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edited by Alice-Mary Talbot

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7. LIFE OF ST. THEODORA OF THESSALONIKE

translated by Alice-Mary Talbot

Introduction

As in the case of two of the other holy women featured in this volume, Athanasia and Theoktiste, Theodora's life course was profoundly affected by the Arab raids that devastated the islands and coastal areas of the Aegean in the ninth and tenth centuries. Like Athanasia, Theodora (812–892) was a native of Aegina; after her brother was killed in a Saracen attack, she emigrated to Thessalonike with her husband and father. Following the deaths of her husband and two of their children and the dedication of their third child to monastic life, Theodora entered the convent of St. Stephen in 837, as a twenty-five-year-old widow. She spent the remaining fifty-five years of her life as an exemplary nun, praised for her obedience, hard work, frugal life style, and humility.

Theodora worked no miracles during her lifetime, nor did she perform extraordinary feats of asceticism, except for her steadfast endurance of a harsh penance prescribed by her abbess for a trifling lapse in obedience: she was ordered to spend a night in the monastery courtyard during a snowstorm. Yet immediately after her death, in 892, her sanctity was manifested by a series of posthumous miracles and the revelation during the translation of her relics that her body had remained uncorrupted after a year of burial. So how was it that, as certain skeptical monks remarked, “a woman who lived in a city and had once been married could be elevated by God to such a height of glory”?¹ The *vita* of Theodora and the appended account of the transfer of her relics and her posthumous miracles shed some light on this question, by documenting the role of her family (especially her daughter Theopiste, who was abbess of the convent) and her supporters (primarily a certain Theodotos and the family of the hagiographer) in promoting a cult at her tomb. Attentive reading reveals the phases of a carefully orchestrated campaign to demonstrate Theo-

¹ See Chap. 59 of her *vita*.

dora's holiness: reports of oil gushing from the lamp over her tomb and miraculous healings by means of the oil; the painting of an icon of the holy woman; the translation of her uncorrupted body from the communal tomb of the nuns to an above-ground sarcophagus, where her relics were more accessible to pilgrims; the miraculous exudations of fragrant healing oil from her icon and sarcophagus; and finally the composition of a hagiographic work on her life and miracles.

A strong emphasis on family pervades the *vita* and miracle account. The hagiographer describes Theodora's family on Aegina, and its loyal service to the church: her father was a senior priest who later took monastic vows; her brother, a deacon; her sister, a nun. Theodora moved to Thessalonike because she had relatives there: Aikaterine, abbess of the convent of St. Luke; Aikaterine's brother Antony, who was briefly to serve as archbishop of Thessalonike; Anna, abbess of St. Stephen's; and her sister, a nun at the same convent. Theodora and her daughter also took up residence at St. Stephen's: one of the principal episodes of the *vita* recounts Theodora's inability to renounce her maternal affection for Theopiste. As penance mother and daughter were ordered by the abbess to live and work together in the same cell for fifteen years without speaking to each other.

The chronology of Theodora's life seems quite certain. The hagiographer carefully details her age at each phase of her career, and also provides some absolute dates, such as her death on 29 August, 6,400 years after the creation of the world, which corresponded with the sixth regnal year of emperor Leo VI [= 892].² He also gives precise dates for the death of the archbishop Antony (here dating by indiction), for the miraculous cure of a woman from Verroia (here dating by the feastday of John the Baptist), and for the translation of Theodora's relics.³

In the final chapter of the *Translation and Miracles* (Chap. 20), the hagiographer identifies himself as Gregory the "least of the clerics," and states that he wrote his *vita* of Theodora two years after her death, that is, in 894. Gregory himself participated in the translation of Theodora's relics, and his father was one of the seven priests who conducted the ceremony. Gregory had special reason to be devoted to the saint, because she had healed his young sister

² See Chap. 45 of the *vita*.

³ See Chap. 17 of the *vita*, and Chaps. 2 and 7 of the appendix to the *vita* of Theodora, hereafter referred to as the *Translation and Miracles*.

Martha when she was near death from smallpox. He evidently wrote the *vita* and miracle account for delivery to a general congregation at the convent of St. Stephen assembled for the celebration of Theodora's feastday on 29 August.⁴ Gregory had at least some classical education (as evidenced by his quotations from Homer) and was familiar with the works of Photios.⁵

The *Life* of Theodora is of interest as an iconodule text written long after the controversy over image veneration had officially ended. It is also an invaluable source for the study of monasticism, female sanctity, and healing shrines. It is by far the longest biography ever written of a Byzantine holy woman, comparable, for example, to the *vita* of the patriarch Nikephoros I.⁶ Her cult, an urban cult as so rightly emphasized by E. Patlagean,⁷ rivaled that of St. Demetrios, the patron saint of Thessalonike, and attracted pilgrims from as far as Verroia and Thebes. Gregory is also an accomplished writer: he vividly describes the psychological tensions of nunnery life, while (perhaps inadvertently) revealing a great deal about the way in which an ambitious abbess could turn her convent into a popular healing shrine and pilgrimage site. He brilliantly conveys the mysterious episode of the cracking marble tomb cover, and the excitement and suspense of the nocturnal translation ceremony. He succeeds in maintaining his listeners' interest to the very end, by concluding with a poignant description of his sister's terrible sufferings from smallpox, complete with clinical details that make it possible to diagnose and follow the course of her disease.

The *vita* of Theodora survives in two versions, one found in a twelfth-century Moscow manuscript (Synodal Library 390) and edited by Bishop Arsenij, the other preserved in a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Vatican manuscript (Palatinus gr. 211) edited by E. Kurtz; this second version also includes the appended account of the *Translation and Miracles*. Most scholars (e.g., Beck, Halkin, Patlagean, Paschalides)⁸ accept Kurtz's view that the version in the Vatican manuscript represents a later paraphrase (probably written

⁴ Cf. Chap. 1 of the *vita* and his use of the word "here" (ἐνταῦθα) to refer to the convent in Chaps. 50, 57, 59, 60, etc.

⁵ Cf. notes 63, 65–69, 71–75, 77–78, 81, 83, 86–88, 148, 257, 357.

⁶ Both *vitae* are about 20,000 words long.

⁷ Patlagean, "Theodora," 39, 47–49, 50–51, 55–62.

⁸ Beck, *Kirche*, 563–64; *BHG* 1737–39; Patlagean, "Theodora," 53; Paschalides, *Theodora*, 28–32.

in the final decades of the thirteenth century) of Gregory's original late ninth-century composition.⁹ Alexander Kazhdan, however, has raised some objections, suggesting that the *vita* edited by Kurtz may be the original, or that both *vitae* may derive from a lost original.¹⁰ I have decided to follow the compromise solution adopted by Paschalides for his new critical edition, and have translated the version of the *vita* found in Bishop Arsenij's edition (which I believe to be Gregory's original text) and the Kurtz edition of the *Translation and Miracles* (which is preserved only in the paraphrase version).

Although the cult of Theodora developed rapidly in Thessalonike at the end of the ninth century, there is little evidence for the cult in the subsequent three centuries. Nor did her icon become popular; the only surviving painting of her from the Byzantine era is a mid-eleventh-century fresco in Hagia Sophia in Thessalonike. Interest in the saint evidently revived in the Palaiologan era; leaden oil flasks imprinted with Theodora's image,¹¹ the paraphrase of her *vita*, and encomia by John Staurakios and Nicholas Kabasilas all date to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while the Russian pilgrims Ignatios of Smolensk and Zosima visited her oil-producing relics in the early fifteenth century.¹² Theodora's cult is attested in the period of Turkish occupation, and still continues today in the modern church of St. Theodora, which is now part of a male monastery.¹³

⁹ Kurtz, *Theodora*, 3–9.

¹⁰ See Kazhdan, *List of Saints*, s.v. Theodora of Thessalonike.

¹¹ Ch. Bakirtzes, "Μαρμαρινη εικόνα της άγιας Θεοδώρας από τη Θεσσαλονίκη," *Hellenika* 39 (1988), 159, 162.

¹² Patlagean, "Theodora," 53–57.

¹³ See Paschalides, *Theodora*, 283–96, for a sketch of the history of the monastery.

*Bibliography**Edition Used for Translation*

(BHG 1737, 1739) S. A. Paschalides, Ὁ βίος τῆς ὁσιομυροβλύτιδος Θεοδώρας τῆς ἐν Θεσσαλονικῇ. Διήγησις περὶ τῆς μεταθεσεως τοῦ τιμίου λειψάνου τῆς ὁσίας Θεοδώρας (Thessalonike, 1991), with modern Greek translation.

Other editions

(BHG 1737) [Bp.] Arsenij, *Zitie i podvigi sv. Feodory Solunskoj* (Juriev, 1899), 1–36.

(BHG 1738, 1739) Kurtz, *Theodora*, 1–49.

Translations

(modern Greek) S. A. Paschalides (see above)

(BHG 1738) D. Katsane-Lada, in Tsames, *Meterikon* 4:91–185.

Secondary Literature

Patlagean, “Theodora,” 39–67.

Papageorgiu, “Vita,” 144–58.

Ch. Bakirtzes, “Μαρμαρινή εἰκόνα τῆς ἁγίας Θεοδώρας ἀπὸ τῆς Θεσσαλονικῆς,” *Hellenika* 39 (1988), 158–63.

A. Kazhdan, “Theodora of Thessalonike,” in *ODB* 3:2038–39.

[p. 66]

LIFE AND CONDUCT OF OUR BLESSED MOTHER
THEODORA OF THESSALONIKE

1. In the commemoration of saints we learn many marvelous ways of life that are beneficial to the soul; for when their deeds are proclaimed they become an incentive and exhortation to virtue for those who listen. For when we hear of the struggles and sufferings of martyrs and the lives of those who have distinguished themselves by piety, *as a result of this recollection alone we are incited to zeal and imitation*¹⁴ of their virtue. Thus, since the auspicious day of the annual commemoration of our blessed mother Theodora is upon us¹⁵ (she who truly appeared to be a gift of God),¹⁶ and has compelled all of us to leave our occupations in the city and to flock together to this revered and inviolate treasury of miracles,¹⁷ it is not right for us to return whence we came empty-handed without having heard any of her good deeds as inspiration. Even though we are not aided by the passage of time, we should not for this reason keep silent about our mother's revered accomplishments; on the contrary, we should loudly proclaim to the ends <of the world> the fruit of her piety which she grants generously to all, the demonstration of her miracles which have recently appeared and are genuine, an ornament for us Thessalonians.

And let no one be incredulous, thinking that it is impossible for <a miracle> to occur in our generation that surpasses many miracles <of old>; [p. 68] for the almighty wisdom of God, which *in all ages enters into holy souls, maketh them friends of God and prophets*.¹⁸ Nor let the charge of rash action be made against me, for equating myself to those who received the talent of the Scriptures¹⁹ and for daring to praise with a defective and unskilled account one who is above all human praise. May I never be guilty of such a wicked deed! But in the fear that the miraculous deeds of God performed daily for us

¹⁴ Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Gordium martyrem*, PG 31:492A. The notes in Tsames' *Meterikon* have alerted me to several of the patristic borrowings in this *vita*.

¹⁵ 29 August, the anniversary of her death.

¹⁶ Theodora's name in Greek means "gift of God."

¹⁷ The tomb of Theodora at the convent of St. Stephen.

¹⁸ Sap. 7:27.

¹⁹ Cf. Mt. 25:18.

through her agency be cast into the depths of oblivion because no one has recounted them and the course of her life with fitting praises, I have decided to narrate a few of them in an artless and simple narrative, if God *gives utterance to my unworthy mouth*,²⁰ preferring an unworthy fulfillment of my undertaking to complete neglect of matters worthy of remembrance. I thus begin my narrative from the very starting point of the story, having the intercession of our blessed mother as my aide and adviser and collaborator.

2. The homeland of Theodora was *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*,²¹ her nobility was *the preservation of the image*²² of the Creator, <in Whose likeness> we have been fashioned; and her wealth was her rejection of all the material fortune of the world as if *shaking off dust from her feet*,²³ her glory was her desire not to be glorified at all by men. I can speak in this way about the homeland and nobility of her holy and truly irreproachable soul; for it is not right to offer her praise for things whose inherent glory she utterly denied, she whose aim was to honor them [sc. her homeland and family] rather [p. 70] than to obtain from them the glory which they did not inherently possess. For how could people who consider praise for certain things to be censure relish the glory from these <same> things, since everyone considers dear <to him> what is familiar and especially proper <to his nature>. But since it is customary in narration of history to describe who <a person is> and wherefrom <he comes> and the nature and number of his worldly characteristics, I will recount them (for it is not right to omit them), in order to give the body of my narrative continuous harmony, so that it may become known to the pious and those desirous of learning, with nothing left out that should have been included. For when something is kept silent that yearns to be made known in words, it causes extreme distress, since everything that is desired, if it is not present, increases the yearning of the one who desires it and causes him great pain if he does not obtain it quickly.

3. Thus the birthplace of the blessed <Theodora> was one of the islands of Hellas, Aegina by name.²⁴ It was formerly illustrious in the land of the west, but after falling into the hands of the Ishmaelites, through the will of God, it

²⁰ Cf. Eph. 6:19.

²¹ Heb. 12:22.

²² Cf. Gregory of Nazianzos, *or.* 8 (PG 35:796B).

²³ Cf. Mt. 10:14.

²⁴ An island in the Aegean Sea, located in the Saronic Gulf southwest of Athens.

has now been left deserted and obscure.²⁵ The blessed <Theodora> was born²⁶ on this island, once glorious, but now inglorious (for I do not blush at the present inglorious condition of her birthplace, since I can take pride in the incomparable glory of its native daughter, nor am I ashamed by the capture of her homeland, since I see with boundless pride how it exults in her). Her father was that Antony who inherited a great name for himself [i.e., from Antony the Great]; adorned with all nobility and goodness and a member of the clergy of the most holy cathedral there [i.e., Aegina] and holding first rank among priests,²⁷ he was also deemed worthy to become a monk, so that he might be seen as *perfect*²⁸ in all ways [p. 72] to Christ our God. Her mother was Chrysanthe, who on account of her virtue achieved no less distinction than the glory of her husband and her ancestors. The blessed <child> did not suckle long at the breast of her natural mother after coming into the light <of life> through the pangs of childbirth; but almost simultaneously she received the name “daughter” and “orphan,” *since God provided* and arranged *some better thing*²⁹ concerning her upbringing and her life. For consider her father’s propensity for right action. The mother of the blessed <Theodora> was not yet in her grave, but was still laid out dead on the bier, when he donned the habit of monastic life; for inasmuch as he loved a life of quiet contemplation, he was anxious to renounce worldly affairs and himself, and to embrace remote isolation.

²⁵ The Ishmaelites were Arabs who raided the Aegean area throughout the 9th and first half of the 10th century from their base on the island of Crete, which they conquered ca. 823–828; cf. Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 85–88, and *vita* of Theoktiste, above, note 5. The precise year of the abandonment of the island of Aegina by its Greek inhabitants is unknown; the date of Gregory’s composition of the *vita*, 894, provides a terminus ante quem. Attacks on the island in the first half of the 9th century are also mentioned in the *vitae* of Luke the Younger of Steiris and of Athanasia of Aegina (see p. 143 of this volume and Vasiliev, *Byz. Arabes*, 1:57–58). The evidence of the *vita* of Athanasia indicates that relatively tranquil and prosperous life continued on Aegina after the Arab raid that killed her first husband; perhaps the desertion of the island should be placed in the second half of the 9th century.

²⁶ Theodora was born in 812, since she died in 892 at the age of 80; cf. Chap. 45 and note 221.

²⁷ I.e., *protopresbyteros*, the senior *presbyteros* or priest, who could take the place of an absent bishop, and performed administrative duties; cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, s.v. ἀρχιπρεσβυτερος.

²⁸ 2 Tim. 3:17.

²⁹ Heb. 11:40.

4. And after developing this admirable ambition, while his yearning was still fiery hot, he attained his desired goal; and so the city dweller, who had been attended by many servants, came to such a <remote> place, relieved of intercourse with mankind, bringing nothing along except himself, after entrusting his daughter to God and to one of his relatives, her godmother at her baptism (who was so virtuous that she was guided everywhere by divine will, and embraced a pure and immaculate way of life), so that as her kinswoman and spiritual mother and as one distinguished for virtue she would provide for her physical and spiritual nurture in the best way possible. God approved that His servant [Theodora] should be entrusted to this woman, so that from the time she was in swaddling clothes her life might be distinguished and admired. For a reed is not as likely to catch fire because of its dryness, as the [p. 74] disposition of those under guardianship is liable to be influenced by the one in authority over them, for good or evil, especially if they should chance to be infants, inasmuch as their undeveloped mind soon adapts and conforms to the habits of the guardian who converses <with them>. For, as someone said, *he who walketh with wise men will be wise*,³⁰ and association with the wicked is not without danger. Wherefore it is always better for the weaker to follow the stronger in hope of improvement. From this <sequence of events> then resulted Theodora's existence and flourishing and the fact that she was praised and admired by all.

5. Thus the blessed <Theodora> was raised by that marvelous woman. And while still a child, she was engaged to a man from a prominent family on the island. The reason for her early betrothal was as follows. When the girl was seven years old,³¹ she was at the same time graceful and intelligent, and whatever lesson her adoptive mother decided to set for her, therein was revealed the girl's cleverness and natural intelligence. And she had learned the sacred letters³² and part of the Psalms; and she was praised and admired for the beauty of her body, her pretty face, and her inherent modesty and piety. Therefore a huge swarm of noblemen sought to marry the young girl, and

³⁰ Prov. 13:20.

³¹ Cf. also Chap. 45. Byzantine law permitted a girl to be betrothed at the age of seven; cf. Title 1.1 of the *Ecloga* of Leo III issued in 741 (L. Burgmann, *Ecloga, das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstantinos' V.* [Frankfurt, 1983], 168.112–114). Marriage, however, was not permitted until the age of twelve. The *vita* of Theodora does not specifically mention her marriage, nor the age at which it occurred.

³² τὰ ἱερά γραμματα; cf. note 47 in *Life* of Elisabeth the Wonderworker.

kept pestering her father in an importunate manner, whenever he returned from his isolated place <of retirement>. Since her father was no longer able to endure this concern, [p. 76] inasmuch as he had renounced the world and its affairs, he selected a man of distinguished family, who was known for his prudence and famed for his knowledge, and decided to betroth the girl to him. And thus they were joined to each other in lifestyle and manners, so that each revealed in himself the other's character as in a fine and diaphanous fabric. Therefore they were the pride and glory of all their family.

6. The Saracens, however, attacked that island and began to ravage it; and they took most of the inhabitants prisoner, but put some to the sword. Among these latter was the brother of the blessed <Theodora>, a cleric who was distinguished with the rank of deacon; he was killed by the sword, a piteous sight for his family and his entire homeland, since he was revered by all. Since the blessed <Theodora's> husband³³ could not bear to witness the foreign attacks befalling his homeland unexpectedly on a daily basis, he sought the good advice of his father-in-law. The latter, taking pity on this sole child left to him, counseled him to leave his native land. For he had been the father of three children: of a daughter who had ended her pious life there [on the island] as a nun, the deacon who was killed by the Saracens, and this woman, who is the subject of my narrative, with whom the birth pangs of her mother were terminated.³⁴ And her father, through divine inspiration, named her Agape,³⁵ so as to foretell the future course of the girl's life through this name <which means love>. And indeed one would not miss the mark if he were to dare to say that the appellation was given <to her> not only for the name, [p. 78] but also to indicate her lifestyle and conduct and genuine love for God; for the ensuing events confirm this statement.

7. And so they emigrated from their native land and set out for our illustrious city [i.e., Thessalonike].³⁶ Upon their arrival, they observed the city's

³³ This sentence demonstrates that Theodora married before leaving Aegina, contrary to the supposition of Paschalides, *Theodora*, 264.

³⁴ I.e., Theodora was her last child.

³⁵ This was her baptismal name.

³⁶ As we learn from Chaps. 9, 20, and 34, Theodora's family had relatives in Thessalonike who were prominent in the church, including Aikaterine, superior of the convent of St. Luke; her brother Antony who served briefly as archbishop of the city in 843; Anna, superior of the convent of St. Stephen; and Anna's sister, who was a nun in the same convent. All these relatives were iconodules.

location and situation and the peaceful living conditions, and that as a result of its protection by its guardian and defender, the all-glorious martyr Demetrios³⁷ (second only to God), it was protected from all evil assaults and remained impregnable. Theodora's father, who desired peace and quiet and detested the iconoclast faction, loathsome to God (for the holy Church was still controlled by them, through some oversight of God),³⁸ *retired to the remote area* below Thoropa,³⁹ *which is not frequented by men, in the belief that it was easier to live among wild beasts than to associate*⁴⁰ with people of false belief, so that he might be able to see God to as great an extent as possible and to become blessed. And he spent the remaining years of his life here in a pious manner, inasmuch as he enjoyed freedom from worldly cares and could live the ascetic life in peaceful contemplation. He left everything <else> to those who wanted it, and communing constantly with himself and with the <Holy> Spirit, he departed this human life, and flew off to the heavenly abodes.

8. But they [i.e., Theodora and her husband] decided to live in the city. They had three children, of whom the second and third died soon <after birth>,⁴¹ adding great sorrow to their distress at living in a strange place and the loss of their possessions. But not even this terrible, indeed exceedingly terrible, and great blow prevailed in the end over that <holy> woman's noble and virtuous soul. [p. 80] On the one hand, <the tragedy> did overwhelm her, inasmuch as she was a mother, and, as in the case of mothers, her nature was overwhelmed in this as in all things; but unlike most women, she was not swept away by the tragic event, her reason giving way to her suffering. Rather she used reason to withstand her suffering, and became a support for her husband in his despondency, saying: "I have heard the Holy Writ explain that '*the head of the woman is the man*'⁴² and that '*the members should have the same care for*

³⁷ Tradition holds that Demetrios, the patron saint of Thessalonike, was martyred there under the emperor Maximian (286–305).

³⁸ Gregory is referring to the imperial policy of persecuting those who venerated the images of Christ, the Virgin and saints. The second period of iconoclasm (lit., "breaking of icons") lasted from 815 to 843.

³⁹ An unknown place probably in the vicinity of Thessalonike.

⁴⁰ "Retired to . . . associate": cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Gordium martyrem*, PG 31:496B.

⁴¹ An indication of the high infant mortality in Byzantium; cf. also note 324 in Chap. 13 of the *Translation and Miracles*, and G. Contis, "Patterns of Disease and Death among Women and Children in Early Byzantine Times," *BSCAbstr* 19 (1993), 34–35.

⁴² 1 Cor. 11:3.

one another'⁴³ and that 'the eye cannot say unto the hand, "I have no need of thee." Nay, much more, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary.'⁴⁴ Therefore, since I, although a feeble and lesser part, have the same care for you,⁴⁵ I entreat you, my most respected head, do not be despondent at the loss we have now suffered of our children and pay no heed to me. For we are not the first or the only ones to have suffered this <loss>. But give thanks to God Who granted <us these children>, and carry out this wish of mine. All men offer first fruits to God; let us also offer the first fruit of our children, the girl who is the sole child remaining to us, and has been temporarily granted by Him to us. And I am confident that Christ will accept the child like the two obols of that faithful widow of old,⁴⁶ and in the present life will give us complete solace and at [p. 82] the future judgment day we will receive in turn greater compassion from Him on account of the offering which we present to Him of the last of our children."

Her good husband replied to her: "Wife, your wish is a good one, and your advice is excellent. Come, let us quickly carry out your good plan. For one should not hesitate to carry out the best propositions."

9. And immediately they took the girl in their arms (for she was six years old), and upon reaching the sanctuary of St. Luke,⁴⁷ the wholly blessed apostle and evangelist, which is located on the road leading to the Kassandreotic Gate,⁴⁸ they offered her to Aikaterine, who was a relative of Theodora and the sister of Antony the confessor, who also served as the archbishop of our city.⁴⁹ For she [i.e., Aikaterine] lived there with certain orthodox nuns, and apparently their <convent> was overlooked by the iconoclasts because of its small size. And falling at her feet they said: "O mother, receive our first-born and

⁴³ 1 Cor. 12:25.

⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 12:21–22.

⁴⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:25.

⁴⁶ Cf. Mk. 12:41–44.

⁴⁷ This is the only mention in the Byzantine sources of the convent of St. Luke; cf. Janin, *EglisesCentres*, 395. See Papageorgiu, "Vita," 146–47, for speculation on its location.

⁴⁸ The Kassandreotic Gate (also called Kalamaria) was located in the walls on the east side of Thessalonike, and was the gate through which the Via Egnatia passed. Hence the λεωφορος of the text must be the Via Egnatia.

⁴⁹ On Antony, see Chaps. 10–18, below.

sole remaining child, and present her as a voluntary sacrifice and spiritual whole-offering to the Lord our God, after clothing her in the life-bearing and holy monastic habit.” And that holy woman took the girl and lifting up her eyes and her hands to the One Who dwells in heaven, she said: “O Lord, Who out of compassionate mercy deigned to be born of a holy virgin as an infant in the flesh, Thou Who didst accept the sacrifice of Abraham when [p. 84] he was willing to sacrifice his only son in deference to Thy bidding, accept also the offering brought to you by this couple and make her increase in the divine virtues like Samuel who was promised to Thee, our God, before his birth, *because Thou art blessed unto the generations.*”⁵⁰

At dawn then, after the conclusion of <the singing of> the entire *kanon*, that marvelous woman had the girl tonsured⁵¹ by a pious man, and named her Theopiste.⁵² And her parents returned to their own home, magnifying and praising God, because their daughter was entered into the register of nuns.

10. At this point in my narrative I would have liked to describe the lives of many of Theodora’s relatives, who were of a very high-placed family, not in order to add to her praise, but so that you might see in what sort of godly manner her relatives lived. But since I will seem to exceed <my mandate> if I go beyond my assigned theme, I will mention only our archbishop Antony,⁵³ and then return my narrative again to Theodora. This chief shepherd of ours, Antony, after learning the sacred letters as a child⁵⁴ and donning the life-

⁵⁰ Cf. Ps. 88 (89):52.

⁵¹ It would have been highly irregular for a six-year-old girl to be tonsured. Normally a girl did not take monastic vows until the age of sixteen, although convents did admit some girls as novices at an earlier age, and educated them in preparation for monastic life.

⁵² Literally, “faithful to God.” A nun normally took a new name at the time of her monastic vows; the monastic name frequently, but not always, began with the same letter as her baptismal name.

⁵³ Here Gregory begins a lengthy nine-chapter digression about the career of Antony, which forms a “*mini-vita*” or a “*Life within a Life*.” He presents most of the necessary elements to demonstrate the sanctity of this relative of Theodora: disputation with an iconoclast emperor (Chaps. 13–15), suffering torture and exile for his iconodule beliefs (Chap. 16), posthumous healing miracles (Chap. 18) and the miraculous preservation of his body from decomposition (Chap. 18). S. A. Paschalides’ article on Antony (“*Ἐνας ὁμολογητῆς τῆς Δευτερας Εἰκονομαχίας ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Θεσσαλονικῆς Ἀντωνίος [+844]*,” *Byzantina* 17 [1994], 189–216) appeared when this book was already in press.

⁵⁴ Cf. 2 Tim. 3:15, and note 32, above.

bearing and holy monastic habit, adorned himself with all forms of virtue, constantly studying *the divinely inspired Scriptures*⁵⁵ and immersing his mind in their depths, and *bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*.⁵⁶ And he was not only trained in our [i.e., Christian] wisdom, [p. 86] which is concerned only with the salvation of our souls and rejects the enigmatic and deep power of words, but was also thoroughly educated in secular and general knowledge (since one needs this in order to explain the meditations of the mind), even though his desire for our <Christian> knowledge was greater. Wherefore it so happened that he assiduously studied every old and new book, as no one else. And thereby he enriched his powers of spiritual contemplation, and enriched the brilliance of his life, and attained extraordinary fame. Thereby the Wisdom of God the Father and the Word, Christ our God, granted <him> a towering knowledge of doctrines, and he *shone* with radiance *like a light in a dark place*.⁵⁷ And therefore by God's decision he was appointed archbishop of Dyrrachion.⁵⁸ For it was not right *to hide his lamp under a bushel, but to place it on the lampstand*⁵⁹ of the Church.

11. Thus when the blessed man had ascended the archiepiscopal throne, and was nobly guiding his flock to the pastures of salvation, suddenly that abominable heresy <of iconoclasm> that had recently appeared cruelly rekindled like a flame, and the whole throng of orthodox [i.e., iconodules] was terrified, and tumult and confusion overwhelmed the inhabited world, and people of every age and race, being cruelly tortured by the defenders of impiety, were forced to blaspheme against our Lord and God Jesus Christ by trampling on His venerable and revered image. You are surely aware that I am speaking of the persecution that recurred during the reign of the Amalekite Leo,⁶⁰ named

⁵⁵ 2 Tim. 3:16.

⁵⁶ 2 Cor. 10:5.

⁵⁷ 2 Pet. 1:19.

⁵⁸ Dyrrachion (= Durres in present-day Albania), a city on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, was under Byzantine control in the first half of the 9th century. Antony must have become its archbishop sometime before 815 when the second period of iconoclasm began.

⁵⁹ Cf. Mt. 5:15.

⁶⁰ Leo V the Armenian (813–820), who renewed iconoclastic policy; cf. note 38, above. He is called Amalekite, meaning Arab, because of his evident approval of the Islamic prohibition of the depiction of sacred images. For a general overview of the history of the iconoclastic controversy, see C. Mango, "Historical Introduction," in

after a wild beast⁶¹ and loathsome to God and bold-spirited, against the holy and venerable icon of Christ our God; [p. 88] for the church that is holy from one end of the earth to the other in a pious and God-pleasing manner inherited the tradition of the holy apostles and fathers that we should depict it [the image of Christ] in the likeness of the animated flesh which He received from the holy blood of the Virgin, and offer it relative veneration. The memory of this <persecution>, which was so cruel and intolerable, stirs up a torrent of tears <within me>. I will corroborate <my statement> with a tale that does not proceed at random so as to be diffused into the air, nor is it based on the <formal> establishment of proof, but on the great achievements of the holy fathers who lived at that time.

12. For when this accursed Leo, by some oversight of God, succeeded to imperial rule, a terrible war was threatened and waged against the holy church, as the tyrant strove with the greatest impiety and fierce battle to intimidate and overpower every orthodox and pious soul, and to bring down every *exalted horn*⁶² of piety by the power of his impiety, and endeavored not to seem lesser than anyone. For he sat in authority in brilliant fashion, showing great pride in his artifices, and mixing authority with evil deeds. And by frightening certain of our contenders <for the faith> with maltreatment, and attempting to persuade some with flattery and condemning others to exile, and striving to subdue yet others to his will with <promises of> glory and lavish payments of money, he transformed himself into various shapes like a most wicked Proteus,⁶³ mingling misfortunes with life and mixing mercy with death. And certain people submitted, but most carried off the garland of victory through Christ. Then this Antony was brought before him [Leo V], and the tyrant expressed all his opinions in vain and threatened every sort of punishment, weaving together the nets of his words with the authority [p. 90] of his power, having decided to trap in them this man who was strong and impregnable in every respect. But he [Antony], with fearless soul and splendid spirit,

Iconoclasm, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 1–6. For more specific treatment of Leo V, see W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford, Calif., 1988), 196–225.

⁶¹ The Greek name for Leo (Λέων) is the same as the word for lion (λέων).

⁶² Cf. Ps. 88 (89):17.

⁶³ A minor pagan deity who was able to assume various shapes; cf. Homer, *Od.* 4:385–461.

using the testimony of the divinely inspired Scriptures, filled the tyrant's soul with darkness and confusion through his response delivered with divine power, and revealed him to all *as a deaf man who does not hear and as a mute who does not open his mouth*.⁶⁴ For he is said to have made his refutation with such invincible boldness that the ears of the entire audience could not bear to listen to anything but the words of Antony. They were as follows⁶⁵:

13. "O emperor, I do not wish *to use blasphemous words* against our true God Jesus Christ, nor do I intend to *insult Him with deeds*,⁶⁶ like the assemblage of iconoclasts, which does not fear *with bold and impious tongue and intellect* to give the name of *idol to the venerable icon of Christ, through which we were saved from the error of <venerating> idols*,⁶⁷ and to denigrate it with other such blasphemies; for I know that *the honor of the images is the honor <rendered> to those depicted, just as dishonor is transmitted to the same images*.⁶⁸ For we true worshipers of God *do not stop and limit* our reverence and *veneration* to the icons,⁶⁹ as they [the iconoclasts] assert. Nor do we render to them a veneration which is a worshipful veneration (forbid the impropriety!), which is appropriate only for God Who has authority over all. For *all* people who are *taught of God*⁷⁰ in the Spirit are familiar with this distinction of reverence [p. 92], and what sort of veneration we should render to Christ our God; and they know how to render the proper reverence to holy icons, and how to offer through them [i.e., the icons] honor to the archetype. For basing our-

⁶⁴ Cf. Ps. 37 (38):13.

⁶⁵ As Kurtz (*Theodora*, iv, n. 3) pointed out, much of this speech is borrowed from Photios' letter of ca. 865 to the Bulgarian prince Michael, ed. as ep. 1 by B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, *Photius: Epistulae et Amphilochia*, I (Leipzig, 1983), 2–39 (hereafter, Phot., ep. 1). It should be noted, however, that the hagiographer has reordered the sequence of sentences. Perhaps, as Paschalides has suggested ("Αντώνιος," 203), both the text of Antony's speech and the letter of Photios are based on a common prototype. For a comparison of the wording of the texts of the letter of Photios and Antony's speech, see Paschalides, "Αντώνιος," 204–6.

⁶⁶ Phot., ep. 1.387–88.

⁶⁷ Phot., ep. 1.391–93.

⁶⁸ Phot., ep. 1.403–4; the first part of the phrase is based on the famous dictum of Basil of Caesarea, from the *De Spiritu Sancto* (PG 32:149c).

⁶⁹ Phot., ep. 1.430.

⁷⁰ Jn. 6:45.

selves on the revelations from above of the Holy Scriptures and on the apostolic and patristic traditions, we render the reverence of veneration in a fitting and relative manner in honor of the person depicted.⁷¹ Thus when we consecrate the icon of Christ with reverence and veneration, we do not circumscribe the reverence and honor in it [i.e., the icon], but we direct and offer these <marks of honor> to the One Who became incarnate for our sake through the ineffable wealth of His love for mankind.⁷² Thus we venerate the thrice-blessed and life-giving wood of the cross, on which the body of the Lord was stretched, and the blood that cleanses all filth, that purifies all the world, poured forth from His side that flows with life; and watered by its streams, it [the cross] changed its nature and produced eternal life for us instead of death. Thus we venerate the symbol of the cross, by which phalanxes of demons are put to flight and incurable diseases are healed, as if the same grace and power <that is found> in the prototype were operative in the symbolic form.⁷³ Thus when we render the reverence of veneration to the other holy symbols and holy places of our pure and holy worship,⁷⁴ we are not divided into various and different rites, but through their visible different and divisible worship and veneration we are led indivisibly to that indivisible, uniform and unifying divinity.⁷⁵ Thus we honor and venerate the holy icons of our all-pure Lady the Mother of God and of all the saints in proportion to⁷⁶ the pre-eminence and venerability of their prototypes,⁷⁷ and [p. 94], to sum up, we venerate in a relative manner the relics and churches and tombs of the saints, and other things of this sort, in our unblemished and holy rites. For we acknowledge and praise the original and primordial cause through the gift and blessing worked by them.⁷⁸ And we do not depict in an icon⁷⁹ that which cannot be

⁷¹ Phot., ep. 1.424–26.

⁷² Phot., ep. 1.442–47.

⁷³ Phot., ep. 1.435–40.

⁷⁴ Phot., ep. 1.428–29.

⁷⁵ Phot., ep. 1.431–34.

⁷⁶ After ἀγαλογίαν, Paschalides omitted the phrase τῆς τῶν πρωτοτύπων ὑπεροχῆς καὶ σεβασμιότητος, καὶ . . . which is to be found in the Arsenij ed., p. 8.38–39 (and in the letter of Photios).

⁷⁷ Phot., ep. 1.456–58.

⁷⁸ Phot., ep. 1.447–53.

⁷⁹ Here εἰκὼν has the double meaning of “icon” and “image.”

seen. For the divine is totally without form and shape and is invisible and cannot be perceived by the eyes, but can only be conceived by the mind, if indeed someone can do this.

14. "But you, O emperor, why do you not revere these things, but dishonor them? Who counseled you <to do> this wicked deed? What serpent, begrudging your salvation, deprived you of the delights of paradise and the kingdom of heaven? Truly, if someone were to call that saint-hating assemblage of accusers of Christians offspring of the Christ-hating Jews,⁸⁰ he would not err from the truth. For from where else did they get such cruelty? Whence came such insolence? Whence their persistent battle and *implacable war against Christ and His saints*,⁸¹ and the demonic alliance of that unholy phalanx, if it is not a product of the Christ-battling assembly of Jews, whose words, which can defile the ears, somehow led astray your correct and sober belief? For before <you donned> the imperial robe you were devoted to the orthodox faith;⁸² but now you have been captivated by their doctrines and *strive in your excessive wickedness to surpass*,⁸³ even your teachers, whose heart completely loathes the *name* of Christ our God *which is above all*,⁸⁴ as Isaiah says: '*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*'⁸⁵ And [p. 96] since you are unable *to reject Christ even with your lips* while you are in the midst of assembled Christians, *you have revealed yourself* to be far from their *ancestral zeal, that of the Jews*,⁸⁶ I mean, and *you have shown yourself no more tolerant than idolaters toward the divine mysteries of Christians, trampling the Christians themselves*⁸⁷ *with feet swift to shed blood*,⁸⁸ and throwing into the fire the form of the One Who created you, and Who *crushed* under His feet

⁸⁰ Antony accuses the iconoclasts of holding beliefs similar to those of the Jews, who prohibited the manufacture of images in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:4).

⁸¹ Phot., ep. 1.401–2.

⁸² The chronicler Theophanes asserts that just before Leo, the general of the Anatolikon theme, seized the throne, he wrote to the patriarch Nikephoros I to assure him of his orthodoxy; cf. Theoph. 1:502.20–22.

⁸³ Cf. Phot., ep. 1.408.

⁸⁴ Cf. Phil. 2:9.

⁸⁵ Is. 29:13.

⁸⁶ Cf. Phot., ep. 1.409–11.

⁸⁷ Cf. Phot., ep. 1.417–19.

⁸⁸ Phot., ep. 1.397, a quotation from Is. 59:7.

*the head of the intelligible serpent,*⁸⁹ of whom you are the most bitter offspring, and Who melted down with divine fire our corrupted nature.

15. “O most silly and foolish man, do you not revere the ancient and revered <tradition> of venerable icon-painting, but say that it is a new invention and contrary to the holy laws of the Church? Do you not revere the delight and dignity of the Church, supported by place and time and doctrine? Do you not revere the holy synods assembled with Christ and for the sake of Christ, which have unanimously accepted these <icons> and transmitted them to later generations? How can you want to be called a Christian when you are insolent toward Christ? What connection do you have with a commandment <issued> to Jews? Will it not be considered a matter for great censure, if you display their attitude toward Christ and even worse than them because of your dishonor of His veneration in icons? Who would not call you an idol-worshiper, since you demonstrate their inhumane cruelty against Christians? You have once more stirred up implacable war against the Church. You torture the nurslings of the Church so that they will carry out your foul and nonsensical doctrines. The curse of the divine David is most appropriate for you and your wicked henchmen: ‘*Drown, O Lord, [p. 98] and divide their tongues*’⁹⁰ which reproached and treated insolently Christ our God through the destruction and dishonor of His revered icon, and the icon of the supremely pure Mother of God, She Who incomprehensibly gave birth to the co-eternal and unoriginate Word of God the Father, She Who is truly our protector, and the icons of the holy angels and all who pleased Him of old.”

16. Although <Antony> wanted to continue his discourse even longer, when the tyrant realized that this contest of words was achieving none of the results that he desired, and seeing that the holy <Antony> was striving to trap him rather than <Leo> overpowering <the saint>, he quickly shifted his defense with words into actions. And after inflicting unbearable torture on that holy flesh, he ended by sentencing the thrice-blessed <Antony> to perpetual exile. And <Antony> left the arena with distinction, bearing on his face the clear marks of victory. For they beat him so mercilessly on his head that ever after his eyes were rheumy, because the blessed man’s head was so terribly battered by countless blows. Meanwhile <Leo> had an angry and pale face and his eyes were livid, frenzied with the blood of the righteous man and

⁸⁹ Cf. Ps. 73 (74):13–14.

⁹⁰ Ps. 54 (55):9.

blinded with dark madness. Thus Antony was sent into exile, saying nothing to himself and everyone <present> except that melodious psalm of David: “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.*”⁹¹ And when he arrived at his place of exile, what need is there to recount how many tortures were endured by the noble-spirited <Antony>, whose purpose was firmer than adamant? For I could not find words suitable to the reality, since every tongue is vanquished by the truth of events. [p. 100]

17. When that Leo, the barbarian named after a wild beast, suffered his unlucky fate (for as the result of a conspiracy he died wretchedly as he deserved for his tyrannical rule),⁹² his successor to the imperial throne, Michael,⁹³ recalled the holy <Antony> from exile, and bade him live quietly at home,⁹⁴ for he respected his steadfast and venerable <character>. But <Antony> supported the faithful [i.e., the iconodules] even more than before, saying: “Make a courageous stand in the face of your struggles and <God>, *Who together with temptation also makes a way to escape,*⁹⁵ will soon free us from the wickedness of the Devil, the author of evil, and will remove his stumbling blocks and obstacles. And those who hated Christ and us will soon fall into the ditch which they themselves dug.”⁹⁶

But why go on at length? When the terrible winter of heresy abated and the spring of the unsullied orthodox faith once more appeared,⁹⁷ this thrice-blessed Antony by vote of the synod received the archiepiscopal throne of our most celebrated city of Thessalonike, attaining this celebrated see as a fitting

⁹¹ Ps. 23 (24):1.

⁹² Leo was murdered on 25 December 820, in the palace chapel of St. Stephen (W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* [Stanford, Calif., 1988], 224 and n. 307), by a band of conspirators in the employ of Michael of Amorion, commander of a select imperial troop of bodyguards.

⁹³ Michael II (820–829) had a much milder policy toward iconophiles than his predecessor, and recalled a number of iconophiles who had been sent into exile.

⁹⁴ It is not clear whether “at home” means Dyrrachion or Thessalonike or someplace else.

⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 10:13.

⁹⁶ Cf. Ps. 7:15.

⁹⁷ The second period of iconoclasm came to an end in March 843, with a council that reaffirmed the orthodox doctrine on the veneration of images laid down at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. This shift in policy was made possible by the regency of the empress Theodora, widow of Theophilos (829–842), for her young son Michael III (842–867).

reward for his terrible suffering and for his holy and revered white hair, like that of Abraham. But after living <only> a short while longer, he soon passed over to the Lord, on November 2 of the seventh indiction.⁹⁸ And it is said that he did not <have time before his death to> celebrate in Thessalonike either the bloodless sacrifice [i.e., the eucharist] or any ordination or any other <rite> which is customarily performed by archbishops [p. 102] except to ordain a single cleric. And the leaders of our church, inspired by their incomparable faith in the man who performed the ordination, gave to the cleric the name of Antony, desiring, I think, that he should have this <name> for the eternal memory <of Antony>.

18. And so, after performing honorable funeral rites, they laid the body of this all-holy combatant <for the faith> on the left side of the famous church of the holy and glorious great martyr Demetrios, in the chapel there of the prophet and forerunner John the Baptist,⁹⁹ who is above all men *born of women*.¹⁰⁰ And up to this day Christ preserves his holy remains sound and uncorrupted to His glory. And through his <body> the Lord, the provider of blessings, grants many cures to those who approach it with faith. And I myself, unworthy as I am, have been deemed worthy to witness this <relic>. For forty-six years after his departure unto the Lord, when another of our prelates departed this life,¹⁰¹ and we wanted to lay his body in Antony's tomb, we found

⁹⁸ The seventh indiction corresponds to the year 1 September 843–30 August 844; Antony must therefore have died on 2 November 843 (Pascalides [*Theodora*, 59, and “Αντωνιος,” 212] is a year off in dating Antony's death to 2 November 844). Since the council restoring image veneration was held on 11 March 843, it is unlikely that he could have been installed as archbishop of Thessalonike before summer; hence, the assertion of the hagiographer that he had a very short tenure seems reasonable. On Antony, see L. Petit, “Les eveques de Thessalonique,” *EO* 4 (1900/1901), 217; Pascalides, *Theodora*, 252–53. Theodore of Stoudios addressed two letters to Antony when he was archbishop of Dyrrachion; cf. G. Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, II (Berlin, 1992), eps. 462 and 542.

⁹⁹ The chapel of St. John the Baptist must be one of the mortuary chapels excavated on the north (left) side of the church of St. Demetrios; cf. G. A. and M. G. Soteriou, Ἡ βασιλικὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονικῆς, I (Athens, 1952), 135–38.

¹⁰⁰ Mt. 11:11.

¹⁰¹ This is a reference to archbishop Methodios, who evidently died in 889 (forty-six years after 843). He is known from the *vita* of Euthymios the Younger to have consecrated the two monasteries founded by Euthymios; cf. L. Petit, “Vie et office de Saint Euthyme le Jeune,” *ROC* 8 (1903), 202.16–19. See also Petit, “Les eveques,” 220; J. Gouillard, “Le Synodicon de l'Orthodoxie,” *TM* 2 (1967), 114.7.

the all-holy body of Antony almost entirely whole and unaltered,¹⁰² together with his archiepiscopal vestments, so that one could discern the location of the honorable crosses of his *omophorion*¹⁰³ and all other features of his archiepiscopal vestments.

19. But enough about this. Since my narrative has swerved aside a bit, like a colt at the turning-post <in the race course>, carrying away the narrator with praises of Antony, I must now come back and tell my simple account in orderly sequence, describing the ascetic [p. 104] contests which the blessed <Theodora> endured in the wrestling pit of the cenobitic convent. For when the holy woman's husband departed this mortal life (for the father did not live long after the tonsure of his daughter),¹⁰⁴ the blessed Theodora, after observing at home the third and ninth day commemoration of her husband,¹⁰⁵ bade farewell to all worldly affairs. For she did not view the loss of her husband as a grievous <affliction>, but revealed to all the heart-felt desire for the monastic habit which <she had felt> for many years, maintaining the sovereign mastery of her mind over her passions even in the prime of her youth, when the flame of desire flares up and prompts a great battle against the spirit. For she was only twenty-five years old when these events occurred. But there prevailed over her carnal love that divine love which leads up to heaven all those in its power, and which forcefully drags <them> away from all ephemeral things and persuades <them> to bear eagerly on their shoulders the yoke of obedience with free and voluntary compulsion. Therefore she endured nobly even that unbearable tragedy of widowhood and uttered cries of thanksgiving to God, because her husband did not die at the hands of the Ishmaelites, but died peacefully in her <arms>.

¹⁰² This was a typical indication of sanctity; cf., for example, Chap. 7 of the *Translation and Miracles*, where the excellent preservation of Theodora's garments is also noted.

¹⁰³ The *omophorion* was a very long (ca. 3.5 m) woolen scarf worn by bishops.

¹⁰⁴ Later in the chapter Gregory states that Theodora was twenty-five when her husband died, so his death must have occurred in 837.

¹⁰⁵ It was customary to observe commemorative rites for the recently deceased on the third, ninth, and fortieth day after their death. Liturgical prayers were said, and *kollyba*, boiled wheat, was distributed to the congregation; cf. G. Dagron, "Troisieme, neuvieme et quarantieme jours dans la tradition byzantine: temps chretien et anthropologie," in *Le temps chretien de la fin de l'Antiquite au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1984), 419–30, and Koukoules, *Bios*, 4:208–11.

20. Therefore, as I have already described, after performing the third and ninth day memorial rites for her excellent husband, she divided her property into three parts, and gave one portion to the poor for the repose <of the soul> of her departed <husband>. Then she decided that she should seek refuge with her celebrated relative Anna, who for the sake of God's honor and the most pure [p. 106] veneration of the sacred icons *fought the good fight*¹⁰⁶ of being a confessor <for the faith>, when a certain bodyguard of the emperor, named Choirosphaktes,¹⁰⁷ severely abused her. And so <Theodora> went immediately to the holy monastery dedicated to St. Stephen,¹⁰⁸ first among martyrs and deacons, bringing with her one hundred gold coins (and after her tonsure she donated to the monastery three maidservants and all the rest of her property).¹⁰⁹ And prostrating herself at the feet of the aforementioned Anna, who was also superior of this monastery, she said:

“Blessed mother, have mercy on me, since I have been terribly buffeted by the storms of this life. Now that I have discovered a joyful <outcome> of my sorrowful widowhood, let me not be turned away, but may I attain the angelic habit <of the nun>. Some time ago I dedicated to God the fruit of my loins [i.e., Theopiste]; now I dedicate myself <to Him> through you. Have mercy on me.”

21. That holy woman [Anna] raised her up and replied: “Since you are my blood <relative> and my child and I am well aware of the mode of life

¹⁰⁶ 2 Tim. 4:7.

¹⁰⁷ Choirosphaktes is known only from this text. He is evidently the first member of his family to be mentioned in the historical sources; G. Koliass, who was not aware of this passage in the *vita* of Theodora, claims that Leo Choirosphaktes, born ca. 845–850, is the first person of this surname to be recorded; cf. *Leon Choerosphactes, magistre, proconsul et patrice* (Athens, 1939), 16. It is unclear under which emperor Anna suffered persecution for her beliefs; it was probably Leo V (813–820) or Theophilus (829–842).

¹⁰⁸ The convent of St. Stephen the Protomartyr is mentioned only in the *vita* of St. Theodora. It later took her name, and is attested several times in sources of the 14th and 15th centuries. The convent evidently stood on the site of the modern church of St. Theodora, west of Hagia Sophia; cf. Paschalides, *Theodora*, 257–58, 283–96; Janin, *EglisesCentres*, 374–75, 411 (the notice on p. 411 has several errors).

¹⁰⁹ The account in Chap. 20 of Theodora's distribution of her property to the poor and to the monastery of St. Stephen, in addition to the fact that she had three maidservants, indicates that she lived in comfortable circumstances despite her refugee status.

<you have led> since you were in swaddling clothes,¹¹⁰ how should I not welcome you and embrace you as if you were one of my own limbs? But I am not willing to enroll you immediately in the ranks of nuns, lest through some scheme of the devil you change your mind, once your grief abates. Therefore stay for a while in the convent and, if God wills, I will joyfully counsel and assist you <in taking the monastic habit>.”¹¹¹

But when Theodora replied, “If you do not immediately enroll me in the register of nuns, you will have to give an accounting for me on the day of judgment,” [p. 108] <Anna> began to exhort her and prepare her for her spiritual struggle, saying, “Watch with whom you associate, my child, lest you turn again *like a dog to your own vomit*,¹¹² and prefer to God the pleasures of this world, and *the last state will be worse than the first*.¹¹³ Mark, my child, that the Lord says in His Gospels, ‘*Whoever taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*’¹¹⁴ Therefore, *be manly*, my child, and *let your heart be strengthened and endure*¹¹⁵ for Christ’s sake. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness*,¹¹⁶ as the holy apostle [Paul], the cho-

¹¹⁰ Since Anna claims to have known Theodora since infancy, one might propose identifying her with the pious relative who was entrusted with Theodora’s care after her mother died (cf. Chap. 4). In Chap. 38, however, it is stated that Anna had lived in a convent since childhood; therefore she cannot have been Theodora’s godmother and foster mother on Aegina. It also seems impossible that Anna could have known Theodora since infancy, unless she originally lived on Aegina. Perhaps Gregory has confused Theodora’s two spiritual mothers.

¹¹¹ The period of the novitiate, usually three years, could be shortened or waived for more mature women, especially those who had been widowed. Cf., for example, the provisions of the late 13th-century *typikon* of the Lips convent (chaps. 17–18), which state that a teen-aged woman should spend three years as a novice before taking her final vows, a woman older than twenty should wait one year, while a woman who has been widowed or lost a child need spend only six months in the novitiate (Delehaye, *Deux typica*, 115–16).

¹¹² Prov. 26:11; 2 Pet. 2:22.

¹¹³ Mt. 12:45.

¹¹⁴ Mt. 10:38.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Ps. 26 (27):14.

¹¹⁶ Eph. 6:12.

sen vessel,¹¹⁷ said.” After instructing her with these and many other words, <Anna> immediately arranged for the scissors to be given to the priest, as is customary.¹¹⁸ And she was tonsured and donned the holy monastic habit, and changed her name to Theodora.¹¹⁹

22. But that wondrous confessor <for the faith> [i.e., Anna] continued to counsel her on a daily basis, for she was distressed in her soul about her, since she had a youthful body and a rosy¹²⁰ and beautiful face; and she was afraid that the Devil who envies the good might impede her progress toward God. But she rejoiced as she came to be familiar with <Theodora’s> good conduct. For [p. 110] from childhood the discipline of fasting was ingrained in her by long habit (just like breathing or any other natural process necessary to sustain life), and abiding in her with desire became a condition which stayed with her until death. Nor, as long as she lived, did she fail to advance in this virtue, accomplishing it habitually, without compulsion and free of discomfort. Therefore, desiring to increase <her exercise of> this virtue even more in the convent, and not being bold enough to ask the superior <for permission> to fast more than the nuns who had come there before her, nor daring to break the monastic rule, lest she thereby give offense to the nuns, she used to sit in the refectory with the nuns, but hardly touched her food. And often she did not drink water for an entire week. But she did not do this for long without the knowledge of the superior. For she [Anna] bade her to practice openly, as best she could, this <fasting> and whatever else was profitable to her, because she loved Theodora, observing her extraordinary humility and the concern that she had for her salvation. She used to examine her even in <matters that> are considered minor and insignificant, not permitting her to concern herself even the slightest about <matters> that do not profit the soul, and she exhorted her night and day to confess her deeds and her thoughts, her words and her movements, and not to do anything without her approval.

23. Thus, whenever the Devil used to try to assail her with impure and

¹¹⁷ Acts 9:15.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Goar, *Euchologion*, 385, sect. 18–386, sect. 19.

¹¹⁹ Theodora, whose baptismal name was Agape (see Chap. 6), did not follow the customary (although not obligatory) tradition of taking a monastic name beginning with the same letter as her baptismal name.

¹²⁰ Ευροδον, not in the dictionaries.

passionate thoughts, she quickly made them vanish by means of extended prayer and confession and constant recollection of eternal punishment. For she knew that it is not permissible for those who have once and for all renounced Satan and all his works to be defiled with wanton and filthy thoughts. For, [p. 112] as God says, “*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*”¹²¹ And this was easier for her because she did not puff herself up and boast of her accomplishments, that she differed from many, but she deemed herself wretched as she called to mind the extent to which she lacked in perfect obedience. Thus she believed that she was a *worthless servant*¹²² to the superior and the nuns and so called herself, and she performed by herself almost all the work of the convent: grinding grain, making bread with her own hands, and cooking, work which she had never done before. And in addition to this, she used to carry out another responsibility, going to the marketplace and somewhere far outside the city for the abundance of goods for sale; and she used to walk through the marketplace carrying a huge load of wood or something else on her shoulders. And sometime she used to raise up her scapular,¹²³ and carry such things in it. And if ever someone who was familiar with her distinguished background would meet her and comment, “Why are you demeaning your noble <ancestry>?” she would not even listen to them with full attention, offering her commendable zeal to all as a rule <of conduct>; she used to always go out to work unobserved, and involved herself in every <type of> work as required, and constantly strove only for retreat from the tumult of the world. Thus she scorned worldly honor, and thus she mortified *her flesh together with her passions and desires.*¹²⁴

24. And since she had heard the Lord saying, “*Search the Scriptures,*”¹²⁵ when she was ordered by the superior [p. 114] to assume responsibility for the care of the church,¹²⁶ she gladly accepted. For just as she loved to <cover> her

¹²¹ Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16.

¹²² Lk. 17:10.

¹²³ The scapular (*epomis*; lit., “shoulder garment”) was an element of the monastic habit consisting of a sleeveless outer garment which fell over the shoulders, down the front and back; cf. also notes 206 and 307.

¹²⁴ Gal. 5:24.

¹²⁵ Jn. 5:39.

¹²⁶ I.e., to become *ekkleziarchissa* or sacristan, the monastic official responsible for preparing the church for services and for leading the nuns in the chanting of the offices.

body with modesty, so she also loved to feast her soul with the constant study and hearing of the Holy Writ, because, as the psalm says, “*her pleasure is truly in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth she meditate day and night.*”¹²⁷ Thus she was revealed to be *like a tree planted by the brooks of waters, bringing forth the suitable fruit in each season.*¹²⁸ For although we have been given many great commandments by the Creator through which, if we wanted, we could wipe away the wrinkle of the soul and purify our mind from the mist of worldly cares in order to receive the incomprehensible divine illumination, she managed to carry out each of them in an extraordinary manner.

25. Therefore the Devil, who begrudges the good, observing that she was truly deserving of the blessing in this psalm,¹²⁹ heated up his venom and scrutinized her spiritual paths <to see> if he might somehow be able to trap her. Since he knew that she was particularly devoted to the *two commandments* on which *hang all the law and the prophets*,¹³⁰ and since he knew that parents, and especially the mother, are compelled by the laws of nature to love their children, he lay in ambush to strip the second <commandment> away from the first; and in his typical fawning mode of combat he instilled in Theodora a passionate attachment to her daughter. And she, becoming subject to human emotions, began to pester the superior <about her daughter Theopiste> (for she had brought the child to her own convent¹³¹ because the woman responsible for her tonsure [i.e., Aikaterine] had already died), saying: [p. 116]

“My Lady Mother, you who alone are concerned with my soul, I cannot endure to see the daughter born of my womb clothed in a cheap and tattered garment and subsisting on so little food. Please arrange for her to be trans-

¹²⁷ Ps. 1:2.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ps. 1:3.

¹²⁹ I.e., Ps. 1.

¹³⁰ Mt. 22:40. The author is referring to the commandments to love Jesus Christ and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mt. 22:37–39).

¹³¹ Theodora’s transfer of her daughter to her own convent might seem to contravene the principle of monastic stability, discussed in note 175 below, that nuns should remain for life in the convent where they first took monastic vows. But Theopiste may still have been a novice who had not yet taken vows at the convent of St. Luke. In any case, Theodora’s transfer of her daughter was an early indication of her inability to forget her maternal bonds even though monks and nuns vowed to substitute the cenobitic community for their biological families; cf. A.-M. Talbot, “The Byzantine Family and the Monastery,” *DOP* 44 (1990), 121–23.

ferred to another convent, since I cannot bear the fire in my heart. For I am a mother, and like all <mothers>, I too am devoted to my child.”

26. But the blessed Anna, realizing that this was a trap set by the Devil, replied with these words of exhortation: “My child, I have never heard the Holy Writ speaking of clothing and food, and bidding us be concerned with these matters. Instead <I have heard>: ‘*Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on,*’¹³² ‘*for after all these things do the Gentiles seek,*’¹³³ and ‘*No man can serve two masters.*’¹³⁴ Therefore we must serve God, and adorn our souls with His commandments, and *be an abject in the house of the Lord,*¹³⁵ so as to attain the blessed condition of the saints. It is for this reason that we have donned the angelic and holy habit of nuns. If you wanted your daughter to be enslaved to *the mother of passions*, I mean *gluttony*,¹³⁶ and to be clothed in soft garments, why did you dedicate her to Christ from infancy? It would have been better <in that case> to install her in a worldly domicile; for, as the Lord says, ‘*they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.*’¹³⁷ What connection is there between monastics and lay people? Or *what communion hath light with darkness?*¹³⁸ [p. 118] My sister, you have been deceived by the Devil, *the inventor of evil*,¹³⁹ you have been deceived. Recover then from this torpor that has overcome you, and make your mind rise above these earthly and transitory concerns, and reflect with your perceptive mind’s eye on this black habit of yours, realizing that it is a garment of mourning, not of luxury and pleasure. And tell me, my child, why do we prostrate ourselves before the holy altar at the beginning, when we enter the convent?¹⁴⁰ Is it not because we are supplicating God to make us worthy of this angelic habit, and to be numbered among the ranks of those who have crucified themselves for the Lord? Did you not vow to re-

¹³² Mt. 6:25.

¹³³ Mt. 6:32.

¹³⁴ Mt. 6:24.

¹³⁵ Ps. 83 (84):10.

¹³⁶ Cf. Isidore of Pelousion, ep. 1 (PG 78:228c).

¹³⁷ Mt. 11:8.

¹³⁸ 2 Cor. 6:14.

¹³⁹ Cf. Rom. 1:30.

¹⁴⁰ Much of the following passage is drawn from the service for taking monastic vows; cf. Goar, *Euchologion*, 382–88, esp. 383.

nounce the world and the things of the world,¹⁴¹ in accordance with the commandment, and to endure every *tribulation and distress*,¹⁴² and to be mortified *to the world, and the world to you*,¹⁴³ and to renounce not only your blood relatives, but your very life,¹⁴⁴ as the Lord said? You know what sort of vows you made to God on the holy altar, vows which the angels recorded and for which an accounting will be asked of you at the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If then you have agreed to do these things, why do you not disregard everything else and strive to keep only those <vows> that will bring you the heavenly life? And what does your daughter lack? Does she not study the Holy Scriptures, and has she not been embellished with all monastic virtues, and does she not shine like a star in the midst of the [p. 120] assembly of nuns? Or did you wish to eradicate her good intentions? In short, do you say that you have a daughter in the convent? Go away, keep your peace, do not interfere with Theopiste, or else I will inflict a great penance on you because of this.”

27. When she realized that the blessed Theodora was distressed to hear these words, she dismissed her with a rebuke. And from that time on <Anna> sought to find a small pretext to free her from her emotional attachment, secretly entreating the Lord to aid and assist Theodora so that the indescribable labor and toil that she undertook for His sake not be rendered unacceptable through the scheming of the Devil. And He *Who performs the desire of them that fear Him and hears their supplication*¹⁴⁵ heard her. A short while later Theodora was again seen displaying toward Theopiste the affection of a mother. It happened to be a Sunday, and around noon all the nuns were gathered in one part of the convent and each of them was saying something beneficial to the soul. But Theodora, disregarding the words of the superior, was paying more attention to her daughter than to what was being said, as if she had received permission (and she thought she would escape notice because the superior was engaged in solitary prayer in the chapel). But she did not escape the notice of *the unsleeping eye <of God>*,¹⁴⁶ which prompted the superior to

¹⁴¹ Goar, *Euchologion*, 379.

¹⁴² Cf. Goar, *Euchologion*, 383, sect. 16, and Rom. 8:35.

¹⁴³ Cf. Gal. 6:14.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Mt. 10:37–39, and Goar, *Euchologion*, 384.

¹⁴⁵ Ps. 144 (145):19.

¹⁴⁶ Cf., e.g., Basil of Caesarea, *Hom. VII in Hexaemeron*, chap. 5 (PG 29:160B).

emerge quietly at that moment to observe the nuns, as is customary for the true shepherds of the spiritual sheep of Christ. For Anna frequently did this, thus delivering the nuns from every kind of negligence. And so, when she emerged quietly from the chapel to look around, she saw Theodora in the midst of the nuns looking after her daughter. And immediately, as if [p. 122] inflamed by fire, being inspired with divine zeal (for she realized that the Lord had heard her), without even crossing the threshold¹⁴⁷ <of the chapel>, she summoned the blessed <Theodora> and her daughter and said to her (to recall her exact words): “Theodora, what relation is this girl to you?,” as she pointed at Theopiste. And after she replied shamefully, “She is my daughter,” <Anna> asked the girl the same question. And when she called Theodora her mother, <the superior> sighed deeply from the bottom of her heart, and said to them: “By dispensation of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit and all the holy fathers and my sinful self, from this moment on you are forbidden to speak even one word to each other.”

28. They [Theodora and Theopiste] were seized with uncontrollable fear when they heard the extremely harsh and unexpected penance, as if they had been admonished by a divine voice, since she [the superior] presented a terrifying aspect to those who saw her, from the sight of her alone (because she had boldness of speech through her deeds), even when she administered mild penances; and so after making the customary obeisance, they withdrew fearfully. And for fifteen years they lived together in one cell and <ate> at one table and undertook the same handwork, often even *plying* one *loom*¹⁴⁸ and grinding grain at one mill, and in general living together without paying attention to or taking notice of each other; and they carried out this commandment <of the superior> to such an extent that if Theodora ever happened to be summoned by the superior and did not answer right away, Theopiste never dared say to her (even without addressing her as “mother”), “Theodora, the superior is calling you”; [p. 124] and this <would happen> even though they often used to sit together and work at the same handwork. Instead she [Theopiste] would say to one of the <nuns> who was nearby: “Call Lady Theodora, the superior is summoning her,” since they never conversed with each other directly. And Theodora <treated> Theopiste in the same fashion.

¹⁴⁷ Literally, “lintel.”

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Homer, *Il.* 1:31; *Od.* 5:62.

29. O Christ-loving and affectionate shepherd, always keeping a watchful eye on the salvation of her sheep! O the docility of those spiritual sheep, who know they should heed only the voice of their shepherd¹⁴⁹ and refuse to follow any other! Consider then how often the superior tearfully entreated the Lord on their behalf, that after this penance they should not disobey her orders; consider the disposition of the hearts of Theodora and her daughter during the fifteen years. How great a fire must have inflamed their emotions, and what kind of a sharply whetted sword must have cut their hearts grievously, as they did not speak to each other at all for so many years, especially when a burdensome task was imposed on one of them and they wanted to talk to one another like sisters, to help each other, and could not! How often did the Devil craftily prompt them to disobey the order, and they tearfully entreated the Lord, saying, “*Set a watch, O Lord, on my mouth and a strong door about my lips*”?¹⁵⁰ They were never seen to utter a complaint against the superior for suppressing their use of words and not allowing them to use speech as do all humans who are endowed with the ability to talk. For they were often consoled [p. 126] by repeating to themselves the divine verse of David, “*I waited patiently for the Lord, and He attended to me.*”¹⁵¹

30. Thus they spent fifteen years, never conversing with each other. But in the fifteenth year of the penance it so happened that the blessed Theodora fell ill, and all the nuns begged the superior to release them <from their penance>. And she did so after delivering many admonitions. And by the grace of God <from then on> both of them remained unaffected and untroubled by their bond of kinship, and up to the time of the blessed Theodora’s departure unto the Lord they conversed and talked with each other as with the other nuns, giving no thought to their relationship. Nor hereafter did the daughter address her mother as mother, nor did the mother address her daughter as daughter. The blessed Theodora, through her total submission and true humility, totally destroyed and trampled under foot *every proud*¹⁵² vanity and arrogance that is hateful to God, and banished all passions from her body and soul through the power of the Holy Spirit which guided and protected her;

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Jn. 10:3.

¹⁵⁰ Ps. 140 (141):3.

¹⁵¹ Ps. 39 (40):1.

¹⁵² Cf. 2 Cor. 10:5.

and while still living this transitory life she died, wanting to live the eternal life. And the story I am about to relate, together with her other good <deeds>, is proof of my words.

31. In those days there was a severe winter so that water froze from the bitter cold and became as hard as a stone. Therefore, on account of the extreme cold the superior ordered that meals be taken not in the refectory but in the dormitory.¹⁵³ And it so happened that the nuns placed the cauldron of hot water on the spot where the blessed <Theodora> used to spread her rush mat on the floor to sleep. For she did not have a bed covered with soft and colorful bedding. There was not even a wooden plank underneath, or anything else [p. 128] to ward off the bitter cold; rather she slept on a rush mat and sheepskin on the bare ground. Therefore, when the cauldron boiled over, the whole area was soaked. And so Theodora took her bedding and spread it out in another spot without informing the superior. When the latter saw the bedding laid out in a different place from the one previously assigned (for she always kept track of and concerned herself with this, too, in order to take better care of the souls entrusted to her), she realized that it belonged to the blessed Theodora; and seizing this opportune moment to procure for her [Theodora] a crown of obedience (since she always tried to provide this for her charges), and to instruct the other nuns not to do anything of their own accord and volition, she ordered the blessed <Theodora> to come to her.

32. When <Theodora> presented herself solemnly and respectfully, as was her custom, <the superior> said to her: “O sister, since you are enrolled in the ranks of those who are accustomed to fight against selfishness, and up to now you have nobly distinguished yourself in the battles of obedience, why have you chosen to make yourself liable to a charge of desertion? Where is the mastery of your reason over the passions? And how will this authoritative part of the soul [i.e., reason] be recognized in you, when the Devil, who despite his great assaults never shook the tower of your obedience which is founded on

¹⁵³ Κοιτων here seems to have the meaning of “dormitory” rather than an individual “sleeping cell”; thus the convent of St. Stephen was a truly cenobitic institution where the nuns slept in a communal dormitory. Cf. the 12th-century typikon of the Kecharitomene convent where all the nuns slept in a κοιτωνισκος (ed. Gautier, “Kecharitomene,” 41.382, 387, etc.). On the other hand, in Chap. 28 we are told that Theodora and Theopiste were punished by having to live in “one cell” (κελλιω); this may have been a special arrangement.

Christ the cornerstone,¹⁵⁴ has <now> cast it to the ground with an attack of boldness against your weak mind? Does not the Lord, Who through Paul, His *chosen vessel*,¹⁵⁵ bids us *to obey them that have the rule <over us> and submit <to them>*,¹⁵⁶ witness and praise the things that happen according to His commandment, [p. 130] as you have often heard from Scriptures and believed? What has robbed you of your inalienable wealth of obedience and humility? Clearly it is your overweening boldness. It would therefore be a good thing to drive out of your soul the root of all evils. Tell me, why did you move your bedding without informing me? Do you not know that whatever one does against the will of one's master is considered disobedience and selfishness?"

And when the blessed <Theodora> replied, "Mistress, I did this because my <sleeping> place was soaked," the superior said: "Since, as you yourself have truly admitted, because you wanted to warm your body, you have delivered your soul to the unbearable abyss of selfishness, which is accompanied by the *gnashing of teeth*¹⁵⁷ and eternal hellfire, take the sheepskin on which you sleep and go out to the courtyard of the monastery and sleep there. And may *He Who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*,¹⁵⁸ warm you with the sweetest light of His goodness during this bitter freezing night; and after He has delivered you from the stormy waves of selfishness, may He bring you to anchor in the calm of obedience, and rank you *with the poor in spirit in the kingdom of heaven*."¹⁵⁹

33. When these words struck the ears of <Theodora>, who had not at all given up hope that she would fall into many temptations, because of the blessed state which lies in hope for those who struggle,¹⁶⁰ she prepared herself to endure all suffering, in accordance with the one who said, "*If thou comest to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation. Set thy heart aright and con-*

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Eph. 2:20.

¹⁵⁵ Acts 9:15.

¹⁵⁶ Heb. 13:17. The Greek word for "they that have the rule," ἡγούμενοι, can also mean monastic superiors.

¹⁵⁷ Mt. 8:12.

¹⁵⁸ Phil. 2:8.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Mt. 5:3.

¹⁶⁰ I.e., she welcomed temptations because she hoped for the rewards to be procured by a successful struggle against them.

stantly endure, and depart not away, that thou mayest be increased at thy last end."¹⁶¹ And again making her customary obeisance <to the superior>, she went out to the assigned spot, paying no heed to the extremely bitter weather and the torrential downpour of rain at that time and icy cold and violent blasts of wind. Thus from evening on she spent the night outdoors, sitting on both feet.¹⁶² For she was unable to sit down all the way because of the rainwater flowing beneath her. O, what a marvel! The angels were astonished to see such a terrible sight, a woman, the soft and *weakest vessel*,¹⁶³ thus spending the night in the open air, being assailed by constant pelting of rain and frozen by the cold because of the order of the mother superior. What person now or in the past has ever known a woman to show¹⁶⁴ such obedience and to wrestle in such contests? Around midnight when the rain stopped and the bitter air¹⁶⁵ became even colder because a lot of snow had fallen, the raindrops froze and stuck to the tattered garment that covered her head and shoulders.

34. When it was time for the nocturnal psalmody, the superior assembled the nuns in the chapel, and clearly described her [Theodora's] noble struggles, and accordingly heaped much praise on her for each of them; and through her <praises> she magnified <Theodora> and devised precepts of obedience for the nuns. [p. 134] Subsequently, like water flowing downhill unimpeded from a spring, her flowing speech came to her present feat of endurance; greatly marveling at these <trials>, she said, "I am sure that God might not unreasonably number her among the forty martyrs who endured bitter cold and wind for His sake¹⁶⁶ and might deem her worthy of the same rewards, because although she had lived a life of luxurious abundance amid the plea-

¹⁶¹ Sir. 2:1–3.

¹⁶² I.e., she was squatting down on her heels.

¹⁶³ 1 Pet. 3:7.

¹⁶⁴ An alternative translation could be: "Who has ever known a person of the present or past generations who has shown. . . ."

¹⁶⁵ After *περι δὲ τοῦ μεσονύκτιου* the Paschalides edition unintentionally omitted the phrase *ληξάντος τοῦ οὐμβροῦ καὶ δριμυτέρας γεναμένης*, which is found in the edition of Arsenij, p. 20.

¹⁶⁶ The forty martyrs of Sebasteia were soldiers martyred during the reign of Licinius (308–324); as a result of their refusal to recant their Christian beliefs, they froze to death after being forced to stand in an icy lake all night long. In the course of the night diadems were seen descending from heaven to crown the head of each of the martyrs.

sures of the world, when she was sore tried by suffering in our cenobitic community, she never turned her attention to the sensation of pain, but even now, when she is congealed by the cold, she endures because of her love for God.”

And while she was still speaking, one of the nuns, who was the blood sister of the superior,¹⁶⁷ said to her quietly: “This very night, my lady, I saw a luminous and brilliant crown,¹⁶⁸ whose beauty and brilliance is impossible for me to describe, descending from heaven. And as I was wondering to whom this brilliant crown belonged, I heard a voice saying: ‘This is Theodora’s.’” And since the superior was afraid that the blessed Theodora might somehow hear this and *be lifted up with pride and fall into condemnation*,¹⁶⁹ like a wise and knowledgeable person she gave thanks to God and said, “Be careful, my sister, and take care to tell no one what you saw.”

35. And she immediately ordered the blessed <Theodora> to come into the church. So she entered, all white with snow on her exterior, while her soul within was shining with heavenly light. [p. 136] And again making her customary obeisance, she asked for forgiveness and would not rise until she heard the words of pardon. Afterwards, when she was asked privately by the nuns how she had spent the night, taking confidence in her love for them she said: “Believe me, my sisters, once I accepted with utter faith the penance <imposed> by the superior, I did not experience rain or any other painful affliction during the night, but was joyful and happy and seemed to be sitting in a bath.”

Thus God knows how to aid *those who hope in Him*.¹⁷⁰ Such prizes does He Who *alone fashions our hearts and understands all our works*¹⁷¹ grant to those who sincerely love Him. Thus the Lord revealed this woman to be like *a city set on a hill*¹⁷² through her humility and obedience.

¹⁶⁷ It is worthy of note that this nun, as a sister of Anna, was related to Theodora; hence family considerations no doubt played a role in her testimony promoting Theodora’s sanctity.

¹⁶⁸ This crown, besides suggesting a comparison between Theodora and the forty martyrs, is symbolic of the crown of obedience which the mother superior sought to obtain for her protegee; cf. Chap. 31.

¹⁶⁹ 1 Tim. 3:6.

¹⁷⁰ Ps. 33 (34):9.

¹⁷¹ Ps. 32 (33):15.

¹⁷² Mt. 5:14.

36. Therefore John of blessed memory, who was archimandrite at that time,¹⁷³ recognizing her unsurpassable humility and ascetic practice, wanted to transfer her from this convent and make her superior in another. But when the blessed woman learned this from the <emissaries> who came to summon her, she uttered words of lamentation and cried out against the mother superior, assuming that she supported and encouraged the decision. But when she saw the mother superior mourning and weeping about her separation from her, she said, “*Let no man trouble me.*”¹⁷⁴ It is impossible for me to become a sinful transgressor of my vows to God and to leave this convent where I made my vows.¹⁷⁵ And there is no point in talking of my supervision of <other> souls [p. 138] when I still reek of worldly slime and cannot even care for the salvation of my own soul. Go to the archimandrite and tell him, ‘Even if you separate me from the church, whatever punishment you might visit upon me, you will never be able to bend my resolve. For I have heard the Lord saying, “*If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all,*”¹⁷⁶ and “*I came not to be served but to serve.*”¹⁷⁷ If then the Lord has thus commanded and I have vowed to Him to remain in the convent until I attain old age and advanced years and to serve Him and the nuns as much as my weak condition permits, who will be able to tear me away from here, since I have God as my helper?’”

¹⁷³ An archimandrite was the administrator of the monasteries in a given city. From this chapter and Chap. 37 it seems that in Thessalonike he was responsible for the appointment of superiors of monasteries, or confirmed the decision of the monks or nuns. The archimandrite John, who had died by 894 when Gregory wrote the *vita*, is not otherwise attested.

¹⁷⁴ Gal. 6:17.

¹⁷⁵ Theodora is referring to the principle of “monastic stability” (*stabilitas loci*), that a monk or nun should remain for life in the monastery where he or she first took monastic vows; cf. Goar, *Euchologion*, 383, sect. 14, canons 4 of the Council of Chalcedon and 21 of Nicaea II (Rhalles-Potles, *Syntagma* 2:225–29, 641–42; Joannou, *Discipline*, 72–74 and 281–82), and *ODB* 3:1941. Exceptions could be made, of course, as in this case where an archimandrite wished to make a nun superior of another convent. Nuns were more likely than monks to observe the rule of stability; see A.-M. Talbot, “A Comparison of the Monastic Experience of Byzantine Men and Women,” *GrThR* 30 (1985), 14 f.

¹⁷⁶ Mk. 9:35.

¹⁷⁷ Mt. 20:28.

When the archimandrite learned this, he glorified God Who granted such humility to Theodora, and prayed that her mind would remain unsullied and steadfast in such a purpose until her last hour and breath.

37. When the blessed Theodora was in her fifty-sixth year,¹⁷⁸ Theopiste, the holy woman's daughter, was appointed superior by the most holy archbishop Theodore,¹⁷⁹ as a result of the decision of the archimandrites Hilarion and Dorotheos¹⁸⁰ and the mother superior [Anna] and all the nuns,¹⁸¹ because [Anna] had reached extreme old age¹⁸² and could no longer supervise the nuns since her eyes had grown dim and her hearing was dulled. And so Theodora's daughter in the flesh became her spiritual mother, and Theodora, who despised glory and loved God, strove even more to be manful in her labors of obedience. One day, when she was hurrying to carry out some order, she was tripped up by the crooked Devil [p. 140], slipped and fell flat on her face on the ground, and was in pain for some time as a result of her fall. And it so happened that <Anna>, while walking in the courtyard without anyone to guide her, also slipped and fell; and the head of her thighbone was dislocated from the right socket located at the sacral bone beneath her lower back.¹⁸³ And from that time on she was unable to move and was confined to bed. After she had been bedridden for four years, her mind also became confused be-

¹⁷⁸ I.e., in 868.

¹⁷⁹ The exact dates of Theodore's tenure as archbishop of Thessalonike are unknown; the *Synodikon of Thessalonike* places him between Euthymios and Sergios; cf. J. Gouillard, "Le synodikon de l'orthodoxie," *TM* 2 (1967), 114.6–7. Theodore was the archbishop who ordained Euthymios the Younger as deacon, an event dated by Petit to 864 ("Saint Euthyme le Jeune," 188.18–20 and 531 n. 23). Theodore was still archbishop in 879/80 when he attended the Photian synod; cf. B. Ateses, *Ἐπισκοπικοὶ καταλογοὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μέχρι σήμερον* (Athens, 1975), 81. See also Paschalides, *Theodora*, 261–62.

¹⁸⁰ In 868 there must have been two archimandrites in Thessalonike.

¹⁸¹ The procedure for selection of the superior varied from one monastery to the next, and was generally spelled out in the *typikon* or rule for the monastery. Typically, a superior would name his or her successor, or the monastic community would elect its next superior.

¹⁸² If one believes the assertion in Chap. 38 that Anna was 120 when she died in 880, she would have been 108 when she retired!

¹⁸³ Note the unusual precision in anatomical detail; the author demonstrates a similar interest in medicine in his description of smallpox in the *Translation and Miracles*, below.

cause of her extreme old age; and she lived another three years. Then one could see the blessed Theodora ministering almost alone to Anna's every need, carrying her and frequently shifting her position, bringing her food with her own hands and taking her to the bath, and in general taking total care of her, even though <Anna> reviled and hit her. For <Theodora> was prompted <to such solicitude>, being mindful of the One Who says, "*Child, help thy father in his old age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth. And if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy full strength. For compassion for a father will not be forgotten.*"¹⁸⁴

38. When the blessed Theodora was in her sixty-eighth year,¹⁸⁵ the great confessor Anna, who from childhood had donned the holy monastic habit and by the grace of God lived a blameless life, found repose in the death that is owed to the righteous. The entire span of her life was reputedly 120 years. And it is right that I should not pass over without mention how her life ended, so that the merciful Lord may be glorified [p. 142], and the foolish ideas of faultfinders may be proved wrong, and so that we, by following without deviation in the footsteps of the blessed, may not turn aside from the path that leads to paradise. For <there were> certain base people who paid undue attention to the flesh, instead of marveling, as they should have, at how those who despised earthly matters for Christ's sake disregarded themselves, and at how stable and refined is the character of those who are entrusted with responsibility for souls and that their firmness of purpose does not change at whim, but they appropriately assign to each of those in their charge <a task> proportional <to their capabilities>, since <the superiors> impose a greater burden upon those who are able to procure by obedience a heavenly reward for themselves, so that they may receive an even greater reward, and dispense to more self-indulgent individuals <a burden> proportionate to their capability. <And these base people> impiously interpreted the divine zeal of the great <Anna> for a better and more perfect <life> as a form of arrogance, and they suspected that she was enslaved to the disease of the Pharisees,¹⁸⁶ wickedly applying to her the <words of the Gospel>, "*They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne,*

¹⁸⁴ Sir. 3:12–14.

¹⁸⁵ I.e., in 880.

¹⁸⁶ The Pharisees were criticized by Jesus in the Gospels for their rigoristic observance of Judaic law. Gregory appears here to be attempting to deflect criticism of Anna for being too inflexible in her administration of the convent.

and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."¹⁸⁷ For this reason and lest their thoughts take a wrong direction on account of being afflicted by such a disease, and lest they <think wrongly> that God did not accept her sufferings <for the faith> and her extensive ascetic struggle, He saw fit that after three years of senility she regained her senses for a time before her departure to the Lord, so that she both spoke and reasoned appropriately. And, they say, when the hour approached for the great <Anna> to depart to the Lord, as an enormous crowd of monastics and laymen sat in attendance and [p. 144] watched her, she quietly raised her right hand to her left side, and tranquilly opening her mouth, she spoke thus in the following words, "What do you seek? *Thou hast no part with me,*"¹⁸⁸ as if she were rebuking and blowing upon the Devil¹⁸⁹ that lies in wait for Christians up to their last breath and as if she were rendering him ineffective with the sign of the cross.

Fear and trembling seized them all, as each of those who heard <her words> wondered what it was that the Lord vowed to confess before the heavenly Father: "For," He said, "*whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father Which is in heaven.*"¹⁹⁰ And thus the Devil shamelessly lay in wait for <Anna> up to the time of her death, although she had reconciled herself to <the Lord> from the time she was in her mother's womb through her monastic office and had directed her entire life in a manner pleasing to God. But glory be to the holy God, Who strengthened His servant against him [the Devil]. For with the <above> words she gave up the ghost to the Lord with joy and rejoicing. And after having conducted appropriate funeral rites, they laid her to rest in coffins of the blessed.¹⁹¹

39. The blessed Theodora continued to gain strength and was manful in her labors for obedience; indeed she believed that she had just commenced these <struggles>, since, as she said, up to that point in her life she had been

¹⁸⁷ Mt. 23:4.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Jn. 13:8.

¹⁸⁹ Anna's action is reminiscent of the baptismal liturgy in which the priest blows upon the baptismal water to exorcise evil spirits; cf. Goar, *Euchologion*, 289.

¹⁹⁰ Mt. 10:32.

¹⁹¹ The meaning of ἐν ὀσίοις θήκταις is unclear. The plural form of coffin may be a poetic plural or might refer to the practice attested in Sozomenos of placing a wooden coffin inside a lead receptacle; cf. note 27 of *Life* of Mary/Marinos, above.

subject to her superior rather than to her own free will. Therefore she endured nobly and persevered mightily and fearlessly in the holy monastery like a champion of a battle formation, in no way frightened by the enemy phalanx, but thrusting aside every assault of afflictions which attacked her and her companions, [p. 146] and she anointed the souls of her weaker <sisters> with her own unyielding and steadfast purpose to prepare them for deeds of manly valor and battle against the unseen foe. For since most of those marvelous nuns had departed to the Lord, some before the great <Anna>, others after her, no one was left to urge and incite the sisters to obedience with a zeal like hers (for words are not as persuasive as deeds to attain a desired goal); so, as if unmindful of the weakness that afflicted her because of her great age and always wishing *to strain forward to what lies ahead*,¹⁹² and hastening to advance *from glory to glory*,¹⁹³ and *purposing ascents in her heart*,¹⁹⁴ she did not cease from her spiritual labor. But she shared with her sisters all the tasks that were imposed on them, zealously sharing their duties, and voluntarily lightening most of their labors, even though <these labors> appeared <to her> secondary in importance to listening to the Holy Scriptures and praying most assiduously and intentionally to God in every time and place. It was her endeavor, as I have already said, by her example to make her companions strive together with her in a similar struggle, and to demonstrate the purity of her mind by excising her will in accordance with the scriptural goal,¹⁹⁵ and to assign all reverence to her mother in the Lord [i.e., Theopiste], making herself worthy of that <verse>, “*If thou wilt bring forth the precious from the worthless, thou shalt be as my mouth*,”¹⁹⁶ and “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Which is in heaven*,”¹⁹⁷ [p. 148] and before these <words> and on their account, “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account*.”¹⁹⁸

40. In addition to the subjection of her body and the humility of her

¹⁹² Phil. 3:13.

¹⁹³ 2 Cor. 3:18.

¹⁹⁴ Ps. 83 (84):5.

¹⁹⁵ Cf., for example, Jn. 5:30.

¹⁹⁶ Jer. 15:19.

¹⁹⁷ Mt. 5:16.

¹⁹⁸ Heb. 13:17. Cf. note 156 in Chap. 32.

spirit, she also maintained rigorous control over her eyes, thrusting aside any missile which might attack her soul as the result of looking intently <at someone>. And I heard this from those who had accurate knowledge of her, that, whenever anyone who was not known to her came to her for a prayer, she would reply to his questions while looking at the ground, on no account gazing at the face of her visitor. And after his departure she would inquire who it was and what he looked like. She also restrained her tongue from speaking unseemly words; for she was never seen conversing with anyone at an inopportune moment, fearing the accounting <she would have to give> for her words. Thus she never swore, heeding <the words>, “*I say unto you, swear not at all,*”¹⁹⁹ and she never spoke abusively, heeding <the words>, “*Why dost thou set at naught thy brother?*”²⁰⁰ and she never condemned anyone, heeding <the words>, “*Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant?*”²⁰¹ And she possessed every form of virtue whatsoever. Thus she attained the angelic way of life,²⁰² and often heard their divine voices. And this is clear from what she herself frequently recounted. For when all the nuns were sleeping in the narthex of the church, she would often quietly rouse Theopiste²⁰³ and say, “Did you hear the very sweet and melodic angelic psalmody inside the church?”

She used to do this, not showing off or boasting of the spiritual favor <granted to her>, but, in my opinion, to prepare her own daughter to desire the divine spiritual gifts. [p. 150] And she often used to say to her kinswomen in God: “I know that the Lord will not disregard the servitude of obedience that I have discharged for so many years, but will visit me in the mercy of His goodness.” And she bade her daughter bury her body separately and by it-

¹⁹⁹ Mt. 5:34.

²⁰⁰ Rom. 14:10.

²⁰¹ Rom. 14:4.

²⁰² A common circumlocution for the monastic life.

²⁰³ This puzzling passage could also be translated “While all the nuns were sleeping, she would often quietly rouse Theopiste in the narthex of the church.” I have found no parallel passage that specifically describes nuns dozing in the narthex between services, but such a practice is suggested by chap. 38 of the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene nunnery. The *typikon* prescribed that after the completion of the midnight office, which took place in the narthex, the *semantron* should be struck to signal the beginning of matins; thus, there may have been a brief interval between the services during which the nuns dozed in the narthex. Cf. Gautier, “Kecharitomene,” 87.1213–20. I am indebted to Angela Hero for this reference.

self,²⁰⁴ foretelling the power of miracle-working that she would acquire from the Lord.

41. As my narrative proceeds, it bids me <turn> to the deeds of the blessed Theodora in her final years, which surpass all and proclaim more than her other <deeds> her exalted humility. For even if they are brief in the telling, they are very great in <the estimation of> those who know accurately how to strive after acts of obedience. When she arrived at about the seventy-fourth year or more of her life,²⁰⁵ her body became weak because of extreme old age and her extensive asceticism, and she was no longer able to work with the nuns, or even to draw water from the well. For as long as she could, she used to carry a small water jar inside her scapular,²⁰⁶ and going <to the well> she would secretly fetch sufficient water, lest the nuns see her and be troubled on this account. And when <she could> no longer <do> even this, she set her hands to the spindle; and preparing and spinning the very coarse fibers of flax that had been rejected and the useless wool tossed into the dung heaps, she would make bags. For she used to say, “The apostle commanded that the person who does not work should not eat.”²⁰⁷ [p. 152] And she carried out such tasks as she could until she arrived in the harbor of <final> repose.

42. In her eightieth year the blessed Theodora fell ill for five days during the month of August; the following day, realizing that it was appointed the final day of her life in the flesh,²⁰⁸ she revealed to those present the pure love which she kept hidden in the recesses of her soul for the sole heavenly Bridegroom [i.e., Christ], desiring to be with Him quickly, after being released from the bonds of the body. For she experienced no anxiety or fear about the <impending> separation of her soul, but was cheerful and rejoiced with the sublime thought that this very brief illness of her earthly body would lead to a greater and more perfect ascent of her mind. And therefore no sooner did she desire to draw near to Christ Whom she had married in her youth than, lo, *the hour of departure*²⁰⁹ was at hand. Therefore, at sunrise she requested and partook of the pure and eternal mysteries [i.e., the eucharist]; and after reclin-

²⁰⁴ As will become evident in Chap. 43, the nuns were normally buried in a communal tomb.

²⁰⁵ Ca. 886.

²⁰⁶ Cf. note 123, above.

²⁰⁷ Cf. 2 Th. 3:10.

²⁰⁸ Foreknowledge of the day of one's death was a typical sign of sanctity.

²⁰⁹ Cf. 2 Tim. 4:6.

ing on the bed on which she lay with her limbs arranged in an orderly manner, and placing her hands on her chest and suitably closing her eyes and her lips, as if in the natural sleep that comes over us, she was transported to the eternal and everlasting life, having *fought the good fight*²¹⁰ of asceticism and having *finished the course*²¹¹ of obedience with *a contrite and humble heart*,²¹² and *having kept her faith*²¹³ in Christ our God in a blameless fashion.

43. When her death was made known, a large number of nuns assembled from the neighboring convents. For the Lord, *Who seeth in secret and doth reward openly*,²¹⁴ arranged that the following <incident> should occur at her funeral, so that His goodness might be more greatly [p. 154] glorified hereafter, and so that thereby might be manifested the virtue that was silently and secretly practiced by Theodora from her youth, and which dwelled in the secret storehouse of her soul until her death. Thus the blessed Theodora was laid out for burial, with her face full of wrinkles because of old age; but suddenly her face appeared to be shining, so that those who were watching closely thought, on account of its beauty, that it was emitting rays. And there also appeared on her face beads of perspiration, which emitted a divine sweet fragrance, and her venerable and angelic face was seen to smile. So much grace of such a sort did the divine power instill in her body. Then the nuns performed their hymnody mingled with their lamentations, and there was discussion as to where they should lay to rest her holy body. On the one hand, Theopiste, wanting to carry out her mother's bidding, was anxious to have a new tomb constructed separately for her;²¹⁵ but the priests and monks who were present said that it was not right for her to be separated from her fellow nuns after her death, but that just as those women who served Christ with united purpose had dwelled together in the course of their monastic exploits, so also <they should dwell together> in the grave, as is customary for monks. And thus²¹⁶ the majority opinion prevailed.

²¹⁰ 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7.

²¹¹ 2 Tim. 4:7.

²¹² Ps. 50 (51):17.

²¹³ 2 Tim. 4:7.

²¹⁴ Mt. 6:4.

²¹⁵ Note that Theopiste is anxious to promote her mother's sanctity by having her buried in a separate tomb, but was opposed by certain priests and monks (representing the official church of Thessalonike?).

²¹⁶ Reading τοις αὐτοῖς, as in Arsenij edition.

44. And so they all bestowed a final kiss on her holy body with psalmody and reverence. A certain Demetrios, who was honored with the rank of deacon, was a member of the clergy at the church of the holy and all-glorious great martyr Demetrios,²¹⁷ and had for a long time been a friend and acquaintance of the blessed Theodora; at that time <he> had been indisposed for nine months with a very serious illness, so that as a result of the suffering of his entire body his stomach, too, was grievously upset and his whole head was terribly affected. Hearing that the blessed <Theodora> [p. 156] had departed to the Lord, he was anxious to attend her funeral. Since he had to interrupt his laborious journey with three rest stops, he arrived only at the end of the psalmody, panting and with gasping breath. As soon as he fell upon her holy body and bestowed upon it with faith a final kiss, he immediately regained his health, so that he partook of food with good appetite that very day and was able to sleep and to walk well on his own feet, he who for a long time had not enjoyed these <pleasures>. And another man, a young neighbor called John, who had been severely oppressed for two years with a quartan fever and whose whole body was emaciated, was immediately delivered from his illness as soon as he was permitted to kiss the holy remains of the blessed <Theodora>. And another young man, who was also afflicted by illness, became completely healthy, finding that kissing the holy remains was a most effective remedy.

45. About the sixth hour of the same day,²¹⁸ the blessed <Theodora> was gloriously laid to rest in the tomb of her fellow nuns²¹⁹ at the hands of priests and fathers.²²⁰ The day of her departure from the body was the twenty-ninth of August, 6,400 years after the creation of the world,²²¹ from the point when

²¹⁷ It is significant that the first person to be healed by Theodora's remains was a deacon at the cathedral of St. Demetrios, a saint whose healing miracles are attested in Thessalonike as early as the 7th century; cf. P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint-Demetrius et la penetration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1979–81). Yet the deacon Demetrios had evidently failed to be cured by his namesake saint, but found immediate relief from his illness after kissing Theodora's body. See also Chap. 60 and note 271.

²¹⁸ The sixth hour was midday.

²¹⁹ Chap. 52 relates that this communal tomb was located in the chapel of the Theotokos in the right (south) colonnade of the church at the convent of St. Stephen.

²²⁰ Monks or abbots.

²²¹ The hagiographer is using the year 5508 B.C. as the date of the beginning of the world; hence, Theodora died in 892.

time began to be measured by the course of the sun. The chronology of her corporeal habitation and <summary of her> life is as follows. She was born on the island of Aegina, and as an infant was deprived of her mother. At the age of seven, she was legally betrothed by her father to a husband; then on account of the attack of the Saracens, she emigrated with her husband and father to our celebrated Thessalonike. At age twenty-five she was widowed, and took refuge in the convent, where she spent fifty-five years in the cenobitic life, contending in the arena of asceticism [p. 158]. She died in the eightieth year of her life, during the divinely protected reign of Leo <VI> and Alexander, our most Christian and orthodox holy emperors, in the sixth year of their reign,²²² in which God was their helper; and at that time the most holy John adorned the archiepiscopal throne in our city of Thessalonike.²²³

46. Theopiste, who had been entrusted with the position of superior of the holy convent, was truly the genuine daughter of the blessed <Theodora>, both by birth and in her behavior, and was possessed with divine love for her; so she commissioned seven very pious priests to perform the forty days of rites²²⁴ that are held for the departed in accordance with the tradition of the holy church, requesting that one of them come here each day to celebrate the divine liturgy.²²⁵ And the merciful Lord, Who grants heavenly glory to those who conduct themselves during this ephemeral life in accordance with His commandments, *He Who is faithful in all His words and holy in all His works*,²²⁶ immediately worked a great and extraordinary miracle, which exceeds human speech and understanding. And even if no other had occurred, I think that this one alone would suffice to exalt and magnify the name of the blessed <Theodora> all over the world. And indeed with these deeds He fulfilled for us who are unworthy the words of the prophet, “*The children of Israel shall be*

²²² Leo VI and his brother Alexander were co-emperors from 886–912; hence, the sixth year of their reign would be 892.

²²³ The archbishop John is also mentioned in Chap. 4 of the *Translation and Miracles* as having gone to Constantinople in August 893 to attend the installation of Patriarch Antony II Kauleas. The 15th-century *Synodikon of Thessalonike* lists two Johns who served successively as archbishop at this time; cf. V. Laurent, “La liste épiscopale du Synodicon de Thessalonique,” *EO* 32 (1933), 301.

²²⁴ Cf. note 105, above.

²²⁵ Apparently each priest celebrated the liturgy one day a week.

²²⁶ Ps. 144 (145):13.

amazed at the Lord and His goodness until the end of days."²²⁷ Truly man will not see as God sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, while God looks at the heart."²²⁸ For which one of her acquaintances suspected in their thoughts that she was a storehouse of such virtues? Who, seeing her associate on a daily basis with all <kinds of> people, in the midst of worldly <affairs>,²²⁹ could conceive this extraordinary fact about her, that she removed herself from the world through [p. 160] the total tranquility of her mind? Truly nothing was more exalted than her exalted humility. *For the Lord gives grace to the humble*²³⁰ and *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*²³¹ I will try, however, to the best of my ability, to recount what sort of extraordinary and great miracle the magnificent Lord worked through her, even if I will diminish it through my inexperience in writing.

47. On the ninth day after the departure to God of the blessed Theodora, the lamp hanging above the tomb, although it had very little oil in it, was burning in such a fashion as to astonish those who saw it because of the brilliance of the light; and they said to each other, "What is this strange sight?" Indeed <the lamp> neither went out, nor did it use up all the oil in it, but it burned brightly from one evening to the next. On the eleventh day after her death, that is the ninth of September, after the priest offered the bloodless sacrifice to God and returned home, since the fire had consumed the oil in the lamp, the superior ordered the <nun> charged with this duty²³² to add <more oil>, since she wanted it to burn all day long. But when she put it off to the next day, because it was a special holy day,²³³ and said that it would be better

²²⁷ Cf. Hos. 3:5.

²²⁸ Cf. 1 Ki. [= 1 Sam.] 16:7.

²²⁹ It is unclear whether this is a reference to her life before she entered the convent or to her activities outside the cloister (e.g., fetching firewood) after she became a nun.

²³⁰ Prov. 3:34.

²³¹ Lk. 18:14.

²³² I.e., the lamplighter. In the 11th-century *typikon* of Gregory Pakourianos (ed. P. Gautier, "Le typikon du sebasto Gregoire Pakourianos," *REB* 42 [1984], 59.671) there is mention of a *λυχνιατης*, a subordinate of the *ecclesiarches*. Goar's *Euchologion* (225, sect. 50, 230) mentions a *lampadarios*, an official responsible for the maintenance and lighting of lamps.

²³³ Or "day of special observance" (σεβασμία <ἡμέρα>). In 892 the tenth of September fell on a Sunday, and was the Sunday before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September).

for it to be cleaned and then be filled with oil, the superior agreed that this was a good idea. After a very short time passed and some necessity caused the same nun to go inside the church, as soon as she was inside the door, she saw the same lamp gushing forth oil and overflowing in streams onto the floor. Just as when a cauldron is heated from beneath by a blazing fire the water inside boils and overflows, so the oil in the lamp, gushing forth noiselessly, [p. 162] flowed onto the ground. She was frightened and went to the superior to tell her the news. She [Theopiste] immediately recalled the prophecies of her mother, and went to the church with trembling and joy, thanking the merciful God with a loud voice for such an ineffable visitation that He made through His servant Theodora. And news <of the incident> suddenly spread through the whole city as if a herald had proclaimed it, and summoned everyone <to witness> the astonishing miracle. And, I would venture to say, so many people, of every age and every class, came that not even the forecourts of the convent could accommodate the crowd that assembled. And they all witnessed that astonishing and great miracle, how the sweet-scented oil flowed in streams from the lamp onto the earth, and anointing themselves with it in faith they returned home glorifying and praising God. And they were forced to place a vessel beneath the lamp to catch the overflowing oil.

48. And from that moment until now <the lamp> has kept burning and never runs out <of oil>. And sometimes it gushes forth oil abundantly and overflows onto the ground, <as if it> issued from an unseen vein, or rather from divine blessing. And may it never run out <of oil>. For He Who arranged that through the one responsible for the lack of rain [i.e., Elijah] the flask of oil belonging to that widow of old not be diminished, so that in a land beset by famine He might remedy the lack of provisions with an unfailing supply of food,²³⁴ the same <God> through the entreaties of the blessed <Theodora> will grant His servants an unfailing supply of perpetually flowing oil, in an astonishing and incomprehensible manner, to cure the physical and spiritual afflictions that befall us because of our lack of good deeds, and so that her oil may proclaim with wordless voice her compassion for those who [p. 164] suffer. For since she heard in the holy Gospels that *love for one's neighbor*²³⁵ is manifested exceedingly in assistance to the sick, whenever one of the <nuns> of the convent happened to fall ill, she devoted herself to attendance upon the sick

²³⁴ Cf. 3 Ki. [1 Ki.] 17:1, 7-16.

²³⁵ Cf. Mt. 5:43.

<nun> after receiving permission. She also loved *to feed the hungry, and to give drink to the thirsty, and to take in strangers, and to clothe the naked*,²³⁶ and *to lead the unsheltered poor to her house*,²³⁷ so as to achieve perfection in virtue. But as it was impossible for her to accomplish these <exact> deeds, because she was under <monastic> authority, she <still strove> to the best of her ability to attain this excellent <spiritual> advantage, so that not only in saying, “*Lord, Lord,*” but also in *doing the will of our heavenly Father*,²³⁸ she demonstrated her love for Him and for her neighbor. For whosoever came to the convent in need of basic necessities and begging for their daily bread, if the blessed <Theodora> was at the convent, she would quickly furnish them with provisions. For dropping whatever she was doing, she would run to the nun who was entrusted with responsibility for such <necessities>,²³⁹ and taking <provisions> from her would distribute charity to the brethren (for she herself had no <goods> of this world). And she considered it a great sin to keep waiting at the convent gate²⁴⁰ Christ Who was begging through the poor.

49. For this reason, then, the merciful Lord brought it about that her [Theodora’s] first miracle after her burial²⁴¹ should be the continual flow of oil, so that through the oil, as I have already said, she might manifest her merciful disposition toward those who begged for mercy,²⁴² and through its constant flow she might demonstrate that she had access to God equal to that of Elijah, inasmuch as she had risen into the air by [p. 166] mounting <the chariot> of virtues²⁴³ and had cast off this earthly covering [i.e., the flesh] and had seen Him clearly. And what could be more amazing than this? Who could be so foolish and stupid as to disbelieve such a miracle? Surely no one except some-

²³⁶ Cf. Mt. 25:35–36.

²³⁷ Is. 58:7.

²³⁸ Cf. Mt. 7:21.

²³⁹ The cellaress (δοχειαρία) was responsible for provisioning the convent; see, for example, Delehayé, *Deux typica*, 119.11–15.

²⁴⁰ Reading θυρωρεῖον as in Arsenij edition, p. 29. Food was distributed at the gates of monasteries on a regular basis, with extra provisions added on special feastdays; for a discussion of these charitable distributions at convents, see Talbot, “Byzantine Women,” 117–19.

²⁴¹ Note that the emphasis is on “after her burial”; Theodora performed several miracles while still laid out on her bier (Chap. 44 of the *vita*).

²⁴² Throughout this and the previous paragraph there is a play on the homophony between the Greek word for oil (ἐλαίον) and mercy (ἐλεος).

²⁴³ Cf. 4 Ki. [2 Ki.] 2:11.

one with a haughty spirit who in a mercenary fashion was accustomed to reckon of no account the munificent gifts of God. For if anyone should suspect that this is not the truth, then let him witness the miracle as I did and not disbelieve my words. And indeed one of the priests chosen <to celebrate the commemorative liturgies>, Sisinnios by name, seeing this <miracle> with his own eyes, told me, "As I approached the tomb of the blessed <Theodora> and prayed, the lamp which gushes forth the oil was extinguished. But suddenly I saw it swing violently, and, as it was swinging, it suddenly was lit spontaneously without <the application of any> fire."

50. A few days later a neighbor woman who lived in poverty brought here [i.e., to the tomb] her very young son, whose senses were deranged by a demonic attack. For <one day> in the month of September, in the oppressive heat of midday, this boy, like the child that he was, was dashing about in one of the city's rubbish heaps in childish games; he was running to and fro trying to catch birds with birdlime and setting hidden traps on the ground for sparrows, when he was trapped in the snares of the devil. For while he was busying himself with this <pastime>, as he looked around he suddenly saw an Ethiopian²⁴⁴ who appeared very big and tall, and terrified he took to his heels to escape. But (as <the boy> explained to me after his recovery) the Ethiopian apparition seized him vigorously with both hands, hurled him to the ground, and after making a great thumping noise in the nearby vaulted chambers,²⁴⁵ he disappeared. As soon as [p. 168] Theodore (for this was the young boy's name) regained consciousness, he ran home, dumbstruck and terrified, bearing on his face clear evidence of the incident, and told his mother what had happened. And she immediately took her child (for what <else would> a mother <do>?), and tearing out her whitened hairs she sought refuge with God and the blessed <Theodora>. When the boy arrived at the place where the remains of the blessed <Theodora> were <buried> beneath the earth, straightway the wicked demon was exposed and revealed himself <as the child's tormentor>; and after he completely stunned the wretched child, he caused him to go out of his mind, so that he tried to leap about and attempted to leave the shrine, to speak abominable words and cry out indecently and utter strange responses when he was addressed. After his mother stayed

²⁴⁴ Demons were frequently described as Ethiopians in Byzantine hagiography.

²⁴⁵ The Greek word is *καμαραι*; Papageorgiu ("Vita," 150) suggests that the term may refer to aqueduct arches. It could also describe an old cemetery with vaulted tombs, the ruins of buildings with vaulted chambers, or cisterns.

<there> with him for a certain number of days, she took him <home> with sound mind and <fully> recovered. For while <the boy> was asleep, the blessed <Theodora> appeared to him and said, “O child, what is your problem?” And when he pointed to his head, she said, “Arise; from now on there is nothing wrong with you.” He awoke immediately, and more swiftly than words he got up; and when he saw the lamp gushing forth streams of oil onto the floor, he anointed his head, and was delivered from the soul-destroying abuse of the demon.

51. And another young man, by name of George, who also originated from this celebrated city of ours [Thessalonike], and from his childhood on was exceedingly disturbed by a demon, was also brought to the tomb of the blessed <Theodora> by his parents. His mother kept vigil with her son and supplicated God with fasting and tears, and compelled her son to abstain from wine and olive oil and all animal <products>; she also anointed him from his head to the tips of his toes with the oil that overflowed from the lamp, crying out loudly the saint’s name, especially when the unclean spirit would seize the <young man> and hurl him <to the ground>. [p. 170] One night one of the nuns dreamed that she saw the blessed Theodora walking to the convent church, carrying in her hand a glass vessel full of oil,²⁴⁶ in the middle of which could be seen a flame burning. And flanking her were two very handsome young men clad in white robes,²⁴⁷ and another man, a cleric of radiant appearance, was leading them, holding a censer in his hand and swinging it.²⁴⁸ When he saw the great crowd of sick people lying in the church around the tomb of the blessed <Theodora> (for on account of the previous miracles a large crowd of these people had assembled here), he entreated the saint to look mercifully

²⁴⁶ Surviving specimens of middle Byzantine glass lamps are extremely rare. A hanging lamp, probably of the 10th century, is preserved at Dumbarton Oaks (M. C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, I [Washington, D. C., 1962], no. 103, pp. 85–86), but I have not been able to locate any example of a lamp with a base. For the most recent discussion of glass production in Byzantium, see J. Durand, “Verrerie,” in *Byzance. L’art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris, 1992), 301. D. Talbot Rice mentions glass workshops in Thessalonike in the 10th century, but with no source cited (*Byzantine Art*, rev. ed. [Harmondsworth, 1968], 502).

²⁴⁷ Perhaps angels; the verb *λευχεμονεω* (“to be clad in white”) is frequently used in hagiography to describe angels seen in visions; cf. Chap. 12 and note 55 of *Life of Athanasia of Aegina*.

²⁴⁸ A censer was normally carried by a deacon.

upon them and to sprinkle them <with compassion>. And so she did; for approaching the young man's pallet and sitting by his head, she opened his mouth with the forefinger of her right hand and extracted something putrid and foul, which on the saint's finger looked like human excrement. And she shook it off and threw it on the ground. She did this three times. Then after washing her finger with saliva and wiping it off on the young man's cloak, she said, "Get up, there is nothing wrong with you." And from that time on the unclean spirit was banished from him, and from that moment the young man was healed.

52. And so these <miracles> occurred in this way; but let me speak of another form of miracle-working, no less <wonderful> than those previously mentioned. For it is not right for me to boast about these <miracles> alone, when in the space of a few days the all-merciful God adorned the blessed <Theodora> with an infinite multitude of miracles exceedingly different from the aforementioned. For since the Lord had seen fit for this woman to be celebrated and praised in the mouths of all as a result of these divine miracles, it was now deemed appropriate for her icon to be set up in a reverent fashion within the holy precincts,²⁴⁹ so that [p. 172] by being venerated in a relative manner she might be more revered and extolled, and so that by sanctifying those who venerated her she might fill them with divine grace; for up to this time no one had been eager to do this, perhaps by divine providence, so that in this way the blessed <Theodora> might be glorified even more greatly and lest certain people, out of ignorance of her virtuous deeds, surmise that <such veneration> was not pleasing to God. Thus a painter named John, who had never seen the blessed Theodora in the flesh, nor indeed had he ever entered the holy convent in which she lived, saw the following vision in a dream. He saw himself lying in the narthex at the church of her convent, and in the middle of the right hand colonnade of the same church, where there is a chapel of the exceedingly holy Mother of God in which the holy remains of the blessed woman were deposited, <he saw> a hanging lamp that was gushing forth oil and a ceramic vessel placed beneath it to catch the oil that was overflowing from the lamp.

53. At dawn then, when he had shaken off sleep and was walking through the city, he encountered an acquaintance who said to him, "Let us go to the

²⁴⁹ The *vita* provides the important information that an icon, an essential element of the cult of a Byzantine saint, was created of Theodora within a month or so of her death.

church of the protomartyr <Stephen>,” so that they might set up an icon of him. Therefore they approached the convent, and after announcing themselves to the mother superior by knocking at the gate, they went into the church. And as soon as they crossed the threshold, the painter recognized the narthex; and after recollecting what he saw in his dream and reconstructing the evidence, he said to his companion, “Truly, brother, this is the church in which I dreamed last night that I was lying.” And he described in detail his entire vision, the shape of the church and of the lamp and of the ceramic vessel, just as he had seen them. When they finished their prayers, [p. 174] and the man realized that he no longer saw the vision in his sleep but with his own eyes, he diligently inquired of the nun who happened to be in the church at that time²⁵⁰ why the vessel was placed beneath the lamp; for at the moment when he entered the church the oil was not gushing forth as he had seen it in his dream. The nun explained everything in sequence, even though her words did not convince the men who had not seen the gushing lamp with their own eyes. For sensible people always believe what they see and touch more than what they hear.²⁵¹ For the more precise <the evidence> from either end [i.e., eyes and hands or sight and touch], the clearer and more indisputable <is the evidence> for the middle [i.e., ears or hearing]. The <two> men then *kept in their hearts everything*²⁵² told them about the blessed <Theodora>, and went back home.

54. That night the artist again saw himself painting an icon of a nun, at the place where the holy image of the blessed Theodora is now. As he told me on oath, he did not realize whose <it was>, but thought he was painting the icon of the woman about whom the nun had told him the day before. When on the following day in a similar fashion he saw again exactly the same thing, and was assured that the vision was from God and divine, he went to the convent. And after describing his vision to the mother superior, he painted the icon of the blessed Theodora, without having learned from anyone the size of her stature or her complexion or her facial features. And assisted by divine guidance through the intercession of the blessed <Theodora>, he depicted her

²⁵⁰ Probably the *ekklesiarchissa* or the lamplighter.

²⁵¹ Cf., for example, Chap. 59 of the *vita* and Chap. 15 of the *Translation and Miracles*, where Gregory comments on the persuasive evidence of personal observation and touching.

²⁵² Cf. Lk. 2:19.

in such a way that those who knew her well said that she looked <in the icon> just as she did when she was younger.²⁵³ After a certain amount of time [p. 176] sweet-scented oil was seen to issue forth from the palm of the right hand of this holy icon, and up to this day it pours forth in streams so as to wash the paint from the icon. Thus they were forced to attach a lead receptacle at the base of the icon, so that the oil that gushed forth would not be lost by overflowing onto the floor.²⁵⁴ And the fame of this miracle as well resounded throughout the city and all its environs, and everyone came to seek refuge at the saint's tomb, as if in a waveless harbor; and bringing the sick with faith to this hospital that charged no fees, they would return home rejoicing, taking back in a healthy condition those who had been ill only shortly before.

55. For what person who went to the tomb of the blessed Theodora <ever> departed with pain in his heart? What person who was troubled by an unclean spirit was not freed from the demon who sorely tormented him after anointing himself with oil from the lamp and the holy icon? What person with eyes that were rheumy for any reason whatsoever was not quickly relieved of their rheum? And it is impossible for me to speak of those people whose bodies were sorely distressed with shivering fits and who were considered to be incurable and of whose lives men despaired; for <Theodora's> exceedingly swift succor of these people surpasses verbal expression and mental comprehension. For some people immediately recovered their health by throwing themselves on the tomb, others by anointing themselves with oil from the lamp or the icon, others by drinking it. To put it simply, all who approached <the tomb> with true faith were healed, no matter what disease afflicted them; and they would hurry back home rejoicing and praising Christ our God *Who accomplishes great and marvelous deeds*²⁵⁵ through those who love Him, and would proclaim the miracles of the blessed <Theodora>. [p. 178]

²⁵³ Indeed the earliest preserved image of Theodora (an 11th-century fresco at Hagia Sophia in Thessalonike) does depict her as a young woman; cf. Bakirtzes, "Μαρμαρινη εικονα," 161 fig. 2.

²⁵⁴ A marble icon of the Theotokos in the Byzantine Museum in Athens has cuttings for the attachment of such a receptacle. Bakirtzes ("Μαρμαρινη εικονα," 158–63) has argued unconvincingly that this icon is really of St. Theodora, and should be dated to 893, but the *vita* clearly describes an icon painted on a wooden panel, not a sculpture: the artist John is described as a painter (ζωγραφος - Chap. 52.15) who paints the icon (σκατταγραφούντα εικονα - Chap. 54.1–2).

²⁵⁵ Cf. Job 5:9.

56. A certain distinguished and honorable woman, the wife of the *strategetes* Euthymios,²⁵⁶ who lived in seven-gated²⁵⁷ Thebes, heard about the ineffable and indescribable miracles of the blessed mother (for word <of them> spread all over the earth as if on wings); and sending a letter of entreaty with a most faithful servant to the superior of the convent, she asked for some of the holy oil that was gushing forth. For this extremely decent woman had a young female slave whom she loved very much, and who surpassed her other servant girls in both deeds and common sense; and this <girl> had become blind three years previously. When her request was granted and she took in her hands the vessel containing the oil²⁵⁸ as if it were the blessed <Theodora> herself or one of her relics, and <when> she anointed with the holy oil that had been sent <to her> all the people from the surrounding area who suffered some bodily affliction, and when she saw with her own eyes that many of them were quickly healed, she gave instructions that the fragrant oil should be poured at frequent intervals on the eyes of her servant girl. And indeed within a few days her slave was healed, as her eyes were cleansed by the divine drug, that is, the healing of disease through the prayers of the blessed <Theodora> and anointing with her holy oil.

57. Among the villages subject to our celebrated great city <of Thessalonike> is one called Myriophytos.²⁵⁹ A man by the name of Elias lived there, who was of Amalekite [i.e., Arab] extraction²⁶⁰ and was devoted by ancestral

²⁵⁶ *Strategetes* is a relatively rare term for a military commander; cf. R. Guiland, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*, I (Berlin, 1967), 395. Paschalides (*Theodora*, 271–72) identifies *strategetes* with *strategos*, and concludes that Euthymios was *strategos* of the theme of Hellas, whose capital was at Thebes.

²⁵⁷ This epithet for Thebes goes back to Homer; cf. *Il.* 4:406 and *Od.* 11:263.

²⁵⁸ Some small lead flasks bearing the image of Theodora and dating from the Palaiologan period still survive; they were undoubtedly intended for the use of pilgrims who wished to carry away from the shrine some of the miraculous oil; cf. Bakirtzes, “Μαρμαρινη εικονα,” 159, 162 and fig. 3, and Paschalides, *Theodora*, 277–79.

²⁵⁹ Myriophotos (present-day Olynthos) was a village in the western Chalkidike peninsula; cf. J. Lefort, *Villages de Macedoine. I. La Chalcidique occidentale* (Paris, 1982), 102–5, and Paschalides, *Theodora*, 272.

²⁶⁰ This passage attests to the settlement of at least some Arabs in the region of Thessalonike by the late 9th century. For a survey of the evidence on Arab raids and settlement in Greece in the 9th and 10th centuries, see G. C. Miles, “Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area,” *DOP* 18 (1964), 1–32, and Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 157–68.

tradition to the iconoclast heresy. Many priests and laymen <tried to> compel him to anathematize the impious madness and to be converted to the orthodox Christian faith, but they were unable to sway his convictions. <One day> when he came to the city for some needful purpose, he encountered an acquaintance named Theodotos²⁶¹ (whose devotion to the blessed <Theodora> will be revealed by my subsequent narrative), who told him about [p. 180] the remarkable miracles of the blessed woman, and how fragrant oil gushes forth from her holy icon, while urging him to venerate the revered icons. And he, goaded to repentance by God, as if *the veil which lay over his heart were taken away*,²⁶² said, “If your words are true, I will indeed anathematize the religion handed down to me by my ancestors and convert to your faith.” And that man [i.e., Theodotos], who deserves to be remembered, with no hesitation took the heretic and brought him here [i.e., to the convent of St. Stephen]. And when <the heretic> entered and examined carefully the oil pouring from the icon and felt it with his hands and was assured in his mind, he knelt down and pressed his forehead to the ground; and after anointing with the flowing oil his hip which pained him terribly and perceiving the exceedingly swift succor of the blessed <Theodora>, he uttered words of thanksgiving to the *One Who does not want the death of a sinner but that he repent and live again*,²⁶³ saying, “I thank Thee, Christ my God, that Thou didst not leave me to be condemned to death in my ancestral heresy, but Thou hadst mercy on my sinful self, which is unworthy even to live, and Thou didst bring me back from the path of the sinners to the true path of Thy heavenly kingdom, and Thou didst snatch me from the soul-destroying jaws of the lion, and Thou didst number me in Thy flock of chosen sheep, *who know Thee and are known by Thee, the good shepherd*.²⁶⁴ Therefore I venerate Thy all-pure and life-bearing form and that of the One who bore Thee, my Lord and God, and of all the saints who have been pleasing to Thee from the beginning of time.” [p. 182] And with these words he kissed the icon of our blessed mother Theodora. And after anointing his entire body with the holy oil and praying at length, he returned to his home with

²⁶¹ This is Gregory’s first reference to Theodotos, who is mentioned several times in the subsequent account of the *Translation and Miracles*. He evidently played a major role in the promotion of Theodora’s cult.

²⁶² Cf. 2 Cor. 3:15–16.

²⁶³ Cf. Ez. 18:23; James 5:20.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Jn. 10:14.

rejoicing and gladness, firmly established in the orthodox faith and loudly proclaiming his salvation.

58. Nor should I omit from my narrative the following great and remarkable miracle. For it is extraordinary even among the <miracles> that reveal her [Theodora] as imitating in a supernatural manner the compassion and benevolence of God our Savior. And thereby I propose to make known that, just as she fulfills expediently the requests of those who come with pure *testimony of their conscience*²⁶⁵ to the abundant fountain of blessings (I am referring to her living relics, from which the grace of her miracles gushes forth like a river and encompasses all the land), and also <fulfills the requests> of those who invoke her greatly desired name from a distance, in the same way she leads those who are dubious about her blameless life away from their lack of faith in her, as out of the depths of the sea. And having rescued them from the darkness of passions she illuminates them with the light of her miracles, and by healing their bodily pain she persuades them to proclaim loudly her access to God and her power.

59. Certain monks, who lived *in dens and caves of the earth*,²⁶⁶ came from various mountains²⁶⁷ which are very close to our celebrated city to visit the holy churches in our city and to pray. And having assembled for the same <purpose> in a certain place, they were all telling all sorts of stories beneficial to the soul; and while the early part of their discussion introduced the *vitae* of many <monastic> fathers, as is likely to happen in such <discussions> [p. 184] (for they could not remain silent when they chanced to meet), the discussion as it proceeded came round to reminiscences of her [Theodora's] life. And <on the one hand> they all marveled at how a woman who lived in a city and had once been married could be elevated by God to such a height of glory, so as to surpass all women known to us with regard to the miracles <she accomplished>; but on the other hand they were somewhat dubious, because none of them knew with exactitude the true evidence and power of what was being

²⁶⁵ 2 Cor. 1:12.

²⁶⁶ Heb. 11:38.

²⁶⁷ Papageorgiu ("Vita," 150) and Katsane-Lada (Tsames, *Meterikon*, 4:181 n. 177) suggest that this may be a reference to Mt. Chortaites (a mountain east of Thessalonike), while Patlagean thinks it may be Athos ("Theodora," 51). The adverb *εγγιστα* ("very close"), however, makes the former suggestion more likely.

related <which comes> from observation, <and thus> with one accord they all decided to come here [i.e. to the convent of St. Stephen]. And so they came, and each of them investigated or even touched the various <objects of veneration>, and they wiped off the oil which was flowing from the icon, and tried to understand the nature and origin of its flow. And among that same group of monks was a certain Antony,²⁶⁸ about whom the mountain fathers recounted to us his many virtuous accomplishments; and they say that he and his community restored many holy churches that had fallen into ruin, and that he built the tower at the village of Karkarea, and the celebrated Monastery of the Tower there.²⁶⁹ He had a chronic problem with his hips, and was neither able to sit on a mule,²⁷⁰ nor indeed to remain standing for long, and so he made this sole experiment and trial by himself. He approached the icon of our blessed mother Theodora, and after genuflecting three times and pressing his forehead against the ground, he anointed the painful place with the oil that flowed from it. And he was immediately healed, so that no trace of the disease remained in Antony's hips. And after the monks thus received confirmation of what they they had been told about her, each returned to his cell, glorifying and praising Jesus Christ our God the provider of blessings.

60. A certain nun, the daughter of Kosmas the priest <at the church> of the holy and all-glorious great saint Demetrios,²⁷¹ [p. 186] had her knees,

²⁶⁸ Antony is known only from the *vita* of Theodora.

²⁶⁹ Karkarea was a village on the western side of the Chalkidike peninsula, on the site of the present village of Semantra; cf. Lefort, *Villages de Macedoine*, 80–81; Paschalides, *Theodora*, 274–75.

²⁷⁰ Reading ζῶο for εἶξω; cf. Chap. 2 of *Translation and Miracles*, ed. Paschalides, *Theodora*, 192.13.

²⁷¹ Kosmas is attested only in this *vita*. Note that as in the case of the deacon Demetrios (cf. Chap. 44), an individual with a connection to the church of St. Demetrios is healed at the (rival) shrine of Theodora. It is by no means clear when *myron* (perfumed oil) became a feature of the miraculous healing cult of St. Demetrios. He is first called μυροβλῦτης (“giving forth perfumed oil”) by the 10th-century author John Kameniates in his account of the sack of Thessalonike in 904; cf. G. Bohlig, *Ioannis Kaminiatae. De expugnatione Thessalonicae* (Berlin, 1973), 5.66; it should be noted, however, that A. Kazhdan has questioned the date of Kameniates' composition (“Some Questions Addressed to the Scholars Who Believe in the Authenticity of Kaminiates' 'Capture of Thessalonica',” *BZ* 71 [1978], 301–14). For the archaeological evidence on the mechanics of providing the *myron* to pilgrims, see G. and M. Soteriou, Ἡ βασιλικὴ τοῦ ἁγίου

wrists,²⁷² ankles and feet swollen and puffed up like a wineskin, and since they were terribly painful, she came here. And after remaining only five days and anointing herself with the holy oil, she returned healthy to her own convent. Thus such great miracles of this sort were occurring every day, and the fame of the blessed <Theodora> was greatly increasing because the events themselves were emitting a quite conspicuous light and voice, like a shining lamp and loud-voiced herald from a high vantage point, and <her fame> was attracting people from all over to this free hospital for both souls and bodies. <At this time then> a woman from our city named Auxentia, who had a terrible and very pitiful affliction (for she was paralyzed in every joint from her loins to the tips of her toes) was brought here by her relatives, who had heard about the power of the <miracles> wrought here; and they carried her from either side in their arms,²⁷³ because she was totally incapable of standing on her feet. And after anointing herself for only three days with the oil that gushed from the lamp and the holy icon, she stood up by herself and was able to *leap up and walk around*, since the muscles of her hips and her thighs and *her ankles and feet were made strong*.²⁷⁴ And after staying four more days at the convent, and serving the nuns' every need with no impediment or pain, on the seventh day she returned to her home on her own two feet.

61. And this <miracle> is no less great than the miracles of the illuminator of the church and chief of the apostles [Peter]. For the latter healed the *lame man who asked for alms at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful*²⁷⁵ by invoking Christ and stretching out his hand; whereas she [Theodora], who had Christ Himself dwelling within her, [p. 188] healed the woman who approached the spring of miracles (I mean the hallowed tomb) and <who> hoped to receive deliverance from her afflictions through <Theodora's> intercessions, <curing her> by anointing her with the oil which gushes forth

Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης (Athens, 1952), 54–55. On the basis of present evidence, it is difficult to determine whether the shrine of St. Theodora or St. Demetrios was the first church in Thessalonike to provide *myron* with miraculous healing properties. For a more thorough investigation of this problem, see my forthcoming article, "Family Cults in Byzantium: The Case of St. Theodora of Thessalonike."

²⁷² Or "elbows."

²⁷³ I.e., making a chair for her in their arms?

²⁷⁴ Cf. Acts 3:7.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Acts 3:2.

through her from ever-flowing sources. For even if the blessed <Theodora> did not strengthen her suppliant by clearly manifesting herself and tightening up the paralyzed limbs or even by extending her hand as did Peter, she restored the woman to her family in good health by gazing in a kindly fashion on the afflicted woman with the overshadowing of her mind.²⁷⁶ What praise then should we give for these <miracles> to our mother who is glorified both in heaven and on earth? For visiting on earth and sea and in the homes of the sick, she grants their petitions as is expedient for those who eagerly invoke her greatly desired name, as if supernaturally imitating the incomprehensible compassion of Christ our true God, Who is all-merciful in His essence, to Whom is due all glory, honor, and veneration forever. Amen.

²⁷⁶ This “protective overshadowing” of suppliants is often connected with the Virgin; cf. John of Thessalonike, “Oration on the Dormition of the Virgin,” ed. M. Jugie, “Homelies mariales byzantines. X,” in PO 19:403.32.

[p. 190]

NARRATIVE <OF GREGORY THE CLERIC> ABOUT THE
TRANSLATION OF THE VENERABLE RELICS OF OUR BLESSED
MOTHER THEODORA.²⁷⁷

Give a blessing, lord.²⁷⁸

1. Since through the grace of Christ, our great God, *Who makes the tongues of the stammerers to speak clearly*,²⁷⁹ I have described in part the life and some miracles of our blessed mother, to the extent that my feeble mental faculties <permitted>, <now> I should eagerly proceed to the translation of her relics, having as surety her intercession and assistance. For it is not right to omit this <translation> through negligence and to pass over in silence the greatness of such wonderful miracles. For I have chosen to write not on the basis of the accounts of others, as usually happens, but what my own eyes have revealed to my mind. Although I could still recount many of the miracles that occurred before the translation of her relics, so as to avoid a surfeit of narrative I have left them to those who marvel at even her small accomplishments (and although they are insignificant when taken individually, they do not so appear when compared with each other), and have decided that I should describe her translation. Send me, O mother, your assistance. And you will surely send it, inasmuch as you are a loving [p. 192] mother who graciously accepts the praises of her children. Thus I will begin my narration from that point.

2. During the first year after her departure to God,²⁸⁰ many of her fellow nuns saw her in their dreams, ordering that her living remains be moved, and

²⁷⁷ Gregory's account of the translation of Theodora's relics and her posthumous miracles is preserved only in a later paraphrase, which begins here. See introduction to this *vita*, pp. 161–62. For a similar episode of a translation of relics, see chap. 15 of the *Life of Athanasia*; cf. also note 65 of that *vita* for discussion of the significance of the transfer of relics.

²⁷⁸ This formulaic introductory phrase, included in the Kurtz edition (p. 37), but omitted by Paschalides, was most probably addressed to Christ or to the priest presiding over the service of commemoration; cf. A.-M. Malingrey, *Lettres a Olympias* (Paris, 1968), 406 n. 2.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Is. 35:6.

²⁸⁰ I.e., 892–893.

sometimes rebuking her daughter because she had not been buried in accordance with her wishes.²⁸¹ In the tenth month,²⁸² *toward the dawn of the first day of the week*,²⁸³ when the birthday of the holy prophet and Forerunner, John the Baptist, was being celebrated,²⁸⁴ before sunrise one of the marble slabs covering the relics of the blessed Theodora suddenly broke.²⁸⁵ And at that time Theodotos (whom I have previously mentioned) happened to be present, engaged in solitary prayer. Also lying <by the tomb> was a paralyzed woman from the city of Verroia,²⁸⁶ dumb and deaf as well, who had arrived the previous day, carried on a pack animal. Thus, when the slab of marble popped out of the floor as if someone were pushing it forcefully from underneath, it broke into three pieces, and made a louder noise in breaking than in popping off. The man who was present [i.e., Theodotos], filled with amazement and seized with great fear and trembling, remained speechless. The superior of the convent [Theopiste], who heard the noise in the church and did not understand what had happened, came fearfully. And when she saw the broken slab of marble and the man with his mouth agape and scarcely breathing, pale and with downcast eyes, she was seized with confusion. Then, as she looked around, she saw that the woman who had arrived the previous day, carried on a pack animal, and unable [p. 194] to move any of her limbs whatsoever, was supporting herself on her elbow and emitting moans from her mouth; and by these means she barely enabled those who saw her to understand that the Lord *Who raises up those who are broken down*²⁸⁷ had given strength to the paralyzed limbs of her body, and opened up the plugged auditory canals of her ears through the intercessions of the blessed <Theodora> with this unexpected visitation, thus adorning the translation of the blessed <Theodora> with two mar-

²⁸¹ Theodora had asked to be buried in a separate tomb; cf. *vita*, Chap. 40.

²⁸² Theodora died on 29 August 892. The tenth month after her death would be June 893. June is also the tenth month of the Byzantine year, which began in September.

²⁸³ Mt. 28:1. In Byzantine calculation, the first day of the week was Sunday.

²⁸⁴ The birthday of John the Baptist is celebrated on 24 June. In 893, 24 June indeed fell on a Sunday.

²⁸⁵ One must envision this as a marble slab flush with the floor pavement and covering the communal tomb of the nuns.

²⁸⁶ A city on the Macedonian plain southwest of Thessalonike. For another pilgrim from Verroia, see Chap. 12, below.

²⁸⁷ Ps. 144 (145):14.

velous signs. For when the dumb woman realized that her auditory canals were opened, as I have already said, and perceived the sudden strengthening of her afflicted body and was seized with unsurpassable joy, she hastened to give thanks to her savior as best she could. And she was immediately delivered from her muteness, and cried out in a loud voice, "Glory to Thee, O God!" When the superior saw this she was filled with divine joy, and after she restored with her words the courage of the aforementioned <Theodotos>, they both turned <their attention> to the wondrous miracle, and offered up thanks to the God and Savior of all. As for the paralytic woman, that very same day she stood up by herself and walked. And two days later she returned to her home under her own power.

3. Several days later another marble slab broke off spontaneously in the sight of all. And a little later the same thing happened again. And so her daughter [Theopiste], convinced by the triple occurrence of this holy miracle and by the frequent exhortations of the blessed woman in her dreams, and fearful that she might be punished for disobedience and negligence, taking the aforementioned <Theodotos> as her collaborator, with diligent zeal and heartfelt desire had a sarcophagus [p. 196] prepared, and deposited in it the remains of the blessed <Theodora>. And the manufacture and the form of the sarcophagus were the result of divine forethought, as I shall explain in my account to those who are unfamiliar <with the story>. Since many of those who came said that the sarcophagus should be made one way, but some argued that it should be manufactured differently, the people responsible for the work supplicated the Spirit which guided Beseleel in his manufacture of those things that were shown to Moses on the mountain²⁸⁸ to give them good courage and to help them accomplish their good work. And so they invited a certain stone-cutter, who had the office of priest,²⁸⁹ and guided by divine grace they made a rectangular marble sarcophagus, like a casket, for the blessed woman, and decorated its exterior with various carvings.²⁹⁰ And they left a small hole in

²⁸⁸ Cf. Ex. 31:2–3, 25:40.

²⁸⁹ For other artists who were also clerics, see entries on Anastasios, John (a deacon), Leontios (a deacon), Nicholas (an *anagnostes*), and Nikodemos in A. Cutler's article on "Artists" in the *ODB* 1:198–201. A. Kazhdan has suggested an alternative interpretation of *πρεσβύτερος*, that he could be the elder of a guild of stonemasons, but I have found no parallel.

²⁹⁰ After the late antique period, stone sarcophagi became much less common in Byzantium and were usually reserved for the wealthy; as in the case of Theodora's

the area of the feet, so that after the completion of their work, when they cleaned it out with water, the water could flow out through the hole.²⁹¹ This was their design, as humans, but through the forethought of the life-giving Spirit this also occurred: for through that hole, as can <still> be seen, pours the healing and sweet-scented oil that exudes from the relics.

4. By coincidence someone brought a marvelous lock,²⁹² such as no one in our city had ever seen. The man who brought it said, “When I saw this lock, I felt as if someone were speaking to me, telling me, ‘Buy it, and take it to the venerable coffin of the blessed <Theodora>, because it is right and pleasing to God [p. 198] that her living relics should be seen by all.’” Therefore they decided that they should place a board on top of the sarcophagus instead of a <stone> slab, leaving an opening in the part by her head, and to put a cover over the opening, which could easily be lifted and put back. And so the sarcophagus was made in this fashion, and the day of the translation arrived. And since the chief shepherd of our city, the thrice-blessed John,²⁹³ had gone to the Queen of Cities [i.e., Constantinople] with all the archbishops for the election and installation of the ecumenical patriarch Antony,²⁹⁴ seven priests who were invited to transfer the remains of the saint²⁹⁵ arrived without fanfare

sarcophagus, they were generally custom-made (cf. *ODB* 3:1841–42, s.v. Sarcophagus). For middle Byzantine examples, see O. Feld, “Mittelbyzantinische Sarkophage,” *RQ* 65 (1970), 158–84, and Th. Pazaras, Ἀναγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι και ἐπιταφίες πλακες τῆς μεσης και ὕστερης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου στην Ἑλλάδα (Athens, 1988). Since Chap. 7, below, relates that the sarcophagus was completed by 3 August 893, the date of the translation of Theodora’s relics, we can conclude that it took the stonecutter a month or less to carve the sarcophagus.

²⁹¹ Such holes can be seen in surviving sarcophagi; cf., for example, Feld, loc.cit., p. 159 and pl. 5, p. 176 and pl. 11a; Pazaras, loc.cit., cat. no. 65, pp. 48–49.

²⁹² On Byzantine locks and padlocks, which were essential to maintain the security of relics, see G. Vikan in *Security in Byzantium: Locking, Sealing and Weighing* (Washington, D. C., 1980), 2–9.

²⁹³ John, archbishop of Thessalonike, was already mentioned in Chap. 45 of the *vita*; cf. note 223, above.

²⁹⁴ Antony II Kauleas, patriarch of Constantinople from 893 to 901. It is only from this source that the exact date of his election, late July or August 893, is known; cf. V. Grumel, “Chronologie des evenements du regne de Leon VI (886–912),” *EO* 35 (1936), 6.

²⁹⁵ Perhaps the same seven priests whom Theopiste had invited to perform the daily liturgy during the forty days after Theodora’s death; cf. *vita*, Chap. 46.

after sunset,²⁹⁶ lest it be difficult for them to accomplish their goal if the people heard the news and flocked to her tomb, since they all had an insatiable desire to witness that wondrous spectacle. Nor could they have done this without effort, since for about three nights already everyone had kept vigil in the nearby squares, awaiting the translation of the holy body, each one striving to be second to none in his affection for and faith in the saint.

5. Thus the most pious priests arrived at the tomb of the blessed <Theodora>; there also assembled many of the devout, of whose numbers I was one, accompanying my honorable father.²⁹⁷ When we came inside the convent, after securing the doors²⁹⁸ and praying for a long time, with the priests wearing their sacred vestments, we began to excavate the tomb around midnight. When we reached the stone²⁹⁹ and cleared it off, we strove to roll it away. [p. 200] And then a great and terrifying event occurred. For the <stone> that <normally> two men could roll away from the tomb, all of us who had assembled could not budge even a little, even though we were pulling on it with ropes and pieces of wood.³⁰⁰ As a result each of us concluded that, since we were unworthy to assist in such a great matter, we were not even allowed *to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher*.³⁰¹ After two and three more efforts, with breaks in between, we accomplished nothing and we all wanted to give up the attempt; but one of the priests, who was filled with the Holy Spirit at that hour (it was John, my father, for he was distinguished above all men in his way of life and was revered by them and considered to be their father), standing in prayer and reciting the words that are customary in

²⁹⁶ I.e., ca. 9:00 P.M., since it was the month of August.

²⁹⁷ I have taken εὐλαβεῖς as “devout” and “my honorable father” as Gregory’s birth father. It is possible, however, that εὐλαβεῖς should be understood as referring to monks (cf. *Ignatii Diaconi Vita Tarasii archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani*, ed. I. A. Heikel [Helsingfors, 1891], 421.4, ὁ δε τῶν μονοτροπῶν εὐλαβεστατος θιασος, and Lampe, s.v. l.c) and that the “father” is Gregory’s spiritual father.

²⁹⁸ It is not clear here whether the πύλαι are the gates of the convent or the doors of the church. Paschalides accepts the first interpretation. Again, there is an emphasis on the secrecy with which the translation was performed.

²⁹⁹ This stone (λίθος) seems to be distinct from the marble slabs (πλακέες) over the tomb. It was evidently a stone slab covering the communal tomb of the nuns. It was in turn covered with dirt, and then with marble plaques flush with the church floor.

³⁰⁰ The pieces of wood were probably wooden levers or wedges.

³⁰¹ Mk. 16:3.

church, when he came to the holy conclusion of the prayer and made with his hand the sign of the life-giving cross and exhorted everyone to pull all together, with faith,³⁰² <the stone> was easily pulled away. And extraordinary happiness and rejoicing replaced the previous despair. Then seeing that the marble slabs that had broken off had been directly above the holy corpse,³⁰³ we decided to place them there to be seen as a memorial of that great miracle, so that they [i.e., the marble plaques] might thereby persuade those with minds like stone that it is pleasing to God and to <Theodora> for her living relics to be seen and venerated by all. For this reason, in my opinion, <God> preserved <her body> intact and almost uncorrupted to His glory and the honor of the <blessed woman> who glorified the true God, our Savior, [p. 202] Jesus Christ. But my narrative should return to the sequence of the story.

6. The priests then asked the group of nuns to withdraw for a little, and to leave only <Theodora's> daughter, so that she could provide what was needed; and as each <of the priests> held a wax candle in his hand, with one voice they sang hymns to God and descended into the tomb,³⁰⁴ chanting psalms. And they began to discuss with each other, "If she gives herself to us, how should we remove her from the tomb?" But when they asked the superior [i.e., Theopiste] to give them a splendid shroud to wind around that holy body, so that it should not suffer any damage during removal, being pushed this way and that, the superior replied: "An undefiled and pure life was my mother's adornment while she lived, and in death too this same life is a most splendid shroud. Besides, even in this world she had no love for that which beautifies the flesh. Consider then whether this would be pleasing to the saint; for it is not right to do anything to her body that would be displeasing to her. In any case, whatever is pleasing to God and agreeable to my mother, this I deem to be right at this time." Therefore they decided it was better to wrap her <body> in a woolen shroud, so that her body which was accustomed to be covered in rags should not seem to be beautified by the alien covering of a splendid shroud. [p. 204]

³⁰² An alternative translation is "persuasively exhorted everyone to pull all together."

³⁰³ Although *κατ' ἰσοτητα* would at first seem to mean "in pieces of equal size," the translation makes no sense in this context. John Duffy has suggested that *κατ' ἰσοτητα* may refer to the original position of the slabs.

³⁰⁴ This sentence suggests that the communal tomb was quite large with stairs leading down into it.

7. Therefore, when this was decided and they held in their hands <the woolen shroud> which they sought, my holy father <stood> at the feet of the blessed <Theodora>, another <priest> at her head, and another at her side, and they took hold of the holy corpse and raised it up slightly, and by introducing the shroud at each end they wrapped it up. And then that steadfast body that had willingly endured many trials was passed by the priests from hand to hand and was laid to rest with dignity on the third of August in the sarcophagus that had been prepared, in the first year after her departure to God.³⁰⁵ And it was securely wrapped in the aforementioned shroud so that no one could steal any part of the relics. And thus the hearts of those who in their humility had judged themselves unworthy of the undertaking were at peace. For one could see that this body, with its grave-clothes, was truly completely uncorrupted, with only the cloth on the back having rotted from the flow of the decayed intestinal fluids³⁰⁶ and the dampness of the earth. For the <garments> in front, on her shoulders and chest, and as far as her feet, I mean the *sticharion* and *koukoulion* and scapular,³⁰⁷ have all been preserved intact until now. And the narrow girdle³⁰⁸ that bound her hands to her chest, as is customary for corpses, was preserved intact and undamaged, with not even a trace (as they say) of damage, so that its knot could be easily loosed; and when we wanted to take a little piece of it as *eulogia* instead of the relic, we were not able to tear it with our hands, but had to use a knife to divide it up.³⁰⁹

8. A neighbor named Akindynos, who was sound asleep in his own house, assured us that at this very hour such fragrance wafted over him [p. 206] that he was awakened by the sweet smell itself, wondering at the source of such a perfumed aroma. He immediately realized that the precious relics of the blessed <Theodora> were being transferred. And quickly arising, he arrived <to find us> still laboring at our task, all making a prayer in unison with

³⁰⁵ I.e., 3 August 893.

³⁰⁶ Reading τῶν ἐντοσθίων ἰχώρων for τῶν ἐντος θείων ἰχώρων, an emendation suggested by Paul Magdalino.

³⁰⁷ The *sticharion* was a monastic tunic, the *koukoulion* a hood; on the scapular (*epomis*), see note 123, above.

³⁰⁸ Σιμικτινθιον, from Latin *semicinctium*.

³⁰⁹ Literally, “blessing.” In the context of pilgrimage an *eulogia* was a kind of holy souvenir, an object (such as water, earth, oil, a cross, a piece of bread) sanctified by contact with a holy person or place. For a parallel to the devotional practice of pilgrims taking bits of cloth from saints’ burial garments as *eulogia*, cf. the *vita* of patriarch Ignatius (d. 877) in PG 105:560A, 564B.

tears <in our eyes>. And then as we took pleasure in the singing of hymns to <Theodora>,³¹⁰ as if it were on a notable day of a glorious feast, and as we were beginning the morning psalm, somehow the news having suddenly spread everywhere, so many people came that there was not enough room in the forecourt for the crowd that streamed in.

9. That same day fragrant oil began to pour forth in streams from the aforementioned hole in the sarcophagus, in every way indistinguishable from and similar to the <oil> from the lamp and the icon; and it flooded the entire floor of the church. And God has granted that up to this day it gushes forth on each occasion through the intercessions of the blessed <Theodora> to heal us in both body and soul. Thus God knows how to honor those who honor His goodness *with mouth and heart*.³¹¹ Such are the prizes awarded to those who contend on His behalf during this very short life and who trample under foot *His adversary, the Devil*.³¹² Such accomplishments are possible for the race of earth-born men, if they wish. Thus the munificent Lord, in Whom there is no difference between *male and female*³¹³ nor are the measures of our labors measured, knows how to measure out *grace to the humble*,³¹⁴ so that we who are arrogant and through lack of intelligence prefer the present to the future, we who are not willing to bend our untamed neck and submit to the *easy yoke*³¹⁵ of the Lord, may hearken to <the precept of> humility. [p. 208] Let us see how through her humility the blessed <Theodora> distinguished herself exceptionally in the world and strove supremely in the monastic life, and now is glorified by the Lord in heaven. And she will be praised for eternity, rejoicing among the choirs of saints, whence *sorrow, pain, and groaning have fled*.³¹⁶ Let us see that not only the *Queen of the South*³¹⁷ desired to see the wisdom of Solomon, but tens of thousands of other women as well praised the Creator

³¹⁰ It is noteworthy that hymns had been composed in honor of Theodora within a year of her death. One surviving hymn (Kurtz, *Theodora*, 82–86) is attributed to a contemporary, Joseph the Hymnographer, but the attribution is suspect because Joseph is thought to have died ca. 886; cf. *ODB* 2:1074.

³¹¹ Sir. 39:35.

³¹² I Pet. 5:8.

³¹³ Cf. Gal. 3:28.

³¹⁴ Prov. 3:34.

³¹⁵ Mt. 11:30.

³¹⁶ Is. 35:10.

³¹⁷ Mt. 12:42.

of Solomon and ran to follow Him; and utterly loving His wisdom (if indeed *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*),³¹⁸ they will arise and condemn our generation, which prefers present pleasures to those in the future.

10. But the narrative, which leads me from one <incident> to another, does not permit me to keep silence even if I should so wish. For in addition to the above-mentioned miracles, <let me tell you about> the daughter of a servant of one of the famous inhabitants of this city of ours, a child who was still being breastfed and was honored by the name of the blessed <Theodora>.³¹⁹ One night it so happened that she asked for a drink with the childish babble typical of infants: and her mother, impelled by her love for her, offered her water to drink. Immediately, while the liquid was still in her mouth, the child was seized with shuddering and trembling, and from that moment and long into the next night was subject to terrible convulsions, biting her tongue and gnashing her teeth and twisting her mouth and rolling her eyes. Then her limbs went limp, and she lay half-dead and breathing her last, with her mouth in an unnatural position, and her eyes rolling and her [p. 210] tongue lacerated by the violent movement of her teeth. After three days passed during which the baby drank no milk, her parents and her masters were at a loss because all human efforts to assist <the child> proved of no avail; <thus> they invoked the great munificence of God and prayed that He receive her spirit as soon as possible, so that the child should not be seen thus suffering before their eyes. In this situation a certain man, who was familiar with the miracles that the most merciful Lord brings about through His servant Theodora, said with divine inspiration: “If you want the child to be quickly delivered from this illness, go to the grave of the blessed Theodora.” The mother immediately carried her daughter to the sarcophagus of the saint, and tearfully invoking the blessed woman’s name, she remained for one night, anointing the girl with the oil which gushed forth from the lamp and the icon and her holy relics. And the child got better right away. And after staying for only three nights and regaining a healthy child, she returned home with joy and gladness.

11. A certain cleric, who had gone to the tomb of the blessed <Theodora> to pray and wanted to take back to the members of his household an *eulogia*

³¹⁸ Prov. 1:7.

³¹⁹ Although Theodora was one of the most common female names in Byzantium, it still seems likely that this particular child, born just about the time of Theodora’s death, was named after the saint.

of the manifestations of divine grace there, dipped a piece of papyrus³²⁰ in the gushing holy oil, as is customary for the faithful, and leaving <the church> went on his way. And by chance someone met him and inquired where he had gotten the oil. And when he replied, “From our blessed mother, Theodora,” [p. 212] a certain woman leapt down³²¹ quietly, and grabbing the cleric’s hand, tried to take away the piece of papyrus. When the cleric would not allow this, that most faithful woman displayed her distress with many groans, and said to herself with fervent zeal like the woman <in the Gospels> with the issue of blood³²²: “If only I anoint my child with the holy oil from the saint, she will be saved at that very hour.” And she tearfully begged the cleric, saying: “Be so kind as to show mercy with a compassionate gesture toward the pathetic child carried in my arms. For she is half-paralyzed on account of the multitude of my sins. Therefore do not begrudge my salvation nor be merciless toward this pathetic child, but give me the holy oil that you are carrying in your hands. For I know that the Lord Who loves mankind will compensate me for my faith and through the intercessions of the saint will provide healing for my pitiful child.” She cried out these words with lamentation and wailing; but the cleric, who wanted to bring the oil to the members of his household, refused to give it to her. And so that admirable woman grabbed the piece of papyrus with her fingertips and was able to squeeze oil out of it; and immediately anointing the half-paralyzed child in a certain place with the oil squeezed out on her fingers, she regained a whole and healthy daughter through the intercessions of the saint, as the illness dissipated just like a dark cloud at sunrise. [p. 214]

12. A young woman from the town of Verroia, which is subject to our metropolis, as the result of an attack of the wicked devil suffered a dislocated jaw when she yawned (that is, her lower jaw was forced out of its joint), and she remained for many days with her mouth agape. When extensive medical treatment in that <city> proved fruitless, her father, who could not bear to see

³²⁰ The author is probably referring to a piece of paper made from papyrus rather than to a piece of papyrus reed. Papyrus paper continued to be used in Byzantium up to the 12th century as an alternative to parchment and rag paper; for bibliography, see N. Oikonomides, “Le support matériel des documents byzantins,” in *La Paleographie grecque et byzantine* (Paris, 1977), 389 n. 6.

³²¹ It is unclear from where the woman is leaping down, but it could conceivably have been from a sidewalk raised above a sunken roadway (suggestion of Paul Magdalino), or from a horse or a balcony.

³²² Cf. Mt. 9:20–22.

his daughter's incomparable suffering, hastened to our illustrious metropolis, hoping to find a cure for the girl. And (to make a long story short) the girl was brought to the sarcophagus of the saint, and immediately felt better after pressing her face against the holy relics of our mother and anointing the afflicted area with the gushing oil. And she, too, after staying only three nights, finally was completely healed and joyfully returned home with her father.

13. And that frequently aforementioned Theodotos, who had a little daughter about two years old, was staying at the convent of the saint.³²³ But it is better to start from the beginning, so that what I am about to relate will be clear. This Theodotos had married the daughter of a member of the nobility, and although he had lived with her for about fifteen years, he was childless, but not because his wife had lost her reproductive capacity, due to infertility or old age; but <nonetheless> (by the judgments known only to that Lover of mankind Who disposes of our affairs) Theodotos was childless. For as long as the infant was an embryo in his wife's womb or was breastfeeding, Theodotos was a father and was so called. But when the child grew and reached its second or third year, the child would die and Theodotos would again be childless. After four of [p. 216] his children had died in this way,³²⁴ Theodotos decided that this would be the only good and God-pleasing plan, to entrust his hopes to God, because all human assistance was of no avail in such matters. After he communicated his plan to his wife, they offered up a prayer in unison to the compassionate Lord, saying: "O Thou Who granted Isaac to Abraham though he was elderly and past his prime, Who through Elisha resurrected the boy who had just died and restored him to the Shunammite woman,³²⁵ Who granted to Zacharias even after he became impotent that he

³²³ As will become clear in Chap. 14, below, Theodotos had dedicated his infant daughter to monastic life at the convent in 893 in thanksgiving for her miraculous healing from a grave illness. He evidently took up temporary residence at the convent (in the guest house?) the following year, when his daughter fell seriously ill a second time.

³²⁴ This chapter provides important evidence on the high rate of infant mortality in Byzantium. It also suggests a three-year interval between the birth of children (five children were born in fifteen years), perhaps reflecting the period of infertility naturally provided to the mother by breastfeeding (generally two to three years). See also note 41, above.

³²⁵ Cf. 4 Ki. [2 Ki.] 4:8–37.

should bring forth for Thee the Forerunner who would surpass all men *among them that are born of women*,”³²⁶ and they recalled other such <divine favors>. And beating their chests and <with their faces> streaming with tears and wailing in lamentation, they added these words: “O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, Thou alone art the maker and creator of human nature. Thou, O Lord, knowest the despair of the childless and the joy of those who are blessed with children. Therefore we promise, O Lord, that if Thou dost grant us a child, of whatever sex, we will make an offering of it in Thy presence.” And He Who proclaimed, “*While thou art yet speaking, behold, I am here*,”³²⁷ heeded their <prayer>. For not long afterward Theodotos, who was formerly both the father of many children and childless, again became a father. For his wife conceived in her womb and gave birth to the <child> called Theopiste after the superior of this convent. [p. 218] And although she is not yet able to speak clearly, she is garbed in the habit of monastic life, as you see.³²⁸

14. During the first year after the departure of the blessed Theodora to God, when the girl was a year old,³²⁹ she was stricken with a very severe illness so that they despaired of her life. Therefore Theodotos, who as a neighbor had witnessed the indescribable miracles that occurred here <at her tomb>, recalling the blessed woman’s deep-seated love for him from of old, ran with unsurpassable faith to the place where the relics of the saint lay beneath the earth,³³⁰ and entreated her fervently with tears, saying: “If you deliver my child from this illness, I will immediately offer her to God and to you.” And the saint was moved by his prayers, and the girl was delivered from her illness, and the father rejoiced in his good hopes in these matters, hastening to fulfill his vow quickly. Shortly thereafter the girl was brought to the convent of the

³²⁶ Mt. 11:11.

³²⁷ Is. 58:9.

³²⁸ The data in this sentence accords well with the chronology established by Gregory in the following chapter. When Gregory wrote the *Translation and Miracles* in 894, Theopiste would have been two years old, and thus would “not yet <be> able to speak clearly.” The phrase “as you see” suggests that the toddler may even have been present among the congregation as living proof of Theodora’s miraculous powers.

³²⁹ Theopiste (the daughter of Theodotos) must have been born in 892, shortly before Theodora’s death.

³³⁰ Note that this miracle occurred before the translation of Theodora’s relics.

saint, and was clothed in the habit of monastic life, that is, the scapular.³³¹ The following year³³² the girl was again stricken with a very severe illness; after suffering for five whole months, she was in critical condition and expected to die. Around the sixth hour of the night³³³ one of the nuns in this convent saw herself in a vision standing in the church. The sanctified sarcophagus of the saint was illuminated on all sides by candles, and the saint was sitting on top of it and the aforementioned Theodotos was standing alongside holding his sick daughter in his arms, and throwing himself at the saint's feet and crying out in supplication, saying, "Mother, why do you not heed the sound of my wailing? Why do you ignore me, a wretched sinner, [p. 220] in my affliction, and why do you not snatch from *the gates of Hell*³³⁴ this child who has been dedicated to you after God? Why did you not receive with compassion this gift which is offered to you, but have rejected her as if <she were offered> by profane *hands filled with blood*?³³⁵ Is this <the outcome of> my confidence in you and my loud praises of you to all? Is this how you reward my extraordinary devotion to you, both while you were still alive and after your death? <For> death is trying like a lion to snatch away the child that I hoped to have through your intercessions, now that she is growing up. Why do you not entreat the merciful Christ our God on her behalf to grant her to you to be a source of joy and pride for those who have faithfully placed their hope in you?"

15. The saint gazed at him with a merciful eye and responded: "The Lord Who loves mankind has not disregarded my numerous prayers on her behalf, but Christ our great God, Whose mercy is boundless, has heard my supplication. And behold, through me your daughter is given to you." <The nun> saw and heard these things in a dream, and the girl got better immediately and the news of <the nun's> vision quickly spread and the disease disappeared even more quickly. And to this day one can see the girl living happily in the convent, although she will not <always> escape physical death.

The generous Lord offers such <gifts> to his saints in response to peti-

³³¹ Cf. note 123, above.

³³² I.e., in 893.

³³³ Around midnight.

³³⁴ Mt. 16:18.

³³⁵ Cf. Is. 1:15. Read *πληρέων* for *πλήρης* (*πλήρεις*, in Isaiah).

tions even after their death as well as if they were still alive. For they do live, as <Christ>, the Absolute Truth, [p. 222] explicitly proclaims: “*Whosoever believeth in me shall never see death.*”³³⁶ And it is clear from the benefactions they always transmit to us (and indeed much more than when they were living on earth), that they are standing right next to God and are continually entreating on our behalf Christ our great God, the fountain of love for mankind. And I rejoice in relating to you³³⁷ the miracles of the blessed <Theodora>, because you yourselves have been deemed worthy of her providential care and have taken pleasure in her gifts and you have seen with your own eyes and touched with your hands <people who have been cured>. Although many other miracles were wrought by the saint, I have decided I should bring my narrative to a close at this point, both to avoid excess and because I have many worthy witnesses of the events, and I shall record only the miracle that occurred to my sister. For your part, do not cease to relate in a truthful fashion to listeners the <miracles> that are omitted in this narrative, so that as a result of this twofold <effort>, I mean my written exposition and your living words, the account of the saint will be both lasting and worthy <of her>.

16. You are all familiar with the unbearable and horrible calamity of the epidemic that befell the populace of our city³³⁸ on account of our sinful actions, ravaging people of both sexes and all ages and all but destroying <the city>. For many of those afflicted by this disease developed worms in their lesions as a result of the unspeakable putrefaction <of their flesh> and died a painful death. Others, whose flesh was ravaged by the inflammation of their lesions and fever, also died painfully. And in the case of those who escaped death, some developed pustules on the membranes of their eyes, and when the pustules burst [p. 224] they lost their sight; others were also deprived of the

³³⁶ Cf. Jn. 11:26.

³³⁷ Gregory is here addressing his audience.

³³⁸ From the ensuing description of symptoms, the epidemic seems to have been smallpox, as first suggested by Patlagean, “Theodora,” 44. Just about this time (ca. 910) the Islamic physician al-Razi (864–925) wrote a treatise distinguishing between measles and smallpox (*A Treatise on Small-Pox and Measles*, trans. W. A. Greenhill [London, 1848]). To my knowledge the *vita* of Theodora is the earliest Byzantine text to describe smallpox; Theodore Prodromos apparently was stricken with the disease in the 12th century. Cf. P. S. Codellas, “The Case of Smallpox of Theodoros Prodromus (XIIth Cent. A.D.),” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 20 (1946), 207–15.

sweetest light before they died, when the membrane over the pupil thickened from the disease and became cloudy,³³⁹ and thus even before their burial they were condemned to inhabit a world that was like a tomb. Yet others became paralyzed in their arms and legs, and became incapacitated and completely immobile.³⁴⁰ And the most terrible feature <of the epidemic> was that the same disease would strike its survivors a second time.³⁴¹

When my sister, who was still a very young girl (the child's name was Martha), was stricken with this disease, she remained mobile for two days. But at the end of the <third?> day,³⁴² she was burning up terribly with a raging and fiery fever,³⁴³ which rendered her immobile. For a rupture on her right <cervical> tendon³⁴⁴ rendered each of the limbs around it, both arms and legs, paralyzed and motionless. And then the pain in her limbs became sharper and more acute so that the child often lost consciousness and lay for a long time

³³⁹ One complication of smallpox was corneal ulceration and keratitis, sometimes resulting in permanent corneal scarring and opacity; cf. F. Fenner et al., *Smallpox and Its Eradication* (Geneva, 1988), 47.

³⁴⁰ Osteomyelitis and arthritis resulting in limb deformities were a possible complication of smallpox; the literature makes no mention, however, of paralysis; cf. Fenner et al., *Smallpox*, 47–48.

³⁴¹ The author is mistaken in this statement, because victims of smallpox who survived gained permanent immunity from future recurrence of the disease. On the other hand, several other diseases, such as chicken pox and measles, can be easily confused with smallpox.

³⁴² John Duffy has suggested the possibility that τῆν could possibly be a corruption from γ' [= τριτῆν (third)].

³⁴³ A high fever is characteristic of the first active phase of smallpox after an incubation period of ten to fourteen days.

³⁴⁴ I am grateful to John Duffy for pointing out that the τένων here must refer to one of the two cervical tendons that the Greeks believed controlled the movement of the arms and legs. The notion is found as early as Homer, who refers to the two tendons of the neck (e.g., *Il.* 10:456, 14:466, and 16:587 [where the verb ρήγνυμι is used; cf. the ρῆγμα of the text of the *vita*]). Galen, noting that he is following Homer and Hippocrates, specifically refers to the sinews of the neck as τένοντες, and describes the τένων as the primary organ of motion; cf. C. G. Kuhn, *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia* (Leipzig, 1821–33), 4:9, 5:209, and 14:703. For a parallel text roughly contemporary with the *vita*, see the 10th-century medical writer Leo the Physician, who writes that the back of the neck is called τένων; cf. *Leo the Physician. Epitome on the Nature of Man*, ed. R. Renehan (Berlin, 1969), 44.29–30.

without speaking. And for us there remained no conclusion but this: even though it was not yet the day and hour at which the fever becomes more intense, there was <already> such burning heat and bleeding (for there was no place remaining on her entire body where there were not numerous bloody <lesions> draining like small pustules),³⁴⁵ that it was clear that she would die, especially since the same thing happened to the left tendon and the parts around it soon after.

17. Tears come to me as I summon up in my mind the image of that child, with most of her limbs lifeless and hanging limp from every part of her body; such was the tension in both tendons from the severe hemorrhage. And it is no wonder that I am affected in this way by my sister. For if *all* of us [p. 226] who live *in Christ are one*³⁴⁶ and Christ is the one *head*³⁴⁷ of us all, through Whom we are controlled in every way, and each of us has the same relation to the other as our limbs to each other,³⁴⁸ and *we are made all things to all men*³⁴⁹ and we share the suffering of those who are ill (even the infidels) by virtue of our natural relationship—in this case where there is a single faith and kinship and natural bonds³⁵⁰ and brotherly love, how could I possibly remain untouched in these circumstances and not share in her sufferings as best I could? At any rate that flesh-devouring and all-destroying disease, spreading through her entire body, which, one might well say, became one single lesion³⁵¹ (for one could no longer rightly distinguish her limbs, as they were formed by God the master craftsman) that exuded streams of purulent serous discharge.³⁵² And since her tongue was also inflamed by the countless pustules of that epidemic,

³⁴⁵ The child evidently suffered from a severe form of smallpox with confluent rash, perhaps the hemorrhagic variety which was almost always fatal.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Gal. 3:28.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Col. 1:18.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Rom. 12:5.

³⁴⁹ 1 Cor. 9:22.

³⁵⁰ Reading *δεσμοί* for *θεσμοί*, as suggested by John Duffy.

³⁵¹ I.e., there were so many pustules that they ran together in a confluent rash.

³⁵² In the hemorrhagic form of smallpox, “the superficial layers of the skin became raised and fluid collected underneath, forming large blebs containing serous or sero-sanguinous fluid, which ruptured after slight trauma . . .” (Fenner et al., *Smallpox*, 37).

the child could barely articulate her words. And who could describe the foul stench emitted from her throat?³⁵³ Thus, as I have said, her condition persuaded us that it was impossible for the child to escape death.

18. But the girl recalled the miracles of the blessed mother and being aware of the faith and love which we all had for her, she began to call upon her unceasingly with lamentation and wailing, adding the name of the supremely pure Mother of God and the glorious martyr Barbara.³⁵⁴ For as the result of extreme necessity, she was an expert at pitiable words, which could break the hearts of all and persuade God [p. 228] to accept propitiation on her behalf. One night the girl fell into a trance and, as she <later> told us, saw two women coming toward her from the window of the house where she lay <in her sickbed>.³⁵⁵ One of them was clad in splendid garments of silk and was adorned all over with gold,³⁵⁶ and was carrying in her right hand a wax candle and oil. She recognized the other woman, who was wearing a monastic habit, by her features as soon as she saw her. For she said that it was the blessed Theodora, clearly resembling the image on her icon, from which flows that fragrant-smelling oil. When the two women in her vision drew near, at a nod from the nun the woman who was holding the candle grasped her right arm and anointed it with oil. And she said this woman was the glorious martyr Barbara because the nun addressed her by this name. And the girl received the sensation of their grace, and filled with joy begged them to anoint her eyes as well with the holy oil. And they responded: “Know full well that there is nothing wrong with your eyes, and your arm which has been so painful is also healed.” Thereupon the girl’s condition improved, and after describing to us the apparition of the saints, which occurred *not in a dream, but in a waking*

³⁵³ In a typical case of smallpox, pustules appear on the tongue and it becomes swollen, so that it is difficult for the patient to speak; a “fetid odour of the breath . . . was common . . . in most cases of very severe smallpox”; cf. Fenner et al., *Smallpox*, 20, 27, 37.

³⁵⁴ An early Christian martyr of uncertain date, perhaps late 3rd century. It is unclear why the young Martha prayed to St. Barbara as well as to Theodora for healing; Janin lists no church dedicated to St. Barbara in Thessalonike in the 9th century.

³⁵⁵ This probably means that she saw the two saints entering through the window.

³⁵⁶ St. Barbara was conventionally depicted in elegant garments in Byzantine art; see *ODB* 1:252. Cf., for example, the 11th-century fresco at St. Nicholas tou Kasnitze at Kastoria (S. Pelekanides, *Καστορία*, I [Thessalonike, 1953], pl. 55b).

vision,³⁵⁷ she was relieved of the pains in her arm, but the arm remained immobile.

19. After suffering in this way for about fifty days,³⁵⁸ when the pustules over the lesions were drained of the fluid in them and were dried out by her fever, they formed <scabs> like black leather over her entire body. So we used a knife to cut them off her ankles and the soles of her feet,³⁵⁹ and removed her toenails as well. And we did the same thing to her arms, and, to be brief, exposed new skin on virtually her entire body. But even though she was finally unexpectedly delivered from the illness, [p. 230] her limbs were still paralyzed. And whenever we wanted to take her to the baths, we used a new-fangled type of chair which we devised, to facilitate the necessary task. And the final phase was a flux in three parts of her body, and we had to make incisions and <insert> cotton wicking³⁶⁰ for the drainage of the pus from deep <inside the body>. And the child, who was again suffering as great pain as before from the frequent replacement of the <absorbent> wicking, called upon the saint to ease her pain and restore her health. And she appeared again, alone <this time> and looking the same as she did in the first vision, and readjusting the cotton wicking, consoled her suppliant with joyful countenance, and proclaimed that from now on nothing bad would happen to her, saying, "I am Theodora, whom you summoned with lamentation to come to your aid." And indeed through her intercessions this soon came to pass. For shortly thereafter the girl became as healthy as she had been before her illness, and walking on her own feet she came with her mother to the sarcophagus of the blessed Theodora, her savior, and offered up the thanksgiving which was due to God Who loves mankind and to the saint.

20. This extraordinary miracle inspired in me even greater love for the

³⁵⁷ Homer, *Od.* 19:547.

³⁵⁸ This is a longer period than normal; in the average case of smallpox the scabs fall off three to four weeks after the onset of the disease (Fenner et al., *Smallpox*, 22).

³⁵⁹ Fenner et al. (*Smallpox* 20, 22) note that lesions and scabs persist much longer on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, and that such scabs were often artificially removed to speed up healing.

³⁶⁰ The word *μωτος* can mean a lint bandage or a drainage tube, according to Liddell-Scott (*Lexicon*, s.v.), while for *μωτωσις* only the meaning of lint bandage is given. In this context absorbent cotton wicking must be meant, since it would have to be replaced, while drainage tubes would remain in place.

saint, and indeed this was the reason that obliged me to investigate and write an account of her life, something that I already wanted to do. For since two years had already passed and no one, as I said in my introduction,³⁶¹ had written an account of her life or miracles, I was driven to irresistible zeal and began to tackle this work which is beyond my capability. Then, [p. 232] coming to my senses and realizing the magnitude of the task and taking into consideration my lack of skill, I hesitated <to attempt> the work. For if it is risky for lowly individuals to undertake lowly tasks, surely it is perilous for them to attempt something beyond their abilities. Let that wise man persuade you who asserts “Do not seek that which is higher than you” and enjoins “Do not search for that which is lower than you.”³⁶² However, as I said, fearing the scope of the undertaking, I would have preferred to remain silent, but my sister’s unbearable suffering compelled me to vow to God <to undertake> a task beyond my ability. For I said, “If Thou savest my sister from death, setting aside my rational hesitations I will start the narrative to the best of my ability.” And when I heard the words of Solomon, “*Whenever thou shalt vow a vow to God, defer not to pay it,*”³⁶³ and placing my hope in the One *Who makes the crooked straight*,³⁶⁴ the co-eternal Word of God the Father, the true *Wisdom and Power*,³⁶⁵ Who opens wide the tongue and makes clear <the words of> the mouth, I decided that I should undertake the work for His glory, and for the glory of our blessed mother who glorified Him. For I know that He will accept this feeble <act of> homage, and will reward me many times over on the day that leads everything into the light [i.e., judgment day]. Thus, I, Gregory, the least of the clerics, entrusting myself to the mercy of the saint, and taking her as my colleague and collaborator in this work, in the second year of her departure to God have composed an account of a few of the events of her life and of her miracles,³⁶⁶ [p. 234] knowing her compassion and generosity toward all. For I do not think that she will reward me in accordance with the merits of the narrative, but in accordance with the intent of the author. For I am unable

³⁶¹ Cf. Chap. 1 of *vita*.

³⁶² Cf. Sir. 3:21.

³⁶³ Eccl. 5:3.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Is. 40:4.

³⁶⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 1:24.

³⁶⁶ This phrase indicates the *vita* was composed as a unit with the *Translation and Miracles*.

to write this in a more elevated style, even though I should wish to, held back by my lack of education. But, O fathers and brothers,³⁶⁷ inasmuch as you are pious praisers of virtue, disregard my humble and feeble narrative, but rather gladly magnifying the power of the events, grant me this favor in recompense for my short account, to commemorate my humble self. For I am confident that I will be greatly benefited by your prayers, even more than that paralytic of old, who through the faith of his neighbors was healed in soul and body, when they removed the roof of his house and lowered him to Jesus Christ our God, the healer of souls and bodies,³⁶⁸ to Whom be glory, honor, veneration, and majesty, together with His eternal Father and the all-holy and good and lifegiving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages, Amen.

³⁶⁷ The phrase *πατέρες και αδελφοί* is normally applied to a male monastic audience, and seems a curious form of address for an audience that must have included nuns and lay men and women, as well as priests, monks, and abbots.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Mk. 2:1–12.