Byzantine Saints’ Lives in Translation

I

Holy Women of Byzantium
Byzantine Saints’ Lives in Translation

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HOLY WOMEN OF BYZANTIUM

TEN SAINTS’ LIVES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Edited by Alice-Mary Talbot

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

Washington, D.C.
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The Lives (vitae) of medieval saints reflect the great variety of individuals who came to be venerated as holy men and women: hermits, monks and nuns, abbots and abbesses, emperors and empresses, popes and patriarchs, housewives, former soldiers and prostitutes, even Jews who had converted to Christianity. The process of sanctification is still not fully understood and needs further study, especially in the case of Byzantium, but can be summarized as follows. In both the western and eastern medieval worlds, popular veneration preceded official church recognition of the sanctity of a holy man or woman. Usually a cult developed first at the local level (e.g., at a parish church or monastery): pilgrims would flock to the saint’s tomb in hope of receiving healing from his or her relics; there would be a special annual commemoration, usually on the anniversary of the saint’s death, which became the saint’s feastday; a vita might be written and an icon painted; eventually the saint might be recognized by the local church hierarchy and his or her name inscribed in a register of feastdays. But canonization in the strict sense, that is, official ecclesiastical acknowledgment and proclamation of the sanctity of an individual by pope or patriarch, did not occur in the West until the tenth century, and in Byzantium only in the thirteenth century.¹

Hagiography (i.e., writings on the lives and miracles of saints) has been the focus of study in recent decades by both western medievalists and Byzantinists. Vitae were originally written to demonstrate the sanctity of the holy man or woman portrayed, and to serve as sources of edification for the faithful. The biographies describe the ways in which these pious individuals manifested their sanctity: through mortification of the body, performance of miracles, prophecy, and charitable activity. Vitae have long been used by medievalists as a source of data on the life history of saints, religious controversies, and

monastic institutions. More recently, scholars have come to realize that the incidental information provided by these texts is invaluable for understanding everyday life and mentalités;\(^2\) in contrast to histories and chronicles, which were usually written in Constantinople and focus on political, military, diplomatic, and ecclesiastical affairs, many saints’ Lives have an urban middle-class or rural setting, and thus present useful data on life in provincial cities and the countryside, and on the routine existence of ordinary families. In addition to shedding light on historical events—such as church councils and religious controversies; famines, plagues, and enemy invasions; the foundation of monasteries and daily monastic routine—hagiographical narratives illuminate aspects of everyday life, such as diet, clothing, child-rearing, education, modes of travel, accidental injuries and diseases, the cult of relics, the construction of churches, and the role of icons.

Dumbarton Oaks is launching a series of English translations of medieval Greek Lives of saints to bring a selected group of these biographies of holy men and women to the attention of a wider public. It is hoped that this new series will make available in translation a genre of medieval Greek text that has hitherto been relatively inaccessible. At present, the majority of the Byzantine Greek texts that have been translated into English are narrative histories or writings of the Church Fathers;\(^3\) these should now be complemented by other types of materials. This project to translate saints’ Lives is not, in fact, a new idea, but one rooted in tradition, for many of the Greek Lives of saints were translated into Latin, Slavonic, Syriac, Armenian, Geor-

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\(^2\) Although a pioneering study was made in the early 20th century by A. P. Rudakov (Ocerki vizantijskoj kul'tury po dannym grecheskoj agiografii [Moscow, 1917; repr. London, 1970]), western European Byzantinists long remained unfamiliar with his work and were slow to follow his lead in using hagiographic texts as a source for Byzantine social and cultural history. This approach has now been embraced by such scholars as A. P. Kazhdan, A. E. Laiou, E. Patlagean, H. Magoulias, G. Vikan, and H. Maguire, to name but a few. A Dumbarton Oaks project is establishing a computerized database of information on everyday life and realia derived from the Lives of saints of the 8th through 10th centuries. For recent work on this subject by western medievalists, see D. Weinstein and R. M. Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700 (Chicago, 1982).

\(^3\) The best list of Byzantine sources available in translation has been compiled by E. A. Hanawalt, An Annotated Bibliography of Byzantine Sources in English Translation (Brookline, Mass., 1988).
gian, and Arabic during the early Christian and Byzantine centuries to make them accessible to non-Greek speakers.

The new Dumbarton Oaks series will focus on the Greek Lives of holy men and women of the eighth to fifteenth centuries, few of which have been previously translated, but will include a few earlier vitae as well. For the initial phase of the series three volumes are planned, the first two comprising collections of vitae of holy women and of saints of the so-called iconoclastic period (ca. 730–843), the third being the lengthy Life of the eleventh-century monk Lazaros of Mt. Galesios. The series is aimed at a broad and multitiered audience: students and general readers who wish to learn more about the cult of saints, monasticism, and everyday life in Byzantium; scholars of the western medieval and Slavic worlds who want to do comparative studies in hagiography and monasticism; and Byzantine specialists who will find these volumes convenient selections of important vitae, accompanied by relatively extensive annotation and bibliography.

The rationale for devoting the first volume of the series to selected Lives of female saints is the notable paucity of translations in English (or indeed any western European language) of the vitae of Byzantine holy women, especially for the post-Justinianic period. Therefore, an attempt has been made to include most of the vitae of holy women of the middle and late Byzantine

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4 For example, as early as 373 the vita of St. Antony the Great was translated into Latin. See the introductions to the vitae of Mary/Marinos and Mary of Egypt for discussion of the widespread translations of these popular texts.

5 For female saints of the 7th to 15th centuries, the single vita translated into English is J. O. Rosenqvist, The Life of St. Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton (Uppsala, 1986). The picture is rosier, on the other hand, for holy women of the 4th to 6th centuries: see K. Corrigan, The Life of Saint Macrina (Toronto, 1987); the vita of Synkletike, trans. by E. A. Castelli, in Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook, ed. V. L. Wimbush (Minneapolis, Minn., 1990), 266–311; the vita of Olympias in M. A. Clark, Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends (New York, 1979), 127–57; Symeon Metaphrastes’ vita of Matrona of Perge in K. Bennasser, Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1984), 118–54. It should be noted that the Lives of repentant harlots (Mary of Egypt; Pelagia; Thaïs; and Mary, the niece of Abraham) translated by B. Ward (Harlots of the Desert [Kalamazoo, Mich., 1987]) are all based on medieval Latin translations of the original Greek texts.
which are relatively few in number, in addition to some earlier saints who exemplify certain types, such as nuns who adopted male monastic habit and female hermits.

The issue of female sanctity in Byzantium has received considerable attention in recent years, sparked by the pioneering article of Evelyne Patlagean in 1976. The attitude of Byzantines toward female saints reflects their general ambivalence about women: they were torn between the Old Testament statement that God made humankind, both male and female, in His image (Gen. 1:27), and the portrayal of Eve as causing Original Sin by succumbing to the temptation of the serpent (Gen. 3). The teachings of the New Testament sent mixed messages as well: Paul wrote that in Christ “there is no male and female” (Gal. 3:28), but at the same time taught that women should be subordinate to their husbands (Eph. 5:22–24, Col. 3:18), should cover their heads while praying (1 Cor. 11:5), and remain silent in church (1 Cor. 14:34); Christ’s chosen disciples were all male, but Mary was the instrument of man’s salvation by giving birth to Christ. The cult of the Virgin was highly developed in Byzantium; countless church dedications to the Mother of God and Her widespread depiction in icons and monumental painting, on seals and coins, testify to Mary’s enormous popularity.

Despite the ambivalence of Christian teachings, misogynistic attitudes that resulted in the inferior status of women came to predominate in Byzantine society. It is, thus, not surprising that after the early Christian era of martyrdom few women came to be considered holy. The Synaxarion of Constantinople (a late tenth- or early eleventh-century liturgical collection of short hagiographical notices, organized according to the church calendar) reflects the drastic decline in the numbers of female saints over the centuries: it in-

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6 The vita of the empress Theophano has been excluded because an English translation is promised by P. Cesaretti; the vita of the empress Theodora, wife of Theophilos, will appear in the volume of iconodule saints.

7 Patlagean, “La femme deguisee.”

cludes fifty-five women (exclusive of groups) martyred during the persecutions of the third and early fourth centuries, fourteen holy women of the fourth and fifth centuries, four from the sixth century, none from the seventh, and eight from the iconoclastic era of the eighth and ninth centuries. By way of contrast, the *Synaxarion* lists sixty-four male saints for the iconoclastic period.\(^9\) For subsequent centuries, the numbers of new female saints provided with *vitae* are also very low: five in the tenth century, one each for the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, one for the fourteenth, and none in the fifteenth.\(^10\) However, these figures may not present a completely accurate picture, as textual evidence always depends upon accidents of survival of manuscripts. Moreover, because so many saints were venerated at the local level, in some cases no *vita* may have ever been produced.\(^11\)

The reasons for the imbalance between male and female saints are still not fully understood, but must reflect societal attitudes toward women, the phasing out of most consecrated offices for women after the sixth century,\(^12\) the much larger proportion of monks compared with nuns, and the greater opportunities during the middle and late Byzantine centuries for monks to


\(^11\) Cf., for example, the cases of Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina and Thomas, both abbesses of the Palaiologan period. Although miracles took place at Choumnaina’s tomb (*Nicephorus Gregorius. Byzantina historia*, ed. L. Schopen and I. Bekker, III [Bonn, 1855], 238), she was never recognized as a saint because of her anti-Palamite views. Further on her, see A. C. Hero, “Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina, Abbess of the Convent of Philanthropos Soter in Constantinople,” *ByzF* 9 (1985), 119–47. The historian Sphrantzes included a “mini-*vita*” of his godmother Thomas in his *History*, stating that she was viewed as a holy woman by her contemporaries; yet her name was never inserted into the official church calendar of commemoration of saints. See *Georgios Sphrantzes. Memorii 1401–1477*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest, 1966), chap. 18, pp. 32–36; Eng. trans. M. Philippides, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes, 1401–1477* (Amherst, 1980), 21, 37–40.

\(^12\) After the 6th century the offices of widow and deaconess, so important during the formative years of Christianity, virtually disappeared, as did the consecrated lay virgins.
adopt a solitary and rigorously ascetic lifestyle, in contrast to the cenobitic form of monasticism exclusively approved for women. Women's convents also became more cloistered and contemplative in contrast to those of late antiquity, which placed greater emphasis upon charitable service in the community. It must also be remembered that even though the numbers of new female saints decline during the later centuries of the Byzantine Empire, the dearth of holy women was offset by a tremendous surge in the veneration of the Theotokos from the sixth century onward and by the continuing popularity of biblical women saints and female martyrs (e.g., Thekla and Barbara).

A definite transformation in type of female saint occurs over time. The women martyrs of the first four Christian centuries were followed by transvestite nuns and female hermits in the fifth and sixth centuries, then by cenobitic nuns and married laywomen in the eighth through tenth centuries. The gory deaths of female martyrs are succeeded by a trend to harsh mortification, which renders the female body virtually sexless (e.g., Mary of Egypt), or by a form of asceticism in which women deny their gender by dressing as monks (Mary/Marinos, Matrona), or wanton depravity followed by sincere repentance and a life of abstinence and isolation (Pelagia; ThaõÈs; Mary of Egypt; Mary, the niece of Abraham). There is also the occasional virgin who is consecrated to monastic life at a tender age (Elisabeth the Wonderworker). After the seventh century there is a remarkable shift to married women in the ranks of female saints, although earlier types of saints are occasionally


14 This observation was made by an anonymous referee who commented that as a result “one has far less public context for establishing sanctity.”


16 The classic study of Byzantine transvestite nuns is Patlagean, “La femme deÂguiseÂe.”

17 This observation was first made in Patlagean, “La femme deÂguiseÂe,” esp. 617–23.

18 Although the numbers of married holy women are particularly striking in the 9th and 10th centuries, there were earlier role models such as the mother and sister of Gregory of Nazianzos. Gregory commemorated his sister St. Gorgonia (d. 370) in a funeral oration that resembles a vita in many aspects, praising her devotion to her husband and children, piety, asceticism, and charity. He eulogized his mother Nonna
found. Many holy women of the ninth through thirteenth centuries entered monastic life after being widowed (Athanasia, Theodora of Thessalonike, Theodora of Arta); other married women attained sanctity without ever having taken monastic vows (e.g., Mary the Younger, Thomas, plus the empresses Theophano, Irene, and Theodora, wife of Theophilos). In contrast, relatively few male saints of the middle Byzantine period were ever married. It must be admitted, however, that while marriage is not viewed as an obstacle to sanctity, it is not always presented in a positive manner. Matrona, Mary the Younger, and Thomas were all abused by their husbands in one way or other, and found marriage a form of martyrdom.

The few women whose sanctity was recognized in the middle Byzantine period were restricted to local cults and, with one exception, their vitae are preserved in a limited number of manuscripts. Moreover, no strong iconographic tradition developed for the women saints of the middle and late Byzantine periods; surviving images are known only of Theodora of Thessalonike and Theodora of Arta.

Judging from the number of surviving manuscripts of their vitae and the...
frequency of their artistic representation in monumental church decoration, icons, and seals, the most popular female saints of the Byzantine era were, in fact, those of the first through sixth centuries: martyrs (e.g., Thekla, Euphemia, Barbara, and Catherine); transvestite nuns (e.g., Theodora of Alexandria, Euphrosyne of Alexandria); and repentant harlots (e.g., Mary of Egypt). To their number can be added images of sainted empresses like Helena, the mother of Constantine, and to a lesser extent the iconodules Irene and Theodora.  

A recent study has emphasized that not only women embraced the cult of female saints: the audience for the vitae of holy women included both sexes, and virtually all known hagiographers were male. This latter conclusion is borne out by the evidence of the ten Lives in this volume, of which six were definitely written by men. There is no conclusive evidence as to the gender of the anonymous authors of the other four vitae.

It is also clear that both male and female pilgrims visited the shrines of women saints; in fact, a tabulation of miraculous cures effected by the holy women in this volume reveals a fairly even balance in the gender distribution of Arta should perhaps be discounted, as it is not intended to be a holy icon, but rather a dynastic portrait. [After this volume went to press, an article appeared questioning the identification of the figure as Theodora; cf. vita of Theodora of Arta, below, note 53.]


26 I am grateful to Claudia Rapp for sharing with me a copy of her unpublished paper, “Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and their Audience” (scheduled to appear in DOP 50 [1996]). Her conclusions are supported by the observations of J. Cotsonis; see note 25, above. The only two attested medieval Greek female hagiographers are Sergia, who wrote an account of the translation of the relics of St. Olympias (BHG 1376), and Theodora Raoulaina, who composed a vita of Theodore and Theophanes Grapti (BHG 1793). The Syriac vita of St. Fgbronia (written in the late 6th to early 7th century) was supposedly written by Thomas, a fellow nun; cf. S. P. Brock, S. A. Harvey, Holy Women of the Syrian Orient (Berkeley-Los Angeles, Calif., 1987), 150 and 176.

27 The vitae of Matrona, by an anonymous male hagiographer; Mary of Egypt, attributed to Sophronios, and indubitably composed by a male author; Theoktiste of Lesbos, by Niketas Magistros; Athanasia of Aegina, by an anonymous male author; Theodora of Thessalonike, by Gregory the Cleric; Theodora of Arta, by the monk Job.
of those who sought healing. Women occasionally sought healing from female saints for specifically female complaints, such as menstrual disorders, breast cancer, and drying up of breast milk, but they also approached holy men (or their relics) with similar complaints.

One may conclude then that only a small percentage of Byzantine saints were women and that, with the exception of a few early martyrs and ascetics, they were not widely venerated in the Byzantine church. Thus the Lives of those women who did achieve sanctity are of particular interest for the insights they give us into attitudes toward the status of women in Byzantium. Moreover, these texts present a considerable amount of information on Byzantine domestic households, the spiritual life of laywomen and the plight of battered wives (as in the vita of Mary the Younger and Thomaïs), the foundation and growth of monasteries (vita of Matrona), the daily monastic routine (vita of Theodora of Thessalonike), and the development of popular cults (especially the vitae of Athanasia, Theodora of Thessalonike, Mary the Younger, and Thomaïs). Our understanding of the everyday life of Byzantine women would be much poorer without these sacred biographies, which open a door into the cloister and into the homes of ordinary people.

A Note on the Translation

The aim of the translators has been the production of a text that is close to the original Greek, yet at the same time readable and comprehensible. It has proved impossible to impose stylistic uniformity on the work of nine different

28 Five of the vitae in this volume include accounts of miracles. Elisabeth healed four men and one woman (plus other unspecified women), Athanasia five men and six women, Theodora of Thessalonike seven men and nine women, Mary the Younger twenty-one men and eleven women, and Thomaïs eight men and five women.

29 See vitae of Elisabeth (pp. 117, 130–31), Mary the Younger (Chap. 15), and Thomaïs (Chaps. 13–14). See also the remarks of P. Halsall in his introduction to the vita of Thomaïs, note 7.

30 Thus, hemorrhaging women were healed by Athanasios of Athos and patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople, and women with lactation problems were cured by Symeon the Stylite. Cf. J. Noret, Vitae duae antiquae Sancti Athanasii Athonitae (Turnhout, 1982), vita B, chap. 72; A.-M. Talbot, Faith Healing in Late Byzantium: The Posthumous Miracles of the Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople by Theoktistos the Stou-dite (Brookline, Mass., 1983), 112; P. van den Ven, La vie ancienne de S. Symeon Stylite le Jeune, 1 (Brussels, 1962), chap. 138, p. 129.
contributors, hence variations in style reflect the taste of the individual translator rather than that of the hagiographer. The editor has attempted, however, to maintain consistency in the translation of terms such as “blessed” for ὁσίος (όσιο), “superior” for ἡγουμένος (ἡγουμένη), and “steward” for οἰκονομός.

Greek proper names and technical terms have been strictly transliterated for the most part, except in instances where a traditional latinized or anglicized form (e.g., Homer, Thebes, Constantinople) is well known. The anglicized form of Greek first names that are common in English (e.g., Mary, John, Peter) has also been adopted.

The use of pointed brackets (< . . . >) indicates the insertion of words to clarify the meaning of a phrase, for example, “the <previous> miracle,” while square brackets ([ . . . ]) represent an additional phrase of identification, e.g., “the mother superior [Anna].”

Scriptural citations are taken from the Lancelot Brenton translation of the Septuagint and from the King James Version of the New Testament. 31

31 The King James Version was chosen over the more accurate translation of the New Revised Standard Version, because its archaizing language harmonizes better with the Brenton translation of the Septuagint. In a few cases where the Brenton or King James translations are misleading, the translators have substituted their own rendering.
I want first of all to express my appreciation to the translators, who were valued collaborators and colleagues in the preparation of this volume; their cooperative response to deadlines and requests for revisions enabled the book to go to press in a timely fashion. I should also like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the members of the Advisory Board for the series, who helped to define the scope and contents of the initial volumes, and advised on the selection of translators and on the format of the volumes. John Duffy, Elizabeth Fisher, and Angela Hero deserve special thanks for carefully reviewing my translation of the Lives of Theodora of Thessalonike and Theodora of Arta. My colleagues Alexander Alexakis, Robert Browning, Stephanos Efthymiades, Paul Magdalino, and Lee Sherry helped to solve some thorny problems of translation and emendation. A word of thanks also to three students, Deborah Fitzl, Rachel Rezek, and Jonathan Talbot, who reviewed portions of the typescript and made useful suggestions from the viewpoint of the undergraduate reader. In addition, I should like to convey my gratitude to the two anonymous referees for the Dumbarton Oaks press who made many excellent suggestions for improving the introductions and notes. Finally, I am grateful to the copy editor, Susan Higman, and to members of the Dumbarton Oaks publications staff who oversaw the transformation of typescript to printed book, especially Glenn Ruby and Robin Surratt.

Various publishers have graciously granted permission to translate works still under copyright: St.-Pietersabdij Steenbrugge (vita of Mary/Marinos), the Center for Hagiological Studies in Thessalonike (vita of Theodora of Thessalonike), and the Societe des Bollandistes in Brussels (vitae of Elisabeth the Wonderworker, Athanasia of Aegina, Theoktiste of Lesbos, Mary the Younger, and Thomas of Lesbos).

The National Endowment for the Humanities and Dumbarton Oaks provided generous financial support for preparation of the translations. I am particularly grateful to the director of Dumbarton Oaks, Angeliki Laiou, who first suggested a series of hagiographic translations and has herself translated one of the vitae, and to Henry Maguire, director of Byzantine Studies, who has offered encouragement and advice over the past three years.
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

*Scriptural Citations*

*Septuagint* (all citations are based on the numbering of the L. C. L. Brenton edition, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* [London, 1851])

<table>
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<th>Abbr.</th>
<th>Book</th>
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<td>Gen.</td>
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<td>N.B. 1–2 Sam. in OT = 1–2 Kings in Sept.</td>
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<td>Song of Sol.</td>
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HOLY WOMEN OF BYZANTIUM

Jon.  Jonah
Mic.  Micah
Nah.  Nahum
Hab.  Habakkuk
Zeph. Zephaniah
Hag.  Haggai
Zach. Zachariah
Mal.  Malachi

Apocrypha
Macc. Maccabees
Tob. Tobit
Jdth. Judith
Sir. Siracides (Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach, Ecclesiasticus)
Sap. Wisdom of Solomon (Sapientia Solomonis)

New Testament
Mt. Matthew
Mk. Mark
Lk. Luke
Jn. John
Acts
Rom. Romans
Cor. Corinthians
Gal. Galatians
Eph. Ephesians
Phil. Philippians
Col. Colossians
Th. Thessalonians
Tim. Timothy
Tit. Titus
Philem. Philemon
Heb. Hebrews
James
Pet. Peter
John epistles to John
Jude
Rev. Revelation
List of Abbreviations

Bibliography


**ABME**  Ἀρχείον τῶν βυζαντινῶν μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδος

**ActaAntHung**  *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*


**AnalBoll**  *Anaelecta Bollandiana*,

**ArchDelt**  Ἀρχαιολογικοὶ Δελτίον

**Basilics**, ed. Scheltema et al.


**Beck, Kirche**  H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959)

**BHG**  *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 3d ed., ed. F. Halkin  (Brussels, 1957)

**BHG Nov. Auct.**  *Novum Auctarium Bibliothecae hagiographicae graecae*, ed. F. Halkin (Brussels, 1984)

**BHO**  *Bibliotheca hagiographique Orientale*, ed. L. Clugnet  (Paris, 1891–)

**Bibl.sanct.**  *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, 12 vols. (Rome, 1961–70)

**BMGS**  *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*

**BollGrott**  *Bollettino della Badia greca di Grottaferrata*

**BSCAbstr**  *Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of Papers*

**ByzF**  *Byzantinische Forschungen*

**ByzSlav**  *Byzantinoslavica*


**BZ**  *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*

**Christides, Conquest of Crete**  V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824), a Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984)

da Costa-Louillet, “Saints de CP”


Dawes and Baynes, Three Byz. Saints

E. Dawes and N. Baynes, Three Byzantine Saints
(Leiden, 1948; repr. Crestwood, N. Y., 1977)

Delehaye, Deux typica

H. Delehaye, Deux typica byzantins de l’époque des Paleologues (Brussels, 1921)

Demetrakos, Lexikon

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DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers

DuCange, Glossarium

Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Graecitatis (Leiden, 1688; repr. Paris, 1943)

EEBS Έπετηρίς τῆς Ἑπαρχείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν

EO Echos d’Orient

EtBalk Études balkaniques

Gautier, “Kecharitomene”


Goar, Euchologion

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GORThR Greek Orthodox Theological Review

GRBS Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies

Gryson, Ministry of Women


Homer, Il.

Homer, The Iliad

Homer, Od.

Homer, The Odyssey

HThR Harvard Theological Review

IRAIK Izvestija Russkogo Arheologiceskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole


*JOB* *Jahrbuch der Oesterreichischen Byzantinistik*

*JTS* *Journal of Theological Studies*

*JWalt* *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*


HOLY WOMEN OF BYZANTINUM

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Patlagean, “Theodora”


Peeters, Recherches, 1

P. Peeters, Recherches d’histoire et de philologie orientales, 1 (Brussels, 1951)


PLP Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit, 12 vols. (Vienna, 1976–94)


PO Patrologia orientalis (Paris, 1903–)

REB Revue des etudes byzantines

Reg F. Dolger and P. Wirth, Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des ostromischen Reiches, 5 vols. (Munich-Berlin, 1924–65)


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RHR Revue de l’histoire des religions

ROC Revue de l’Orient Chretien

RQ Romische Quartalschrift fur christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte

Sophocles, Lexicon

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Holy Women of Byzantium

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SubsHag Subsidia Hagiographica

SynaxCP Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae: Propylaeum ad Acta sanctorum Novembris, ed. H. Delehaye (Brussels, 1902)

Taft, Great Entrance


Talbot, “Byzantine Women”


TheophCont Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838)

TIB Tabula imperii byzantini, ed. H. Hunger, vol. 1- (Vienna, 1976–)

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ZRVI

*Zbornik radova vizantoloskog Instituta*
1. LIFE OF ST. MARY/MARINOS

translated by Nicholas Constas

Introduction

St. Mary (also called Marinos) belongs to the remarkable group of so-called transvestite nuns (i.e., nuns who disguised themselves as monks) popular in Byzantine hagiography from the fifth to the ninth centuries. Their popularity was by no means limited to the Greek-speaking world, and the story of Mary/Marinos appeared in Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Arabic, and much later, medieval German and French versions. Thus, in contrast to many of the holy women in this volume who had only localized cults, Mary/Marinos, whose geographic origins are shrouded in legend, was venerated throughout the medieval world, in both east and west. She is commemorated in the Synaxarion of Constantinople on 12 February.

According to her vita, Mary, with hair cut short, dressed like a man, and renamed Marinos, followed her father into a monastery where she lived undetected as a monk. Remaining in the monastery after her father’s death, “Marinos” was eventually accused of fathering a child. She did not deny her “crime,” but voluntarily accepted severe punishment and raised the infant in the monastery. Her sex, and with it her innocence of the paternity charges, was not revealed until after her death. Although the story does not locate Mary in any specific historical or geographical context, it has been suggested that the original vita was written in Greek sometime between the early sixth century and the early seventh century.

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1 The Latin vita was edited by L. Clugnet, *ROC* 6 (1901), 357–78; the Syriac by F. Nau, *ROC* 6 (1901), 283–89; the Coptic by H. Hyvernat, *ROC* 7 (1902), 136–52; the Ethiopic by E. Pereira, *ROC* 8 (1902), 614–22; the Arabic by I. Guidi and E. Blochet, *ROC* 7 (1902) 245–64; and the medieval German and French versions by L. Clugnet, *ROC* 7 (1902), 478–500, 647–67; for the Armenian version, see P. Peeters, *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* [= SubsHag, 10] (Brussels, 1910), 151, no. 690.

2 *SynaxCP* 460.
NUNS DISGUISED AS MONKS

and mid-seventh centuries, probably in Syria. The vita of Mary/Marinos translated here, termed by Richard the vita antiqua, is in his view the version closest to the original Life of the sixth or seventh century, which underwent considerable changes over time as the result of oral transmission. The vita antiqua is preserved in three Athonite manuscripts, the oldest of which (Vatopedi 38) dates to the tenth century. The anonymous author writes in a simple and vivid style, making extensive use of dialogue and omitting the characteristic prooimion. The vita is also notable for the almost total absence of scriptural citations.

Monastic writers and their audiences were fascinated by stories of holy transvestites, and despite the injunction of Deuteronomy 22:5, more than a dozen different vitae were composed on this theme, which seems to have originated in the second-century Acts of St. Thekla. One thus reads of St. Anastasia Patrikia, who fled the advances of the emperor Justinian (and the jealousy of his wife Theodora) by hiding in the Egyptian desert as the monk Anastasios, or St. Matrona of Perge, whose transvestite masquerade as the monk Babylas was exposed by her pierced earlobes, or St. Euphrosyne of Alexandria, who, as the attractive novice Smaragdos, was removed to an isolated cell

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3 Basing his conclusions on a later redaction of the vita, L. Clugnet suggested that Mary lived near Tripoli in Syria in the 5th century ("Histoire de sainte Marine," ROC 6 (1901), 276–77). According to M. Richard, "La Vie Ancienne de Sainte Marie surnommee Marinos," in Corona Gratiarum, I (Brugge, 1975), 112, the original vita was written between 525 and 650. Richard discusses the various versions of the vita on pp. 83–87 of his article. A Syrian provenance for the motif of the transvestite nun has recently been reasserted by S. A. Harvey, Asceticism and Society in Crisis. John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints (Berkeley, 1990), 115–16, who remarks that the "(transvestite nun) motif crystallized the misogyny that had become an integral part of the Syrian church."


5 "The apparel of a man shall not be on a woman, neither shall a man put on a woman's dress; for every one that does these things is an abomination to the Lord thy God."

6 The connection with St. Thekla was made by an anonymous referee. A catalogue of twelve female transvestite saints, citing editions and manuscripts, can be found in Patlagean, "La femme deguisee," 600–602. Patlagean's list does not include St. Susan-nah/John (AASS, Sept. 6:153–59 and SynaxCP 58–59).

7 See Life no. 2 in this volume.
when “he” became a source of temptation to the other monks. Others, such as St. Apollinaria/Dorotheos, St. Eugenia/Eugenios, St. Susannah/John, and St. Theodora/Theodore, refused to disclose their true identity even though, like Mary/Marinos, they too were falsely accused and peremptorily condemned for seduction and rape.8

H. Delehaye’s reductive characterization of Mary’s \textit{vita} as a “pious novellette,” the plot of which was a “favorite subject of the purveyors of edifying fiction,”9 probably underestimates the significant social, psychological, and religious concepts embodied in the dramatic figure of the saintly female transvestite. The holy transvestite nun is an enigmatic, though compelling figure. Unified in her contradictions of the masculine and the feminine, indeed constituted by those very contradictions, the transvestite nun is a symbol of the ambiguities, tensions, and hostility that often comprised Early Christian attitudes toward women.10 Although these attitudes are difficult to characterize without caricaturizing, women were generally perceived as having to transcend their inferior feminine nature to attain spiritual virility and manliness. In this vertiginous conquest of manhood by woman, Mary/Marinos is a hero of virile temperament, and at the same time a hero who suffers, voluntarily accepting marginalization, victimization, and helplessness. Ironically, her exploits suggest that the feminine element is part of the ambivalence of virile strength, and that it may serve to balance and amplify that strength, as well as subvert its authoritative claims to dominance and hegemony.


9 H. Delehaye, \textit{The Legends of the Saints} (New York, 1962), 51; see also 150–54. The book was originally published in Brussels in 1905 as \textit{Les legendes hagiographiques}.

Modern attempts to interpret the saintly transvestite have ranged from the psychological\textsuperscript{11} and the literary,\textsuperscript{12} to the socioreligious\textsuperscript{13} and theological.\textsuperscript{14} Although there is something of value in each of these interpretive approaches, it should also be noted that the story of Mary/Marinos is primarily a drama of elaborate personal transformation, a grand exchange of otherness. The dramatic movement of the \textit{vita} consequently unfolds as a harrowing ritual of initiation, a mysterious rite of passage marked by three characteristic stages: separation, liminality, and reaggregation.\textsuperscript{15} Accordingly, the initiate is deprived of the old status at the beginning and accorded the new status at the end. The middle phase is marked by a dark ambiguity, isolation, the threat of annihilation, and often an inversion of the role that the final phase will confer (i.e., the saint putting on a man's clothes before being accepted as a “man”). There is often a segregation of those being initiated, as if they were dangerous or unworthy. Mary/Marinos, like many transvestite nuns, was thought to be a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} M. Delcourt, “Le complexe de Diane dans l'hagiographie chrétienne,” \textit{RHR} 153 (1958), 1–33, and eadem, “Female Saints in Masculine Clothing,” \textit{Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity}, trans. J. Nicholson (London, 1961), 84–102. Delcourt explains the story in (Freudian) terms of the heroine’s psychology and suggests that the change of clothes is a form of self-mutilation in pursuit of androgynous perfection.
\item \textsuperscript{12} J. Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,” \textit{Viator} 5 (1974), 1–32. Anson, arguing that the story neither records real female behavior nor shows any interest in female characterization, contextualizes the motif in a male society dedicated to celibacy and given to an excess of anti-feminism. Anson suggests that the story is a “wish-fulfillment dream of domestication of the demonic seductress,” and that the “secret longing for a woman in a monastery is brilliantly concealed by disguising the woman as a man and making her appear guilty of the very temptation to which the monks are most subject. After being punished for their desires, their guilt is compensated by turning her into a saint with universal remorse and sanctimonious worship” (pp. 17, 30).
\item \textsuperscript{15} For this, and what follows, see A. Van Gennep, \textit{The Rites of Passage}, trans. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (London, 1960), and K. Dowden, \textit{Death and the Maiden}: \textit{Girl’s Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology} (London, 1989).
\end{itemize}
eunuch and lived on the periphery of the community. Transvestite nuns are creatures of the margins.\textsuperscript{16}

The process of initiation and transformation is a passage from one social role or status to another, and as such it marks boundaries and defines categories. It suggests that society consists not of individuals but of types, signified by costume and dress.\textsuperscript{17} If monastic culture defines and privileges certain values, thus making monasticism possible, these values may often be restrictive and confining, such as the notion that women are spiritually inferior to men. In contriving a ritual of transition, the culture attempts to address and solve a problem that it has itself created. Accordingly, the lives of the saintly transvestite nuns suggest a moment when monastic androcentrism became a problem, or at least a question, to itself. In the symbolic process of redefinition, undefined and uncontrollable human potential is momentarily released, and the saint abandons structured relations in recognition of a more fundamental unity.


\textsuperscript{17} Cf. J. Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” in \textit{Images of Women in Antiquity}, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (Detroit, 1983), 179: “Apparel, far more than physique, identified a person. The monastic disguises adopted by women enabled them to simulate a holiness reserved by male ecclesiastical authorities to men only. To the church fathers, the very idea of a holy woman was a contradiction in terms, which women could only get round by pretending to be men.”
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Related Texts

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1. There was a certain man named Eugenios who lived in purity, piety, and in the fear of God. He had an honorable and devout wife, who bore him a daughter whom he named Mary. When his wife died, the father raised the child with much teaching and in ways of a pious life.

2. When the young girl grew up, her father said to her, “My child, behold, all that I own I place in your hands, for I am departing in order to save my soul.” Hearing these things by her father, the young girl said to him, “Father, do you wish to save your own soul and see mine destroyed? Do you not know what the Lord says? That the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep?” And again she said to him, “The one who saves the soul is like the one who created it.”

3. Hearing these things, her father was moved to compunction at her words, for she was weeping and lamenting. He therefore began to speak to her and said, “Child, what am I to do with you? You are a female, and I desire to enter a monastery. How then can you remain with me? For it is through the members of your sex that the devil wages war on the servants of God.” To which his daughter responded, “Not so, my lord, for I shall not enter the monastery as you say, but I shall first cut off the hair of my head, and clothe myself like a man, and then enter the monastery with you.”

4. The father, after distributing all his possessions among the poor, followed the advice of his daughter and cut off the hair of her head, dressed her in the clothing of a man, and changed her name to Marinos. And he charged her saying, “Child, take heed how you conduct yourself, for you are about to enter into the midst of fire, for a woman in no way enters a male

18 This title is based on Richard, “La Vie Ancienne,” 113. The numbering and division of paragraphs follow the Richard edition.

19 In another version of the vita, the wife is called Eugenia; cf. L. Clugnet, ROC 6 (1901), 575.3.

20 Jn. 10:11.

21 In this vita, the father transformed the gender of his daughter (although it was her idea), whereas in the vita of Matrona she herself was responsible for the disguise.
monastery. Preserve yourself therefore blameless before God, so that we may fulfill our vows.” And taking his daughter, he entered the cenobitic monastery.

5. Day by day, the child advanced in all the virtues, in obedience, in humility, and in much asceticism. After she lived thus for a few years in the monastery, <some of the monks> considered her to be a eunuch, for she was beardless and of delicate voice. Others considered that <this condition> was instead the result of her great asceticism, for she partook of food only every second day.

6. Eventually it came to pass that her father died, but <Mary, remaining in the monastery>, <continued> to progress in asceticism and in obedience, so that [p. 89] she received from God the gift of healing those who were troubled by demons. For if she placed her hand upon any of the sick, they were immediately healed.

7. Living together within the cenobitic monastery were forty men. Now once a month four of the brethren were officially sent forth to minister to the needs22 of the monastery, because they were responsible for looking after other monks as well, the solitaries, <who lived> outside <the community>. Midway on their journey was an inn, where both those going and those coming were, on account of the great distance, accustomed to <stop and> rest. Moreover, the innkeeper provided <the monks> with many courtesies, accommodating them each with particular solicitude.

8. One day, the superior, summoning abba23 Marinos, said to him, “Brother, I know your conduct, how in all things you are perfect and unwavering in your obedience. Be willing then to go forth and attend to the needs of the monastery, for the brethren are annoyed that you do not go forth unto service. For in doing this you will obtain a greater reward from God.”24 At

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23 Abbas or abba was a term of respect for monks in general, not limited to abbots.

24 Cf. Justinian, Novella 133.5 (CIC 3:672), which strongly urges the appointment of either aged or eunuch monks to the position of apokrisiarios to avoid the likelihood of sexual liaisons.
these words, Marinos fell down at his feet and said, “Father, pray for me, and wherever you direct me, there I shall go.”

9. One day, therefore, when Marinos had gone forth unto service along with three other brethren, and while they were all lodging at the inn, it came to pass that a certain soldier deflowered the innkeeper’s daughter, who thereupon became pregnant. The soldier said to her, “If your father should learn of this, say that ‘It was the young monk who slept with me.’” Her father, upon realizing that she was pregnant, questioned her closely, saying, “How did this happen to you?” And she placed [p. 90] the blame on Marinos, saying, “The young monk from the monastery, the attractive one called Marinos, he made me pregnant.”

10. Thoroughly outraged, the innkeeper made his way to the monastery, shouting accusations and saying, “Where is that charlatan, that pseudo-Christian, whom you call a Christian?” When one of the stewards25 came to meet him, he said, “Welcome.” But the<innkeeper> replied, “The hour was an evil one in which I made your acquaintance.” In like manner he said to the father superior, “May I never see another monk,” and other such things. When he was asked why he was saying these things, he answered, “I had but a single daughter, who I hoped would support me in my old age, but look at what Marinos has done to her, he whom you call a Christian—he has deflowered her and she is pregnant.” The superior said to him, “What can I do for you, brother, since <Marinos> is not here at the moment? When he returns from his duties, however, I will have no recourse but to expel him from the monastery.”

11. When Marinos returned with the three other monks, the superior said to him, “Is this your conduct, and is this your asceticism, that while lodging at the inn you deflowered the innkeeper’s daughter? And now her father, coming here, has made us all a spectacle to the laity.” Hearing these things, Marinos fell upon his face, saying, “Forgive me, father, for I have sinned as a man.” But the superior, filled with wrath, cast him out saying, “Never again shall you enter this monastery.”

12. Leaving [p. 91] the monastery, <Marinos> immediately sat down outside the monastery gate, and there endured the freezing cold and the burning heat. Thereafter, those entering the monastery used to ask him, “Why are you sitting outdoors?” To which he would reply, “Because I fornicated and have been expelled from the monastery.”

13. When the day arrived for the innkeeper’s daughter to give birth, she

25 “Steward” = ἀποκρισίαριος.
bore a male child, and the girl's father took the <infant> and brought it to the monastery. Finding Marinos sitting outside the gate, he threw the child down before him and said, “Here is the child which you have wickedly engendered. Take it.” And immediately the innkeeper departed.26

14. Marinos, picking up the child, was filled with distress and said, “Yes, I have received the just reward for my sins, but why should this wretched babe perish here with me?” Accordingly he undertook to procure milk from some shepherds, and so nursed the child as its father. But the distress that overwhelmed him was not all, for the child, whimpering and wailing, continually soiled his [Marinos’] garments.

15. After the passage of three years, the monks entreated the superior saying, “Father, forgive this brother; his punishment is sufficient, for he has confessed his fault to all.” But when they saw that the superior remained unmoved, the brethren said, “If you do not receive him back, then we too will leave the monastery. For how can we ask God to forgive our sins, when today marks the third year that he has been sitting in the open air [p. 92] beyond the gate, and we do not forgive him?”

16. The superior, considering these things, said to them, “For the sake of your love, I accept him.” And summoning Marinos he said to him, “On account of the sin which you have committed, you are not worthy to resume your former position here. Nevertheless, on account of the brethren's love, I accept you back into our ranks, but only as the last and least of all.” At this Marinos began to weep and said, “Even this is a great thing for me, my lord, for you have deemed me worthy to come inside the gate, so that I might thus be given the honor of serving the holy fathers.”

17. Consequently the superior assigned him the lowliest chores of the monastery, and he performed them <all> scrupulously and with great devotion. But the child was forever following him about, crying and saying, “Dada, Dada,” and such things as children say when they wish to eat. Thus, in addition to the <usual> trials and temptations that beset a monk, Marinos was continually anxious about procuring and providing sustenance for the child. When the boy grew up, he remained in the monastery, and having been raised in the practice of virtues he was deemed worthy of the monastic habit.

18. One day, after a considerable passage of time, the superior inquired

of the brethren, “Where is Marinos? Today is the third day that I have not seen him singing in the choir. He was always the first to be found standing there before the start of the service. Go to his cell, and see whether he is lying ill.” Going [p. 93] to his cell, they found him dead, and informed the superior, saying, “Brother Marinos has died.” But the <superior> said, “In what state did his wretched soul depart? What defense can he make for the sin that he committed?” <Having thus spoken, the superior then> directed that <Marinos> be buried. But as they were preparing to wash him, they discovered that he was a woman, and shrieking, they all began to cry out in a single voice, “Lord, have mercy.”

19. The superior, hearing their cries, asked them, “What troubles you so?” And they said, “Brother Marinos is a woman.” Drawing near and seeing <for himself>, the <superior> cast himself down at her feet, and with many tears cried out, “Forgive me, for I have sinned against you. I shall lie dead here at your holy feet until such time as I hear forgiveness for all the wrongs that I have done you.” And while he was uttering many such lamentations, as well as things yet more remarkable, a voice spoke to him saying, “Had you acted knowingly, this sin would not be forgiven you. But since you acted unknowingly, your sin is forgiven.”

20. The superior thereupon sent <word> to the innkeeper to come and see him. When he arrived, the superior said to him, “Marinos is dead.” The innkeeper replied, “May God forgive him, for he has made of my house a desolation.” But the superior said [p. 94] to him, “You must repent, brother, for you have sinned before God. You also incited me by your words, and for your sake I also sinned, for Marinos is a woman.” Hearing this, the innkeeper was astonished and wondered greatly at his words. And the superior took the innkeeper and showed him that <Marinos> was a woman. At this <the innkeeper> began to lament and to marvel at what had happened.

21. They buried her holy remains and placed them in blessed caskets, all the while glorifying God with psalms and hymns. When these things were

27 “Blessed caskets” = θηκας ὁσιας. It is not clear whether this phrase is simply a poetic plural (as in the vita of Athanasia of Aegina [no. 6 in this volume], ed. Halkin, chap. 9, p. 186), or if it designates a double casket, perhaps similar to the one described by Sozomenos, Ecclesiastical History, IX.17 (PG 67:1629a): “A double casket, the inner one of wood, and the outer of lead (λαρνακα διπλην, ξυλιγη των ευθον, εν μολυβδηνη τη εξωθεν). L. Robert has noted, however, that “le mot θηκη est des plus vagues dans la terminologie des monuments funeraires” (Hellenica 11–12 [1960], 387).
completed, the innkeeper’s daughter appeared, possessed by a demon, and confessing the truth that she had been seduced by the soldier. And she was immediately healed at the tomb of the blessed Mary, and everyone glorified God because of this sign, and because of <Mary’s> patient endurance, for she vigorously endured <her trials> until death, refusing to make herself known. Let us then, beloved, zealously emulate the blessed Mary and her patient endurance, so that on the day of judgment we may find mercy from our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs glory and dominion to the ages of ages. Amen.
2. LIFE OF ST. MATRONA OF PERGE

translated by Jeffrey Featherstone

introduction and notes by Cyril Mango

Introduction

The *vita* of Matrona evokes many themes found in the Lives of women saints: like Mary/Marinos, she lived for a while as a transvestite nun; like Mary of Bizye and Thomas of Lesbos, she had an abusive husband, and while still a laywoman led a pious and ascetic existence, marked by acts of charity; like Elisabeth the Wonderworker and Athanasia of Aegina, she was the abbess of a convent. At the same time, her *vita* presents some distinctive features, especially her extensive travels, the prominent role played by women,¹ and the fact that she and the nuns of her convent openly wore a male monastic habit.

Although Matrona spent many years as the abbess of a nunnery in Constantinople, she is most renowned for the first three years of her monastic career, which she spent in disguise in the male monastery of Bassianos;² this is the aspect of her life normally featured in the sources.

At the same time, she is known to have been a historical figure who in her old age opposed the Monophysite policy of the emperor Anastasios I (491–518). She is documented, for example, in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Theodore Lector (ca. 525), which is preserved only in summary form. With a chronological reference point of A.D. 460 (when Daniel the Stylite mounted his column), the text states that many persons excelled at that time in monasticism, “among them the famous Matrona, who had abandoned her home, her wealth and her husband, and pretending to be a eunuch, entered a men’s monastery. . . . The wonderful Bassianos, too, distinguished himself at that time.”³

¹ A point emphasized by Topping, “Matrona.”

² St. Bassianos and the monastery which took his name are usually spelled with a double “s” (from the Latin Bassianus); see, e.g., Janin, *EglisesCP*, 60 f. In the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* and in the Greek text of the *vita*, however, the name is rendered Βασιανος. To avoid confusion, the name will be spelled throughout as Bassianos.

A story told by the chronicler Theophanes (d. 818), which also appears to stem from Theodore Lector,\(^4\) recounts that the emperor Anastasios, acting through his patriarch Makedonios II (496–511), applied pressure on a number of prominent monasteries of Constantinople to force them into line with his anti-Chalcedonian religious policy. Among the monasteries in question were those of Matrona and Bassianos. A certain deacon Chrysaorios was deputized to enforce compliance, but Matrona, a staunch supporter of the Council of Chalcedon of 451, stood firm in refusing communion with the official church. Makedonios wisely decided to leave the recalcitrant monasteries in peace and not to start a persecution. This incident is placed by Theophanes, whose dates are not always reliable, in the year from Creation 5991, corresponding to A.D. 498/499.

No *Life* of Bassianos has survived, but a notice in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*\(^5\) states *inter alia* that he “flourished” in the reign of Marcian (450–457) and set up a monastery at Constantinople, which Matrona entered in disguise.

Yet another source is a mutilated hymn (*kontakion*) attributed to Romanos the Melode (d. after 555), which relates that Matrona came of a distinguished family, was forced into marriage by her parents, did her best to avoid intercourse with her husband, but nevertheless gave birth to a daughter. At this point the text breaks off.\(^6\)

The *Life* of Matrona presented here (the so-called *vita prima*) is preserved in an eleventh-century manuscript, Par. gr. 1519. As the editor of the *vita*, H. Delehaye, has suggested, its anonymous male author may have been a monk at Bassianos’ monastery who made use of the notes taken by the nun Eulogia.\(^7\) The *vita* is written in a conventional and straightforward hagiographic style, but is distinguished by its length, unusual for a female saint.\(^8\)


\(^5\) *SynaxCP* 127–28.


\(^7\) Cf. *AASS*, Nov. 3:789A. The hypothesis of E. C. Topping (“Matrona,” 223–24) that the author must have been a woman, most probably a nun at Matrona’s monastery, is invalidated by the hagiographer’s use of masculine participles to refer to himself (791A, 792D, 812A).

\(^8\) In this volume, only the *vita* of Theodora of Thessalonike is longer.
Delehaye declared the text to be of dubious value, written not earlier than the middle of the sixth century. He was unfavorably impressed by the romantic story of Matrona’s wanderings in the Near East, skeptical of the alleged prevalence of idolatry at Beirut, and inclined to question the prominent role assigned to the deacon Markellos of Emesa, who, by a strange coincidence, bore the same name as the author of a well-known opuscule concerning the discovery of the head of St. John the Baptist at Emesa, an incident that does figure in our Life. Delehaye might have been even more skeptical had he noticed the anachronistic reference to the church of St. Mary the New at Jerusalem, dedicated in 543. His intuition that the Life as we have it could not have been composed before the middle of the sixth century is thereby confirmed. Certain other elements, however, strongly suggest that the author was not guided only by oral tradition and his own imagination, but that he had, as he himself claims, a written source (whether it was or was not in the form of notes taken down by the nun Eulogia). Particularly significant is his extraordinary reticence about Matrona’s courageous stance in the face of the emperor Anastasios. The coded reference to the “tempest” and “upheaval” that overtook the Church at the time would be understandable on the part of an author writing while Anastasios was still alive. But why omit one of Matrona’s most famous achievements, especially one in the cause of orthodoxy, if the text was first written in the second half of the sixth century or later? References to certain named persons, such as the mother of the ex-prefect Elias and the mother of the scholastikoi, who accompanied Matrona from Beirut to Constantinople, the soon to be forgotten empress Euphemia, and Antiochian, wife of Sphorakios, also suggest a source close in time to the events narrated.

It is a matter of conjecture how much of the information given in the Life is genuine and how much was added by the later redactor. Statements to the effect that the vegetable garden at Bassianos’ monastery and the buildings put up by Matrona “still exist today” point to the later date, although it should be remembered that monastic foundations at Constantinople in the fifth and

9 AASS, Nov. 3:786 ff.
10 The text is to be found only in the 17th-century edition of C. DuCange, Traite historique du chef de S. Jean Baptiste (Paris, 1655), 215 ff.
11 See below, note 59.
12 See below, note 115.
sixth centuries were often of short duration. The incident relating to the discovery of the head of St. John the Baptist, introduced for the sole purpose of associating a miracle with Matrona, may also be regarded as suspect and it certainly strains the chronology of the early part of the Life. Indeed, the Baptist’s head was discovered in February of 452 or 453.¹³ By that time, we are told, Matrona had already risen to the position of superior of the monastery of Hilara in Emesa (i.e., had been there more than a few months), prior to which she had spent three years at Bassianos’ monastery at Constantinople. Yet, from what little is known, the latter monastery was established only in the 450s. If, therefore, the discovery of the Baptist’s head is eliminated, only two chronological anchors remain: Matrona’s return to Constantinople seems to have taken place between 472 and 474¹⁴ and her contest with the emperor Anastasios in ca. 500. Assuming that she entered Bassianos’ monastery not before 455, she may have been born ca. 430 and died by 510–515.

Matrona’s Life cannot be regarded, therefore, as an entirely sincere document, and it certainly contains a good part of padding. At the same time it offers some unique glimpses into conditions in the Byzantine capital in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Little is known of the cult of Matrona. She was commemorated in her own convent on 9 November at least until the twelfth century according to a twelfth-century manuscript of the Synaxarion of Constantinople.¹⁵ A notice on her is included in the tenth-century Menologion of Basil II, complete with a miniature depicting her in a nun’s habit.¹⁶ Her cult seems to have died out by the Palaiologan period, as there is no mention of her in the accounts of Russian pilgrims.

¹³ The indications of the sources (i.e., the opuscule of Markellos cited above in note 10 [452 and 453], and Marcellinus Comes and the Chronicon Paschale [sub anno 453]), though unusually detailed, are discordant. The more likely date appears to be 452.
¹⁴ See below, notes 85 and 88.
¹⁵ SynaxCP 203.53–54; 8 November is also listed by the Synaxarion as an alternate feastday.
¹⁶ Cf. Il Menologio di Basilio II (Cod. Vaticano Graeco 1613) (Turin, 1907), fol. 169; see also LCI 7:587.
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Secondary Literature

Topping, “Matrona.”


THE LIFE AND CONDUCT OF THE BLESSED AND HOLY MATRONA

1. The books entitled *Paradise*, which are indeed paradise, have passed on to us the lives of men and women who have practiced monasticism, both in communities and in solitude, including those whose light shone forth in Egypt. It is fitting, however, to add to these the *Life*, full of benefit for our souls, of the blessed and holy Matrona, a woman who, as we shall presently relate, displayed the traits of holy men in the midst of monastic men and mastered the feats of accomplished solitaries. That she was no ordinary woman or in any wise deficient, but rather, greater than those women who had already distinguished themselves in asceticism, is evident from the holy flock about her, quite large in number and bedecked with the cultivation of virtue, which she gathered together and brought as an offering unto God. Even if one were to leave the rest of her story untold, this alone would suffice to her praise: the constitution of such a flock; which, we have no doubt, she will increase and protect and shepherd. For though she has left this life, she has not departed from those here: she stands by and abides with every soul which practices monasticism and strives after her way of life and teaching, especially now that she has ceased from her labors of asceticism; existing as a mere soul, free of all toil, she is released from the warfare over her own thoughts and is able by divine grace to cleanse our thoughts. With boldness she appears in the company of those who have lived lives such as hers, and she comes even to us, with the longing and understanding and foresight of a loving mother. All this notwithstanding, a detailed account of her achievements must be undertaken, insofar as this is possible; for one may with justice marvel at her on account of each and every one of the facts related and may also derive no ordinary benefit from these same. Now, I wish to begin at an earlier point in the story of her life, but attend ye with diligence and share in the contest. For wheresoever speech is wise and pious, it behooves the listener to give heed to the

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17 This was the title of the *Lausiac History* by Palladios, the most famous collection of stories about the earliest Egyptian monks, and of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. The *Meadow (Leimonarion)* of John Moschos was also known as the *New Paradise* (cf. Photios, *Bibliotheca*, cods. 198, 199). Moschos himself (PG 87:3104c) mentions yet another similar collection entitled *Paradise*.
speaker, in order that the latter may follow the example of the careful husbandman and the former that of the good ground receiving the seeds; otherwise, the teacher will have cast his words aimlessly and in vain, and the listener retire empty-handed, having learnt naught from what has been said. But I am persuaded better things of you, though I speak thus, after the manner of the blessed Paul, [p. 791] and I shall relate her story from the beginning, following the practice of narrators.

2. There is a certain large and broad district subject to the Romans that lies along the borders of Cilicia and Isauria and is known as Pamphylia, most probably so called because of its populousness and the fact that its inhabitants come from all over the earth. There are forty cities in this district, one of which is called Perge: it is here that this glorious and blessed Matrona had her origins. Now, once she had received the customary upbringing and a liberal education from her parents, and had come to the age of marriage, she was united with a man by the name of Dometianos, and became the mother of a daughter by the name of Theodote; and indeed, as we shall show presently, abandoning everything, she was to give her to God. How, after her marriage, she was humble and moderate, taking no care whatsoever for the adornments and cosmetics that worldly women are accustomed to use, cultivating instead manners of piety and prudence; and how she neglected all indulgence of the body, neither bathing nor allowing intercourse with her husband, being mindful of the blessed Paul’s saying that those that have wives should be as though they had none, I shall refrain from relating at length, for the sake of brevity. However this may be, she left her homeland by the wish of the God of all and

18 Cf. Lk. 8:15.
20 Pamphylia, a province of southern Asia Minor, means literally “land of all races” or “of mingled races.”
21 The site of Perge, a short distance northeast of Attaleia (modern Antalya), has been excavated. For a general account, see G. E. Bean, Turkey’s Southern Shore (London, 1968), 45–58.
22 Otherwise unknown, Dometianos appears to have been a man of some standing; cf. below, note 61. He may have gone to Constantinople on official business.
23 Her name means “given to God.”
24 Cf. 1 Cor. 7:29.
25 The author evidently knew nothing about Matrona’s early life and did not take the trouble to fill it out with usual commonplaces.
with the assent of her husband, who accompanied her, though he was not
privy to her well-made plans, and came to the Queen of Cities, Constantinople. Once arrived in the imperial city, she hastened to the sanctuaries of the saints; and therein she remained, not only by day but also by night, in prayer and vigils, humbling her body with fasting, that it might be obedient to the pious designs of her soul. She did not consider the body to be the most evil of foes, after the manner of the hateful and loathsome Manichaeans, but constrained its unreasonable urges with great wisdom, correcting it as is necessary, in obedience to the blessed Paul who says, *Make not provision for the flesh,* to fulfill the lusts thereof. Now, she was not satisfied with this alone, nor did she think it a great thing to humble the body unless she also brought consolation to those in need. In secret, then, from her husband, she cared for the poor to the extent of her ability—all the more remarkably as her body was young and vigorous, when the waves of passion are wont to be strongest. For she was then twenty-five years old, when she accomplished ascetic feats before becoming an ascetic, training herself in advance and preparing for the future. In this good and God-pleasing exercise she had as a teacher the blessed Eugenia, who not only in name but also in deed showed nobility of soul, chastity of body, and manliness of heart. For she was one of those women who devoted themselves to all-night psalmody, displaying the traits of martyrs for the martyrs’ sake.

3. Now while the blessed Matrona was thus engaged, great sorrow weighed down upon her husband Dometianos, who was carried away by absurd notions and thought that the blessed one was leading the life of a courtesan because of her frequent attendance at the all-night vigils. Wherefore a dispute arose between them, Dometianos forbidding her to go to the services

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26 Manichaeans were adherents of a dualist system of religious belief, allegedly founded by the Persian Mani, which emphasized the conflict between good and evil.


28 See introduction, p. 16, for discussion of the chronology of her life.

29 As suggested by E. C. Topping ("Matrona," 215 n. 28), it is probably not coincidental that Eugenia, Matrona’s first spiritual teacher who led her to the monastery of Bassianos, bears the same name as an earlier Alexandrian nun who lived in disguise in a male monastery; cf. BGH 607w–608a.

30 Probably as a member of a voluntary confraternity (cf. ODB, s.v.) centered on a shrine, like the one recorded in the 7th century at the church of St. Artemios in Constantinople.
and Matrona constraining him to allow her to do so. After many days and with many words she won him over, and she went off to the church of the Holy Apostles. There she concentrated her thoughts with all zeal and invoked them with tears: “Have compassion with me,” said she, “O holy apostles and lights of the universe! Beseech the Lord Christ on my behalf, that I may be delivered from this vain life and be deemed worthy truly to serve Him, for I fear the <Last> Judgment and I am afraid of the punishments <hereafter>. Scorn not, O holy apostles, my wretched petitions, nor reject me as unworthy, but bring me unto yourselves and all the world unto God Who loves mankind. Soften the heart of my husband, for it is he who hinders and thwarts me. Give me aid, I pray, and grant me succor, I beg.” After the blessed one had prayed for such and similar things, when evening came on, the keepers of the church called out to all, as is the custom, that they should leave; and the blessed one, finding the abode of a certain Susannah, an acquaintance of hers, in the porticoes adjoining the church, remained with her on account of her virtuous way of life. This Susannah had been enrolled from an early age in the order of widows there, embracing chastity and a life devoted to God. <Matrona>, then, remained with her that evening, and on the morrow she went off to her teacher Eugenia and spoke again yet more fervently of her intentions, this [p. 792] being the result of her great longing for the Lord and rejection of the delights of this world. Many opinions were put forth: neither did the student give way nor the teacher relent, and special consideration was given to the matter of the child Theodote. Then the blessed Matrona uttered something in the vein of Abraham and quite beyond nature itself: “Let there be nothing in common between me and my affections,º said she. ºLet the honest Susannah take my child, and let the monastic life sustain me.” The matter did not remain one of words, but became fact: the blessed Susannah accepted the child Theodote and took the place of her mother.

31 The famous church built by Constantius II (337–361) on the fourth hill of Constantinople. Next to it were the imperial mausolea.

32 Like Eugenia, Susannah bears the same name as an earlier woman (Susannah of Eleutheropolis) who lived as a monk; cf. Topping, “Matrona,” 214 n. 25 and 216 n. 44.

33 The order of widows, an ancient institution of the Church, was a consecrated office of women devoted to good works; see Gryson, Ministry of Women, 35–41. The statement that Susannah had been enrolled in the order from an early age is, however, something of a contradiction, as members of the order normally had to be at least fifty years old.
4. There remained, then, the consideration of how and where she was to become a nun and, once she had become one, how she would escape the notice of her husband. Said the blessed Matrona, “Heaven forbid that Dometianos should cause trouble for the convent which receives me and thus should keep me from the goal of my salvation!” Now while they were occupied in these counsels, merciful God showed them in a nocturnal vision what was to be done. In a dream the blessed Matrona thought herself to be fleeing her husband and rescued by certain monks. From this she understood that she was to enter a male monastery and thus escape the notice of her husband. Cutting her hair and dressing herself as a eunuch she went off to the church of the Holy Apostles with the aforementioned <Eugenia>. After extended prayer she took up the holy Gospel, and by God’s providence this lesson came up: The Lord said to His disciples, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”34 O declaration of blessed and divine words! O clear and manifest revelation! O faith of the souls of them who have discovered God’s will! Without hesitation, then, after these revelations, putting all their hope in God and making Him counselor and assistant of their actions, they went off, the blessed Eugenia leading the way and the blessed Matrona following her; and God’s grace guided them to the monastery of the blessed Bassianos.35 There pious hunger made strong those who struggled <in the monastic life>; there frailness of body carried off the prizes of victory over the ranks of demons, and gold was trodden underfoot and reckoned as naught; there poverty was esteemed together with virtue. To such an honorable flock did the blessed Eugenia bring the holy Matrona and enrolled her among the pious monks: she was now completely transformed into a man and bore a man’s name, Babylas. For like that valiant and holy martyr of Christ,36 the holy instructor of those meek and blessed youths, or like Eleazar, the

34 Mk. 8:34.

35 This monastery was situated outside the Constantinian walls, not far from the cistern of Aspar (modern Sultan Selim); cf. Janin, EglisesCP, 60–61. The monastery must have been quite new at the time of Matrona’s arrival if it is true, as related in the Synaxarion of Constantinople (SynaxCP 127.5–13), that Bassianos came to Constantinople under Marcian (450–457) and set up his establishment with the assistance of John, a man of consular rank (= John Vincomalus, consul in 453). Cf. above, p. 14.

36 St. Babylas of Nikomedeia, allegedly martyred under Diocletian (284–305), is represented as a schoolmaster. His Passion is edited by F. Halkin, Ineditis byzantins d’Ochrida, Candie et Moscou (Brussels, 1963), 329–39.
teacher and companion of the seven youths in the Old Testament, so also did Matrona accomplish feats of endurance and asceticism in a frail body; she was honest toward God and solicitous toward those who sought salvation. After this digression, then, let me bring the narrative back to the monastery of the holy Bassianos, which, as has been said, the blessed Matrona had entered as a man. The multitude of the brethren there marveled at her struggles, taking into account, as was right, the fact that an eunuch, one frail by nature, endeavored not only to vie with them in ascetic labors, but strove to do yet more, fasting patiently and taking little nourishment, tempering his anger and resisting desires, abiding in prayer, abounding in love, most eager in obedience, persevering in labors of the earth and, greater than all these things, not giving in to the despair that besets those who practice continence. Nor did they envy her, for the striving for virtue is not subject to envy, but rather, they strove to imitate and gave heed to her way of life as to a most important lesson. This great zeal of the blessed one for the Lord very nearly revealed her secret to those who shared in the contest with her, but she quickly diffused suspicion with the wisdom of her soul, and contrived to escape everyone’s notice. What happened was this.

5. There is even today a garden belonging to the disciples of the blessed and holy Bassianos. Now, while the blessed Matrona was working the ground there, as is the custom for monks, and comporting herself most eagerly with her fellow worker (this was the remarkable Barnabas, the later superior of the same monastery, who had at one time led a life on the stage, but had now chosen a way of life like hers, striving for piety), the latter was affected by a certain human weakness, inasmuch as he had only recently turned from his vain and frivolous life. Said he to her in a jocular manner, “How is it, brother, that the lobes of both your ears are pierced?” But the blessed Ma-

37 Cf. 2 Macc. 6:18–41, which tells the story of Eleazar, a teacher of the law, who was martyred under King Antiochus for his refusal to eat sacrificial meat, as were the seven brothers who followed his example. The memory of the Maccabean martyrs was celebrated on 1 August; cf. BHG 1006–10k.

38 According to the Synaxarion, the number of monks at the monastery grew to three hundred.

39 See introduction, p. 15. The author may well have been a monk at Bassianos’ monastery.

40 This suggests that it would not have been abnormal for a man to wear a single earring.
trona replied curtly, “You, brother, have indulged yourself in a frivolous manner, unbefitting our profession. You should be paying attention to the ground, not to me. But since you are minded to learn of this, hear the reason. The woman to whom I formerly belonged was lovingly disposed toward me, maintaining me with all generosity and luxury, and she shrank not from putting gold about my ears, so that many of those who saw me said that I was a girl.” Thus did the holy Matrona divert the suspicion of the blessed and holy Barnabas, though she was thereby brought to a state of uncommon anxiety and commotion, distracting her mind with many divers considerations and remembering the words of her teacher Eugenia: “It is a difficult thing,” said she, “and indeed impossible for a woman to enter a male monastery or, once entered, to escape notice.” But she took recourse yet more fervently in her entreaties toward God, saying, “I have hearkened unto Thy voice, O Master, and received Thy command in the matter of monasticism. And since I have not withstood Thee, but rather have followed eagerly Thy command to follow, do Thou settle the affairs of my life through Thy grace. Let me not be deprived of the things for which I hope, O Lover of mankind, nor let me abandon unfinished the course that I have begun, lest I suffer reproaches of disgrace from the other contenders. Provide Thou always for Thy suppliant: show me what is expedient for me and assist me in attempting it. For without Thine inclination it is impossible for men to accomplish any good thing, and especially for women, who are easily disposed through weakness to evil’s diversion.” Such were probably the words with which the noble Matrona besought God.

6. Now, it was not only a matter of speaking of the outcome of better things, but also seeing it. For so it is with one pious in understanding that he sees future things not yet present. On this account I am again moved to marvel at her as at one of the holy women of ancient times. Leaving aside the great multitude of them, to avoid surfeit of speech, I shall mention only that Susannah of old,41 who was distinguished and glorified for her prudence; the same might also be said about this <holy Matrona>, for she put all her hope in God and left all her affairs to His inclination: she clove to her ascetic practice and

41 The heroine of the Book of Susannah, a short apocryphal book of the Old Testament, which relates the story of the virtuous Susannah, who was falsely accused of adultery by two lustful elders.
took care for spiritual perfection. Now, the blessed and holy Bassianos, though endowed with the grace of prescience, was at first unaware of this cleverly devised, marvelous deed; but he soon found it out. For the Lord God shall make no word, according to Scripture, which He shall not reveal unto His servants the prophets. The blessed Bassianos, then, was also a prophet, by reason of his prescience, whereby he found out <the secret> on this wise. In a dream he thought he saw a man, decorously attired and pleasant of face, in short, one bearing the marks of a certain divinity of nature, who said to him, “The eunuch you have in your monastery is not a eunuch, but a woman”; and after repeating this three times, he withdrew. Thereupon the blessed and holy Bassianos considered how the matter stood. He did not wish that the blessed <Matrona> should become the object of vulgar talk, but thought to summon her and rebuke her privily, in the presence of her supervisor alone. Now, there was a certain pious man, Akakios, also an archimandrite of the monastery of the godly minded Abramios at the third milestone, who also saw <in a dream> on this same night the same man in the same attire; and he said to him, “Tell your brother Bassianos that the eunuch he has is no eunuch, but a woman.” In the morning, then, the blessed Bassianos summoned the deacon John, who held second place after him and was Babylas’ supervisor; and he related his dream to him. While he was thus occupied, the messenger of the most divinely favored Akakios presented himself with a message that was to be delivered in secret. When asked by the doorkeeper, as is customary, the purpose of his visit, he declined to tell, saying that he had been commanded to give the message to the most holy Bassianos alone. Upon hearing this, the holy one ordered that he should come up; and learning from him the message, he dismissed him, saying, “Well done, brother. May the Lord grant you reward for your trouble. The Lord’s will be done!” Then the blessed Bas-

42 Cf. Tob. 12:11.

43 Archimandrite is a term with various meanings (cf. ODB 1:156); in this case it is the superior of a monastery.

44 The monastery of Abramios was probably founded in the 5th century and is attested in 518. Our text provides the only indication that it was situated at the Triton, i.e., the third milestone, which would have been inside the Theodosian walls if measured from the Milion; for more details, see C. Mango, Le developpement urbain de Constantinople (IVe-VIIe siecles) (Paris, 1985), 33 n. 58. The discussion by Janin (EglisesCP, 4–6) is rather confused on this point.
sianos went with John into the sacristy, and after extended prayer he took up the holy Gospel and this lesson came up: *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid* [p. 794] *in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.* Accepting this as another vision, he commanded that the blessed one should be summoned: “Call Master Babylas,” he said.

7. Now when she had been summoned, he regarded her with a stern countenance and said, “Tell me, sister, what prompted you to dare such a thing against us, secretly bringing temptation all the while?” <The blessed one>, upon hearing the amazement in his speech and seeing the sternness of his countenance, added fear to fear and trepidation to trepidation. For she was quite faint of heart. Directly she had heard those who summoned her saying, “The lord abbot is calling for you,” she knew within herself how the matter stood and she moaned, saying, “Woe is me, wretch that I am! For I am cast out as one unworthy. Woe is me, miserable one that I am! For it has been discovered what I am, and I am no longer counted a brother among the brethren; no longer am I thought to be a eunuch, nor to be addressed as Babylas, but am soon once again to be a woman and to be called Matrona.” Then, accepting the reproach, she covered her head with her cloak and, prostrating herself on the ground at his feet, she answered softly and with great fear: “Not to bring temptation upon your flock, Master, did I come—Heaven forbid!—but to flee the world and the things in it.” Hearing this, <the blessed Bassianos> said to her, “So be it. You have all the while escaped notice as a woman, and have done no harm to us who were unaware of this. But how have you approached the divine mysteries with your head uncovered? And how have you offered the kiss of peace to the brethren?” Said she, “During the divine mysteries I have pulled my cloak halfway over my head, feigning a headache. And as for the symbol of peace and seal of love, I have not shunned it, for I considered that I offered myself not unto human mouths, but unto God’s angels and men free of passion.”

8. The holy and blessed Bassianos was amazed by this wondrous answer and said to her, “Why, then, if you had such a purpose with regard to God,

45 The *diakonikon*, normally the sacristy south of the apse; cf. *ODB* 3:1594, s.v. Pastophoria.

46 Lk. 13:21.

47 In the Byzantine period it was customary to give the kiss of peace on the lips; cf. Taft, *Great Entrance*, 389–92. See also Chap. 35 of the *Life* of Mary of Egypt, below.
did you not enter a women’s monastery?” Recovering somewhat from her fear and taking courage to pronounce more words in her defense, <the blessed one,> lying upon the floor at his feet, revealed her affairs as before God. Said she, “If it please your Holiness, I had become the wife of a man and the mother of a child. But, wishing to serve God rather than marriage and sin, I would go to the all-night vigils of the holy martyrs. However, my husband would prevent me, now insulting me, now quarreling and striking me; at times he even threatened me. Seeing this and suffering from him on every occasion, I lost heart, I moaned, I cried and besought God night and day that He might soften his heart48 and satisfy my desire.49 While I did this I considered entering a women’s monastery, but I knew that, if I did so, I should not escape the notice of my husband; and unless I did this [i.e., escaped notice by disguising myself as a monk], I should bring affliction upon myself and the monastery. For my husband would have neglected nothing that would have brought harm and distress upon me, as I have said, and the monastery. In this state of faint-heartedness, longing for salvation and caught up in many calculations, as I slumbered one day, I thought I saw myself fleeing my husband, as he pursued and threatened me. When I was about to be overtaken by him and suffer irreparable <injuries>, I was rescued by pious monks. Upon waking I knew within myself that I had to take refuge in a male monastery and thus hide from my husband. Going, then, to the blessed Eugenia, I related these things to her. There was with this Eugenia a certain Susannah, and I commended my child to their keeping, inasmuch as they were pious and God-loving women with whom I had become acquainted at the all-night vigils. Upon hearing this, <the blessed Eugenia> thanked God, Who desires the salvation of all. Thereupon, we devised the plan that my child Theodote should be given over to the lady Susannah, and that I, dressed as and transformed into a man, should enter a men’s monastery; and we fulfilled in deed that which we had planned. For as soon as the child Theodote had been given over to the aforementioned Susannah, I put off my female attire forthwith and cut my hair; and, in a word, becoming a man both in garb and purpose, with Eugenia’s assistance and God’s guidance I came to this holy monastery of yours, a eunuch in appearance and Babylas by name; and once received I became one of your flock, even if I have now been found unsuitable and unworthy of you.”


49 Cf. Ps. 126 (127):5.
9. When the most holy Bassianos had heard the details of this cleverly devised and extraordinary action, he marveled at the blessed Matrona’s intelligence and accepted her purpose; and consoling her with spiritual words, he bade her stand up, and then he asked her which life she would henceforth choose, the monastic or the secular. She replied that she would choose the monastic life, for, she said, she had loved this life from the beginning, and on its account she had taken leave of her husband, her child, abundant wealth, indeed the entire world and everything in it; and she averred that to her very death she would not forsake it. Marking the fullness and sincerity of her purpose, the blessed Bassianos said to her, “Take courage, my child and sister. The Lord Jesus Christ, Who has chosen you out unto salvation and enlightened your soul, that you should so love Him, He Himself shall guard you and fulfil your every desire.” With these and many other words did he console and counsel her, renewing, as one might say, and restoring her purpose; then he bade her rest in one of the monastery’s cells and, in compliance with the usage of her sex, to tie round her head a piece of cloth that happened to be at hand. After all this had occurred, in the late evening, he commanded her to leave the monastery, instructing her thus: “Depart, sister, and remain with one of your acquaintances, in expectation of God’s assistance and our counsel, for we shall not neglect you.”

10. Thus, the blessed Matrona departed from the monastery, conducted by the deacon Markellos, and was once again received in the abode of Susanannah. But before the blessed one departed from the monastery, God, Who fulfilleth the will of them that fear Him and assists in every way to the good of them that love Him, had taken her child Theodote unto Himself, lest she should add despair to despair and might, out of concern for the child, somehow slacken in her purpose. Wherefore, finding that she had died, the blessed one felt joy rather than grief, for she was thus set free of concern for the child, and the latter, also set free, had departed hence before experiencing the evils of this life. As greatly as she grieved over her separation from the monastery, even so great was the consolation she found in her rejection of the child: for this, too, was God’s doing, to assuage in one part the suffering she

50 Not merely a commonplace (topos). By all accounts Matrona was a person of wealthy background who consorted with the rich and mighty on equal footing.

51 Cf. Ps. 144 (145):19.
felt in another. Thus did the blessed Matrona lie hidden in the abode of the worthy Susannah, or rather, thus through Susannah did God preserve her, even as a spiritual treasure, who would enrich and enlighten many souls. But though she lay hidden, talk of her spread everywhere, and report reached every ear proclaiming that a woman had lived undetected in a men’s monastery, even if her disguise was at last discovered. Whereupon her husband Dometianos learned the facts concerning her; and after he had run round to other monasteries, he came running like a wild beast to the monastery of the blessed Bassianos, shrieking with violence and shouting loudly and beating at the doors with stones, saying, “Give me my wife. Give me my hope. Give me my consolation. For Whom God hath joined together, put ye not asunder.” 52 Uttering these and other such words and wrongly accusing Eugenia of having been her guide and imputing to her countless wrongs, he was told by Eugenia: “Who this woman is of whom you speak, I know not: it was a man seeking salvation, a eunuch by the name of Babylas, whom I brought to this monastery.” And the disciples of the blessed Bassianos said to him, “We, brother, did not receive any woman: ours is a monastery of men, not women. We did receive a eunuch by the name of Babylas. And until a short time ago, he was satisfied, he said, with our way of life and remained with us; but then he devised a better plan, and thought to go to Jerusalem, to shut himself up in a cave. Such was his intention when we sent him off a few days ago. For the rest, whether he has remained in this city, or has gone to the Holy Places, as he said <he would>, God alone knows; we are blameless in this matter. Wherefore, if even you, who now stone and abuse us, wish to be saved, we shall receive you with joy and shall not censure you for your abuse. For we have been taught by the Lord to receive those who persecute us, for He received the persecutor Paul and made him a preacher of the Gospel. Wherefore, inasmuch as you are a man, albeit ever such a bad one, we shall receive you: for this is in name and in fact a monastery of men, even as we have said. If you do not know this, go hence and the entire city will assure you thereof.” Hearing this Dometianos was all the more stirred with anger and fired with rage, and since he had nothing reasonable to reply or to do, inasmuch as he had been told that it was a eunuch that they had received and that he was no longer among them, he withdrew in dejection and vexation.

11. Now, it was no ordinary anxiety and concern that the blessed and

holy Bassianos had for her, fearing as he did lest he should destroy the soul he had received from God. Forthwith he summoned his deacons and the foremost of the brethren and said to them, “What shall we do, brethren, about our sister who has departed from us? For even if she has proven to be a woman, nevertheless she was and is one of our members. Wherefore I am grieved beyond measure on her account and [p. 796] am distressed: in a word, my entrails are rent asunder when I think of her position, lest the ever wily devil should dull her resolve, or lest her husband should hear of where she is and entrap her, and such great effort and such longing should be extinguished and perish.”

Then the deacon Markellos said to him, “Despair not on this account, most honorable father, but commend her to God Who loves mankind and pray for her, and He will be able to preserve her. If your Holiness sees fit to send her to a women’s monastery, there is a monastery in my city, Emesa, \(^53\) that of the blessed Hilara, \(^54\) which is very beautiful and has sheltered and still shelters holy souls; it is there that I arranged for my sister to be a nun. Send her then, father, for a time to this monastery, and be in some wise relieved from your great care for her.” Hearing this the holy one was pleased by the good counsel and instructed him, saying, “Go, deacon, do as you know best, for the Lord’s sake, and dispatch her by ship.” Straightway the deacon found a ship departing to the East, and putting her on board sent her off. The blessed Matrona, then, inasmuch as she desired indeed to follow Christ, neither objected in any wise nor deliberated, but accepted her superior’s order as God’s command and went off eagerly, requesting nothing else from him save his worthy and holy prayers and a bit of bread as a blessing. For she knew, she knew with certainty and was convinced that, with these latter as shipmates and traveling companions, all would proceed according to her desire and to her profit; by God’s grace, this came to pass. For she made the whole voyage with ease and calm, and consumed but very little of the blessed bread, a most remarkable fact and sure proof of her faith. Arrived, then, at the monastery of Hilara, the blessed Matrona was kindly received, and she said to the sisters, “Take, my ladies, from this blessed bread given me by my superior, for his blessing is great and worthy. For he is a holy man, who truly loves God and is loved by Him.”

\(^{53}\) The modern Hims in Syria.

\(^{54}\) This establishment does not appear to be recorded elsewhere. St. Hilaria (called Hilara in the vita), martyred in the 3rd century, was also a woman monk; cf. A. J. Wensinck, *Legends of Eastern Saints. II. The Legend of Hilaria* (Leiden, 1913), 9–89.
She gave them some of her *bread*, and received some from them; and together they praised and glorified God. Now, having entered that monastery, the blessed Matrona so devoted herself to humility and asceticism and nobility of conduct, and so did she shine with virtues, that the sisters, in their admiration for her life and their love for her on account of her noble struggles and fitting manners, asserted that upon the decease of their mother superior they would submit themselves to her as guide and leader and spiritual mother.

12. But since it was necessary that such excellent virtue and conduct should also be proven through *miraculous* signs, neither did the Lord omit these. For at that time the precious head of the holy Forerunner and Baptist John was discovered.55 The discovery was made in this wise. During the course of many days one of the local farmers saw fire rising up from the place where he was,—where the Baptist’s holy head was to be found. Unable to understand this strange sign, *the farmer* went off to the bishop56 and told him what he had seen. The bishop realized that the fire portended some mystery and, without any delay or hesitation, took all his clergy and went to the place. Pronouncing a prayer, he commanded that the ground be dug up. The digging done, a pot was found, which contained the holy head of the Forerunner. Thereupon rumor spread throughout the entire region, and people of all ages assembled, together with those from the monasteries, for a procession bearing *the head*, with psalmody and the appropriate honors, to the church. This blessed one, then, perfect servant of Christ that she was, came thither with the sisters from the monastery and was among those who had gathered in reverence to the holy head. As proof to the assembled throng and confirmation of the discovery, fragrant oil gushed forth from *the head*, and all were drawing it off for themselves as a blessing. *The blessed one* also came forward to draw off *the fragrant oil*; and having drawn it, she became a distributor thereof, involuntarily. For the throng would not cede her an exit: cut off in their midst she was forced to distribute to all of them as they all cried out to her: “Dispense to all, O servant of Christ!” As she was thus occupied, then, dispensing to all unstintingly, a man blind since his mother’s womb rushed

55 The circumstances of the discovery, as given here, do not quite tally with the detailed and allegedly eyewitness account by the archimandrite Markellos; cf. his text, along with an early Latin (6th century) translation by Dionysius Exiguus, in DuCange, *Jean Baptiste*, 215 ff. For the date, see introduction, p. 16.

56 He is called Ouranios by the archimandrite Markellos.
past all the others, the bishop and the clerics (for all of these latter were distributing <the fragrant oil>), and approaching her, besought and prayed her anoint his eyes with the oil. Stretching out her hands, then, the blessed one did as asked. Straightway the eyes of the blind man were opened and he began to glorify and praise God, Who through the blessed Matrona had granted him the gift of beholding the image of man and of perceiving man's beauty, [p. 797] delivering him from the constant falling and stumbling that congenital darkness and lightless life had caused him. This miracle proved <the blessed one's> greatness at that time, and all trod one upon the other and stood on the tips of their toes in their attempt to get a glimpse of her. Nor was she any less marveled at afterwards by all. Everyone would say, “She is the one who lived for a time as a monk, escaping notice among men: therefore has she been magnified by receiving from Christ the grace of healing.”

13. It was because of this fame that Dometianos, too, came to Emesa. Arrived there, he learned in which monastery the blessed one dwelled; but since he could not gain access to her, he sent a message to her through certain noblewomen (from whom he had information of her), and asked to be permitted to do obeisance to her, making a pretense of supplication and cloaking his plot in the guise of reverence. But when the blessed Matrona was told of his appearance and stature and his manner, she recognized that it was her husband and she said, “Go, my ladies, and await me for seven days, while I consider the matter, then I shall meet him with convenience in your presence.” Persuaded by her they departed and relayed to him this answer, and Dometianos waited for seven days, anticipating the eighth as a great feast. But the blessed Matrona, escaping the notice of the sisters, set off for Jerusalem, taking nothing with her save the hair-shirt she wore, a staff in her hand, and a bit of the blessed bread given her by the most holy Bassianos. When the seven days had passed, the women came seeking her in accordance with their agreement, but they were told by the sisters that “We have not seen her since the day she met with you. Wherefore we are borne down by great grief and no common affliction on her behalf, deprived as we are of such a great good and pondering what sort of powerful demon could have shaken so valiant a soul and taken it from this house.” Withdrawing, then, they reported to Dometianos what they had been told.

14. When he learned of this he was sore aggrieved, and he made countless inquiries after her. Hearing that she had betaken herself to the Holy Places (for her fame made her conspicuous everywhere), he hesitated not in the least
not despaired of finding her, but came at once to Jerusalem and learned from certain pious women that she was there. For they told him that her stature was tall and fine, her garment of hair, her skin white, and her countenance bright and joyous; and thereby he understood that she was the blessed one, and he inquired after her abode. They told him that she had no abode, but slept either on Golgotha or in the Anastasis or in St. Mary’s or in whichever of the other churches where she stayed late on a particular night>. Said he to them, “If you point her out to me, I shall reward you handsomely.” Said the women to him, “Go you to the holy Anastasis, and we shall go to St. Mary’s. We have described her attire to you. If you find her yourself, well and good; if we <find her>, we shall let you know.” Having thus decided and divided the churches among them, the women went off to St. Mary’s and Domitianos to the holy Anastasis; and <straightway> the blessed Matrona caught sight of him, though she turned neither to the right nor the left, but kept her gaze downward and continued undisturbed on her way. When she approached him, she bent over toward the ground, as if to pick up a stone, and thus escaped his notice. He passed by her, paying no attention, and went into the Anastasis in search of her; but she, escaping his notice by her clever device, fled him and went away from the Anastasis. Having escaped him, however, she encountered the women. For as she was making her way toward holy Zion, they met her and said, “A certain illustrious man of the emperor’s

57 The hill where Christ was crucified, marked by a rocky outcrop about 40 m east of the Anastasis church; cf. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 177, and *ODB* 3:1870, s.v. Sepulchre, Holy.

58 The Rotunda of the Anastasis (Resurrection) was a circular church that enclosed the tomb of Christ at Jerusalem and was part of the church of the Holy Sepulcher; cf. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 176–77.

59 The text makes it clear that this church was in the direction of Mt. Zion, i.e., south when coming from the Anastasis, and so can only have been St. Mary the New (the Nea Ekklesia of the Theotokos), the largest church in Jerusalem, built by Justinian and consecrated on 20 November 543. The building had been started some thirty years earlier; cf. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 166 (s.v., New Saint Mary). The allusion to this church provides a terminus post quem for the date of composition of the *vita*; see introduction, p. 15.

60 Also called Sion, a holy place in Jerusalem that included such sites as the house of Caiaphas and the Column of the Flagellation; cf. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 171–72, and *ODB* 3:1905.
suite\textsuperscript{61} has come, he says, on your account, wishing to do obeisance to you and to receive your blessing. He goes about himself in search of you, and has also dispatched us for this purpose." Said the blessed Matrona to them, "I have made a vow to go to Paneas,\textsuperscript{62} and I am eager to find traveling companions\textsuperscript{63} in order to fulfill it. Allow me three days, I pray, and I shall meet with him in your presence." Having said this, the blessed one got rid of the women with her reasonable answer, and finding traveling companions she set off for Mt. Sinai. Then the women sought out Dometianos and relayed the blessed one's answer. But he knew from experience, from her answer in the monastery, that her message was merely a ruse and a trick: that she had thereby eluded the women and sent him this message with the intention of going off elsewhere; and he spared no time in making inquiries and seeking traces of her, like a Lacedaemonian dog trained in the hunt.\textsuperscript{64} Finding some other women who told him, "If you seek the woman of noble stature who wears garments of hair, she has set off for Mt. Sinai," he hesitated not a moment but set off in pursuit of her. Now, when the blessed Matrona learned that he had come thither, women dispatched by him having so informed her, she was seized with great fear; and changing her attire she went to the region of Beirut. She found there a temple of idols and dwelled therein, choosing to be devoured by demons or beasts rather than fall into the hands of her husband. Said she, "If I serve God, demons cannot harm me. As for beasts, if I truly and piously pursue virtue, perhaps they will respect me; but if my husband gets hold of me, he will treat me more cruelly than demons and beasts." Taking up her abode, then, in the idols' temple, she per-

\textsuperscript{61} The expression λαμπρὸς ἀνὴρ τοῦ κομιτάτου has a technical meaning. λαμπρὸς, or rather λαμπρότατος, was a title equivalent to the Latin clarissimus. Comitatus designated the emperor's household and chief ministers with their respective staffs who always accompanied the emperor when the latter was on the move.

\textsuperscript{62} Paneas (Caesarea Philippi) was north of Jerusalem, hence in the opposite direction from Mt. Sinai; cf. Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrims, 167. It was a center of pilgrimage, famous for a statue of Christ, allegedly set up by the woman with an issue of blood (cf. Mt. 9:20–22).

\textsuperscript{63} One might note that Matrona thought it wiser to travel to Sinai with a group of companions; see also the end of Chap. 26.

\textsuperscript{64} For a parallel to the expression "Lacedaemonian dog," cf. Historia Alexandri Magni (Recensio A), ed. W. Kroll (Berlin, 1926), 74.1.
formed without ceasing the order of psalmody that had been handed down to her.65

15. Now, it happened once, as she performed the nightly psalmody, that demons sang most fervently in response, for she heard the voices of many men singing. Taking fright and fortifying herself with the sign of the cross, she completed the psalmody, considering within herself and saying, “This place is deserted and the house unhallowed; there is no village in this place, nor have any passersby approached; whence, then, come these voices?” With these thoughts in her mind she went outside the temple, to find out whence the voices came. But neither finding nor seeing anyone, she went back inside the idols’ temple. These voices continued to be heard for many days thereafter, so she fasted for three days and prayed intently to the Lord that He should reveal to her the cause. Swift to hearken unto those who cry out to Him66 by night and by day, the Lord God overlooked not her prayer, but hastened to make the revelation unto her. For as she completed her psalmody on another day, the demons began to sing impiously and to utter discordant, shameful sounds and to bring fire to the door of the temple. But the blessed one sealed herself continuously <with the cross> and rebuked them, and they fled with the fire into the mountains. Recognizing this to be the doing of the Enemy [i.e., the Devil], she looked this way and that, to see what had become of <the demons> or whither they had run off; and looking up she saw the mountains shrouded as it were in a sort of darkness.

16. Sometime later she was oppressed by great thirst, and going a short distance from the temple she found blossomy, tender greens. Picking some of these she pressed them to her lips and tongue, in order to assuage her thirst and alleviate the extreme dryness. But the merciful and compassionate Lord, seeing such great endurance and patience, wrought an ancient miracle: not feasting an ungrateful people but nourishing a soul which loved Him, not showering down a marvelous rain of plenteous manna,67 but providing her with a spontaneous meal in this desolate place. For though all the place was dry and without water, she did find one spot which was moist; and beseeching God and taking Him as assistant, she came to this spot and dug in the earth

65 Evidently by Bassianos.
67 Cf. Ex. 16; Ps. 77 (78):24.
with her hands. After much toil she came to sharp stones, and in them she
dug a small hole; and the further her hands went down <into the ground>, the
more moisture she felt. Having found a bit of water she withdrew, reckoning
that it was the hour of psalmody. But when she returned on the morrow after
completing her morning rule, she found the hole which she had dug the day
before filled with water. Kneeling, she thanked the Giver of good things, and
standing up she picked a few greens. For the place where the water was
abounded in them, as the gifts of God are perfect68 and unfailing and they
require no season to come to perfection. She washed them in water, and letting
the water run off because of the dirt, she took the greens and went inside.
Now, wherever the water ran out of the hole, it brought forth tender, leafy
greens. Coming, then, every day after her morning prayers and picking and
washing the greens, she would let the water run off and then stop it again
when it was clean; and eating the greens and drinking from the water, at the
customary hour of repast after the evening psalmody, she glorified God for all
His gifts to her. Thus did that place supply her ever after, as if by way of
tribute, with the ampest daily nourishment.

17. For a long time the blessed one enjoyed such meals and made prog-
ress in her intense asceticism, but then the evil demon, unable to bear seeing
her rejoice in the Lord, armed himself with another device against her. Trans-
forming himself into a woman fair of face and [p. 799] of solemn and noble
bearing, he approached the holy one and addressed her with no little ¯attery:
“What are you doing here, madam, you who are young and quite fair of form?
This is no place for you: it is a dwelling of idols and demons. Come to Beirut,
for it is a beautiful and hospitable city, which provides for all people. It is
desolate here: there is no provision for the necessities of life. Furthermore,
heaven forbid that any of those men who often come here should do you
harm, desirous of committing sin with you.” Recognizing69 that this was the
Tempter, the blessed one answered saying, “I have greens. I have water. Christ
my Master provides for me in abundance. I am satisfied with these things and
seek nothing else.” Hearing this the demon withdrew, saying, “Out of consid-
eration for you have I counseled you to do that which I know to be to your
advantage, nor shall I cease to counsel you. For the rest, it is for you to test
and do that which is good.” After a few days he came again in the same guise

68 Cf. James 1:16.
69 Reading γνοῦσα for ἄγνοοσα.
and said to her, “I do indeed take thought for you, madam, and have compassion for your youth. I am troubled and concerned lest such great beauty and comeliness should wither and perish in the harshness of this place. Wherefore I pray you, heed my fitting counsel: come to my mistress, Beirut, where there is a hospice worthy of you and everything requisite for your protection and service.” But replying with great wisdom and understanding, “It is not beauty of the body I seek but of the soul, and if I make my comeliness without to wither, I renew that within,” she put the woman to shame and chased her off.

18. Nevertheless, the mischievous one would not desist from tempting her. Abiding but a short time he assumed the form of an old woman, common and ugly, with fiery eyes, and set upon her, insolently threatening and menacing her, uttering mindless things in keeping with his purpose. When she made no reply whatsoever, on account of the disorder of his speech, he became all the more frenzied with rage and fired with anger, and he said to her, “I have used such words toward you, in such a manner on such matters, and you answer me nothing?” But the blessed one fortified herself, as she was wont, with the sign of the cross. Then putting his hands to his head, he rent and tore them in pieces with his teeth and cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Shall I, who have vanquished many with force and worsted yet more, not be able to defeat you? Just give me time. For even if I cannot deceive you in your youth, I shall bring the most dreadful things upon you in your old age.” And lest you now escape my hands, I shall incite Beirut against you, especially those who delight in this place and are enslaved to the worship of the idols; I shall drive you from this entire country.” Having said this and similar things the evil one vanished. To such an extent, then, did the malignant one annoy her; but he found it impossible to deceive her in any wise, and he durst not annoy her in an obvious manner, for God’s grace overshadowed her. Wherefore, after such great trials, she was seized with joy, and the snares of the demons gave way to a beautiful vision. For as she said the evening prayers there appeared

70 Cf. below p. 61.

to her three men; and whether they were men or angels, she neither knew then nor said later, though it would be impious and indeed wholly alien to Christians not to think this visitation divine. For God, in condescension to our weakness and for our benefit, is wont to present visions of the Incorporeal Ones [i.e., angels] in the form of embodied men. As she sang, then, <these three> entered and remained kneeling behind her for a long time. Though the blessed one was afraid, she did not cease singing, but directed her gaze this way and that, desiring to see what they were doing; she did not, however, turn round. When she began the psalmody of the evening office, the men rose from their prayer, and telling her three times, “Pray for us, O servant of Christ,” they withdrew and vanished.

19. But thereafter there was talk of her in Beirut, and many went out unto her, both men and women, and especially noblewomen, for in a few days report of her had spread everywhere. All told of how her angelic way of life and splendid purity had routed the demons in the temple and put them to flight. Now, among the many who came together to see her and receive her blessing, there came also a certain woman with her daughter, whose name was Sophrone. When this Sophrone, then, saw the blessed Matrona, she was moved to compunction, and could not bear to leave the blessed one or follow her mother, saying, “From henceforth is this holy one both mother and father to me.” Though her mother did her utmost and pressed her, that she should at least take leave of her own family, she would in no wise assent to depart. On this ground did other daughters of heathen <parents> also attach themselves to the blessed Matrona: coming to her they fell down at her knees, crying, and said to her, “Deliver us, holy mother, from the vanity of the idols and deception of the demons, and lead us unto the God you serve.” Receiving them the blessed one first tempered their bodily habits and then, once she had strengthened their spiritual reasoning and prepared them, over the course of many days, for the hope that lies in store for Christians, she would have the rites of chrismation72 and baptism performed upon them. Keeping these women, together with the first one, and teaching them letters and poring over Scripture with them, especially the blessed David,73 she made them children of God.

72 Anointing with holy oil at the time of baptism.
73 I.e., the psalter.
20. Yet another maiden, also a heathen, heard of these things, and she too desired to see the blessed Matrona and to associate herself with her. Now, once when her relations were to perform the customary libations to vain idols, they left her in the house, to bring the flour and wine and whatever else they had prepared for the demons and to follow them, while they went on beforehand and began the foolish <rituals>, awaiting the maiden's arrival. But seizing the opportunity the young woman distributed the wine and flour and everything else to the poor, deeming it better to satisfy the hunger of the needy than to serve deaf, senseless idols; and then, finding women who were going off to the blessed one, she followed them. Not knowing what the girl had done, those who worshiped the abominable idols waited for her. When a long time had passed and she did not come, they returned and looked for her. Learning from those who happened to be about what she had done, that she had gone off to the Christian woman in the temple, they ran in pursuit of her; but she had gone in to the holy one. As they stood by the door of the temple and saw her prostrate at the feet of the blessed one, beseeching to be received by her as the others had been received, they called out to her with the most dreadful threats: “Come out here,” they said, “impious one, lest we give you, together with this temple that has been profaned and also your teacher, over to the flames. Who has prompted you to this foolish and lawless action? Why have you forsaken light for darkness? Why have you kindled such anger against us? Are you not afraid, wretched one? Do you not tremble to have done such a lawless deed? Are you not mindful that the gods have power to smite you and this teacher who has thrust herself upon you? Do you not consider how great is the offense you have committed, putting wretched, hopeless paupers before the most great and glorious gods? Flee your impiety. Renounce your folly. Regain sound and prudent reason. Forsake this wretched teacher and her mournful manner, for she has received her just deserts. Come out! Come out from thence, lest this place of salvation become for you a tomb of destruction. We shall bear you no malice, unhappy one, only come away. We shall beseech them whom you have angered, but you must not remain here.” Saying this and similar things they promised the maiden much, and flattered her yet more, while threatening and abusing the holy one; and then they withdrew, promising to burn the temple and the women within on the morrow. Whereupon the godless ones received no reply from the blessed Matrona, save, “This girl is the servant of the God of your gods. For ours is a mighty God, the Maker of heaven and...
earth, but your gods are abominations, works of the hands of men who are
born and die, <idols which> molder and putrefy and in the end serve as fuel
for the fire.”

21. The girl lay prostrate at her feet and, after the godless ones had gone,
she begged and entreated her: “Receive me,” she said, “O servant of Christ,
receive me who am desperate and deceived, having served until now vain
<gods>; <I have been> ignorant of my God and Savior, following my enemy
and destroyer. Join me to those <women> who are with you and lead me to
your Christ. Show me the path of life and guide me safely upon it. Yea, I beg
you, O servant of Christ, let me not be called unworthy of you nor be taken
from your flock, O holy mother.” Saying these and similar things the maiden
moved to tears the blessed Matrona and the freewomen74 who had assembled
about her. Then the blessed one counseled her for a considerable time and
said, “Take heart, my child: our God loves mankind and He shall receive you
who truly repent.” [p. 801] She raised her up and, taking her and the <other>
sisters, she went straightway out of the temple, telling the freewomen, “Wait
here, I pray you, until we return.” Then she collected a great multitude of dried
plants and, returning, made three great piles of them; and she said to the
freewomen, “Have you servants who can attend to some business for me?”
The others replied that they had; and summoning three of their attendants,
she told them, “Go, I pray, into the city and say unto the godless ones who
not long ago threatened us that ‘The Christian woman informs you that you
should not trouble yourselves to bring wood from the city. For I have already
prepared dried plants for you, and you will find fire here. Tarry not, therefore:
I await you. If it is necessary to prepare anything else, let me know in advance
and I shall prepare it. I am eager to spare you any hardship, only be diligent!’”
The servants, then, went into the city and gave the heathens75 the holy wom-
an’s message. Hearing this and marveling at the steadfastness and dauntless-
ness of her soul, her noble-mindedness and the wisdom of her thinking, they
neither sent any answer nor durst they return.

22. Now, after the servants had gone off and brought back no reply, the

74 The Greek word ἐλευθεροί, rendered here as “freewomen,” could also mean a
“widow” or “wife” in this period; see Lampe, Lexicon, s.v. ἐλευθεροί, A.6.

75 The Greek word is ἐλληνες (Hellenes), meaning “pagan,” “adherent of the old
Greek religion.”
blessed one said to the freewomen, “I pray you, tell the most God-loving bishop to send me a priest, a deacon, and a deaconess.” 76 Hastily they made their way into the city and, coming to the church, they related everything to the people; and they informed the bishop likewise. It was the talk of all the city that the Christian woman who lived in the temple had converted heathens, and that she continued to convert many others, and that all who saw her were moved to compunction and came to the knowledge of God. Forthwith, then, the bishop sent clerics as she had requested, and nearly the whole city including all the freewomen, some in covered litters, others in sedan chairs, and yet others on foot, went out to her; and seeing her they derived great profit and were filled with compunction and indeed received a spark of the knowledge of God. For who, upon seeing that honorable and holy figure, her worn face and, in a word, her mortified body, was not moved to compunction and greatly benefitted, becoming a different person? Wherefore all were edified, and praising God for all the miracles wrought through her they returned to the city with great joy.

23. Then the blessed Matrona took the maiden who had been converted and gave her into the hands of the priest, deacon, and deaconess, saying to them, “I pray your Holinesses, take this humble maiden, that she might now turn aside from the error of the idols. When you have instructed her and baptized her, bring her back to me here.” Taking her the clerics conducted her to the church. Then, when they had instructed her after the fashion of the Christians and baptized her, they took the disciple back to the teacher; and she remained with her, in the company of the other maidens who had come before her, and received all manner of spiritual instruction. The blessed one gave her the name Euche [Prayer]. Several other women joined as well, so that there were eight in all. Many persons at that time derived profit merely from the sight of the blessed one and, goaded by divine longing, they began to live better lives. For the figure of that blessed and true servant of God was venerable, her speech accessible and conversation with her full of profit, and association with her gave pleasure in but a short time; in a word, one never had

76 Deaconesses, the female counterpart of deacons, were women whose primary function was to assist at the baptism of women. The office could be held only by unmarried women or widows of mature age; cf. ODB 1:592–93 and Gryson, Ministry of Women, 88–90.
enough of seeing her, and upon thinking of her one was filled with longing. Many who were with her then found it difficult to depart from her, reckoning it a loss to be deprived of her venerable company even for a short time.

24. Now, all the while that she lived thus, piously and honorably, prospering before God’s angels and before men, the blessed Matrona feared her husband, lest, on account of her fame, he should find her there as well. Moreover, she desired to see her superior, the blessed Bassianos. Caught up between these two considerations, she thought of moving either to Alexandria or to Antioch, in order to escape the notice of her husband. Although she desired to live in Constantinople, on account of her superior and the proximity to the brethren with whom she had lived the monastic life, she restrained herself, thinking again of her husband. “For if,” she said, “he did not shrink from pursuing me when I had gone to Emesa, Jerusalem, and Mt. Sinai, would he not all the more pursue me and perpetrate dreadful things if he heard that I was in Constantinople?” [p. 802] Occupied with these thoughts the blessed one earnestly besought God to reveal unto her the profitable course. For if ever she met with difficulty, either in her deeds or her thoughts, she referred the matter to God and waited for the answer from Him.

25. For many days she waited upon Him and prayed Him reveal to her that which was profitable. Then once, as she slept, she saw three men who came to her and said, “We have come here for your sake, Lady, for one of us will take you to wife.” She thought herself to say to them in the dream, “Whence come you, and what are your names?” Then, she said, they told her that one of them was called Alexander, another Antiochos, and the other Constantine. Said she to them, “I will have none of you, for I have made a promise unto God to remain pure, and on His account I have renounced my lawful husband.” Thereupon it seemed as if they were discomfited and said to one another with contention, “I shall have her!” Each of them said this same thing, and thus saying they drew lots to settle the dispute. The lot fell to Constantine; but because Alexander and Antiochos were not satisfied with the first drawing, they drew again. After they had drawn a third time and the lot had three times fallen to Constantine, the blessed one thought herself to say to them, “Whether you draw lots or not, I will have none of you. I have told you once and for all: I have committed myself unto God.” Thus replying in her sleep she awoke. Now, after she awoke, when she had comprehended the meaning of the vision, she rendered thanks unto God, the Giver of good things. For she understood that the three men represented the three cities
which had been in her thoughts: Alexander, Alexandria; Antiochos, Antioch; and Constantine, Constantinople.  

26. Convinced, then, by this dream that it pleased God that she should live in Constantinople, she thought only of her departure and the journey: not that she was concerned for herself—for she knew that God Who loves mankind, Who had shown her where it pleased Him that she should live, would provide for her—but she was anxious about how or where she would leave the sisters with whom she lived. While the blessed Matrona was occupied with such cares and concerns, the freewomen whose acquaintance she had made came to her, to visit her and derive spiritual profit. After considerable conversation, she told them of her desire and of the vision from God. The freewomen, inasmuch as they loved her and were loath to part with her, were grieved and said, “O most God-loving Mistress, if this is to be, we know not whether we ought first to regret the desolation of our souls or your good and profitable conversation. To whom shall we come hereafter for solace, or to which other mother shall we have recourse that we might be consoled, or to which teacher shall we run that we might be taught by her to scorn this temporary, vain life and in no wise prefer it to the coming, everlasting life? Who hereafter, once we are bereft of you, will assuage the afflictions that weigh upon us? Who, when you are gone, will be able to refresh with words, as with a sponge, those beset with despondency? Who will speak to us of love for a husband, of love of children and godly housekeeping? Who will instruct us in good deeds and every good work in service to God? Considering all these things we are filled with all manner of sorrow and despondency, bereft of all solace. Nor can we prevent you <going>, for God has concurred with your desire. But the mother of the ex-Prefect Elias and the mother of the scholastikoi are going off to their children in Constantinople, and if your Holiness so commands, we shall speak to them about you: through your holy prayers they too will be preserved, and your Godliness will make the journey with them.”

27. Having said this, the freewomen were deputed by the blessed one, and

77 It is unusual for cities to be personified by men instead of the female figures normally encountered on coins, diptychs, and other artistic representations; see, for example, Alan Cameron, “Anthusa: Notes on the Iconography of Constantinople,” BSCAbstr 8 (1982), 41.

78 Elias or Helias, probably an honorary prefect, cannot be identified. The same applies to the unnamed scholastikoi (a title favored by advocates and rhetors).
hurriedly they made their way into the city and told the other women about her. Directly they heard, they rushed out to the blessed one, to encourage her, fearing lest she should put off going and they should thus be deprived of the salvation and benefit which gushed forth from her. The blessed one assented to sail with them, and she took counsel with them, that the sisters might go to the most God-loving bishop. But taking the matter upon themselves, the freewomen rushed into the city and informed the bishop. Without a moment’s hesitation the bishop summoned two deaconesses known for their nobility of life and most excellent conduct and sent them to the blessed Matrona, that they should receive the sisters who were with her. Said he to them, [p. 803]

“See to it, sisters, that you preserve the sisters you receive from the most holy woman, lest through life’s vanity you should become slack and neglectful, or should conduct your lives unfittingly and thereby give these women whom God has delivered from the error of idols over to the deception of unlawfulness, and you should then render account to God on their behalf on the day of judgment.” Hearing this the God-loving deaconesses went off with the freewomen to the blessed one and received the aforementioned sisters. Giving them over, the blessed Matrona said to the deaconesses, “O spiritual mothers and sisters, I commend these souls to you and to God: be unto them mothers in body and spirit, and take care for their salvation for as long as you shall have them, that you may present them on the day of judgment perfect, pure, and without offense, unto Christ, Who has chosen them.” Having said this, she kissed them as a loving mother and admonished them as a good teacher, and she gave them leave to depart with the deaconesses.

28. Then the other freewomen took the blessed Matrona to themselves, like some great treasure and instrument of salvation, and because the blessed one so desired they also took one of the sisters who had been with her: the one who had been first to follow her and to love her way of life, Sophrone by name. With haste they set sail from the city of Beirut and, after an unexpectedly calm passage, swiftly reached the Imperial City. For He Who had revealed to her the place of her trials, showing her in a night vision the city that would receive her, granted her an undisturbed and speedy voyage. Coming to anchor at St. Irene’s,79 she sent word of herself to the deacon Markellos; and when he

79 The church of St. Irene of Perama (not to be confused with the larger and more famous St. Irene’s near Hagia Sophia) was situated on the Golden Horn shore, opposite Sykai (Galata). It was rebuilt by the oikonomos Marcian in the middle of the 5th century; cf. Janin, *EglisesCP*, 106–7.
heard, he came to her forthwith. Upon seeing him, the blessed one and Sophrone did obeisance to him upon the ground. But the honorable deacon said to her, “Whence are you come, my Lady sister? Why are you here? What has prompted you to leave the monastery to which you were sent and to come here?” In answer the blessed one said, “It is not by desertion that I have come, honored father, but out of my desire for my venerable and holy superior, and in order that I might receive his blessing.” Moved to compunction, the deacon received her. Then the blessed one related to him all that had befallen her: how after he had dismissed her she had made her way forthwith to the monastery, and how Dometianos had pursued her, and how she had been forced on his account to leave the monastery; how upon reaching Jerusalem she had barely escaped falling into his hands; how again she had gone to Mt. Sinai; how she had lived in Beirut, and how she had become well known there; how many had been through her moved to compunction and many saved; and how and by what cause she was again in the Imperial City. In brief, she hid from him none of the things she had done, not wishing to make a display of herself—Heaven forbid! for this was an emotion alien to that holy soul—but to convince him that she was not there by desertion, but had come in accordance with a vision and her desire.

29. When he had heard this the deacon Markellos went up to the holy Bassianos and told him everything, saying that the Lord Babylas, the eunuch, had come from the East and had brought with him another brother. Upon hearing this the holy Bassianos was sorely grieved and said to the deacon, “Why has he come again?” Said the deacon, “He is here to receive your Holiness’s blessing.” The blessed superior, then, thanked the Lord, and pronouncing his habitual words, “Blessed is the Lord,” he paused briefly and then said to the deacon, “Go, my child, and arrange for lodging, in which he is to abide; God and we shall take care for the rent. Pay the passage money first, then take him up to the lodgings.” Whereupon the deacon went off and did everything as commanded: finding a quite suitable dwelling in the district of St. Thomas above the colonnade, he left a deposit; and taking the key he went down to the sea and brought up the blessed Matrona and the sister with

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80 The implication is that Matrona and her companion are in male attire.

81 The best known church of the St. Thomas region was that built on the property of Amantios near Julian’s Harbor. The Amantios in question is usually identified with the chamberlain of the emperor Anastasios I (PLRE 2:67–68), but there is some reason to believe that the church may have existed earlier; cf. Janin, EglisesCP, 248–50.
her. The freewomen who had made the voyage with her entreated him, and they too came up into the monastery with her, that they might also receive the holy elder’s blessing. When they entered, upon seeing the blessed Matrona and the freewomen with her, the holy [p. 804] Bassianos thanked the freewomen, uttering a prayer, and said, “May the Lord Jesus Christ give you the reward of your compassion, for you have taken her to yourselves and have not allowed her to suffer affliction in any wise.” To the blessed Matrona, who lay at his feet, he said, “Rise, child. What is it again that you want? Why have you come here?” In answer the blessed one said, “I have come to receive a blessing from your holy mouth, holy father.” He enquired also about the sister with her, and learning how she had joined her, this blessed and truly holy one [the superior] became speechless and wept with them. He paused briefly and then commanded the deacon to bring three pieces of blessed bread,82 three girdles, and three cloaks.83 When they had been brought, he prayed for a long time; and sealing them with the sign of the cross, he gave them to her, saying, “Go, my child, settle yourself and save the souls that the Lord shall send you. Preserve yourself and present your way of life as a model to those who are being saved, that those who are taught by you may see the things you teach through words being fulfilled in you through deeds. But do not receive any servant against the wish of her master or mistress, on account of the holy canons.”84

30. It is my opinion that the blessed and holy Bassianos did this not from human understanding and wisdom, but through the influence of a divine force. The very fact that he was in ecstasy and, hesitating a short while, suddenly requested the aforementioned pieces of blessed bread as well as the girdles shows beyond doubt that this was a divine thing. For the blessed <Matrona> had not come for this purpose, nor had she sought any such thing from him. Receiving from his holy hands the blessings of the girdles and other things he gave her, and from his blessed lips the words of confirmation, she was amazed at the strangeness and miraculous character of the thing. But

82 *Eulogia* bread was bread that had been blessed but not consecrated (and thus was to be distinguished from the bread of the eucharist); it later came to be known as *antidoron*. Cf. G. Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison, Wisc., 1970), 109–66.

83 As we learn from Chap. 51, these were men’s girdles and cloaks.

when she had regained her courage she said to him, “Venerable and holy father, I beseech you, I have seven other sisters in the city of Beirut: what is your command concerning them?” Learning to whom they had been commended, he ordered the deacon Markellos to give to the captain who had brought the blessed Matrona the passage money and expenses for the sisters who were in Beirut, and to enjoin him to bring them with dispatch to Constantinople. When this had been done, and the freewomen had also written, through the captain, to the bishop and their relations in Beirut, that they should send them without delay and assist in their speedy embarkation, the most holy Bassianos said to the deacon Markellos, “Take these <women>, honorable child, and conduct them to the quarters you have arranged. For the Lord’s sake, I pray you, take care of them with diligence, in the knowledge that, if you neglect them, you shall have committed a great sin, even as if you take thought for them, so shall you receive great reward from the Lord. Whatever the brethren have for nourishment, send this also to them daily; nor take careful thought only for their nourishment, but for each and every thing.” Saying this and giving blessed bread to the freewomen also, the blessed Bassianos dismissed them.

31. With the permission of the deacon Markellos the freewomen accompanied the blessed one to her lodgings, and the deacon uttered a prayer and installed the blessed one there; and from then on he saw to their every need. Once the blessed one had been installed in her rooms, the freewomen went off to their children. For they had not sent word of themselves to their beloved children until the blessed one had been installed in her lodgings and they had made certain of this: such was the affection they had for her, and so greatly did they revere her and hold her in all honor, that they counted her installation <in her quarters> more important than being with their own children. For they thought, “Now that we have been saved through her prayers, we shall be able to see our children afterwards. But if we do not first see that she is installed and learn where her dwelling is, we shall have to search for her later, and the loss will be great, for there is no one who shall bring word of her.”

Now, while the blessed Matrona dwelled in her lodgings, performing the customary psalmody in the rule which had been passed down to her, the letters arrived in Beirut and were delivered to the bishop. Without any hesitation or delay the bishop commanded the deaconesses to hand over to the captain the sisters they had received from the blessed one, having himself enjoined <the captain> beforehand to preserve them with all care and humility. Straightway,
then, <the captain> took on board provisions, from the freewomen who had sailed with the blessed one as well as from the bishop, and set sail from Beirut. Upon reaching the Imperial City, he sent word to the deacon that the sisters had arrived; and the deacon Markellos reported to the most blessed Bassianos concerning them. He inquired whether he wanted them to come first to him, to receive his blessing; and at the <most blessed> one’s command, he went down to the ship at the seashore and brought them up. When they had come, he blessed them, [p. 805] and admonishing them with many passages from the Holy Scriptures to obey the blessed Matrona in all things and to keep her commandments always, he gave them blessed bread and sent them off to their mother superior.

32. Now, while the blessed <Matrona> was thus occupied, thanking God for having directed her superior’s goodwill toward her and for having preserved the sisters she had received contrary to the purposes of others, report of her spread throughout the city and she became famous in the mouths of all. It was impossible for so great a marvel to lie hidden: everyone was possessed by eagerness and all were equally keen to be first to see her and learn from her what she had feigned or devised in order to enter such a strict monastery; and, once entered, how she had escaped notice for so long. Since everyone, then, was flocking to her and deriving benefit from her, the blessed empress Verina, 85 wife of the blessed Leo, also heard of her, and being a God-loving and venerable woman, she too came to her, to receive her blessing and learn the details of her life. When the blessed <Matrona> told her how she had entered the monastery and in what guise, and how after such a long time her secret had been revealed to the most holy Bassianos, she marveled at the greatness of the undertaking, approving the manliness of her purpose, and bade her pray for her and her children, 86 and the emperor. Then the blessed one gave her pieces of blessed bread that had been soaked <with wine>, but she asked for nothing whatsoever in return, though the empress quite expected to be petitioned by her for something, seeing that the blessed <Matrona> dwelt

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85 Although active in pious works and the building of churches, Verina was a person of rather questionable character. The text implies that her husband, Leo I (d. 18 January 474), was still alive at the time.

86 Verina had two daughters, namely, Ariadne, married since 466/467 to the future emperor Zeno (474–491), and Leontia, wife of Marcian, son of the western emperor Anthemius (on whom, see next note).
in rented lodgings and was in no wise prosperous. The blessed empress Verina, therefore, derived extraordinary benefit by her not asking for anything nor being ashamed to give such pieces of blessed bread to an empress, and commending herself to her she withdrew.

33. Now, a certain Euphemia, who had been the wife of Anthimus, who had formerly reigned as emperor in Rome, had been since that time an acquaintance of the blessed one, and she knew by experience of the beneficial actions wrought through her. And when Antiochiane, the wife of the patrician Sphorakios (I mean the Sphorakios who had constructed the all-holy and all-beauteous church of the great and victorious martyr Theodore), fell ill at that time, Euphemia went to visit her. As is usual in conversations, especially with those who are ill, Antiochiane discussed the cause of her illness, finding fault with her physicians. For though she had spent a great deal of money on them, they had not been able to help her in the least; on the contrary, the illness had got worse through their ineptitude. Showing compassion for her Euphemia said, “My lady patrician, why do you spend money on physicians, who can take the money but know not how to help? You ought rather to approach generous God, the physician who takes no fee. Betake yourself, therefore, to the wonder-working and holy woman who has now settled in our city. For she is the one, that I may tell you of her briefly, who was possessed by divine longing and, fleeing her husband and by clever contrivance transforming herself into a eunuch, spent three years in the monastery of the blessed Bassianos. When she was afterwards discovered through a revelation, being no longer able to live among the men, she was sent off to a women’s

87 Anthimus is a variant form of Anthemius, who reigned as Augustus in the West from 467 to 472; cf. **PLRE**, 2:96–97. His wife Euphemia, oddly qualified as “a certain” (περὶ του), was the daughter of the emperor Marcian.

88 Her meeting with Matrona should probably be dated after 472, when her husband was murdered.

89 Sphorakios or Sporaci was consul in 452. **PLRE**, 2:1026–7, distinguishes him, perhaps wrongly, from a Sporaci who appears to have been prefect of Constantinople sometime between 474 and 491. His wife Antiochiane is not mentioned elsewhere.

90 Situated on the main street (Mese), not far from Hagia Sophia, this church was rebuilt by Sphorakios following a fire, perhaps that of 465. See remarks in C. Mango, “Epigrammes honorifiques, statues et portraits a Byzance,” **Studies on Constantinople** (Aldershot, 1993), pt. ix, 25–28.

91 This information is given here for the first time.
monastery in the East. Her husband pursued her there also, and she fled to many other places, until she returned hither in accordance with a divine vision. In sum, on account of her pure and blameless conduct and her heavenly and angelic way of life, she has effected many cures and converted those gone astray and has helped and still helps a great many. Hasten, therefore, to her and tell her all, doubting naught, and you shall be delivered completely from the ailment that afflicts you."

34. When Antiochiane, wife of Sphorakios, had heard and learned these things, she thanked Euphemia most profusely and bade her go with her to the blessed Matrona. They made an agreement and on the morrow they both came to her. Finding her singing the morning office, they waited until she finished. [p. 806] When she had finished singing, they did obeisance to her and sat down with her. After the conversation had gone on for a considerable time and the blessed one had uttered the customary blessings and benefited them, healing their souls before their bodies, Antiochiane gently and trustingly took the blessed one’s hand and placed it on the place that pained her. As the blessed one did not know the reason for this, Antiochiane said to her, “Mistress mine and servant of Christ, I am employing your touch to assuage the suffering that afflicts me, and in so doing I expect not to be disappointed, for already, with the holy God’s help, I have felt benefit.” Making light of this, the blessed one said to her, “My lady, I am a sinner, and such as I am so is my touch. But the Lord Jesus Christ Who visited Peter’s mother-in-law and cured her of the fever92 will visit you also and will cure you of the pain which troubles you.” Feeling forthwith strength and benefit, Antiochiane remained by her; and bidding Euphemia go home, she said to her, “I shall remain with my physician until my complete recovery.”

35. Now, while Antiochiane remained with the blessed Matrona, her eunuchs asked the blessed one’s doorkeeper for quarters in which they might keep the animals and put away the covered litter. But she told them, “Besides the lodging in which we live, we have none other, and even for this do we pay rent. How could we have yet other quarters, we who are foreigners and have not even the necessities of life?” The eunuchs then went and reported to their mistress what they had been told. Antiochiane acknowledged the goodwill of her servants, and marveling at the blessed Matrona’s praiseworthy poverty and blessed penury she said to her, “I have heard, Mistress mine, that you dwell in

92 Cf. Mt. 8:14–15.
rented lodgings, and I am sorely grieved.” The blessed one said, “I do dwell in rented lodgings, but God and my superior provide for them and for us.” Said Antiochiane again to her, “Let it not be so with you, I beg you, my lady. By God’s bounty I have many beautiful estates: accept one of them for the ransom of my sinful soul and live in it, unto the salvation of the many souls who will be saved through you and me. Whichever estate pleases you, this shall I grant you forthwith, making it over to your full ownership.”

36. Hearing this the blessed Matrona perceived her goodwill from her words, and understanding that she desired to give her a place to be dedicated to God as a haven for human souls, she agreed to accept it and sent for the deacon Markellos; and telling him of the proposal, she left the matter in his hands. Taking the servants who had been instructed to show him the estates, the deacon came to the place called Severiana, where the monastery of the blessed Matrona was built, which was then a rose garden. He was pleased by the situation of the place because of its vicinity to other monasteries, especially that of the blessed Bassianos (of which he was a member), and because of its being within the city walls.93 He came to the blessed Matrona and the Christ-loving Antiochiane and reported that the place was quite well and good and its situation suitable, but that it required much repair. When the deacon had said this, Antiochiane forthwith drew up the property grant to the blessed Matrona, and signing it she gave the document to her; but she made the holding of the property over to the deacon Markellos, as Matrona’s representative, promising to carry out also the repairs. Then she thanked the deacon for his persistence, and departed sound in soul and body. Nor did she prove faithless in that which she had promised, but paid for the appropriate improvement of the place. In this wise, then, did the blessed Matrona get her monastery in this place and establish her spiritual flock, which through her holy prayers and God’s assistance exists to the present day, practicing asceticism unswervingly in accordance with the rule handed down to her. Taking full ownership, then, of the estate, [p. 807] she left the rented lodging upon the instruction of her superior, the most holy Bassianos (for she undertook nothing without his consent), and moved to the lawful stadium of

93 I.e., the Theodosian land walls, completed in 413. The name Severiana may be due to Severos, one of the patrons of Bassianos. It eventually became attached to a hostel for the elderly, which was still standing in the 10th century. See A. Berger, Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinopoleos (Bonn, 1988), 526.
ascetic practice, along with Eugenia, mentioned earlier in this *Life*, who had assisted her in every good deed from the beginning. Now this was no idle or barren change of residence, but lighting tapers and performing quiet and solemn psalmody she moved to the place which had been granted her. Thus did the blessed one attain the end of the vision in Beirut: becoming a lawful resident of Constantinople as had been made manifest in the revelation, she opened the arena of asceticism [viz. the convent] and provided a glimpse of the bridal chamber of salvation, in which she wedded many a soul unto Christ.

37. She brought with her to this <new> place and house twelve sisters, for another four had been added to the eight. Installed, then, in that place by the will of God, the blessed one shone forth marvelously through her way of life, and her fame increased exceedingly. Her flock grew daily, waxing greater in number: in the love of God it was broadened, though it was straitened in the capacity of space. There was not room enough at the time of prayer, but the fear of God prompted them to treat the straitening as relaxation. Seeing her flock grow and increase in number, the blessed one rejoiced and was glad, and she besought God day and night on its behalf saying, “Thou, Lord, inasmuch as Thou art merciful, hast gathered it together: do Thou also protect it, inasmuch as Thou art holy. Longing for Thee, Master, hath summoned them all, and fear of Thee shall preserve them all. Even as Thou hast provided for their souls, so neglect Thou not their bodies. Thou seest, Lord, the straitening. Thou beholdest the poverty. Thou understandest every thing. Comfort us all, inasmuch as Thou art good and lovest mankind.” So did the blessed Matrona invoke the succor of God in this matter; and God, *Who fulfilleth the will of them that fear Him* nor is slow to hearken unto them, in accordance with His truthful promise, “While thou are yet speaking, I shall say: Behold, I am here,” heard her supplications. To her who sought the kingdom of heaven,

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94 Cf. pp. 20–29, passim.
95 It appears that possession of landed property entailed the right of residence at Constantinople. Provincials were discouraged from remaining in the capital longer than necessary, as shown especially by Justinian’s legislation; cf. *Novellae* 80 and 86 (*CIC* 3:390–97, 419–23).
96 Cf. Ps. 144 (145):19.
97 Is. 58:9.
98 Cf. Ps. 144 (145):19.
in accordance with His word, did He add also all riches and abundance in this world.\textsuperscript{99}

38. Now, on the annual feast of the victorious martyr Lawrence,\textsuperscript{100} when all the city gathered together in his holy house (for his feast is a great one and is celebrated gloriously, fragrant oil from his holy relics being distributed on this day to the honor and glory of his martyrdom)—on this \textless feast\textgreater, then, there were two sisters, pious of manner and noble of birth, who came together with the others to receive a portion of the holy oil. When they had received the blessed bread with all the others, after the completion of the holy mysteries and dismissal of the festal offices, as they went through one of the streets adjoining the monastery, they heard the sound of psalmody coming from the buildings. Struck by the strangeness of the sound (for they knew that place to be an estate, not a monastery), they enquired of those living nearby who it was performing this psalmody. When these latter had told them of the blessed one, relating the events of her life, they got down from their litters and went in to her. Upon seeing that venerable and angelic figure, wondering at the marvelous and strange nature of her attire,\textsuperscript{101} they remained with her for a long time, profiting from her counsels. To such an extent were they edified by her holy words and the sisterhood’s marvelous appearance, that one of them, Athanasia by name, pricked with divine longing, said to her sister, “Go home, my sister, and fare well: for from this moment this holy one is mother, father, and sister to me. For what profit shall I have henceforth from this vain life? Even if I should seem to prosper in some wise or reign as empress, is not all thereafter death? Shall I not become ashes and dust? Shall I not, who am today borne about by servants and eunuchs, soon be committed to the grave and trampled underfoot by them? Does not dishonor succeed to glory, and disease obscure the most celebrated beauty? Go, then, go, I beg you. Go in peace, and allow [p. 808] me to lament my sins.”

39. Saying this the honorable and blessed Athanasia caused her sister

\textsuperscript{99} Cf. Mt. 6:33.

\textsuperscript{100} Celebrated on 10 August. The basilica of St. Lawrence was built by the empress Pulcheria and completed in 453. It stood close to the Golden Horn, near modern Aya-kapi (according to Janin, \textit{EglisesCP}, 303–4) or farther to the northwest, at modern Balat (according to Berger, \textit{Untersuchungen}, 530). It must have been fairly close to Matrona’s nunnery.

\textsuperscript{101} I.e., her male monastic garb.
fright and anxiety, and the latter was compelled to ask her, “Did I not give your husband assurances concerning you? Was it not perhaps because your husband knew beforehand what you intended to do that he tried to prevent you going? What has suddenly come over you? Why do you strive to beset me with temptation? How can I leave without you? If I were to leave, what excuse should I give concerning you? Keep your desire to yourself, and guard your intention in your heart. I do not command that you desist from this good purpose, even if it is very hard and burdensome and difficult of accomplishment; only come with me now: spare me troubles and concerns. Put your house in order: first convince your husband, and abandon not your good goal.” Saying this and more she also besought the blessed Matrona to bid her return home. The blessed one sat with both of them, hearing the words of both: she marveled at the quickness of the change in the one and counted blessed the fervor of her faith, but she accepted the good reason of the other’s exhortation. Seeing what needed to be done, she said to the blessed Athanasia, “Go, child, for the meanwhile back to your house with your sister, and make trial of yourself, but do not reveal your plan to your husband. If this thought abides with you, then may God’s will be done. For longing after God, my child, is like a seed which comes up forthwith but does not forthwith bear fruit. Just as seed thrown upon any land whatsoever will bring forth the blade, but will not in every land come to perfection, even so will the word of God introduce its own warmth in whichever soul it enters, though it will not endure permanently in every soul, but will disappear with time or be stifled by worldly cares or fade through indifference. Wherefore, my child, it is not in the least strange or marvelous if, coming here and receiving a spark of God’s love, you have been possessed forthwith by the desire for asceticism; nor, moreover, do you deserve great approbation. One need not, therefore, be convinced by you now, until you can provide a witness to your character, for you are still young: the flame of bodily desires burns within you, and the flower and beauty of bodily form is upon you. You are adorned with great wealth, you have now taken a husband, you are of a noble lineage, you have acquired much property, your body is delicate and weak, you are served in every wise by handmaidens and attendants. Asceticism, my child, is for one who serves, not one who is served.”

40. Saying these and similar things the blessed Matrona was unable to

102 Cf. Mk. 4:28.
convince her, for her desire for asceticism and love of God prompted Athanasia to resist the teacher and induced her to pledge readiness for everything. The blessed one, then, summoned the deacon Markellos and told him of her. The deacon gave Athanasia many admonitions, and offering a prayer over her he said, “Holy God, Who has given you this thought and warmed your heart, that you might love Him with all your soul, shall Himself fulfill your desire and finish your course.” Thus he persuaded her to leave the monastery. Now, the blessed ones [viz. Matrona and Markellos] had said these things not in opposition to her good intention and zeal, but only to test her purpose, in fear lest being young she should make a false start and be unable to bring it to fulfillment; for she was <but> eighteen years of age. Thus was the blessed Athanasia persuaded to depart with her sister.

41. But not only did she not abandon her goal or diminish in any wise her good desire, rather, she took care for spiritual perfection: she practiced asceticism, accustoming herself to humility through training of the body, praying constantly, and moaning yet more constantly and denouncing her sins. But while the blessed Athanasia was occupied with this most beauteous and goodly exercise and spiritual training, her first and only begotten child died. She did not lament greatly nor grieve in an unseemly manner, as is usual with women who love their children, but wept for it somewhat, so much as to demonstrate the appropriate natural feelings within her, neither suffering nor acting effeminately in any wise. After a few days had passed, she came again to the monastery, bringing with her nothing for her own service: no fragrant wine, no white bread, no [p. 809] fish, no embroidery, no carpet, nor any other of the things to which a noble and wealthy woman is accustomed; but satisfied with their austere way of life, enduring the hardship of <sleeping> upon the bare floor, she contented herself with greens <prepared> without oil and dried figs and made do with the harshness of rush mats instead of the luxury of embroidered bedding. For that holy and honorable and God-loving community of the blessed Matrona was not supplied with the latter, but rather, being rich in godly poverty and being broadened through love, they bore their straitened circumstances and poverty as though they were relaxation and luxury. She spent three days, then, bearing everything gladly and without the slightest pain: she was late neither to the evening nor the morning office; she marked how the sisters gathered together at the hour of the office, how they knelt down, how they rose up; how they began; how they stood singing without distraction; how from the evening until the morning office the blessed Ma-
trona did not recline her body in relaxation, but sitting on a small wooden chair fulfilled her need for sleep, and how after the office and the great toil of standing she returned to the same position; and, moreover, how, as the <other> nuns slept, she would first stretch out her hands in tearful prayer and then wake them at the hour of the office, and would do everything in the same wise as her superior, the most holy Bassianos. Marking all of this, Athanasia returned to her home.

42. Now, using the harvesttime as a pretext—for it was the appropriate season—she had left her husband at home, and having gone out to her estate, she there worthily imitated Terce, Sext, and None and performed all the other offices on the same wise as in the monastery. But then she was informed by her chief stewardess,103 who had charge of all the movable property, that the servant Kallopodios had broken into the back side of the money chest104 and, having stolen a bag of gold, had run off. Hearing this and referring everything to God, the blessed Athanasia returned to her house as quickly as she could. Now, the servant had stolen this gold on the instruction of her husband. For he [the husband] was a squanderer, and not having enough for himself, he found an opportunity, while the honorable and excellent Athanasia was on her estate. He contrived that the stewardess, though unwillingly and contrary to her habit, should go outside the house; and while she, under the constraint of his command, went down to the gate, he ordered the servant to break into the money chest, take in his hands the bag he found in it, and come down <from the house>. Now, as the servant came down the stairs, carrying on his shoulders the <bag of> stolen money bulging out from behind, with his master following him, he met the stewardess; and suspecting what had happened, she stopped the servant and put her hand on the bag he was carrying. Then when the master shouted angrily from behind, she let the servant go; and the latter, descending with him to the gate, gave the money over to the master. The

103 The Greek term is ἡ μείζοντερα, the feminine form of μείζοντερος, μείζον, which is probably an exact equivalent of majordomo; cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, s.v. μεγάς, B. 4. For a parallel usage in 7th-century hagiography, see A.-J. Festugiere, *Vie de Theodore de Sykeon*, 1 (Brussels, 1970), chap. 34.6.

104 Designated as μουζίκιον (variant μουζάκιον), a rare term also used by John Moschos (PG 87.3:2936δ and 3093δ [where μουζίκιον should be emended to μουζίκτιον]). The word was discussed by J. Duffy and G. Vikan ("A Small Box in John Moschus," *GRBS* 24 [1983], 93–99), who were unaware of our text. It can now be said that a μουζίκιον was specifically a strongbox for keeping valuables and that it could be, as here, of some size. It was not a pyxis.
then went up to the estate and reported this crooked business. When the blessed Athanasia had returned from her estate and learned from the stewardess the details of what had happened, she calmly summoned the servant and asked him why he had done this. He told her straightway everything about the matter, and that he had done it at the command of his master. As he was innocent, then, she dismissed the servant; and finding the accusation of theft as a reasonable pretext for separation from her husband, she lived alone, as having repudiated him.

43. Then she summoned the deacon Markellos and, falling at his feet, implored him to send her some of the blessed bread of which the sisters partook. Markellos refused, saying, “You cannot bear such a way of life, for you are delicate and accustomed to eat divers dishes prepared with oil.” But her eunuchs bore witness in her favor saying that, from the time she had gone to her estate, she had not been to the bath, nor put off her silken garment, nor had she slept upon a bed, but had only put down a carpet upon the floor and slept upon it what appeared to be sleep. Nor had she partaken of her usual food, but of that which was light and plain. Then acknowledging her endurance and seeing the persistence of her pious intention, Markellos promised to send her the blessed bread. He went to the blessed Matrona and told her all this about the blessed Athanasia. The blessed Matrona rejoiced to hear of her excellent accomplishments, but still she feared lest she should undergo a change through diabolical assault or worldly circumstances and should slacken and become negligent. Forthwith, then, she rose up with her company of sisters in prayer and supplication on her behalf, nor did she cease thereafter to remember her and to entreat God to strengthen her intention and preserve in her the same good and honorable purpose. From that time on, greens without oil and dried figs were sent to her at the ninth hour. Thus provided for and subsisting on such a diet for a considerable time, it occurred to her that it would be a pious work for her to requite the sisters. Sending a few nomismata to a bakery, she arranged that the blessed Matrona should be

105 Justinianic legislation does not include a husband’s theft of his wife’s property as sufficient grounds for her to divorce him; cf. Novella 117.9 in CIC 3:558–60.

106 Although registered as owner of real estate, Matrona does not appear to have been entitled to a free bread ration, which at Constantinople was attached to the ownership of houses (panes aedium). See J. Durliat, De la ville antique a la ville byzantine (Rome, 1990), 195–211. The reason may have been that her property was a proasteion, i.e., a suburban estate situated outside the Constantinian walls. A ration was worth about three gold pieces (nomismata) a year.
supplied with a few loaves every day, for the sustenance of the sisters. The blessed Matrona, now able to provide her sisters with loaves, thanked God all the more—for she believed Him to be the cause of all good things—and strove that she herself should be found by Him worthy of the bounties granted her. For she believed firmly that the provision of more things becomes a source of more punishments unto those who do not live a life worthy of His commandments.

44. Now, the blessed Matrona prayed for her without ceasing, and Athanasia herself contrived to make her heart worthy of these prayers: she clove unto God all the more, and the longing for asceticism became more urgent within her. She did not cease to opportune her husband daily to release her. Sometimes she would say, “I cannot live with you, who are mean in your intentions and lecherous and are given to unlawful deeds,” and at other times she would promise to give him much money if he would release her with goodwill. For she feared lest, if she left him and went off straightway, she should be liable to the judgment of the Lord that says that Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; for that which is meant of the woman is meant also of the man. Furthermore, if she were to leave him, she would cause no small trouble for the monastery that received her, since he would come in search of her. Therefore she was resolved not to leave him in a heedless manner. Whereupon, admonishing him for a long time with the assent and cooperation of our Lord Jesus Christ, she brought him into concurrence with her good purpose. This done, she removed herself from every matter on all sides: to some of her slaves she granted freedom, providing them with houses and expenses, while exhorting others to a manner and zeal like her own. Then taking herself and all she had she went to the blessed Matrona in the monastery, and laying everything down at her feet after the example of the apostles in the Acts, she entreated her saying, “O servant of Christ and holy mother, behold, you now have me and all that is mine. Consecrate me and all this to God, and administer us with the wisdom you possess. Neglect not my salvation out of consideration for my wealth, but take care and look after me as you would for the poorest of your sisters, for the weight of riches makes even heavier the burden of transgressions.”

45. The blessed Matrona acknowledged her goodwill but rejected the bur-

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107 Mt. 5:32.
den of administration, telling her, “God, Who has called you to this house, my child, and has directed your heart to despise wealth and the world and to serve Him, will be able also to keep you in our midst until your last breath. But as for the property, I beg you, my child, administer it yourself as you know how and as God will show you; or else put it in the hands of one who will be able to serve your noble intention. For I—I confess to you—fear my many sins, lest I should not learn to administer this as might please God, and should add burden to my burden.” But the blessed Athanasia was greatly grieved by this and, beseeching her with many tears to accept the administration of this property, she pleaded her cause with reason and said appropriately, “If you, who have served God for so many years and have done that which pleases Him and have attained boldness before Him through your way of life—if you refuse the administration of the property, how can you commend its administration to me, the most sinful of all persons, who until the present have lived in iniquity, a slave to greed and lawless acts, wherefore my soul’s eye has been blinded?” With such pleading and appropriate speech did she convince the blessed Matrona to take upon herself the guardianship of the property. Forthwith she summoned the deacon Markellos and referred all this through him to the most holy Bassianos. The latter then responded to her thusly: “As you think best, my child, so should you do. The Lord God shall help you in every good deed.”

46. Then the blessed Matrona took over the stewardship with the prayer of the blessed elder [i.e., Bassianos] and, after consultation with the deacon Markellos, she put up a wall around her entire monastery. She also constructed a three-storied building, giving over the first story to a charnel house for deceased sisters, after the fashion of the monastery of the blessed Bassianos, though the lower chamber was rather darker on account of the position of the place. The second story she set apart as a winter chapel, and likewise the third as a summer chapel, both these latter being also after the

109 It was customary in Byzantine monasteries for the bones of monks and nuns to be removed from the cemeteries after a certain period of time, and transferred to ossuaries or charnel houses. The ossuaries were usually located on the lower level of a cemetery church, while the second floor (and in this case third floor as well) housed a chapel where funerary and memorial services were conducted. Cf. Ch. Bouras, Nea Moni on Chios. History and Architecture (Athens, 1982), 191–92 (with illustration); A. Orlandos, Μοναστηρική Αρχιτεκτονική (Athens, 1958), 146–48; G. Millet, Le monastere de Daphni (Paris, 1899), 23–24.
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fashion of the chapels in the monastery of her superior. And by the grace [p. 811] of God these chapels stand to this day, displaying their beauty: they proclaim in perpetuity the intelligence and zeal of the blessed Matrona, and attest to coming generations the offering of the blessed Athanasia. When the monastery had been given the form which it now exhibits, she distributed the remaining money to monasteries round about, employing the honorable Markellos as minister in this ministry. Of the blessed Athanasia’s property, then, did the desert with its luminous solitaries receive a share, as well as Jerusalem and Emesa and Beirut and, in a word, all the East, in order, so I think, that on the day of Resurrection the blessed Athanasia might have witnesses from the ends of the earth to her magnanimous benefaction.

47. Thus did the monastery of the blessed Matrona take on a fitting beauty and become like other monasteries. Thus did the blessed Matrona receive recompense for her many tears and toils, the Lord Jesus Christ having looked favorably upon her labors and struggles. It is for this reason we have included the story of the blessed Athanasia in this account: that we might show how the blessed Matrona often besought many things of God, and God swiftly granted her everything in abundance. Thus did the blessed Athanasia flee the snares of this life: she lived fittingly as a nun, and as a nun she finished her course. Having cleverly deceived her husband she practiced asceticism and brought the work of asceticism to perfection. Thus did she love God and bring love to fulfillment. Thus did she yearn for poverty and at last find the kingdom of heaven. Thus did she scatter insatiate wealth, which draws one down, and love the poverty of the Lord. To finish briefly, let me say that this woman, out of her extraordinary piety, that she might not pronounce with her own mouth the names of abominable gods, declined to read <accounts of> the struggles of the holy and victorious martyrs, though she honored the martyrs above all. For she constantly pressed her face, ears, breast, and all her limbs upon the chests containing their glorious relics, in order to sanctify herself, and clove to them with extraordinary love. There were also seven eunuchs

110 A winter chapel in a monastery not far from Matrona’s is mentioned in the early 7th century in the Life of Theodore of Sykeon, ed. A.-J. Festugiere, Vie de Theodore de Sykeon, I (Brussels, 1970), chap. 135.14. The multistory arrangement described here is attested in Syria, from where it was probably imported.

111 Cf. 2 Tim. 4:7.

112 I.e., the pagan gods to whom the martyrs refused to sacrifice.
and three ladies of the bedchamber who followed her in her purpose: the three latter remained with her as nuns in the monastery, and she sent the eunuchs to male monasteries. For fifteen years she lived under the supervision of the blessed Matrona and became a model of perfect obedience and humility to the sisters with whom she lived and to all mankind as well, and then she departed this life unto the Lord, to join those who have pleased Christ of old.

48. Thereafter, then, did the blessed Matrona, though increased in buildings and expenditure, as has been related, persist in her asceticism, bringing herself closer to God through a diligent way of life and offering Him also many other souls that had been brought to perfection. For the blessed one was a spiritual husbandman and, receiving neglected and barren souls, she tended them with careful and experienced ascetical attention; and when they had become fruitful through good works she offered them to Christ. Nor did she escape the attacks of temptations while she did all this. That mischievous demon, who in Beirut had told her, “Even if I cannot deceive you in your youth, I shall assault you with pernicious temptations in your old age,” did not cease to afflict her. Through visions he frightened her at night, and he made trial of her through incidents by day: striving and contriving in every wise the wretched one gave her not the slightest respite.

49. Now, when the blessed one saw that she had performed through God’s grace the greater part of her feats of asceticism and that most of her life was past and she was now declining downward to earth, soon to pay nature’s debt (for both those who have achieved as well as those who have idled must die, to be requited for their deeds), she desired to behold the repose that awaits the just after their tribulation here. So desiring, she entreated the Lord Christ in her usual way to reveal this unto her. After she had remained seven days in fasting and earnest prayer, when sleep had overcome her, she thought herself in a garden, with green grass and a grove, adorned with many and divers trees. And then she was just inside a splendid house, illuminated by the purest light, and there was a woman in it, and she was clothed in imperial garments and arrayed with all manner of beauty. Then, having approached this woman’s knees, she was sent by her inside yet another house, greater in size and splendor than the first. Once inside this house, she conversed with some other women, marvelous in their attire and appearance; and

113 Κουβικουλάρια; it was quite common for an aristocratic woman to keep female servants to attend her when she entered a convent.
then she awoke. Having seen this vision toward the end of her holy life, and having given her soul assurance of the houses, called by the Lord mansions, in which those who have lived good lives are deemed worthy to dwell, the blessed Matrona strove to make herself worthy of habitation in them. [p. 812]

50. We, who have been deemed worthy to compose this her Life at a later time, relate this vision as the consummation of her achievements. For she was no longer alive when these things were written down, but after she had departed to a better life, it was God's best beloved Eulogia who related these things, being pressed by those who afterwards desired to learn her story. For this blessed Eulogia had practiced asceticism and worked with her from the beginning: some of her achievements she had seen most accurately with her own eyes, and she had heard the blessed one herself tell of others and had made note of them. For the blessed Matrona, seeking to encourage her sisters through her example, often sat with them, counseling them as a loving mother, and told them of the assistance she had from God Who loves mankind: not in order to show off—Heaven forbid!—nor to publish her achievements, but in order to edify and convince them that if one serves God and does what is pleasing unto Him, even though he be persecuted, or attacked, or he be in the desert unbeknownst to anyone, still will he not be abandoned by Him. Thus, then, did the honorable and most blessed Eulogia live with her for many years, and having seen some things, as I have related, and made note of others, she committed them to writing. She related these things, and as many of them as might be revealed at the time were written down, for the tempest which then buffeted those who desired to serve Christ honestly and the upheaval of the most holy churches kept the greater part of her achievements hidden. This partial account, then, of her achievements has given us who come after her the chance to delight in her as if she were still alive, and hereby shall those who come after us be edified through her. Not only to us but also to those hereafter shall the blessed Matrona be shown to be a diligent teacher, no longer seen and heard talking but read about and known, unto the end of time. Thus shall she be a model of salvation unto ages to come for those who wish to be saved. Thus has she proved and shall she hereafter prove many worthy of the kingdom of heaven. Thus having conducted her life did she

115 I.e., because of the pro-Monophysite policy of the emperor Anastasios I, the full story of Matrona’s career could not be published; cf. p. 15 above.
bring enlightenment to many and convert many who had gone astray. Thus in her deeds and teaching did she become an exact copy of her teacher the most holy Bassianos and was proven a flawless mirror of his way of life, having diligently preserved his legacy and passed it on to those who came after her.

51. For that most holy one [Bassianos], who dwells among angels and is a peer of the saints, after he had adorned the desert with his achievements and thwarted the devil’s many wiles, had received his monastic rule from God and had been taught his order of the daily office by an angel. He established many monasteries following his rule throughout the world,¹¹⁶ and he founded two in the Imperial City: a male one, which he himself founded and which by God’s grace stands to the present day, keeping his rule and deriving its name from his, and another one, founded by the most holy Matrona, whose name it bears, which also still exists and preserves the order of the office as he prescribed. For in the same wise that the most holy Matrona, upon renouncing the world, had been deemed worthy to assume the monastic habit from the holy elder, even so did she bestow <the habit> upon the women who came to her. Just as the most holy Bassianos laid his hand upon those whom he received <as monks> only after a long time and much trial, so did the blessed Matrona refuse to bestow the habit upon any woman who came to her unless she had spent time in proving her intention. And again, even as the holy elder had done before the holy altar: when the mysteries were set out and appropriate lessons were read and psalmody performed, those receiving the holy habit, exemplifying the crucifixion of the Lord and confessing through <their assumption of> the habit the rejection of their own will, were first tonsured by him and then girded and finally invested by him with the cloak, with much admonition and instruction, so did the blessed Matrona do before the holy altar when she received those who had come to her, commending them to those who were to take charge of them, and so again did she do when she completed their initiation before the holy altar, after those who had charge of them had testified to their way of life. In short, she did everything after the fashion of her supervisor. And after she had returned from Beirut, and he had ordained her overseer of souls, so to speak, and had given her authority for the laying of hands on others <to receive them>, he did not give her woolen girdles and veils, such as women are accustomed to use, but wide, dark leather

¹¹⁶ The *Synaxarion of Constantinople* (*SynaxCP* 127.8–9) records that Bassianos, a native of the East (probably Syria), had dwelled in many lands.
men's girdles and white men's cloaks, which they wear constantly. Through the benevolence and love of mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ this same order has been followed unto the present day in her monastery, preserved by those who have succeeded her.

52. Thus did the blessed Matrona live a pious and devout life [p. 813] and preserved with diligence the monastic rule bequeathed to her by the most holy Bassianos. Having reached her hundredth year, more or less\(^{117}\) (she had become a monastic at the age of twenty-five, and spent the remainder in asceticism), and having finished well the course of her ascetic struggles\(^ {118}\) and preserved the orthodox faith\(^ {119}\) until the end, she left this life, in healthy old age, on the seventh of November, and went to join her holy fathers and brethren of all ages. As successor and guardian of her flock she left the honorable and most God-loving deaconess Mosilia, who was adorned by her way of life and her wisdom and abounded in humility and love. As spiritual fathers and brothers the most blessed and holy Matrona had—and still has—the most holy Bassianos, her superior, and all those after him who shall keep his \(<\text{rule}>\). By their intercessions may we all be deemed worthy to obtain mercy on the day of judgment, through the grace and love of mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory and power, to the ages of ages. Amen.

\(^{117}\) Probably an exaggeration, although she appears to have lived at least eighty years.

\(^{118}\) Cf. 2 Tim. 4:7.

\(^{119}\) Once again, an allusion to her struggle against Monophysitism.
3. LIFE OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT

translated by Maria Kouli

Introduction

Mary of Egypt, the prostitute from Alexandria who achieved sanctity through repentance and ascetic solitary life, was a holy woman who offered reassurance to every Christian: if such a licentious woman could find forgiveness, surely ordinary sinners could hope for salvation. Her vita provides some information on daily life in Alexandria and Jerusalem, on pilgrimage, on the cult of the True Cross and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and on Palestinian monasticism. Its primary importance lies, however, in its graphic portrayal of the theme of the “repentant harlot,” a type of female saint that found particular favor in the milieu of Syro-Palestine and Egypt in the fourth to seventh centuries.¹

The earliest version of Mary’s story is a brief account in the vita of Kyriakos by the sixth-century hagiographer Cyril of Skythopolis.² Cyril records the tale told him by a certain monk named John who had encountered Mary living as a solitary in a cave in the Judean desert. She, in turn, explained that she had been a singer at the church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem who withdrew to the desert to avoid leading men into sexual temptation. She had subsisted for eighteen years on the jar of water and basket of legumes she had brought with her. When John returned to visit Mary a second time, he found her dead, and buried her in the cave that had served as her hermitage.

A very similar tale is found a half-century or so later in The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschos (b. ca. 540/550, d. 619 or 634). Moschos describes the unnamed woman as a nun from Jerusalem who fled to the desert to avoid

¹ See B. Ward, Harlots of the Desert (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1987), for translations of the vitae of other harlots, Pelagia, Thais, and Mary, the niece of Abraham.
causing temptation to young men, surviving for seventeen years on a basket
of soaked legumes.3

The much longer and more detailed version presented here has trans-
formed Mary into a prostitute with an insatiable sexual appetite, thus render-
ing even more remarkable her subsequent repentance and conversion into an
ascetic holy woman. This vita is generally attributed in the manuscripts to a
contemporary of Moschos, the theologian and writer Sophronios (ca. 560–
638), who served as patriarch of Jerusalem from 634 to 638. Sophronios’ au-
thorship of the work has been debated in the scholarly literature. Both Zo-
naras, a twelfth-century eulogist of Sophronios,4 and H. Delehaye5 viewed the
vita as a genuine work of Sophronios, while F. Delmas cautiously accepted
his authorship; other modern scholars, however, among them F. Halkin and
H.-G. Beck, have doubted the attribution.7 In any case, the work was probably
composed in the seventh century, since in the eighth century it was cited by
John of Damascus and translated into Latin.8

The vita is written in a simple but vivid style, making abundant use of
dialogue to advance the story. A substantial section, perhaps one-third of the
whole, is Mary’s first-person account to Zosimas of her sinful youth, conver-
sion, and flight to the desert. It was no doubt this combination of compelling
subject matter, exotic desert locale (complete with wadis and lions), and acces-
sible language that led to the great popularity of the vita.

Despite the attempts of certain scholars,9 it is impossible to provide a
chronology for the life of Mary, or even to establish her historicity. The vita is
almost totally lacking in fixed chronological reference points, indicating only
Mary’s age at various stages in her life. One must treat with skepticism the

3 PG 87:3049; Eng. trans. J. Wortley, The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschos (Kal-

4 A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ‘Ανάλεκτα Ἰεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταυρολογίας, V (St. Pe-
tersburg, 1898), 149.

5 H. Delehaye, L’Ancienne hagiographie byzantine: les sources, les premiers mo-
deles, la formation des genres [ = SubsHag, 73] (Brussels, 1991), 53.

6 F. Delmas, “Remarques sur la Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne,” EO 4 (1900–
1901), 37.

7 BHG 1042; Beck, Kirche, 435.

8 For John of Damascus, see PG 94:1416–17; for Latin translation, see below, p. 68.

9 E.g., K. Doukakes, Μεγάς Συναξαριστής, IV [April] (Athens, 1892), 5–6.
author's claim that the events he relates occurred in his own time, since Cyril of Skythopolis describes a similar female hermit around the middle of the sixth century. But there were indeed female solitaries in both the Syro-Palestinian and Egyptian deserts, and one of them may well have inspired the edifying tale of Mary of Egypt.

According to the *vita* attributed to Sophronios, Mary left her parents’ home at the age of twelve and went to the cultural and commercial center of Alexandria, where she lived as a prostitute for more than seventeen years. When she was twenty-nine, she decided on the spur of the moment to attach herself to a group of Libyan and Egyptian men who were voyaging to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September), which attracted pilgrims from all over the empire. Mary joined the pilgrims, offering sexual favors to the sailors in return for her passage.

It was at Golgotha in Jerusalem that she underwent a mystical experience that led to her conversion, repentance, and eventual expiation of her sins. After buying three loaves of bread for sustenance, she crossed the river Jordan and settled in the desert. There she lived for forty-seven years without encountering any other human being, until she met Zosimas, a devout monk of a monastery in the vicinity of the river Jordan. A year later, on Maundy Thursday, Zosimas brought her the holy eucharist as he had promised. He then went to meet her a third time in the following year as they had agreed. By then, however, Mary was dead. Zosimas discovered her body in the desert, and buried her with the help of a lion that appeared out of nowhere. The vignette of the lion’s assistance in the burial of the holy woman is only one of many passages suggesting that the composition was strongly influenced by Jerome’s *vita* of Paul the Hermit.

The story of Mary of Egypt was popular in medieval Europe and eastern Mediterranean lands. Confirmation is found in the abundance of manuscripts of the Greek text (the earliest of which dates to the ninth century), and the influence of the *vita* on Eastern Orthodox literature (see, for example, the *Life* of St. Mary of Egypt).

10 *PG* 87:3697b.
12 In the National Library of Athens alone, according to Halkin’s catalogue of the library, twenty-seven Greek manuscripts are preserved. There are thirty-seven manuscripts of the *vita* in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and numerous others in the libraries of Athos, Mt. Sinai, the Vatican, Oxford, and Cambridge.
of Theoktiste of Lesbos, no. 4 in this volume) and hymnography. There is also a strong tradition of Latin translations in the West, particularly in Spain, France, and Italy (e.g., by Paul the Deacon in the eighth century). In addition, versions exist in Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Slavonic. The Orthodox church commemorates Mary of Egypt on 1 April and on the fifth Sunday of Lent, while in the West her feast is usually celebrated on 2 April or sometimes on the third, ninth or tenth of that month.

In Byzantine art the saint is depicted as an androgynous figure, extremely thin with a dark complexion. Her emaciated body is partly covered by a piece of cloth, representing the cloak offered her by Zosimas during their first encounter. Usually her figure is accompanied by that of Zosimas, toward whom she stretches her arms to receive his blessing or the eucharist.

The Greek vita of Mary of Egypt still awaits a proper critical edition. The translation below was prepared from the inadequate edition of the Patrologia Graeca, which is based on two sketchily identified manuscripts, one from Munich (perhaps Monac. gr. 24 of the eleventh century) and another from Paris. The Migne text is occasionally supplemented by better readings from the Athens and Munich manuscripts, as indicated in the notes.

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13 For an English translation of the services for the fifth Sunday in Lent, see Mother Mary and K. Ware, The Lenten Triodion (London, 1977), 447–63. The story of Mary is also read on the Thursday of that week.

14 The most detailed discussion of her iconography in Byzantine art is found in N. K. Moutsopoulos and G. Demetrokalles, Γέρσωτα Ι: Οἱ Εκκλησίαις τοῦ Οἰκουμένου (Thessalonike, 1981), 61–71 and pl. 102 (with full bibliography). See also LCI 7:507–11.

15 I am currently preparing a new edition based on the twenty-seven Athenian manuscripts as a D. Phil. dissertation at the University of London under the direction of Dr. Julian Chrysostomides.
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Secondary Literature
1. “It is good to keep close the secret of a king, but it is honorable to reveal the works of God.”\textsuperscript{16} Such were the words of the angel to Tobit\textsuperscript{17} after the incredible recovery of his sight from blindness, and after he experienced those dangers from which he was saved because of his piety. And just as failing to keep the king’s secret is dangerous and destructive to oneself, similarly keeping silent about the marvelous works of God endangers the soul. Hence, fearful of remaining silent about divine things, and discerning the danger encountered by the servant who after receiving the talent from his master buried it in the earth and hid it, thus making no use of it,\textsuperscript{18} I shall in no way keep silent with regard to the holy tale which has reached me. No one should disbelieve me when I write\textsuperscript{19} what I have heard, either thinking that I am talking altogether about marvels, or being amazed by the extraordinary occurrence. For \textless God\textgreater{} forbid that I should give false account of or tamper with a story that mentions God.

To have mean thoughts unworthy\textsuperscript{20} of the majesty of the incarnate word of God, as well as to disbelieve what has thus been said, does not seem to me sensible. If there are some people who happen to read this account and, allegedly because of their amazement at the extraordinary \textlt;aspects\textrt; of the story, refuse to believe it readily, may the Lord be merciful to them, because they, too, thinking in terms of the weakness of human nature, find it hard to believe extraordinary tales told about human beings.

I now proceed to narrate an event that took place in our own times, and which was told by a holy man, trained since childhood to speak and act in accordance with the divine \textlt;truths\textrt. Nor should this lead into disbelief read-

\textsuperscript{16} Tob. 12:7.

\textsuperscript{17} A Jewish captive in Nineveh known for his piety and good works; his sight was restored after eight years of blindness. His story is told in the apocryphal book of the Old Testament that bears his name.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Mt. 25:25.

\textsuperscript{19} The participle is masculine, thus indicating male authorship.

\textsuperscript{20} Reading ἀναξία for ἀναξία.
ers who assume that such a miracle could not possibly happen in our times. For the grace of the Spirit\textsuperscript{21} \textit{in all ages enters into holy souls and maketh them friends of God and prophets}, as Solomon taught with divine inspiration.\textsuperscript{22} It is now time to begin the holy narration.

2. There was a man \textit{who lived} in the monasteries of Palestine, who was adorned both by his way of life and by his speech and from infancy was brought up in accordance with monastic principles and [col. 3700] customs. Zosimas was the name of this monk. One must not assume that I am talking of the Zosimas who was once accused of being a heretic,\textsuperscript{23} simply because of the name. These two men are totally distinct, and the difference between them is great, even though they both had the same name. This Zosimas then followed the right faith, and from the very beginning lived as a monk in one of the monasteries in Palestine,\textsuperscript{24} pursuing every kind of ascetic practice and entirely mastering self-discipline. For he obeyed every rule handed down \textit{to him} by those who had trained him in such a wrestling arena. He also devised on his own many ways by which he sought to subdue the flesh to the spirit. In this goal he did not fail. For the monk became so famous for his spiritual qualities that many \textit{monks} from the neighboring monasteries, and sometimes even distant ones, often resorted to him to be molded and trained in self-discipline by his teaching. And even though the monk was famous for his ascetic practice, yet he never neglected the study of the Holy Scriptures, whether going to sleep or waking up or holding his handiwork, or partaking of food (if one can give the name of food to what he ate).\textsuperscript{25} He had one ceaseless task, which never ended, namely to sing psalms continuously and always study the Holy Scriptures. Some also say that the monk was often deemed worthy to receive a divine vision through illumination from God. For as the

\textsuperscript{21} Reading τοῦ πνεύματος for τοῦ Πατρός.
\textsuperscript{22} Sap. 7:27.
\textsuperscript{23} Possibly an allusion to the pagan historian Zosimos, count (komex) and advocate of the imperial treasury (\textit{ODB} 3:2231), although the hagiographer could surely distinguish between Christian heretics and pagans. Also in Greek there is a difference in both orthography and accentuation between Ζωσιμᾶς and Ζωσιμός.
\textsuperscript{24} Reading κατὰ Παλαιστίνην for παλαιά, as in Athens 252, fol. 61v.
\textsuperscript{25} Following the variant reading of the Munich manuscript cited in n. 15 of the PG text (cols. 3699–3700), which is also found in two Athens manuscripts (e.g., Athens 252, fol. 61v).
Lord said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Thus those who have cleansed their flesh, and always keep the vigilant eye of their soul alert, see visions of divine illumination, thus gaining a foretaste of the good which awaits them in the future.

3. Zosimas told <us> then that he was given to this monastery when he was still in his mother’s arms, so to speak, and pursued the ascetic discipline in this place until he was fifty-three years old. After that he was disturbed, as he said, by certain thoughts, namely, that he had become perfect in all <practices> and did not need anyone else’s teaching at all. For, as he said, he thought to himself, “Is there a monk on earth who can teach me anything new, or who has the power to help me in any form of ascetic discipline that I do not know or have never practiced? Is there any man among those leading a contemplative life in the desert who surpasses me in ascetic practice or spiritual contemplation?”

As the monk was mulling over these thoughts, someone approached him and said to him, “Zosimas, you have exerted yourself well and as much as is possible for a human being, and you have traversed successfully the ascetic path. But there is no man on earth who has achieved perfection. In fact, the future struggle will be greater than that of the past, even though you are not aware of this. In order for you to learn how many other ways lead to salvation, Go forth out of thy land and out of thy kindred and out of the house of thy father, as did Abraham the venerable among patriarchs, and go to that monastery which is situated near the river Jordan.”

4. Obeying this command, at once the monk left the monastery where he had followed the monastic life since childhood. When he reached the Jordan, the most holy of rivers, he was led by the one who had ordered him to go to that monastery, where God had commanded him to be. [col. 3701] After knocking on the gate with his fist, he first met the monk guarding the gate, who announced him to the father superior. The father superior received him, observing his <monastic> habit and his pious character, while Zosimas made the obeisance customary for monks and received his blessing. Then the father

26 Mt. 5:8. I have inserted this verse (which is not in the PG edition), following Athens 252, fol. 62r, because a quotation from the Gospels has evidently fallen out here.

27 Reading μητρικῶν for πατρικῶν.

28 Gen. 12:1.

29 A certain John; cf. Chap. 32.
superior asked him, “From where do you come, brother? And for what reason have you come to us humble monks?” Zosimas answered, “It is not necessary for me to state from where I come, but I have come for my own benefit, Father, because I have heard glorious and commendable things about you, capable of bringing the soul near to Christ, our God.” Then the father superior said to him, “It is God, my brother, the only one Who can heal human weakness, Who will teach both you and us the divine will, and guide us to do what is proper. For no man can benefit another, unless each one constantly turns his mind within, and exercising self-control performs his duty, having secured God as his helper. But because the love of God, as you say, moved you to visit us humble monks, stay with us, if indeed you came for this reason, and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the Good Shepherd will feed all of us, He Who gave His life as a ransom on our behalf, and He Who calleth His own sheep by name.” When the father superior said this, Zosimas made obeisance once more, asked for his blessing and, after saying “Amen,” remained in that monastery.

5. <There> he met monks who distinguished themselves both in the practice of ascetic life and spiritual contemplation, and who showed a fervent spirit in the service of the Lord. Indeed, they continually chanted psalms during all-night vigils, and always had handiwork in their hands, and psalms on their lips. For they did not indulge in idle talk and were not preoccupied with cares for material things. They did not even know the names of the revenues that were assessed and collected on a yearly basis, or the cares pertaining to the hardships of daily life. But they all eagerly pursued their one and only primary goal, namely, that each one of them mortify his body, since they had died once and for all as far as the world and worldly things were concerned, and they did not exist among the living. They received the God-inspired sayings [i.e., the Holy Scriptures] as their inexhaustible food, while they nourished their body with only the utmost necessities, that is, bread and water, depending on the extent of the fervor of each monk toward divine love. When Zosimas saw these struggles, as he said, he was greatly edified, striving for progress and constantly intensifying his course of monastic life, since he had found fellow travelers who were admirably re-creating the divine paradise.

30 Jn. 10:11, 14.
31 Cf. Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45.
32 Cf. Jn. 10:3.
6. After many days had passed, the time came when Christians traditionally observe holy Lent, so that they may purify themselves in advance so as to venerate the divine Passion and Resurrection of Christ. Normally the gate of the monastery was never opened but remained always shut, providing in this way the opportunity for the monks to pursue their ascetic life undisturbed. In fact, it was not permitted for the gate to be opened for a monk, except in case of necessity. For the site of the monastery was in the desert and it was not only inaccessible, but also unknown to the majority of the neighboring monks. The following rule was observed in the monastery from the very beginning, on account of which rule, I think, God led Zosimas to that particular monastery. I shall now describe this rule and how it was observed. On the Sunday which customarily gives its name to the first week of Lent, the divine liturgy was performed as usual, with each monk participating in the undefiled and life-giving sacraments; and, according to custom, they partook of a small portion of food. Afterwards they all gathered in the chapel and, after long prayers and many genuflections, the monks kissed each other and each one embraced the father superior. Then they made obeisance and asked for his blessing, so that they would have it with them as an experienced fellow combatant in their forthcoming spiritual struggle.

7. After these proceedings, the gate of the monastery was opened and all the monks came out singing in unison, “The Lord is my light and my Savior, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?,“ and the rest of the psalm. Often they left one or two monks behind to guard the monastery, not to guard what was stored inside (for there was nothing that could be taken away easily by thieves), but so that the chapel might not be left without ministry. Each monk provided his own food, as much as he could or wished. One carried bread with him in proportion to the need of his body, another dried figs, another dates, another legumes soaked in water, while another carried nothing at all, apart from his own body and the ragged habit he wore, and whenever he was hungry he fed himself with plants that grew in the desert. Moreover, there was a rule that each monk observed as an inviolable law: not to be concerned with the way that the other monks practiced self-restraint or conducted themselves. As soon as they crossed the river Jordan, they separated and moved far away from each other and made

33 Ps. 26 (27):1.
the desert their city.34 No <monk> approached another; but if one of them saw another <monk> coming from afar toward him, he immediately turned away from his intended direction and went to another place. Indeed <each monk> lived for himself and for God, chanting psalms continually throughout the day and <occasionally> tasting some uncooked food.35

8. Having spent all of Lent in this way, they would return to the monastery on the Sunday before our Savior’s life-giving Resurrection from the dead, which the Church traditionally celebrates with palms as a preparatory feast.36 Each monk returned <to the monastery>, having as the fruits of his own purpose his own conscience, which knew how he had labored and with what toil he had sown the seeds <of his spiritual struggles>. No <monk> asked another anything whatsoever about how or in what way he had exerted himself in his struggle. This was the rule of the monastery and in this way it was well fulfilled. For when each of them is in the desert, he struggles by himself under the supervision of God, the Judge of the contest, so that he may free himself from the desire to please men or to practice self-restraint in order to show off <to others>. For those actions undertaken for the sake of men and performed in order to please them, not only do not benefit the one who does them, but are an additional cause of much harm to him.

9. So Zosimas, following the customary rule of the monastery, crossed the Jordan, taking with him a few provisions for his bodily needs and the ragged garment that he wore. Indeed, he followed the rule as he walked through the desert, making time for food whenever he felt hungry, and at night he rested by lying down on the ground for a while, to get some sleep wherever dusk overtook him. He began to walk again very early at dawn, never relaxing the pace of his movement. For, as he told <us>, he wished to go to the inner-

34 Reading πολιν for πολλήν. This phrase is derived from a passage in the vita of Antony the Great by Athanasios of Alexandria (328–373); cf. PG 26:865b (chap. 14).

35 This custom of the monks of Palestine was introduced in the early 5th century by Euthymios the Great. On 14 January, after the celebration of Epiphany, the monks would withdraw to the innermost desert of Palestine, according to the example of Christ, to prepare themselves, through fasting and praying, for Easter. A few decades later, St. Sabas moved the date of retreat to after the celebration of the memory of saints Antony and Euthymios (17 and 20 January, respectively), and later it was placed before the first week of Lent. Cf. Y. Hirschfeld, The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 214–16 and nn. 5–7.

36 Palm Sunday, which is considered a preparatory feast for Passion Week.
most part of the desert, hoping to find a <holy> father dwelling there, who could help him <to find> what he longed for. He continued his journey rapidly as if he were hastening to reach some renowned and famous <monastic> abode. When he had journeyed for twenty days, at the sixth hour of the day\footnote{Around midday.} he stopped walking for a short while and, turning toward the east, offered his usual prayers. He used to interrupt his journey at regular intervals during the day so that he could rest for a short while from his exertions, chant psalms, standing and kneeling, and pray in this way. [col. 3705]

10. While he was chanting psalms and looking up to heaven with an alert eye, he saw the shadowy illusion of a human body appear to the right of where he was standing and performing the prayers of the sixth hour. At first he was alarmed, suspecting that he was seeing a demonic phantom, and he shivered with fear. But after he had made the sign of the cross and shaken off his fear (for his prayer had ended), he looked again and saw that in fact someone was walking in a southward direction. What he saw was a naked figure whose body was black, as if tanned by the scorching of the sun. It had on its head hair \textit{white as wool},\footnote{Cf. Rev. 1:14.} and even this was sparse as it did not reach below the neck of its body. When Zosimas saw this, he was inspired with pleasure and, filled with joy at that incredible sight, began to run in the direction that this creature he saw was heading. He rejoiced \textit{with joy unspeakable},\footnote{Cf. 1 Pet. 1:8.} for all those days <of his desert sojourn> he had never seen the shape or shadow of any kind of human being or of any animal, be it winged or terrestrial. So he sought to find out who this creature was and of what sort, hoping that he would become the observer or witness of some great marvel.

11. But as soon as <that creature> saw Zosimas coming from afar, it began to flee and run toward the innermost part of the desert. And Zosimas, as if unmindful of his old age and with no thought for his fatigue from his journey, hastened and exerted himself to overtake <the creature> that was running away from him. Thus he was pursuing, while the creature was being pursued. But Zosimas’ pace was quicker, and little by little he drew nearer to the fleeing <figure>. When he had approached close enough that his voice could be heard, Zosimas started calling out these words tearfully, “Why are you running away from this old and sinful man? O servant of the true God, wait
up for me whoever you are, in the name of God, for Whose sake you dwell in this desert. Wait for me, weak and unworthy <as I am>, for the sake of the hope that you expect as a reward for these toils of yours. Stop and give to an old man your blessing and benediction, for God never abhors anyone.”40 Zosimas said this with tears in his eyes, while both were running toward a place where a dry streambed had left its traces.41 I do not think that a torrent ever existed there (for how could a torrent appear in that land?), but the place happened to have such a setting.

12. When they reached the aforementioned place, the fleeing creature descended <into the streambed> and climbed up again on the other bank, while Zosimas, who was exhausted and unable to run <any further>, stood on the opposite bank of the apparent streambed, and shed tears upon tears and <uttered> lamentation upon lamentation, so that his wailing could be heard by anyone in his vicinity. Then that fleeing creature cried out, “Father Zosimas, forgive me in the name of the Lord; I cannot turn toward you and be seen by you face to face, for as you see I am a woman and I am naked, and I am ashamed to have my body uncovered. But if you are really willing to grant one favor to a sinful woman, throw me the garment that you are wearing, so that with it I may cover my feminine weakness and turn toward you and receive your blessing.” Shivering fear and astonishment overwhelmed Zosimas, as he told <us>, when he heard her calling him “Zosimas” by name; for as the man was sharp in mind and most wise in divine matters, he decided that [col. 3708] she could not have called by name a man whom she had never seen or heard about, unless she was clearly blessed with the gift of foresight.

13. So he quickly did her bidding and, removing the old and torn cloak which he was wearing, threw it to her while he stood with eyes averted. She took it and covered certain parts of her body that ought to be covered more than others. Then she turned to Zosimas and said to him, “Why, Father Zosimas, did you decide to look at a sinful woman? What did you wish to learn from me or see, so that you did not hesitate to put yourself to such trouble?” <Zosimas> knelt on the ground and asked to receive her blessing, according to the custom, while she insisted on doing obeisance to him. Both remained on the ground, each one asking the blessing of the other. No other word could

40 Cf. Sap. 11:24.
41 He is no doubt describing a wadi, the dry channel of a watercourse, such as are common in the deserts of the Middle East.
be heard from either of them, except “Give me <your> blessing.” After a long time had passed, the woman said to Zosimas: “Father Zosimas, it is fitting for you to give a blessing and prayer, for you have been honored with the rank of priest and you have served at the holy altar for many years\(^{42}\) and have often performed <the sacrament of> the holy gifts <of eucharist>.” Those words cast Zosimas into greater fear and anxiety, and the monk became terrified and bathed in sweat, sighed, and was unable to speak clearly. He said to her with gasping and rapid breath, “It is clear from your appearance, O spiritual mother, that you have long ago departed toward God, and have in great part mortified yourself to the world. Also apparent to me is the grace that has been granted to you <by God>, from the fact that you called me by name and addressed me as priest, although you have never seen me before. But since grace is manifested not by official rank, but is usually indicated by spiritual attitudes, you should bless me for the sake of the Lord and pray for one who needs your help.”

14. Finally, yielding to the monk’s persistence, the woman said, “Blessed be God, Who is concerned for the salvation of men and their souls.” Then Zosimas said “Amen,” and they both arose from their kneeling position. The woman said to the monk, “Why did you come to see a sinful woman? Why did you wish to see a woman who is deprived of every virtue? But since the grace of the Holy Spirit surely guided you <to me> that you might render a service appropriate to my <old> age, tell me, how do the Christian people fare these days? How fare the kings? How are the affairs of the Church managed?” Zosimas said to her, “Briefly, <revered> mother, thanks to your holy prayers, Christ has granted stable peace to all. Yet accept the unworthy request of an old man, and pray for the whole world and for me the sinner, so that my sojourn in this desert may not prove fruitless.” She answered him, “It is you, Father Zosimas, who hold the office of priest, as I have said, who ought to pray for me and for everyone. For you were appointed to do this. However, since we are commanded to be obedient, I shall willingly do your bidding.”

15. After she spoke those words, she turned toward the east and, raising her eyes on high and stretching out her hands, started to pray in a soft whisper. Her voice was not heard to utter articulate sounds, and for this reason Zosimas was unable to take note of the words of the prayer. He remained standing,

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\(^{42}\) Note that the hagiographer does not inform his readers that Zosimas is a priest until this episode, when it is necessary for him to be an ordained priest to offer the eucharist to Mary.
as he told <us>, trembling from fear, and bowed down toward the ground without uttering a single word. He swore <to us>, calling upon God as the witness of his words, that when he saw that she was prolonging her prayers, he raised his head up a bit from the ground and saw her elevated about one cubit above the earth, hanging in the air and praying in this way. When he saw this, he was even more terrified and in great torment, not daring to utter a word, except to repeat to himself for a long time, “Lord, have mercy.” While he was lying on the ground, [col. 3709] the monk was tormented by the thought that perhaps she was a demonic spirit who was <only> pretending to pray. But the woman turned toward him, and raised up the monk, saying, “Why, O father, do these thoughts about me disturb and torment you, that I am a demonic spirit and that I pretend to pray? Be assured, my good man, that I am a sinful woman, but I am protected by holy baptism. I am not a spirit, but altogether earth and ashes[43] and flesh,” meaning that she was in no way a spirit. While she was speaking, she made the sign of the cross on her forehead, eyes, lips, and breast, saying thus, “Let God lead us away from the devil and his snares, Father Zosimas, for his power against us is great.”

16. When the monk heard those words and saw those gestures [i.e., the sign of the cross], he threw himself on the ground and clasped her feet, saying tearfully, “I implore you in the name of Christ our God, Who was born of the Virgin, for Whose sake you wear this nakedness, for Whose sake you have worn out this flesh of yours in this way, do not conceal anything from your servant, who you are and where you came from and when and in what way you came to dwell in this desert. Do not conceal from me any detail of your life, but tell me everything so that you may make manifest the wonders of God. For, as it has been written, Wisdom that is hid and treasure that is hoarded up, what profit is in them both?[44] Tell me everything in the name of the Lord, for you shall speak not to boast or show off, but to give assurance to me, a sinful and unworthy man. For I believe that God, in Whom you live and serve, led me into this desert for this reason, so that the Lord might make your life manifest. For it is not in our power to oppose God’s judgments. Indeed, if it were not pleasing to Christ, our God, that you and your struggles become known, He would not have permitted anyone to lay eyes on you, nor would He have given the strength to accomplish such a long journey to me who never intended to or was able to leave my cell.”

43 Gen. 18:27; cf. Sir. 17:32.
44 Sir. 20:30.
17. When Father Zosimas said these words and many more, the woman raised him up and said to him, “I am ashamed, my father, to describe for you my shameful actions. Forgive me in the name of the Lord. But since you have seen my bare body, I shall lay bare to you also my deeds, so that you may know with what great shame and humiliation my soul is filled. For <the reason> I did not wish to describe my life <was> not because I did not want to boast, as you suspected. For how could I possibly boast, since I had become the instrument of the devil? And I know that when I start telling you the story of my life, you will avoid me, as one avoids a snake, for you could not bear to hear the outrageous things that I have done. However, I shall speak without concealing anything. But before I do so, I ask you to swear that you will not stop praying for me that I may find mercy in the hour of judgment.” So, while the monk shed copious tears, the woman started the narration of her life with the following words:

18. “My homeland, <dear> brother, was Egypt. When my parents were still alive and I was twelve years old, I rejected my love for them and went to Alexandria. I am ashamed to think about how I first destroyed my own virginity, and how I then threw myself entirely and insatiably into the lust of sexual intercourse. But now <I feel> it is more decent for me to speak openly what I shall briefly describe, so that you may become aware of my lust and love of pleasure. For more than seventeen years—please forgive me—I was a public temptation to licentiousness, not for payment, I swear, since I did not accept anything although men often wished to pay me. I simply contrived this so that I could seduce many more men, thus turning my lust into a free gift. You should not think that I did not accept payment because I was rich, for I lived by begging [col. 3712] and often by spinning coarse flax fibers. The truth is that I had an insatiable passion and uncontrollable lust to wallow in filth. This was and was considered to be my life, to insult nature <with my lust>.

19. “So, while I was living in this way, one summer day I saw a huge crowd of Libyan and Egyptian men running toward the sea. I asked someone who happened to be next to me, ‘Where are these men running?,’ and he answered, ‘Everybody is going to Jerusalem for <the feast of> the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,45 which as usual takes place in a few days.’ Then I said to him, ‘Would they take me with them, if I wanted to go along?’ He replied, ‘If you

45 Also called the Elevation of the Cross, a feast celebrated on 14 September in commemoration of the empress Helena’s discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem; see ODB 1:551.
I have the money for your passage and expenses, no one will prevent you.' Then I said to him, 'In fact, my brother, I have no money for passage or expenses. But I shall go and get on one of the boats they have hired, and they shall feed me whether they wish it or not, for they will accept my body in lieu of the passage money.' I wanted to go away with them for this reason—forgive me, my father—so that I could have many lovers, ready to satisfy my lust. I warned you, Father Zosimas, do not force me to describe to you my disgrace. For Lord knows how I shudder to defile both you and the air with my words.”

20. Then Zosimas, while drenching the ground with his tears, answered her, “Speak, my mother, in the name of the Lord, speak and do not interrupt the flow of such a beneficial narration.” Then, resuming her tale, she added the following: “So, when that young man heard those shameful words, he went away laughing. As for me, I threw away the distaff I was holding—for it happened that I had it in my hands at the time—and ran toward the sea, where I saw the other people running. And I saw some young men standing at the seashore, about ten or more, vigorous in their bodies as well as in their movements, who seemed to me fit for what I sought (they were apparently awaiting their fellow passengers, while others had already embarked on the ships). I rushed shamelessly into their midst, as was my habit. ‘Take me where you are going,’ I said, ‘Surely you will not find me useless.’ Then, uttering other even more obscene words, I made everyone laugh, while they, seeing my penchant for shamelessness, took me and brought me to the boat they had prepared for the voyage. In the meantime, the men they were waiting for arrived, and we sailed from there.

21. “How can I possibly describe to you what followed, my dear man? What tongue can declare, or what ears can bear to hear what happened on the boat and during the journey and the acts into which I forced those wretched men against their will? There is no kind of licentiousness, speakable or unspeakable, that I did not teach those miserable men. I am truly surprised, my father, how the sea endured my profligacy, and how the earth did not open its mouth to draw me alive down to Hades, as one who had ensnared so many souls! But, as it seemed, God sought my repentance, for He desires not the death of the sinner, but remains patient waiting for his conversion. In this way, therefore, and in such a haste we reached Jerusalem.

46 Reading ἄνεμενος for ἄνεβαίνων, as in Athens 252, fol. 64, and Athens 273, fol. 182r; cf. εἰμενος at end of Chap. 20.

47 Cf. Ezek. 33:11.
And during the days that I stayed in the city before the feast, I engaged in the same practices or even worse. For I was not contented with the young men who were at my service at sea and on the road, but I also corrupted many other men, both citizens and foreigners, whom I picked up for this purpose.

22. “When the holy feast of the Exaltation of the Cross came, I was wandering around hunting after the souls of young men, as I did before. At early dawn I saw [col. 3713] everybody hurrying to the church and I went, running along with those who were running. So, I came with them to the courtyard of the church. When the time came for the divine Exaltation of the Cross, I tried to join the crowd and force my way to the entrance, pushing forward but being pushed back. Eventually, with great trouble and grief—wretched woman—I approached the door through which one entered the church where the life-giving cross was displayed. But as soon as I stepped on the threshold of the door, all the other people entered unhindered, while some kind of divine power held me back, not allowing me to pass through the entrance of the church. Once more I was pushed back and forth, finding myself again standing alone in the courtyard. I assumed that this was happening because of my womanly weakness. So I mingled with other people and pushed with all possible strength, shoving with my elbows and forcing myself inside. But I tried in vain, because again, from the moment my wretched foot stepped on the threshold, though the church received the others without any obstacle, it refused entrance to me alone, miserable woman; and just as if a large company of soldiers were arrayed for this purpose, with orders to prevent my entering, so did some kind of overwhelming power hold me back and once more I was standing in the courtyard.

23. “After this happened three or four times, I became fatigued and no longer had the strength to push and be pushed back, for my body was exhausted as a result of my violent effort. So, I gave up and went back and stood at the corner of the courtyard of the church. Only then did I realize the cause which prevented me from laying eyes on the life-giving cross, for a salvific word touched the eyes of my heart, showing me that it was the filth of my actions that was barring the entrance to me. Then I began to cry, lamenting and beating my breast, raising sighs from the depths of my heart. As I was crying, I saw the icon of the all-holy Mother of God standing above the place

48 This must be the church of Constantine on Golgotha where the wood of the cross was housed; cf. Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrims, 175.
where I stood. I looked straight at Her and said, ‘Virgin Lady, Thou Who
didst give flesh to God the Word by birth, I know, I know well that it is neither
decent, nor reasonable for me who is so filthy and utterly prodigal, to look
upon Thy icon, Thou the ever-virginal, the chaste, Thou Who art pure and
undefiled in body and soul. For it is right that I, the prodigal woman, should
be hated and abhorred by Thou Who art pure. But since, as I heard, God to
Whom Thou gavest birth became man for this reason, in order to summon
sinners to repentance, help me, a lone woman who has no one to help her.
Command that I, too, may be allowed to enter the church. Do not deprive me
of seeing the cross on which God, to Whom Thou gavest birth, was crucified in the flesh and offered His own blood as a ransom for my
sake. Command, my Lady, that the door may be opened also to me, that I
may venerate the divine cross; and I name Thee before God, Who was born
from Thee, as a worthy guarantor, that I shall no longer insult this flesh by
any shameful intercourse whatsoever, but from the moment I look upon the
wood of Thy Son’s cross, I shall immediately renounce the world and all
worldly things, and I shall go wherever Thou shalt instruct and guide me, as
the guarantor of my salvation.’

24. “As soon as I spoke these words I received the fire of faith just like
some kind of assurance, and being encouraged by the compassion of the
Mother of God, I moved from that place where I stood praying, and returned
and joined those people who were entering the church. No longer did any-
one push me this way and that, nor did anyone prevent me from approaching
the door through which they entered the church. Indeed, I was filled with a
shivering fear and astonishment, shaking and trembling all over. Then I
reached the door that until then had been barred to me, as if all the force that
previously held me back was now preparing the way for my entrance. In this
way I entered the church without any effort. Thus I found myself inside the
Holy of Holies, and I was deemed worthy to see the life-giving cross, and
saw the mysteries of God and knew that He is always ready to accept our
repentance. [col. 3716] I threw myself to the ground—wretched woman that

49 The icon of the Virgin was displayed “on a raised place” in the courtyard before
the church of Constantine; it is mentioned, for example, by the Piacenza Pilgrim (ca.
570) and by Epiphanius the Monk (8th century). Epiphanius states explicitly that he
saw “on the left side of Saint Constantine . . . the icon of the very holy Theotokos, who
forbade Saint Mary to enter the church on the day of the Exaltation.” Cf. Wilkinson,
Jerusalem Pilgrims, 83, 117, 177.
I was—and after I kissed that holy ground, I rushed out eagerly to Her [the Virgin], Who had stood as guarantor for me. So I came to that place where the bond of guarantee was signed and, kneeling in front of the ever-virgin Mother of God, I said the following words:

25. ‘O my Lady, Thou Who lovest goodness hast shown me Thy love for mankind, for Thou didst not abhor the prayers of an unworthy woman. I saw the glory which we prodigal people rightly cannot see. Glory be to God, Who accepts through Thee the repentance of sinners. (For what else could I, a sinful woman, think or utter?) It is now time, my Lady, to fulfill what was agreed in Thy act of guarantee. Guide me now wherever Thou dost command. Be the teacher of my salvation and guide me toward the path which leads to repentance.’ While I was saying these words, I heard someone crying aloud from afar, ‘If you cross the Jordan, you shall find a fine place of repose.’ When I heard this voice, believing that it was addressing me, I tearfully shouted and called out to the Mother of God, ‘Lady, Lady, do not abandon me.’ Having cried out these words, I came out of the courtyard of the church and hurried away.

26. ‘As I was leaving, someone who had seen me gave me three copper coins,’ saying, ‘Accept these, my revered mother.’ I took those coins that were given to me and I spent them to buy three loaves of bread that I took with me as a provision of blessing. I asked the man who sold me the bread, ‘Which is the way and direction, my good man, which leads to the Jordan?’ When I learned which gate of the city leads out to that place, I passed through it at a run and began my journey filled with tears. Then I asked again and again, and went on walking for the rest of the day—I think it had been the third hour of the day when I saw the holy cross—and around sunset I arrived at the church of John the Baptist, which was very near the Jordan. After I prayed in the church, I immediately walked down to

50 Literally, “folleis.” In the 6th and 7th centuries, the term *follis* referred to a large copper coin marked with a capital M (for 40 *nummi*); in the 540s it was worth 1/180th of a gold *solidus*; cf. P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, II (Washington, D. C., 1968), 8–9, 22–32.

51 The church, built by the emperor Anastasios I (491–518), was located approximately 8 km north of the Dead Sea (and about 30 km from Jerusalem), at the traditional site of Christ’s baptism by John the Baptist; cf. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 16–17, and Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 162–63.
the Jordan and washed my face and hands with its holy water. Then I partook of the undefiled and life-giving sacraments in the church of the Precursor [i.e., John the Baptist], ate half a loaf of bread, drank water from the Jordan, and spent the night lying on the ground. The next day I found a small boat there and crossed <the river> to the opposite bank. Once more, I asked my guide [i.e., the Virgin] to lead me wherever She pleased. So I came to this desert, and since then to this day I have fled afar off and lodged in this <wilderness>, waiting for my God Who delivers those who return to Him from distress of spirit and tempest.”

27. Then Zosimas said to her, “How many years have passed, my lady, since you have lodged in this wilderness?” The woman answered, “Forty-seven years have passed, I think, since I came out from the Holy City [Jerusalem].” Zosimas said, “And what did you find or have for food, my lady?” The woman said, “I crossed the Jordan carrying two and a half loaves of bread, which little by little dried up and became hard as rock. In this way, I survived for years eating those <loaves> in small portions.” Then Zosimas asked, “And did you live in this way for so many years without distress and without being disturbed by the sudden change in your way of life?” The woman answered, “Now you ask me something, Father Zosimas, which I shudder even to speak about. For, if I recall now all those dangers I suffered patiently and those thoughts which terribly disturbed me, I am afraid they might strike me again.” Then Zosimas said, “Do not hold back, my lady, anything that you might tell me. Indeed I have asked you before to tell me everything without any omission.”

28. She said to him, “Believe me, revered father, for seventeen years I wandered in this desert [col. 3717] struggling with those irrational desires, as if with wild beasts. Whenever I tried to take some food, I yearned for meat and fish that abound in Egypt. I longed to drink wine, which was <constantly> in my thoughts, for I used to drink a lot of wine when I was living in the world. But since I did not have even water to drink here, I was burning with terrible <thirst> and could not endure its deprivation. Also an irrational desire for lascivious songs entered my mind, always disturbing me profoundly and trying

52 Cf. Ps. 54 (55):7–8.
53 Cf. Ps. 54 (55):7.
54 Thus Mary must have been seventy-six years old, as she was twenty-nine when she left Alexandria for Jerusalem.
to seduce me into singing the demonic songs that I have learned. But immediately I would shed tears and beat my breast with my hand, and remind myself of the agreement I made when I came out to the desert. In my mind I would stand in front of the icon of the Mother of God, my guarantor, and I would weep before Her, asking Her to chase away those thoughts that assailed my miserable soul in this way. When I had shed enough tears and had beaten my breast as hard as I could, I used to see light shining everywhere around me. From that moment on, after that storm, I would feel constant tranquility deep inside me.

29. “How can I describe to you, revered father, those thoughts that were urging me again to fornication? Indeed, deep in my miserable heart a burning desire was kindled and set my whole <being> aflame and excited my desire for intercourse. Whenever such a thought came to my mind, I would at once throw myself to the ground and let my tears fall on the earth, imagining that She Who had acted as guarantor for me was present as my protector, and that since I was disobeying Her She was <rightly> inflicting punishment on me because of my trespasses. So I did not raise my eyes, but kept them cast down on the ground, even if it happened that I had to spend the whole day and night there, until that sweet light shone around me chasing away those thoughts that disturbed me. Therefore, I constantly raised the eyes of my mind toward my guarantor, seeking Her help for one who was in danger <of drowning> in the sea of the desert. And indeed She always helped and assisted me in my repentance. In this way seventeen years passed by, during which I encountered countless dangers. But from that day until now my helper [i.e., the Virgin] has stood by me and guided me through all <hardships>.”

30. Then Zosimas said to her, “Did you not need any food or clothes?” She answered him, “After I consumed those loaves of bread, as I said before, during those seventeen years, I <then> fed myself with wild plants and whatever else can be found in the desert. As for the cloak I wore when I crossed the Jordan, it was torn to pieces and wore out long ago. I have endured cold and again the flames of summer, scorching in the burning heat and freezing and shivering in the frost, so that many times I collapsed to the ground and remained there scarcely breathing or moving. The fact is that I have struggled

55 It is probably no coincidence that Mary continued to be assailed by temptations during her first seventeen years in the desert, for this is exactly the length of time she lived in sin in Alexandria.
against many and various calamities and unbearable temptations. But from
that day until now the power of God has preserved my sinful soul and humble
body in many ways. For in only thinking of those evils from which He rescued
me, I receive as inexhaustible food the hope of my salvation, for I feed and
cover myself with the word of God Who governs the universe. For *man shall
not live by bread alone*, and *because they had no shelter*, those who have re-
moved the covering of sin have *embraced the rock.*”

31. When Zosimas heard her citing verses of Scripture, from Moses, Job,
and the Book of Psalms, he asked her, “Have you read the Psalms or other
books, my lady?” When she heard this, she smiled gently and said to the monk,
“Believe me, my good man, I have not seen another man since I crossed the
Jordan, except your own face today, nor have I seen any beast [col. 3720] or
any other animal since I saw this desert. So I have never learned to read, nor
have I heard anyone chant psalms or read <sacred> texts. Yet the word of God
which is living and powerful teaches man knowledge. This is the end of my
story. But as I did when I first started my story, I shall now ask you once again
to swear in the name of the incarnate Word of God that you will pray to the
Lord for me, the prodigal woman.” When she completed her narration with
these words, the monk rushed to make obeisance, crying aloud again in tears,
“Blessed be God Who doth great and wondrous things, glorious things also and
marvelous, of which there is no number. Blessed be God Who showed me all
those <wonders>, which He grants to those who fear Him. For truly, *Lord,
Thou hast not failed them that diligently seek Thee.*”

32. But she grasped hold of the monk and did not allow him to complete
his obeisance, saying to him, “I want you to swear to me, my good man, in
the name of the Savior Christ our God that you will not tell anyone all these
things you have heard, until God releases me from this world. In the meantime
go in peace, and you shall see me again and I shall see you again next year,
protected by the grace of God. But in the name of the Lord, do what I now
bid you. During next year’s holy Lent, do not cross the Jordan as you are
accustomed to do at the monastery.” Zosimas was astonished when he heard

56 Deut. 8:3; Mt. 4:4.
57 Job 24:8.
58 Heb. 4:12.
60 Ps. 9:10.
her reciting the rule of the monastery, and he said nothing else but, “Glory to God Who grants gifts to those who love Him.” Then she said, “Revered father, stay in the monastery, as I said, for if you wish to go out, nothing good will happen to you. On the holy night of the Last Supper take for my sake the life-giving body and blood of Christ and put it into a sacred vessel, worthy of such great mysteries, bring it with you, and wait for me at all events on the bank of the Jordan that is near the inhabited area, so that I may come and receive the life-giving gifts. For since the time I received holy communion in the church of the Precursor, before I crossed the Jordan, I have been unable to receive this blessing up to this day. But now I long for this with unrestrained fervor. For this reason I ask and beg you not to disregard my request, but bring me without fail those life-giving and sacred gifts at the time when the Lord invited His disciples to partake of the divine Supper. Also say these words to Father John, the superior of the monastery in which you live: ‘Take care for yourself and your flock, for certain things are happening there that need correction.’ I do not want you to say this to him now, but when the Lord allows you.” After she spoke these words and said to the monk, “Pray for me,” she ran once more into the depths of the desert. Then Zosimas, kneeling and venerating the traces that her feet had left on the ground, praised and thanked God, and began his return journey rejoicing in both body and soul, glorifying and praising Christ our God. And after traversing that part of the desert, he arrived at the monastery on the customary day of return for the monks who lived there.

33. For the whole year he kept silent, not daring to say to anybody anything of what he had seen. But deep inside him he entreated God to show him again the person he longed for. He was worried and anxious as he considered the length of one year, wishing if possible that one year would become one day. When the Sunday arrived after which holy Lent begins, immediately after the usual prayer, while all the other monks went out of the monastery chanting psalms, he was stricken with fever and was forced to remain inside. Zosimas then remembered the blessed woman who had said, “If you wish to go out of the monastery, nothing good will happen to you.” A few days passed and then he recovered from the illness and stayed in the monastery.

34. When the monks returned and the evening of the Last Supper came,

<ref>Reading εὐ σαι γενήσεται for οὐ σαι γενήσεται, as in Athens 252, fol. 66r.</ref>
he did what he had been commanded. After placing the undefiled body and sacred blood of Christ our God in a small chalice, he put in a small basket dried figs, dates, and a small portion of lentils soaked in water, and departed late in the evening. He sat on the bank of the <river> Jordan awaiting the arrival of the blessed woman. Although the holy woman was late, Zosimas did not doze, but steadfastly watched the desert waiting to see the one whom he longed to see. While he sat <there>, the monk said to himself, “Is it possible that my own unworthiness prevented her from coming? Is it possible that she came and not finding me here left again?” While he was saying these words he wept, and while he shed tears he sighed. He raised his eyes to heaven and prayed to God, saying, “Do not deprive me, Lord, of laying eyes again on what Thou didst once allow me to see. Do not let me depart empty-handed, carrying my own sins for judgment.” Having made this tearful prayer, another thought occurred to him, and he said to himself, “What will happen even if she does come? Since there is no boat around here, how will she cross the Jordan and come to me, the unworthy one? Alas for my unworthiness and pitiable condition! Who deprived me rightly of such good?”

35. While the monk was thinking this, behold! the blessed woman coming from the further side reached the river and stood on the opposite bank. Zosimas stood up full of happiness and joy and praising God. But again he struggled with the thought that she might not be able to cross the Jordan. Then he saw her making the sign of the holy cross over the Jordan—for, as he told us, there was a full moon that night— and at the same time she set foot on the water and walked on it, approaching him. When he wished to make obeisance, she prevented him, crying aloud as she walked on the water, “What are you doing, revered father, you who are a priest and holding the divine gifts?” As he complied with her words, she stepped out of the water and said to the monk, “Bless me, father, bless me.” He answered her trembling with fear, for he was astonished at that extraordinary sight, “Indeed, God spoke the truth when He promised that those who purify themselves liken themselves to God as much as is possible.62 Glory be to Thee, Christ our God, Who didst not disregard my prayers and didst show mercy to Thy servant. Glory be to Thee, Christ our God, Who hast shown me through this servant of Thine how far I am from reaching the measure of perfection.” As he was saying these words, the woman asked him to recite the holy creed of our faith and to begin the

prayer, *Our Father, Who art in heaven* . . . 63 When this was done and the prayer came to an end, according to custom she gave the monk the kiss of love on his mouth. 64 And having received the life-giving sacraments, she raised her hands to heaven, sighed with tears in her eyes and cried aloud, “*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.*” 65

36. Then she said to the monk, “Forgive me, father, but I beg you, fulfill one more wish of mine. Under the protection of God’s grace return now to the monastery, and come again next year to that dry streambed where I met you before. Come without fail, in the name of the Lord, and you shall see me again as the Lord wishes.” He answered her, “I only wish it would be possible for me to follow you from now on, and look always upon your holy face. Fulfill an old man’s wish and take some of the food I have brought here.” As soon as he said this, he showed her the basket he had with him. She touched the lentils with her fingertips, took three of the lentil beans and brought them to her mouth, saying that the grace of the Spirit was ample to preserve undefiled the essence of her soul. Having spoken those words, she said again to the monk, “Pray [col. 3724] in the name of the Lord. Pray for me and remember my wretchedness.” He touched the blessed woman’s feet and asked her with tears in his eyes to pray for the Church, for the empire, and for him. He then released her and took his departure sighing and lamenting, for he did not dare to hold for long one who could not be held. She once more made the sign of the cross over the Jordan, stepped upon the water and walked across exactly as before. The monk returned <to his monastery> with joy and great fear, blaming himself for not seeking to learn the name of the blessed woman. But he hoped to be able to do so the following year.

37. When the year passed, he went again to the desert, doing everything according to the custom <of the monastery>, and ran to meet that extraordinary marvel. After he walked a long distance in the desert, he reached a point where there were signs indicating that he had found the place he was looking for. He looked carefully right and left, turning his gaze in every direction like a most experienced hunter pursuing a most sweet prey. But as he did not see anything moving anywhere, he began to shed copious tears, and raising his

63 The Lord’s Prayer; cf. Mt. 6:9, Lk. 11:2.
64 Cf. note 47 in *Life* of Matrona, above.
65 Lk. 2:29.
eyes to heaven, he prayed, “Show me, my Lord, Thy inviolate treasure that Thou hast hidden in this desert. Show me, I pray, the one who is an angel incarnate, of whom this world is unworthy.” While he was saying this prayer, he reached the place that had the form of a dry streambed, and saw the blessed woman lying dead on its eastern slope, her hands folded in the proper manner and her body lying in such a way that she was facing toward the east. He ran up to her and bathed the feet of the blessed woman with his tears, for he did not dare to touch any other part of her body.

38. After he wept for some time and recited psalms appropriate to the occasion, he offered a funerary prayer and said to himself, “Is it proper to bury the remains of the blessed woman? Would the blessed woman approve this?” While he was saying these words, he saw some writing impressed on the ground beside her head, where the following words had been written:

Father Zosimas, bury the body of the humble Mary in this place. Return dust to dust, and pray always to the Lord for me. I died in the month of Pharmouthi, according to the Egyptians (April, according to the Romans), on that very night of the Passion of our Savior, after I received the holy Last Supper.”

When the monk read these words he was overjoyed, for he had learned the name of the blessed woman. He realized that as soon as she had received the divine sacrament at the river Jordan, she came immediately to this place, where she died. In fact, the distance Zosimas had covered in twenty days of laborious walking Mary had traversed in one hour, and had then departed straightway to God.

39. Praising God while he drenched his body with tears, he thought to himself, “It is now time, humble Zosimas, for you to fulfill her bidding. But how will you dig a burial pit, you poor man, since you have no tool at hand?” As soon as he had said this, he saw nearby a small piece of wood lying on the ground. He picked it up and tried to start digging. But since the earth was dry, it did not yield at all to the old man who was trying hard to dig, drenched with sweat. So he heaved a great sigh from the depths of his spirit, and lifting up his head he saw a huge lion standing beside the dead body of

66 Since Mary was illiterate (cf. Chap. 31), her writing of a message in the sand must be viewed as miraculous.


68 Thus her body had miraculously been preserved from corruption for an entire year, as another sign of sanctity.
the blessed woman, licking the soles of her feet. When he saw the beast, he was terrified and trembled with fear, especially when he remembered Mary’s words saying that she had never seen a wild beast. He made the sign of the cross, trusting that the power of the <holy woman>, who was lying dead, would keep him safe. The lion in turn began to fawn upon the monk, [col. 3725] thus not only greeting him with the movements of its body, but also showing its intentions. Then Zosimas said to the lion, “Since, wild beast, that great woman entrusted me with the burial of her dead body, and as I am an old man and do not have the strength to dig a pit (for I do not have the proper digging tool I need <for such work>), and since I cannot walk back such a long distance to get a suitable tool, do what is necessary with your claws, so that we may return to the earth the body of the blessed woman.” As soon as he said these words, the lion dug with its front paws a pit deep enough for the burial of her body.

40. Once more the monk bathed the blessed woman’s feet with his tears and entreated her now even more to pray for all men. Then, with the lion in attendance, he covered with earth her body, which was naked as before and clad in nothing more than that torn cloak that Zosimas had thrown to her with averted eyes and with which Mary had covered certain parts of her body. Then they both departed, the lion withdrawing like a sheep into the innermost part of the desert, while Zosimas returned <to the monastery> blessing and praising Christ our God. When he came again to the cenobitic monastery, he told the monks everything, without holding back anything of what he had heard and seen. Indeed, he narrated in detail everything from the beginning, so that all who heard the marvels of God were astonished and celebrated the blessed woman’s memorial service with awe and affection. Moreover, John the father superior found certain people <in the monastery> who were in need of correction, so that even in this respect the blessed woman’s words did not prove futile or fruitless. As for Zosimas, he died in that monastery when he was almost a hundred years old.

41. The monks continued to pass on these events by word of mouth from one generation to the other, presenting them as a model <of ascetic life>, to benefit those who wish to listen. However, to this day they have never heard that anyone else has set this story down in writing. <Thus> I have put down in this written narrative what I had heard by word of mouth. Perhaps others, too, have written the Life of the blessed <woman>, and probably in a more imposing style than my own, even though nothing of this sort has ever come
to my attention. Nevertheless, I wrote this story to the best of my ability, desiring to prefer nothing but the truth. May God, Who rewards with great gifts those who take refuge in Him, grant me as a reward the benefit of those who read this story, and may He grant it as well to the one who commanded that this work—I mean this narrative—be handed down in writing. And may God deem us worthy of the state and position of this blessed Mary, the subject of the story, along with all those individuals who ever pleased Him through their contemplation and acts. Let us, too, therefore, give glory to God, the universal King of ages, so that He may deem us worthy of mercy on the day of judgment, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom belongs all glory, honor, and reverence forever, together with His eternal Father and the all-holy, benevolent, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.
According to her vita, Saint Theoktiste was born near the town of Methymna on the Aegean island of Lesbos. Having lost her parents in early childhood, she was placed in a nunnery where she later took monastic vows. At the age of eighteen she was taken prisoner by Arab pirates from Crete who raided her native Lesbos, but managed to escape her captors during a stop at the island of Paros. For the next thirty-five years she lived as a hermit on that uninhabited island until a visiting hunter from neighboring Euboea discovered her accidentally at the abandoned church of the Virgin. To him she confided the story of her life, and after receiving the holy sacraments which he brought at her request on his subsequent visit, she died. Instead of burying the holy woman’s body, the hunter cut off her hand to keep as a relic, but a supernatural force prevented him from carrying it home: his boat would not sail back to Euboea until he realized his error and returned the relic to its proper place. Afterwards, as he and his companions were sailing home unimpeded, he confessed to them the act that was responsible for their troubles. At once they reversed their course, and upon reaching Paros rushed to the place in the church where the hunter had found Theoktiste lying dead, only to discover to their horror that the body had disappeared. After searching at length, but in vain, all over the island for the remains of Theoktiste, they were finally allowed to return home to Euboea safely.

The Life of Theoktiste, as presented by Niketas Magistros, is a story within a story within a story: while accompanying Admiral Himerios on a mission to the Arab rulers of Crete (in 910), the author and his companions

1 See Chap. 20, where the hunter voices his regret for having failed to place the holy woman’s remains in a grave, and Chap. 21, where her body is said to have disappeared not from a grave but from the place in the church where it had been lying and on which it had left its marks. This evidence goes against H. Delehaye’s assumption that the hunter buried Theoktiste; see “La Vie de sainte Theoctiste de Lesbos,” Byzantium 1 (1924), 194 (hereafter Delehaye, “La Vie”).

2 Since Niketas accomplished his mission successfully and returned to the capital before the death of Leo VI in May 912 (Chap. 13), he cannot be here referring to
were forced by headwinds to put in at Paros. During their brief stay there, they came upon a saintly hermit by the name of Symeon who told Niketas the story of Theoktiste as he himself had heard it a few years earlier from a Euboan hunter; it was Symeon who urged Niketas to save the tale from oblivion by writing it down.

Noting the similarities between this *vita* and that of St. Mary of Egypt (see *vita* no. 3 in this volume), students of hagiography agree that Niketas did not write the biography of a historical saint, but the story of a legendary figure. However, as A. Kazhdan has pointed out, Niketas’ account is not a mere plagiarization of a famous piece of early ascetic literature. Although inspired by and borrowing from the *Life* of Mary of Egypt, the *vita* of Theoktiste diverges from its model both in its unusual literary format and in the character of its heroine. Unlike Mary of Egypt, Theoktiste is portrayed as a chaste woman whose struggle is not against the demons of the flesh but against the havoc wrought by war and enemy raids. As such, she resembles Athanasia of Aegina and Theodora of Thessalonike. Her *vita* is a version of the legend of Mary of Egypt, but it reflects the political and social climate of the ninth century.

Furthermore, the historical framework in which Niketas places the *vita* is not without interest. It provides information regarding the Arab raids and their effect on the islands of the Aegean following the capture of Crete, which

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4 See Kazhdan, “Hunter,” 50.
may have occurred sometime between 823 and 828; it describes Paros as an uninhabited island; it preserves the only surviving description by a Byzantine writer of the cathedral of Paros—an early Christian basilica later rebuilt by Justinian I (527–565); and through the prosopographical details it contains it helps to complete the portrait of the author who has been identified by L. G. Westerink with Niketas Magistros, a high-ranking official and man of letters who rose to prominence under Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), following the marriage of his daughter, Sophia, to Romanos’ son, Christopher.

Niketas’ reference to the death of Leo VI (886–912), “the truly fortunate emperor who took with him to the grave the <good> fortune of the Romans”

5 On the dates and effects of these raids, see V. Christides, “The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea, Piracy and Conquest,” Byzantion 51 (1981), 76–111. On the date(s) of the Arab conquest of Crete, see Christides, Conquest of Crete, 85–88. His views are criticized by Tsougarakis, Byzantine Crete, 30–41, who argues that the Arab conquest of Crete was a gradual process that cannot be dated precisely.

6 One must assume that the island had been fairly recently abandoned as a result of the Arab raids, since the presence of the basilica indicates a populated settlement from at least the early Christian period. See also note 7, below.

7 The Paros cathedral, dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin (15 August) and located in the island’s present capital, the town of Paroikia, has been known since the 17th century as Hekatontapylane (the church of a Hundred Gates), a scholarly attempt to classicize the demotic Katapoliane. The latter is derived either from καταπολεμά (from κατά and πολέμο), “below the city,” seeing that the church is built on lower ground than the town (see H. H. Jewell and F. W. Hasluck, The Church of our Lady of the Hundred Gates in Paros [London, 1920], 3, with pertinent, bibliography; hereafter Jewell and Hasluck), or more plausibly, from καταπόλεμα (κατά την πόλη), “in the direction of the city.” See P. Zerlentes, “Περί τοῦ ἀξιοπιστοῦ τοῦ συναξάριστου Θεοκτίστη τῆς όσιάς,” BZ 10 (1901), 162 (hereafter, Zerlentes) and G. N. Korres, Ὁ Ἐκατονταπύλαιον τῆς Πάρου (Athens, 1954), 33–37 (hereafter, Korres). I have been unable to consult the most recent book on the church, T. C. Aliprantis, Ὁ Ἐκατονταπύλαιον τῆς Πάρου (Thessalonike, 1993).

According to tradition, the original basilica was built by Constantine the Great (d. 337) at the request of his mother, St. Helen, who on her way to Jerusalem to search for the cross had been forced by inclement weather to seek refuge in Paros; cf. A. C. Orlandos, “La forme primitive de la cathedrale paleochretienne de Paros,” Atti del VI Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana, Ravenna 1962 (Vatican City, 1965), 159–68. On the surviving building, a domed basilica dating from the middle of the 6th century, see Jewell and Hasluck, and Korres.

8 For a biographical sketch of Niketas, see Westerink, Nicetas, 23–38. On the identification of Niketas with the author of the Life of Theoktiste, see ibid., 41–46.
(Chap. 4), provides the terminus ante quem for the date of the vita’s composition. As Westerink argues convincingly, such a statement would have been incongruous after 919, when the author himself became actively involved in the political fortunes of the Lekapenoi. It was, therefore, during the troubled period of the regency for Constantine VII (913–919) that Niketas most probably wrote the eulogy of Theoktiste and delivered it before an unspecified audience for the glory of God and the edification of others (Chaps. 2–3). Nearly half a century later, Symeon Metaphrastes included Niketas’ work, anonymously and with some slight changes, in his own collection of saints’ Lives, which later led to the assumption that Symeon was the author of the Life of Theoktiste.

Niketas’ educational background is reflected in the elevated style of his composition, its elegant structure resembling a set of Chinese boxes, and his quotations of the church fathers and classical texts. His patristic citations include Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria; he also quotes from or echoes Homer, Thucydides, Achilles Tatius, and Dio Chrysostom.

Despite the popularity of the vita, attested by the number of manuscripts that have preserved it, no significant cult of Theoktiste is known to have developed. According to tradition, the saint’s body was stolen by sailors from her native Lesbos, but was seized en route by the inhabitants of Ikaria, and it is on that Aegean island that the grave with her presumed relics is shown today. In the Paros cathedral, a small chapel is dedicated to her memory. However, both the chapel and the grave at its entrance, which the local people claim to be that of Theoktiste, date from the seventeenth century. Although she is the patron saint of Paros, only a small church has been erected there in

9 See Westerink, Nicetas, 27.
10 See Delehaye edition, AASS, Nov. 4:224–33. For other editions of the Metaphrastic vita, see BHG 1726.
12 Citing only the most important, Delehaye lists twenty-seven manuscripts dating from the 11th to the 16th century; see AASS, Nov. 4:222.
13 It is in the church of a small monastery in the old municipality of Messaria (modern Frantato), whose inhabitants attribute miraculous powers to her remains. See Zerlentes, 164–65, and Korres, 44 n. 1.
14 See Korres, 80–81.
her honor\textsuperscript{15} and her cult did not spread to any other islands of the Aegean, with the exception of Ikaria and recently Lesbos.\textsuperscript{16} Her memory is celebrated on 9 November.

\textsuperscript{15} Built on the Hill of the Prophet Elias, this church dates from the mid–20th century; see Korres, 44 n. 1.

\textsuperscript{16} In 1960 some of her relics were transferred from Ikaria to Methymna, where a church was built in her honor; see I. Phountoules, Ὅ τιμη τῶν λειψάνων καὶ τῶν ταφῶν τῶν Λεσβίων ἐγγύων (Mytilene, 1965), 27–28 (as quoted in Tsames, Meterikon 4:262 n. 51. Phountoules’ book was unavailable to me.)
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G. N. Korres, Ἡ Εκατονταπυλιανή τῆς Παροῦ (Athens, 1954).


The Life of Our Blessed Mother Theoktiste of Lesbos who Practiced Asceticism and Died on the Island Named Paros. Written by Niketas the Most Glorious Magistros.  

1. Praising that which is good and conducive to virtue and piety is a blessed deed and a trait of good and truly praiseworthy men. Eulogies arouse those who hear them and such a speech makes them strive for praise more than the ardor of athletes makes those who attend athletic contests eager to emulate the contestants. Our souls are, indeed, wont to develop and be trained by edifying discourse, just as our bodies by suitable exercise. For this reason a eulogy impels some to rise to bravery and, as if inspired by God, to seize their armor and seek their opponents; while others to embrace justice and acclaim fairness in distribution as justice and devote their full attention to this matter and pursue the unjust. Others to love moderation and exercise control over the pleasures of the flesh and strive to mortify the part of the soul that is the seat of desire. There are some whom emulation causes to turn eagerly to the religious life and especially to the pursuit of asceticism, which trains and educates their character to walk in the image of God and be like Him as much as is possible for human nature.

17 In the early 10th century fewer than twelve dignitaries bore this high-ranking title, which was above that of anthypatos. See R. Guillaume, “Etudes sur l’histoire administrative de l’empire byzantin,” EEBS 39–40 (1972–73), 14–28.

18 The division into chapters is that of the translator, not the AASS edition.

19 In other words, “To each according to his deserts.” As already noted in Tsames, Meterikon 4:232 n. 2, Niketas is here quoting Basil of Caesarea, Hom. 12, In Principium Proverbiorum (PG 31:401d–404a): ἔστι δὲ δικαιοσύνη, ἡ μὲν τις ἐν ἡμῖν στρεφομενη, ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ διανομη. Ibid., 401b: Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἐστι δικαιοσύνη εξ ἀπονεμητικὴ τοῦ κατ’ ἄξιαν . . . On the same principle, see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1131a.10–30.

20 On this meaning of φιλοσοφία, see Lampe, Lexicon, s.v. 7.

21 On this meaning of πρακτική, see Lampe, Lexicon, s.v. 5.


23 Cf. Plato, Theaetetus, 176b.
Emulation encourages them to scorn the transient; to neglect the body; to rise above the earth and soar up to heaven where our citizenship is and Christ, the head of the entire body. For to be pious is first and foremost to worship God by an upright and blameless way of life, following the teachings of the blessed apostles and fathers in the hope of the everlasting life and kingdom of Heaven. This is how speeches that praise the good and extol the noble move the audience to emulate those who are praised, just as on the other hand evil talk corrupts the ears, going through the body like a pestilence. For “evil communications,” says the apostle, “corrupt good manners.”

2. For this reason, I, too, came forward bringing to you the profit to be derived from the present story, which will be the cause of many benefits and will deserve to be remembered and written down. For both God will be honored Who honors those who honor Him, as is written somewhere in the Holy Scriptures, and those who hear the story will deem blessed the person who performed this important deed and wish to emulate this person. For one of the great men says: “You should call blessed him who deserves to be called blessed that you may become like him by inclination and be called blessed without exertions and trials.” Furthermore, we always seek to emulate those whom we praise, for it is evident that one desires what he praises while, on the contrary, he ridicules what he despises.

3. Since this is the case and what has been said proves the great benefit of edifying stories, I beg you, my devout audience, to incline your ears to the present topic and, setting aside your worldly cares, to listen with a pure heart to this grand tale. Still, I do not know how I forgot myself and proceeded to write such a story, seeing that by my words and deeds I am far removed from what I describe and am aware that such compositions befit other men whose exertions and lives rival those of the persons they praise. Nevertheless, since there is also a reward for obedience and obedience leads to salvation and is deemed blessed, I should reasonably be acquitted of the charge of arrog-
gage. For I am carrying out the command of a man who was dedicated to God from childhood and chose to dwell in the wilderness like the great prophet Elijah and John the Baptist, the greatest of all men born of women. But let us start the story from the beginning. For it is now time to recount it to you, since you have been sufficiently prepared to hear it.

4. I was once on the island of Paros. I happened to land there while sailing to Crete, dispatched by the pious emperor of blessed memory, the truly fortunate emperor who took with him to the grave the good fortune of the Romans. I was being sent on a campaign with the renowned Himerios, the most excellent general and commander of the dromos and of the entire fleet and, to speak more truly, of the passions themselves. But lest I dishonor the man by making the account of his campaign, which deserves many praises, secondary to this story, after this brief reference to him here, I will pass over in silence his achievements, which are beyond words. For I will remember the general in due time, while now I will go on with the present story.

5. As I was saying, I was sent with Himerios partly to campaign with him and make progress in the exercise of command, skipping along, like a colt by the side of its mother, toward the mastery of the best strategies—for such was the intent of my late emperor—and partly to serve as an ambassador to the Arab conquerors of Crete. But as I was approaching the island of Ios, the onset of headwinds halted our advance and we sailed towards Paros, to observe incidentally the situation of the island and to see the church of our Lady the Mother of God, which is there.

6. Having come to anchor in the harbor that faces toward the island of Naxos (this harbor gets deeper gently and gradually and naturally retreats from the waves, as if it were built for that purpose, being enclosed in the hollow of the mountain, so that ships can pass the winter or the summer comfortably), we disembarked and, after a short walk, arrived at the church. We

30 Cf. Mt. 11:11; Lk. 7:28.
31 Leo VI the Wise (886–912).
32 Himerios held the office of logothetes tou dromou, whose duties in the 10th century were those of a minister of foreign affairs; see D. A. Miller, “The Logothete of the Drome in the Middle Byzantine Period,” Byzantion 36 (1966), 438–70. The dromos was the system of imperial post and transportation.
33 For discussion of this church, see introduction, above, p. 97 and note 7.
34 The harbor of the modern town of Paroikia (ancient city of Paros). As Zerlentes notes (p. 162), Niketas’ knowledge of geography is deficient in this instance, for the
burned incense, offered the customary prayers, and walked around the church in wonder. For it was indeed worth seeing and preserved vestiges of its old beauty. Built in perfect symmetry on all sides, it was supported by numerous columns of royal marble. Every wall was covered with sawn marble similar to that of the columns. The artisan had carved (lit. “woven”) the marble so fine as to give the impression that the wall was dressed in cloth of fine linen. The marble gleamed with such translucence and sparkle as to surpass even the luster of pearls. That is how superior was the quality of the marble or rather the zeal of the artisan who strove to bestow additional beauty on nature.

7. But when we saw the ciborium over the venerable and holy altar inside the gate of the sanctuary, we were astonished at the delightful sight. It should be noted that Cyril Mango translates basiliko λίθος, literally “royal stone.” The reference must be to Parian marble, the finest marble found in Greece. On λίθος meaning marble, especially when accompanied by such adjectives as λευκός, πολύτελης, πριστός, see Demetrakos, Lexikon, s.v. λίθος, πριστός. On the phrase τιμία λίθος meaning “Parian marble,” see Stephanus, Thesaurus Linguæ Graecæ, s.v. λίθος.

It should be noted that Cyril Mango translates basiliko λίθος in this passage as “imperial marble” (The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453 [Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1972], 104 and n. 238), thus assuming that both the columns and the veneer of the walls of the church were of porphyry. However, Niketas’ comparison of the marble’s “translucence and sparkle” to the “luster of pearls” (Chap. 6) indicates that the marble was white. In their exhaustive studies of the Paros cathedral, Jewell and Hasluck (pp. 4, 11) and Korres (p. 43) also share this view. Furthermore, the extant columns are of white marble. According to Jewell and Hasluck (pp. 10 and 35)—who do not question the fact that the present columns are the original ones—their shafts are of cipollino marble while the capitals are of Parian marble. Korres (p. 75) is more cautious in dating the columns, but he too agrees that on the south side of the nave arcade the original ones have been preserved. Of the marble veneer of the walls no trace has survived (Jewell and Hasluck, 11).

Mango translates εἷς ψιστίνων βυσσίνων as “purple fabric” instead of “fine linen.” Βυσσίνων can indeed mean either “purple” or “linen”; I have adopted the latter meaning here, as being more appropriate for walls sheathed in marble.

37 The Paros cathedral is known for its ciborium, a structure in the form of a canopy supported by columns and placed over the altar as a symbol of Christ’s tomb. One of the few and finest to survive from the Byzantine era, this ciborium was damaged either by an earthquake or, as Niketas and the local tradition claim, by an Arab raid. See Jewell and Hasluck, 42–43, and Korres, 88–91. On its recent restoration, see Korres, 90.
For the carving did not seem to be made of marble nor wrought by <human> hands with <tools of> iron and skill. <It looked>, instead, as if <it had been made> out of milk mixed with the juice of the fig tree <in order to thicken> and had been cast in the shape of a canopy. Made of such stone I saw once <a statue of> Selene [i.e., the goddess of the moon] driving a chariot drawn by bulls. The <ciborium> lay broken in pieces and we ran up to it and stood before it, uttering all manner of curses and revilement at the man who smashed it, for it was surely a treasure and an heirloom and offering worthy of the house of God.

8. While we were standing there in amazement, crying out against the man who shattered it, all of a sudden we saw coming toward us a monk who had emerged from the wilderness and was stepping forward from the grove. His face was pale, his cheeks drawn, his feet bare, and he was all shriveled up. He was wearing a hair shirt, a cape and headcover similar to the shirt, and a leather belt around his waist. He was as hairy as a beast, as kind as an angel. For he did not look like a man who lived on bread, but like someone without flesh, almost without blood, in a word, like the abode of virtues or even of God Himself. As he approached, he greeted us and we greeted him in return and urged him to tell us who he was, about his homeland and family lineage, and whether he lived here alone. “I have nothing to say,” he answered, “about a homeland and family lineage and all the other things upon which city-dwellers pride themselves. Nor do I have any worldly concerns or find pleasure in things transient. God is my father and master for Whom alone I live and practice asceticism. For His sake I have persevered for more than thirty years, wandering alone in this wilderness. My name is Symeon and my rank is that of a lowly monk, priest, servant, and minister of the live and bloodless sacrifice.”

39 σιντοφαγος, epithet used by Homer to describe Polyphemos the Cyclops; cf. Od. 9:191.
40 Homer, Il. 5:342; “bloodless” is used here to describe the Olympian gods.
42 I have tentatively translated ζωοθυτου θοσιας as “live sacrifice.” I am deeply grateful to Professor Demetrios Tsames of the University of Thessalonike who pointed out to me that the adjective ζωοθυτος, although unattested in the dictionaries, is found in the ninth Ode sung during matins on Easter Sunday, where Christ is called “the live victim” (Χριστος το ζωοθυτον θημα). See Th. Sakellariou, Η άγια και μεγάλη έβδομα
9. Out of respect for the man’s virtue, his words, his appearance and monastic habit, as well as for his asceticism, but above all for the fact that he was a priest of God, we fell at his feet and begged him to pray for us and for the forgiveness of our sins on the day of judgment. He both prayed and spoke words of comfort. He urged us to *take heed to ourselves* and not to be discouraged, saying, “God is compassionate and long-suffering and receives into His arms those who return like the prodigal.” By these and other such words he comforted us and then he fell silent. I, however, being more inquisitive and anxious to know better the man’s character, begged and implored the great man to instruct us about some of the things that are mysterious to us, for he seemed to me to be in communion with the Divinity. But he said, “Enough of this! I have not yet been deemed worthy of such revelations. I withdrew to this wilderness to mourn my sins,” [p. 227] not to seek what is above me.”

10. I cannot tell whether he was feigning or telling the truth when he said this. Nevertheless, he seized my hand and pressed it, as if he were an old acquaintance; this is what his simple disposition prompted him to do. For when the souls of great men are in communion with the highest power, they strive to become like it and, through communion with the Original Good, they become good in every way, pure, simple, removed from all our affectations, just like this great man who, by being gracious and good, appeared in his unaffected manner to be one of us. And then, on a sudden impulse, he asked me to sit down. There were some fallen blocks and columns as well as thick green grass and a spring gushing out fresh water and the whole place was filled with quiet and was suitable for godly tales.

11. Having sat down on the grass and seated me beside him, he seemed to be pleased with our chance encounter. So I looked at him and said, “Now is the time, father, for you to tell me anything good and deserving to be recounted that you may have witnessed here. But do start by telling me

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43 I suspect that a phrase like ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ has fallen out before τῆς διηγήσεως. For διηγήσεως with the meaning of “Last Judgment,” cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, s.v. I.2.

44 Cf. Lk. 17:3.

45 Cf. Lk. 15:11–25.

first who was the man who broke the cover of the divine altar and what beastly soul dared to smash such a masterpiece.” (For I had in mind to lead him little by little to more exalted topics.)

12. He answered thus: “Have you heard of the notorious Nisiris, the commander of the Cretan navy? He came here in person and, astonished at the beauty of the ciborium, planned to carry it off to Crete. He measured the doors of the sanctuary and then this holy and divine ciborium and decided that the deed could be easily accomplished. He lowered the ciborium to the ground and was dragging it to the doors of the sanctuary to take it out, but the ciborium immediately grew in size. He dug through the wall and, after taking the measurements, he tried again to take it out. But the ciborium kept getting bigger and bigger and this happened many times until the Arab gave up. Since despite his efforts he failed to attain his objective—for it seems that the divine object did not deign to be defiled and become an instrument of foul sacrifices, for rumor has it that he was eager to dedicate it to the mosque of the Agarenes—he went into a frenzy and decided to smash it.” When I heard this, I railed at that murderous and thrice accursed Arab. But the holy man said, “Never mind! He was indeed punished for his insolence shortly thereafter. His ship was dashed to pieces against the cape of Euboea called Xylophagos and he perished beneath the sea.”

13. I then begged that holy man to partake of our food and to relieve our anxiety over the voyage and its progress. For we feared that we were wasting time because adverse winds were blowing against us. He partook of our food and without concealing anything, he said to me: “You will sail across to Naxos and after lying in harbor there for one day, you will sail away on the

47 It should be noted that κατάλεξων is a favorite Homeric expression, used twenty-six times in the Iliad and Odyssey to introduce a tale; cf., e.g., Il. 10:384.

48 Nisiris (a Hellenized form of the Arabic Nasr), who is also mentioned in Chap. 18, is otherwise unknown. As Westerink (p. 45) suggests, he was probably modeled on such historical figures as the early 10th-century Arab commanders Leo of Tripoli and Damian.

49 Or possibly “of the church.”

50 Presumably a mosque in Chandax on Crete. Virtually nothing is known of buildings constructed in Crete during the period of Muslim occupation; cf. Christides, Conquest of Crete, 121–22.

51 Literally, the “wood [i.e., ship] eater”; Cape Kaphereus, at the southeastern end of the island. On this incident, see Tsougarakis, Byzantine Crete, 45 and n. 89.
second day and reach Crete on the third, without having to fear any hardship. You will carry out your mission in accordance with your wish and the emperor’s order, and when you return home you will be well received by him who sent you.” All this was indeed fulfilled and accomplished later as he predicted. For, after praying and singing hymns at the church, we went down to the ships with the great old man, and early the next morning we crossed over to Naxos, the width of the strait being approximately ten stadia.52

14. <The holy man> celebrated the divine liturgy, administered to us the holy sacraments, and partook of food with us. Then he began to speak to me <as follows>: “You may perhaps offer some excuses regarding a request that I wish to submit to you, my devout <friend>. You may claim the lack of literary training or your concern about your duties or the care of your wife and children and home, or you may find some other reason for evading my request. But I promise you happiness and prosperity [p. 228] and an abundance of everything and much leisure. And I implore you to remember my words at that time and write down what occurred here, for it deserves to be remembered and recounted so that our God may be magnified and glorified by those who hear this <story>. For <the psalmist> says, ‘God is wonderful in His holy places’.53 Moreover, many will emulate those glorified for their virtue and obtain equal <rewards> and you yourself will be rewarded because of them.”

15. After these exhortations, he began his tale: “A few years ago some hunters came here from Euboea,54 for the island <of Paros> has an abundance of game, deer, and wild goats. One of the hunters, a pious man who was very much concerned with his <spiritual salvation>,55 recounted an extraordinary story of the majesty of God Who performs at times strange and wondrous

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52 The actual width of the strait is 2.8 nautical miles, i.e., 28 stadia and 4 feet. See Zerlentes, 163.

53 Ps. 67 (68):35.

54 Although Niketas’ account contains no direct quotations from Dio Chrysostom’s Euboikos—a well-known story about a family of hunters from Euboea—there can be no doubt that in choosing to portray the hunter as a native of Euboea Niketas was influenced by Dio. His quotations from Achilles Tatius (see nn. 37 and 45) suggest that he was familiar with the romances of late antiquity. On his library of classical authors, see Westerink, Nicetas, 33–34.

works. ‘Once upon a time,’ said this hunter, ‘I came here to hunt and, as was my custom always, I went up to worship and pray at the holy church of the Mother of God. Having said my prayers, I looked around and saw a few lupine seeds soaking in water in a shallow hole in the ground—for they grow on this island, just as other plants grow on other islands. One island produces an abundance of fennel with its widely spreading shoots, while another produces only rue, and another savory or thyme or some other herb. But each island has its special product that grows and flourishes there better than anything else—as I was saying, I saw the lupine seeds being softened and I reckoned that someone, no doubt, had placed them in that hole and that he must be a holy man to live in this wilderness. I was thinking of this as I hastened to catch up with my companions who had already advanced into the forest, and I was praying that I would come across this great quarry, for I was hoping to gain therefrom something very important.

16. ‘Having bagged a lot of game, we started our return to the ship. But while my companions walked in the direction of the sea, I turned aside to pursue the object of my prayer. I went into the church of our Lady and, as I was praying, I saw to the right of the church’s holy altar something that resembled a thread being blown by the wind. I thought at the moment that I was seeing a spider’s web, but when I decided to step forward and determine what was there, I heard a voice saying, “Stay, my good man! Do not go further, nor come closer! For being a woman, I am ashamed to show myself to you in my nakedness.” When I heard this I was astounded by the unexpected voice and wished to flee. For the hairs rose on my flesh and were sharper than a thorn. For when something unexpected appears suddenly, it enthralls the spirit of a man, and even if one thinks of himself as fearless, when taken

56 Sir. 43:25.
57 For a parallel to lupine seeds as a food for ascetics, cf. the vita of Symeon the Fool, ed. L. Ryden, Das Leben des heiligen Narren Symeon von Leontios von Neapolis (Uppsala, 1963), 146.13, 153.6.
58 See Vita Mariae Aegyptiae, PG 87.3:3705b (hereafter, Vita Mariae). Italics indicate passages borrowed—albeit not verbatim—from the above work.
59 Cf. ibid., 3705d.
60 Cf. Thucydides, 2:61.3. The translation of this phrase is borrowed from Thucydides. The Peloponnesian War, trans. B. Jowett (New York, N. Y., 1960), 128.
by surprise, he stands with his mouth agape. When I recovered, I plucked up courage to ask who she was and how she came to be living in the wilderness. Again a voice reached me saying, “Throw me a cloak,” I beg you, and when I have covered myself, I will not hesitate to tell all that God bids me <to say>.” Right away I took off my outer garment, left it and ran out the door. She took it, put it on, and when I returned after a while, I saw her standing in her original position.

17. ‘She had the shape of a woman but the appearance of a superhuman being. Her hair was white; her face was black with an underlying tinge of whiteness; the skin alone kept the bones in place, for there was hardly any flesh. She was almost a shadow, the shape alone resembling a human being. When I saw this (he said), I was afraid, I trembled, I reproached myself, I cursed the ill-timing of this encounter, for by being over-­curious I was left behind by my companions. Trembling all over, I threw myself on the ground, begged for her prayers, and entreated her to bless me. She first turned towards the east, wishing perhaps to set my mind at ease so that I would not suppose she was an apparition, and stretching up her hands she prayed in a faint whisper. Then she turned to me and said, “May God have mercy on you, sir! But for what reason did you come to this wilderness? What necessity has brought you to an uninhabited island? But seeing that the divine will brought you here—for the sake of my humility, I believe—I will tell you all about my life, as you requested.”

18. ‘Again I prostrated myself on the ground, begging her to go on with her story, and she began to tell me about herself thus: “My homeland is Lesbos, the city of Methymna. My name is Theoktiste and I am a nun by profession. Having been orphaned while still a very young child, I was entrusted to a nunnery by my relatives and assumed the monastic habit. When I was nearly eighteen years of age, I went to a village near the city of Methymna to visit my sister during the Easter season, for she lived near that village with her husband. But one night, Arabs from Crete under their leader,

61 Cf. *Vita Mariae*, 3705d.
62 Cf. ibid., 3705a.
63 Cf. ibid., 3709a.
64 Cf. ibid., 3708d.
65 Cf. ibid., 3708c.
66 Cf. ibid., 3709a.
the notorious Nisiris, raided "the village" and took everyone prisoner. At dawn, after chanting the song of victory, they set sail and came to anchor at this island "of Paros". They brought out the prisoners, and started to assess and settle the price "of each prisoner". But I made up an excuse and, going toward the forest, I fled running into the interior of the island. Indeed, I did not stop running until I had torn my feet to pieces, piercing them with stones and sharp twigs, and had stained the ground with my blood. Exhausted finally, I collapsed half-dead and spent the whole night in misery, unable to bear the pain from my wounds. But in the morning when I saw the abominable people sailing away, I was released from all pain and filled with so much joy as I cannot describe. And since that time—a little over thirty-five years already—I have lived here, subsisting on lupine "seeds" and other herbs that grow in the wilderness, or rather on the word of God, keeping in mind the divine saying that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. I am naked, of course, for the ragged habit in which I was taken prisoner was torn to pieces, but I am dressed and covered by the hand of God which sustains the Universe. With these words, she raised her eyes to heaven and gave thanks. She stood at a distance for a while and then, as she saw me staring at the ground very quietly, not even daring to look at her, she started to speak again: "I have told you my story, sir. I ask you now to repay me with one favor for the Lord's sake. Whenever in the coming year you are going to sail to this island for hunting (I know for sure that you will be back, God willing), place in a clean vessel a portion of the most pure gifts, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. For since I began to live in the wilderness I have not had the privilege of receiving this gift." Having said this and enjoined me not to tell anyone at all about our "meeting", she sent me back to my companions with her blessing. I agreed to fulfill all "her requests" and left rejoicing because God had satisfied my longing, finding me worthy to attain such treasure.

67 Cf. note 48, above.
68 Cf. ibid., 3717c.
69 Deut. 8:3; Mt. 4:4.
70 Cf. Vita Mariae, 3717c.
71 Cf. ibid., 3717d.
72 Cf. ibid., 3708d.
73 Cf. ibid., 3720bc.
74 Cf. ibid., 3720b.
19. ‘In accordance with the command of the blessed woman, when I was again ready to go hunting with my companions for deer and wild goats—the latter are numerous on the island of Paros and grow bigger than on any other island, a marvel to behold and describe. For their skin is almost like that of deer, but they are bigger in size than deer and their horn is up to sixteen palms long. Unlike that of deer, it is not embellished with offshoots and branches, but the entire horn is straight and protrudes in one piece—as I was just saying, when I was about to sail away and go on a hunt, I took in a small box a portion of the divine flesh of the Lord to bring to the blessed one. But when I reached the island and turned aside to the house of the Mother of God, I failed to find her. Whether she was there but hiding because some of my companions had come up with me to the church, or was not there I cannot tell; only that I did not find her. The others then hurried to the forest to start hunting, but I slipped away and returned to the church. Right away, the holy woman appeared wearing the cloak which she received from me on my previous visit. As I threw myself on the ground, she ran toward me and in tears called to me from afar: “Never do that, sir, when you are carrying the divine gift!” Do not burn me, wretched that I am, by dishonoring the divine sacraments.” Taking hold of my tunic, she helped me to my feet and I took from my bosom the small box with the Lord’s flesh. And she, falling to the ground, received the divine eucharist and lamenting and watering the earth with her tears, cried out, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” Having said this, she stretched up her hands to heaven for a long time and sent me back to my companions with her blessing.

20. ‘We hunted for a few days, bagged an abundance of game, and started out on our return. My companions hurried down to the boat, but I ran to

75 Or, “grow bigger than any other goats”?
76 Cf. Homer, Il. 4:109.
77 Cf. Vita Mariae, 3721a.
78 Cf. ibid., 3725a.
79 Cf. ibid., 3721b. Although this episode closely follows that in the Life of Mary of Egypt when Zosimas brings Mary the eucharist, there is a significant change in that Zosimas was a priest, whereas here it is a mere hunter who conveys the sacraments.
80 Ibid., 3721c, quoting Lk. 2:29–30.
receive the blessing of the blessed one as a companion on my journey. When I came to the church and looked around for her, I saw her lying dead on the spot where I had previously seen her standing. Falling to the ground, I kissed her venerable feet and watered them with my tears, and remained there speechless for a long time wondering what to do. It would have been sensible and expedient as well, if I had begged God with tears and implored the blessed woman and asked them how to dispose of this matter properly and, in accordance with their decree, ministered to the divine command. Had I failed to obtain this divine guidance, I should have done the next best thing, as they say, I should have told the story to my companions, and with their assistance placed in a grave the remains of the blessed one and sung the burial hymns as best we could. But it seems that prudence is not an easy prey. Hence I, too, failed to do what was right and proper. Out of boorishness and simple-mindedness—indeed, being a hunter and an ignorant man, I could not have thought of anything different—I did a foolhardy thing, because of faith, as I believed, but it seems that it was not pleasing to God. For I cut off her hand, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and went back to the ship.

21. ‘Late that evening, we put out from the land, set sail, and were on our way. Since favorable breezes were blowing, we were flying, so to speak, before a fair wind, and expected to reach Euboea by morning. But at daybreak we found ourselves back in the same harbor, as if the ship were held fast by an anchor or a sea monster. Fear and terror seized us all, and we looked at one another trembling, as we sought to determine the cause of this delay. We examined and questioned one another to find out whether we had committed an unforgivable offense and were held back for that reason. While one man said one thing and the other said another, being at a loss, I realized what a foolhardy thing I had done and, escaping the notice of all my companions, I ran up to the church, placed the hand by the saint’s body and returned to the boat. After giving words of encouragement, I started on my journey with my companions. When we were far out at sea—for the ship was flying like a bird, with the sail bellying out with wind, on a straight and unimpeded course—I told my companions what had happened; how I had found the

81 Cf. ibid., 3725a.
82 Apostolius, Centuria, 5:98 (Leutsch-Schneidewin, Corpus, 2:362).
83 The hunter was evidently so overwhelmed by his desire to possess a relic of the holy woman that he neglected his duty to perform Christian burial of her corpse.
blessed one and how she had recounted the story of her life and about the holy communion and her death. I also told them that I had boarded the ship the previous evening with the saint’s hand in my possession and that for this reason perhaps we were held back although we expected to sail away. And that now we were rightly proceeding on a straight course because I had put the relic back.

22. ‘Having heard this, they reproached me a great deal and, putting the ship about at once, they hastened to return to Paros. All of us together went running up to the church. Fearful and trembling, but with the confidence of faith we approached and found that the place where she had been lying preserved the shape of her body, so to speak, but her corpse had vanished. Dismay and terror seized us all and we ran hither and thither, looking round about carefully lest she had been moved or come back to life. We ran around the entire forest and the groves seeking to discover if that divine treasure was perhaps hiding somewhere. We were wretched and foolish and thick-skinned men, running after what can never be captured, for we were altogether uninitiated into the miracles of God. We were not troubled by the miracle of Elisha who, standing in the middle of the men sent by the Syrian king to arrest him, remained undetected, for he enveloped them in blindness and led them to Samaria and delivered them to the king. Not to mention the great miracle-worker [Gregory the Wonderworker] who, by turning himself into a tree while he was praying on the mountain, escaped the men tracking him down to arrest him. So (he said), having failed to find the remains of the blessed woman, we went back to the ship, weighed anchor and went home, glorifying and praising God Who works wonders and miracles always.’

23. The blessed and great man [Symeon] recounted these things just as I related them above and received my sworn assurance that I would not cast them in the depth of oblivion nor would I make up excuses for keeping silent about the miracle, fearing both divine retribution and the wrath of the blessed one. When I inquired about the year and day of her death that it might be written down together with the miracle and that her commemoration might be celebrated, the holy man answered: “As you see, my friend, many details

84 Homer, Il. 17:75.
85 4 Ki. 6:18.
86 Gregory of Nyssa, Vita S. Gregorii thaumaturgi. PG 46:948c.
were left out of my account. For I should have discussed her lineage and all her ascetic exertions and suffering on the island [p. 232] and how she struggled against the assaults of <spiritual> enemies. But what can I do? The man who met the great <Theoktiste> was not like the great Zosimas who knew how to investigate the lives and struggles and achievements <of saints>; on the contrary, he was a man of the mountains, obtuse and ignorant of such things. This alone he remembered, as he said, that <her death> occurred in the fall, around November. Still it would be desirable to write down the Life of the blessed one and not bury it in the depth of oblivion. As for her commemoration, important people and zealous admirers <of the saint> will, no doubt, assign to it a feastday at the proper time, as they please. For what additional fame and glory can eulogies and celebrations bestow on those who have inherited the kingdom of heaven and the everlasting blessings, which things the hosts of angels desire to look into, except, of course, that <eulogies can add> zeal to persons of understanding and glory to God and the blessing of those <saints> who are commemorated. For they whose life glorified them are rightly blessed and honored when their life is proclaimed.” With these instructions and gentle admonitions that great man sent us on our way. And since the winds were fair, we reached <the island of> Dia on the following day.

This was the conspicuous profit of our visit to Paros, this was the unexpected gain of our Cretan expedition, that is, this Life of the blessed Theoktiste, this <story of> her ascetic discipline and her contest and battle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. As for me, I have come forward to honor obedience and to repay a debt. What will the benefits of this be? Many and various, but the following three will be the most important: <it will serve as> a hymn, thanksgiving, and praise of God Who brings about and bestows <these blessings>; the saint will be pronounced blessed as a result of this eulogy and her memory will be hon-

87 Zosimas was the ordained monk who discovered St. Mary of Egypt in the desert; cf. vita 3 above, Chaps. 11–12.
88 This suggests that the autumn was hunting season.
89 1 Pet. 1:12.
90 Dia (modern Standia) is a small island just north of Crete; cf. E. Malamut, Les îles de l’empire byzantin (Paris, 1988), 554.
91 Eph. 6:12.
92 Cyril of Alexandria, Explanatio in Ps. 6.11, PG 69:748c.
ored and acclaimed every year; and Jesus Christ our munificent and great God will bestow on us who wrote it a lavish reward for our zeal, [p. 233] through the intercessions of His all-immaculate Mother, the Theotokos, the godlike angels and all the saints. For His is the glory together with the Father and the all-holy Spirit, now and unto everlasting generations. Amen.
LIFE OF ST. ELISABETH THE WONDERWORKER

translated by Valerie Karras

Introduction

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

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

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

2 The saint’s foreknowledge of the fire of 465 not only mimics the prophetic gifts of her contemporary St. Daniel the Stylite, but puts her in a superior position: according to the *vita*, she reveals to him that the fire will occur. Significantly, Elisabeth’s *vita* has none of the specificity of the *Life of Daniel*. For an English translation of the *vita* of Daniel, see Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byz. Saints*, 1–84.
the altar during the Divine Liturgy. Returning to Herakleia for a last visit, she had a vision of St. Glykeria, who warned her of her imminent death. She returned to her monastery and was stricken by a fever following the feast of St. George, dying the following day. Several more miracles were attributed to her by pilgrims visiting her tomb after her death.

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

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


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

6 F. Halkin, “Sainte Elisabeth d’Heraclee, Abbesse à Constantinople,” AnalBoll 91 (1973), 249–50. Halkin believed that the vita was probably written fifty to a hundred years after the saint’s death.
On the other hand, the church was rebuilt by the emperor Maurice (582–602). The seventh-century historian Theophylaktos Simockattes dates Maurice’s visit to Herakleia in 591, while John of Antioch believes he visited the city in 610. In addition, Halkin’s argument that the reference to Herakleia as a large city implies an early date is not convincing because the Russian pilgrim Daniel, who visited Herakleia in the early twelfth century, wrote that the city was called “the great Herakleia.” More importantly, the vita’s description of the procession through the city involves only the head of St. Glykeria, not her whole body. According to Delehaye, the inscription on the marble reliquary that contained her head, from the church dedicated to her in Herakleia, dates to just after the ninth century; the body of St. Glykeria had been in Lemnos since at least the eighth century. It is therefore unlikely that the description of the festival procession could have been written earlier than the eighth century. The anonymity of the pilgrims healed by Elisabeth is another factor pointing to a date of composition well after the time she lived.

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

9 Cf. p. 124, below.
11 AASS, Sept. 5:277.
tury, and the monastery where St. Elisabeth lived was one of several in the city named for him. The episode of the dragon is generally assumed to have been added to the story of George’s life in the twelfth century; therefore, Kazhdan believes that Elisabeth’s *vita* may be a thirteenth-century work.

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

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

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13 *SynaxCP* 625–27.

14 *ODB* 1:638.

15 Cf. note 50, below.

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


Translations

(modern Greek) A. Lete in Tsames, Meterikon, 2:356–77.

Related Texts

AASS, Apr. 3 (Venice, 1738), 272.


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E. Kourilas, “Αγιοι μαρτυρες της έπαρχιας Ηρακλείας και μερικώς της ολης Θρακης,” Thrakika 26 (1957), 63–86.
"Many daughters have wrought valiantly, many have obtained wealth," said Solomon the most wise, prophetically proclaiming that, at various times, women as well as men would shine with the beauties of every type of virtue and share in the spiritual gifts of the divine spirit and marvelously work miraculous wonders and signs throughout the world. For scripture also shows countless and innumerable women, both under the <Mosaic> Law and after the advent of grace, transforming feminine frailty to manly resolution and, through self-discipline and painful ascetic practice, courageously overthrowing the ancient conqueror of our foremother Eve and common enemy of the human race through the power of the Most High, and being crowned with the shining trophies of victory.

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

They made their residence near the aforementioned city of Herakleia, in a village we now call Abydenoi, though it was known in days of old as Thrakokrene. The couple—being godly and blameless like the righteous Job,
and emulating the hospitality of the patriarch Abraham—gave liberally to all the needy the necessities of life. And so, also like Abraham, they received, as a result of their vow, fruit of the womb worthy of their own beauty and good works.

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

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

25 Cf. Gen. 18:1–8 (the hospitality of Abraham to the three men at the Oak of Mamre).
26 Isaac was born to the childless Abraham and Sarah when they were 100 and 90 years old, respectively; cf. Gen. 17:15–19, 21:1–3.
28 Cf., e.g., Gen. 30:2, Lk. 1:42.
29 The infertility of a saint’s parents, a frequent commonplace in vitae (see, for example, the Life of St. Thomas, Chaps. 4–5), has its roots in the biblical motif of barren parents who at long last bear a holy child (e.g., Isaac, Samuel, John the Baptist). At the same time, sterility was a real problem in the Byzantine world, as suggested, for example, by the use of amulets; see J. Herrin and A. Kazhdan, ODB 2:994, s.v. Infertility. A recent Ph.D. dissertation at Catholic University (1994) by Efthalia Walsh, “Overcoming Gender: Virgins, Widows and Barren Women in the Writings of St. John Chrysostom,” discusses the dilemma that infertility posed for theologians.
31 St. Glykeria was martyred at Herakleia in the 2d century under Antoninus Pius. Cf. H. Delehaye, “Saints de Thrace et de Mesie,” AnalBoll 31 (1912), 249–52; BHG 699–699m; BHG Nov. Auct., p. 82.
32 This is a fairly early example of a saint’s feast being celebrated for a full week. Presumably the actual feastday was the culmination of the week’s festivities. For discussion of these festive celebrations, see S. Vryonis, “The Panegyris of the Byzantine Saint,” in The Byzantine Saint, ed. S. Hackel [University of Birmingham, 14th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies] (London, 1981), 196–226.
gathered together with those who lived in the city—this was done on the thirteenth of May. So the blessed <Elisabeth’s> admirable parents came with everyone else and participated in processions and all-night doxologies and visited the holy shrines throughout the city, shrines which contained the sacred relics of the forty holy women and Ammos the deacon33 and of many others. (The Life of the great Bishop Parthenios discusses at more length both these relics and the expensive and brilliant construction of the renowned churches.)34 And so, venerating these <saints>35 and giving them due honor, they feasted and celebrated with the populace, carrying with them <in procession> throughout the city the ever-venerated [p. 254] head of the martyr,36 who was beheaded for the sake of Christ. While the divine liturgy was being celebrated by Leo,37 who was the bishop of the city at that time, in the church which is called Treasure and is dedicated to the Mother of God, <whenever> Eunomianos (the aforementioned father of the blessed <Elisabeth>) gazed at <the head of St. Glykeria>, he noticed her sometimes smiling slightly as though happy and sometimes with a sad and gloomy expression. He considered this to be a visible symbol of his trust in the martyr and he found his soul divided between happiness and sadness.

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

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

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

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

37 There is no evidence of an archbishop Leo for the see of Herakleia in the 5th century; it should be noted, however, that the evidence is fragmentary since the extant lists of bishops have several gaps, particularly between 459 and 518; cf. Halkin, 254 n. 2. Leo I of Herakleia was bishop from 783 to 806, Leo II from 1263 to 1281 (A. Lete in Tsames, Meterikon 2:360 n. 15).
After the service ended, the throng made fervent prayer in the church of the Theotokos called Katacheilas by the local inhabitants, and at about the sixth hour they all returned to the holy church of the martyr Glykeria. After the vespers hymn, the others left the church, but Eunomianos remained there alone with his wife Euphemia, fervently beseeching the victorious <martyr> to release them from the bonds of their barrenness and to grant them, beyond <all> hope, a child. They prayed long into the night, and finally lay down on the floor and went to sleep for a while.

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

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

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

38 The sanctuary called κατ’ Χιλας in Crispinus’ vita of St. Parthenios (PG 114:1361α).
39 I.e., St. Glykeria (γλυκυνατη = “most sweet”).
40 Cf. Ps. 50 (51):17.
41 θεοφιλέστατος, a standard epithet of archbishops; cf. I. and N. P. Sevcenko, The Life of Saint Nicholas of Sion (Brookline, Mass., 1984), 135.
42 In the eastern rite, a “churching” of mother and child occurs forty days after the child’s birth (in commemoration of Christ’s presentation in the Temple when he was forty days old), and the child may thereafter be baptized.
Upon arriving at the church of the famed martyr and approaching her pure
icon (located on the right side), he threw himself face first on the floor, giving
thanks to her [p. 256] with a joyous heart and tears. Then, as he gazed upon
the icon and suitably addressed his thanksgivings to it, he saw a sight both
strange and remarkable, for her face blazed brighter than the sun and her lips
gently moved. “The time has come, Eunomianos,” she said, “to fulfill your
vows to God.” This instilled fear and trembling\textsuperscript{43} and great amazement in him.
And so \(<\text{he and his wife}>\), approaching the most blessed archbishop and giv-
ing him the customary greeting, beseeched him to give their child the seal in
Christ.\textsuperscript{44} Whereupon, receiving\textsuperscript{45} the child, he baptized her and named her
Elisabeth, as the martyr had foretold. After praying at length for \(<\text{her par-
ents}>\), he said to the child, “Through you, child, may the Lord be gracious to
me, granting me remission of sins.” Thereupon, they returned home rejoicing.

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

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

\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Ps. 54 (55):5, 1 Cor. 2:3.

\textsuperscript{44} Baptism and, especially, chrismation.

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

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Lk. 2:52.

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

\textsuperscript{48} Or “from simply listening to them.”
Her father wanted to give her away in marriage,\(^{49}\) but the girl could not bear to hear of it at all, for she desired rather to be wedded to the immortal bridegroom, Christ. And, three years after this, her father Eunomianos also journeyed rejoicing to the Lord, and the blessed [Elisabeth], left alone, turned straightway to God, the Father of orphans. Since she desired the life of solitude and poverty [i.e., monasticism], she distributed among the poor the gold and silver that her parents had set aside for her, as well as her other property (which was considerable), and so through the hands of the needy offered <her fortune> to God; and she gave both her male and female slaves their freedom.

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

\(^{49}\) In Byzantium, girls could be betrothed at age seven and married at twelve. For references to the pertinent legislation, see vita of Theodora of Thessalonike, below, note 31.

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

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

\(^{52}\) I.e., the monastic habit.

\(^{53}\) Cf. 1 Cor. 9:27. The KJV translation reads “kept under” for “mortified.”

\(^{54}\) Deut. 9:9.

\(^{55}\) 3 Ki.[1 Ki.] 19:8.
eating, and she never partook of oil, but was nourished by the living and heavenly bread alone.\textsuperscript{56} Because she was constantly adorned by exalting humility\textsuperscript{57} and noetically contemplated divine beauty\textsuperscript{58} with the eyes of the heart, she did not wish to raise her eyes to heaven at all, and so for three years or more she kept her head bent toward the ground, nor would she tilt <her head> upward at all toward the heights of the sky. She considered poverty to be wealth rather, and so embraced it completely, possessing but a single robe\textsuperscript{59} and wearing the garment of incorruption\textsuperscript{60} woven for her from above by freedom from passions. And she was so ablaze with divine love that she readily bore the frost of winter and kept her feet bare of shoes, beautiful\textsuperscript{61} and running toward the prize of the high calling.\textsuperscript{62} She could never endure to immerse her body in warm waters, but rather, bathing it daily with ever-flowing founts of tears, as the psalmist says,\textsuperscript{63} and washing out every bit of uncleanness, she kept it clean and molded her soul like to God.

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

\textsuperscript{56} The eucharist; cf. Jn. 6:50–51.
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Mt. 23:12.
\textsuperscript{58} The use of Neoplatonic language is noteworthy here.
\textsuperscript{59} Possession of a single garment was a common virtù among monks; cf., for example, C. van de Vorst, “La vie de s. Evariste, higoumene a Constantinople,” \textit{AnalBoll} 41 (1923), 305.11. This ascetic practice was based on Christ’s command to His disciples, when He sent them out to preach, not to take a second tunic with them. Cf., e.g., Mt. 10:10.
\textsuperscript{60} Cf. 1 Cor. 15:54.
\textsuperscript{61} ὁς ῥατίους. Halkin suggests as a possible scriptural reference Rom. 10:15—“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace,” which in turn makes reference to Is. 52:7. More importantly, the allusion to bare feet is connected to the immediately following quotation from Philippians, making her an athlete running a race.
\textsuperscript{62} Phil. 3:14.
\textsuperscript{63} Cf. Ps. 6:6.
\textsuperscript{64} Gennadios I, patriarch of Constantinople from 458 to 471.
height of utmost virtue and perfection did she attain that she was endowed with miraculous powers, healing incurable diseases and driving out demons by calling on the name of Christ, enjoying divine illumination and revelation from above, and prophetically foretelling the future.

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

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

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\(^{65}\) Leo I, Byzantine emperor from 457 to 474.

\(^{66}\) This fire, which lasted a full week, devastated Constantinople in September of 465; it was commemorated each year on 1 September.

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

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

\(^{69}\) On the church of St. Babylas near the Hebdomon, see Janin, \textit{EglisesCP}, 55–56.
city with sorrow and helplessness since they saw no deliverance from this tribulation from any quarter. When the saint learned of this from certain people, she was seized by a divine zeal and, taking up the weapon of the venerable cross, went down to that place. Raising up her gaze to heaven and calling upon assistance from on high, she cried out to the beast and made him come out from his lair upon hearing her. Then, after making the sign of the cross over him, filling mouth with spittle she spat upon his head and, trampling him underfoot, she slew him, saying, “I shall tread on the asp and the basilisk, and I shall trample on the lion and dragon,” protected by the venerable cross.” And thus she completely liberated everyone in the city from harm from him. Indeed, from that time on she became hopeful, as it were, and, having received firm assurance that through her alliance with Christ she would trample on the spiritual dragon as well as the physical one and win victory over him, she boldly began her wonder-working.

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

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

71 Reading (with Lackner) καταχείται for κατέχεται.

72 Cf. Ps. 90 (91):13.

73 Halkin has suggested this phrase (Χριστοῦ καταπατήσαι καὶ) to complete the syntax of the Greek.

74 I.e., Satan.

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

76 Cf., e.g., Mt. 18:4, Lk. 14:13.
great martyr George\textsuperscript{77} and restored her to health. And so she sent \textit{<the girl>}, rejoicing and giving thanks, home with her father. In addition, she similarly healed many other women who were faint with the same disease of hemorrhaging and who approached her with wholehearted faith in her, staunching their flow of blood by prayer.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{78} Jn. 9:1.

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

\textsuperscript{80} The Cherubic Hymn was introduced into the liturgy in 573–574 during the reign of Justin II; cf. note 4 above. It is chanted while the bread and wine are brought from the table of preparation or the \textit{skewophylakion} to the altar to be consecrated.
that she spoke of this vision to no one until the time appointed for her departure <from this life> for God.

Now, since she was already drawing near to this <departure>, she desired, as she said, to behold her homeland again. And so, after arriving in Herakleia and venerating the holy churches of the saints there, she entered the church of the Theotokos called Chalkoprateia.81 And, as she was praying, there appeared to her a woman who was apparently from <one> of the esteemed and leading <families> of the city. The woman embraced her warmly and greeted her, saying, “Welcome, O much-beloved mother.” But the blessed <Elisabeth> answered her, “Who am I, my lady, a humble stranger, that you should thus gladly embrace and greet me, <a woman> whom you have never seen?” And again the woman spoke: “Before you were conceived in your mother’s womb, since I resided here, I knew you.82 And, if you wish, come to my house, and I will tell you about it.” The blessed one inquired, “And where, O my lady, is your house?” “On the right side of the church of the holy martyr Romanos83 you will see me,” she answered, and with those words she disappeared.

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


82 Cf. Jer. 1:5.

83 Romanos was a deacon martyred at Antioch under Diocletian.

84 Painted or mosaic decoration on the outer walls of a church is unusual and normally dates to the late Byzantine period. It may be that the allusion here is to an icon of the saint on the gate leading into the churchyard. See a similar reference in L. Petit, “Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosoteira pres d’Aenos (1152),” *IRAIK*, 13 (1908), 61.11–13: ποιεῖτο τὴν προσκύνησιν τῷ μεμονωσισμένῳ περὶ τας τῶν περιβόλου πυλὰς τῆς Θεομητορος εἰκονοματί (“let him make veneration to the mosaic icon of the Mother of God on the gate of the enclosure wall”).
earlier in the church. But go back quickly to your monastery, for you are destined soon to forsake <your life> here and to pass over to your homeland on high.”

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

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

Then, consumed by a violent fever from the sixth hour,89 she survived until the next day; and about the third hour she fell asleep peacefully, and commended her spirit into the hands of God90 on the twenty-fourth of April. <Monks and nuns from> all the surrounding monasteries gathered and, with psalms and hymns, reverently buried her venerable body in the church of <St.

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85 The feast of St. George, the patron saint of Elisabeth’s convent, was celebrated on 23 April.
86 I.e., Holy Communion. The phrase used is taken from near the end of the divine liturgy.
87 Cf. Mt. 17:2, regarding Christ’s face at the Transfiguration. The radiance of the “uncreated light” is a common characteristic of saints.
88 Lk. 2:29–30.
89 About noon.
90 Cf. Lk. 23:46.
George> the martyr. And, up to the present day, <her body> is preserved sound and whole\textsuperscript{91} by the power and grace of God, and is known as a vehicle of healing\textsuperscript{92} for all those who venerate it in faith, because anyone, stricken by whatever illness, who approaches her venerable tomb with unwavering belief and right intention and calls upon her God-given name will immediately receive the cure appropriate to the disease directly through her intercessions.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{91} As Halkin (p. 263 n. 3) notes, incorruptibility of the body is another common sign of sanctity.
\textsuperscript{92} Literally, “a clinic.”
\textsuperscript{93} Mt. 8:13.
\textsuperscript{94} Mt. 12:13.
\textsuperscript{95} Literally, “on account of satiety.”
\textsuperscript{96} This work apparently has not survived.
\textsuperscript{97} Reading (with Lackner) \greek{γερα} for \greek{εργα}. 
tual ills and may we escape without harm the obstacles of invisible and spiri-
tual\textsuperscript{98} enemies. And having finished our present life peacefully, may we attain from above blessedness with her in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom belongs all glory, honor, and worship now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

\textsuperscript{98} Literally, “intelligible.”
6. LIFE OF ST. ATHANASIA OF AEGINA

translated by Lee Francis Sherry

Introduction

In contrast to the virginal St. Elisabeth who became a nun at a youthful age, after successfully resisting her father’s efforts to marry her off, Athanasia entered a convent following a period of married life. Her vita, like that of Matrona, Theodora of Thessalonike, and several other holy women in this volume, demonstrates that in Byzantium marriage was not viewed as an impediment to future sanctity. Indeed, Athanasia was married not once but twice, although involuntarily in both instances according to her hagiographer. After she and her second husband reached a mutual agreement of separation in order to adopt the monastic habit, her saintly qualities were manifested in her leadership of her convent; in her teaching, asceticism, and visions; and by the miraculous cures effected by her relics.

The daughter of Niketas and Irene, Christian nobles on the Greek island of Aegina, Athanasia received a standard education consisting of readings in the psalter and Holy Scripture. Her parents forced her into a marriage that proved to be short-lived, as her husband soon fell victim to an Arab raid against the island. Subsequently, an imperial edict was issued ordering unmarried women and widows to marry foreigners, and for a second time her parents forced her to wed. After some years of married life she persuaded her husband that they should withdraw from the world and take monastic vows. Her second husband died in this holy state. Meanwhile Athanasia assembled a group of pious women of the island, and they were tonsured by a presbyter who provided them a convent. After about four years she reluctantly accepted the office of mother superior, but continued to maintain an ascetic way of life with regard to food, sleep, and dress. Four years later the superior of a local monastery, with the permission of the bishop, offered the women a new site for their convent called Timia, where there was an ancient church of Stephen the Protomartyr.

Athanasia’s future sanctity was manifested in heavenly visions of a man
gleaming in a cloud and a voice which told her to pursue humility and meekness. Her ascent to the heights of virtue was proved by the only healing miracle of her lifetime, the cure of a man with an eye disease, an affliction from which she herself had also suffered previously.

Athanasia built three churches on Aegina: one to the Theotokos, one to John the Baptist, and one to Nicholas of Myra. This construction activity provides evidence of a flourishing economy on the island before its eventual abandonment sometime in the second half of the ninth century as a consequence of Arab raids.

At an unspecified date Athanasia went on business to Constantinople, where she stayed in a monastery for nearly seven years. A dream sent her back to Aegina and she fell ill shortly after arriving home. She died within twelve days on the feast of the Dormition of the Virgin, 15 August, which was to become her original day of commemoration. Her tomb was thereafter the source of many healing miracles. One year after her death her relics were exhumed and transferred to a coffin in open view. It is possible that there was yet another transfer of the holy relics, originally commemorated on 13 April.

Athanasia is known only from this vita, which is preserved in a single manuscript, Vaticanus Graecus 1660, of A.D. 916. Her exact dates remain un-
certain, but based on the internal evidence of the Life she must have lived at the time of the early Arab raids on the Aegean islands in the first half of the ninth century. The famous monk Ioannikios (752/4 or 762–846) had passed through Aegina before the beginning of Athanasia’s monastic career and had predicted that a place on the island called Timia (worthy of honor) would be honored (τιμηθηναι) by a future burial in it of some holy corpses (presumably Athanasia and some of her companions). This chronology also coincides with the first allusions in Byzantine sources to the Athinganoi (heretics to whom Athanasia gave assistance during a famine on Aegina) during the reigns of Nikephoros I (802–811), under whom they were in favor, and Michael I Rangabe (811–813), under whom they were persecuted. The imperial edict which forced Greeks to marry foreigners may have been promulgated by Theophilos (829–842).

The anonymous male hagiographer apologizes for his mundane style, calling himself “entirely devoid of lofty expression” (Chap. 19). Indeed his writing is quite conventional, and his citations are limited to the Holy Scriptures. The author was an eyewitness to the posthumous miracles of the saint and verified other events with nuns who had lived with Athanasia for her entire monastic career (Chap. 19). It is likely that he wrote within a short period after her death, and certainly before 916, the date of the Vatican manuscript.

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4 See Christides, Conquest of Crete, 158–63, who attempts to distinguish between raids by Arabs from North Africa and by Arabs from Crete. He postulates (p. 158) that the attack on Aegina described in Chap. 1 was made by Arabs from Africa and occurred between ca. 805 and 830. He also argues (p. 166) that the evidence of other saints’ Lives suggests that the island was completely abandoned around 830; this date seems too early, however, judging from the evidence of Athanasia’s vita, since she built three churches there during her career and returned to the island and her monastery at the end of her life after six or seven years in Constantinople. Aegina was definitely deserted by the time the vita of St. Theodora of Thessalonike was written by Gregory the Cleric ca. 894; see below, Life of Theodora, Chap. 3.

5 See below Chap. 11, note 53.

6 See the end of Chap. 11, note 54.

7 The hagiographer states that Athanasia’s fellow nuns also deserved their own vitae because of their virtuous lives, but that he will let others compose their encomia; see end of Chap. 19.

8 See below Chap. 2, note 23.

9 See below Chap. 2, note 22.

10 See Chap. 19, note 79.
Curiously, the hagiographer makes no mention of iconoclasm,\textsuperscript{11} although one would expect some reference to it in the \textit{vita} of a saint who supposedly lived in the first half of the ninth century. This suggests that the question of image veneration was not as fiercely disputed on Aegean islands as in Constantinople and Bithynia.\textsuperscript{12}

Virtually nothing is known of the cult of Athanasia, but one can assume that she continued to be venerated locally on Aegina. She is absent from the tenth-century version of the \textit{Synaxarion of Constantinople}, but a notice on her is included in the version of 1301 (Paris, Coislin. gr. 223) for 18 April, her feastday.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Iconoclasm (lit., “breaking of images”) was the imperial policy that prevailed between 730 and 787, and again between 815 and 843, of prohibiting the depiction and veneration of the images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints.


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{SynaxCP} 611–14.
Bibliography

Edition Used for Translation

Other Editions

Translations
(Latin) Surius, AASS, Aug. 3:170–75.
(modern Greek) A. Lete in Tsames, Meterikon 2:97–123.

Related Texts
SynaxCP 611–14.
1. Participating in the commemoration of the saints is an apostolic precept.\textsuperscript{15} It is also very laudable and an act of salvation to compile their Lives and set them forth as a common benefit for any who wish <to read them>.\textsuperscript{16} So then I will try to compile the Life of the blessed Athanasia, narrating in my discourse a few facts about her, so that these not be consigned to the depths of oblivion by time and thereby harm very many people. So then this praiseworthy woman, who bears the name of immortality,\textsuperscript{17} who lived her life admirably and showed herself to be a handmaiden of the Lord of all, was born of a father named Niketas, and a mother named Irene. They were of noble family\textsuperscript{18} and very God-fearing people who resided on the island of Aegina.\textsuperscript{19} Being born of and reared by these <parents>, she truly earned her designation as a \emph{useful vessel}\textsuperscript{20} of the all-holy Spirit. When she was seven years old, she learned the psalter in a short time and eagerly studied all the Holy Scriptures.

One day while sitting and weaving at the loom by herself, she saw a shining star descend as far as her chest. It shed abundant light on her and then

\textsuperscript{14} The title shows that the author has consciously added the posthumous miracles to the end of the \textit{vita}. Accounts of the ceremonial transfer of a saint’s relics and his/her posthumous miracles were sometimes preserved in separate works apart from the \textit{vita} proper, as in the \textit{vita} of Theodora of Thessalonike, which follows (\textit{Life} no. 7, in this volume).

\textsuperscript{15} A punning variation on Rom. 12:13.

\textsuperscript{16} The Greek phrase τὸν ζητῶν ἐπαινετὸν καὶ σωτηρίων poses difficulties of interpretation. Carras (“Athanasia,” 212) suggests an emendation to ἐπαινετῶν καὶ σωτηρίων, “of very praiseworthy and salvific acts,” but the predicate genitive does not work well with σωτηρίων, and I suggest the reading was αὐτὸ λίαν (for τὸν λίαν) as the Latin translation of Surius seems to construe.

\textsuperscript{17} Athanasia in Greek means “immortality.”

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Eupatridai}, i.e., the local aristocracy or, less specifically, “well-born.”

\textsuperscript{19} Aegina is an island in the Saronic Gulf southwest of Athens.

\textsuperscript{20} 2 Tim. 2:21.
disappeared from her sight. By this <light>, therefore, she was abundantly enlightened in her soul and came into an absolute hatred for the vanity of life.

She intended to enter into the monastic way of life, but her parents very forcibly joined her to a husband, though she was unwilling and adamantly refused. After living with him for only sixteen days, she suddenly came into <the state of> widowhood. [p. 181] For, when the barbarian Maurousioi21 swept into those parts, her husband went out to join battle and (by the judgments that <only> God knows) became a casualty of war.

2. After considerable time had passed and Athanasia was struggling within herself and directing her mind toward the monastic life, suddenly an imperial edict was issued that unmarried women and widows should be given in marriage to foreign men.22 So because of this, her parents drove Athanasia into a second marriage, since she had not yet attained <her goal of> monastic life. But even after this had happened, she maintained her habitual concern for her own salvation, applying herself tirelessly to the chanting of the psalms and devoting herself with assiduity to reading <Scripture>, and accepting no change in her <previous> good <ways>, but adorned with meekness she shone in a blessed fashion with humility of heart. Wherefore this praiseworthy woman was much loved by all who knew her good ways. She so distinguished herself in almsgiving that her household goods did not suffice, even though they were very abundant, for the generous distribution <to the poor> from her hand. She graciously received monks visiting from all over, and she plentifully provided widows and orphans and all the needy with the necessities of life.

Once after a famine arose and everyone was reduced to destitution, she generously donated food not only to her fellow believers, but also compassion-

21 Specifically North African Moors or Berbers, but here by a Byzantine literary metonymy Spanish or African Muslims. The raid probably occurred within a few years of the conquest of Crete by the Arabs under Abu Hafs, ca. 823–828. The earliest possible dating for the raid on Aegina is 805–807; see Christides, Conquest of Crete, 158.

22 A. Kazhdan has suggested a connection with the edict of Theophilos that is mentioned in the Acts of the Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion, ed. V. Vasil’evskij and P. Nikitin, Skazaniia o 42 amoriiskikh mucenikach (St. Petersburg, 1905), p. 27.5–7 [= Reg I, no. 422]. The ἐθνικοί could be Christian non-Greeks, pagans or other foreigners. Since Athanasia’s second husband eventually entered a monastery, he must have been a Christian from birth or as the result of conversion. The purpose of the edict may have been to encourage the assimilation of foreigners.
ately distributed <food> to the so-called Athinganoi, who were then hard-
pressed by the famine and approached her. For she fulfilled that saying of the
Lord which states, “Be ye merciful as your heavenly Father; for he maketh his
sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the
unjust.” Not only did she provide them food, but also clothed them with
garments and comforted them with other gifts. On the Lord’s day and on feast days, she lovingly assembled all the neighbor women <in her presence> and read them the Holy Scriptures, gradually opening their minds and
in a godly way directing them into a fear and desire of the Lord.

3. In this way, advancing according to God and blooming with virtues,
just like a flower-laden meadow, she persuaded her spouse, who yielded to her
many exhortations after some years of cohabitation, to withdraw from the
world and everything in it and to enter into the sacred way of life of the monks. After <becoming a monk> and distinguishing himself in a blessed manner, he fell asleep in the Lord.

So the blessed woman, taking advantage of her freedom, totally dedi-
cated her entire self to God. For finding other very pious women, who had
the same aim and were ardent in spirit, and joining with them in full unanim-
ity, she very soon withdrew from worldly confusion. Distributing to the poor
all that she possessed according to the commandment of the Lord, along
with the aforementioned honorable women she changed her worldly garb to-
gether with her way <of life>. And abiding quietly in one place at the invitation
of a virtuous and blessed man who tonsured them, after three or four years

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23 Literally, “untouchables.” They were heretics from Asia Minor who adopted a
number of Jewish practices; see ODB 1:223 and J. Starr, “An Eastern Christian Sect:
The Athinganoi,” HThR 29 (1936), 93–106.
24 Lk. 6:36 and Mt. 5:45.
25 This may include the Athinganoi who at that time were close to her, since the text
seems to imply that she was introducing them to the Christian scriptures.
26 Athanasia, now liberated from the bonds of marriage, is manumitted again before
her death by the vision of angels who hand her papers of manumission from the slavery
of this world; see Chap. 12.
27 A reference to Athanasia’s taking monastic vows and her formal founding of a
female monastic community.
28 Mk. 10:21.
she unwillingly accepted the leadership of the assembled women, called first by them but in her mind considering herself the last, and fulfilling that saying of the Lord which states, “Let the one wishing to be first among you be the last of all and the servant of all.”

4. So what account could explain, what tongue could present the loftiness of her great humility? For she would never allow herself to be served by anyone of them nor allow water to be poured over her hands during her entire lifetime, as all her fellow nuns assured everyone following her holy dormition [p. 183], after making inquiry of each other. Considering herself unworthy to be with them, let alone be served by them (even though she was mother superior) and engaging in great abstinence, she used to partake of a little bread and a modest amount of water after the ninth hour, refraining entirely from cheese and fish, but only on the feast of Easter tasting them with thanksgiving; and during the holy days of Lent, she used to eat every other day, subsisting on raw greens alone, not partaking of any drink whatsoever during all those sacred days. And for her rest, she partook of little sleep, not on her side, but leaning on a rock that was prepared for this purpose. Not only during the holy and great Lent did she practice this discipline but also during the other two Lents, I mean that of the Holy Apostles and that of Christmas. Her bedding set on the ground was of fairly large stones, covered above with a small goathair cloth, and leaning on this at the time of rest she watered it every night with tears, in the words of the prophet. For since the love of God abundantly inflamed her from within, she also used to shed abundant tears both in chanting the psalms and in prayers, so that one would be more likely to see a spring without streams of water than without tears her holy eyes, which continually looked to Christ.

5. Her inner garment was a goathair shirt, which irritated her flesh with its roughness, and her outer clothing was a ragged garment of sheep

29 Athanasia accepts the office of mother superior.
30 Cf. Mk. 9:35.
31 After 3 p.m.
32 The fasting period before the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul on 29 June and the fasting period before Christmas.
33 Or “goatskin”?
34 The “prophet” is David with reference to Ps. 6:6.
wool; and this <former garment> was the unseen one and was covering her sacred body.\textsuperscript{35} She kept solitary vigils and studied the Psalms of David, during each one of the \textit{kathismata}\textsuperscript{36} making a prayer with the greatest attentiveness.\textsuperscript{37} Then during the day, sometimes by herself and sometimes with her companions, she used to recite the Psalms, striving <to ensure> that she would spend every hour in glorifying God with her lips or mind, in accordance with the verse of the sacred psalmist David, \textit{“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be continually in my mouth.”}\textsuperscript{38}

From the day she became a nun until [p. 184] her departure to God, she never tasted any fruit whatsoever. Although enduring many tribulations, inasmuch as she was the leader of her sisters and was concerned about them, she never upbraided any of them because of the great humility she had attained. No abuse emerged from her venerable mouth, neither against the small, nor the great, neither against a slave, nor a free person, and all this even though she was often disobeyed <by her subordinates> through diabolical influence. But she was tolerant of everyone in meekness of opinion and in rectitude of heart, continually \textit{looking forward to her future reward}.\textsuperscript{39}

6. After spending four years with her female companions, she persuaded them to depart from the place where they were living and withdraw to a secluded and completely isolated mountain where they would be able to devote themselves to God in solitude and be separated from all human intercourse. So, after distributing to the poor all that they had acquired for personal use, with fervent hearts they prepared themselves to achieve their goal. And then they encountered a very virtuous and God-loving man called Matthias, who was honored with the rank of priest and was superior of an ascetic sheepfold.\textsuperscript{40}

And this venerable man, observing the fervor of their purpose, said to the

\textsuperscript{35} Her inner garment was “unknown” to anyone else, since its existence was a private act of mortification. Or emend ἄγνωστα “unknown” (i.e., “unseen”) to ἄγνωστον “chaste,” and construe as “this garment covered her chaste and sacred body.” Lete (Tsames, \textit{Meterikon} 2:103) suggests yet a third translation, “ . . . garment of sheep wool which also covered her neglected and holy body.”

\textsuperscript{36} One of the twenty sections into which the psalter is divided for liturgical use.

\textsuperscript{37} Literally, “sobriety,” but here to be construed as a monastic virtue.

\textsuperscript{38} Ps. 33 (34):1.

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Heb. 11:26.

\textsuperscript{40} I.e., the superior of a monastery.
blessed Athanasia, “Your aim and that of your companions is good and very laudable. But since I see you so exhausted by ascetic discipline and completely lacking in strength, I exhort you not to commit yourselves to an extremely harsh lifestyle; but if you accept my advice, I will move you to a place where you will be able to install yourselves comfortably and take care of yourselves. You will have me to render assistance to your weakness and to serve you with all my strength and will in whatever way you require.” With these words he persuaded the blessed woman and the other <nuns> to follow him very enthusiastically.

And then when they <Matthias and the nuns> drew near and the blessed woman observed the place, <Athanasia> began to speak joyfully, “A long time ago I saw this place in my mind’s eye. And so I think we will live here from now on and here we will die.”41 [p. 185]

7. There was in this same spot a very famous and very old church of the holy protomartyr Stephen.42 So the blessed Matthias, with the approval of the bishop of the district, established these women in residence there and took every care for them, practicing himself as well the greatest ascetic discipline, both abstinence and many vigils. For reciting by heart all night long the divine psalter and saying as many prayers as possible, he fulfilled his need of sleep, by sleeping not on his side but in a sitting position. So great was his contrition in chanting the Psalms and in his attendance at the divine and bloodless sacrifice,43 that those watching him reaped a great benefit. By being content with one robe of goathair44 worn with the rough side on the inside <i.e., next to his flesh>,45 he subdued his flesh in an awesome way.

He had a great devotion to John, the bosom friend of the Lord. On his holy commemoration day,46 when <Matthias> was about to partake of the bloodless liturgy, he was filled with great and ineffable contrition. And he said to one of his companions, “Is there a man today who would be worthy to

41 The place was called Timia; cf. Chap. 11, note 51.
42 I.e., Stephen the Deacon, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death ca. A.D. 35; cf. Acts 7:54–60.
43 I.e., the eucharist.
44 Reading τριχίνου (“goathair”) for τριχίνου (“roughness”).
45 Cf. Chap. 5.
46 The dates of the commemoration of John the Apostle (also called John the Evangelist) are 26 September and 8 May.
arrive in Ephesus and see the holy apostle John?” And saying these things, he gushed out streams of tears from his eyes and sent up a groan from his heart. And then occurred an event worthy of his faith and his love for the disciple of the Lord. For from the beginning of the divine rite up until its sacred completion he saw the holy apostle standing together with him in the holy sanctuary. Not only did <Matthias> observe him but so did two others present with him during the celebration of the bloodless sacrifice. So he spent three days indulging in such contrition that he was not able to partake of human food.47

8. A man who was paralyzed in all the joints of his body approached this blessed Matthias. Taking pity on him, the blessed man took off the cloak that covered him and placed it around the man’s shoulders. After this happened, his joints made a loud creaking and the man immediately became healthy.

   He also granted healing to another man whose face was twisted by a diabolical power by making the sign <of the cross> with his honored hand.

   But also to an old woman, who was possessed by an unclean spirit and who approached the blessed Matthias, God granted health within a few days because of his constant prayers.

   And another woman, cloaked in the monastic garb and afflicted with an unclean spirit, came into the nunnery. When the blessed man suddenly entered and saw her suffering alone in the church, he took pity on her, and stretching his hands up to heaven and praying for a sufficient time and turning <toward her>, three times he made the sign of the cross over her. After this, the wicked demon fled. The nun then stayed healthy for the rest <of her life>.

   We have narrated these tales to demonstrate the loftiness of the man’s conduct and to make very clear to all the gift of miracles granted to him by God.

9. But, alas, I don’t know how to recount what follows. It happened (by the judgments that only God knows) that this very holy man, who was dedicated to God, after boarding a ship and sailing to the royal megalopolis [Constantinople], was drowned in the waves of the sea along with his fellow passengers. Thus we were deprived of his holy body and do not have in reliquaries <his> sacred and blessed remains, which would benefit us very much. For as long as he survived in the flesh, he enriched all <of us> in the activity of his

47 In contrast to the eucharistic bread, “spiritual food.”
healings; and after his death he would have provided much more <healing power> to pilgrims through contact with his relics.48

Another priest took over his duties, a eunuch by nature and Ignatios by name. And he, distinguishing himself in ways similar to the aforementioned blessed man, [p. 187] fell asleep in the Lord in a holy manner, burning up the phalanxes of demons with lightning emanating from his healing tomb. But let us return to the sequence of the story, narrating the deeds of our blessed mother, Athanasia.

10. So then this blessed woman obtained, as we have said, both much humility and great and incomparable meekness. Now often when she prayed and stared into the heavens, she would be filled with ecstasy and awe; for she would see a shining cloud emitting rays of sunlight, and in the middle of it a beautiful man, brilliant in form, so that his beauty was incomparable. Now often while seeing this and being amazed at the vision of the man, she would say to herself, “I wonder, who bestowed so much grace on this man? What sort of virtue produced one so illustrious and very beautiful?” Speaking and pondering these things, she seemed to hear a voice telling her, “Humility and meekness have rendered this man upon whom you look with amazement so illustrious that if you imitate <these virtues> it is evident that you will be outstandingly enlightened.” So day by day when she perceived this, she so embellished herself with these two virtues that there could not be found in her any trace of anger or pride. So it is not strange if God adorned her with incredible miracles, since she had ascended to a spectacular height of such virtue and had seen in the purity of her heart visions in heaven.

11. For one day when she was sitting and contemplating God, a certain man who was seriously diseased in his eyes approached her and entreated her to address a prayer to God on his behalf. But she, demonstrating humility, said to him in consolation, “This disease has afflicted me as well; [p. 188] so have patience and the Lord will be able to heal you.” Then after he did not withdraw but asked in faith to gain healing, the blessed one, placing her holy

48 Chaps. 6 to 9 represent the motif of a *vita* within a *vita* frequently met in hagiography; cf., for example, a similar digression in the *vita* of Theodora of Thessalonike (Chaps. 10–18) about the iconodule confessor Antony. Matthias should have ranked as a saint for his asceticism, his mystical vision of John, and his miracles, but, since he was lost at sea, he left no relics which could become the object of cult veneration.
hand on his eyes, said, “May Christ Who healed the man blind from birth\(^49\) grant to you, brother, a complete cure of your affliction.” After he had heard these things and received the words with sure faith, straightway and on the spot he gained the healing which he desired.

After the blessed woman had built three other churches in addition to the aforementioned church of Stephen the Protomartyr, namely the church of our much praised mistress, the Theotokos, the church of John the Baptist, and the church of Nicholas of Myra\(^50\) the herald of God, on account of some business she departed to the Queen of Cities [Constantinople] and resided in a monastery there six or seven years. But she was sad and would say, “I have become an exile from the church of the Theotokos by abandoning it and spending time here.” So after a divine vision appeared to her, she confidently told the nuns who were with her, “The time has at last come for us to depart to the place where we resided previously; for while in a trance I saw the doors of the church of our mistress, the all-hallowed Theotokos, opened and inviting us to enter therein.” With these words, she departed from the Queen of Cities. And so this truly honored vessel of God arrived at Timia,\(^51\) for so the place was named. For it was appropriate, wholly appropriate\(^52\) that Timia be honored through her and have its name verified by fact, as had been foreseen many years previously by a most clairvoyant father. Now this father was the celebrated Ioannikios,\(^53\) whose fame reaches throughout all creation. For this inspired man, while once passing through that place, uttered prophetically, “It is appropriate that this place be honored through the burial of some holy bodies.”\(^54\) And thus it came to pass.

12. So then living on there a few days after her arrival, she was over-

\(^{49}\) Cf. Jn. 9:1.

\(^{50}\) Nicholas of Myra was a legendary saint who came into prominence in the 9th century; his vita is attributed to patriarch Methodios I (d. 847).

\(^{51}\) Timia means “place worthy of honor.” The verbal play is continued into the next sentences.

\(^{52}\) The gemination of the verb is for emphasis. For a parallel in 9th-century hagiography, cf. the vita of Theodore of Stoudios by Michael the Monk (PG 99:260A).

\(^{53}\) The iconodule Ioannikios is one of the most ubiquitous saints of the 9th century. His vita exists in two similar versions by different authors (BHГ 935–36). A translation of the vita by Peter will appear in vol. 2 of the Dumbarton Oaks series of saints’ Lives.

\(^{54}\) Or, “through the establishment of some holy individuals.”
come by a very serious illness. In fact she was forewarned by a vision that she would depart from life within twelve days. For she had seen two men clad in white coming toward her and presenting her a piece of paper with writing. They said, “Behold your liberation. Take it and rejoice.” When the blessed recovered from the trance, she summoned one of the sisters and narrated to her everything word for word. Then for those entire twelve days she remained in continuous meditation and refrained from food and drink. She said nothing other than, “Chant my sisters, chant; and praise God continuously so that He may look kindly on our sins.” When the twelfth day arrived, the blessed woman said to the nuns, “Please assist me in my weakened condition by entering into the church and rendering up to God my verses of the psalter; for I am now unable to finish the psalter, since my strength has entirely left me.” Then they answered her with cries and tears, “So which psalm, our mistress, did you reach and from which shall we start the remaining ones?” She calmly answered them and said, “I have the ninetieth psalm on my lips, but due to my weakness I cannot progress further.” After hearing these words, they entered the church as quickly as possible and finished the remaining verses of the psalter. When they came out, they fell on their faces in prostration and started a great lamentation, begging to receive a benediction from the blessed woman. She made a benediction upon them all equally, but she embraced Marina and Eupraxia in her honored arms and said, “Behold, my beloved sisters, from this very day we will be separated from one another, but the Lord will unite us again in the eternity to come. May He grant to both of you peace, love, and harmony; may He fill with all His good blessings.” After she had said these and a few other words, her face did shine as a light so that those who came to see her were amazed and awestruck.

55 This is the standard description of the appearance of angels. It stems from the episode of the women at the tomb, when on the morning after Christ’s resurrection they are variously reported to have met: an angel whose garb was white as snow (Mt. 28:3); a youth dressed in a white gown (Mk. 16:5); two men in shining robes (Lk. 24:4); and two angels in white (Jn. 20:12). These last references to the two men in shiny white robes were conflated to become the common expression for the appearance of angels in later Christian literature, including hagiography.

56 The document represents her manumission papers from the slavery of this world.

57 Cf. Mt. 17:2.
13. And when the feast of the Dormition of the all-hallowed Theotokos was at hand, she exhorted all the nuns, saying, “See to it that you do not leave undone any of the rituals for the feast. And pay special attention to the service of the psalmody and to fulfilling your ministry to the needy as best you can. Then after the divine liturgy commit this humble body of mine to the ground.” So then after giving these instructions and embracing the two aforementioned sisters, at that moment she fell asleep in eternal peace and was so reposed that those who looked upon her thought she was taking her rest in ordinary sleep. For she shut her mouth and eyes in a natural fashion and did not need anyone to arrange them in a seemly way.

So falling down before her holy corpse, they wept at their orphanhood, saying, “So where have you gone, our blessed mother who bears the name of immortality? How could you have left us orphaned in this way, disappearing from our very eyes? Where evermore shall we look upon your angelic face? Where shall we hear your voice that delights our hearts and prompts us to good deeds? The last flicker of our good hope is extinguished. You have gone to your rest and we are benumbed with listlessness. We will no longer have you associating with us, since the Lord has selected you for His immortal mansions.”

14. After uttering these and similar lamentations and after singing the accustomed hymn over her after the eucharistic service, they placed her sacred body in a coffin and committed her to the ground in the appropriate manner. Then the new mother superior maintained a vigil next to the tomb and would not leave it day or night, shedding tears and mourning the loss of the blessed woman. Athanasia then appeared to her in a dream and said, “Take heart and know this accurately, that at the completion of the forty days from my death I will obtain what I am going to receive from God.” After

58 15 August.
59 Cf. Ps. 4:8.
60 This is an allusion to the custom of closing the eyes of the dead.
61 Literally, “kanon,” a set of nine odes that was sung in three sections; cf. ODB 2:1102.
62 Reading στερησιν (as in Carras ed.) for στερησιν, which is evidently a typographical error in Halkin. στερησιν would mean “barrenness.”
63 On the fortieth day after death a special service was held in commemoration of the deceased, food was distributed to the poor, and a reception banquet was held.
seeing these things <in her dream>, <the mother superior> awoke and was perplexed by her vision and the words of the blessed woman.

When the fortieth day arrived, the women who lived in the nunnery forgot it, as is often wont to happen, thinking that it was two days later. Thereupon when evening arrived, the blessed Athanasia <again> appeared to the aforementioned sister [i.e., the mother superior] and said, “Why did you utterly neglect my fortieth-day commemoration, preparing nothing for distribution to the poor or for a banquet for my friends?” She was amazed by this vision; [p. 191] and when she came to her senses and counted again precisely the number of days, she realized that this was the evening during which the sacred psalmody for the fortieth-day commemoration should be performed.

When it was already morning and the divine liturgy had begun, two of the leaders of that sacred group of nuns, 64 whose eyes of the heart the Lord opened for such an awesome vision, observed two men, awe-inspiring in appearance and with flashing bright robes; and they had the blessed Athanasia between them. And leading her and making her stand in front of the holy sanctuary, they brought out a purple robe decorated with gems and pearls. They dressed her like an empress and crowned her head with a crown that had crosses in the front and back. They placed in her hand a jewel-studded sta and escorted her into the divine sanctuary. After the occurrence of this vision during the fortieth-day commemoration, the coffin in which the relics of the blessed woman were deposited under ground began to creak continuously for an entire year.65

15. When the all-venerable <anniversary> day of her dormition arrived, behold, two men and a tormented woman, <all> possessed by wicked spirits, were caught frantically dancing above the holy relics of the blessed woman. They then removed the overlying soil with their hands and dragged the coffin

64 These two are probably Marina and Eupraxia whom Athanasia embraced as she died. Marina may also have been the new mother superior. She is singled out in Chap. 18 as being healed from a stomach disease by the laurel that decorated the coffin of Athanasia on her commemoration day.

65 Cf. Chaps. 2–3 of the Translation and Miracles of Theodora of Thessalonike, where marble slabs pop off of her tomb to indicate her displeasure with the burial site and her wish for the transfer of her relics. A common stage in the development of a saint’s cult was the transfer or “translation” of the holy individual’s remains from their original place of burial, usually an underground tomb, to an above-ground coffin or reliquary more accessible to pilgrims.
from the tomb. After this happened, the afflicted woman immediately was re-
stored to health.

Some holy men, who happened to be nearby, observing the coffin, found it dripping streams of fragrant oil on all sides. Hastily opening it they saw her so gracefully laid out that they thought she had died recently. For her shining eyes, her holy lips, that entire blessed body appeared sound, intact, and unharmed; her flesh was soft and her arms could be manipulated and were not hindered in any movement. After venerating her and shedding many springs of tears, they secured the coffin and properly decided that it should be placed in the view of all.

After she was transferred into another coffin, in which the blessed woman even now resides in a blessed fashion, the nuns, taking off her robes, then tried to drape her in another one made of silk thread that was gray in color. But she did not cooperate at all, keeping her hands fixed on her chest and utterly resisting this change of robe.70

Then one nun of this sacred group, who was distinguished in every virtue and was truly a treasure chest of the Holy Spirit, knelt down and beseeched the saint with these words, “O mistress, as when associating with us you possessed unwavering obedience, so now please obey us and put on this cheap tunic that we have brought to you.” She heard this as if alive and immediately relaxed her arms and received the covering of the tunic. Then in this way she was laid out in her sacred coffin.

16. It would be a good thing to recall a few of the miracles that occurred

66 The adjective ἱεροῖ (“sacred”) implies that they were priests (ἱερεῖς).

67 Myron, a perfumed oil that often miraculously exudes from the relics, coffin, or icon of a saint.

68 Cf. the locks attached to the coffin of Theodora of Thessalonike; see Chap. 4 of her Translation and Miracles, below.

69 The word φαῖάζει, commonly applied to ecclesiastical garb, seems to include a chromatic range from dusky gray-black (salt and pepper) to pure black.

70 Athanasia may have resisted a change in her burial garments because she objected to the silken material, much more luxurious than her habitual garb of wool and goat-hair. Cf. a similar incident during the translation of the corpse of Theodora of Thessalonike, when her daughter insisted that she be covered with a simple woolen shroud instead of one made of more elegant fabric (Chap. 6 of the Translation and Miracles).

71 Perhaps again Marina.
after this, and then in this way end the account. For not many days had yet passed when a girl about twelve years old, who was possessed by an unclean spirit, and kept falling down and foaming at the mouth, rushed up to the tomb of the blessed woman. And after spending forty days there, she departed in good health through the grace of the Lord.

And there was another child around eight years old who had a demon in his hand. For he would see a black sparrow coming and sitting on his hand, whereupon the hand would go into a spasm and hurt pitiably. Remaining at the divine relics of the blessed woman for seven whole days, he became healthy with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit.

Then a man, a slave by fate but free by faith, who had an internal demon and by this was bloated like a wineskin in his whole body by dropsy, arrived at the nunnery and prayed to gain healing. The blessed Athanasia appeared to him in a dream and said, “Stay a short while, brother, and I, with the cooperation of God, will provide you a cure. For I will send out to you a part of my body through which you will be entirely delivered from the disease that afflicts you.” The man heard this and took heart. And a month later at nightfall, the man fell into a sort of trance and saw himself getting soaked from all sides by water coming down from the roof of the church. When all the lamps were extinguished, he ran to the holy relics of the blessed woman. There was a loud creaking in the coffin and the man thought he heard a voice coming out to him, “Open your mouth quickly, open it!” The man did this and happily received what was proffered to him. As soon as he received it, he recovered his health.

When morning came, he informed all the women in the nunnery, shouting out the good news of his healing. And when all the women assembled at the same moment and wanted to know the cause of his healing, he brought out the gift from the fold of his garment. Now this was the nail from the big toe of the blessed woman’s foot, wrapped in a small cloth. So the man departed in good health, glorifying God and proclaiming the miracles of the blessed woman.

17. Another time when her holy commemoration day was being celebrated and a great crowd of people had assembled, a woman by the name of Theodote, who had a paralyzed hand, made entreaties to gain healing. So one
of the sisters grabbed her hand and placed it under the armpit of the blessed woman in the coffin. By the grace of God she removed it healed and wholly sound.

There was another woman with an internal spirit, who, although she visited the coffin for quite a few days, still sadly returned to her house without success. Then she saw in her sleep the saint saying words of this sort to her, “You have committed a deceit against your husband and have bitterly condemned to death your own soul. Therefore, depart and confess your transgression, and I will free you from the vexation of the wicked demon.” After the woman heard these instructions and carried them out, she became healthy with the help of the Lord.

There was a woman who brought a nursing infant who was blind in the right eye and whose hand and leg were paralyzed and useless. She cast him upon the healing coffin of the blessed woman. A few days later she took him back healthy, and returned to her house rejoicing.

18. There was another woman who suffered a very great inflamed swelling of the eyes so that they drooped like apples from a tree branch. Standing at the coffin of the saint and placing her head on the holy relics, she made supplication to receive healing. After remaining there for two or three days, she became healthy with the help of the Lord, and her eyes returned to their former condition.

There was a child about twelve years old with hands and legs that were totally numb, who dragged himself to the tomb of the blessed woman. After a few days had passed in this way, the boy was deemed worthy of a divine visitation and returned home walking on his own two feet. Everyone was amazed at the very great miracle worked on him by the blessed woman.

A girl called Mary who lived in the nunnery suffered a painful affliction in her neck. The blessed woman appeared to her in a dream and said, “Take my goat hair sticharion and place it on the affected area.” After the girl awoke and did this, straightway she miraculously gained healing.

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73 Probably adultery.
74 Athanasia is awarded the epithet thaumaturge (“miracle-worker”) by the Orthodox church.
75 Vestment of clerical office that indicates Athanasia was a deaconess; cf. ODB 3:1956. It was a tunic with long sleeves.
Marina, who was mentioned above, had been afflicted for many years with a terrible disease in her stomach. So then taking one of the laurel leaves from those laid at that time on top of the coffin and placing it for three days on the diseased area, she reaped the fruits of a complete healing.

19. I have now narrated in moderation just enough things to provide you pious a mere reminder of the saint. For not only would it have been impossible for me to narrate everything verbatim, but as well for those who have far surpassed me in their lives and who possess the speech equal to it. But I, who am very spare and entirely devoid of lofty expression, have devoted myself to this small service, not depending at all on fictitious accounts, but trusting in those events which I observed with my own eyes and on blessed women who utter the words of truth and lived in an outstanding manner with the all-blessed mother for her entire life and who really knew everything about her. We will leave to others in due time to write about their lives and virtuous careers, which are very great and sources of benefit.

20. Now you, O blessed one and bearer of the name of immortality and dweller with the divinely formed angels, you who really embraced poverty for the sake of Christ but were enriched by divine gifts, you who mourned continuously but found comfort therein, you who were beautified with meekness and gained the earth of the meek, you who lived a life in hunger and thirst but who found nourishment that does not flow away, you who possessed a merciful heart and were shown great mercy by God, you who received in purity of heart the radiance of the Holy Spirit, you who pacified your soul from passions and were proved to be a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, you who

76 See Chaps. 12 and 14, and note 64.
77 Or “womb.”
78 Evidently placed on the coffin for her commemoration day.
79 The masculine endings show the narrator was male.
80 Cf. 2 Pet. 1:16.
81 Carras (p. 224) suggests the emendation of to sundiapreysaiz to sundiatryaiz, but this is probably unnecessary.
82 Reading τροφήν for τροφήν.
83 “You who really embraced poverty . . . you who pacified your soul from passions”: a paraphrase of the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3–9).
became, so to speak, the treasure house of all blessings and thereby were deemed worthy of the ineffable light, you who congregate with the herds of the blessed and cheerfully dance with the choruses of the just,\textsuperscript{84} remember us who are adorned in you, remember. Guide your flock which you established with your own sweat,\textsuperscript{85} watch over our lives that have been battered by the many flood waves of life.\textsuperscript{86} Just as we lived in a blessed manner through your prayers and were proved superior to the snares of the devil, may we be deemed worthy along with you of eternal blessings through the grace and benevolence of our Lord Jesus Christ, together with whose Father and the Holy Spirit <may there be> glory, honor, and veneration now and to the ages of ages. Amen.

\textsuperscript{84} Compare Athanasios, \textit{de Virginitate}, 24–25 (PG 28:281a): χορεύσει και μετά ἄγγειλ προφητῶν and χορεύρηται Χριστοῦ ("He will dance with the holy prophets" and "dancer of Christ").

\textsuperscript{85} She was the founder of the monastic community.

\textsuperscript{86} Although this is a standard metaphor, it may be an allusion to further raids by the Arabs before the abandonment of Aegina.
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]. He also gives precise dates for the death of the archbishop Antony (here dating by induction), 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.

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

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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. Gregory had at least some classical education (as evidenced by his quotations from Homer) and was familiar with the works of Photios.

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. Her cult, an urban cult as so rightly emphasized by E. Patlagean, 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) 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” (ἐντοθα) to refer to the convent in Chaps. 50, 57, 59, 60, etc.
6 Both vitae are about 20,000 words long.
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, 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.  

9 Kurtz, Theodora, 3–9.  

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


13 See Paschalides, Theodora, 283–96, for a sketch of the history of the monastery.
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Secondary Literature
LIFE AND CONDUCT OF OUR BLESSED MOTHER THEODORA OF TESSALONIKE

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\textsuperscript{14} of their virtue. Thus, since the auspicious day of the annual commemoration of our blessed mother Theodora is upon us\textsuperscript{15} (she who truly appeared to be a gift of God),\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{18} 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 \textless a miracle\textgreater{} to occur in our generation that surpasses many miracles \textless of old\textgreater{}; [p. 68] for the almighty wisdom of God, which \textit{in all ages enters into holy souls, maketh them friends of God and prophets}.\textsuperscript{18} Nor let the charge of rash action be made against me, for equating myself to those who received the talent of the Scriptures\textsuperscript{19} 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

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Basil of Caesarea, \textit{Homilia in Gordium martyrem, PG 31:492A}. The notes in Tsames’ \textit{Meterikon} have alerted me to several of the patristic borrowings in this \textit{vita}.

\textsuperscript{15} 29 August, the anniversary of her death.

\textsuperscript{16} Theodora’s name in Greek means “gift of God.”

\textsuperscript{17} The tomb of Theodora at the convent of St. Stephen.

\textsuperscript{18} Sap. 7:27.

\textsuperscript{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;\textsuperscript{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;\textsuperscript{21} her nobility was the preservation of the image\textsuperscript{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;\textsuperscript{23} her glory was her desire not to be glorified at all by all 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 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 things, since everyone considers dear 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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Eph. 6:19.

\textsuperscript{21} Heb. 12:22.

\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Gregory of Nazianzos, or. 8 (PG 35:796b).

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. Mt. 10:14.

\textsuperscript{24} An island in the Aegean Sea, located in the Saronic Gulf southwest of Athens.
has now been left deserted and obscure. The blessed Theodora was born 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, he was also deemed worthy to become a monk, so that he might be seen as perfect in all ways 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 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 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, 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, 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 letters 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

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 τα ἱερά γράμματα; cf. note 47 in Life of Elisabeth the Wonderworker.
kept pestering her father in an importunate manner, whenever he returned from his isolated place. 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> husband 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. And her father, through divine inspiration, named her Agape, 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]. 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 Demetrios\textsuperscript{37} (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),\textsuperscript{38} retired to the remote area below Thoropa,\textsuperscript{39} which is not frequented by men, in the belief that it was easier to live among wild beasts than to associate\textsuperscript{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>,\textsuperscript{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’\textsuperscript{42} and that ‘the members should have the same care for

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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{39} An unknown place probably in the vicinity of Thessalonike.

\textsuperscript{40} “Retired to . . . associate”: cf. Basil of Caesarea, Homilia in Gordium martyrem, PG 31:496a.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{42} 1 Cor. 11:3.
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." Therefore, since I, although a feebler and lesser part, have the same care for you, 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, and in the present life will give us complete solace and at 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, the wholly blessed apostle and evangelist, which is located on the road leading to the Kassandreotic Gate, 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. 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.”

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 (“Ένας όμολογητής τῆς Δευτερας Εἰκονομαχίας ὁ Ἀγιοπρεσβύτερος Θεσσαλονίκης Ἀντώνιος [+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 and immersing his mind in their depths, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. And he was not only trained in our [i.e., Christian] wisdom, 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 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. And therefore by God’s decision he was appointed archbishop of Dyrrachion. For it was not right to hide his lamp under a bushel, but to place it on the lampstand 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, 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 beast\(^1\) 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\(^2\) 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,\(^3\) 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,

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\(^{1}\) The Greek name for Leo (\textit{λέων}) is the same as the word for lion (\textit{λεων}).

\(^{2}\) Cf. Ps. 88 (89):17.

\(^{3}\) A minor pagan deity who was able to assume various shapes; cf. Homer, \textit{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. 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 follows:

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, 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, and to denigrate it with other such blasphemies; for I know that the honor of the images is the honor to those depicted, just as dishonor is transmitted to the same images. For we true worshipers of God do not stop and limit our reverence and veneration to the icons, 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 in the Spirit are familiar with this distinction of reverence, 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 (“Ἀντώνιος,” 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, “Ἀντώνιος,” 204–6.


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. 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. 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. Thus when we render the reverence of veneration to the other holy symbols and holy places of our pure and holy worship 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. Thus we honor and venerate the holy icons of our all-pure Lady the Mother of God and of all the saints in proportion to the pre-eminence and venerability of their prototypes, 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. And we do not depict in an icon that which cannot be

72 Phot., ep. 1.442–47.
75 Phot., ep. 1.431–34.
76 After ἁγαλογίαν, Paschalides omitted the phrase τῆς τῶν πρωτοτυπῶν ὑπεροχῆς καὶ σεβασμοτητος, 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 εἰκών 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, 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, 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; but now you have been captivated by their doctrines and strive in your excessive wickedness to surpass even your teachers, whose heart completely loathes the name of Christ our God which is above all, as Isaiah says: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.’ And 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. I mean, and you have shown yourself no more tolerant than idolaters toward the divine mysteries of Christians, trampling the Christians themselves with feet swift to shed blood, 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.


88 Phot., ep. 1.397, a quotation from Is. 59:7.
The head of the intelligible serpent,\textsuperscript{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 \texttt{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 \texttt{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 \texttt{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: ‘\textit{Drown, O Lord, and divide their tongues}\textsuperscript{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 \texttt{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 \texttt{Antony} was striving to trap him rather than \texttt{Leo} overpowering \texttt{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 \texttt{Antony} to perpetual exile. And \texttt{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 \texttt{Leo} had an angry and pale face and his eyes were livid, frenzied with the blood of the righteous man and

\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Ps. 73 (74):13–14.

\textsuperscript{90} Ps. 54 (55):9.
blinded with dark madness. Thus Antony was sent into exile, saying nothing to himself and everyone except that melodious psalm of David: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” 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), his successor to the imperial throne, Michael, recalled the holy Antony from exile, and bade him live quietly at home; 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, 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.”

But why go on at length? When the terrible winter of heresy abated and the spring of the unsullied orthodox faith once more appeared, 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 Demetrius, 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 (Paschalides [Theodora, 59, and “Ἀντωνιος,” 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; Paschalides, Theodora, 252–53. Theodore of Studios 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 Δημήτριου Θεσσαλονίκης, 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, together with his archiepiscopal vestments, so that one could discern the location of the honorable crosses of his omophorion 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, carrying away the narrator with praises of Antony, I must now come back and tell my simple account in orderly sequence, describing the ascetic 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), the blessed Theodora, after observing at home the third and ninth day commemoration of her husband, 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, “Troisième, neuvième et quarantième jours dans la tradition byzantine: temps chrétien et anthropologie,” in Le temps chrétien de la fin de l’Antiquité 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 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 veneration of the sacred icons fought the good fight of being a confessor for the faith, when a certain bodyguard of the emperor, named Choirosphaktes, severely abused her. And so Theodora went immediately to the holy monastery dedicated to St. Stephen, 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). 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 and my child and I am well aware of the mode of life

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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. Koliás, 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. Leôn Choirosphacte, 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 Theophilos (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,\textsuperscript{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>.

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,\textsuperscript{112} and prefer to God the pleasures of this world, and the last state will be worse than the first.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{114} Therefore, be manly, my child, and let your heart be strengthened and endure\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{116} as the holy apostle [Paul], the cho-

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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, \textit{Deux typica}, 115–16).

\textsuperscript{112} Prov. 26:11; 2 Pet. 2:22.

\textsuperscript{113} Mt. 12:45.

\textsuperscript{114} Mt. 10:38.

\textsuperscript{115} Cf. Ps. 26 (27):14.

\textsuperscript{116} Eph. 6:12.
sen vessel,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{118} And she was tonsured and donned the holy monastic habit, and changed her name to Theodora.\textsuperscript{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 rosy\textsuperscript{120} 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

\textsuperscript{117} Acts 9:15.

\textsuperscript{118} Cf. Goar, \textit{Euchologion}, 385, sect. 18–386, sect. 19.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{120} Εὔροδος, 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, 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 servant122 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 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

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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 ekklesiarchissa 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.
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 entreat ing 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.


\(^{143}\) Cf. Gal. 6:14.


\(^{145}\) 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 threshold\(^\text{147}\) 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\(^\text{148}\) 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.”

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 shepherd\(^{149}\) 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 \(<\text{from their penance}>\). And she did so after delivering many admonitions. And by the grace of God \(<\text{from then on}>\) 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. 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 Κοίτων 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 κοίτωνισκός (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” (κέλλια); this may have been a special arrangement.
Christ the cornerstone, has cast it to the ground with an attack of boldness against your weak mind? Does not the Lord, Who through Paul, His chosen vessel, bids us to obey them that have the rule and submit to them, witness and praise the things that happen according to His commandment, 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 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, 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.”

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, 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-

155 Acts 9:15.
156 Heb. 13:17. The Greek word for “they that have the rule,” ἔχομενοι, 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.”  

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.  

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, 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 show such obedience and to wrestle in such contests? Around midnight when the rain stopped and the bitter air 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 sake 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 Απερ περι δε τομεσονυκτην the Paschalides edition unintentionally omitted the phrase ληξαντος τοι oμβρου και δριμυτερας γενομενης, 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 com-
munity, 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 custom-
ary 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: “Be-
lieve 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 works171 grant to 
those who sincerely love Him. Thus the Lord revealed this woman to be like 
a city set on a hill172 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 Theo-
dora’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 protege; cf. Chap. 31.

169 1 Tim. 3:6.

170 Ps. 33 (34):9.

171 Ps. 32 (33):15.

172 Mt. 5:14.
Therefore John of blessed memory, who was archimandrite at that time,\textsuperscript{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, “\textit{Let no man trouble me.}\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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, “\textit{If any man desire to be ®rst, the same shall be last of all and servant of all,}’\textsuperscript{176} and “\textit{I came not be served but to serve.”}\textsuperscript{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?’”

\textsuperscript{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 con®rmed the decision of the monks or nuns. The archimandrite John, who had died by 894 when Gregory wrote the \textit{vita}, is not otherwise attested.

\textsuperscript{174} Gal. 6:17.

\textsuperscript{175} Theodora is referring to the principle of “monastic stability” (\textit{stabilitas loci}), that a monk or nun should remain for life in the monastery where he or she ®rst took monastic vows; cf. Goar, \textit{Euchologion}, 383, sect. 14, canons 4 of the Council of Chaledon and 21 of Nicaea II (Rhalles-Potles, \textit{Syntagma} 2:225–29, 641–42; Joannou, \textit{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,” \textit{GORThR} 30 (1985), 14 f.

\textsuperscript{176} Mk. 9:35.

\textsuperscript{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, the holy woman’s daughter, was appointed superior by the most holy archbishop Theodore, as a result of the decision of the archimandrites Hilarion and Dorotheos and the mother superior [Anna] and all the nuns, because [Anna] had reached extreme old age 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. 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 καταλόγοι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀπὸ ἀρχῆς μεχρί 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.”

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.
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 ὀσίων θηκαίς 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.
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 Theopiste 203 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.
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, 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 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 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.” [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, 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 was at hand. Therefore, at sunrise she requested and partook of the pure and eternal mysteries [i.e., the eucharist]; and after reclin-

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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\textsuperscript{210} of asceticism and having finished the course\textsuperscript{211} of obedience with a contrite and humble heart,\textsuperscript{212} and having kept her faith\textsuperscript{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, \textit{Who seeth in secret and doth reward openly},\textsuperscript{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;\textsuperscript{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 thus\textsuperscript{216} the majority opinion prevailed.

\textsuperscript{210} 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7.
\textsuperscript{211} 2 Tim. 4:7.
\textsuperscript{212} Ps. 50 (51):17.
\textsuperscript{213} 2 Tim. 4:7.
\textsuperscript{214} Mt. 6:4.
\textsuperscript{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?).
\textsuperscript{216} Reading τοινυον, 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, 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 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, the blessed Theodora was gloriously laid to rest in the tomb of her fellow nuns at the hands of priests and fathers. The day of her departure from the body was the twenty-ninth of August, 6,400 years after the creation of the world, 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 episcopale 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.”

Truly man will not see as God sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, while God looks at the heart.”

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, 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

and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. 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 duty 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, 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.


233 Or “day of special observance” (σεβασμὴ <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, 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 ineflable 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, 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 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 gate\(^{240}\) 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 burial\(^{241}\) 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 virtues\(^{243}\) 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, Delehaye, *Deux typica*, 119.11–15.
\(^{240}\) Reading θρησκεύων 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 (ἐλαιον) 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 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 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 Ethiopian 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, he disappeared. As soon as 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. When the boy arrived at the place where the remains of the blessed 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 καμαρίας; Papageorgiou (“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 λεύχειμονω (“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 time\(^{250}\) 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 just as she did when she was younger. 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. 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 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 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 through those who love Him, and would proclaim the miracles of the blessed. [p. 178]
56. A certain distinguished and honorable woman, the wife of the strategetes Euthymios, who lived in seven-gated 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 oil as if it were the blessed Theodora herself or one of her relics, and 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. A man by the name of Elias lived there, who was of Amalekite [i.e., Arab] extraction and was devoted by ancestral
Theodora of Thessalonike

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 Theodotos (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, 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, 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. 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.


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 conscience265 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 εὐγείαστα (“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, 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. He had a chronic problem with his hips, and was neither able to sit on a mule, 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 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, [p. 186] had her knees, related to 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, 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. He had a chronic problem with his hips, and was neither able to sit on a mule, 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 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, [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 ζωόν for εξόν; 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 μυροβλατης (“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 Caminiatae. 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
wrist, 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, 276 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, 277 by anointing her with the oil which gushes forth

Δημητριος Θεσσαλονικης (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?
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.

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

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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.\textsuperscript{281} In the tenth month,\textsuperscript{282} \textit{toward the dawn of the first day of the week,}\textsuperscript{283} when the birthday of the holy prophet and Forerunner, John the Baptist, was being celebrated,\textsuperscript{284} before sunrise one of the marble slabs covering the relics of the blessed Theodora suddenly broke.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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 \textsuperscript{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 \textit{Who raises up those who are broken down}\textsuperscript{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-

\textsuperscript{281} Theodora had asked to be buried in a separate tomb; cf. \textit{vita}, Chap. 40.

\textsuperscript{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.

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{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

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. 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, 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 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, had gone to the Queen of Cities [i.e., Constantinople] with all the archbishops for the election and installation of the ecumenical patriarch Antony, seven priests who were invited to transfer the remains of the saint 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, Ἀναγλύφες σαρκοφάγοι και ἐπιτάφιες πλακες τῆς μεσης καὶ ύστερης βυζαντινῆς περιοδοῦ στὴν Ελλάδα (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, 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. When we came inside the convent, after securing the doors 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 stone and cleared it off, we strove to roll it away. 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. 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. 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 ἐὐλαβεῖς as “devout” and “my honorable father” as Gregory’s birth father. It is possible, however, that ἐὐλαβεῖς should be understood as referring to monks (cf. Ignatii Diaconi Vita Tarasii archiepiscopi Constantinopolitanus, ed. I. A. Heikel [Helsingfors, 1891], 421.4, ὁ δὲ τῶν μονοτροπῶν ἐὐλαβεστάτος θασσὸς, and Lampe, s.v. Ἠχε) and that the “father” is Gregory’s spiritual father.
298 It is not clear here whether the τύλαι 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 (πάλαικες) 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,\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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]

\textsuperscript{302} An alternative translation is “persuasively exhorted everyone to pull all together.”

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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. 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 fluids 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, have all been preserved intact until now. And the narrow girdle 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.

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

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305 I.e., 3 August 893.

306 Reading τὼν ἐντοσθίων ἱχαρὼν for τῶν ἐντός θείων ἱχαρὼν, 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 Σμικίνθιον, 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 Ignatios (d. 877) in PG 105:560A, 564b.
tears in our eyes>. And then as we took pleasure in the singing of hymns to Theodora, 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. 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. 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 nor are the measures of our labors measured, knows how to measure out grace to the humble, 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 of the Lord, may hearken to the precept of humility. 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.

Let us see that not only the Queen of the South desired to see the wisdom of Solomon, but tens of thousands of other women as well praised the Creator

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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.


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),\textsuperscript{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 <Theo-
dora>.\textsuperscript{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 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

\textsuperscript{318} Prov. 1:7.

\textsuperscript{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 papyrus 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 down 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 blood: “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

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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 materiel 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. 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, 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,*” 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,*” 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.

14. During the first year after the departure of the blessed Theodora to God, when the girl was a year old, 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 old, ran with unsurpassable faith to the place where the relics of the saint lay beneath the earth, 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.\textsuperscript{331} The following year\textsuperscript{332} 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 night\textsuperscript{333} 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\textsuperscript{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?\textsuperscript{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? 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-

\textsuperscript{331} Cf. note 123, above.
\textsuperscript{332} I.e., in 893.
\textsuperscript{333} Around midnight.
\textsuperscript{334} Mt. 16:18.
\textsuperscript{335} Cf. Is. 1:15. Read πλήρεων 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.” 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 you 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 city 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

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 Theodorus 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, 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. And the most terrible feature of the epidemic was that the same disease would strike its survivors a second time.

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, she was burning up terribly with a raging and fiery fever, which rendered her immobile. For a rupture on her right cervical tendon 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 τῆς could possibly be a corruption from γ´ [= πρὶς (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 τενων 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 ῥηγνωμί is used; cf. the ῥήγμα of the text of the vita]). Galen, noting that he is following Homer and Hippocrates, specifically refers to the sinews of the neck as τενωντες, and describes the τενων 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 τενων; 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), 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 and Christ is the one head 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 and we are made all things to all men 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 bonds 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 lesion (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. And since her tongue was also inflamed by the countless pustules of that epidemic,

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


348 Cf. Rom. 12:5.

349 1 Cor. 9:22.

350 Reading δεσμοι for θεσμοι, 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? 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. For as the result of extreme necessity, she was an expert at pitiable words, which could break the hearts of all and persuade God to accept propitiation on her behalf. One night the girl fell into a trance and, as she told us, saw two women coming toward her from the window of the house where she lay in her sickbed. One of them was clad in splendid garments of silk and was adorned all over with gold, 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 state.

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, Κασνίτζη, I [Thessalonike, 1953], pl. 55b).
Theodora of Thessalonike

After suffering in this way for about fifty days, 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, 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, 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 wicking 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 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.

This extraordinary miracle inspired in me even greater love for the

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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 μωτις can mean a lint bandage or a drainage tube, according to Liddell-Scott (Lexicon, s.v.), while for μωτις 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, 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, 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.” 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 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,” and placing my hope in the One Who makes the crooked straight, the co-eternal Word of God the Father, the true Wisdom and Power, 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, 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.
363 Eccl. 5:3.
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, 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, 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 καὶ ἀδελφοί 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.
8. LIFE OF ST. MARY THE YOUNGER

translated by Angeliki E. Laiou

Introduction

St. Mary the Younger1 (d. ca. 903) was a woman of Armenian origins, whose family migrated to Constantinople during the reign of Basil I (867–886). Her father was a military man, as were her husband, Nikephoros; her brother-in-law; and one of her sons. Upon her marriage, she moved to her husband’s household in a small town in eastern Thrace, and eventually to the city of Vizye,2 where Nikephoros was stationed after having fought valiantly against the Bulgarians. She and her husband had four sons, of whom the first two died while still very young, while the last two, a pair of twins, were born with signs on their bodies foretelling that one of them would become a soldier and the other a monk.

According to her vita, Mary was a very pious woman, whose piety was expressed both in private ways, that is, through her constant attendance of church or praying at home, and in social ways, through almsgiving and philanthropy. She is also praised for more homely virtues, for example, the fact that she treated her servants not as slaves but as fellow human beings. It was indeed her excessive philanthropy that proved her downfall. Her husband’s brother and sister accused her of squandering the household property and of adultery with a slave—a heinous crime. Despite her heated denials, and her statement that her almsgiving would procure salvation for her husband as well, she was placed under guard in her bedroom. One day, her husband, incensed at some words of hers that were misrepresented by one of her enemies, beat her, and as she tried to escape she hurt her head and died after a few days.

Four months after her death, a miracle occurred at her tomb, which was

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1 She was evidently called “the Younger” (ἡ Νέα) to distinguish her from the earlier Mary of Egypt.
2 Vizye is modern Vize, in eastern Turkish Thrace.
housed in the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia. The bishop of Vizye did not believe that a woman, who had lived and died in a married state, could perform miracles which were, for him, reserved to pure men and holy monks and martyrs (Chap. 12; cf. also Chap. 19). The miracles belied this assertion. Nevertheless, when, a short time later, her husband decided to move her body into a chapel he had built for her, members of the clergy tried, unsuccessfully, to block the operation. Posthumous miracles continued, and among the miraculous happenings was the execution of a painting of her by a painter from another city (Raidestos) who had never laid eyes on her (Chap. 18).

The vita discusses the occupation of Vizye by the Bulgarians, under the tsar Symeon (893–927), after a five-year blockade. The inhabitants fled, and Symeon ordered the city razed, turning the churches into barns and warehouses, with the exception of the church that housed the saint’s body, where a flame burst out and frightened him. The saint eventually performed miracles for the Bulgarians as well. Twenty-five years after her death, when peace had been made with the Bulgarians, her body, which had remained intact, was reburied in a marble tomb. Her sons gave property to her church, founding a monastery. The last part of the vita contains information about her sons and praises for her.

The geographic area in which the events narrated in this vita take place is restricted to eastern Thrace and Constantinople; the boundaries are Medeia in the northeast, Arkadioupolis (modern Luleburgaz) in the west, Raidestos in the south, and Constantinople in the east. For the rest, there is passing mention of Mt. Olympos in Bithynia, where one of her sons engaged in ascetic practices, and of Mt. Kyminas, but the latter reference is garbled, as will be explained below. There are also people from Bulgaria who came to the saint’s grave to be cured (Chap. 14; cf. also Chap. 25). This is, then, a local saint, in whose sanctification her family played a primary role. Nothing is known for certain of the cult of Mary the Younger after the mid-tenth century. Her absence from the Synaxarion of Constantinople suggests that her cult remained


localized in Vizye and its environs. On the other hand, her commemoration up to the time of the fall of the empire is indicated by the two surviving manuscripts of her *vita*, which date to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Her feastday is celebrated by the Orthodox Church on 16 February.

The chronology of the saint can be established fairly reasonably, if not precisely. The main and firm point of reference is the Byzantine-Bulgarian treaty of October 927 (see Chap. 27). Soon after its conclusion Mary’s remains were transferred; she had been dead for twenty-five years. Her son Stephen/Symeon was instrumental in the transfer, and as he journeyed from Constantinople, it is unlikely that the event took place before the spring of 928, fall and winter being ill suited to travel. Therefore, she died ca. 903. The year of her birth can be established, *grosso modo*, from internal evidence. She and her husband moved to Vizye after the death of Basil I (867), and after a Bulgarian campaign that had resulted in “great slaughter” (Chap. 5). This may refer to Symeon’s campaign that started in 893, but most probably refers to the great Byzantine defeat at Boulgarophygon, in 896. At that time she had already had one son who had died at the age of five, and another child, Vardanes. Assuming that in 896 Vardanes was one year old, and allowing one year’s interval between the birth of the two children, she would have been married in 888. She was very young when she married, and the youngest age of marriage for girls was thirteen, or over twelve; so she may have been born in 875. In that case, she died before the age of thirty. The rest of the internal chronology is quite consistent; thus, at the time of her death her twin sons would have been approximately one year old (Chap. 9), and her son Vaanes would have reached the rank of *droungarios* in his very early twenties, a not unlikely story.


6 In his introduction to his edition of her *vita* (in *AASS*, Nov. 4:690–91), P. Peeters thinks that she must have moved to Vizye in 893, and thus have been married in 886 or earlier. He concludes from that that she must have been born in Armenia, since her father came to the Byzantine Empire during the reign of Basil I. I do not see that this follows, unless one assumes that she was married at an age considerably older than thirteen. But we know that girls married very early; see Laiou, *Mariage*, 16 ff. Although the examples in this book are drawn from a later period, girls married very young in the 9th century as well. There is no information as to whether Mary was born in Armenia or in Constantinople, and no basis for even a reasonable guess.
A more complex issue is the date of composition of the *vita*, which is preserved only in two late manuscripts, Vat. gr. 800 (fourteenth or fifteenth century) and Athos, Laura K. 81 (fourteenth century). Some scholars have argued for a composition soon after her death,7 or in the second half of the tenth century,8 while others suggest a date after 1025. The arguments for a tenth-century date may be summarized as follows. The death of her son Stephen/Symeon is not mentioned, so he must be assumed to have been still alive at the time of the composition. The references to “our generation” (Chaps. 1, 19, and 33) have been interpreted to mean that the author was a near-contemporary. The vividness of the narration has been taken to indicate immediacy in time. The reference to invasions in Thrace (Chap. 33) is thought to apply to Pecheneg and Hungarian invasions of the tenth century.9

All these arguments can be disputed. As regards Stephen/Symeon, the *vita* mentions earlier written texts (Chap. 27, 31). Whether these are writings about him or about a translation of the saint’s relics or earlier versions of the *vita* is not explicit. But the last hypothesis seems to me the most probable, in which case the existing text would be a later recension, making use of earlier writings. “Our generation” (ἡ καθ’ ἡµῶς γενεα) may well mean not “our generation” in biological terms, but rather our nation or our epoch.10 As to the narration, the most vivid elements in the story are the dialogues, which may very well be a literary exercise.11 The invasions of Thrace might just as easily be the Pecheneg invasions of 1047 or of the 1090s.

The most firm argument for a date of composition in the eleventh century or later is the reference to the emperor Basil II (Chap. 2). This would be conclusive, were it not for the possibility of an interpolation. I do not, myself, believe in a tenth-century date, but I am well aware that most of my reasons

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7 E. g., Beck, *Kirche*, 565, but this is excluded because of the subsequent events narrated in the *vita*, which take us well beyond that date.


9 See Peeters, *AASS*, Nov. 4:691.

10 On this see Demetrakos, *Lexikon*, s.v. γενεα, with impeccable ancient Greek antecedents.

11 Peeters, in presenting the arguments for an 11th-century date, also mentions that while some of the miracles are quite detailed, others are presented in the dull and dry fashion of events that happened long ago (*AASS*, Nov. 4:691).
are soft. Nevertheless, I think they are worth considering. First, it is interesting that there is no mention of living people who could bear witness to the saint’s life or the miracles;¹² nor is there any mention of surviving members of her family, very strange in a vita written within living memory of the saint. Second, there is the explicit differentiation between town and city, with Vizye figuring as a populous city (Chap. 5); this does not sound like the tenth century, but such arguments run the risk of being circular. Then, there is the curious contempt for monks (Chap. 19), including, if my translation is accurate, a statement that monks are people who have failed in their first profession. Since we know relatively little of tenth-century attitudes toward these matters, such a date cannot be excluded by a negative argument. On the other hand, it is in the eleventh century, and in the twelfth, that we find such irreverent attitudes toward monks, in the writings of Psellos, for example.¹³ And the closest parallel I can find is that in the funeral oration of Anna Komnene by George Tornikios, where he stresses that it was not ugliness (and therefore, I add, failure in matters secular) that drove her to the virtuous life, as had been the case with others.¹⁴ The celebration of secular life dedicated to God, presented with extraordinary force (Chap. 19), brings to mind the theology of Symeon the New Theologian (ca. 949–1022), who also saw a devout life in this world as a path to God. For him, many saints pass their lives in the things of this world, but choose holiness; it is possible for laymen, he says, not only for monks, to achieve perfect virtue. Those who, living in the world, purify their senses and their hearts from all evil desire are blessed; but the hermits and anchorites, if they lust after lands or after glory among men, are to be despised, and will be treated as adulterers by God.¹⁵ Clearly, the author of our vita was very close to such sentiments.

¹² By contrast, see the vita of Michael Maleinos, a near-contemporary of Mary’s son Symeon, ed. L. Petit, “Vie de Saint Michel Maleinos suivie du traite ascetique de Basile Maleinos,” ROC 7 (1902), 543–68.


One final piece of evidence seems to me to argue conclusively for a late rather than an early redaction. This is connected with the life of Stephen/Symeon, Mary’s son who became a monk. According to the *vita*, he had first gone to Constantinople to enter imperial service, and became quite successful at it (Chap. 31). Before 927 he had already become a monk at Mt. Olympos in Bithynia (Chaps. 24 and 27). Around 927 he went from Mt. Olympos to Constantinople on business, then visited Vizye (928), and then went “to the mountain called Kyminas, at the borders of Paphlagonia, near Plousias” (Chap. 27). The part about Mt. Olympos does not concern us here. But the mention of Mt. Kyminas is interesting in that it is garbled. Mt. Kyminas was not at the borders of Paphlagonia but on the river Gallos, in Bithynia; however, there was a monastery in Prousias, in the theme of Boukellarion, called Xerolimne. The author has simply conflated the two. In fact, there is a very important link between the two monastic centers, namely, St. Michael Maleinos, who established the foundation at Xerolimne in 921, and in 925 went to Mt. Kyminas where he built a great monastery, so that Mt. Kyminas was closely associated with him. There is no doubt that Stephen/Symeon was a disciple of Michael Maleinos; but why does our *vita* never mention the name? If it had been written in the tenth century, when the Maleinoi were powerful and Mt. Kyminas was flourishing, the connection would certainly have been made; but after the fall of the house of Maleinoi under Basil II, silence is easier to understand. The most powerful argument against a tenth-century redaction, however, is the confusion about the location of Mt. Kyminas. The foundation of St. Michael Maleinos fared very well under the emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), and as late as Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969); then it seems to disappear. I think it unlikely that a well-informed individual, living in the late tenth century, with Mt. Kyminas enjoying imperial favor, should have been ignorant about its location. On the other hand, someone writing much later, after the monastery had declined or even been abandoned, may have easily misunderstood two references to two monasteries.

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I wish to thank this colleague for several helpful suggestions.

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16 See below, note 132.
quite different in fact but equally unknown to him, and combined them into a single reference.17

All of this evidence, hard and soft, leads me to suggest a date of composition after 1025, and quite considerably after, since Basil II is not commemorated as recently dead, nor is there living memory of Mt. Kyminas. The author undoubtedly made use of earlier writings, some of which may well have been composed during the reign of Romanos I, the last emperor during whose reign specific events are mentioned.

The author of the *vita* remains unknown.18 He seems to have been from Vizye (cf. Chap. 33), although not necessarily living there. He was in all probability a layman, and very learned. His Greek is correct and at times elegant; there is at least one reference to Homer, a possible allusion to Plato, use of the dual (Chap. 25), the use of rare words such as ἐρομαι instead of the more usual ἐρωταω for “to ask” (Chap. 25: ἡρετο, 2d aorist), the employment of terms which were perfectly correct but much more common in ancient than in Byzantine Greek (νεοκορος, Chap. 20). Some constructions are both learned and vivid, such as the beginning of the saint’s *apologia* (Chap. 7). The author employs references to acting and miming as well as to music very comfortably, expecting his audience to have a familiarity with these allusions. He also uses wordplay and rhetorical figures that show his linguistic agility without reaching the point of hyperbole or showing off. A few examples include alliteration and paronomasia,19 synonymia,20 anaphora,21

17 What the hagiographer may have read in an earlier text is anyone’s guess. I suppose that Symeon may have gone first to Xerolimne and then to Mt. Kyminas; or that he may already have been a monk at Xerolimne before 927, followed St. Michael to Kyminas in 925, and in 927 was at Constantinople on some business connected with the monastic communities of Mt. Olympos. In any case, the connection of this scion of a provincial military family with the family of the magnates Maleinoi is interesting in itself.

18 Although there is no absolute proof that the hagiographer was male, I am making this assumption because of the extreme rarity of female hagiographers in Byzantium; cf. the remarks of A.-M. Talbot in the general introduction to this volume, p. xiv and note 26.

19 See συνθέταις-συνεκράθημεν-συνεδεθημεν-συνδεσμωμεθα-συγγένεια (p. 692ε); παρελθομε-παραδραμομε-δρομον (693β); κατεστηθα-ἐπεστη-ἐπεστη (696α); the two uses of ἀκολουθη (704β); τοπον-τροπον (694α). For his help with rhetorical figures, I thank Lee Sherry.

20 See εἰκουν-ὑποδειγμα-τυπος-παραδειγμα (693α); παρελθομε-παραδραμομε (693β).

21 See the parallel structures starting with πῶς αν and οὐ (693β).
zeugma, and more complex figures such as a use of synonymia and paronomasia together. In a couple of places, the hagiographer speaks of “audience” literally, that is, as though he expected the text to be heard rather than read, which would make the rhetorical affectations even more effective.

All of this suggests not only a good sense of language but also something of a sense of humor, evident, for example, in the curious phrase that Vaanes “reached Constantinople together with his illness” (ἡ Κωνσταντῖνου . . . μετὰ τῆς νόσου κατέλαβεν, Chap. 31). There is, in fact, an interesting combination of the humorous and the serious, an intriguing use of paradox, both in the language and in the story. For one thing, the relationship between Mary’s future husband and her brother-in-law, as well as the relationship between her son, Vaanes, and his superior in the military hierarchy (Chaps. 2 and 30) are somewhat curious. In both cases, while the strongest relationship is between men, women are only a means of cementing the male bond, or lending it respectability. In Chapter 30, Vaanes’ wife is dismissed in a few stock words regarding her high birth, while his relationship to his friend Theodore is described in some detail, and in ambiguous language, with the use of terms denoting marriage and sexual relationships. This may be seen as paradoxical in a text that claims to celebrate the achievements of women. The sense of paradox emerges rather strongly in the description of the behavior of Vaanes and Stephen/Symeon, Mary’s twin sons. Stephen/Symeon is the monk, but nothing concrete is said about his ascetic exploits; instead, the issue is relegated to “holy men” who should decide whether he merits sainthood. But Vaanes, the active soldier, is credited with a list of devotions that would be very arduous for a monk and quite impossible for a man living in the world and holding down a job (Chap. 30). Certainly, the hagiographer’s audience, who had a much more immediate understanding of such matters than we do, would have grasped the paradox immediately, and perhaps been aware of its

22 See συνεπήλθε ταῖς ρήμασιν (696β), τὴν Κωνσταντῖνου . . . μετὰ τῆς νόσου κατέλαβεν (704β), πενιώ συνεζήσεν (700β).
23 ἵδειν-περιδέιν, θεασασθαι-παριδέιν (696ν–697α).
24 On the question, see J. Boswell, Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe (New York, 1994), esp. his annotated translation of “The Passion of SS. Serge and Bacchus” at pp. 375–90.
25 This juxtaposition points up the paradoxical presentation of the polity of the two brothers; does the paradox incorporate yet another subtle criticism of monks?
subtlety: unusual events are to be expected in the life of a saint, but the ascetic discipline ascribed to her son verges on parody. It would surely have evoked a knowing smile among the audience. Is there also a subtle irony in the juxtaposition of St. Mary’s specialization in curing demoniacs, and the fact that her husband is obliquely presented as possessed by Satan when he believed his wife’s accusers (Chap. 9)? As for the transfer of Mary’s relics into her husband’s luxury tomb, and the relegation of his body outside the chapel (Chap. 27), is that presented seriously or half-jokingly, as suggested by Symeon’s statement that he did not wish to look upon the nakedness of his father, dead these four years? The simultaneous presence of seriousness and humor, the underlying irreverence, is certainly a characteristic of Byzantine writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which is, in my view, the most likely dating for the composition of the extant text of this vita.26

As I have already suggested, the vita is written in an interesting style. The author clearly has literary pretensions, not without cause. His use of dialogue is felicitous, making for a lively narration. The interest of the reader is kept up through rhetorical questions such as “what happened next?” and with questions addressed to the audience. The main characters, especially the saint and her husband, are well drawn, and the picture of Nikephoros, acting the tough as he tries to pry the truth from a terrified slave-girl, has some power (Chap. 8). Indeed, some of the most powerful scenes give an impression of people in an almost theatrical setting. Nikephoros is explicitly said to have assumed on purpose a fierce countenance in the scene with the slave girl;27 in the description of his fatal attack on his wife, which takes place in the inner chambers of the house, the author takes pains to tell us about the lighting and Mary’s exact posture; in the first miracle, the possessed man is accused of acting, and the bishop and Nikephoros play out their roles, each trying to expose the ruse (Chap. 12). In short, this is a good story well told. The author is often paradoxical or ironic, which makes one wonder how much of the straight story he believed.

This, of course, creates a problem when we try to evaluate the historical


27 By contrast, the husband of St. Thomas of Lesbos was dour and harsh without feigning it; cf. Life of Thomas, below, Chaps. 6–9, 15–16.
evidence given in the vita. The problem is perhaps not very grave with regard to political or military events, which are in all probability drawn from earlier texts. Scholars have found the vita a valuable source of information for the Thracian campaigns of Symeon, which began in earnest after the battle of Anchialos (917), and especially after 919.28 Surely no one would argue for the historical accuracy of the dialogue between the Bulgarian general and Mary’s son, the droungarios Vaanes (Chap. 25). Scholars have also disputed the likelihood of a five-year siege of Vizye, preferring to think of a blockade of the city.29 On the other hand, the savagery of the war in Thrace, the destruction of cities first by their fleeing inhabitants—surely an act of despair—and then by the Bulgarians, the search for refuge in safer places (the inhabitants of Vizye fled to Medeia), the bitterness against the Bulgarians who, although Christians, waged a terrible war (this last attitude being corroborated by other sources),30 are too vivid and too circumstantial to be ignored. Similarly, we learn interesting details about Symeon’s administration of the captured cities: he may have settled some Bulgarian civilians; he certainly installed garrisons, but routinely replaced the heads of the garrison after a time (Chaps. 24–25). The soldiers returning to Bulgaria considered it a right of war to plunder the territory before going home. Some fraternization may have taken place between Bulgarians and Byzantines.

The date of the fall of Vizye to the Bulgarians, which is mentioned by the vita, cannot, unfortunately, be established with certainty.31 There are two internal pieces of information: first, Nikephoros, Mary’s husband, died during the siege and was buried in a marble tomb; when the tomb was opened, in 928, he had been in the ground for four years, which would place his death in 924, but we do not know whether that was at the beginning or at the end of the blockade.32 Second, the blockade lasted for five years before the inhabit-

29 See below, note 118.
30 See below, p. 276 note 119.
31 Balascev, “Novye dannye,” 209, estimates it at a little after 925; the blockade would have begun ca. 920. Dvornik, “Quelques donnees,” 42, following Zlatarski, prefers the date 922 for the fall of the city.
32 Peeters (AASS, Nov. 4:691) argues that it is not likely that a great marble tomb would have been erected toward the end of the blockade, and thus Nikephoros must have died closer to the beginning. He thinks the city fell in 925.
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ants fled and the city was taken. If the information concerning Nikephoros is admitted as accurate, then the city cannot have fallen before 924. On these grounds, the date 925 for the fall of Vizye, proposed by Balascev, seems a reasonable possibility; it would allow Symeon time to place a garrison in Vizye, and also to change it during one of the two campaign seasons between 925 and the treaty of October 927 (spring-summer 926, spring-summer 927). On historical grounds, one would prefer earlier dates, since the great push in Thrace occurred in 917, 919, 921, 922, 923 (fall of Adrianople), and 924. But these dates, with the exception of the last one, would not accommodate the date of Nikephoros’ death. Therefore, the autumn of 924 or 925 (at the time of sowing) seems the best guess, with the siege beginning in 919–920.

The vita also contains data of considerable importance for social history and for what might be called histoire des mentalités, specifically in regard to attitudes toward the family, women, and female sanctity. For example, it has long been recognized that Mary is representative of a new type of female sanctity: the woman who remains married throughout her lifetime, never becomes a nun, but nevertheless attains sanctity through pious living. This has been taken as a new affirmation of marriage as part of the stable structures of the Middle Ages. And, indeed, it is true that there is a small cluster of married female saints, who died within some thirty years of one another: Theophano, wife of Leo VI (who died in 895–896); Mary the Younger (died ca. 903); and Thomas of Lesbos (died ca. 930). But the model, if model it was, enjoyed a very brief season, disappearing thereafter. Given the small number of cases involved, each one carries a good deal of weight. Therefore, the late date of

33 Runciman, Emperor Romanus Lecapenus, 86 ff. Runciman thinks Vizye fell in 923; cf. idem, First Bulgarian Empire, 166 n. 5. The meeting between Romanos I and Symeon, on 11 November 924, was not followed by peace; see R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters (Washington, D. C., 1973), letters 30 (with commentary) and 31. Consult also the redating of Nicholas’ letters by A. P. Kazhdan, “Bolgaro-vizantijskie otnosenija v 912–925 gg. po perepiske Nikolaja Mistika,” EtBalk, n. s. 12, no. 3 (1976), 92–107.


35 For further discussion of the chronology of Thomas, see Life of Thomas, below, pp. 291–92 and note 3.

36 For this, and most of what follows, see Laiou, “Historia henos gamou,” 237–51. In this article, I accepted an early 11th-century date for the vita of St. Mary, a position which I have since revised. The rest of my discussion stands, with the caveats introduced here.
composition of the *vita* of St. Mary the Younger (the other two *vitae* were written either immediately after the death of the saint they celebrate or within a generation thereof) and the literary interests of the author should caution against attributing eleventh-century attitudes to the late ninth or early tenth century. One way out of this dilemma is to retain what is securely attributable to the ninth or tenth centuries on the basis of other sources, and to note those elements unique to this *vita*. With regard to attitudes toward marriage, the elements to be accepted as contemporary to the life of St. Mary are those which can be found in other *vitae* of female saints. The highly quotable dialogues in the *vita* of St. Mary owe more to the eleventh-century author than to whatever sources the author was using.

The description of Mary's everyday life may, I think, be retained. The fact that the wife had the management of the household property is attested by the *vita* of St. Thomas among other witnesses. The involvement of the extended family in the couple's affairs is described particularly powerfully here, but it is not unlikely. The statement that her marriage was arranged is commonplace. The sentiments expressed about the proper love between husband and wife, the fact that sexual relations could be part of a virtuous life, and the parental love toward the children can be found variously in the *vita* of St. Theophano and in other tenth-century texts, those connected with the tetragy of Leo VI and even those of the saints' Lives by Symeon Metaphrastes. Most important, the social virtue of charity as a way to sanctification may be found in the *vita* of St. Theophano and in that of St. Thomas who, like Mary, was accused by her husband of squandering the property of the household. Thus, charity was a prime virtue; extreme abstemiousness and asceticism in a married woman were not. I think this is, indeed, an early tenth-century phenomenon, and the text is genuine as far as this matter is concerned. On the other hand, as I have indicated above, the forceful juxtaposition of a good secular life and a bad monastic one is more redolent of the eleventh century. The *vita* of St. Thomas also provides a parallel to the wife-beating that we see in the *Life* of St. Mary; although in the former case it plays a more important ideological role, since Thomas is likened to a martyr because of what she suffered at the hands of her husband (which did not include death).

This brings us to attitudes toward marriage, where nuances are necessary. Doubtless, the whole story revolves around the idea that a married woman may nonetheless achieve sanctity, and that marriage is not only the normal way of life, but also a good state to be in. Still, the ambivalence is clear, for if
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St. Mary achieved sainthood despite her married state, she also found suffering and death because of it. Such an ambivalence imbues also the Life of St. Thomas, although there the hagiographer explicitly develops the themes to which the Life of St. Mary merely alludes, that is, that the saint would have eschewed sexual relations (in this text) or even marriage itself (in the Life of St. Thomas) if she could; Theophano actually stopped having sexual relations with her imperial husband. The convergence of the three texts on this issue suggests that it was indeed a theme of the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Similarly, the objections of clergy and monks (including Arethas of Caesarea) to the idea that a married woman, living with her husband, could be worthy of sanctity, appear in all three texts. On the other hand, the vocal opposition to monks, expressed by the author of the Life of St. Mary, and implicit in his treatment of her son Symeon, is absent in the other texts; it seems to me to embody an eleventh-century attitude. Similarly, the exceptional vindictiveness of the saint toward her accusers, including the scene of the eviction of the remains of her husband from his tomb, sounds as if it owes a lot to the imagination of the author.

Finally, the humor and irony that we find in the Life of St. Mary are absent from the other two texts. To what do we owe them? Possibly to the fact that the author himself found the story a little far-fetched, and that he too had his doubts about the process that had made St. Mary a saint. If so, he was not alone. He wrote a good story nevertheless, and any doubts he had he wove into his language and into the paradoxes, thus producing a saint’s Life with a markedly literary character.

This discussion of attitudes toward marriage rests on two assumptions: first, that the vita of St. Thomas was composed in the mid-tenth century, and second, that this text and the vita of St. Mary the Younger are independent of each other. The first assumption is in dispute, as may be seen in the introduction to the vita of St. Thomas in this volume. As far as I am concerned, the reference to Romanos “born in the purple” is not to be easily bypassed; not the greatest stretch of the imagination nor the wildest flattery could make a porphyrogenetos out of Romanos III or Romanos IV. The other arguments


38 A porphyrogenetos (“purple-born”) is a son or daughter born to a reigning emperor; cf. ODB 3:1701. Neither Romanos III nor Romanos IV qualify.
advanced for an eleventh-century date (or later) also seem disputable.\textsuperscript{39} Much more treacherous is the question of the relationship between the two \textit{vitae}. If they are independent of one another, there are two witnesses, of debatable date to be sure, on the issue of sanctity within marriage, with St. Theophano (whose \textit{vita} incorporates very traditional attitudes) as a third witness of firm date. If, however, the \textit{vitae} of Thomas and Mary the Younger are not independent of each other, one is led to a troubling conclusion.\textsuperscript{40} For in that case we have only one example of the married female who becomes a saint without becoming a nun. If that is so, there is no new model of the female saint, just a fine story. And we are left, as far as late ninth-century attitudes go, with the traditional virtues of Theophano: charity, asceticism, abstinence from sex; and with the constant suspicion of the possibility of sainthood for a woman whose life is spent in a married state. The next task will be to investigate in depth the relationship between the \textit{vitae} of St. Thomas and St. Mary the Younger.

\textsuperscript{39} For example, the fact that a monastery of Angourios is not attested before the 11th century is an argument \textit{e silentio}. For a \textit{patrikios} Angourios, of debatable morals but of good family, lived in the 9th century, at the time of Photios (cf. PG 102:937), and a quarter of that name existed in Constantinople in the 11th century. I cannot believe that there can have been many families of that peculiar name. The argument about the Hodegetria is also one where the terminus ante, not the terminus post is known.

\textsuperscript{40} As far as I can see, there is no reason to suppose that the \textit{Life} of St. Thomas was modeled on that of St. Mary simply because it is a much less detailed account. It is not unusual for a more detailed story to develop out of a simpler one, so that, if a dependence is admitted, it could just as easily run the other way: the \textit{vita} of St. Mary would then be a more detailed and more literary version of the plot in the \textit{vita} of Thomas.
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1. Only men are called to compete in secular contests and prove their bodily strength. The arena of virtue, however, is open to women no less than to men, and God the prize-giver generously grants the rewards and victory crowns to both sexes equally. Neither sex, nor fortune, nor weakness of the body, nor differences in station, nor anything else is an obstacle for entering the contests, to those who desire to do so. Here [i.e., in the arena of virtue] women are not sent away while men are accepted, nor are the slaves and the poor deemed unworthy and rejected while the masters and the wealthy are considered worthy of the contest; those who are young and minors are not disqualified, while the one who is fully of age and already a man is admitted; nor does the master of the games accept those who have chosen celibacy over those who bear the yoke of marriage. On the contrary, all sexes, offices, ages, and walks of life are called to this good fight: kings of the earth, and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; young men and virgins, old men with youths. So also with the blessed Mary, the wonder of our generation, who is the subject of our discourse. Although she was a woman, although she was married and bore children, nothing hindered her in any way from finding favor with God: neither the weakness of nature, nor the annoyances of wedlock, nor the needs and cares of child-rearing. To the contrary, it was these things which gave her the occasion to find favor with God, and thus proved that those who believe and claim that such things form an obstacle to virtue are foolish and create pretexts for sins. But let us start the narration about the blessed woman from the beginning, as is proper.

41 The comparison of the saint’s polity to athletic contests is a hagiographic commonplace.
42 ᾠνός can also mean “race” or “family”; here, the meaning “sex, gender” is preferable.
43 Ps. 148:11–12.
44 Ἀθένες means both weakness and, in law, incapacity; cf. J. Beaucamp, Le statut de la femme a Byzance (4e–7e siecle), I, Le droit imperial (Paris, 1990), 11–16.
45 Ps. 140 (141):4.
2. The imperial scepter was being held by Basil; not the one born in the purple, but the Macedonian, the one who from horse-groom had become emperor, after having killed Michael. During Michael's reign, the insolence of the iconoclasts was put to an end, while the orthodox doctrine began to flourish anew. History identifies <Michael> as the son of Theophilos, last of the iconoclasts, but his excessive wine-drinking has made him an object of ridicule, causing him to be called “the Drunkard.” It was after killing this man, then, that Basil acceded to the throne. During his reign, it happened that some of the very powerful men of Greater Armenia came to the great city of Constantine and appeared before the emperor Basil. He received them gladly, rewarded them with presents, raised them to high positions, and held them in the greatest honor. Among them was the father of the revered Mary. To him were born two sons and three daughters; two of the latter were given in marriage while the father was still alive, while Mary, the one praised here, being the last of the children, was left to live with her mother and be raised by her, after the father's death.

The <husband> of Mary's sister, named Vardas Vratzes, had in Thracian Messene a proasteion, which is called “tou Vratze” after him even today. Basil the “Macedonian” is Basil I (867–886), who had succeeded Michael III (842–867). Basil II (976–1025) was, indeed, born in the purple. The reference to him is taken by some to establish the year of his death as the terminus post quem of the writing of the vita. On Basil I, see A. Vogt, Basile Ier, empereur de Byzance (867–886), et la civilisation byzantine a la fin du IXe siecle (Paris, 1908).

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47 The reference is to the restoration of icon veneration by Theodora, Michael III's mother and regent, in 843.

48 On the reigns of Theophilos and Michael III, see, in the last instance, W. Treadgold, The Byzantine Revival, 780–842 (Stanford, 1988).

49 There is a sudden change of subject in the sentence if one retains the verb in the passive form ἔδοξασθη. The simplest solution is to emend to ἔδοξασεν. On the very considerable role of the Armenians in Byzantium of this period, see P. Charanis, The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire (Lisbon, [1963]). Basil was himself of Armenian origin.

50 The death of the father before one or more of his children had reached the age of puberty was not uncommon in this period. Messene, in eastern Thrace, is the ancient Druzipara. The name Vratzes is an Armenian rendering of the word “Iberian,” meaning Georgian, that is, possibly, an Armenian of Chalcedonian persuasion. Bartikian tentatively links him with the attested Byzantine family of Iberitzes. See Peeters, Recherches 1:129–35, and Hr. M. Bartikian, “Razmyslenija o zitii sv. Marii Novoj.” Moyen Age bulgare, Recueil I. Dujcev (Sofia, 1980), 62–64. The sentence referring to Vratzes has
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das would often go out to this small property, and he became a friend and companion of a certain Nikephoros, a droungarios who hailed from a village named Kamarai. As, with time, their friendship grew greater and stronger, Vardas was eager to make it even closer; so he devised a firm and unbreakable bond. Once, as he was talking with Nikephoros, he said, “Since, O dearest of men, we have been connected and bound together so intimately, I think it proper to make this bond of love more forceful and more perfect, by adding to it the ties of marriage alliance, so that we may be twice bound, adducing kinship to our acquaintance.” And then he began to recount to him the following: “My wife has a sister, a virgin most beautiful both in appearance and in soul, so that her inner beauty is reflected in the beauty of her body. Take her for your wife, if it please God, and thereafter we shall preserve our love unbroken. It will be my affair to persuade the girl’s mother to assent to the marriage of her daughter.” Nikephoros heard these words with pleasure, and without further ado they went to Constantinople and discussed the matter with the girl’s mother. She was persuaded, and married her daughter off to Nikephoros; thus, the most excellent Mary followed her husband when he set out for home.

3. Ointment poured forth cannot go unnoticed even if it is very well hidden, for it is proclaimed by its fragrance, nor is it possible for active virtue to escape notice, for it is heralded by its works. Similarly, Mary, most revered of women, could not escape notice, for she was fervent of spirit and served

one word missing, undoubtedly the word ἄνδρα, “husband.” A proasteion is a rural or suburban holding.

51 A droungarios is a commander of a regiment, a moira; see Oikonomides, Listes, 341, and J. B. Bury, The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century (London, 1911), 41–43. Kamarai is not identifiable.

52 Ἐκ συνηθείας, “from long habit, habitual intercourse.” The word also means sexual intercourse.

53 “Parthenos” means both a virgin and a young girl.

54 In Byzantium the consent of the parents, along with that of the prospective spouses, was a necessary precondition of a valid marriage. Marriage alliances were arranged when the girls were very young, and with the interests of both families in mind; see Laiou, Mariage. The affair as recounted here is a rare testimony of the involvement of the girl’s relatives by marriage. The case is all the more interesting because it refers to families of a fairly low-level provincial aristocracy, for which information is not ample, especially in this period.

55 Emend κενομένον to κενομένιον, following Song of Sol. 1:3.
the Lord. Those who lived near her marveled at her, and all spoke of her. Of what kind were her praises? She was the image of meekness, the pillar of moderation, the exemplar of love of God, the model of charity, the paradigm of piety for everyone. No one saw her become even mildly angry, nor strike a servant, nor speak insults. She loved the holy churches greatly, so that she could say, with David, “Lord, I have loved the beauty of Thy house, and the place of the tabernacle of Thy glory.”\(^{56}\) She would never suffer to send away sad or empty-handed anyone in need; rather, whoever came to her received whatever he wanted. She honored priests exceedingly, as servants of God and stewards of the awesome and great mysteries; she considered the monks as fathers, and was flushed with the proper glow of modesty with regard to all. I leave aside her good housekeeping, her industriousness, the plainness and simplicity of her dress, her temperance at the table, and all the other artless aspects of her life.

But how can I pass over her zeal in frequenting the holy churches? How can I pass over the straight road she trod? How can I keep silent about the harmonious and sober manner in which she sang hymns to God? There was no private chapel in her house, but she would go to the main church of the town\(^{57}\) every evening and morning, at the time of the service. Nothing checked her eagerness, not the unstable weather or the change of seasons; not the heat of summer or the cold of winter; neither rain nor snow; neither the length of the road, which was more than one stadion,\(^{58}\) nor the river that she had to cross daily—for, along with everything else, it was not possible to keep to dry land, but rather it was necessary to wade through water. She who carried a manly soul in a female body never weakened because of any of these things and never abandoned her good journey, unless she was hindered by serious illness. When she attended church, she was not satisfied simply with getting there, but she would secretly seek out a hidden spot in the church and there would genuflect and would not stop until her weariness was proved by the abundant perspiration that dripped upon the earth. This may serve as proof of her great love of God.

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\(^{56}\) Ps. 25 (26):8.

\(^{57}\) The distinction is made here between the εὐκτήριος οἶκος (a private chapel, of a monastery or of individuals) and a καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία, a church open to the public and more directly dependent on a bishop. For the distinction, see G. Dagron, “Le christianisme dans la ville byzantine,” DOP 31 (1977), 9 n. 31.

\(^{58}\) About 600 feet.
As for the sympathy and philanthropy with which she behaved toward her fellow men, it will be shown by the following story. Once the tax collector, who is customarily called *dioiketes*, arrived, and arrested the inhabitants of the town who could not pay their dues, putting them in jail and under torture. What did this compassionate soul do? She was pained when she heard of it and could not bear for the inhabitants of the town to suffer in this manner. So she looked to her property, but could not find enough of her own gold to free the afflicted. Some friends lent her what was needed and, receiving the loan, she sent it through a good man to the tax collector and freed the prisoners. As for them, instead of each returning to his own house when he was released from jail, they all went to their deliverer full of joy and praise for her, heralding her beneficence. Such was this event, and let it serve as one proof among many, and in place of many, of her philanthropy early in life. But what about crises and temptations? Did she basely collapse and weaken, or, on the contrary, did she bear them bravely and become stronger? Or is it perhaps impossible to find in her any aspect that is bereft of philosophy, impossible for the pious woman to be overcome by calamities? The following will make the matter clear.

4. Her marriage bore fruit in a male child, whom she named Orestes. When the child was five years old, it was cut down by the scythe of death, before its time. The others wept disconsolately and mourned in a disorderly fashion. As for her, her mother’s heart was broken and torn asunder, as one would expect; but she kept to herself, sighing and openly weeping, without, however, displaying unseemly behavior. She did not tear out her hair, nor did she disfigure her cheeks with her hands, nor did she rend her clothes, nor did she throw ashes on her head, nor did she utter blasphemous words. She almost

59 The *dioiketes* collects the land tax of a theme or a city; cf. Oikonomides, *Listes*, 313. The use of this title in the text does not help place the redaction chronologically, for the *dioiketes* appears in all periods after the time of Leo III, even though with greater frequency in the 9th–11th centuries. See F. Dolger, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Finanzverwaltung besonders des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1927), 70 ff.

60 I do not see in this story a case of Mary paying the tax ἄλληλεγγυος, i.e., having the obligation to pay the tax of indigent members of her community, as does P. Peeters, “Bulletin des publications hagiographiques,” *AnalBoll* 46 (1928), 393–94.

61 The strict meaning of the verb ἀνδρᾶζωμαι is “to become manly.”

62 Here ἀνθρώπος denotes someone who does not reflect upon life, who does not stoically accept misfortune.
conquered nature and, weeping just enough to show she was a mother, gave thanks to the guardian of our souls and, bringing to mind Job’s troubles, cried out in a calm voice with greatness of soul, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; blessed be the name of the Lord for ever and ever.” In this manner she bore what happened with patience and thanksgiving. And if she could accept with such courage the death of her only son, what other grief would she not bear with ease and equanimity?

5. What happened after that? Mary had a second son, whom she named Vardanes. She subsequently set forth for Vizye, the reason for her change of abode being the following. After the death of the emperor Basil, his sons, Leo the Wise and Alexander, succeeded him. At that time, Symeon, the ruler of the Bulgarians, in name a Christian but fully a bloody man, campaigned against the Romans and wrought great slaughter. On that occasion, Mary’s husband, Nikephoros, displayed great prowess in the fight against the Bulgarians and, by imperial decision, he was sent to the tourma of Vizye. So he went to that city along with his wife and children. Here Mary changed place, having moved from a town to a city, but did not change her ways, holding firm to the same purpose as before. She helped widows, orphans, and

63 Job 1:21.

64 An Armenian name. Peeters (Recherches 1:133) has commented on the alternation of Greek and Armenian names in Mary’s offspring.

65 On Vizye, see note 2, above.

66 Alexander and Leo VI were co-emperors from 879, before the death of their father. They reigned as co-emperors after Basil I’s death from 30 August 886, until Leo VI’s death on 11 May 912. Their relations were far from cordial.

67 2 Ki. [2 Sam.] 16:7.

68 Symeon’s campaigns began in 893; the date on which they ended is disputed by scholars, some of whom have argued for 897, others for 899, and others for 904; see I. Bozilov, “A propos des rapports bulgaro-byzantins sous le Tzar Symeon (893–912),” Byzantino-Bulgarica 6 (1980), 73–81. Our text excludes the possibility of constant hostilities until 904; Mary died in 903, and her life in Vizye seems to have been spent in relative peace. She followed her husband to that city probably after the Byzantine defeat at Boulgarophygon, in 896.

69 He became tourmarches, commander of a brigade, thus receiving a promotion; cf. Oikonomides, Listes, 341; Bury, Administrative System, 41.

70 The text mentions children, although only one, Vardanes, was living at the time.

71 Note the wordplay in τοσπον-τροπον.
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monks; she gave provisions to those who immure themselves in caves or small houses; and, through a priest who was close to her, she took care of the adornment of the churches in the vicinity. In one matter only she changed: instead of going to church every day as before, she said her prayers at home, prostrating herself before an icon of the Mother of God and chanting the appropriate prayers, along with the book of Psalms, which she understood perfectly. The change was due neither to indolence nor to sloth, but to a prudent reticence, and, since she was in a populous city, to a reluctance to come into the sight of one and all, native and foreign. This, then, we note as the single novelty, while in all other matters she retained with precision the harmony, as though they followed each other in a series.\(^{72}\) For the celebrated woman heeded the voice of the Savior, saying, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones,” and was eager to have their angels\(^{73}\) as witnesses of her care for the little ones. And, indeed, if another man’s slave came to her, who had either lost something of his master’s or had broken a vessel, he would receive from her what he had lost and would return to his master joyfully, fearing neither blows nor the whip. Her own male and female servants she did not consider as slaves, but rather took care of them as if they were part of her own body, wisely discerning all that comes from God, taking into account that we are equal by nature and also that we use slaves as we do our hands and feet, and frequently we accomplish the hardest and basest services through them, while we ourselves take our ease. For these reasons she did not like to beat them, but was eager to feed and comfort them.

She did not shut her gate to the foreigners who found themselves there, but welcomed them with open doors and, having given them generous hospitality, sent them away happy. If any monks came by, what honor, what kindliness she showed! She received them as if they were God’s angels coming from above, bringing blessings, carrying heavenly gifts; thus she honored them, thus gladly she embraced them.

In such a fashion she behaved toward others, while she neglected her own self, considering that the <best> ornament was its absence, and she rejected adorning\(^{74}\) herself with gold and <costly> array, following the wise exhortation of the holy Paul.\(^{75}\) Through the hands of the poor, she deposited to her soul’s

\(^{72}\) A musical reference.

\(^{73}\) Cf. Mt. 18:10.

\(^{74}\) Emend κομμείσθαι to κοσμείσθαι.

\(^{75}\) Cf. 1 Tim. 2:9.
<benefit> gold and translucent precious stones and bright garments. For whatever she had as her own inheritance, all of it she deposited to the treasure house in heaven, leaving nothing for her children. But she never touched any of her husband’s property, so that her actions not occasion opprobrium, and that she not give cause for accusations of squandering <his property>, and creating tumult in the household. As for her diet, when her husband was with her, she observed only the forty-day fasts. But when he was away on campaign, she abstained from meat at all times, pretending it was because of her husband’s absence, but in truth because of the benefits of fasting. As for wine, she was by nature averse to it because of some physical propensity and idiosyncrasy, so that she had not tasted it from childhood.

6. Such were the achievements of the blessed one; such were the good qualities of this wonderful woman, to the wonder of those who heard or saw them and to the glory of God. When her second child died, she bore the suffering with thanksgiving. Not long afterwards, she conceived again and gave birth to twins. Immediately, something strange occurred with regard to the children. The first one, called Vaanes, had a belt, so to speak, extending diagonally from his right shoulder to his left side, while the one born after him, who was named Stephen, had around him a sort of girdle, vertically from his head to his loins. To their father and mother the sight seemed not without meaning, and they wondered what it portended. The mother prophesied that one would become a soldier and the other a monk. The father said that he, too, wanted to enlist the first-born in the army, and to give the second one over to a teacher so that he would become expert in letters and join those who live at the imperial court. The blessed woman said, “Let it be as God wishes; as for myself, whichever of the two possibilities is realized, I will not see it; for I believe I will depart hence before these things occur.” The sequence of the narration will show that her prophecy was fulfilled, and one of her sons became a soldier while the other became a monk.

76 The word κληρος has both the specific meaning of inheritance and the more general meaning of property. In this case, if we assume that Mary’s family followed the law and the general practice, the property she spent must have come to her from her family, but cannot have been dowry property, because the husband held usufructuary rights over the dowry, while the woman retained the right of ownership.

77 These are the forty days before Christmas and the Great Lent, before Easter.

78 Vahan, an Armenian name.

79 In fact, Stephen first entered imperial service and then became a monk; see Chap. 31, below.
7. While she was living in this manner, and was praised by all, he who sought the surrender first of Job and then of Peter, he who watches against our heel [i.e., Satan],\(^{80}\) and who, above all, watches for the end of our life's journey, tried also, it seems, the blessed woman and sought to upset her God-fearing life, to divert her steps and to disturb her straight path. [p. 695] He finally brought such a trial upon this most revered of women, that she ended her life through it, and was translated to eternal life. Behold the wickedness of the tempter, and his shrewdness, and how he brought the greatest and most unbearable temptation not at the beginning but at the end. This is the fashion of his art and his wiles: to save the harshest and most powerful trials until the end, and then to bring them on with every machination, so that, when one is exhausted by his earlier tricks, he then brings forth the most powerful one, and emerges victorious and wins <the victim> over to himself. Such is he, nor will he ever forgo his knavery. But the Lord of hosts knows His own and causes them to trample upon the full might of the enemy, placing it under the foot of those who have been strengthened by the greatness of His power. It is a marvel that even tender women mock him who boasts that he defeats the whole earth.

Thus it happened with this perfect dove, who was wholly moved by the spirit, so that, flying over the snares of the wily one, she was not caught by temptation. The temptation was a most terrible calumny, from which, as the proverb goes, even men are brought low,\(^{81}\) which even the miserable Job did not suffer easily, though in his case it was of a different kind. Who contrived <the calumny>? Not strangers, but the siblings of Mary's husband, whose names were Helena and Alexios. They accused the chaste one to him, <as>, they say, the Egyptian woman <had done with> Joseph,\(^{82}\) that she had denuded the household and that she had consorted with Demetrios, her slave.\(^{83}\) Her husband gave ear to the slander, believing it to be true, and from that time on he could not be reconciled to his wife. Calling her to him in private, he said, “Wife, the rumor I hear of you is not good.” When she asked what he had

\(^{80}\) Gen. 3:16.

\(^{81}\) Cf. Eccl. 7:8.

\(^{82}\) The incident of Potiphar’s wife; cf. Gen. 39:14–19.

\(^{83}\) A woman’s adultery with a slave was punished severely by Roman and Byzantine law; cf. Procheiros Nomos 39.43 (ed. Zepos, Jus 2:221), Eisagoge 40.49 (ed. Zepos, Jus 2:364), Basilics 60.37.72 (ed. Scheltema et al., 2995).
heard and from whom, he replied, “My siblings have told me, and they speak of the plundering of the household, and what is worse, your adultery with the slave, Demetrios.” The revered woman heard these most shameful words and, sighing deeply and passionately, and with eyes full of tears, said, “Alas, faith has departed from mankind. If you would believe me today when I speak in my defense regarding the accusations, if you have not given both ears to my accusers but will lend just one to me! I have no knowledge of these things about which such words were fabricated. I have known no man’s bed but yours, O sweetest husband, to whom I was lawfully wedded, to whom I was given by my mother, and with whom alone I have had intercourse. I would happily have abstained even from that if it had been possible and if divine law had permitted it. But I know that I am not mistress of my body, but that you are my head, even if you do not think so. This is my response to the slanderous accusation, and I call the all-seeing eye as my witness that I never shamed myself nor did I wrong your bed. As for the accusation that I have squandered what was in the house, let my accusers say what I spent, where, and for whom. If they can say that I squandered these things wantonly, stupidly or for luxuries, and if they can produce clear and certain proof, then you must punish me, and I will also receive the divine and inescapable retribution on the day of judgment. But if I distributed them to the necessities of saints, if I fed the hungry and comforted the poor, then I have negotiated our joint salvation, for our life too is joint. Should we reckon this distribution as a loss, or rather as profit and as seed that will yield much fruit?”

8. To this, Nikephoros answered, “I, too, do not wish to hamper your generosity toward the needy; you know that I have never checked your eagerness. What I complain about is excessive liberality and high-mindedness, for I fear that by ministering to the needs of others so generously we might ourselves come to abject poverty.” After these things were said and heard, he stopped consorting with her, having sided with the accusers rather than with his wife. Therefore, he set guards to his wife’s bedchamber, and subjected to meticulous examination all matters pertaining to her. Once, he ordered to be brought to him the handmaiden who was most devoted to her and served her,

and, having set a gloomy brow, narrowing his eyes and making his voice harsh, he questioned her, with fierce looks and speech, about her mistress, threatening to kill her if she did not divulge the identity of the adulterer. She, although a slave by fortune, was not slavish in character, but had a free soul, and thus did not become a traitor to the truth out of cowardice, nor out of fear did she lie concerning her mistress, but spoke brave words to her master. She said, “My lord, this day you hold in your hands my life and death, and I will suffer anything you wish. But I know nothing shabby about my mistress, nor have I heard such from others.” He was filled with rage at this, and, having the slave stretched out on the ground, ordered her to be beaten mightily. Learning nothing more from her, even though she was whipped a good deal, he grudgingly allowed her to go free. The blessed Mary, seeing these things and knowing that the devil raged against her, sent to the nuns and monks whom she had helped in the past and, concealing the state of her affairs, sought their blessing, for the love of God. She herself, being armed against temptation by prayer and supplication, said tearfully to Him Who could rescue her: “Draw nigh, O God, to my help; make haste to help me, O Lord.” She prayed for her slanderers, asking that their sin be forgiven.

She then acquired another prosecutor, Drosos by name, established in the household by her empty-headed husband, who was easily swayed by others, like an empty vessel. He set the man up as a guard on his wife, ordering him to watch her carefully, along with a slave girl, to whom he entrusted the storeroom. He ordered both of them to cause every sort of distress to the blessed woman, not allowing her to take anything if she so desired, nor giving her anything if she asked. To these griefs was added sickness of the body, and her stomach illness, from which she suffered greatly and constantly, worsened. She endured pains and nausea, and when the time of her death came near, she was suffering from her stomach disease. Then something else happened as well.

9. It was the Sunday on which Christians abstain from meat, in preparation for Lent. That implacable man did not deign to eat together with his wife even on such a day; instead, he ate and drank alone with his brothers and

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86 Lee Sherry has suggested two emendations here: ἐπισκόπωνιον for ἐπισκήπτων, and λοξέωσις for λοξήσας.
87 Ps. 69 (70):2.
88 This is Great Lent. The Sunday in question is called ἀποκρέσσιμος Κυριακή.
other relatives. The blessed woman was saddened, and spoke thus to the women who were with her: “See, the days of temperance are upon us, during which we purify ourselves, through repentance, from all the defilements that have touched us. But how can my husband’s fasting and prayer be accepted as long as he bears this irreconcilable hostility and steadfastly maintains his fruitless enmity? Woe is you, Satan, evil and envious one, enemy of our salvation and alienated from God! Yours is this work, you who harden the hearts of men.”

These words fell upon the ears of a malicious man, who ran and reported them to Nikephoros not as he had heard them but in such a way as to provoke him and fuel his anger. He said, “Your wife does not regard you as a Christian, nor does she think that you can have any good hope of salvation, as long as you are not reconciled to her; rather, she openly calls you Satan, the one who from the beginning was a killer of mankind and an enemy of God.” When Nikephoros heard these things, he was roused against her, but he held himself back on that day, out of respect for those who were present and who restrained his impulse. But the next day, at dawn, he took a whip and entered her bedroom. He looked—the lamp of the holy icon of the Virgin, which happened to be burning, pierced the darkness of the house and made the interior visible—and saw the blessed woman lying on the bed, holding her baby in her arms. Grabbing her by the hair, he dragged her and beat her mercilessly, until one of the servants who was present ran and told those outside; some of them came in and, with difficulty, managed to tear him away from her.

10. She, having escaped from his hands and rushing toward another part of the house, stumbled and tripped over her feet and injured her head. Thus, with the conjunction of three causes, her illness and her sorrow and her wounds, she became feverish, and took to her bed. On the tenth day, as the illness became mightier, she sent her husband this message: “If, my lord, you want to see my miserable self still alive, come, and we will see each other.” When he came she said, “I am now departing, and the Lord has manifested this to me in my sleep, for He sent my two children who grasped my hands and promised to lead me to the King of all Who was calling me.” Upon hearing this, he began to cry, and she spoke again, saying, “Lo, I am dying of this illness as the Lord has ordained, and I am going to our common master.

89 The premonition of death is common for saints. Mary saw her two children who had already died.
As for you, even if you did not believe me before, do so now, for I speak the truth. You were badly misled by my slanderers and accepted an empty rumor. The Lord is my witness, into Whose hands I shall deliver my soul; I do not know that evil word;\(^90\) I was questioned about things of which I had no knowledge; expel the unworthy suspicion from your heart, and fare well and keep safe with our children.” Thus she spoke, and taking her cloak from her shoulders, and calling one of her household, ordered that it be sold to pay the debts for debtors, stating both the names of the creditors and how much was owed to each.\(^91\) Her husband said, “Let the children have your cloak, and I will repay the entire debt to the creditors,” which he did, immediately. When the distinguished women of the city learned of her imminent death, they all came, and she, having seen them and kissed them, and spoken with them for a short while, at last said: “Lo, the heavens are opening, and I see an ineffable light and a suspended crown.” And she departed with these words.

11. Then there broke forth great weeping and wailing, raised by both her husband and the women. When the lament quieted down, they prepared the funeral bath.\(^92\) But before this could be brought to the corpse of the blessed one, a sweet fragrance arose from the body and filled the entire place, so that the women who had come to help marveled, and pronounced the departed one to be a \textit{chosen vessel}.\(^93\) When the bath was brought, and it was necessary to find the burial dress, then did the husband know his wife’s limitless compassion, who had left nothing to herself except this last garment.\(^94\) For a young slave, named Marina, came to him and said that she had nothing, neither a shift nor a linen sheet,\(^95\) for the blessed one to be buried in. When he queried, in amazement, what happened to all of these things and where they had gone, She is referring to the accusation of adultery. Byzantine law punished the husband who accused his wife of adultery without proof; cf. \textit{Procheiros Nomos} 11.17 (ed. Zepos, \textit{Jus} 2:148), \textit{Eisagoge} 21.6 (ed. Zepos, \textit{Jus} 2:305), and \textit{Basilics} 28.7.1 (ed. Scheltema et al., 1359).

\(^91\) Cf. Chap. 11, below.

\(^92\) On the customs surrounding death and burial, see Koukoules, \textit{Bios}, 4:154 ff.

\(^93\) Acts 9:15.

\(^94\) That is, the garment put on her after the bath.

\(^95\) Χτισώνοικον ἡ οὖντιον πτ. The οὖντιον would be a linen sheet that would be cut into strips for swaddling the body. Then the body would be covered by a shroud or winding sheet (cf. below, Chap. 16), and then dressed in a sumptuous dress; see Koukoules, \textit{Bios}, 4:154 ff.
the girl’s eyes watered at his words and she said, “O master, are you puzzled at this, and wonder that my mistress has no other garment except the one in which we dressed her after having bathed her? She could not find it in her compassionate soul to see anyone going naked and overlook him, nor could she look at a poor person and [p. 697] disregard him. To them were her many things expended, to them were they dissipated. And you, who ask me for linen cloth and garments, how is it that you do not search for the more precious things? I am speaking of gold and silver and the other valuable belongings that you will not find, however hard you may look. For nothing escaped her right hand, there is nothing she did not divide up among the poor.” Having heard this, he made no further investigation, but ordered one of his own garments to be altered into a feminine one, and for the blessed woman to be buried in it. When her hallowed body was placed upon the bed, there were present the archbishop Euthymios, the oikonomos\textsuperscript{96} Anthimos, and almost the entire population of the city. Then Anthimos, who knew everything about the blessed one, having served her, described it all, enumerating the widows and orphans and recounting the other needy people, none of whom had gone away empty-handed, all of whom had had their needs attended to. As he spoke of these things he was moved to tears, and moved the others as well. When the entire clergy had sung the funeral hymns, they took her to the episcopal church and placed her hallowed body in hallowed ground.\textsuperscript{97}

After a few days, as his mourning abated, the husband opened her co\textsuperscript{ers} and looked for the effects of the deceased. Finding <the co\textsuperscript{ers}> empty, he ordered the young slave girl to be brought to him, and asked her where her mistress’s ornaments were, the earrings of pearls and precious stones, the gold rings, the multicolored silk dresses. She answered, “With some she freed captives, with others she redeemed the debts of those who could not pay, with others still she fed the poor, and her garments she gave to the churches, some to cover the holy altars and others to adorn the rest of the church buildings.” Only then did he recognize the virtue of his wife, and he blamed himself, and blamed those who had accused her, for they had sinned and had made him

\textsuperscript{96} The person responsible for the administrative and financial affairs of a see, usually a priest.

\textsuperscript{97} See Mango, “Byzantine Church,” 12–13. He identifies the church of Hagia Sophia of Vizye as the episcopal church, the καθολική ἐκκλησία. In Chap. 17, I have translated this term as “cathedral church,” for variety.
partner in their crime by deceiving him; he called them wretched, and himself
more so.

12. Not many days went by, not even four months, when a man named
Strategios who was possessed by a demon arrived at the church and called by
name Mary, the wife of the tourmarches. At his crying out, the entire city
assembled to see the afflicted man. When, finally, the demon stopped his disor-
derly shouts and excited movements, the archbishop called in the man and
asked who he was and from where, and who had persuaded him to pretend to
be possessed and whether he was not ashamed to perform and shout such
things. “For,” said the archbishop, “we know this woman to have been good,
and her life to have been virtuous; but we cannot believe that she has been
found worthy of such grace. God has granted the ability to perform miracles
to chaste men, holy monks, and martyrs. She, on the other hand, lived with a
man, and did not change her mode of life, nor did she ever do any great or
extraordinary things. Whence her power to perform miracles? Who proposed
this pretense to you? Was it the husband of the deceased or another relative
of hers? If you do not cease your acting, it will be up to the scourge to expose
this performance and teach you prudence.” At this, the man blamed his own
sins as the reason for which he had been delivered to the demon, and main-
tained that his frenzy was no deceit but a true derangement of the mind. But
he also said that he would find his cure here, and that he would be delivered
from the demon who drove him. If this did not happen, he said, they could
do with him as they saw fit. The archbishop was not persuaded by these words,
and he threatened the man even as he let him go.

Then Mary’s husband took the man over, imprisoning him, interrogating
him, torturing him, and asking him who it was who prompted him. “Where
did you learn my wife’s name, to call upon her?” he said. “Perhaps your doings
were prompted by her relatives. You will derive no benefit from this venture,
and if you do not leave here at once, you will blame those
who put you up to this.” To this the man replied, “I never came into your
wife’s sight; I don’t know her relatives, for whose sake I should pretend to be
possessed as you say. A fierce demon leads me wherever he likes, and I have
come here driven by him. So do not threaten me, but wait a short while and
you will see the glory of God. Not only will demons be driven away here, but

98 Emend παύσαι to παύση.
99 The references to the theater, and earlier (chap. 5) to music, are noteworthy.
many different illnesses will be cured and God will be glorified through me first. If, in a short while, you don’t all see events coming to pass in accordance with my statements, then I am ready to suffer whatever you see fit.” Thus he spoke, and Nikephoros, astounded, kept his peace, unable either to believe firmly or to disbelieve, and standing midway between belief and disbelief, waiting to see what would eventuate.

What then? For many days, the possessed man, driven, went to the grave of the saint. Once, on a Sunday, when the morning prayers were being sung and almost the entire city was assembled, the man was suffering at the demon’s pleasure; then he approached the tomb of the blessed one, and tried to raise the stone that lay on top of it, calling others to help, for the saint wanted the tomb to be opened and the man to be rid of the demon. The husband of the blessed woman having allowed people to help, the stone was raised and the possessed man tore off the cover of the coffin and threw it far away.100 Then, bending over the remains of the blessed one, he brought her right hand to his lips, whence he was made to vomit, and, apparently spitting out a stream of blood, he also, invisibly, spat out the demon who was troubling him. All were astounded at the miracle, including the archbishop Euthymios. Stooping to look into the tomb, they saw the blessed woman lying intact, and smelled the fragrance that issued forth. Observing [p. 698] more intently, they saw blood on her face. One of the priests, thinking that the possessed man had spat it out, tried to wipe it with the saint’s winding sheet, but the blood was vital blood and issued forth from her nostrils. They tearfully glorified God Who had revealed a great blessing to the city.

After this miracle, the man, freed from the evil spirit, returned home. He did not keep silent, but bore witness to the miracle and proclaimed the beneficence of the blessed woman. In consequence, a large mass of sick people

100 The word θυρα normally means “door.” It has here been translated as “cover,” because one cannot easily imagine a door to a coffin. Alice-Mary Talbot has brought to my attention a passage from the vita of St. Theodora of Thessalonike, where the word θυρις describes an opening in the coffin left at the position of the head, with a wooden cover that could be easily opened and closed; cf. Paschalides, Theodora, 198.9–12 (= Chap. 4 of her Translation and Miracles). In this case, it cannot have been a small opening, because later (Chap. 18) the coffin is opened and a woman touches the big toe of the saint, S. Kissas, “Ο βαζεις ης ΄Αγιας Μαριας της Νεας ως πηγη για την ΄φραμολογια και ισοτρια της τεχνης,” ByzF 14.1 (1989), 259, speaks of a wooden coffin “with cover” inside a stone sarcophagus.
streamed to her tomb and returned home healed: the blind recovered their sight, the deaf their hearing, those who had lost their mind returned to normality, those who suffered from evil spirits (they were innumerable) were delivered from their tormentor. Since it is impossible to enumerate everything, I will describe only a few of the many miracles, to illustrate the grace that was bestowed on the blessed woman.

13. There was a woman whose whole life was anchored on her daughter; seeing the girl so demented that she gathered and ate stinking dung and her own excrement, the woman did not know what to do. Rather, she did everything that seemed reasonable, but nothing worked. Finally she despaired of all these <remedies> and, giving up on the doctors, she found refuge, along with her daughter, with the saint. There she took oil from the lamp on the tomb, anointed her demented daughter, and after a little while carried her away sane, and, along with her daughter, kept offering sensible praise to the saint’s God.

Similarly, a blind man who had arrived led by the hand, left with his sight, having simply anointed himself with oil. Thereafter, he would go to the tomb of the blessed woman every year, giving thanks to God and to her.

14. A woman possessed by a demon was brought to the saint’s coffin, where she was delivered from the evil spirit that disturbed her. Similar was the case of a priest who could just barely be restrained by chains and shackles, driven as he was by the demon; he, too, was delivered from the <spirit> that possessed him when he came here. And the same happened later with a nun who was brought from Bulgaria by the evil spirit that drove her, and she too was sent away by the saint, freed of the possessing <spirit>.

15. What then? Shall we say that those possessed by demons found relief here, while others, needing different kinds of help, did not find grace? Far from it. Indeed, report of the blessed one spreading everywhere, a woman came to her tomb from Karavizye.101 Her nipples were hardened so that she could not feed her infant; she asked for the flow of her milk, received what she sought, and returned home overjoyed. Another woman asked for the same kindness and was given it, but when, after her departure, she was galled at something, her breasts again became dry and desiccated, as they had been before.

101 Karavizye is mentioned as an archiepiscopal see dependent on Constantinople in H. Gelzer, Georgii Cyprii Descriptio orbis Romani (Leipzig, 1890), 60. Cf. AASS, Nov. 4:698 n. 1.
Two paralytics were brought to her tomb in a single day, and on that day they were restored to perfect health.

A blind woman came, anointed her eyes with the holy oil from the lamp of the tomb, and recovered her sight.

Another woman came to the tomb of the blessed woman carrying in her arms a nursling who was possessed and terribly tormented by a demon. She threw the child at the blessed woman's feet, shedding tears of fervent faith, and received it back pure of the spirit that had troubled it. Countless such prodigies took place every day.

16. <Word of> the miracles reached Arkadioupolis and a certain pious woman, the superior of the nunnery at Kachlakine, desired to visit the tomb of the blessed woman and see some of the things that were rumored. So, taking two of her disciples, she set out on the road to Vizye, and in her wake came a cleric who was being bothered by a demon. At first the woman lodged at the house of Nikephoros, the blessed woman's husband. On the next day, she came to the tomb where, while the divine liturgy was being celebrated, five possessed men converged, as if at a signal, uttering meaningless, mad words, and opened the tomb. One brought to his mouth her hand, the other her foot, yet another one of her funerary garments, and all were immediately stilled and became sane. The woman marveled at this and, bending in faith to kiss the hallowed body, she saw that the headcloth was stuck to the other cheek. As she took hold of it and tried to pull it apart, a drop of blood flowed. This woman thus enhanced the miracle, and she shouted, "Truly the saints live!" She wiped up the blood in a rag, showing it around in Arkadioupolis and proclaiming the miracle to those who were ignorant of it.

17. At that time, the blessed one appeared to her husband in his sleep and urged him to build for her a house of prayer and there to transfer her relics "so that," as she said, "I can watch those dearest to me." He, considering the matter to be but a dream, disregarded it. After a brief time, he suffered a most just punishment; for, even though his eyes were open, he could not see. Because of this he came into awareness and understood the reason [p. 699] for his suffering to be no other than his disobedience. So, having brought together a large number of people, he ordered them to dig in the neighboring hill and

102 Arkadioupolis, ancient Bergoule, is a Thracian town between Herakleia and Vizye (modern Luleburgaz). The mention of the monastery of Kachlakine would seem to be unique; cf. M. Gedeon, Βυζαντινόν Εορτολόγιον (Istanbul, 1899), 296.
take out square blocks. When the quarrying began, he started to see again, dimly; as the digging continued, so his sight became clearer, and when the work reached its peak, his sight was totally restored. From that moment on, he pursued the work most earnestly. When the church was completed and consecrated by the archbishop, and it was time for the translation of her body, Nikephoros and his people arrived at the cathedral church for this purpose. But some among the clergy disliked this proposition, and they attacked the archbishop Euthymios. Nikephoros, afraid of sedition and its attendant evils, kept quiet for a while. But he looked out for a time when the archbishop would be away, and, taking about forty men with him, and also a few clerics who did not dare to oppose, he carried out the translation.

18. When the relics were placed in the church, a woman possessed by an evil spirit opened the coffin and pressed the holy woman’s big toe; from it flowed blood, and the woman, having rolled about on the earth for a short while, arose sane, and went away free of evil.

At this time, she appeared in a dream to a painter in Raidestos who lived as a recluse; she was wearing a white garment and a red headdress, and holding in her right hand a burning lamp on which was written, “The light of charity.” She was preceded by two graceful and very handsome boys, and was followed by a good-looking girl. When she drew near, he asked her who she was, and why she had come to him. She replied to him in a cheerful and smiling voice, saying, “I am Mary from the city of Vizye, about whom you have heard much but whom you have never seen until now. Paint my picture as you have just seen me, with my children, Orestes and Vardanes, and my handmaiden, Agathe, and send it to the city of Vizye.” The old man, waking up and realizing that this was the wish of the blessed woman, painted the picture gladly, as he had seen it in his sleep, and sent it from Raidestos to Vizye, to the church built by her husband. Those who had seen her when she

103 An interesting reference to quarrying. Was there a well-known quarry on these hills?
104 As Cyril Mango has noted, the clergy undoubtedly did not want to give up profitable relics; cf. his “Byzantine Church,” 12. This was the first and most important translation of St. Mary’s relics. For the sequence, see Chap. 27.
105 Modern Tekirdag in eastern Thrace.
106 Ἐγκλειστός, a man who lives shut up in a cave or a cell.
was still alive, when they looked at the icon were filled with amazement and testified that it was, indeed, her likeness and that of her children.

19. Thereupon some monks, moved not by zeal but by envy at the miracles, said, “It is not possible for someone who lives a secular life, eats meat, and enjoys the pleasures of marriage to receive from God the grace of working miracles, while monks, who deprive themselves of every pleasure, who are mortified and distressed in everything, who, on top of that, devote themselves to singing hymns day and night, are not deemed worthy of such grace.” Thus they spoke, not knowing that when one accomplishes fully what he has promised, he is worthy of his gift. But he who has not carried out his promises not only loses the bounty but also makes himself subject to condemnation inasmuch as he has deceived the person to whom he made the promise. The blessed Mary, the wonder of our generation, preserved unadulterated to the end the promise she made at the moment of holy baptism. That was perfection in things secular, to which she added virtues of many other kinds, among them charity which exalts man more than any other virtue, being the fruit of love that so pleases God that He Himself wishes to be called by the name of Love. As for him who, having chosen one vocation, is false to it, then tries another and is even more false to it, how can he get a reward from God’s gift? But this is not the time for such philosophizing.

20. The sickness of doubt also afflicted Stephen, the bishop of Vrysis, who reasoned that the marvelous things that were said about the saint were a delusion, considering that her marriage, her wealth, and her glory in the world were obstacles to attaining the height of sanctity. So, what happened to free the man of his doubt? There was a woman named Zoe, who was possessed

107 The pronoun is a masculine one, but refers to both men and women.

108 1 John 4:16.

109 I have translated the noun ἑπαγγέλμα as “vocation,” even though the verb ἑπαγγέλλω in the same paragraph was translated as “to promise.” The reason is that the phrase αποτομῶ ἑπαγγέλματος describes a vocation better than a promise.

110 Vrysis is to the west of Vizye; Bishop Stephen does not seem to be otherwise attested; cf. M. LeQuien, Orients Christianus, I (Paris, 1740), 1187–88. For the bishopric of Vrysis in the 11th century, when it was subject to the metropolitan of Adrianople, see Gelzer, Georgii Cyprii, 80.

111 I have adopted Alice-Mary Talbot’s suggestion to emend καλύμματα to κολύμματα.
by demons. For seven years she had stood around the church, watching others being healed while she remained without a cure. But she never gave up her true hope. Once, while the holy liturgy was being celebrated, the woman, standing away from the coffin, grasped the bishop, and, pointing at the coffin, begged him to open it, for thus had the blessed one ordered, so that <the woman> could be cured of the troublesome demon. The bishop marveled at this, and the sexton\textsuperscript{112} and the others who were present also implored the <bishop>, asking him to get the key to the coffin from the blessed woman's husband. This was done. Then the possessed woman, having shaken out the cloth that covered the coffin, threw it to one of the priests. Then, the coffin having been opened, she took the saint's right hand into her mouth, and was cured by vomiting. The bishop said that the miracle was performed on his account, so that he should shed his doubts. Having kissed the holy relics, and found them to be whole and fragrant, he went away amazed. But the woman who had been cured, since she did not lead a decent life after her cure, but drifted into wantonness and drunkenness and the attendant licentiousness, within a year was again possessed by the demon. \textit{And the last state of <the woman> was worse than the first},\textsuperscript{113} a cure being no longer possible. [p. 700]

21. The blessed one's detractors were not destined to escape the eye of justice, nor were they to go unpunished. Either God <wished to> honor her by punishing them, or she herself, knowing that those who slandered her must suffer in some way, judged it best to have them chastised, nay, punished, on this earth, so that they would not have to render an account of their conduct in heaven. What then was the punishment? To run the household, Nikephoros had brought in his sister, Helena, along with her daughter Sophia. Once the blessed woman came to the girl in a dream, seeming to complain that Helena thought she could lord it over her household, and she ordered Helena to leave, unless she wanted to be evicted willy-nilly. The girl related her vision to her mother, who paid no attention. After a few days, the girl said that a sudden sharp pain struck the back of her neck, and from there extended to her heart;

\textsuperscript{112} The word νεὼκορος refers to a man in the lowest rank of ecclesiastical office, who takes care of the church building, makes sure it is clean, etc. In the \textit{vita} of St. Niketas of Medikion (\textit{AASS}, Apr. 1:xix, chaps. 5–7 [at end of volume]), the νεὼκοροι seem to be very young. Here, one does not get the impression that the νεὼκορος was a youth.

\textsuperscript{113} Mt. 12:45.
three days later, she died in pain.\footnote{114 Emend ἐπανεβίω to ἐπέβιω.} Helena had two other daughters who had also raved against the blessed one and participated in the mother’s calumnies. They were troubled to the point of death by demons.\footnote{115 Ἀγας ἐκείνου μέχρι θανάτου διέμειναν. A possible translation is “were choked to death.” It is not preferred, because of the verb διέμειναν.} As for Drosos, who was also among the saint’s slanderers, as we have seen, having been thrown out by Nikephoros, at first he lived in such abject poverty that he could not even find his daily food, and later died of pleurisy. Alexios, the brother of Nikephoros, spent his days in such extreme poverty that he did not own a second garment and died a bad death. Nor did Nikephoros himself escape retribution. He was out hunting when a hare leapt out from somewhere. He rode on hard, along with many others. Then his horse tripped, carrying him down with it, and his right shoulder came out of its socket, so that from that time on his right arm was entirely useless.

22. Because large numbers of people streamed from many places\footnote{116 Pollacou’ should be emended to pollaco’qen.} to the revered tomb of the blessed one, and from there received cures aplenty, I don’t know in what direction to turn in the matter of the narration of her miracles. On the one hand, it would be impossible for me to describe every one, while to omit all of them would not only bring loss to the God-loving ones who should hear them, but also to me, who would incur God’s great displeasure. For it is right that God’s works should be proclaimed. Thus, I will narrate a few out of many, and bring the story to a close.

A man named Sephronas was driven mightily by an impure spirit. He thrashed about in a disorderly fashion, rolled his eyes, ate his own flesh, could not bear any clothes to cover his nakedness. His head was spiky because, being unwashed for so long, the hair stood up. One might say that he was filled with countless ills. His relatives brought him by force to the grave of the blessed one and there, having been anointed with oil on the forehead—<praised be> Thy works, immortal King, Thou Who knowest how to glorify those who serve Thee with ardent faith!—the man was seen to be healthy, and as sane as if he had never suffered any of these things, for the evil spirit was completely driven away from him.

Furthermore, a woman who was held totally immobile by paralysis and

114 Emend ἐπανεβίω to ἐπέβιω.
115 Ἀγας ἐκείνου μέχρι θανάτου διέμειναν. A possible translation is “were choked to death.” It is not preferred, because of the verb διέμειναν.
116 Πολλαχο’ should be emended to πολλαχοθεν.
suffered sharp pain in all her limbs was brought <by her relatives> in a wagon to the tomb of the saint. They then got her back free of all pain, and brought her home on her own two feet.

23. It is appropriate to add the following to what has already been said. Symeon, the ruler of Bulgaria, a savage man, having campaigned against the Romans, plundered the entire area of Thrace, laying waste to everything up to the very walls of Constantinople and razing most of the cities to the ground. For this reason the inhabitants of Vizye, unable to remain any longer in their city, which had been besieged for five long years, found an opportune time and abandoned it, after burning all the houses to the ground.

A certain captive, escaping from the hands of the enemy, walked a long way and, of an evening, reached Vizye. Finding it entirely empty of people and buildings, he sought refuge in the blessed woman’s church, to spend the night there. Before he could fall asleep, he heard mournful voices coming out of the tomb of the saint; they were complaints and lamentations. “Why,” she said, “did the inhabitants of the city, although Christian, abandon the city and leave, while I still reside at the same place? If they wanted to do this, why did they not take me with them, but left me here, among the nations?” The man, terrified at this, spent the night and then reached Medeia, where he made the matter known to all. Among those present was a priest named Niketas Kannakes, who had celebrated the holy liturgy at the church of the saint dur-

117 See above, pp. 248–49.

118 From 919/920 to 924/925. Scholars find it difficult to believe that Vizye could survive a true siege for five years, and that its inhabitants could break through in the end. They thus speak of a five-year blockade of Vizye and Thrace; cf. F. Dvornik, “Quelques données . . . des Acta Sanctorum,” ByzSlav 1 (1929), 42.

119 Dvornik has noted the surprising opposition of Christians-pagans, at a time when the Bulgarians had been Christian for more than two generations (“Quelques données,” 41). A. Kolia-Dermitzaki (Ο βυζαντινός “ιερός πολέμος” [Athens, 1991], 307) mentions religious preparations before the battle of Anchialos (917), but stresses that the letters to Symeon, composed by Nicholas Mystikos and Theodore Daphnopates at the time of the peace treaty of 927, insist on Symeon’s Christianity to point out his unseemly behavior. At the same time, Symeon is likened to the pharaoh and Goliath, as opposed to the comparison of Romanos I with Moses and David; ibid., 307–10. Of course, the term έθνεσι might be translated as “barbarians” instead of “nations”; cf. Oikonomides, Listes, 177.29–30, which counts among the έθνεσι the Pharganoi, Khazars, Arabs, and Franks. The text dates from 899.

120 Medeia is modern Kiyikoy, on the western Black Sea coast of Turkey.
ing the entire siege, and who, having recently left with the <rest of the> inhabitants, was now in Meideia. When he heard these things from the captive, he recalled the miracles wrought by the blessed woman and could not restrain himself from going to Vizye to prostrate himself before the saint, even though the enemy was in the city. For the above-mentioned Symeon, having meanwhile seized Vizye and found it empty of people and buildings, ordered the remaining walls, which had not been consumed by fire, to be razed to the ground, and the earth to be plowed and sown. This was done, since it was the right season.\textsuperscript{121}

24. It would not be right to pass over in silence the events that took place during the time of this Symeon. When he entered Vizye and found that only the churches had survived the fire, he went to look around and ordered some to be turned into granaries, others into houses, and others still into stables. He reached the saint’s church and, casting his eyes on the sarcophagus, asked those who were around whose it was. They explained and told him of the miracles worked by the woman who lay inside it, and so he ordered it to be opened. As soon as it was opened, a flame shot forth and terrified everybody. Seeing this, Symeon ordered his men not to touch the church at all and allowed the priests to celebrate the liturgy every day. Having populated the city with some of his own men, and established as head of the garrison a certain Voulias,\textsuperscript{122} he left to establish similar garrisons in the other Thracian cities. The priest Kannakes, of whom we spoke earlier, prompted by the words of the captive to go to Vizye, as we have said, hastened to fulfill his desire. When he came close to the fort, he was held by the Bulgarians and was asked who he was and how he dared come here. He, being a truthful man who had learned to tell the truth, confessed who he was and why he had come. When these things reached the ears of Voulias, he ordered the man to be brought before his eyes as well. And when the man came, Voulias behaved deferentially to him, called him “father,” received him with great honor, and demanded to be told of the life of the saint and her miracles. The priest, shedding tears of joy, described freely everything about her: how she

\textsuperscript{121} This would place the conquest of Vizye in the fall of 924 or 925; the best time for sowing was considered to be early November; cf. A. Laiou, “The Provisioning of Constantinople During the Winter of 1306–1307,” \textit{Byzantion} 37 (1967), 101.

\textsuperscript{122} Voulias is probably an old Bulgarian title, which the Byzantines used as a name; cf. Dvornik, “Quelques donnees,” 42 n. 3, contra Balasci, “Novye dannye,” 219.
was from Constantinople, the daughter of noble and glorious parents, and how she married a brave man, Nikephoros by name, a general, who became *tourmarches* in this city. He spoke of how at first she had two boys who had paid the common debt\(^{123}\) during her and her husband’s lifetime, and what courage she displayed at their death; and how after that she bore two other boys, twins, and about the signs attending their birth, and how all that the mother had prophesied regarding them had come to pass. For the first-born, whose name was Vaanes, having been enrolled as a soldier, was the commander of the Roman army then in Selyvria,\(^{124}\) while Stephen, born after him, chose the way of monks and, dwelling somewhere around Mt. Olympos,\(^{125}\) lived only with himself and God. The priest narrated to Voulias in detail all the other matters pertaining to the blessed one: the unfeigned love she had for everyone; the measureless charity; her sympathetic attitude; her peace, forbearance, clemency; her kindness; her love for the poor; her night-long prayers; her tears; her patience; her frequent visits, full of pleasure, to the holy churches; the perspiration she shed there because of her constant genuflections; the love and diligence she showed for the beautification of the holy churches. Then <he spoke about> the machinations devised against her through the prompting of Satan, her husband’s hostility, the blows, her death, and the countless miracles that followed it, both the ones that have been already mentioned here and the ones that have been omitted for the sake of brevity. He spoke of the retribution suffered by those who slandered her, and how her husband, Nikephoros, died during the siege of Vizye and was buried on the left side of the chapel he had built for the blessed one. Hearing all that, Voulias was filled with amazement and wonder and, along with the others present, praised God on high, while he said <to the priest>, “O honorable father, how could you bear to abandon such a treasure if, because of the disasters of war, you stood to suffer such damage? But now all is forgiven you, and you may, if you wish, celebrate a liturgy. Please stay and live with us, and we will meet your every need unfailingy.” He responded, “I cannot do the latter, because I desire to live with mine own, in Medeia; but I hope I may achieve

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\(^{123}\) I.e., died.

\(^{124}\) Modern Silivri, about 70 km from Constantinople, on the coast of the Sea of Marmara.

\(^{125}\) In Bithynia. A holy mountain and important monastic center in the 8th–10th centuries; cf. *ODB* 3:1525.
the thing I can do: you should order that I may come and celebrate the liturgy in the church of the saint without hindrance from anyone.” <Voulias> agreed to this very happily, and furthermore he demanded that the priest not procrastinate, but that he do this frequently.

25. The above-mentioned Symeon used to change the heads of garrisons of the conquered cities after a while, recalling them to himself and replacing them with others. So he also recalled Voulias from Vizye, sending in his place another man to guard the city. Those who quit the garrison considered that it was a right of war to return home laden with spoils; so they overran what remained <of the territory> of the Romans, and, having amassed much plunder, they took the road home. Voulias, too, when he left Vizye to his successor, in line with the same law <of war>, went out to collect booty as well. Thereupon, he came to Selyvria where he met the Roman army that was commanded by Vaanes, as we have said. Having found out that Vaanes was with this army, he settled his men, and he alone, by himself, went out with peaceful intent. He summoned someone from the Roman camp and inquired about Vaanes, whether he was present at the camp. When he learned that Vaanes was indeed present, he asked to see him. The message reached Vaanes, who came to Voulias armed, just as he was. <Voulias> immediately asked him, “Are you my revered Vaanes, the son of the sainted Mary of Vizye?” He answered, “Yes, I am he; but who are you, and how do you know my name and that of my mother, and why are you well disposed toward me?” To that Voulias [p. 702] answered, “I am a man, a sinner. I was not able to see the holy relics of your mother, because, when the precious receptacle in which she reposes was opened so that we could view her, a flame shot forth and almost consumed us. So we no longer dared open it and look at her—for this reason, I desired to see you instead, so that I might have the benefit of the grace of her <relics> through you. I learned your name and your whereabouts from men we took captive; from them I have also learned of her miracles. I received even more certain knowledge of all these things from a priest who used to serve the church built by your father. But there was also such <a miracle> among ourselves. Once, our soldiers were on guard at the walls of Vizye. They were talking about this and that, and also began to speak about the saint’s miracles, and all were amazed. But one man, seized by the sickness of doubt, said that these things were not true: “for if she had been truly a saint, she would have saved from us this city, in which she lies.” Before he had even finished speaking, he was seized by an evil spirit and fell down, rolling his eyes, gnashing his
teeth, spitting saliva from his mouth, frequently beating his head with his two hands, and shouting mightily. Thus he was tormented for a long time. Then he barely managed to rise, on trembling knees, and went to your holy mother’s grave where, after having been tormented for many days, he received a cure. All of us, frightened at the sight, greatly praised God, Who glorifies His true servants, and sent the healed man to Bulgaria. We informed people there of what had happened to him, and we summoned a priest who, to this day, performs the divine liturgy in her church.” Having conversed thus, Voulias and Vaanes parted peacefully.\footnote{A wordplay: the Greek reads ἀλλήλοις συνομιλήσαντες, εἰρηνικῶς διεξευχηθήσαν. Συνομιλῶ and διεξευχήσασθαι have also the meaning “keeping company” and “divorcing,” respectively.}

26. After a while, when the miserable soul of the aforementioned Symeon was torn away \(<\text{from him}>\), his son Peter succeeded him.\footnote{Peter of Bulgaria, Symeon’s son, reigned from 927 to 969. He made peace with the Byzantines in October 927. Symeon died in May 927.} Behaving in an even more barbaric fashion, he destroyed to the ground the Thracian cities captured by his father, recalling the Bulgarians who were in them. He dealt in this manner with Vizye, among other \(<\text{cities}>\). When Vaanes learned this, he came to Vizye with some priests and some of the soldiers under his command. With his men, he entered the holy church of his sainted mother and, after they had made the appropriate prayers and given thanks, they kissed her precious and holy relics. When the divine and holy liturgy began, there was a mighty creaking in the sarcophagus that frightened everyone so much that they almost left the church. After quite a while it stopped, and they began to wonder what was the meaning of this sign. Her son Vaanes said, “Just as, when we left Vizye, she was vexed and gave out mournful cries, as the captive told us, so does she leap about in exultation at our presence.” Having performed the divine liturgy and given thanks for what happened, they returned again to Selvyria.

27. When Romanos took hold of the scepter of the Romans, and made marriage alliances with the Bulgarians, there was peace between them and the Romans.\footnote{The reference is to Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), whose granddaughter Maria married Peter in 927. It is curious that in our text the reign of Romanos, who had already been crowned emperor in 919, seems to follow Symeon’s death, at some distance.} As a result, everyone got together and rushed back each to his own country, without fear. Vaanes, too, with his people, came back to Vizye...
from Selyvria. At that time, it happened that his aforementioned brother Stephen went to Constantinople from Mt. Olympos, on some business. He was no longer called Stephen but Symeon, having changed his name when he became a monk. This Symeon then arrived in Vizye, happy at the peaceful state of affairs, and also desirous of seeing his country and meeting his brother, and, above all, of venerating and kissing the holy relics of his mother and receiving grace from them. Having come to the church, and having carried out his prayer and thanksgiving as he desired, he also met his brother Vaanes. Thereupon, they both communicated their thoughts to each other, and, leaving their share of the inheritance\(^{129}\) to the church of their sainted mother, they made it into a monastery. Symeon wanted at this point to move the relics as well. So, having made a tomb outside the church, he placed his father’s remains into it. As for his holy mother, he laid her down where his father had lain, in a tomb made of marble. Symeon did not effect this translation himself, but by means of others. The reason is given as follows by those texts which relate this.\(^{130}\) “I am frightened by the example of Ham and therefore did not wish to look upon the nakedness of my parents.”\(^{131}\) For this reason he entrusted the translation to others. Those who carried it out say that of Nikephoros’ remains, which had been in the soil for four years, only bones and some joints could be distinguished. But the saint’s holy relics they avowed to be whole and complete, and to have suffered no deterioration at all, even though they had lain there for twenty-five years. This can be seen even now, when many years have gone by, and the body has suffered no corruption at all. Thus they fulfilled these duties as they should, and performed the proper actions. Symeon then left Vizye to go to the mountain called Kyminas [p. 703] at the borders of Paphlagonia, near Plousias,\(^{132}\) continuing to labor at the ascetic life he had chosen.

\(^{129}\) The term ἀδελφικὴ μέρις denotes the share of each brother from the property of their parents. If their parents had died intestate, the two brothers would share the property equally between them.

\(^{130}\) Note the author’s reference to older texts, either of the vita or of the translation; since this translation itself is a minimal affair (indeed, it is not a translation at all, merely a transfer of the relics to a more prestigious tomb inside the same chapel), it is more likely that the reference is to older texts of the vita.

\(^{131}\) Allusion to Gen. 9:18–27.

\(^{132}\) Plousias is Prousias on the Hypios, in the theme of Boukellarion. Mt. Kyminas was a monastic center on the river Gallos, in Bithynia. The author is conflating this foundation, associated with St. Michael Maleinos who built a large monastery there in...
28. Since many miracles took place subsequently, our discourse should move on to them, not wishing to leave untold anything that happened. A certain woman from the town of Medeia, seized by an evil spirit, was led by her relatives in shackles to the tomb of the saint. There she received back her health and returned home happy. A certain man named David fell victim to a cruel illness, which held him until his limbs were deadened by paralysis. The normal structure of his body was weakened, and was closed to food and drink. If he ever brought anything to his mouth, it went down as far as the pharynx and then, projected by the force of this internal affliction, came out the way it had gone in. Nor were his internal organs in order, so that they could digest food necessary for life, according to the laws of nature. For this reason he, too, was brought to the storehouse of cures, to the treasury that was never empty. He, too, was set down close to the tomb, and there he spent the day, petitioning to be relieved from his illness. He got his request that same day, but was not quite cleansed, perhaps because the blessed one foresaw the occurrence of something more miraculous still. Indeed, the immobilized man stood up and found that his feet, which had been insensible before, were now cured and capable of carrying out their proper function; so he walked on his own and went off to his house without being led or supported by anyone. But after a short while, being mildly distressed by some remnant of the disease, he forgot the source of his cure and where he had found deliverance from those violent and unbearable pains, and called in a sorceress, a woman who worked false wonders under the influence of evil spirits, thinking, like a madman, that he would receive perfect health from her. As the wretched man had recourse to sorceries and incantations and frequent use of potions,

925, with the small monastery of Xerolimne in Prousias, founded by the same man in 921. The monastic center at Mt. Kyminas profited greatly from the patronage of Romanos I Lekapenos and Nikephoros II Phokas; it seems to have declined thereafter; cf. Janin, *EglisesCentres*, 110, 116–17. Undoubtedly our Symeon was a disciple of Michael Maleinos, who was a near-contemporary (894–961). The significance of the conflation for establishing the chronology of the composition of the *vita* is discussed above in the introduction, pp. 244–45.

133 The Greek term is καστρον.
134 Emend μονηρό το πονηρό.
135 Emend ισος το ισως.
not only did he not at all improve his health but rather his calamities worsened, and the last state was worse for him than the first, as it is written. 137 Again <he suffered> violent pains and paralysis of his limbs and misfortune filled with a thousand evils. But Satan was not to rejoice for long, for the man, realizing the deceit, called upon the compassionate Mary with hot tears and asked his relatives to bring <him> to her divine church. They brought him on a bed, and put him down before the saint’s coffin. The sick man looked toward the doctor [i.e., Mary’s relics] and, sighing profoundly and mournfully, said with panting voice and breath, “You, O blessed one, having taken pity on my wretched self, freed me from the disease that was killing me. But we repaid your gift with unworthy rewards. We did not entrust to you, as to a good doctor, the slight remnants of our illness, you who of your own will had healed us of that many faceted disease, but we behaved in a reckless manner, foolishly through Satan’s prompting, and turned our affairs over to a deadly, evil woman. Do you <now>, with your customary philanthropy, extricate me from the double danger. For if I regain bodily health, I will surely know that I will also be granted forgiveness for the sins I have sinned miserably and unforgivably, having openly committed impiety.” Such words and other similar ones he uttered pitiably; and the blessed one, the disciple of the Philanthropous One, 138 she who during her lifetime, and even after her death, distributed mercy freely, relented and granted the man complete healing.

29. And again, another woman, captured and oppressed by a demon, was brought to the saint’s tomb and healed. And her son-in-law, possessed by a similar demon, also achieved health in the same manner. A certain priest had been rendered dumb and insensible by an illness; the blessed one gave him back his speech and his senses. To a child that had suffered such benumbing of the body that he could not even open his mouth, she made a present of his health when he was brought to her tomb. Another man, named Isaakios, had lost his mind because of satanic attack. He stamped over the plains like a horse 139 and traversed the crags of mountains and impassable roads, tearing off his bonds. Only with difficulty were his relatives able to restrain him and

137 Mt. 12:45.

138 I.e., Christ. Φιλανθρωπία, love of mankind, was an important attribute of God, and a virtue expected of emperors as well as saints.

139 Ἡμερ, II. 6:507: θείη πειδίον κροαίνων. The passage in the vita is κατὰ πειδίων ὀσπερ ἱππος ἐκροαίνε.
bring him, tied up, to the tomb of the saint, whence he received a perfect cure. Add to this another man, who was brought because he was troubled by a demon and who also obtained a complete cure and went back home with his relatives, in exultation.

30. I will omit willingly the majority of the miracles wrought by the blessed one, because of the length of the narrative. But it is natural for attentive listeners to feel the loss, since they would like to learn about the saint’s children, how and in what condition they met their death; so, let the discourse leave room for a few words to be said about this as well. Vaanes, having grown up under his father’s authority and become a man, was married to a woman of distinguished family. Even though he achieved the rank of droungarios, he did not become conceited because of any of the honors of this world, but rather, emulating his mother in all things, remained gentle, quiet, cheerful, fair, and kind, surpassing everyone in expert military achievements. For he was courageous in body, but much more courageous in his soul and predisposition. Being above material things and profit, he always conceded the spoils to his fellow soldiers, and as a result he was much loved by them, and highly reputed, and spoken about by everybody. As his associate and helper in all excellent exploits he had a certain Theodore, who succeeded his [Vaanes’] father as tourmarches, a man brave and robust in military matters but braver still in the ways of God. Vaanes was yoked to him, like a pedigreed, powerful young bull, and together they plowed in themselves as though in fertile land, and they sowed the seeds of virtue like the best of farmers. In due season they cheerfully harvested, depositing the ripe fruit with God and in the divine vats, and received therefrom eternal joy.

More than any other virtue Vaanes embraced charity, in emulation and imitation of his mother. Nor did this excellent lover of divine and eternal

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140 I take this construction, ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς συζυγεῖν, to refer to the legal relationship between Vaanes and his father before the young man reached his majority, i.e., while he was under patria potestas, not emancipated. On emancipation, see M.-Th. Fogen, “Muttergut und Kindesvermögen bei Konstantin dem Grosse, Justinian und Eustathios Rhomaios,” in Eherecht und Familiengut in Antike und Mittelalter, ed. D. Simon (Munich, 1992), 22–26.

141 On this rank, which his father also held, see note 51, above.

142 The word συζυγεῖν, rendered here as “yoked,” is commonly used to describe the marriage relationship.
things neglect the divine office;\textsuperscript{143} every day, along with the \textit{akolouthia} of twelve hours, he recited the entire psalter, and every evening, before going to sleep and after compline, he would make a \textit{paraklesis} in honor of the ever-virgin Mother of our God through forty canons, not ever using a book.\textsuperscript{144} And he never omitted anything from the rest of the divine office.

31. When he was summoned to the heavenly dwelling places, the Lord ordered this to take place through a natural sequence \textit{of events}.\textsuperscript{145} He suffered an ailment of the bowels and went to Constantinople, ostensibly to find a cure but in truth because of the disposition of divine providence for the better. For, on the same day that Vaanes, together with his illness, reached Constantinople, there arrived also his brother Symeon from Mt. Kyminas where, as we have already said, was located the workshop of his virtue. They met each other unexpectedly outside the door of the house in which Vaanes meant to take up residence, an event \textit{that seemed of} divine origin to those who saw it then and those who hear it now. Here they embraced each other and spoke together of the appropriate things and rendered thanks to God. Vaanes received the divine and angelic habit from the hands of his brother

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\textsuperscript{143} An \textit{akolouthia} is a liturgical rite of the Orthodox church. Here it refers to the monastic \textit{akolouthiai}, based on a twelve-hour system, in which a prayer is recited twelve times during the daytime (and twelve times at night, but Vaanes seems to have observed the daytime office only). This monastic office rests on the idea of perpetual prayer. See \textit{ODB} 1:46–47; 2:952–53, s.v. Akolouthia and Hours, liturgical, and R. F. Taft, \textit{The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West} (Collegeville, Minn., 1986), esp. pp. 72, 202. The passage concerning Vaanes’ devotions is difficult. I am deeply grateful to Father Taft for his authoritative advice, which informs this note and the next one; if I have misconstrued his statements, I alone am responsible. My thanks are also due to Father Miguel Arranz.

\textsuperscript{144} A \textit{paraklesis} is an occasional office, in this case in honor of the Virgin. The \textit{paraklesis} has at its core a canon (see \textit{ODB} 2:1102, s.v. Kanon). The meaning of forty canons is quite unclear since, according to Father Taft, there is no evidence of the existence of forty \textit{paraklesis} canons. He also tells me that it would be quite impossible for anyone to recite forty canons in one night. Father Arranz suggests the possibility that the pertinent passage might be translated as “going through forty canons,” i.e., Vaanes had memorized forty canons and was reciting from among them. The passage remains enigmatic, at least insofar as the forty canons are concerned. Cf. introduction, pp. 246–47.

\textsuperscript{145} There is a wordplay with \textit{άκολουθία} here and at the end of Chap. 30.
Symeon, changing his name to Marinos, and he was transferred to the divine abode, on the second day of June. His venerable and honored remains were buried in the monastery of the Virgin called “ta Korones,” near Aspar’s cistern. This, then, was the manner of his death.

As for Symeon, our discourse will leave it to holy men to contemplate whether he is to be numbered among the saints because of the things about him which have been mentioned many times. He became expert in letters and was assigned to live in the imperial palace, as has been said. His manner caused him to advance among the powerful. But he was conquered by love for things divine, and chose the good part, in the words of the Gospel. He abandoned earthly honors of his own free will, and since he decided to live only with God, gave himself over to ascetic toil, and, passing from mountain to mountain, exchanging one place for another, and culling the best of virtues as bees do from flowers, made himself into a vessel for true sweetness and, cleansed of all earthly bitterness, became a house of God. He also received the priesthood, but despite himself, and persuaded only by obedience to his superior.

32. It was indeed meet and proper that such sons should have been born to such, holy ones from the holy one, admirable ones from the admirable one, kind ones from the kind one, sainted sons from the sainted, for they had been dedicated to God at birth, or rather even before birth, since their mother had dedicated herself to God ever since she was a

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146 I.e., he was made a monk.

147 M. Gedeon, 

148 The words πολλαξιοῦ τοῦ λόγου would seem, at first glance, to refer to this narrative. But the narrative has not, up to this point, provided information that would justify Symeon’s inclusion among the saints. Either this is subtly ironic or the reference is to other narratives.

149 Lk. 10:42.

150 A hagiographic commonplace denoting humility. See, for example, the Life of St. Daniel the Stylite, in Dawes and Baynes, Three Byz. Saints, chaps. 42–43.
baby, out of her own free will, and had become a dwelling place for all the virtues that delight the Lord of all. Who could possibly describe the nobility of her spirit; the appropriateness of her prudence; the great beauty of her intelligence; the pleasantness, friendliness, and charm toward everybody; her gentleness; her sympathetic nature; her fairness and moderation to one and all; her kindness and philanthropy toward all in need, wherefrom she embraced and fulfilled boundless mercy, saving nothing for herself and furnishing everything to the poor? How many girls do you think she gave away in marriage, providing dowries from her own property? How many young men did she restore who had been ruined by being orphaned? How many widows enjoyed consolation from her generous donations? How many were the hungry whom she fed? The naked whom she clothed? The thirsty whom she filled full of sweetest drink? The poor breathed her rather than air, those who suffered from the ice and froze from the cold were warmed by her clothes. Those who could not even obtain water because of the paralysis of their limbs found her a constant supplier of their needs. About her it is fitting to say what was said by Job, that her door was open to all comers. As for her journeys to holy churches, and her care and attention for their adornment, her night-long prayers, her all-night standing vigils, her untold genuflections and the sweat that, resulting from this, flowed from her like rivers, the continuous and constant tears, who could have the power to relate them? Who would not be astonished and marvel at her fortitude in the face of temptation, her bravery in the face of slander and calumnies, a bravery proffered by constancy of mind, her unyielding and unfeigned patience in the face of adversity and sorrow? In addition, what words could recount the good deeds she wrought for everyone after her death, the healings, the miracles, those that were done and those that are still being done [p. 705] and granted to people in need, who approach her holy tomb with sincere faith? Indeed, how could she not continue to help the needy after her death, when she acquired even greater

\[151\] An anonymous referee has pointed out that the expression is used by Gregory of Nazianzos in a letter to Basil of Caesarea, and that he/she has not encountered this expression in other hagiographic works. Cf. P. Gallay, \textit{St. Gregoire de Nazianze, Lettres}, I (Paris, 1964), ep. 6, para. 8: “I would rather breathe you than air.”

\[152\] Cf. Job 31:32.

\[153\] ἐπαρχεῖν should be emended to ἐπαρκεῖν.
power, having shed any remaining thickness of the flesh, being able to converse directly with God in purity of spirit, and having the fortune to be counted among the children of God, in grace?

33. But O venerable Mary, the ornament of all women who live a good life in this world, the delight of the righteous, and the sweetest relish of the blessed, the receptacle of virtue, the vessel of the graces, the inexhaustible treasury of healings, the storehouse of the gifts of the divine and holy Spirit, you who, with the precious choir of your children, stand before the blessed and holy Trinity and cry out boldly, “O Lord, behold me and the children Thou hast given me!”

<O venerable Mary,> bring upon us unworthy ones the mercy of the forgiving, forbearing, and patient Lord, having as your fellow intercessors and assistants the multitudes of the blessed, the communities of martyrs, the brigades of the righteous, the choirs of angels, the array of the apostles, the assemblage of prophets, and the battalion of the Fathers. For I know that they all intercede together on our behalf, carrying in themselves the form of philanthropy, like true disciples of the Philanthropous One. Together with all of them and above them all, you have the willing intercessor of our race, the mistress and lady of all, the Theotokos, the ever-virgin mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, who always entreats on our account and never abandons her intercession on our behalf. Thus being propitiated by all, the benevolent Lord, Who always, through His goodness and love of mankind, conquers our many transgressions, might be persuaded as is His wont, might relent and look upon us with benevolence, and turn away from us His wrath and vexation, giving us His mercy only because of His ineffable kindness and philanthropy, that we might be freed from the pains that are afflicting us and the unbearable misfortunes, and that we might witness the destruction of the terrible enemies and their entire race who have been inflicted upon us, who are attacking us like wild beasts, and destroying the flock of Christ, the chosen people, whom He bought off from the <ancestral> curse

154 I.e., a secular life. An anonymous referee comments that the titles for Mary the Younger are reminiscent of the Akathistos Hymn and other Marian hymns; cf., e.g., Cyril of Alexandria, PG 77:1032–36.
155 I.e., the saints of the Old Testament.
156 I.e., the saints.
158 I.e., Christ.
with His own blood.\textsuperscript{159} O revered mother Mary, marvel of our generation,\textsuperscript{160} do not cease to beg for us Christians profound peace and the blessings that come from God, asking that our emperors who have been ordained by God to rule over us on earth be granted great victories against all our enemies, and asking also for the Church of Christ growth, tranquillity, and unbroken union. And may you remain the protector of this best of <all> cities, Vizye, to which God has granted your most sacred and holy body to be the succor of all its inhabitants, to defend them and avert all manner of disease and the enemies who oppose them openly or in secret. May you grant salvation and deliverance from all illness to the archbishop and the entire clergy and all those who honor you every year—to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the all-holy and transcendent Trinity, the one and only God and king, to Whom is due glory, power, honor, and worship, to the ages of ages. Amen.

\textsuperscript{159} The Byzantines as chosen people; the enemy here has been thought to be the Hungarians and Pechenegs who invaded Thrace in the years 934–967; cf. Balascev, “Novye dannye,” and \textit{AASS}, Nov. 4:691. This is plausible only if one assumes that the \textit{vita} was written in the 10th century; see introduction, above, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{160} A phrase that has been taken to indicate that the author was writing relatively close to the time of her death, i.e., in the early to mid-10th century. See introduction, p. 242, and Chap. 1.
Like Mary the Younger, Thomaïs of Lesbos is a rare example of a married laywoman who achieved sanctity through her daily life. Her story survives in two anonymously written vitae, one perhaps datable to the mid-tenth century, the other of unknown date. The first, a more detailed account edited by Hippolyte Delehaye from a fourteenth-century manuscript (Florence, Bibl. Naz. 50 [Conventi soppr. B.1.1214]), is translated here. In addition to the two vitae, there is an encomium of Thomas written by the noted hagiographer Constantine Akropolites in the late thirteenth century.¹ The vita presented in this volume is especially interesting for the light it sheds on Constantinople, where Thomaïs spent most of her life; for its treatment of marriage; and for its presentation of what constitutes holiness for a Byzantine woman. The Life is strongly focused on Constantinople, and one must assume that the author was an inhabitant of the capital, familiar with its topography. He has written in a fairly high style, in several places resorts to plays on words, and reveals his classical education by quoting from Hesiod and Homer and echoing Plato and Plutarch.

There is some uncertainty about the date of the vita. Internal evidence (Chap. 26) indicates that it was originally written during the reign of “Romanos,” usually identified as Romanos II (959–963), the only emperor of that name “born in the purple.” Another passage (Chap. 25) might be read as implying that the composition took place twelve years after Thomaïs’ death, at age thirty-eight (Chap. 16), which would place her birth sometime between 909 and 913 and her death sometime between 947 and 951.² This latter conclu-

¹ It is based on the vita edited by Delehaye, but includes some additional information such as the residence of Thomas’ parents in Chalcedon.

² A. Laiou places her activity in the early decades of the 10th century, and her death ca. 930 or shortly thereafter (“Historia henos gamou,” 239 n. 7).
sion needs to be treated with caution, however; the passage might only refer to twelve years of the hagiographer’s experience of Thomas’ shrine. Delehaye concluded that one could only generalize that Thomas lived during the first half of the tenth century.

Alexander Kazhdan has expressed doubts about the traditionally assigned tenth-century date for the vita; he points out, for example, that Thomas is not included in the late tenth-century Synaxarion of Constantinople, and proposes that the Romanos who is addressed may have been Romanos IV Diogenes (1067–1071), even though he was not “born in the purple.” Moreover, the hagiographer does not name most of the individuals miraculously healed by Thomas, thus suggesting a significant lapse of time between her death and the date when her miracles were recorded. The conflicting internal indications of chronology as well as certain repetitions and inconsistencies suggest the possibility that the vita was originally written in the tenth century, and revised later.

Although Thomas was born in Lesbos, the vita is limited to her activities in Constantinople. The text presents a sacred topography of the city; most sites are specified in relation to some church or monastery. Within this space Thomas is able to move freely, by day and night, as she visits shrines and participates in religious processions. She is also able to frequent marketplaces and other crowded areas. Her freedom of movement contrasts with that of Mary the Younger. While Mary was living in a village with her husband after their marriage, it was acceptable for her to walk alone to church each day. Once she moved to the much larger town of Vizye, however, Mary, unlike Thomas, had to curtail her activities outside the house and worship at home.

It may be that Thomas’ lower social status gave her more latitude than Mary, but her excursions into the streets and marketplaces may also reflect the security and stability of urban life in tenth-century Constantinople.

The Life of St. Thomas, although it echoes that of Mary the Younger—a pious married woman driven to death by her husband—presents, within hagiographic constraints, a distinct structure and story about Christian marriage and holiness. In contrast to the author of the Life of Mary the Younger,

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3 A. Kazhdan, in ODB 3:2076; and, at greater length, in List of Saints, s.v. Some of his other objections are discussed in the notes to the translation.

Thomais’ hagiographer takes great care to describe the marriage and lives of the saint’s parents, Michael and Kale, who are real characters in the story, and indeed dominate the first quarter of the Life. Their marriage is carefully presented as happy and God-pleasing; indeed they are referred to as a “golden team” (Chap. 3) and compared to Anna and Joachim, the parents of the Virgin Mary. Against this background the disastrous marriage of Thomais and Stephen unfolds as an aberration, and Thomais’ persistence in good works becomes heroic. If the tenth-century dating for the Life is accepted, the background here may reflect the contemporary ecclesiastical concern over the marriage laws of Leo VI (d. 912). The references to the crowning ceremony of marriage (Chap. 6) and the wordplay with the name “Stephen” (i.e., “crown”) may be an allusion to the increased prominence of marriage in religious discourse. If so, it would be a marginal confirmation of the earlier date for the Life.

While the special interest of the Life of St. Thomais is its portrayal of the activities of a middle-class woman in Constantinople, there are other points to note. The issue of domestic violence, also raised in St. Mary the Younger’s Life, will concern modern readers. Thomais’ story also contains one major oddity in describing her life pattern: like other Byzantine women she remained under her parents’ control until marriage, but was able to postpone marriage until the age of twenty-four, ten years later than usual. The author connects this with Thomais’ desire to avoid marriage, a commonplace of hagiography, but the saint also apparently had no children (unlike the fertile St. Mary the Younger). Thus, there is a continuing conflict between ideals of domesticity and ideals of sanctity.

The hagiographer uses a number of strategies to confirm Thomais’ claim to heroic sanctity, the basis of public recognition of a saint. This was an issue, because she did not fit any of the traditional criteria for female holiness, such as virginity, adoption of male monastic habit, or extreme asceticism. It was not enough that she was simply a pious woman—her mother Kale also ful-

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5 Cf. the remarks of A. Laiou in “Historia henos gamou,” 237–38.

6 A. Laiou (“Historia henos gamou,” 240–41) suggests that the hagiographer may have deliberately changed her age at marriage (as provided by his original source?) to emphasize her desire to remain a virgin; this would explain the discrepancy in Chap. 7 where Thomais is described after her marriage as still being of a tender age, interested in childish playthings.
filled that role without any call for a cult—and, given the tumult of her relationship with her husband Stephen, married life is presented as a problem for Thomas, not the source of her sanctity. The author first establishes that Thomas was conventionally pious: she attended church services and processions, and special note is made of her charitable activities (see especially Chap. 6). Second, the author embellishes the saint’s conventional piety by assimilating her to well-understood categories of sanctity: with some confidence Thomas is claimed as a martyr because of her husband’s brutality and, in a move which even the author admits is “bold,” a conceit is unfolded in which Thomas is named as equal to the apostles, the single point of comparison being that St. Paul was also involved in conflict (Chap. 9). What makes Thomas more worthy of veneration than her mother then was not her good works alone, but her perseverance and willpower through conflict. Finally, the Life illustrates Thomas’ holiness in ways more typical of hagiography: by her foreknowledge of her own death (Chap. 16), and by her many miracles, performed both during her lifetime and posthumously. Although two of her miracles involved the cure of prostitutes suffering from specific female complaints, overall she cured more men than women; her vita, among others, suggests that there was no gender-based differentiation in the miracles performed by Byzantine saints.7

Thomas never acquired a major cult: she is absent from the Synaxarion of Constantinople and her feast day, 1 January, coincided with the major feast of St. Basil the Great, a fact noted by the hagiographer (Chap. 26). Furthermore, no iconographic image of her was ever developed. There is some evidence, however, that her cult became more popular in the late Byzantine period. Both her vitae are preserved in fourteenth-century manuscripts and Constantine Akropolites’ encomium was written around 1300, at the time of the restoration of the church at the convent of the Virgin τα μικρά Ῥωμαίων.8

7 It is my impression that male and female saints perform very similar thaumaturgical roles. Male saints such as Daniel the Stylite; Theodore of Sykeon; Nikon “ho Meta-noeite”; and Athanasios I, patriarch of Constantinople, all cure women’s maladies, while female saints effect miraculous cures for male clients. A task for the future is the tabulation of the distribution of miracles in the Lives of male and female saints to see if any pattern of gender-based differences appears.

Russian pilgrims to Constantinople in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries describe visiting the tomb of the saint at this convent. In their accounts, as frequently happened with Byzantine saints, the story of Thomas of Lesbos was conflated with that of another Thomas, a sixth-century Alexandrine saint (feastday 14 April), who had been beaten to death by her father-in-law. It is not clear if this confusion was particular to Russian travelers, or to the local population as well. In either case it is startling to note that prayers at the tomb of Thomas were considered effective in quieting “carnal passion.”

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THE LIFE AND CONDUCT OF THE BLESSED AND
MIRACLE-WORKING THOMAÏS

1. Since the Holy Scriptures say that the memory of the righteous is praised, should we not praise one who is an adornment to the female sex? I exclude from discussion the Mother of God, She Who has been lifted above the cherubim, since She is beyond all created beings. As I said then, we should praise one who was more righteous than all the righteous women, the admirable Thomaïs, for whom we keep the present festival. By her family and life she was well known to all, she who was adorned by all forms of virtue and sparkled like a light. By her holy habits, modest character, still more modest lifestyle, as well as her asceticism, Thomaïs adorned her family by her ways, rather than being one who was adorned by her family’s glory, renown, and brilliance.

2. It was Lesbos, virtually another island of the blessed, that was her homeland, having given birth to the blessed one and brought her forth into the present life as a great good, praised and beloved, a woman who exceedingly surpassed all Lesbian women in her beauty and greatness. She was adorned with bodily graces, whom all the virtues bedecked. The nature of her body was equal to that of the incorporeal powers. She lived an angelic life,

10 Prov. 10:7.
11 Thomas’ feastday was 1 January.
12 γένος, meaning “family” or “lineage,” but also “sex” or “gender.” Here and later in the prologue it has been translated as “family” (as also in 240c, where γενεί λαμπρός clearly means “brilliant lineage” or “family”), mainly because it would be unusual for a Byzantine author to write of the “glory, renown, and brilliance” of the female sex. It is also usual for a hagiographer to praise the lineage of a saint.
13 Lesbos is a large Aegean island close to the coast of northwestern Asia Minor.
14 Cf. Hesiod, Works and Days, 171, and Leutsch-Schneidewin, Corpus 1:78. The author may also be referring to Lesbos as the birthplace of saints such as Theoktistite.
15 I.e., the archangels.
16 Since Thomaïs was married, and there is no specific claim in the Life that she abstained from marital intimacy, this seems at first a surprising statement. “To live like the angels” is a common circumlocution for a monastic or celibate life, and the reference may be to her attempt to live an ascetic life, even though married, as if she were...
and trampled down the powers of darkness, indeed she drove away pleasure like so much refuse. She raised the cross upon her shoulders\(^{17}\) and walked in the divine steps of the Lord. She was totally devoted to Christ, so as to reflect Him in all <ways> and be completely overpowered by His beauty. She *crucified herself to the world*,\(^{18}\) or rather was outside of <the world>, devoting her whole mind to the first and brightest light, and so became a second light, receiving reflections from such light. She was the nobler offspring of a noble root for, as is said, the fruit is of the same quality as the tree.\(^{19}\)

3. Her father, a man who lived in a way pleasing to God and maintained an angelic lifestyle, was named Michael.\(^{20}\) He was upright in character, holy in his way of life, firm of purpose, prematurely gray-haired, possessed of a perfect and advanced understanding because of his mature age. So that, to tell the truth, there is no <virtue> at all worthy of words and praise, neither innate nor attained by practice, which did not accrue to him; frequently reading the holy books\(^{21}\) in which the divine revelations have been recorded; searching out the assemblies\(^{22}\) in the divine churches when the Divine is warmly praised; paying attention to his manner of speech; examining his mind; humbling the spirit of his flesh; adorning his character; dignifying his life; covering his head in the most pure faith of Christ. And he was an intelligent man as well, making use of a good four-horse chariot, I mean the quartet of the virtues,\(^ {23}\) as a result of which he very often spoke with God.

His wife and life companion was Kale,\(^{24}\) who was most beautiful in char-

\(^{17}\) Cf. Mt. 16:24.

\(^{18}\) Cf. Gal. 6:14.

\(^{19}\) Cf. Mt. 7:17–18.

\(^{20}\) Michael was of course a fitting name for a man who lived “the life of angels.”

\(^{21}\) Literally, “unfolding the tablets.”

\(^{22}\) Or “services.”

\(^{23}\) The four cardinal virtues of antiquity were courage or manliness (\(\alpha\nu\delta\rho\varepsilon\iota\alpha\)), righteousness (\(\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\pi\omicron\sigma\omicron\nu\eta\)), prudence or moderation (\(\sigma\omega\phi\rho\omicron\sigma\omicron\nu\eta\)), and prudence or good sense (\(\phi\omicron\nu\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma\)); cf. *ODB* 3:2178.

\(^{24}\) Thomas's mother, whose name means “good” or “beautiful.”
acter, and more beautiful in soul. <She was> quite temperate, and, to speak truly, was of one mind with her husband. She <was> praiseworthy in conduct, intelligent in her mind, and good in her disposition. This then [“Good”] was the woman’s personal name\textsuperscript{25} and it found such an appellation from her exceedingly good disposition, because her character was indeed revealed to be appropriate to her name. And so Kale was given <in marriage> to be a companion for the aforementioned man, and they were revealed to be a golden team, a team thrice happy and blessed, vigorously bearing the evangelical yoke\textsuperscript{26} and observing the divine precepts. Thus both were blessed like that prophet [Isaiah], on whose lips shone a seraphic and purging coal,\textsuperscript{27} because they had \textit{seed in Sion and household friends in Jerusalem}.\textsuperscript{28} But, to return to my subject, Kale, who was God-pleasing in her lifestyle, was lawfully united with a man of the same habits. And one could often see both of <these> wise <individuals> holding in contempt the \textit{fine things of life}, since they were of one mind and accord. They had enough wealth and money that they were neither enslaved by poverty, nor were they swollen by the weight of money, but they proceeded along in a middle path, which is a clear sign, I think, of their virtue.

4. The fetter of sterility strongly grieved this <couple>, as of old the shackle of childlessness had bound the forefathers of the Lord.\textsuperscript{29} It agitated them mightily, upset them deeply, and tore apart their soul. They constantly went to the holy churches, remaining all night singing hymns, [p. 235] indeed singing to the Lord both night and day. For they had not turned to marriage

\textsuperscript{25} Κυρίων ονόμα, a relatively rare expression. There is a parallel in the \textit{vita} of the 9th-century saint Theophanes the Confessor, where it is said that as a youth he was usually called by his father’s name Isaac rather than by his given name (τὸ κυρίω τῆς θεόφανου ἐπονύμιον); cf. V. Latysev, \textit{Vita s. Theophanis confessoris} (St. Petersburg, 1918), 5. 7. Up to the 10th century Byzantines generally had only a baptismal name, and no surname; cf. \textit{ODB} 2:1435.

\textsuperscript{26} Cf. Mt. 11:29–30.

\textsuperscript{27} Cf. Is. 6:6–7.

\textsuperscript{28} Is. 31:9.

\textsuperscript{29} This could be a reference to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 16), or to Joachim and Anna; see, for example, the \textit{Protevangelion of James}, chaps. 1–2, in \textit{New Testament Apocrypha}, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, I (Louisville, Ky., 1991), 426. See note 29 in the \textit{vita} of Elisabeth for further discussion of the theme of infertility in the \textit{vitae} of saints.
for the sake of bodily pleasure, quite the contrary, but out of desire for a good child; I speak of the wondrous Thomas, toward whom this account is hastening. But let it pause a little, so as to tell its tale as clearly as possible.

This good couple suffered, being troubled by their desire for a child, as had the ancestors of my Lord Christ. You surely know who they are; my account has alluded to some of them. They were afflicted with despondency and composed words of lamentation. They entreated God unceasingly; they kept falling down on their knees in supplication, and were mourning and of sad countenance all day long. They did not know what they could do. Since they had no consolation of their own, they used to sing frequently the song of David: “Many are the scourges of the sinner but him that hopes in the Lord mercy shall compass about.” And indeed mercy did encompass them, nor did it wholly reject those who were entreating: “Hearken to us, O God our savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of them that are on the sea afar off.”

Thus the Lord looked down from heaven and hearkened to the lamentation of this couple which was bound, and He loosed the fetters of childlessness, which were like iron collars laid upon them and binding them all around, and removed from them their disgrace, I mean the heavy collar of childlessness that was laid upon them. And in accord with His promise the aforementioned couple obtained a fruit beautiful in appearance and in character. The fruit was beautiful to see, but even more beautiful in soul. But my previous account has already explained how much and in what ways the parents of the blessed Thomas suffered in being deprived of a child.

5. As so often when God is entreated greatly, He gave ear to those who call on Him, and healed them at the right season, testing their endurance by this, whether they would be fainthearted in the face of temptations, whether they would forsake Him, if they would dedi-

30 Or “Scripture.”
31 Ps. 31 (32):10.
32 Ps. 64 (65):5.
33 Reading πεπεδεμένον for πεπηδημένον.
34 Or possibly “as a result of their vow,” although there is no mention of any vow made by Michael and Kale.
35 Cf. Eccl. 3:3.
cate everything to God, even as surely they had been doing. And, indeed, frequenting often the divine churches, they praised the Lord seven times in a day. And continually reading the divine Scriptures, and devoting themselves to all-night prayer and fasting, they entreated the Lord that a child be given to them. They emulated the supplications of the righteous Anna and Joachim, the parents of the Mother of God; they frequently beat their breasts, and bathed their beds with tears. And from the Lord they heard “Why criest thou to me?” for indeed they were crying to the Lord with cries of woe and lamentations, “Hearken to us, O God our savior; the hope of all the ends of the earth and of them that are on the sea afar off.” Be the defender of those that call upon Thee. Reveal Thyself as helpmate to our intention. Grant a fruit of the womb to Thy servants who petition Thee. Do not drive away empty-handed Thy pitiable servants who prostrate themselves before Thee.” They continually uttered these and similar words to the Lord, “Let not our adversaries rejoice against us.” Let them not say ‘where is their God? But our God has done in heaven and in earth whatsoever He has pleased.”

What then did the God of wonders bring about in this situation? He did not overlook their entreaty, nor disregard their lamentations. But one night the all-immaculate and ever-virginal Virgin was seen in a dream by the wondrous woman Kale, truly good in character and manner, and said these very words: “Do not be of sad countenance about these things, O woman, and do not be upset on account of your childlessness. In a short while you shall bear a female child, who will chase as far as possible from you all despondency, O good woman.” While nearly awake, she heard these things from the Mother of God, and waking from her sleep she said words of this sort to her husband: “While I was asleep a divine dream came; therefore I awaked and beheld and

36 Cf. Ps. 118 (119):164.
37 Cf. Ps. 6:6.
38 Cf. Ex. 14:15.
39 Ps. 64 (65):5. This quotation, and indeed the whole chapter, repeats elements from Chap. 4.
40 Cf. Ps. 34 (35):19; Ps. 37 (38):16.
41 Ps. 115:2–3; cf. also Ps. 78 (79):10.
42 Another pun on her name.
43 Or “O woman Kale.”
44 Homer, Od. 14:495; Il. 2:56.
my sleep was sweet to me.” Indeed shortly thereafter, having conceived, she brought forth a child in fulfillment of the promise of the ever-virgin Maiden and Mother of God. The name “Thomaîs” was given to her, a child who was born in accord with a promise, who by nature was female, but by virtue and ascetic discipline much more male than men.

6. After these events, then, the parents of the blessed Thomaîs departed from Lesbos and settled in the area of the Bosporus where they lived for a long time. They devoted themselves to fasting and all-night prayer, rejoicing in the Lord in the words of the apostle, giving thanks in all things, and living their lives in a way pleasing to God.

As Thomaîs grew up, she continued to be strengthened in the virtues, devoted to the worship of God, and adorned by all forms of goodness. She disclosed her hidden beauty by its external manifestation and revealed the grace of her soul by her bodily features; invisible virtues by the visible, her internal virtues by her external beauty. One could see in her a perfect bodily harmony, which suggested the spiritual beauty of her soul. She was not raised in an ignoble manner by her parents, but with discipline, understanding, and frequent admonition.

After Thomaîs was thus reared and trained and reached the age of about twenty-four years, she was forced by her parents to take a husband even though she preferred to remain a virgin; she wished to remain ignorant of...
bodily pleasure and to trample on fleshly desires so as to present herself as a pure and undefiled temple to the pure God. But she had both to guard her virginity and to respect marriage, since these things are appreciated and revered by all.

<And so> she obeyed her parents. Agreeing to marriage, she bowed her head to the <marriage> crown and took a lawful husband. But he, who was Stephen by name, but not by <his> lifestyle, did not devote himself to her as companion but as an opponent, not as a helpmate but rather as an enemy. For, as the saying goes, “It was necessary for evil to be fixed next to virtue and <for her> to live side by side” with it somehow.

But what a noble mind she had, what a staunch spirit, what praiseworthy judgment again of her way of life! She did not cease to give thanks continually to God, to spend her free time in the divine churches, to take care of the poor, to pour out her wealth, and to give back her own <property> to God. She used to sing constantly these <verses> of the odes of David, “He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever,” and again “The good man is he that pities and lends.” For she fixed her whole mind on readings from the divine scriptures, and did not cease to chant these psalms, indeed she did not weary in putting into practice these <injunctions>. She put her whole hand to the spindle. She worked skillfully and artfully to weave on the loom fabrics of various colors. Her hands made

50 Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19.
51 Cf. Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7:37.
52 The most distinctive rite of the Byzantine marriage ceremony was the “crowning” of the couple; see “Marriage Crowns,” ODB 2:1306.
53 There is a pun here. The Greek name for Stephen, Στέφανος, means “crown” or “garland.”
54 Cf. Gregory of Nazianzos, or. 43 (In laudem Basilii Magni), chap. 64.3 (PG 36:581B). Cf. Chap. 15 and note 113, below.
55 Ps. 111 (112):9; cf. also 2 Cor. 9:9.
56 Ps. 111 (112):5.
57 Cf. Prov. 31:19.
cloth and the bellies of the poor ate to their content. Her hands labored for the sake of the poor and wove tunics for the naked.58 Her feet walked eagerly to the divine churches and kept vigil there all the night, her feet stood always in an even place.59 O feet which frequently moved toward acts of generosity, and always preferred to walk in paradise, O truly blessed feet!

7. After departing from Lesbos, the parents of the blessed Thomaĩês moved from there and took up residence in the region of the Bosporus. But since it was indeed necessary that God, Who arranges everything for the best, Who originally yoked them together in marriage, should separate them again by death in ways known only to Himself, the father of the blessed Thomaĩês passed on to his blessed end.

Her mother then had her hair cut off60 and cut off along with it the distractions of daily life. She embraced the monastic life and entered a convent,61 there to be enclosed in a stifling cell. She added virtues to her virtues; she began to communicate with God; every night she washed her bed with tears;62 she dedicated herself to sleepless prayer; she persevered in continuous fasting; and praised the Lord seven times in a day.63 In this way she put a good roof on a strong foundation. Since she wanted to live in an angelic manner, she engaged in ascetic conduct and did not cease to undertake these and these kinds of activities both night and day.

But as for her daughter who was of a tender age at which it was more customary to occupy herself with childish playthings,65 who discerned the tumult of life, and who was married to a husband, was she unmindful of virtue, or did she neglect the zealous and God-pleasing life, or have a lazy

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58 These two sentences suggest that Thomaĩês not only made clothes for the needy, but may have also sold some of the cloth she wove and distributed the profits to the poor.
59 Cf. Ps. 25 (26):12.
60 I.e., she received the monastic tonsure.
61 Presumably the convent of Τα μικρα Ρομαίου, because we learn from Chap. 22 that Kale became mother superior of this convent. See note 131, below, for more information.
62 Cf. Ps. 6:6.
63 Ps. 118 (119):164.
64 Reading ov for ov.
65 This passage is puzzling because it suggests a much younger girl than the woman of twenty-four mentioned in the previous chapter; cf. introduction, p. 293 and note 6.
St. Thomais of Lesbos

disposition? By no means! She continued to hold more readily to her aforementioned virtues.\textsuperscript{66} And one could see in this situation an unusual married couple; for the wife was manly and masculine in virtue, and strove to surpass her own nature [i.e., sex] by works of zeal for virtue’s sake. (For it is not ignoble thus to outstrip parents who have struggled with works of zeal on behalf of virtue.) \textless Thomais was \textgreater always stretching her hands up to heaven, kneeling, weeping, conversing with God, and kindling the divine love without interruption. And in doing the things pleasing to God—clothing the naked,\textsuperscript{68} raising up and encouraging those who had fallen—in this way she used every effort,\textsuperscript{69} she sought out every method, she devised every purpose through which she might bring to fruition the teachings of the Lord, even though she might be hindered by Stephen, to whom she was married, as our account has related above. For he opposed completely the wondrous intentions of Thomais, and while she was hastening to give away her wealth to the poor, he was opposing her like a Satan. How many times he heard from her, “\textit{Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men},”\textsuperscript{70} the words which the Savior addressed to Peter, the chief of the apostles (who did not \textless yet \textgreater know the mystery of the salvific passion), instructing him most clearly to walk behind him.

\textless And \textgreater he [Stephen] used to strike the noble \textless Thomais \textgreater frequently, mocking greatly and sneering at her. But she remained steadfast, like an iron tower that is not at all shaken even when being savagely attacked, meditating constantly on the words of the Gospel, “\textit{Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely},”\textsuperscript{71} Who then could separate her from the love of Christ? Not fire, not sword, not peril,\textsuperscript{72} nor the foolish chatter of the foolish-minded Stephen.

8. But lift up your ears to me and turn your mind to the divine life of the blessed martyr. For our account has no intention of separating her from the

\textsuperscript{66} Or, “she clung to these virtues even more readily than her aforementioned parents.”

\textsuperscript{67} Literally, “to defeat.”

\textsuperscript{68} Cf. Mt. 25:36.

\textsuperscript{69} Literally, “let out every reef”; cf. Leutsch-Schneidewin, \textit{Corpus} 1:145.

\textsuperscript{70} Mk. 8:33.

\textsuperscript{71} Mt. 5:11.

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. Rom. 8:35.
company of martyrs, since she also received many beatings, and was scourged unbearably for the sake of the divine revelations of our Lord. She was not wantonly outraged by a tyrant, nor punished terribly by instruments of torture, but by her aforementioned husband who tyrannically oppressed her and violently prevented her from living in a God-pleasing manner. For she used to visit the divine churches and exerted not a little but the greatest effort to do this each day. Once, as she was going to a holy church, she encountered a poor and naked man who was pierced with the greatest poverty. But look at what she did about it. She stripped off her own garments, and went naked for the sake of Christ; indeed, she suffered for the sake of Christ. And she was beaten by Stephen so that she might obtain from Christ the lordly crown, for this act of charity was made known to her husband, and the wondrous Thomas endured many blows. She was flogged by that wretched husband of hers, a man of wicked thoughts, a man who did not desire Christ but loved the world and held to the things of the world, a man who was altogether unloving of the Good, and, in short, did not receive the things of the Spirit as a spiritual person, but he was rather a worldly man similar to senseless beasts. The abominable man loathed her and considered her most wicked even though she did no evil. He who was worthy of aversion rejected her, while she, although suffering, had much concern not to lose heart nor indeed to give up and neglect her praiseworthy works, her good intentions, but she bore the blows with good grace, like a martyr rejoicing in Christ, and clung to them to an even greater degree. She struck her husband spiritually when she was struck for the sake of Christ. When she

73 Literally, “catapults.” These devices are described in Maccabees (4 Macc. 8:13; 9:26; 11:9) as instruments of torture to which prisoners were bound for flaying and dismembering.

74 Cf. 1 Cor. 4:11.

75 Another pun on the name Stephen. Thomas receives beatings from her husband Stephen, and receives a “lordly crown” (δεσποτικόν στέφανον) of martyrdom from Christ.

76 1 Cor. 2:14.

77 An anonymous referee has commented that married women were not the only saintly personages to endure beatings patiently; similar behavior can be observed in the “holy fools,” such as the nun who feigned madness in the Lausiac History of Palladius (C. Butler, The Lausiac History of Palladius [Cambridge, 1898], 98–100, Eng. trans.
was hit for the sake of the poor, she hit <him>.\textsuperscript{78} She exulted and she rejoiced, “\textit{My soul rejoicing shall exult in the Lord},\textsuperscript{79} for He hath clothed me in the garment of salvation and the tunic of gladness.” For [p. 237] she clothed herself all over with the blows from the aforesaid Stephen as with a garment of salvation.

9. Our account <now> hastens to take a bold step, by comparing her husband to the odious coppersmith,\textsuperscript{80} and the blessed <Thomaïs> to the blessed Paul, the divine herald; for she is indeed equal to the apostles,\textsuperscript{81} and one could indeed see that her struggle here <was> a struggle equal to that of the aforementioned <Paul and the coppersmith Alexander>. For the most wicked coppersmith did not stop beating Paul, but neither did he [Paul] stop preaching the Gospel. And he entreated the Lord earnestly on his [Alexander’s] behalf, even if his goal for him was not accomplished. Indeed Stephen, too, did not stop striking with unbearable blows his good helpmate, the noble worker of virtue, rather he strove to push her upstream, while she was being carried toward the good by stronger currents. She was distressed to be restrained frequently from her good <work> (and why not?). Since she had such good purpose, she devoted herself to God, broke away from the world, and attached her entire self to God. But she did not entreat the Lord, as did Paul,\textsuperscript{82} to be saved from her tormentor, rather she applied herself even more readily to the God-pleasing and virtuous life, lying like a razor to the whetstone\textsuperscript{83} of her aforesaid husband, receiving blows that can neither be expressed in words nor were bearable in reality. Rather she bore them for the sake of Christ, hav-

\textsuperscript{78} Perhaps an allusion to the New Testament injunction to “turn the other cheek” (Mt. 5:39), i.e., she struck a blow for Christ when she did not retaliate?

\textsuperscript{79} Cf. Ps. 34 (35):9.

\textsuperscript{80} Alexander, an opponent of St. Paul, of whom virtually nothing is known; cf. 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Tim. 1:20.

\textsuperscript{81} “Isapostolos” is a title given to a number of saints, male and female, such as Thekla (cf. \textit{ODB} 3:2033–34), who emulate the apostles in some way. See Lampe, \textit{Lexicon}, s.v.

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. 2 Cor. 12:7–8.

\textsuperscript{83} Leutsch-Schneidewin, \textit{Corpus} 1:284, 2:123, 549. The saying refers to people who achieve what they want.
ing Christ before her eyes. She adorned herself with wounds as with pearls, with hurts as with most precious stones; she was embellished by thrashings as with golden <coins>, and henceforth presented herself as a *queen clothed and arrayed in divers colors*\(^{84}\) before the Ruler of all. She was adorned by insults as with expensive earrings, her beauty was enhanced by the beatings, <and> she was cheered by the mockeries.

This then was the situation of the wondrous Thomais; thus she was prevented by her husband from attendance at the divine churches and was restrained in her charity to the poor. She had as an obstacle to all virtuous behavior the one whom our story earlier compared to the coppersmith, and <so> she sang the ode of David, saying “*I would rather be abject in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of sinners,*”\(^{85}\) because *mercy and truth went before*\(^{86}\) her and she continued to take care of the poor and to engage in hymnody to God. And indeed, <though> suffering, she did not relax her zeal, rather she enlarged her purpose. And one could see a new struggle over this. He [Stephen] did not cease restraining the blessed <woman> from her blessed and customary purpose and activity, while she, on the other hand, increased her charitable purpose and disposition, showing manly courage for the superior and better <course>.

But let us move our tale on to the narration of the miracles of the most blessed Thomais, one by one, and <I will try> to recount her wondrous deeds to the best of my ability. **10. Beginning of the miracles.** My narrative has shown us that <Thomais> constantly visited the divine churches, and most frequently attended <services at churches> where all-night hymnody to God was being performed. She used to go regularly to the most divine church at Blachernai,\(^{87}\) and would walk the

\(^{84}\) Cf. Ps. 44 (45):9.

\(^{85}\) Ps. 83 (84):10.

\(^{86}\) Ps. 88 (89):14.

\(^{87}\) Blachernai, near the northern end of the Theodosian walls, was the site of a major Constantinopolitan shrine of the Virgin built by the empress Pulcheria ca. 450. A circular chapel called the “Soros” was erected by Emperor Leo I (457–474) next to the church to hold the robe of the Virgin, brought from Palestine in 473. The church was burned down in 1070; it was rebuilt by 1077 by either Romanos IV Diogenes (1067–71) or Michael VII (1071–78) and then destroyed again in 1434. See *ODB* 1:293; Janin, *EglisesCP*, 161–71; Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 333–37.
whole way at night sending forth hymns of supplication to God and entreat ing
His all-pure Mother.\textsuperscript{88} Then she would prostrate herself before Her all-
honored and all-holy shrine,\textsuperscript{89} entreat ing Her with tears and begging grace for
the whole world, \textit{<that is>}, to intercede with Her Son to postpone and delay
His punishment and to grant a respite from the wickedness \textit{<that afflicts> the
world because of \textit{<our> sins. For she did not petition and entreat the Lord on
her own behalf, but for the salvation and redemption of the community and
the world. In the words of the apostle she strove \textit{not for her own but for an-
other},\textsuperscript{90} and indeed she carried out this saying by her very deeds.

For when \textit{<in the course of the procession?> the most sacred images
of the all-pure Mother of God arrived at that place which is usually called
Zeugma\textsuperscript{91} by the locals, a man tormented by a demon suddenly sprang out
\textit{<and>} rolled in front of the feet of the blessed \textit{<ThomaõÈs>, calling out loudly,
and revealing the power of the virtue which she had kept hidden for a long
time: “How long will you hide yourself, O servant of God, and be unwilling
to proclaim these works clearly? Let God’s name be magnified through you.
Reveal to me as wondrous, ThomaõÈs, the mercy of God. Let my repentance
be proclaimed through you and immediate forgiveness for my sins, because of
which I am now punished by God’s will. And I beg \textit{<you>}, while rolling at
your holy feet, make yourself manifest. Show that the God of wonders works
great wonders through you. Let the \textit{<demon> who overpowers me be crushed
by your hand. Let the Adversary [the Devil] be crushed by the might of your
power. \textit{The pangs of death compassed me; the dangers of hell found me.}\textsuperscript{92} How

\textsuperscript{88} This might allude to the weekly procession from Blachernai to the church at Chal-
koprateia (cf. note 91, below, and Laiou, “Historia henos gamou,” 242), but ThomaõÈs
is described as going in the opposite direction, i.e., toward Blachernai.

\textsuperscript{89} The Soros, the chapel of the Virgin’s robe, was covered in silver and considered a
“reliquary shrine of architectural dimensions.” Lay people were not allowed inside the
Soros, but could pray in the main church; cf. \textit{ODB} 3:1929. A specific icon type, the
Virgin Hagiosoritissa, was associated with this shrine; cf. \textit{ODB} 3:2171.

\textsuperscript{90} Cf. 1 Cor. 10:24.

\textsuperscript{91} This passage apparently refers to the procession that took place each Friday from
Blachernai to the church of the Chalkoprateia, near Hagia Sophia; cf. Janin, \textit{EglisesCP,
169–70. The Zeugma was an area roughly halfway between Blachernai and the Chalko-
prateia, just north of the present-day Suleymaniye Mosque; cf. Janin, \textit{CP byz.}, 441–42.

\textsuperscript{92} Ps. 114 (116):3.
long might the demon move the hand of Briareos\textsuperscript{93} against me?” These things he called out to the Lord through ThomaõÈs. The saint was then inclined to mercy and spread out her arms to God, from Whom \textit{every perfect gift}\textsuperscript{94} is sent down. And after she rubbed her hands with oil from the utterly pure Mother of the Word\textsuperscript{95} and anointed the aforementioned \textit{demoniac}, one could immediately see the demoniac being completely cured and magnifying God, Who works great wonders, makes the dead live, and drives out demons. And as a result those who happened to be present, <and> saw the swift cure of that demon-possessed man, sent up loudly a hymn to God, because He has been made wholly wondrous in His saints and His name is both proclaimed and magnified through His blessed servants, who work the same miracles, banish demons, heal every sickness, and glorify the Lord.

11. \textit{Miracle 2.} I should add to my narrative [p. 238] another more wondrous miracle of the blessed ThomaõÈs. A certain man once lived in the monastery named after Ankourios.\textsuperscript{96} He was a eunuch, <and> his name was Constantine. For many years the fetters of paralysis bound him, so to speak, and made him suffer like the man <in the Gospels> who was paralyzed for thirty-eight years.\textsuperscript{97} Later the most dreadful disease of quinsy\textsuperscript{98} afflicted him and for a long time constricted <his throat>, so that he kept seeing the danger <of death> before his eyes. One night, while he was sleeping, someone appeared and spoke to him. He added and interjected advice about how he should find

\textsuperscript{93} A huge monster with one hundred hands, also known as Aigaion; cf. Homer, \textit{Il.} 1:403.

\textsuperscript{94} James 1:17.

\textsuperscript{95} The source of this oil is not specified; it was no doubt oil from a lamp hanging before an icon of the Virgin, perhaps at Blachernai.

\textsuperscript{96} The location of this Ankourios (a word meaning “cucumber”) monastery is unclear. On the Asiatic side of the Bosporus was a monastery τοῦ Ἀγγουρίου, whose origin is unknown, but which is mentioned in 11th- and 12th-century sources; cf. Janin, \textit{EglisesCentres}, 27–28. Within Constantinople there was also a \textit{metochion} τοῦ Ἀγγουρίου built by Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) for the Chian monastery of Nea Mone; cf. Janin, \textit{EglisesCP}, 9. In his encomium of Thomas, Akropolites described the monastery τοῦ Ἀγγουρίου as “one of the monasteries of the City” (\textit{AASS}, Nov. 4:244b). The fact that no monastery of Ankourios is attested before the 11th century is yet another indication that the \textit{vita} may have been written after the 10th century.

\textsuperscript{97} Cf. Jn. 5:5.

\textsuperscript{98} Literally, “dog-quinsy,” an inflammation of the throat caused by infected tonsils.
quick deliverance from his illnesses, saying thus: “If you wish to be freed speedily from your present danger, send quickly without any delay to the blessed Thomais,” (in this way he added her name), “and, taking the water with which she has washed\(^99\) her holy hands, anoint that part of your body which threatens you with <mortal> danger and you will thereby obtain a swift cure.” Such were the <instructions> of that wondrous and divine dream. The sick man was persuaded and, upon awaking from his sleep, carried out all the <instructions> from his dream. He sent to the holy woman, anointed the whole of his body with the washwater from her hands, and was cured immediately of his suffering. He <then> loudly proclaimed this miracle everywhere, praising the God of all, <and> magnifying the One Who magnifies His saints.

12. **Miracle 3.** And still I shall add to the previous <miracle tales> this even more unusual and more divine <story>, <which> prompts every ear and mind to a hymn in praise of God.

<Thomas>, who was accustomed to frequent the divine churches and rejoice in the all-night hymnody, went once to the holy church of the Hodegoi (which is now called the Hodegetria).\(^100\) And here she stood near one of the all-holy icons of the Mother of God and made her customary prayers. And while she was visiting, as was her wont, the aforementioned holy church, from which the all-holy icon of the completely immaculate Virgin is carried in procession every Tuesday very early in the morning,\(^101\) revered and venerated by all according to custom, a certain woman, who had been afflicted for a long time by a demon, leapt out and fell down at the feet of the holy woman, who

\(^99\) For the meaning of \(\acute{a}p\omega\lambda\omicron\upsilon\mu\alpha\), see Sophocles, *Lexicon*, s.v., and *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gra\(\ddot{a}\)zitat*, ed. E. Trapp, fasc. 1, s.v.

\(^100\) The monastery τῶν Ὀδηγῶν (lit., “of the guides”) was located near Hagia Sophia. Built (according to tradition) by the empress Pulcheria in the 5th century, it was later famous as the location of the Hodegetria icon; see *ODB* 2:939, Janin, *EglisesCP*, 199–207; Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 363–66; C. Angelidi, “‘Un texte patriographique et edifiant: le ‘discours narratif’ sur les Hodegoi,’” *REB* 52 (1994), 113–49; and note 101, below. Kazhdan (*ODB* 3:2076 and *List of Saints*) argues that the use of the name Hodegetria, which seems to have come into use in the 11th or 12th century, indicates a later date of composition for the *vita*; the parenthetical phrase could, however, be a marginal gloss that was later incorporated into the text.

\(^101\) On the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, reputed to have been painted by St. Luke, see *ODB* 3:2172–73. The icon, which was honored at the site from the mid-5th century, was used in a variety of processions and ceremonies at different periods. See Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 364.
was standing and devoting herself to prayer, and called out words like this to her: “Have mercy on me your servant, O servant of God, and let not this demon maltreat me to such an extent and lead me around here and there like a prisoner of war. My affliction has lasted long enough; will the day of salvation never come, but the night of despair crush me? And will the demon continue to harass me in the future, and is there no one to help?” The aforementioned woman did not cease to utter this sort of lament, wailing inconsolably and crying beyond all measure. The woman was indeed an object of great pity. And was quickly inclined to mercy by the wailing and lamentation of the woman, and she anointed the woman with holy oil. And immediately the demon fled and disappeared, and all the crowd that happened to be present was seen to be full of amazement at the sudden cure of the aforementioned woman, for she reached out to the holy woman and entreated her that she be delivered from the tormenting demon, which indeed had happened.

13. Miracle 4. Let my story hasten then, with all possible zeal, to other miraculous deeds of the wondrous Thomas.

A woman who lived wantonly and licentiously in every way suffered from hemorrhaging for more than six years and was terribly afflicted by this sickness. But the holy woman, realizing that the woman’s illness from God, spoke to her as follows: “If you, woman, desire to be released from this illness which afflicts you, abandon all intercourse with men during the divine and great feasts, and the prohibited activities you habitually perform. Cast as far away as possible your wallowing in the mud of passions.” When the woman then promised to abstain from these activities and rejected with loathing her filthy acts, the holy healed the woman, anointing her with the usual oil. So the words and counsel of the saint released the long-suffering woman from her serious affliction. And after having been sick for so many years, she was restored to health and promised to sin no longer. For indeed she had heard from the saint that which was truly said by Christ: “Behold, thou art made well! Sin no more.” For she realized that it was indecent to engage in sexual pleasure and intercourse.

14. Miracle 5. Another woman who followed a like career and way of life

102 She was evidently a prostitute, as the introductory sentence of Chap. 14 indicates.
103 Jn. 5:14.
did the same things; and she was of the same mind as courtesans, indeed she performed worse and soul-destroying actions, squandering her livelihood for the most part and spending large sums of money inappropriately. And performing every abominable and unseemly act, she rolled about in the slime of passions, engaging in frenzied fornication and illicit sex. 104

This woman, having fresh in her ears the cure of the previous woman, fell down before the feet of the saint and shed warm tears. She rushed toward the aforementioned servant of Christ, and showed her affliction. For she had a cancer in her breast, which terribly troubled and distressed her. At any rate, she made a confession with all her soul and begged for mercy with warm tears. She then heard from Thomaïs words such as these, “If you wish to regain your health, avoid abnormal and filthy fornication. Do away with your passion for this and take a lawful husband, 105 and you will quickly obtain a cure.” She promised the saint to do these things and, vowing with great reverence to do them, attained her goal.

These and similar miracles the truly divine Thomaïs accomplished during the course of her life, while those that follow occurred after her departure to Christ, as marvelous and extraordinary deeds. [p. 239]

15. But let our account pause a little and recount in detail her husband’s treatment of her. Her husband used to lie in wait then, like a violent tyrant with beetled brows, grimly regarding the blessed Thomaïs, and with furrowed brows displaying a wild-looking glance and the coarse nature of his face. She suffered terrible beatings, she bore unmerciful torments, she endured chastisements by virtue of her noble thoughts, maintaining continually a conduct in accordance with God. Although she was restrained by her aforesaid husband, she continued to devote herself constantly to prayers, and continued to abide in the God-pleasing life. She meditated constantly on all the works of God, 106 as was her wont, even though the blessed woman’s pain was renewed, since she was wickedly attacked by her husband, who prevented her from doing such works of mercy. Even though she lived with a lame man

104 Reading κασσωρενούσα for κασσωρενούσα.

105 Unlike earlier repentant harlots (e.g., Mary of Egypt), this woman did not become a hermit, but was urged by Thomaïs to marry, yet another indication of the promotion of marriage at this time; cf. Laiou, “Historia henos gamou,” 245.

106 Cf. Ps. 142 (143):5.
and was taught by him to limp,\textsuperscript{107} she never ceased to walk in a straight path.\textsuperscript{108} For her husband viewed her actions in a contrary fashion and reckoned them extravagant, and he condemned her for living in a prodigal fashion and criticized and scorned her for squandering their livelihood. But <her actions> were rather charity, carrying out mercy in accordance with the divine and holy scriptures, concerning which <mercy> indeed God Himself said: “I will have mercy and not sacrifice;\textsuperscript{109} if you bring incense before me, it is an abomination to me.”\textsuperscript{110}

He considered such <charitable work> to be in vain, but the person who does not do evil is viewed as evil by evil people; the prudent\textsuperscript{111} person <is viewed> as foolish by the licentious;\textsuperscript{112} the brave person is reviled by the craven as over bold; and charity to the poor is suspiciously viewed as prodigality. For evil deeds are affixed beside virtues and are very close to them.\textsuperscript{113} For while her aforementioned husband lived in a rustic\textsuperscript{114} manner, earned their daily bread by going to sea, and enjoyed a modest standard of living, the following occurred: whenever he returned home, he made inquiry about the expenditure of his assets and, calculating on a daily basis, he reckoned up how much of their livelihood she was spending. And he constantly tried to prevent her from <carrying out> the <charitable> activity I have frequently described <above>. For one could see her each day abundantly supplying gifts to the poor: clothing the naked and giving those in rags splendid clothes; distributing food to orphans; and furnishing the necessities of life to the destitute. Making her gifts more splendid, she wanted to go naked for Christ’s sake rather than to clothe this burdensome appendage of earth and clay;\textsuperscript{115} <she wanted instead> to perform every deed in the service of Christ. But her lawless husband did not stop his cruel beating of this woman who was so disposed, calling extrav-


\textsuperscript{108} Literally, “with a straight foot.”

\textsuperscript{109} Mt. 9:13, 12:7; cf. Hos. 6:7.

\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Is. 1:13.

\textsuperscript{111} Or “chaste.”

\textsuperscript{112} Cf. Plato, Gorgias 507c.

\textsuperscript{113} Gregory of Nazianzos, PG 36:581B; cf. note 54, above.

\textsuperscript{114} I.e., “boorish.”

\textsuperscript{115} I.e., her body.
gant this woman who labored hard for the sake of Christ. For indeed she exerted a great effort on His [Christ’s] behalf: through her work for the poor she clothed Him when He was clad in rags and going naked, when He was homeless, hungry, thirsty, and in need of medical attention. She used to go all round the marketplace, searching the shadows, groping around in the darkness, in case she might find on occasion a poor man (or better to call him “Christ”) sleeping outside, that she might lend him the money to pay his debts.

16. Here she was repaid this debt a hundredfold, according to the true word of the Lord, and in the world to come she will receive a ten-thousandfold reward, and in addition the kingdom of Heaven, the greatest and most perfect reward, toward which she was hastening with all fervor, toward which she lifted up her whole mind, which she yearned after and strove with all haste to attain, for the sake of which she had been beaten, endured unbearable blows, and carried wounds.

She used to provoke her tormentor, saying, “Strike this body that will soon perish and return again to the earth from which it came.” And at the same time she expressed prophetic words which foretold her death, for the wondrous Thomas was already all but at the point of departing to the Lord. She had adorned her life by God-pleasing works; she had found her support in the words of the Gospel; she had adorned her inner person with spiritual graces; she had delighted in the Lord frequently; she had very wisely blended and combined contemplation with activity; she had scorned the present life; she had preferred the ornament of virtues and despised the flux of this world here; she had loathed her worldly husband, but was given in marriage to Christ as a most beautiful bride and fair virgin who preferred the adornment of virtues to the vanity of silken clothes.

Thus after the saint had endured her many afflictions for a considerable time (for she had already borne for thirteen years that violent abuse, painful wounds, immoderate bruises and blows), she received her blessed end and was transported to the ageless life without end, having lived in all

118 Literally, “be corrupted and dissolve again into.”
119 There is a pun here on the two meanings of κοσμός, “ornament” and “world.”
120 Literally, “lived together with.”
thirty-eight years of the present life, <it being> the first day of January, when she departed to the Lord.

While still alive she had commanded those she lived with\(^{121}\) not to place her <body> inside the holy church,\(^{122}\) but outside in the forecourts until the all-compassionate God might desire to work miracles through His grace and show where she should be laid. She foretold these <events> while speaking, humbling herself or rather displaying to her listeners\(^{123}\) an example and model of humility. And one could see a certain prophetic gift and humility both observed and understood in these words of the blessed one. For she spoke as follows: “When my spirit departs from its present dwelling, I command all of you not to bury this earthly body inside the divine church, but in the forecourt,” as has <already> been said “until divine providence should work miracles about me.”

And this is what happened: by the time forty days had passed after her departure to the Lord, many miracles had already occurred, since her holy remains provided cures readily to those approaching them, and wrought extraordinary wonders. Our account has already spoken of those miracles she accomplished while alive, and <I will now describe> those after her death as strange and wondrous.

17. Miracle 6. A certain man, who was originally from the land of the Nikomedians,\(^{124}\) was being attacked by a violent demon, [p. 240] and ran to the coffin of the saint with supplications <for aid>. After remaining there a short time <only> and making entreaties to be freed from the demon that tormented him, he quickly obtained a cure. When the holy nuns who resided at the convent saw the wondrous miracle and recalled the words of the blessed \(\text{T}homa{\text{l}}\`\`es\),\(^{125}\) they marveled at her foresight and placed the remains of the

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\(^{121}\) The text is vague on many points of Thoma{\text{l}}\`\`es’ life. The identity of “those she lived with” (in the masculine plural) is unclear. No other family than her parents, by this time dead, or her husband is mentioned in the \textit{Life}. Perhaps it is a generic reference to the members of her household.

\(^{122}\) I.e., the church of the convent of \(\tau\`\`a \mu\`kr\`a \text{\`R}\`\`om\`\`atou\). This was the convent where Thomas’ mother Kale was superior; cf. Chap. 22 and note 131.

\(^{123}\) Reading \(\acute{\text{akou}}\`\`ou\`si\`\`a for \(\text{akou}\`\`si\`\`a\).

\(^{124}\) Nikomedeia was a city of Bithynia, in northwestern Asia Minor.

\(^{125}\) I.e., that they wait to bury her in the church until such time as God gave indications of her sanctity through posthumous miracles.
saint in the divine church with befitting honor, thus carrying out her instructions.\footnote{126}

18. \textit{Miracle 7}. Not long afterwards <occurred the miraculous cure of> a woman who had led a pious life, dedicating herself completely to God, and spending her time in God-pleasing works. She had chosen the monastic way of life, which gives special pleasure to God, as <a way of> living quietly, conversing with God, and abiding by His teachings. She began to be terribly troubled by the demon who envies our race, and who cast an evil eye on it from the beginning and has inflicted harm on us from <the time of our> forefathers. He had insinuated himself into the aforementioned woman and was wickedly contriving to kill her, just as he previously subjected our foremother [i.e., Eve] to death. She therefore went to the tomb of the saint and wept with warmest tears. She made supplication and earnestly entreated the Lord that through her [Thomaïs] she be delivered from her tormentor, for she was being torn apart by the demon and was grievously distressed, emitting piteous cries which moved one to compassion, <saying>, “Have mercy on me, servant of God, and set me free from the present demon.” And dashing her head against the tomb, she found the customary mercy and was set free from the abuse and torment of the demon.

19. \textit{Miracle 8}. Our account <now> adds still another miracle to those already reported, one by no means inferior to the previous ones, in fact even greater in its magnitude and worth.

<There was> a man from this great city [i.e., Constantinople] by the name of Eutychianos. He lived somewhere near the divine church of the Oxeia, in which is highly honored the commander of the heavenly hosts.\footnote{127} He [Eutychianos] prided himself on his wealth, was laden with and exulted in a mass of titles, gloried in a brilliant lineage, and was widely known to all. This man then was bewitched by some sorcerers and wizards with the assistance\footnote{128} of demons, and by sinking to the worst behavior he thus became palsied. Therefore he was distressed and lamented loudly and spent his entire livelihood on

\footnote{126} Her relics were still at the church of $\tau\alpha\; \mu\iota\kappa\alpha \, \Pi\omega\iota\mu\alpha\iota\upsilon$ in the Palaiologan period, when they were venerated by Russian pilgrims; cf. introduction, p. 295, and note 9.

\footnote{127} The church of St. Michael the Archangel was near the church of St. Loukilianos in the Oxeia district, on the slope that descends toward the Golden Horn; cf. Janin, \textit{EglisesCP}, 343–44, and Janin, \textit{CP Byz.}, 400–401.

\footnote{128} Reading $\sigma\nu\varepsilon\rho\varepsilon\gamma\iota\alpha$ for $\sigma\nu\varepsilon\varphi\gamma\iota\alpha$.}
physicians, since he longed for bodily health. Then he ran to her shrine and threw his entire self on the tomb of the wondrous Thomas and uttered cries such as this, saying, “Pour forth your mercy equally on me and on the others who call upon you, show forth your fervent succor, deliver me from this most excessive bodily suffering with which I am wretchedly afflicted. Show your great compassion to me your unworthy servant, who has sought refuge with you with much faith.” And after he made this prayer and his inconsolable lament, the blessed Thomas awarded him a cure, delivering the palsied man from his disease. And just as the paralytic of old, finding release from his lengthy affliction, took up his bed,\(^\text{129}\) so also through her the aforementioned man was cured and leaped about, and he who previously was completely unable to walk was seen to pass swiftly from place to place with rapid movement.

20. Miracle 9. But now let our account pass on to another still more divine miracle; let it demonstrate the wonders of God and magnify His glory as is fitting. There was a man who was afflicted with epilepsy. His foot along with his hand was useless, and there was no natural cure for the malady. But the report of the saint’s miracles, which spread very quickly in every direction, soon reached the ears of the above-mentioned man and drew him, without a moment’s hesitation, to the saint’s dwelling place. Once he had been cured, he returned to his home healthy, without sickness, free from the above-mentioned illness, exalting God and acknowledging the glorious grace of the saint.

21. Miracle 10. Another man, who was a fisherman, had cast his fishing nets as was his wont, but lost them when they were scattered by a huge wave and violent storm. The man’s loss was twofold, since he not only missed out on the haul of fish but also completely lost the tools of his trade, as one says. What then could he do? He begged help from the blessed Thomas, mixing his supplications with tears and wailing. Nor did he fail to obtain his request. For the blessed one appeared to the fisherman and revealed where the nets were lying full of many enormous fish. The place was called Hebdomon\(^\text{130}\) by the locals. When he went to the place, he found the nets filled with a very plentiful catch as had been predicted by the blessed Thomas. And he returned home with much pleasure and good cheer. But let my account continue with subsequent miracles.

\(^{129}\) Mt. 9:6.

\(^{130}\) Hebdomon was a suburb of Constantinople, southwest of the city on the Sea of Marmara; cf. \textit{ODB} 2:907 and note 68 in the \textit{vita} of Elisabeth the Wonderworker.
22. **Miracle 11.** <There was> a monastery established in this great city [i.e., Constantinople], in which was honored and especially glorified the name of the all-blameless Maiden and Mother of God (it was called <the convent of> Ta Mikra Romaiou\(^{131}\) by those who praised it). It was located very near the church of the wonder-working Mokios.\(^{132}\) The remains of the saint were entombed there, and the earthly mother [i.e., Kale] of the blessed and wondrous Thomas had been appointed the mother superior. It happened that on one occasion the nuns there lost a book. When it could not be found, the nuns were quite despondent, [p. 241] and were terribly distressed and upset. The most compassionate and merciful Thomas, however, did not allow these women to remain long in despondency, but appearing <one> night she said to them: “Know, sisters, that I am truly alive, even if I have died as far as you are concerned. The book is lying on my tomb where it is being kept safely by me.” Straightway they went to the holy tomb and found the book lying safely just as the saint had described. They were all filled with delight and astonishment, and were moved to thanksgiving and praise of God, Who at all times works wondrous miracles through His saints. One of them is the miracle I will recount now, adding it to the earlier <miracle tales>.

23. **Miracle 12.** A woman who made her home very near the so-called Forum of the Ox\(^{133}\) was worn down by a severe affliction; she had abdominal distress and was assailed by very sharp pains. Despairing of all other hope, she went to the revered coffin of the saint, and with the most fervent faith pleaded for her assistance. After <the woman> persevered both night and day and shed many tears, she received a cure very quickly and was completely

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\(^{131}\) The *Life* of Thomas is one of the principal sources of information on this convent. Its exact location is unknown, but as it was near St. Mokios it must have been in the southwestern part of the city; cf. Janin, *EglisesCP*, 197, and Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 321–25. By coincidence, at an earlier period Elisabeth the Wonderworker lived in the same convent, which was then dedicated to St. George and called Mikrolophos or “Little Hill”; see note 50 of the *Life* of St. Elisabeth, above.

\(^{132}\) St. Mokios was martyred under Diocletian. His church was traditionally said to have been built by Constantine I on top of a temple to Zeus. It was rebuilt either by Pulcheria and Marcian or by Justinian I, and restored in the 9th century by Basil I. It was located somewhere between the walls of Constantine and the Theodosian walls, perhaps west of the cistern of St. Mokios. See Janin, *EglisesCP*, 354–58.

\(^{133}\) An old Roman forum on the Mese, the main street of Constantinople; it took its name from an enormous bronze sculpture of an ox head. It is now the site of Aksaray Square. See Janin, *CP byz.*, 69–71.
released from the illness that oppressed her. But having received such a favor, the woman was seen <to be> neither ungrateful for this good deed, nor cold-hearted and thoughtless, so to speak, <in her> conduct.\textsuperscript{134} Rather she repaid <the favor> with a small token <of appreciation>, appropriate to her means, to the <holy woman> who had granted her a very great and much desired favor. With much love she had an arch\textsuperscript{135} erected over the tomb of the saint, adorning it with pictures of holy images. And it survives until the present day as a great memorial of this <saint>. And who could pass by this <memorial> there which is most wondrous and pleasing? Therefore we should not then pass over <this memorial> without telling its story.

24. \textit{Miracle 13.} <There was> a man who from childhood had chosen the monastic and celibate way of life and exerted himself completely in godly work. His name was Symeon and his homeland was the most famous of cities [i.e., Constantinople]. He possessed a highly valuable and skillfully made prayer stool\textsuperscript{136} (for it was made of precious materials), which he lost in this way. It came about that a friend of his asked to borrow this <prayer stool>. On account of his simple and friendly character, he did not suspect anything unusual and readily gave his friend what he had asked to borrow. But <the friend>, having acquired it and taken it home, wanted to conceal it with the help of the devil. Thus the aforesaid God-loving man later forgot what he had given and to whom he had given it, and was not a little despondent and upset. The saint then appeared in a dream to the aforesaid man and spoke as follows: “Do you know to whom you gave the prayer stool which you used to have?

\textsuperscript{134} Or “character.”

\textsuperscript{135} Possibly some sort of ciborium or baldachin; cf. A.-M. Talbot, \textit{Faith Healing in Late Byzantium: The Posthumous Miracles of the Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople} by Theoktistos the Stouite (Brookline, Mass., 1983), 56.21, where the same word ἄνευ is used for a baldachin over a saint’s tomb. Alternatively, following a suggestion of Henry Maguire, this may be an arcosolium set into a wall rather than a freestanding structure.

\textsuperscript{136} Or “prayer book.” The meaning of προσευχήδιον as “prayer stool” (it is rendered as “prie-Dieu” by da Costa-Louillet, “Saints de CP,” \textit{Byzantion} 27 [1957], 839) is assured by the context in which the word is used in the \textit{typikon} of the Kecharitomene convent (ed. Gautier, “Kecharitomene,” 79.1083); cf. also DuCange, \textit{Glossarium}, s.v. It should be noted, however, that Akropolites interpreted the word as “prayer book” (προσευχήδια βιβλίον) in chap. 18 of his encomium (\textit{AASS}, Nov. 4:246c), as does A. Lete in her modern Greek translation of the text in Tsames, \textit{Meterikon}, 4:361.
But, if you have forgotten, be reminded of it now!" And she simultaneously revealed the identity of the man who had taken it and jogged his memory, speaking these very words: “Your friend John has the object you are seeking.” And after being reminded and seeking out the prayer stool, he quickly regained his property and promised great gifts to the saint because of her concern for him.

25. Miracle 14. I should also mention the sufferings of her husband, and not be silent about them nor pass over them, but should in the present account make plain and describe to the best of my ability the kind of compensation he had to pay for his most wicked and base life. For he encountered a demon of terrible might and was forcefully driven by it this way and that. And so, wailing inconsolably, he came to the tomb of the saint. And although the demon attacked him terribly there and was unwilling to be driven out of that place, by prayer to this saint he attained salvation from the demon.

Just as it is impossible to reckon the amount of sand of the sea or the tracks of a ship passing through the sea, so it is impossible to set down a detailed narration of the miracles of the saint. But just as one gets a notion of the lion from its claws, and of the whole garment from its edges, so one might understand the whole from a partial narration of her miracles. For over a period of twelve years she has not stopped performing cures for those who approach her with faith night and day. In fact, up to this day she does not cease to supply cures in abundance to those who call on her fervently for aid.

26. But, O partner of the blessed ones, equal of the righteous, associate of the angels, do not cease by your fervent supplications to entreat earnestly the all-merciful Lord, Who loves mankind, to protect the scion of the purple, the most Christ-loving ruler among the lov-

137 Cf., e.g., Jer. 15:8; Hos. 1:10.
138 Prov. 30:19.
139 Leutsch-Schneidewin, Corpus 1:252.
140 See introduction to this vita for discussion of his identity. This concluding paragraph, couched in the form of a prayer for the reigning emperor, is an unusual feature of this vita. It is somewhat reminiscent of the so-called imperial menologion, in which each vita concludes with a prayer in verse form for the emperor; cf. F. Halkin and A.-J. Festugiere, Dix textes inédits tirés du menologe impérial de Koubloumous (Geneva, 1984), 18, 30, 42, etc., and F. Halkin, Le menologe impérial de Baltimore (Brussels,
ers of Christ, who glistens with all forms of goodness. Grant to him <the power of> putting to flight all the leaders of foreign nations and all their semi-barbarous seed. And <may you award> to him the victory prize, as to a most precise discerner and guardian of righteousness, as to a guide-rule of truth, and as to one who provides and awards all good things to all. And do not cease to honor him, you who award all things <that lead> toward salvation. Stand by his side assiduously and be his helpmate and a vigilant guardian through your supplications. Come, shelter and watch over everyone who approaches you, giving to them an acceptable and pleasant year, because on this the first and most beautiful of days you received the end of your life, and journeyed toward the Lord. This <day> is the first of the calends, on which Basil, great among the high priests, journeyed to the Lord. Together with him [Basil] may you always intercede for and stand beside our leader, the most powerful and pious emperor. Remember also me, your miserable [p. 242] servant, who has grown a little weary in singing your praise and in the recital of your miracles, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be glory together with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and unto everlasting generations, Amen.

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1985), 37, 58, 72, etc. These menologia have been traditionally assigned to the reign of Michael IV (1034–41); for the most recent discussion of their date, see N. P. Sevcenko, “The Walters ‘Imperial’ Menologion,” JWalt 51 (1993), 43–64, esp. 44 and 58.

141 Reading φυλαρχιαν for φιλαρχιαν. The term phylarchos (lit., “tribal leader”) was normally (but not exclusively) applied to Muslim rulers; cf. DuCange, Glossarium, s.v. and ODB 3:1672. It is therefore plausible that the author is referring to the (successful) campaign of Nikephoros Phokas against the Arabs of Crete, which took place in 961 during the reign of Romanos II. The term mixobarbaros (“semibarbarous”) could be applied to Slavs or Muslims; cf., e.g., Anne ComneÁne. Alexiade, ed. B. Leib, III (Paris, 1945), p. 14.11 and 205.11.

142 ThomaõÈs’ feast day was 1 January. The calends are the first days of Roman months.

143 The feast day of Basil of Caesarea, the 4th-century theologian, is also 1 January.

144 Reading ἀφηγησιν for ἀρηγησιν, a typographical error.
10. LIFE OF ST. THEODORA OF ARTA

translated by Alice-Mary Talbot

Introduction

Theodora, empress of Arta (Epiros) in the thirteenth century by virtue of her marriage to Michael II Komnenos Doukas (reigned ca. 1231—ca. 1267/68), lived at a time when the Byzantines had lost their capital of Constantinople to the Latins of the Fourth Crusade, and the empire had divided into three successor states in exile, based in Trebizond, Nicaea, and Epiros. Theodora has been included in this volume as a rare example of a late Byzantine female saint. For reasons that are still little understood, after the tenth century the Byzantines seem to have virtually ceased to elevate women to sanctity. There is one holy woman known for the eleventh century (Marina), one for the twelfth century (Irene-Xene), Theodora of Arta for the thirteenth century, and Matrona of Chios in the fourteenth century, a total of four female saints in a period of 450 years.\footnote{See general introduction, pp. xi–xii, for further discussion of the paucity of female saints in late Byzantium.}

According to her \textit{vita}, Theodora was a baby when Theodore Komnenos Doukas was emperor at Thessalonike, that is, at some point between 1224 and 1230. She married Michael II shortly after he became ruler of Epiros in ca. 1231. Thus, if one follows the chronology of the \textit{vita}, she must have been born ca. 1225, and married Michael at a tender (and canonically illegal) age. The birth of her first son Nikephoros is usually placed ca. 1240, when she would have been about sixteen. She is said by the \textit{vita} to have survived by several years her husband, who died in 1267 or 1268. Therefore her death must have occurred in the 1270s. There is no doubt that Theodora was a historical figure, since she is mentioned on several occasions by George Akropolites. In 1249, for example, she journeyed to Anatolia with her son Nikephoros for his betrothal ceremony to Maria, granddaughter of John III Vatatzes and daughter...
of Theodore II Laskaris. In 1256 she accompanied her son to Thessalonike for the long-delayed wedding, in exchange for which Theodore II demanded the cession to the Nicaean Empire of Dyrrachion and Servia (Theodora’s hometown).

As a woman who entered monastic life after being widowed, Theodora of Arta resembles Athanasia of Aegina and Theodora of Thessalonike; like Matrona, Thomas of Lesbos, and Mary the Younger, she suffered abuse at the hands of her husband. In none of these cases was marriage a hindrance to attaining sanctity. Theodora’s most distinguishing feature was her noble endurance of her five-year exile from Arta with no complaint although she, a former empress, was reduced to picking wild greens in the fields. After her reconciliation with her husband, she founded a convent in Arta and adorned the church with offerings. Otherwise her hagiographer describes summarily and conventionally her attributes of sanctity: asceticism, charity, foreknowledge of her death, and the miraculous posthumous cures at her tomb. The story of her life evidently evinced a sympathetic and admiring response among the people of Arta, for her tomb began to attract popular veneration soon after her death and continues to do so to the present day. Her memory is celebrated on 11 March.

The short vita of Theodora translated here is attributed in the fifteenth or sixteenth-century manuscript, Venice, Marc. Nan. 71 [= Marc. gr. II 50], to the monk Job, who has been identified by S. Petrides and L. Vranouses as Job Iasites, who lived in the second half of the thirteenth century and served as adviser to the patriarch Joseph I. It seems surprising, however, that a writer

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2 Akrop. 88.
3 Akrop. 132–34.
4 Cf. S. Eustratiades, Ἀγιολογιον τῆς ὘ρθοδόξου Ἑκκλησίας (Athens, 1935), 180. On the office dedicated to her, see Ἀκολουθία τῆς ὁσίας μητρὸς ἕμων Θεοδώρας... παρὰ Ἰοβ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Μελου (Athens, 1965).
5 I. A. Mingarelli dates the manuscript mostly to the 15th century (Graeci codices manuscripti apud Nanius, patricios Venetos, asservati [Bologna, 1784], 136–41), H. Delehaye to the 16th century (“Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum graecorum Bibliothecæ D. Marci Venetiæorum,” AnalBoll 24 [1905], 209).
6 S. Petriedes, “Le moine Job,” EO 15 (1912), 40–48; L. Vranouses, Χρονικα τῆς μεσαιωνικής και τουρκοκρατουμένης Ἡπείρου (Ioannina, 1962), 49–54; PLP, no. 7959. The 17th-century date assigned to Job by A. Moustoxydes (Ελληνομνημόνες [1843], 41) and initially by D. M. Nicol (Epiros I, 128) is impossible because of the 15th-century
who lived so close to the period about which he wrote would make so many errors of chronology and genealogy, and it is possible that a later monk named Job may have been the author. It should be noted that the first part of the vita is closer in form and style to a chronicle than a saint’s Life: it lacks the standard prooimion, gives a summary of historical events in short, choppy sentences, and provides numerous names and toponyms. The second part reverts to a more typical hagiographical presentation, but is unusual in the almost total absence of scriptural citations.

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7 R. J. Loenertz argues that Job must have lived at least fifty years after the events he describes; cf. “Aux origines du Despotat d’Epire et de la Principauté d’Achaïe,” Byzantion 43 (1973), 367 (hereafter, Loenertz, “Origines”).
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PLP, no. 5664.
This celebrated and blessed empress Theodora was of a family from the East; her parents were John and Helena. Her origins were as follows: while Alexios, a descendant of the Komnenoi family, was ruling the Romans, Michael Komnenos, who was related to the emperor himself and to the emperors that bore the name of Angelos, was entrusted with rule over the Peloponnesus. And Senacherim was sent to Aitolia and Nikopolis. They originally married two first cousins, who were blood relatives of the emperor. And John, the father of the blessed Theodora, whose surname was Petraliphas, being of distinguished and splendid lineage, was married by the emperor to a woman [Helena] who was a member of one of the leading families of Constantinople. After being honored with the title of sebastokrator of the Romans, he was appointed to rule over Macedonia and Thessaly. But alas, with God’s for-

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8 Job 1:3. This is a puzzling statement, since the Petraliphas family originated in Italy; their 11th-century eponymous ancestor, Peter of Alifa (a town in Italy near Caserta), participated in the First Crusade and settled at Didymoteichon in Thrace. Perhaps ἐξ ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν refers to eastern Greece instead of Anatolia or the Levant, its normal meaning.

9 Alexios III Angelos, Byzantine emperor from 1195 to 1203. His great-grandfather was Alexios I Komnenos, whose daughter Theodora married Constantine Angelos, the first-known member of the Angelos family.

10 Michael Angelos Komnenos Doukas, sometimes called Michael I Angelos, was the first ruler (1205–15) of an independent Epiros following the fall of Constantinople in 1204. As the illegitimate son of the sebastokrator John Angelos Komnenos, he was first cousin of Alexios III Angelos. In 1204 he was governor of the Peloponnesus.

11 Little is known of this man, except that he was governor of the theme of Nikopolis (on the western coast of Epiros) and was married to a member of the Melissenos family. He was murdered late in 1204. Cf. Loenertz, “Origines,” 377.

12 John Petraliphas, the sebastokrator, served as governor of Thessaly and Macedonia during the reign of Isaac II Angelos (1185–95, 1203–4); according to the vita, he died while Theodore Angelos was emperor in Thessalonike, i.e., between 1224 and 1230 (see also note 32, below). It is therefore unlikely that he should be identified with the John Petraliphas who was chartoularios of John Vatatzes in 1237, as Nicol suggests (Epiros I, 67, 215).

13 A very high title normally conferred on a member of the imperial family.

14 Reading καταρχὴν for καταρχῆν, as in Moustoxydes edition.
bearance, the Latins conquered Constantinople, and the emperor Alexios was taken captive by them together with many others. And the boy Laskaris was blinded in Anatolia by Michael Palaiologos, who then seized the throne; and everything was filled with tumult and confusion. Then Senacherim was plotted against by the inhabitants of Nikopolis, and summoned Michael Komnenos to help him; but before he arrived, Senacherim was murdered. When Michael arrived, he killed all the murderers. And he married Melissene, the wife of Senacherim. For he had previously lost his own wife who had died. And he appropriated for himself all of Senacherim’s wealth as well as his political power. When the Latin fleet came down from Constantinople and anchored in the harbor called Salagora, Komnenos ransomed the emperor Alexios, whom as a slave, since they did not recognize him; and Komnenos secured his release, after lavishly bestowing many gifts upon them [the Latins] first. Wherefore the imperial authority was given by the emperor as a bequest to Michael and his descendants. Four sons were born to him and Melissene: Michael Doukas, Theodore, Manuel, and Constantine. [col. 905] The eldest son Michael, after the

15 Actually Alexios III fled Constantinople in July 1203 before it fell to the Crusaders. The hagiographer may have confused Alexios III with Alexios V Doukas (Mourtzouphlos), who was briefly emperor at the time of the Latin conquest in April 1204. Later that year Alexios V was captured by the Latins and thrown to his death from the Column of Theodosios.

16 The hagiographer, who has totally confused the chronological sequence of events, is here referring to the blinding of the youthful John IV Laskaris, heir to the empire of Nicaea, by the usurper Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261. The blinding took place after, not before, Michael’s seizure of the throne in 1259. Subsequently the Lascarid prince was imprisoned in the fortress of Dakibyze in Bithynia.

17 Reading αὐτὸς for αὐτοῦς, as in Moustoxydes edition.

18 Reading τὴν for σὴν, as in Moustoxydes edition.

19 The harbor of Arta, 17 km southwest of the city; cf. TIB 3:253–54.

20 Reading δεξιωσάμενος for δεξιώσαμέναις.

21 Alexios III, who had fled the capital in July 1203, was captured by Boniface de Montferrat in late 1204. He was held captive in Montferrat until his ransom by Michael I in 1209 or 1210. Cf. K. Barzos, Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν, II (Thessalonike, 1984), 793–98; Loenertz, “Origines,” 370–76.

22 Again the hagiographer is confused: he has added an extra generation. Michael, Theodore, Manuel, and Constantine were the sons of the sebastokrator John Angelos Komnenos.

23 This is Michael I Komnenos Doukas, who was Melissene’s husband, not her son.
death of his father, took on all his rule. He was an energetic man, sharp-witted and a skilled administrator. He conquered Bellegrada and Ioannina and Bonditza.  

He also acquired the island of Corfu and Dyrrachion and Ochrid, and all of Vlachia and Hellas, and greatly expanded the extent of his territory. But he soon fell victim to the sword and died, leaving his brother Theodore Doukas as his heir. And Theodore disregarded as immature his brother’s son, Michael Doukas, inasmuch as he was a small baby. So he seized total power and, elated at his good fortune, devised a treacherous plot against the child. But when his mother found out, she forestalled it by traveling with the child to the Peloponnesus.

Theodore was shown to be very experienced in battle, and after freeing Thessalonike from Latin tyranny, he was proclaimed emperor. And he held sway over all of the west as far as Christoupolis. <Meanwhile> the sebastokrator Petraliphas, after bearing sons in Thessaly, became the father of Theodora, who is deserving of eternal memory. And coming to the end of a life in Christ, he left his power to his sons. And they skillfully served the emperor Theodore, protecting their baby sister as the apple of their eye. What happened next?

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24 The date of Michael's conquest of Bellegrada (= Berat) in Albania is unknown. Michael was granted the region of Ioannina in a treaty of 1210 (Nicol, Epiros I, 30–31). He had taken the fortress of Bonditza (= Vonitsa) on the Ambracian Gulf by 1207.

25 Corfu fell to Michael ca. 1214 and Dyrrachion in 1213, while Ochrid was captured by Michael's successor, Theodore Komnenos Doukas, in 1216.


27 Michael I was murdered by one of his servants at Bellegrada (Berat) ca. 1215; cf. Nicol, Epiros I, 42.

28 Theodore Komnenos Doukas, ruler of Epiros from ca. 1215–30. He was actually Michael's half-brother.

29 Michael, who was to become Michael II Komnenos Doukas, was actually about nine or ten when his father was murdered; cf. Nicol, Epiros I, 47.

30 Theodore recovered Thessalonike from the Latins in 1224 and was subsequently proclaimed basileus.

31 A seaport in northeastern Greece, modern Cavalla.

32 The exact date of John Petraliphas’ death is unknown, but it must have been between 1224 and 1230, while Theodore Angelos was emperor in Thessalonike. John's sister Maria was Theodore's wife; hence Theodora and her brothers were the niece and nephews of Theodore.
The emperor went on campaign in Zagora, and made war against Asan, the emperor of the Bulgarians. And he was defeated and taken prisoner by him, and deprived of his sight. Michael, who was already a young man, was recalled from exile, and after inheriting all his father’s territory, went to Vlachia. And when he arrived at the castle of Servion, he saw the beautiful young Theodora, and was completely smitten with her. He entered into an agreement with her brothers (of the Petraliphas family), took her as his lawful wife, and returned with her in brilliant style to Akarnania, which was at that time unfortified. And he concerned himself with ruling his own territory. As for Theodora, she was neither carried away by her newly acquired glorious position, nor did she succumb to her youth, nor did she indulge in luxury. Neither was she puffed up by pride in her imperial power. Instead she decided to devote herself to God, to cultivate the pursuit of virtue, and to conduct her life in a chaste manner. So she embraced humility, avoidance of anger, love, meekness, compassion, and mercy, being successful above all others, and always venerating God with her entire soul.

But the enemy of the righteous [i.e., the Devil] could not in any way endure to see this, nor could he bear to see this admirable course of the young

33 The name Zagora or Zagoria, a Slavic toponym meaning “beyond the mountains, in the mountains,” was applied to several different regions of the Balkans, for example, in the 14th and 15th centuries to a mountainous region north of Ioannina (TIB 3:278), or the western Black Sea coast. The name was also used for the middle Strymon valley (region of Melenikon) or the Bulgarian lands between the Haimos Mountains and Danube River (TIB 6:503). In this context, the toponym seems to be a synonym for Bulgaria.

34 Theodore went on campaign against the Bulgarian tsar John Asen II (1218–41) in 1230, but was defeated at the battle of Klokotnica (located on the road between Adrianople and Philippopolis), captured and blinded. The Bulgarians soon conquered Didymoteichon and many other towns in the southern Maritza valley; cf. Nicol, Epiros I, 109–11. Theodore was succeeded as ruler of Epiros by his nephew, Michael II Komnenos Doukas.

35 I.e., Thessaly.

36 A city in southern Macedonia (or northern Thessaly), also called Servia and Serbia. It had fallen to the Latins in 1204, but was recovered for the Greeks ca. 1216 by Theodore Komnenos Doukas. It may have served as the headquarters of the sebastokrator John Petraliphas when he was governor of Thessaly and Macedonia.

37 I.e., Epiros.

38 Reading προσκέισθαι for προκέισθαι, as in Moustoxydes edition.
Theodora of Arta

Woman. So he took up weapons against her, and made her husband weak with lust for women; and thus he brought upon the blessed Theodora the worst trial of any that have ever been recounted. For Michael was consumed with lustful passion for a noblewoman named Gangrene, and as his sanity was beguiled by her sorcery, he developed an implacable hatred for his own wife. And after he rejected her, in an insane fashion he took this maenad as his consort. And he issued a decree to his subjects that they should not support Theodora, nor should they deem her worthy of any veneration, nor even mention her name. When the noble Theodora was afflicted with these tribulations, she was not at all swayed in her purpose, nor did she deviate from her excellent way of life, but endured like adamant, continuing to venerate God in the same manner. Driven into exile, she lived in the open air, made wretched by the cold and the burning heat. Oppressed by hunger and thirst and other hardships, [col. 908] she was anxious to find shelter. Contending for five years with boundless hardships, she neither uttered an ignoble word, nor did she neglect to say a word of prayer to the Lord, but strove for virtue to an even greater extent, and every day was exalted to Him, lifting herself up through her endurance. She was also carrying a baby in her arms, since she was pregnant with him when she was sent into exile.

A priest from the village of Preniste, who found her picking wild greens in a field, while holding her baby, inquired of her with oaths to tell her name. And when he learned her identity, he took her home and concealed her, deeming her worthy of every consideration. Then the magnates and leading officials of Michael Doukas suddenly seized that malicious woman [Gangrene] and after they suspended her in the air, the whole wicked affair came to light. And when Michael came to his senses, he was thoroughly shaken, and he

39 Reading μημονευσαμένων for μημονευσαμένων.

40 An unusual name, unattested in the PLP. It may be the name of a family that originated from Gangra, or may be a derisive name modeled on γαγγραίνα, gangrene.

41 Reading δέ κρατεῖ for δικρατεῖ, as in Moustoxydes edition.

42 The future Nikephoros I Komnenos Doukas, the eldest child of Michael II and Theodora.

43 Also called Prinista, a village on the slopes of Mt. Tzoumerka (modern Korphovounion), 9 km north of Arta; cf. TIB 3:243.

44 I.e., torturing her.

45 Reading ἐνεσείσθη for ἐνεσείσθη, as in Moustoxydes edition.
took the blessed <Theodora> again <into his house>. And all things were filled with joy and rejoicing. Thereafter they both spent their life in peace and love for God, taking care for their own salvation. And they were honored with the rank of despotes, and bore children, and were elevated to a height of great glory, and both fought the good fight for virtue. When the celebrated Theodora saw the despotes, her husband, establish two very beautiful and sacred monasteries, called the Pantanassa and the Panagia, she erected a holy monastery to the great martyr George and established it as a female <convent>. When her husband the despot Michael departed to the heavenly abodes after leading a good and pious life, she immediately donned the monastic habit. And living on for several years, she adorned the church in various ways and beautified it with offerings and liturgical vessels and vestments. She also enhanced <the piety> of her life, training herself with toilsome labors and increasing the fruit of her virtues. She spent her time in vigils and all-night stances, conversing <with God> through psalms and hymns; she wore out her body with fasting, and served all the nuns unceasingly, and acted as champion of those who were wronged. She helped orphans and widows, assisted the poor, consoled the oppressed, and with humility of heart was everything to everyone.

46 Despotes was one of the highest titles in the Byzantine hierarchy, here applied to the ruler of Epiros.

47 The ruins of the church of the Pantanassa are found 13 km northwest of Arta, near Philippias. K. Giannelos dates the construction of the church to the mid–13th century; cf. Το, βυζαντινα μνημεια της Αρτας (Arta, 1990), 67–68. See also P. Vokotopoulos, "Πανανασα Φιλιππιαδος" ArchDelt 27.2 (1972), 463–64; TIB 3:225.

48 The church of the Kato Panagia (or Παναγια της οδου Βρυσεος) is located 2 km south of Arta; cf. TIB 3:223. The patronage of Michael II is proved by monograms on the exterior walls; cf. Nicol, Epiros I, 200–201.

49 The convent of St. George later took the name of St. Theodora. Theodora may have founded the convent, but the three-aisled basilica dates to the mid–12th century. She added a domed narthex to house her tomb; cf. A. Orlandos, "Η Άγια Θεοδώρα της Αρτης," ABME 2 (1936), 88–104; TIB 3:114; and Nicol, Epiros I, 201–3.


51 I Cor. 9:22–23.
the all-pure Mother of God and the all-glorious martyr George to mediate with God for an additional six months\textsuperscript{52} in order to complete the church, which came to pass. And when her appointed time arrived, she summoned the nuns; and after instructing them well on necessary matters, and praying for their salvation, she joyfully delivered her spirit into the hands of God. And she was buried in the monastery which she had erected.

And when God glorified her later, she was seen to work many great miracles, healing the sicknesses and diseases of those who approached her tomb, and driving demons from humans, and curing all sorts of incurable afflictions on a daily basis. She also healed the disease of cancer, and performed and continues to perform other awesome marvels, countless in number. For when she is invoked, she comes not only to those who prostrate themselves at her holy tomb,\textsuperscript{53} but also to those near and far and at sea and on islands and at the ends of the earth, and helps them warmly. And may we be deemed worthy to attain salvation through her holy prayers to God and enjoy the lot of those who are saved in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Cf. with Hezekiah, who was granted an additional fifteen years of life as a result of his prayer to the Lord (4 Ki. 20:1–6; Is. 38:1–5).

\textsuperscript{53} A reconstruction of this tomb can still be seen today in the narthex. It incorporates a marble slab depicting Theodora and a small figure (probably her son Nikephoros) flanked by archangels; cf. A. Orlandos, “Ο τάφος τῆς Ἀγ. Θεοδώρας,” \textit{ABME} 2 (1936), 105–15; Nicol, \textit{Epiros I}, 202–3; Th. Pazaras, Ἀναγέλωσες σαρκοφαγοί και ἐπιτάφιες πλακεῖς τῆς μεσος και ὁστερής βυζαντινής περιόδου στην Ἑλλάδα (Athens, 1988), 42 and pl. 36γδ, 37. Pazaras assigns a late 13th-century date to the relief slab, while Orlandos and Nicol think it is a copy of a 13th-century original. An article which has recently appeared (after this volume had gone to the press) challenges the traditional identification of the figures sculpted on the tomb, and proposes that they represent instead Theodora’a daughter-in-law, Anna Kantakouzena Palaiologina, and her son Thomas; cf. B. Cvetkovic, “The Investiture Relief in Arta, Epiros,” \textit{ZRVT} 33 (1994), 103–13.

\textsuperscript{54} The final words of the Greek text (καὶ τῆς μερίδος ἀπολαύσατο τῶν σωζομενῶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. Ἅμην), missing in the PG edition, have been supplied from Marc. gr. II 50 by M. Petta, “Inni inediti di Iob Monaco,” \textit{BollGrott}, n. s. 19 (1965), 82 n. 7.
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