisabeth was focused on her tomb at the Constantinopolitan monastery of St. George, which, according to her *vita* by Chariton, also bore the name τα μικρα Ῥωμαίου.<sup>15</sup> Veneration of her relics apparently continued until the end of the empire, since they are mentioned by the Russian pilgrims Stephen of Novgorod in 1348/49 and Zosima (1419–22).<sup>16</sup> Her feastday was celebrated on 24 April.

<sup>13</sup> *SynaxCP* 625–27.

<sup>14</sup> *ODB* 1:638.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 50, below.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 40, 148, 188, 321–25. Majeska, who was not familiar with the *vita* of Elisabeth by Chariton, identified the Elisabeth who is mentioned in the Russian texts with the martyr Elisabeth (p. 322); however, since the pilgrims saw at the same convent the relics of St. Thomas, it is evident that they are referring to the convent of τα μικρα Ῥωμαίου (cf. *vita* of Thomas, below, note 131) and the relics of Elisabeth the Wonderworker of Herakleia.

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[p. 251]

## THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED ELISABETH THE WONDERWORKER

“*Many daughters have wrought valiantly, many have obtained wealth,*”<sup>17</sup> said Solomon the most wise, prophetically proclaiming that, at various times, women as well as men would shine with the beauties of every type of virtue and share in the spiritual gifts of the divine spirit and marvelously work miraculous *wonders and signs*<sup>18</sup> throughout the world. For scripture also shows countless and innumerable women, both under the <Mosaic> Law and after the advent of grace,<sup>19</sup> transforming feminine frailty to manly resolution and, through self-discipline and painful ascetic practice, courageously overthrowing the ancient conqueror<sup>20</sup> of our foremother Eve and common enemy of the human race through the power of the Most High, and being crowned with the shining trophies of victory.

One of these women is Elisabeth, renowned and famed for her miracles. She came from the large city of Herakleia in Thrace. [p. 252] Her parents were not obscure or undistinguished, but well-born, wealthy, and full of virtue. Her mother’s name was Euphemia, and her father—who at that time was *dishypatos*<sup>21</sup>—was named Eunomianos. They both lived up to their names in a pious and God-pleasing manner,<sup>22</sup> and their faithful meditation on the Lord’s law<sup>23</sup> made them noteworthy and well known to all.

They made their residence near the aforementioned city <of Herakleia>, in a village we now call Abydenoi, though it was known in days of old as Thrakokrene. The couple—being *godly* and *blameless* like the *righteous* Job,<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Prov. 31:29 (phrases reversed).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Acts 6:8, 2 Cor. 12:12.

<sup>19</sup> I.e., in both the Old and New Testaments.

<sup>20</sup> I.e., Satan. Halkin has noted a parallel usage of *περηνιστης* in Gregentios, *Disputation with a Jew Named Herban* (PG 86:664B).

<sup>21</sup> A title of honor used in the Byzantine Empire from the 9th through 11th centuries. The *ODB* (1:638) notes that in the 11th century the title was often conferred on librarians, judges, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Eunomianos means “good law <keeper>” and Euphemia “good reputation.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ps. 1:2, 118:70.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Job 1:1.

and emulating the hospitality of the patriarch Abraham<sup>25</sup>—gave liberally to all the needy the necessities of life. And so, also like Abraham,<sup>26</sup> they received, as a result of their vow,<sup>27</sup> fruit of the womb<sup>28</sup> worthy of their own beauty and good works.

This is how it came about. After sixteen years of marriage had passed, they still remained childless,<sup>29</sup> and, being bereft of offspring, they of course grieved. They were sorely distressed, and they earnestly beseeched God, Who knows the hearts <of men>, to release them from the sorrow of childlessness and to give them a child as heir of their wealth and lineage. And the Lord, Who *performs the desire of them that fear Him*, graciously *heard their supplication*,<sup>30</sup> and did not disregard the supplication intended to be well pleasing to Him.

[p. 253] Now, it had been the custom of old in that place for the inhabitants from all the areas round about to come together every year on the feast of the victorious martyr Glykeria<sup>31</sup> and to celebrate for an entire week<sup>32</sup> to-

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gen. 18:1–8 (the hospitality of Abraham to the three men at the Oak of Mamre).

<sup>26</sup> Isaac was born to the childless Abraham and Sarah when they were 100 and 90 years old, respectively; cf. Gen. 17:15–19, 21:1–3.

<sup>27</sup> See below, pp. 125–26.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., e.g., Gen. 30:2, Lk. 1:42.

<sup>29</sup> The infertility of a saint's parents, a frequent commonplace in *vitae* (see, for example, the *Life* of St. Thomas, Chaps. 4–5), has its roots in the biblical motif of barren parents who at long last bear a holy child (e.g., Isaac, Samuel, John the Baptist). At the same time, sterility was a real problem in the Byzantine world, as suggested, for example, by the use of amulets; see J. Herrin and A. Kazhdan, *ODB* 2:994, s.v. Infertility. A recent Ph.D. dissertation at Catholic University (1994) by Efthalia Walsh, "Overcoming Gender: Virgins, Widows and Barren Women in the Writings of St. John Chrysostom," discusses the dilemma that infertility posed for theologians.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ps. 144 (145):19.

<sup>31</sup> St. Glykeria was martyred at Herakleia in the 2d century under Antoninus Pius. Cf. H. Delehaye, "Saints de Thrace et de Mesie," *AnalBoll* 31 (1912), 249–52; *BHG* 699–699m; *BHG Nov. Auct.*, p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> This is a fairly early example of a saint's feast being celebrated for a full week. Presumably the actual feastday was the culmination of the week's festivities. For discussion of these festive celebrations, see S. Vryonis, "The Panegyris of the Byzantine Saint," in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. S. Hackel [University of Birmingham, 14th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies] (London, 1981), 196–226.

gether with those who lived in the city—this was done on the thirteenth of May. So the blessed <Elisabeth's> admirable parents came with everyone else and participated in processions and all-night doxologies and visited the holy shrines throughout the city, shrines which contained the sacred relics of the forty holy women and Ammos the deacon<sup>33</sup> and of many others. (The *Life* of the great Bishop Parthenios discusses at more length both these relics and the expensive and brilliant construction of the renowned churches.)<sup>34</sup> And so, venerating these <saints><sup>35</sup> and giving them due honor, they feasted and celebrated with the populace, carrying with them <in procession> throughout the city the ever-venerated [p. 254] head of the martyr,<sup>36</sup> who was beheaded for the sake of Christ. While the divine liturgy was being celebrated by Leo,<sup>37</sup> who was the bishop of the city at that time, in the church which is called Treasure and is dedicated to the Mother of God, <whenever> Eunomianos (the aforementioned father of the blessed <Elisabeth>) gazed at <the head of St. Glykeria>, he noticed her sometimes smiling slightly as though happy and sometimes with a sad and gloomy expression. He considered this to be a visible symbol of his trust in the martyr and he found his soul divided between happiness and sadness.

<sup>33</sup> These forty women together with the deacon Ammos (Ammon) were executed at Herakleia in the early 4th century under the emperor Licinius; their feastday is 1 September. See *BHG* 2280–81; Delehaye, “Saints de Thrace,” 194–97, 247–49.

<sup>34</sup> Parthenios was a bishop of Lampsakos martyred in the early 4th century under Constantine I. As Halkin notes (p. 253 n. 4), neither the extant *vita* of Parthenios by his disciple Crispinus (*BHG* 1422; PG 114:1348–65) nor the later version by Symeon Metaphrastes (*BHG* 1423) discusses at any length the churches and shrines in Herakleia. The *vita* by Crispinus, in fact, mentions only two by name: the martyrdom of St. Glykeria (col. 1360D) and one which is called *κατα Χίλας* (col. 1361A). However, it is quite possible that Elisabeth's hagiographer had access to a longer *vita* of St. Parthenios, which has not survived.

<sup>35</sup> An alternate interpretation would be that the veneration refers to the churches or shrines rather than to the saints themselves.

<sup>36</sup> Glykeria's head was normally kept at her church in a marble reliquary that bore an iambic inscription; the reliquary still exists in the church of St. George at Eregli (formerly Herakleia). Cf. Delehaye, “Saints de Thrace,” 250.

<sup>37</sup> There is no evidence of an archbishop Leo for the see of Herakleia in the 5th century; it should be noted, however, that the evidence is fragmentary since the extant lists of bishops have several gaps, particularly between 459 and 518; cf. Halkin, 254 n. 2. Leo I of Herakleia was bishop from 783 to 806, Leo II from 1263 to 1281 (A. Lete in Tsames, *Meterikon* 2:360 n. 15).

After the service ended, the throng made fervent prayer in the church of the Theotokos called Katacheilas<sup>38</sup> by the local inhabitants, and at about the sixth hour they all returned to the holy church of the martyr Glykeria. After the vespers hymn, the others left the church, but Eunomianos remained there alone with his wife Euphemia, fervently beseeching the victorious <martyr> to release them from the bonds of their barrenness and to grant them, beyond <all> hope, a child. They prayed long into the night, and finally lay down on the floor and went to sleep for a while.

And then—O unspeakable and terrible mysteries of God—the martyr most sweet (like her name)<sup>39</sup> stood before the man in a dream and said to him, [p. 255] “Why, <my good> man, do you bring your sufferings to me and seek from me that which only God can give you? However, if you will promise me in truth to acquire in yourself a *broken heart* and a *humbled spirit*<sup>40</sup> and never to exalt yourself over your neighbors, then the most generous Lord will speedily grant you through my <intercession> a girl child, and you shall call her name Elisabeth, for she will be shown forth like the mother of the Forerunner and Baptist John.” After he eagerly swore an oath to do these things, the saint made the sign of the cross over him, and left him.

<Eunomianos>, immediately waking from sleep, related to his wife the vision he had seen; she replied that she had beheld a similar <vision>. And in like manner, the archbishop, who was most beloved of God<sup>41</sup> and was honored with the gift of foresight, counseled both of them and advised the couple, agreeing with the martyr of Christ. After the feast, he entertained them for three days. Then, blessing them, he dismissed them to return home in peace.

So the wife immediately conceived, and, after nine months had passed, she gave birth to a baby girl just as the martyr had truly foretold. When forty days<sup>42</sup> had gone by, Eunomianos took the child and her mother to the city.

<sup>38</sup> The sanctuary called *κατὰ Χίλας* in Crispinus' *vita* of St. Parthenios (PG 114:1361A).

<sup>39</sup> I.e., St. Glykeria (*γλυκυτάτη* = “most sweet”).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ps. 50 (51):17.

<sup>41</sup> *θεοφιλέστατος*, a standard epithet of archbishops; cf. I. and N. P. Sevcenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas of Sion* (Brookline, Mass., 1984), 135.

<sup>42</sup> In the eastern rite, a “churching” of mother and child occurs forty days after the child's birth (in commemoration of Christ's presentation in the Temple when he was forty days old), and the child may thereafter be baptized.

Upon arriving at the church of the famed martyr and approaching her pure icon (located on the right side), he threw himself face first on the floor, giving thanks to her [p. 256] with a joyous heart and tears. Then, as he gazed upon the icon and suitably addressed his thanksgivings to it, he saw a sight both strange and remarkable, for her face blazed brighter than the sun and her lips gently moved. “The time has come, Eunomianos,” she said, “to fulfill your vows to God.” This instilled *fear and trembling*<sup>43</sup> and great amazement in him. And so <he and his wife>, approaching the most blessed archbishop and giving him the customary greeting, beseeched him to give their child the seal in Christ.<sup>44</sup> Whereupon, receiving<sup>45</sup> the child, he baptized her and named her Elisabeth, as the martyr had foretold. After praying at length for <her parents>, he said to the child, “Through you, child, may the Lord be gracious to me, granting me remission of sins.” Thereupon, they returned home rejoicing.

The child *increased in stature and favor*.<sup>46</sup> By the age of three, her father was already teaching her the sacred letters.<sup>47</sup> She showed herself to be so expert and able in these that she was able to recite the Lives of the saints <by heart> after a single hearing.<sup>48</sup>

When she had just turned twelve, her mother departed from earthly life.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ps. 54 (55):5, 1 Cor. 2:3.

<sup>44</sup> Baptism and, especially, chrismation.

<sup>45</sup> Literally, “having catechized” or “having given instruction.” This may refer to the first part of the baptismal service, where the convert (or sponsor) repudiates Satan and all his works and gives a profession of faith.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lk. 2:52.

<sup>47</sup> Literally, “turned her over to the learning of sacred letters,” which may imply that she was entrusted to a tutor, although Lete also interprets the expression to mean that she was taught by her father. “Sacred letters” (ιερα γραμματα), a phrase derived from 2 Tim. 3:15, refers to the “primary cycle of elementary education which was begun at about the age of six or seven and consisted of reading, writing and spelling based mainly on religious texts” (C. Galatariotou, *The Making of a Saint. The Life, Times and Sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse* [Cambridge, 1991], 154–55). In the *Life* of Sts. David, Symeon, and George of Lesbos, “sacred letters” are defined as the *propaideia* (i.e., elementary education) and the Psalms (ed. I. van den Gheyn, *AnalBoll* 18 [1899], 214). Cf. also P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism* (Canberra, 1986), 111; A. Moffatt, “Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries,” in *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 88–90; and R. Browning, “Literacy in the Byzantine World,” *BMG* 4 (1978), 48–49.

<sup>48</sup> Or “from simply listening to them.”

Her father wanted to give her away in marriage,<sup>49</sup> but the girl could not bear to hear of it at all, for she desired rather to be wedded to the immortal bridegroom, Christ. And, three years after this, her father Eunomianos also journeyed rejoicing to the Lord, and the blessed [Elisabeth], left alone, turned straightway to God, the Father of orphans. Since she desired the life of solitude and poverty [i.e., monasticism], she distributed among the poor the gold and silver that her parents had set aside for her, as well as her other property (which was considerable), and so through the hands of the needy offered <her fortune> to God; and she gave both her male and female slaves their freedom.

[p. 257] So, without looking back, she hastened to the Queen of Cities [Constantinople] and came to the sacred monastery of the holy great martyr George, called “the Little Hill,”<sup>50</sup> where her paternal aunt was the mother superior.<sup>51</sup> When she arrived there, she bid the world adieu and clothed herself in the angelic garment<sup>52</sup> and advanced with all her heart to the ascetic struggles. And soon she managed to attain every type of virtue, becoming filled to overflowing with all the spiritual gifts of the Spirit. She *mortified <her> body and brought it into subjection*<sup>53</sup> by long fasts: like the great Moses<sup>54</sup> and Elijah the Tishbite,<sup>55</sup> she would often endure the entire forty days <of Lent> without

<sup>49</sup> In Byzantium, girls could be betrothed at age seven and married at twelve. For references to the pertinent legislation, see *vita* of Theodora of Thessalonike, below, note 31.

<sup>50</sup> This convent of St. George does not correspond with any of the monasteries of St. George listed in Janin, *EglisesCP*, a work published before Halkin’s edition of the *vita* of Elisabeth. Another *vita* of Elisabeth, by the monk Chariton (*BHG* 2122), locates the convent of the “Little Hill” (whose dedication to St. George it omits) near the cistern of St. Mokios and states that it was also called τα μικρά Ῥωμαίου; cf. Cr̄iscuol̄o, “Vita di Santa Elisabetta,” 62. In the 10th century, however, the convent of τα μικρά Ῥωμαίου was dedicated to the Theotokos; cf. Janin, *EglisesCP*, 197. See also the *vita* of St. Thomas, Chaps. 16 and 22, for more on this convent.

<sup>51</sup> It was common for a young man or woman to enter a monastery directed by a relative, frequently an aunt or uncle; see, for example the *vita* of Theodora of Thessalonike, below, Chaps. 9, 20. See also A. Laiou, “Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women,” *ByzF* 9 (1985), 75–76, and A.-M. Talbot, “The Byzantine Family and the Monastery,” *DOP* 44 (1990), 121–23.

<sup>52</sup> I.e., the monastic habit.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 9:27. The KJV translation reads “kept under” for “mortified.”

<sup>54</sup> Deut. 9:9.

<sup>55</sup> 3 Ki.[1 Ki.] 19:8.

eating, and she never partook of oil, but was nourished by the living and heavenly bread alone.<sup>56</sup> Because she was constantly adorned by exalting humility<sup>57</sup> and noetically contemplated divine beauty<sup>58</sup> with the eyes of the heart, she did not wish to raise her eyes to heaven at all, and so for three years or more she kept her head bent toward the ground, nor would she tilt <her head> upward at all toward the heights of the sky. She considered poverty to be wealth rather, and so embraced it completely, possessing but a single robe<sup>59</sup> and wearing the garment of incorruption<sup>60</sup> woven for her from above by freedom from passions. And she was so ablaze with divine love that she readily bore the frost of winter and kept her feet bare of shoes, beautiful<sup>61</sup> [p. 258] and running toward *the prize of the high calling*.<sup>62</sup> She could never endure to immerse her body in warm waters, but rather, bathing it daily with ever-flowing founts of tears, as the psalmist says,<sup>63</sup> and washing out every bit of uncleanness, she kept it clean and molded her soul like to God.

Two years after she had entered the monastic life, her father's sister, the mother superior of the monastery, departed from this present life after appointing the blessed <Elisabeth> as her successor. The great Gennadios,<sup>64</sup> who at that time was at the helm of the episcopate, confirmed her appointment as superior of the monastery, as was the custom. And so <distinguished> did she show herself by her godly works and her <moral> superiority and such a

<sup>56</sup> The eucharist; cf. Jn. 6:50–51.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Mt. 23:12.

<sup>58</sup> The use of Neoplatonic language is noteworthy here.

<sup>59</sup> Possession of a single garment was a common *virtue* among monks; cf., for example, C. van de Vorst, "La vie de s. Evariste, higoumene a Constantinople," *AnalBoll* 41 (1923), 305.11. This ascetic practice was based on Christ's command to His disciples, when He sent them out to preach, not to take a second tunic with them. Cf., e.g., Mt. 10:10.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 15:54.

<sup>61</sup> ὡς ὀρθίους. Halkin suggests as a possible scriptural reference Rom. 10:15—"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace," which in turn makes reference to Is. 52:7. More importantly, the allusion to bare feet is connected to the immediately following quotation from Philippians, making her an athlete running a race.

<sup>62</sup> Phil. 3:14.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ps. 6:6.

<sup>64</sup> Gennadios I, patriarch of Constantinople from 458 to 471.

height of utmost virtue and perfection did she attain that she was endowed with miraculous powers, healing incurable diseases and driving out demons by calling on the name of Christ, enjoying divine illumination and revelation from above, and prophetically foretelling the future.

In such manner, with foreknowledge from a divine vision, she forewarned the Roman emperor at that time, the most pious Leo,<sup>65</sup> of a violent conflagration<sup>66</sup> to come upon the city from a God-driven rage; these things and other similar <things> she also proclaimed in advance to Daniel the Stylite in Anaplous.<sup>67</sup> In fact, if these two had not prayed to God beforehand, virtually the entire city [p. 259] would have been wasted by fire. For this reason, from that time on, the Christ-loving emperor acquired great faith in the blessed <Elisabeth> and honored her as was her due and, being kindly disposed, he assigned as a gift to her monastery one of the imperial properties in Hebdomon,<sup>68</sup> bearing the name of St. Babylas,<sup>69</sup> inasmuch as <the convent> was in straitened circumstances and without resources.

Now, in this area there were the ruins of many old buildings, in which had lurked since ancient times a fearful dragon who ravaged many passersby and had made that place absolutely impassable to all. This afflicted the entire

<sup>65</sup> Leo I, Byzantine emperor from 457 to 474.

<sup>66</sup> This fire, which lasted a full week, devastated Constantinople in September of 465; it was commemorated each year on 1 September.

<sup>67</sup> Daniel, born near Samosata in Mesopotamia, came to Constantinople in about 451 after twenty-five years of monastic life and five years of peripatetic visiting of ascetics. He lived in a former pagan temple during his first nine years in the capital, then moved to Anaplous, an area near the city along the western shore of the Bosphorus, where he ascended a pillar (balustraded and later covered). He lived as a stylite (pillar saint) for thirty-three years, serving as a focus for Chalcedonian opposition to the Monophysites favored by the emperor Basiliskos, who ruled from 475 to 476. The fire, which occurred in September of 465, was predicted five months earlier during Holy Week by the prophetic holy man, according to his *vita*; cf. H. Delehaye, *Les saints stylites* (Brussels, 1923), xlix, 37–38, 42–44; Eng. trans. in Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byz. Saints*, 31, 33–34.

<sup>68</sup> Hebdomon, an area southwest of the city walls along the Sea of Marmara, was the site of one of the most ancient imperial properties; traditionally, the Senate would meet the emperor at the Magnaura Palace there upon the army's return from a campaign for a triumphal procession to Hagia Sophia. See Janin, *CP byz.*, 139–40, 446–49; Kazhdan, "Hagiographical Notes," *Byzantion* 56 (1986), 170.

<sup>69</sup> On the church of St. Babylas near the Hebdomon, see Janin, *EglisesCP*, 55–56.

city with sorrow and helplessness since they saw no deliverance from this tribulation from any quarter. When the saint learned of this from certain people, she was seized by a divine zeal and, taking up the weapon of the venerable cross, went down to that place. Raising up her gaze to heaven and calling upon assistance from on high, she cried out to the beast and made him come out from his lair upon hearing <her>. <sup>70</sup> Then, after making the sign of the cross over him, filling <her> mouth with spittle she spat <sup>71</sup> upon his head and, trampling him underfoot, she slew him, saying, “*I shall tread on the asp and the basilisk, and I shall trample on the lion and dragon,*” <sup>72</sup> protected by the venerable cross.” And thus she completely liberated everyone in the city from harm from him. Indeed, from that time on she became hopeful, as it were, and, having received firm assurance that through <her> alliance <with Christ she would trample on> <sup>73</sup> the spiritual dragon <sup>74</sup> as well as the physical one and win victory over him, she boldly began her wonder-working.

As a result, her fame spread through the entire city. Now there was a man from a well-born and wealthy <family>, who had an only daughter [p. 260] with a flow of blood. <sup>75</sup> He had exhausted the greater part of his wealth on doctors, but this profited her not at all, for the illness was stronger than their art. Finally, despairing of her being healed by <the doctors>, he took <his> child and cast her at the saint’s feet, crying out through his tears, “Save my unfortunate daughter, handmaid of God—I commit <her> to God and to your prayers and hands—and, if you wish, take all I own.” She answered him, “That which is in your house, <my> child, keep as your own, for I need none of it. But if you believe unwaveringly and in accordance with the Gospel commandments promise to be totally humble and to be merciful to the poor, <sup>76</sup> your daughter will be healed.” When the man immediately agreed to do these things, with a prayer <Elisabeth> anointed the child with holy oil from the

<sup>70</sup> Halkin has emended the text to read ἀκοντα (“unwillingly”), but I believe that the original reading of the manuscript, ἀκουοντα (“hearing”), can stand.

<sup>71</sup> Reading (with Lackner) καταχεῖται for κατέχεται.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Ps. 90 (91):13.

<sup>73</sup> Halkin has suggested this phrase (Χριστοῦ καταπατήσαι και) to complete the syntax of the Greek.

<sup>74</sup> I.e., Satan.

<sup>75</sup> Compare with the story of Christ’s healing of the woman with the flow of blood (Mt. 9:20–22 and Mk. 5:25–34).

<sup>76</sup> Cf., e.g., Mt. 18:4, Lk. 14:13.

great martyr George<sup>77</sup> and restored her to health. And so she sent <the girl>, rejoicing and giving thanks, home with her father. In addition, she similarly healed many other women who were faint with the same disease of hemorrhaging and who approached her with wholehearted faith in her, staunching their flow of blood by prayer.

Among <the people who came to her> was a man who had been *blind from birth*.<sup>78</sup> Hearing of the blessed <Elisabeth's> miracles, he came up to her (led by the hands of others) and said, "Have mercy on me, faithful disciple of God, and open my eyes, so that, seeing the sweet light through you, I may glorify the Creator of all." The blessed <one> was moved with compassion by his lamentations and, without hesitation, she raised her hands to heaven in supplication, then took the saint's oil and anointed his eyes. Within seven days she made him to see most clearly, and he glorified God with a loud voice. [p. 261] In such fashion, therefore, the saint shone with the rays of <her> wondrous miracles and illuminated those who came to her in faith.

Once, while the divine liturgy was being celebrated in the church, she had a vision. An ineffable light flashed round about and the All-Holy Spirit, in the form of a blinding white linen cloth,<sup>79</sup> descended into the sanctuary after the Cherubic Hymn<sup>80</sup> <had been sung> and circled round the priest before coming to rest before the holy altar. She was so filled with wonder and astonishment

<sup>77</sup> The oil is probably from the lamp kept lit before the icon of the martyr. Oil was often used for healing, in accordance with apostolic teaching; cf., e.g., James 5:14. For parallel instances of a saint using oil from an icon lamp for healing, cf. Sevcenko and Sevcenko, *Saint Nicholas*, chaps. 33, 72–74.

<sup>78</sup> Jn. 9:1.

<sup>79</sup> This is an unusual vision for which the translator could find no parallel. However, it is reminiscent of Severos of Antioch's description of 5th and 6th century Syrian liturgical practice with the *aer* or veil and his comparison of it to Acts 11:5–10: "Further what is done in this fashion reminds us of that veil or linen sheet which came down from heaven upon Peter . . . For this reason therefore the cloth that is laid upon what is set forth on the altar shows by being lifted and lowered the abundant and perfect gift of the divine Spirit, which was shown to Peter by the vision to have included all nations, which descends from heaven upon <all> that is set forth, and consecrates and hallows it . . ." See E. W. Brooks, *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch, from Numerous Syriac Manuscripts* [= PO 14, fasc. 1] (Paris, 1920), 257–58; Eng. trans. in Taft, *Great Entrance*, 418–19. I am indebted to Fr. Taft for bringing this passage to my attention.

<sup>80</sup> The Cherubic Hymn was introduced into the liturgy in 573–574 during the reign of Justin II; cf. note 4 above. It is chanted while the bread and wine are brought from the table of preparation or the *skeuophylakion* to the altar to be consecrated.

that she spoke of this vision to no one until the time appointed for her departure <from this life> for God.

Now, since she was already drawing near to this <departure>, she desired, as she said, to behold her homeland again. And so, after arriving in Herakleia and venerating the holy churches of the saints there, she entered the church of the Theotokos called Chalkoprateia.<sup>81</sup> And, as she was praying, there appeared to her a woman who was apparently from <one> of the esteemed and leading <families> of the city. The woman embraced her warmly and greeted her, saying, “Welcome, O much-beloved mother.” But the blessed <Elisabeth> answered her, “Who am I, my lady, a humble stranger, that you should thus gladly embrace and greet me, <a woman> whom you have never seen?” And again the woman spoke: “Before you were conceived in your mother’s womb, since I resided here, I knew you.<sup>82</sup> And, if you wish, come to my house, and I will tell you about it.” The blessed one inquired, “And where, O my lady, is your house?” “On the right side of the church of the holy martyr Romanos<sup>83</sup> you will see me,” she answered, and with those words she disappeared.

Awestruck and trembling, the blessed <Elisabeth> scanned the entire church, searching for the woman who had appeared to her. Since she could not see her anywhere, she left with haste for the exquisite shrine of the holy martyr Romanos. Praying there [p. 262] and admiring its beauty and size, she came to the right side. Going out the gate,<sup>84</sup> she saw <St. Glykeria’s> icon and recognized her, for she appeared to be the apparition <Elisabeth> had seen in the church of the Theotokos. As she considered these things, a voice came from the icon and said to her, “I whom you now see am she whom you saw

<sup>81</sup> For a similarly named (lit., “bronze market”) church of the 5th century in Constantinople, see Janin, *EglisesCP*, 237–42. Also, cf. Janin, *EglisesCentres*, 383–84, regarding the 10th-century church of the Theotokos of the Bronzsmiths (τῶν χαλκεῶν) in Thessalonike.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Jer. 1:5.

<sup>83</sup> Romanos was a deacon martyred at Antioch under Diocletian.

<sup>84</sup> Painted or mosaic decoration on the outer walls of a church is unusual and normally dates to the late Byzantine period. It may be that the allusion here is to an icon of the saint on the gate leading into the churchyard. See a similar reference in L. Petit, “Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosoteira pres d’Aenos (1152),” *IRAİK*, 13 (1908), 61.11–13: ποιειτω την προσκνησιν τῷ μεμουσειωμενῷ περι τας τοῦ περιβολου πυλας τῆς Θεομητορος εικονισματι (“let him make veneration to the mosaic icon of the Mother of God on the gate of the enclosure wall”).

earlier in the church. But go back quickly to your monastery, for you are destined soon to forsake <your life> here and to pass over to your homeland on high.”

A trembling and amazement overcame the saint upon hearing these <words>, and, dropping <to the ground> in the narthex of the church and falling asleep, she once again saw the martyr of Christ [Glykeria], who said to her, “As I told you earlier, go back to your monastery, for the time of your death is at hand. In twenty-four days, you will depart in peace for the Lord, after the annual celebration at your monastery of the feast of the glorious great martyr George.”<sup>85</sup>

And so the blessed <one> arose from sleep and bid the saint a final farewell, giving her proper thanksgiving and veneration. Then she left the city, embarked on a ship, and returned to her holy monastery on the first of April. From that time on, she did not cease admonishing, entreating, instructing, and counseling the entire sisterhood in everything that leads to salvation. When the foreordained days until her death had been completed, she radiantly celebrated the joyous and universal feast of the celebrated martyr George. After receiving the pure and life-creating mysteries,<sup>86</sup> her *face did straightway shine as the sun*,<sup>87</sup> and, with joy and elation, she extended her arms on high and with thanksgiving cried out, “*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart <in peace> according to the word of Thy triumphant martyr, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.*”<sup>88</sup>

Then, consumed by a violent fever from the sixth hour,<sup>89</sup> she survived until the next day; and about the third hour she fell asleep peacefully, and *commended her spirit into the hands of God*<sup>90</sup> on the twenty-fourth of April. <Monks and nuns from> all the surrounding monasteries gathered and, with psalms and hymns, reverently buried her venerable body in the church of <St.

<sup>85</sup> The feast of St. George, the patron saint of Elisabeth’s convent, was celebrated on 23 April.

<sup>86</sup> I.e., Holy Communion. The phrase used is taken from near the end of the divine liturgy.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Mt. 17:2, regarding Christ’s face at the Transfiguration. The radiance of the “uncreated light” is a common characteristic of saints.

<sup>88</sup> Lk. 2:29–30.

<sup>89</sup> About noon.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Lk. 23:46.

George> the martyr. And, up to the present day, <her body> is preserved sound and whole<sup>91</sup> by the power and grace of God, and is known as a vehicle of healing<sup>92</sup> for all those who venerate it in faith, because anyone, stricken by whatever illness, who approaches her venerable tomb with unwavering belief and right intention and calls upon her God-given name will immediately receive the cure appropriate to the disease directly through her intercessions.

But it is also worth mentioning in <this> account, for the benefit of the audience, the miracles that occurred after the blessed <Elisabeth's> departure <from this earth>, and to relate them briefly. A man with a withered hand had run the entire gamut of the medical arts in vain, so he hastened to the tomb of the blessed <one>, emboldened only by his faith in her, on whose account he shortly achieved a wondrous cure. For *it was done unto him*, to speak as the Gospel does, *as he believed*,<sup>93</sup> and his withered hand *was restored whole, like as the other*<sup>94</sup> after it was anointed with holy oil.

Another man, who was blind, approached the blessed one's tomb with the same zeal and faith; and, by similarly anointing himself with holy oil, he departed seeing clearly and exalting the grace and power of the wonderworker. And yet another man, who had an unclean spirit and was driven to a frenzy by it, fell down before the holy coffin of the blessed <Elisabeth> and at that instant was delivered from the destructive demon; and he returned home with his full reason, recounting to all the greatness of God. Our blessed wonderworker Elisabeth did such miracles as these and many, many others even more wondrous. So as not to weary the reader,<sup>95</sup> they are not recounted in this book, but they are written down in another work.<sup>96</sup>

Such was the life, such were the honors<sup>97</sup> and spiritual gifts by which the Master of all worthily glorified her both while she lived and after she passed on. Through her intercessions, may all of us who long to be endowed with her protection and support always be preserved high above bodily as well as spiri-

<sup>91</sup> As Halkin (p. 263 n. 3) notes, incorruptibility of the body is another common sign of sanctity.

<sup>92</sup> Literally, "a clinic."

<sup>93</sup> Mt. 8:13.

<sup>94</sup> Mt. 12:13.

<sup>95</sup> Literally, "on account of satiety."

<sup>96</sup> This work apparently has not survived.

<sup>97</sup> Reading (with Lackner)  $\gamma\epsilon\rho\alpha$  for  $\epsilon\rho\gamma\alpha$ .

tual ills and may we escape without harm the obstacles of invisible and spiritual<sup>98</sup> enemies. And having finished our present life peacefully, may we attain from above blessedness with her in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom belongs all glory, honor, and worship now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

<sup>98</sup> Literally, “intelligible.”