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ART AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN THE STATE OF EPIROS
DURING THE REIGN OF THEODORE DOUKAS
(r. 1215-1230)

The artistic production of the Despotate of Epiros under its first two rulers, Michael I (r. 1204-1215) and his brother, Theodore Komnenos Doukas (r. 1215-1230), is still poorly understood. Only a few monuments can be ascribed to the first three decades of the thirteenth century, but neither their exact date, nor the identity of their founders are known¹. Textual sources from this period, however, shed more light on the circumstances of artistic production. Thus one occasionally comes across references to the foundation or renovation of churches sponsored by members of the ruling Komnenos-Doukas family or by renowned Epirote clergymen and monks. This was, for instance, the case with the monastery of Varnakova², Episkope Mastroi³, or

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1. S. Kissas was the first to attempt a reconstruction of the artistic production in the Principality of Epiros during the first thirty years of the thirteenth century: S. KISSAS, *Umetnost u Solunu početkom XIII veka i mileševsko slikarstvo*, in: *Mileševa dans l'histoire du peuple serbe, Colloque scientifique international à l'occasion de 750 ans de son existence*, ed. V. J. ĐURIĆ, Belgrade 1987, 37-49.

2. A. ORLANDOS, *Ἡ μονὴ Βαρνάκοβας*, Athens 1922; V. KATSAROS, Λόγια στοιχεία στὴν ἐπιγραφικὴ τοῦ “Δεσποτάτου”. Λόγιοι καὶ διανοούμενοι κατὰ τὸν 13ο αἰ. στὴν Ἠπειρο μὲ βάση τὶς ἔμμετρες ἐπιγραφές τοῦ χώρου, in: *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου για το «Δεσποτάτο της Ηπείρου»* (Ἄρτα 27-31 Μαΐου 1990), ed. E. CHRYSOS, Arta 1992, 518-519.

3. A three-aisled, timber-roofed basilica with a single apse, known as Episkope Mastroi,

the Blacherna monastery near Arta⁴, all of which are still standing. On the other hand, many castles, monasteries, and churches mentioned by Epirote writers have ceased to exist. Examples include an unknown monastery in Chimara⁵, the cathedral church of the Panagia Panymnetos in Naupaktos⁶, the Peribleptos monastery in Arta⁷, the Eleousa church in Beroia⁸, St Nicholas church in the

is still preserved in the village of Mastro in Aitolia. During the existence of the State of Epiros, this church was the seat of the bishops of Achelos. A fragmentary inscription in the conch of the sanctuary apse mentions Theodore and his brother Constantine: P. VOKOTOPOULOS, Μάστρου, Ἐπισκοπῇ, *ΑΔ* 22 (1967) Χρονικά, 328–330; IDEM, *ΑΔ* 24 (1969) Β' 2, Χρονικά, 241, fig. 240, 241α; IDEM, *ΑΔ* 25 (1970) Β' 2, Χρονικά, 299–300, fig. 257–259; V. KATSAROS, Η θέση της επισκοπῆς Αχελώου και η σχέση της με τη “βυζαντινὴ Πόλη” γύρω από το λόφο “Επισκοπή” κοντά στο χωριό “Μάστρον” της Αιτωλίας, *Ιστοριογεωγραφικά* 2 (1988) 198–201; KATSAROS, Λόγια στοιχεῖα, 531–533. A. PALIOURAS, *Βυζαντινὴ Αιτωλοακαρνανία. Συμβολὴ στη βυζαντινὴ και μεταβυζαντινὴ μνημειακὴ τέχνη*, Athens 2004, 75–76, 197–200, εικ. 47.

4. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, Συνοδικὰ γράμματα Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ἀποκαύκου, μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου, *Βυζαντις* Α', 14, no. 3, 1909; M. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, *Ἡ Βλαχέρνα τῆς Ἄρτας. Τοιχογραφίες*, Athens 2009, 61–63.

5. N. A. BEES, Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropolitens von Naupaktos (in Aetolien), *BNJ* 21 (1971–1974), ed. N. A. Bees, no. 57, 112–114, 49–61. [hereafter: APOKAUKOS (BEES)].

6. We know about the church of the Panagia Panymnetos and its sculptural and fresco decoration from the letters of John Apokaukos, metropolitan of Naupaktos, written between 1218/9 and 1222. The learned prelate mentions the painters and sculptors engaged in the decoration of the church: APOKAUKOS (BEES), no. 27, 86, 38–41, no. 58, 115, 25–27, no. 103, 153, 16–18, 185, 236.

7. The location of this monastery is still unknown, but its existence is attested by the letters of John Apokaukos from 1222 and 1223, written during his sojourn in this monastery: *Καὶ αὐτὸς ζῶ κατακείμενος ἐν τῇ μονῇ τῆς Περιβλέπτου, καθὼς με ἀφῆκες, πλὴν χωρὶς πόνων οὗτοι γὰρ ἔλειψαν ἀργεὶ δὲ ἡ κίνησις διὰ τὴν τῶν γονάτων νάρκωσιν...* PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS *Συνοδικὰ γράμματα*, 22, No 7. See also: *Εὐρεθέντων ἡμῶν τὴν σήμερον ἐν τῇ κατὰ τὴν Ἄρταν σεβασμίᾳ μονῇ τῆς ὑπεραγίας δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου τῆς Περιβλέπτου...* APOKAUKOS (BEES), 84. V. KATSAROS, Πνευματικὸς βίος και πολιτισμὸς τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἄρτας, in: *Πρακτικὰ Β' Διεθνὸς αρχαιολογικοῦ και ιστορικοῦ συνεδρίου “Ἡ Βυζαντινὴ Ἄρτα και η περιοχή της”*, Arta 2008, 25–42. V. PAPADOPOULOU, Η Βυζαντινὴ μονὴ τῆς Παναγίας Περιβλέπτου. Συμβολὴ στη μνημειακὴ τοπογραφία τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἄρτας, *ΔΧΑΕ* 26 (2005), 283–302, based on some sculptural remains, has suggested that the Peribleptos monastery was located on the spot where the post-Byzantine church dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin and St Merkourios is still standing.

8. *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora* [CFHB 38], ed. G. PRINZING, Berlin - New York, 2002, 48. 17, 39–50 (hereafter *Ponemata Diaphora*).

village Tzermenikon in the metropolis of Bothrotos⁹, and a church “founded at court (αὐλή)” in Skopje¹⁰.

The aim of this paper is not to examine the aforementioned monuments, nor is it to present new archaeological finds dating from the first three decades of the thirteenth century. Instead, the paper sets out to reconstruct the political context of art-making in the State of Epiros, paying particular attention to two aspects: first, the ways in which art reflected and articulated political ideology; and second, the role played by works of art in the formation of a Byzantine imperial identity in exile. In what follows, I will examine a diverse set of evidence, ranging from church dedications to frescoes, coins, and inscriptions.

In the State of Epiros, the fundamental principles of Byzantine political ideology were maintained. Beginning with Michael I, the Epirote rulers stressed that they were connected by blood to the Komnenian family, and accordingly, that they were legal successors of the imperial throne¹¹. Michael I (1204-1215) signed his name as Michael Doukas or Michael Komnenos. Besides the sources commonly refer to him as son of the *sebastokrator* John Doukas, or as cousin of the Emperor Alexios III and uncle of Alexios IV¹². Michael’s successor Theodore, reiterated the same claims. This is evident, for instance, from the dedicatory inscription at Episkope Mastrou (fig. 1):

+ Τὸ.....ἀδε]λφοὺς
στεφ]ηφόρους
ηφορ..... ε.....ν πρὸς θρό
 νον βασιλείας...δεσπο[ίνης Ἀν]νας φι[λενσεβε]στάτης με
 γάλης Κομνηνῆςδεσπ[ό]τη Θεοδ[ώ]ρ[ω καὶ Κ]ωνσταντίνω
 ἔ[κ] μητρ[ό]τητος πάντας [γέ]νει βασιλέω[ν]
 Κομνηνὸν Ἀλέ[ξιον] [τὸν] δοῦλον σὸν πάντως· εὐειδέστα[τος] γὰρ
 <β[ασι]λείας [ἐσ]χά[της] (;)>¹³

9. *Ponemata Diaphora*, 80. 88-93.

10. *Ponemata Diaphora*, 35. 20-21.

11. For the ideological basis of this claim, see a detailed discussion in A. STAURIDOU-ZAFRAKA, *Νίκαια και Ἡπειρος τον 13ο αιώνα. Ιδεολογική αντιπαράθεση στην προσπάθειά τους να ανακτήσουν την αυτοκρατορία*, Thessaloniki 1990, esp. 117-146; EADEM, *The Political Ideology of the State of Epiros*, in: *Urbs Capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences*, ed. A. LAIOU, Paris 2005, 311-323.

12. STAURIDOU-ZAFRAKA, *The Political Ideology*, 316, with relevant sources.

13. KATSAROS, *Λόγια στοιχεῖα*, 531-533.

An inscription set at the behest of Theodore on a tower near Dyrrachium provides another example:

... Παῖς οὗτος ἀνδρὸς εὐτυχοῦς Ἰω(άννου),
σεβαστοκρατοροῦντος, ἄνθους πορφύρας,
Θεόδωρος μέγιστος ἐν στρατηγίαις,
Δούκας Κομνηνός, εὐσθενής, βριαρόχειρ ...¹⁴

This child of that happy man John,
the sebastokrator, the flower of the [imperial] purple,
Theodore supreme in military command,
Doukas Komnenos, firm, strong-handed ...¹⁵.

The political and military accomplishments of Michael I and especially of his brother, Theodore, justified their ideological claims and aspirations to assume the leading political role as legitimate successors of the former Byzantine emperors and, ultimately, to recover Constantinople. As a result of the conquest of Thessalonike by Theodore in 1224/1225, Epiros became an empire in 1227¹⁶, while Theodore assumed a new title: *πιστὸς βασιλεὺς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων*. His signatures on legal acts proclaimed him as *ὁ Θεόδωρος ἐν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ πιστὸς βασιλεὺς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων Κομνηνὸς ὁ Δούκας*¹⁷. Theodore's claim to the imperial succession was supported by members of the clergy, as attested by letters of the metropolitans John Apokaukos and George Bardanes, as well as by a

14. KATSAROS, Λόγια στοιχεῖα, 525-526.

15. The English translation is taken from STAURIDOU-ZAFRAKA, *The Political Ideology*, 316.

16. E. VEI - SEFERLI, Ὁ χρόνος στέψεως τοῦ Θεοδώρου Δούκα ὡς προσδιορίζεται ἐξ ἀνεκδότων γραμμάτων Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ἀποκαύκου, *BNJ* 21 (1971/76), 272-279; A. STAURIDOU-ZAFRAKA, Συμβολή στο ζήτημα της αναγόρευσης του Θεοδώρου Δούκα, in: *Αφιέρωμα στον Εμμανουήλ Κριαρά*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1988, 39-44.

17. A. MUSTOXYDI, *Delle Cose Corciresi*, Tipografia del Governo, Corfu 1848, 410, 423, 688, Appendice V, p. LVI; A. MARTIN, Inscription grecque de Corcyre de 1228, in: *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* II (1882), 379-389, esp. 385, pl. XIII; *MM*, v. 5, 14-16; V. VASILIEVSKII, *Epirotica saeculi XIII*, *VV* 3 (1896), 299. R.- J. LOENERTZ, Lettre de Georges Bardanes, metropolite de Corcure, au patriarche oecumenique Germain II, 1226-1227, *EEBS* 33 (1964), 114-115 [new edition: A. GALONI, Γεώργιος Βαρδάνης. Συμβολή στη μελέτη του βίου, του έργου και της εποχής του, Thessaloniki 2008, 429-430]; *Ponemata Diaphora*, 114.

series of legal acts issued by Demetrios Chomatenos, archbishop of Ohrid¹⁸.

Textual sources are not alone in documenting the political ambition of the Epirote rulers and their attempt to assume the leadership amongst the Byzantine successor states that emerged after 1204. Such aspirations are also reflected in their artistic patronage, that is, in the foundation and renovation of churches and monasteries and their pictorial decoration. Expressions of the official Epirote political ideology and propaganda can be further detected in coins, church dedications, inscriptions, and in some monumental pictorial programs.

Marcus Rautman wrote that, during the thirteenth century, in Western Greece, “around Arta in lower Epiros (...) monastic patronage was motivated by the universally felt needs of piety, contrition, thanks and salvation”¹⁹. Aside from such perennial concerns, which undoubtedly preoccupied royal patrons across the Byzantine world, I would argue that the patronage of the Epirote rulers was to a large extent informed by a nostalgia for the lost “Queen of Cities”. Indeed, I wish to propose that they consciously sought to model their capital Arta in the image of Constantinople. In this way, they preserved the memory of the imperial capital, while the carefully maintained link with Constantinople served as an ideological basis in their attempts to restore the former Empire. The metropolitan John Apokaukos, one of the ecclesiastical and intellectual luminaries of the Epiros state, was particularly influential in the formation of this ideological program. For Apokaukos, who had spent his youth in Constantinople, the former capital was an undisputed ideal. As Michael Angold has observed, “the loss of the city to the Latins must have intensified his attachment to Constantinople and nostalgia must have clouded the reality of the Constantinople of his youth”²⁰.

One of the ways in which this nostalgia was manifested was through the memory of Constantinopolitan shrines. Probably the best example is the Blacherna monastery near Arta (Fig. 2), one of the most important monastic foundations in Epiros²¹. The transformation of the church from a

18. APOKAUKOS (BEES) no. 69, 128, 70–72; VASILIEVSKII, *Epirotica saeculi XIII*, 233–299.

19. M. L. RAUTMAN, *Patrons and Buildings in Late Byzantine Thessaloniki*, *JÖB* 39 (1989), 308.

20. M. ANGOLD, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261*, Cambridge 1995, 213–232, esp. 230.

21. A. PALIOURAS, *Οἱ Βλαχέρνες τῆς Ἀρτας καὶ τὸ πρότυπό τους*, in: *Πρακτικά Διεθνoῦς Συμποσίου Το «Δεσποτάτο τῆς Ηπείρου»*, 163–177.

timber-roofed basilica to a vaulted structure could be placed in the period of Theodore Dukas's rule²². The earliest reference to this church comes from a synodal decree issued by Apokaukos concerning the conversion of the monastery from a male monastic house into a nunnery at the order of the wife of Theodore Komnenos-Doukas²³. Judging by this source, the conversion took place between 1225 and 1230. As has been convincingly argued, the change of the monastic community was most likely prompted by the need to provide shelter for a group of refugee nuns from Constantinople²⁴. As Apokaukos' decree clearly demonstrates, the ruling family of Epiros was closely associated with the Blacherna monastery. The significance of the monastery for the Epirote rulers is perhaps most evident from the fact that its church functioned as their mausoleum. Two sarcophagi bearing funerary inscriptions are still preserved in the naos of the church²⁵. Judging by these inscriptions, the south sarcophagus may have belonged to Michael II, while the north one was probably intended for his two sons²⁶.

The dedication of the monastery to the Virgin of the Blachernai undoubtedly pointed to Constantinople²⁷. One should bear in mind the

22. P. VOKOTOPOULOS, Ἡ τέχνη στὴν Ἑπειρὸν τὸν 13ο αἰ., in: *Ἡ Βυζαντινὴ τέχνη μετὰ τὴν τέταρτη σταυροφορία. Ἡ Τέταρτη σταυροφορία καὶ οἱ επιπτώσεις της* (Διεθνὲς Συνέδριο, Ακαδημία Αθηνῶν 2004), ed. P. VOKOTOPOULOS, Athens 2007, 49, note 15.

23. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Συνδικὰ γράμματα*, 14, no. 3.

24. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, *Βλαχέρνα*, 61-63.

25. For the sarcophagi at the Blacherna monastery see: A. ORLANDOS, Ἡ παρὰ τὴν Ἄρταν Μονὴ τῶν Βλαχερνῶν, *ABME* B' (1936), 30-37, fig. 26-31 and 165, fig. 10; A. GRABAR, *Sculptures Byzantines du Moyen Age II (XIe -XIVe siècles)*, Paris 1976, 145, CXXIIIa, CXXIV, CXXV; TH. PAZARAS, *Ανάγλυφες Σαρκοφάγοι καὶ επιτάφιας πλάκες τῆς Μέσης καὶ Ὑστερῆς Βυζαντινῆς περιόδου στὴν Ελλάδα*, Athens 1988, 42-43, εικ. 38, 39; V. PAPADOPOULOU, *Ἡ Βυζαντινὴ Ἄρτα καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα της*, Athens 2002, 76-78, fig. 85-87.

26. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, *Ἡ Βλαχέρνα*, 44.

27. See R. JANIN, *La Géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire Byzantin. Première Partie. Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Oecuménique. t. III. Les églises et les monasteres*, Paris 1969, 169-179; ODB, t. I, Blachernae, Church and the Place of (C. MANGO); PALIOURAS, Οἱ Βλαχέρνες τῆς Ἄρτας καὶ τὸ πρότυπό τους, 164-177. One would expect to find a church dedicated to Hagia Sophia in Arta. Both Trebizond and Nikaia, the capitals of two other successor states that imitated Constantinople, had churches dedicated to Hagia Sophia [see M. ALPATOFF, *Les fresques de Sainte-Sophie de Nicée*, *EO* 25 (1926), 42-45; M. RESTLE, *Byzantine Wallpainting in Asia Minor, I. Text*, Recklinghausen 1967, 85-86, pl. 551; S. MÖLLERS, *Die Hagia Sophia in Iznik-Nikaia*, Düsseldorf, 1994 (Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften), passim; A. EASTMOND, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and*

pivotal role that the Blachernai played in the consciousness of the Komnenoi. This northwestern quarter of Constantinople was home to the eponymous basilica dedicated to the Mother of God, which was arguably the most important Marian shrine in the city. Under the rule of the Komnenian dynasty, from the late eleventh century onward, the Blachernai became the political and religious center of Constantinople. The Emperor Alexios I (r. 1081-1118) built a new imperial palace in this locale and made it his permanent residence. The shrine at the Blachernai, on the other hand, came to be increasingly identified with the Virgin's role as the guarantor of imperial victory²⁸. The choice of the Blacherna monastery in Arta for the mausoleum of the Komnenos-Doukas family of Epiros clearly demonstrates the desire of this dynasty to stress their Constantinopolitan ancestry, and more specifically, their relation to the imperial family of the Komnenoi. The Blachernai basilica was one of the most important churches in Constantinople. A homily ascribed to the early seventh-century author Theodore Synkellos states that, among the Marian churches of the capital, the one at the Blachernai shrine was "the head, the metropolis, the Virgin's most divine dwelling"²⁹. Besides, among the great charismatic icons venerated in Constantinople, the *Blachernitissa* held a special place as a symbol of the protection of the city³⁰. Numerous sources inform us that in moments of crisis Byzantine emperors turned to icons of the Theotokos, and especially to the

the Empire of Trebizond, Aldershot 2004] passim]. The absence of such a church in the Epirote capital is easy to explain. A venerable shrine of Hagia Sophia already existed in Ohrid, and hence there was no need to establish a homonymous church in Arta. Ohrid was, moreover, the principal ecclesiastical center of the State of Epiros and the see of the archbishop Demetrios Chomatenos, who, as is well known, crowned Theodore emperor.

28. B. V. PENTCHEVA, *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania 2006, 62–63.

29. κεφαλή τις ὥσπερ καθέστηκεν καὶ μητρόπολις, ὁ ἐν Βλαχέρναις αὐτῆς ὑπερένδοξος καὶ θεῖος ναός. Theodore Synkellos, In *Depositionem Pretiosae Vestis*, ed. F. COMBEFIS, *Novum Auctarium. II Historia Haeresis Monothelitarum santaque in eam sextae synodi actorum vindiciae*, Paris 1648, 754.

30. A. W. CARR, Court Culture and Cult Icons in Middle Byzantine Constantinople, in: *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. MAGUIRE, Washington 2004, 90; CH. ANGELIDI – T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Picturing the Spiritual Protector: From Blachernitissa to Hodegetria, in: *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. VASSILAKI, Aldershot 2004, 210–212; PENTCHEVA, *Icons and Power*, 60–61.

*Blachernitissa*³¹. According to Michael Attaleiates, Romanos IV Diogenes took an icon of the *Blachernitissa* (ἥτις εἰώθει τοῖς πιστοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐν ἐκστρατείαις ὡς ἀπροσμάχητον ὄπλον συνεκστρατεύεσθαι) with him in the battle of Manzikert in 1071³².

A special link between Constantinople and the Mother of God had already been established by the early seventh century. Dedicated to the Theotokos, the capital of the Byzantine Empire came to be known as "Theotokoupolis"³³. No fewer than 136 churches dedicated to the Virgin with different epithets are attested in Constantinople before the end of the thirteenth century³⁴. It is highly significant that, while the Marian epithets used in the dedications of these Constantinopolitan churches are rarely encountered in other parts of the Byzantine world, they were very prominent throughout thirteenth-century Epiros. Examples include Peribleptos³⁵ and Blacherna at Arta; Pantanassa at Philippia³⁶; and Panymnetos at Naupaktos³⁷. The church of the Panagia Vellas (Red Church) near Vulgareli was also known by the name of Panymnetos³⁸. A church dedicated to the

31. B. V. PENTCHEVA, The supernatural protector of Constantinople: the Virgin and her icons in the tradition of the Avar siege, *BMGS* 26 (2002), 31–34; ANGELIDI – PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Picturing the Spiritual Protector*, 213; PENTCHEVA, *Icons and Power*, 61–63, 75, 77.

32. *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia*, ed. E. TSOLAKIS, Athens 2011, 118, 20–26.

33. C. MANGO, Η Κωνσταντινούπολη ως Θεοτοκούπολη, in: *Μήτηρ Θεού. Απεικονίσεις της Παναγίας στη βυζαντινή τέχνη*, ed. M. VASSILAKI, Athens-Mailand 2000, 17–25; A. W. CARR, Η δημόσια λατρεία της Παναγίας, in: *Μήτηρ Θεού*, 325–337; ANGELIDI – PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Picturing the Spiritual Protector*, 209–217; PENTCHEVA, *Icons and Power*, passim.

34. JANIN, *Geographie Ecclésiastique*, 156–244.

35. See above, n. 7. The Peribleptos Monastery in Constantinople, established by Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), was located in the southwest part of the city: Michael Psellos, *Chronographie*, v. I, éd. E. RENAULD, Paris 1926, 1: 41–43; JANIN, *Geographie Ecclésiastique*, 218–222; ODB III, 1629 (Peribleptos, A. M. TALBOT, A. CUTLER),

36. P. VOKOTOPoulos, *Παντάνασσα Φιλιπιάδας*, Athens 2007, with earlier bibliography. IDEM, Η κτιτορική τοιχογραφία στο περίστωο της Παντανάσσης Φιλιπιάδος, *ΔΧΑΕ* 28, 2008, 73–79. For the Pantanassa Monastery in Constantinople see JANIN, *Geographie Ecclésiastique*, 215–216.

37. See above, n. 6.

38. This is evident from the dedicatory inscription written on the west wall of the church: εἰς κλήσιν συνηρώσω τῆς Πανυμνήτου. A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, Wien 2009, 146–147. The Constantinopolitan church of the Virgin Panymnetos has not survived. The only reference to its existence turns up in a letter of the Pope Innocent III from 1206: G. DIMITROKALLIS, Παναγία ἡ Πανύμνητος, *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Στερεοελλαδικῶν*

Panagia Paramythia is still preserved in Thesprotia³⁹, while the church at Preventza in Aitolioakarnania⁴⁰ bore the name of the Panagia Kyriotissa⁴¹.

One should also recall that, after 1227, Theodore of Epiros chose the epithet *Hagiosoritissa*, another Marian appellation of Constantinopolitan origin, for an emission of his coins (fig. 3), thereby promoting in yet another way his privileged relationship with the former Byzantine capital⁴². The reverse of these coins shows a standing figure of the Mother of God, with her hands outstretched in a gesture of supplication, and a medallion with the Christ Child hovering on her chest. Around her figure is the inscription:

Μελετών 5 (1974–1975), 54; The cult of the *Panymnetos* was widespread. Icons of and churches dedicated to the Virgin *Panymnetos* have survived in different cities and regions such as Beroia, the Peloponnese, FYROM, and Bulgaria: S. KISSAS, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Art in Ohrid and in the Areas under its Influence, *Cyrrilomethodianum* VIII-IX (1984–1985), 363; TH. ΠΑΠΑΖΟΤΟΣ, *Ἡ Βέροια καὶ οἱ ναοὶ τῆς (11ος-18ος αἰ.)*, Athens 1994, 95, 162–163, 216.

39. A. PASALI, *Ἡ Μεγάλη Παναγιά στὴν Παραμυθιά Θεσπρωτίας*, ΔΧΑΕ 19 (1996–1997), 369–393.

40. The church was flooded by the water from an artificial lake in 1969. P. VOKOTOPOULOS – E. TSIGARIDAS, ΑΔ 23 (1968), Χρονικά 284–285, 225–227; ΑΔ 24 (1969) Χρονικά, 242 and ΑΔ 25 (1970), 300. P. VOKOTOPOULOS, Ὁ ναὸς τῆς Παναγίας στὴν Πρεβέντζα τῆς Ἀκαρνανίας, in: *Βυζάντιον, Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Ἀνδρέα Ν. Στράτο*, Athens 1986, 251–275; S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and donor portraits in thirteenth-century churches of Greece*, Wien 1992, 56–57, fig. 16; A. PALIOURAS, *Βυζαντινὴ Αἰτωλοακαρνανία*, Athens 2004, 302–305, pl. 303, 304.

41. Another, now lost church at Beroia was dedicated to the *Kyriotissa*. See ΠΑΠΑΖΟΤΟΣ, *Βέροια*, 212–213, 274–275. For the ta Kyrou monastery see JANIN, *Geographie Ecclésiastique*, 193–194. The Kalenderhane Djami was identified with ta Kyrou: *The Buildings, Their History, Architecture, and Decoration: Final Reports on the Archaeological Exploration and Restoration at Kalenderhane Camii, 1966–1978*, edd. C. STRIKER – D. KUBAN, Mainz, 1997, 7–17, 124–126. A church dedicated to the Virgin Kyriotissa existed in Nicaea as well. See R. JANIN, *Les églises et les monasteres des grands centres byzantins*, Paris 1975, 113–114.

42. On the coinage of the Epirote rulers, see W. WROTH, *Catalogue of the coins of the Vandals, Ostrogoths and Lombards and of the empires of Thessalonica, Nicaea and Trebizond in the British Museum*, London 1911, LXXIII 192–199, 226, pl. XXVI; P. PROTONOTARIOU, Ἡ νομισματοκοπία τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ κράτους τῆς Ἡπείρου (1204 – 1268), *Ἡπειρωτικὰ Χρονικά* 24 (1982), 130–150; Μ. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΟΥ, Ανασκόπηση τῆς νομισματοκοπίας του “Δεσποτάτου τῆς Ἡπείρου”, in: *Πρακτικὰ Διεθνούς Συμποσίου γιὰ τὸ “Δεσποτάτο τῆς Ἡπείρου”*, 95–99; Μ. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΟΥ – G. TOURATSOGLOU – I. TSOURTI, Συμβολὴ στὴν ἐρευνα τῆς κυκλοφορίας τῶν βυζαντινῶν νομισμάτων στὴν Ἡπειρο (1204 – 1332), in: *Πρακτικὰ Διεθνούς Συμποσίου γιὰ τὸ “Δεσποτάτο τῆς Ἡπείρου”*, 101–123; A. E. LAIOU, Use and Circulation of Coins in the Despotate of Epiros, *DOP* 55 (2001), 207–215.

ΑΓΙΟΣΩΡΗΤΗΣΑ. The obverse shows Theodore in the company of St Demetrios. The ruler is clad in imperial regalia and holds a model of the city Thessalonike⁴³. Due to its official character, Byzantine coinage was a potent vehicle of imperial ideology and propaganda⁴⁴. The criteria for the selection of a particular holy figure to accompany an emperor on his coins were manifold, ranging from personal devotional preferences to dynastic traditions and current political concerns⁴⁵.

It is generally assumed that the epithet *Hagiosoritissa* designates an icon of the Virgin venerated at a reliquary shrine, or *soros*, either at the Chalkoprateia or at the Blachernai in Constantinople. Both of these shrines housed caskets containing Marian relics⁴⁶. The frontal full-length orans figure of the Theotokos, seen on Theodore's coins, differs from the majority of the Byzantine depictions of Mary accompanied by the epithet

43. R. MARIĆ, Iz numizmatičke zbirke Narodnog muzeja, *Starinar* 5–6 (1954–55), 351–352; IDEM, Iz zbirke Narodnog muzeja, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* 3 (1960/61), 22–23, sl. 8–11; V. IVANIŠEVIĆ, Ostava “elektron” traheja Teodora Andjela iz Niške oblasti, in: *Niš i Vizantija* 1 (2003), 47–61; IDEM, *Novčarstvo srednjovekovne Srbije*, Beograd 2001, 87–88. Examples of the same emissions are preserved in the Dumbarton Oaks collection: M. F. HENDY, *Coinage and money in the Byzantine Empire 1081–1261*, Washington 1969, 268, Pl. 37, 3–4; C. MORRISON, The Emperor, the Saint, and the City: Coinage and Money in Thessalonike from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Century, *DOP* 57 (2003), 177, ill. 6,7. See also: V. PENNA, Η απεικόνιση της Θεοτόκου στα νομίσματα και τα μολυβδόβουλα, in: *Μήτηρ Θεού*, 212. The Dumbarton Oaks Collection preserves another coin of Theodore with identical iconography, although from a different emission, as attested by the presence of the inscription ΑΓΙΟΣΟΡΙΤΙΣΑ: *Catalogue of Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, ed. M. F. HENDY, Washington 1968, vol. 4, part 2, pl. XXXVIII, 2c.

44. Theodore's claims regarding the throne of Constantinople are reflected in his coinage most evidently in the presence of his imperial titles. See PROTONOTARIOU, Ἡ νομισματοκοπία τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ κράτους τῆς Ἡπείρου, 134–140, note 54. More for the coinage and imperial propaganda see V. PENNA, *Το Βυζαντινὸ νόμισμα. Μέσο συναλλαγῆς και ἐκφραση αυτοκρατορικής προπαγάνδας*, Nicosia 2002, 48–63, 125–138.

45. PENNA, Η απεικόνιση της Θεοτόκου, 59.

46. J. EBERSOLT, *Sanctuaires de Byzance, Recherches sur les anciens trésors des églises de Constantinople*, Paris 1921, 57; JANIN, *Geographie Ecclésiastique*, III, 169, 250; ODB, t. III, Soros (A. W. CAMERON). In addition, a chapel known as the *Hagia Soros* existed at the Constantinopolitan monastery *ta Kyrou*. See Michael Psellos, *Ἐγώμιον εἰς τὸν μοναχὸν Ἰωάννην τὸν Κρουστουλᾶν ἀναγνόντα ἐν τῇ Ἀγίᾳ Σορῷ*. *Michaelis Pselli Oratoria minora* ed. A. R. LITTLEWOOD, Leipzig 1985, No. 37. PENTCHEVA, *Icons and Power*, 244, note 32.

Hagiosoritissa. Comparable specimens are extremely rare⁴⁷. The more common iconography of the *Hagiosoritissa* features the Virgin depicted in a three-quarter or profile view, with her hands raised in prayer⁴⁸, as witnessed by numerous examples on coins⁴⁹, seals⁵⁰ and icons⁵¹, beginning with the tenth and especially during the eleventh century. Epithets attached to images of holy figures in Byzantium were not always wedded to one particular iconographic type. The *Hagiosoritissa* is a case in point⁵². The epithet on Theodore's coinage does not seem to invoke a specific Marian icon, but a Constantinopolitan shrine dedicated to the Theotokos⁵³. The choice of this epithet for the coins issued by the Epirote ruler provides yet another piece of evidence demonstrating the great prestige that the famed Constantinopolitan

47. T. BERTELE, La Vergine aghiosoritissa nella numismática Bizantina, *REB* 16 (1958), 233–234. HENDY, *Coinage*, 196, pl. 27.8–9.

48. On this iconographic type see: S. N. NERSESSIAN, Two Images of the Virgin in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, *DOP* 14 (1960), 78, 83, fig. 3; N. CHATZIDAKIS, A Fourteenth-Century Icon of the Virgin Eleusa in the Byzantine Museum of Athens in: *Byzantine East - Latin West, Art-Historical Studies in honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, edd. C. MOSS – K. KIEFER, Princeton 1995, 495–500.

49. T. BERTELE, La Vergine aghiosoritissa 233–234; HENDY, *Coinage*, 196, 268, pl. 27.8–9, 37, 3–4.; G. TOURATSOGLOU, Εγκόλπιο Στεατίτη από τη Βέροια, *Ευφρόσυνον*, v. 2, 604–605, compiled a catalogue of coins and seals with depictions of the *Hagiosoritissa*. See also PENNA, Η απεικόνιση της Θεοτόκου, 212, pl. 149.

50. W. SEIBT, Die Darstellung der Theotokos auf byzantinischen Bleisiegeln, besonders im 11. Jahrhundert, *SBS*, Washington, 1987, 48–50, pl. 11. TOURATSOGLOU, Εγκόλπιο Στεατίτη, 600–605; H. HUNGER, Zur Terminologie der Theotokosdarstellungen auf byzantinischen Siegeln, *Aachener Kunstblätter* 60 (1994) [*Festschrift für Hermann Fillitz zum 70. Geburtstag*, Köln 1994], 135, 138, Abb. 2b/1, 2c/1.

51. G. and M. SOTIRIOU, *Εικόνες της Μονής του Σινᾶ*, Athens 1956–1958, t. 1, figs. 146–147, t. 2, 125; CH. BALTOGIANNI, Η Παναγία στις φορητές εικόνες, in: *Μήτηρ Θεού*, 147–148, pl. 87, 90; A. W. CARR, Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople, *DOP* 56 (2002), 78–80, fig. 6.

52. A. GRABAR, L'Hodigitria et l'Eléusa, *Zbornik za Likovne Umetnosti* 10 (1974), 3; B. MILJKOVIĆ, Hilendarska ikona srpskog cara Stefana, *ZRVI* 43 (2006), 330. It should be mentioned that a seal from the Orghidan collection bears a depiction of the Virgin holding the Christ Child accompanied by the epithet *Hagiosoritissa*. See V. LAURENT, *La Collection C. Orghidan*, Paris 1952, 234, pl. LIX (466).

53. A comparable example is the fresco-icon of the Virgin *Pammakaristos* in the church of Hagia Sophia at Ohrid. In relation to this image, KISSAS, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Art in Ohrid, 362, states that its iconographic type was not dependent on the Constantinopolitan prototype of the *Pammakaristos*.

shrines enjoyed in Epiros⁵⁴. The presence of the appellation *Hagiosoritissa* on Theodore's coins further demonstrated and strengthened his links with Constantinople⁵⁵.

The choice of an orans figure of the Virgin on this monetary issue may also be connected with the cult of the Virgin with the epithet *Acheiropoietos* in Thessalonike. Since the thirteenth century, the iconographic type showing a full-length figure of the Mother of God with her hands outstretched in prayer, accompanied by the epithet *Acheiropoietos*, was particularly venerated in Thessalonike and the areas under its artistic influence⁵⁶. As we learn from several written sources, in the tenth century a miraculous icon of the Virgin *Acheiropoietos* was housed in the monastery of the Abrahamites in Constantinople, a fact that has led some scholars to associate it with the shrine of the *Acheiropoietos* in Thessalonike⁵⁷. The famous basilica of the *Acheiropoietos* in Thessalonike was built in the second half of the fifth century, and initially it was known as the church of the Panagia Theotokos or the "Great Church" of the Theotokos⁵⁸. It is not clear when exactly the basilica changed its dedication

54. KISSAS, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Art in Ohrid, 363.

55. The epithet *Hagiosoritissa* is present on coins of Manuel I Komnenos (1118-1180) (HENDY, *Coinage*, 119-120, pl. 17. 7-8); Alexios III Angelos (1195-1203) (HENDY, *Coinage*, 119, pl. 17.7-8); and John III Doukas Vatatzes, Emperor of Nicaea (1221-1254) (HENDY, *Coinage*, 245, pl. 34.8).

56. The standing Virgin orans with the epithet *Acheiropoietos* also appears in the sanctuary apses of churches located in the wider area of Byzantine Macedonia, for instance, at Kastoria, Beroia, Prilep, and elsewhere. See A. TSITOURIDOU, *Ο Ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος του Αγίου Νικολάου Ορφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη: συμβολή στη μελέτη της Παλαιολόγιας ζωγραφικής κατά τον πρώιμο 14ο αιώνα*, Thessaloniki 1986, 63-65, πίν. 1, 2; D. KOCO – P. MILJKOVIĆ PEPEK, *Manastir*, Skopje 1958, 43, 50, εικ. 42; S. E. J. GERSTEL, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries. Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, Washington, 1999, fig 1, 31, 36; In monumental painting, coins and seals the epithet *Ἀχειροποίητος* accompanies different iconographic types of the Virgin. See MILJKOVIĆ, *Hilandarska ikona*, 332, note 69, with a selection of relevant examples.

57. A. ΧΥΝΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, Αἱ περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἀχειροποιήτου Θεσσαλονίκης εἰδήσεις τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Ἀρμενοπούλου, in: *Επιστημονικὴ Ἑπετηρὶς Σχολῆς Νομικῶν καὶ Οἰκονομικῶν Ἐπιστημῶν ΑΠΘ* [τόμος Κωνσταντίνου Ἀρμενοπούλου] 6 (1952), 11.

58. ΧΥΝΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, Αἱ περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἀχειροποιήτου Θεσσαλονίκης εἰδήσεις, 1-26; JANIN, *Les églises*, 375-376. TH. PAPAZOTOS, Ο μέγας ναός της Θεοτόκου στη Θεσσαλονίκη, μια επανεξέταση των πηγών για την ιστορία της Αχειροποιήτου, *Μακεδονικά* 22 (1982), 112-131; M. PAISIDOU, Μήτηρ Θεοῦ ἡ Μεγάλη Παναγία, *Βυζαντινά* 30 (2010), 260-272.

to the *Acheiropoietos*. Xyngopoulos has suggested that the change took place after 1204, when monks from the monastery of the Abrahamites were forced to move from Constantinople to the region of Thessalonike, following the Latin conquest of the capital, and that they transferred with them the cult of the *Acheiropoietos*⁵⁹. The sources, however, do not allow us to ascertain whether the change of the dedication was connected to the refugee monks⁶⁰. It is equally possible that the basilica acquired a new name in the course of the thirteenth⁶¹ or early fourteenth century, again, under the influence of the Constantinopolitan cult of the *Acheiropoietos*⁶². Whatever the circumstances under which the basilica changed its dedication, the fact that the Virgin orans was especially popular in Thessalonike and the surrounding areas makes plausible the connection between the unusual iconography of the *Hagiosoritissa* on Theodore's coins and the cult of the Thessalonian *Acheiropoietos*.

The idea that Theodore's newly assumed imperial dignity was approved and sanctioned by God was expressed in different ways in his monetary issues. Theodore is portrayed with the traditional symbols of imperial power, Theodore appears with Christ or the Hand of God crowning him, or in the presence of St Demetrios on his coins⁶³. As mentioned above, on the reverse of the issue featuring the *Hagiosoritissa*, the Epirote ruler is depicted in the company of St Demetrios, who hands him over a model of the city of Thessalonike (Fig. 3). As the patron saint of Thessalonike, St Demetrios grants him protection, welcomes him, and entrusts him with governing the city. The special relationship of this saint with Thessalonike was undoubtedly the principal reason for the inclusion of his figure on these numismatic types. Besides, one should also bear in mind that the Komnenian emperors were the first to place military saints, and St Demetrios in particular, on their seals and coins. Alexios I venerated St Demetrios as his personal protector, placing the great martyr for his

59. XYNGOPOULOS, Αἱ περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἀχειροποιήτου Θεσσαλονίκης εἰδήσεις, 14–19.

60. JANIN, *Les églises*, 377–378. MILJKOVIĆ, Hilendarska ikona, 332.

61. CH. KONSTANTINIDI, Ἡ Ἀχειροποίητος - Φανερωμένη τῶν πρώτων Παλαιολόγων, ΔΧΑΕ 24 (2003), 89–98.

62. JANIN, *Les églises*, 376–377.

63. HENDY, *Coinage*, 268–271, pl. 37/3–4, 5–6 38/3–4, 5; C. MORRISON, The Emperor, the Saint, and the City: Coinage and Money in Thessalonike from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Century, DOP 57 (2003), 177, 181, ill. 8–10; V. IVANIŠEVIĆ, Ostava (as in n. 43), sl. 1.

seals⁶⁴. Following the demise of the Komnenian dynasty, St Demetrios had disappeared from coinage until Theodore reintroduced the saint's image on his coins in 1224. Indeed, Theodore's emissions are marked by a plethora of different iconographic types of St Demetrios. Theodore's special devotion to the patron saint of Thessalonike, his new imperial capital, must be seen as an important element of his broader ideological program⁶⁵.

Theodore's military successes, and especially his reconquest of Thessalonike, brought him closer to Constantinople. The desire of the Epirote elite for the liberation of the former imperial capital was expressed perhaps most eloquently by the metropolitan of Naupaktos in his letters to Theodore and his wife dating from the period before and after Theodore's coronation⁶⁶. The metropolitan characteristically declares his wish to see Theodore on the imperial throne of Constantinople⁶⁷. In his study of the iconographic program of the dome in the church of St Demetrios Katsouris (Fig. 4), Titos Papamastorakis has demonstrated that the inscriptions on the scrolls held by the prophets constitute a potent statement articulating a vision of the recapture of Constantinople and the union of the entire *οἰκουμένη* under the Byzantine rule⁶⁸. As is well known, Byzantine literati often celebrated Constantinople as

64. V. PENNA, Η απεικόνιση του αγ. Δημητρίου σε νομισματικές εκδόσεις της Θεσσαλονίκης: Μεσοβυζαντινή και ύστερη Βυζαντινή περίοδος, *Οβολός* 4 (2000), 198–199, 201, εικ. 4, 7, 10.

65. Another piece of evidence indicating the importance of the cult of St Demetrios during Theodore's rule comes from monumental painting. In the basilica of St Demetrios in Thessalonike, on the eastern side of the southeast pier of the bema, next to the early Byzantine mosaic of St Demetrios with a deacon, there is a fresco showing the standing figure of a youthful male saint in patrician garb. The fresco can be dated to the period of Theodore's short rule over Thessalonike, since its stylistic features correspond with the broader artistic trends of the first decades of thirteenth century. On the basis of its iconography, the depicted figure can be identified with St Demetrios. See E. TSIGARIDAS, Τοιχογραφία του αγίου Δημητρίου στον ναό του Αγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης, in: *Δώρον, Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Νίκο Νικονάνο*, Thessaloniki 2006, 209–212.

66. Already before Theodore's coronation in Thessalonike, Apokaukos strongly encouraged Theodore's imperial ambitions. See D. DŽELEBŽIĆ, Pisma Jovana Apokavka Teodoru Duki, *ZRVI* 45 (2008), 127–133, 136.

67. ΑΠΟΚΑΥΚΟΣ (BEES) no. 69. 70–72; DŽELEBŽIĆ, Pisma Jovana Apokavka, 137–138.

68. T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Άγιος Δημήτριος του Κατσούρη: Το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα του τρούλου, in: *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου για το Δεσποτάτο της Ηπείρου*, 436.

the New Sion and identified the subjects of the Empire with the New Israel. Authors writing after the catastrophe of 1204 drew a parallel between the exile of the Old Israel to Babylon and the exile of the New Israel to the newly established Greek states of Nicaea and Epiros. Just as the Old Israel expected a Saviour from the Davidic race, who would lead them back to Jerusalem, so did the New Israel eagerly await the time of their return to the New Sion, i.e. Constantinople, under the leadership of an Orthodox monarch. Comparisons between the Byzantine emperors and the Old Testament leaders of the Israelites are occasionally encountered in the writings of Epirote clergymen, including Apokaukos, Bardanes, and Chomatenos⁶⁹. Such comparisons, however, received particular elaboration in the works of Nicaean authors⁷⁰. Niketas Choniates in his encomiastic speeches delivered between 1206 and 1216 to the emperor Theodore Laskaris of Nicaea refers to his imperial pedigree and invites him to become a new Moses and a new Zorobabel who will lead the chosen people to Jerusalem, i.e. Constantinople, which the Babylonians, i.e. the Crusaders, have destroyed⁷¹. According to Papamastorakis, the iconographic program of the dome of St Demetrios Katsouris “reflects a vision of the political and ecclesiastical authority of the Epirotes in this period”⁷². In the zone immediately below the figure of Christ *Pantokrator*, seven angels are depicted in attitudes of adoration. Underneath are fourteen prophets holding inscribed scrolls, arranged in pairs. The prophets are depicted as if engaged in conversation, and the quotations written on their scrolls are carefully selected. Many of these inscriptions feature the theme of the liberation of Israel from

69. C. RAPP, Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium, in: *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. MAGDALINO – R. NELSON, Washington 2010, 175–195. It seems that such comparisons can be traced back to the seventh century. See I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, «Περιούσιος λαός», in: *Οι σκοτεινοί αιώνες του Βυζαντίου (7ος-9ος αι.)*, Athens 2001, 325–346, especially p. 334.

70. After the loss of Constantinople to the Crusaders and the fragmentation of the Byzantine Empire, Nicaea played the leading role in the attempts to recapture the Byzantine throne and restore the former Empire. For the importance of rhetoric in the formation and propagation of the ideology of the Nicaean emperors, see N. RADOŠEVIĆ, Nikejski carevi u savremenoj im retorici, *ZRVI* 26 (1987), 69–85; D. ANGELOV, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium (1204–1330)*, Cambridge 2007, passim.

71. *Nicetae Choniatae Orationes et epistulae*, ed. J. A. VAN DIETEN, Berlin – New York 1972, ep. 13, p. 128, and ep. 14, p. 147; RADOŠEVIĆ, Nikejski carevi, 70; PAPAMASTORAKIS, Άγιος Δημήτριος του Κατσούρη, 434.

72. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Άγιος Δημήτριος του Κατσούρη, 436.

captivity and their return from Babylon to Jerusalem. The scrolls held by Naum, Sophonias (Fig. 4), Joel (Fig. 4), Habbakkuk, and Abdias directly refer to the trials and tribulations of Israel's exile and return. The main means of Israel's salvation, according to the scrolls of Ezekiel, Zachariah, Malachias, Moses, and Jeremiah, is the word of God, that is, Orthodoxy. It is beyond doubt that these references to the history of Israel should be related to the historical circumstances following the capture of the Byzantine capital by the Latins⁷³. The creator of the iconographic program in the dome of St Demetrios Katsouris must have been a learned representative of the Epirote elite. As Papamastorakis has suggested, he is likely to be identified with John Apokaukos⁷⁴.

The mural paintings of the Old Metropolis of Beroia, dated by Papazotos to the second or third decade of the thirteenth century, that is, to the period when the town belonged to the State of Epiros⁷⁵, could articulate political messages similar to those advanced in the mural decoration of St Demetrios Katsouris. In the second zone of the north wall of the nave of the Old Metropolis (fig. 5) underneath a series of scenes from the Passion cycle, there are eight prophets holding unfolded scrolls with inscriptions. Counting westwards, they include a figure most likely depicting Moses, Aaron, Isaiah, Habbakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zachariah or Sophonias. The prophets are engaged in conversation, just like those in the church of St Demetrios Katsouris. The inscriptions on their scrolls are carefully selected interrelated, formulating a unified message that, I would argue, addresses the political concerns of the time. The quotations on the scrolls have not been identified in previous scholarship⁷⁶. The figures carry scrolls with inscriptions taken from: Deuteronomy [28:66: ΩΨΕ /ΣΘΑΙ /ΤΗΝ ΖΩ /ΗΝ ΗΜ(ΟΝ) /ΚΡΕΜΑ(ΜΕΝΗΝ)] (draw 1)⁷⁷, Isaiah (52:13: ΙΔΟΥ ΣΥ/ΝΙΣΕΙ Ο /ΠΙΕΣ ΜΟΥ / ΚΑΙ ΥΨΩΘΗΣΕ/ΤΕ) (draw 2)⁷⁸, Habbakkuk [3:3: Ο Θ(ΕΟ)

73. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Άγιος Δημήτριος του Κατσούρη, 434.

74. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Άγιος Δημήτριος του Κατσούρη, 436.

75. PAPAZOTOS, *Βέροια*, 242–249.

76. I would like to thank Antonios Petkos, Director of the 11th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities at Beroia, for giving me the opportunity to inspect the wall paintings of the Old Metropolis at Beroia.

77. "You shall see your life in suspense".

78. "Behold, my servant shall understand, and shall be exalted".

Σ /ΑΠΟ ΘΕ/ΜΑΝ /ΕΙΕΗ /ΚΑΙ Ο /ΑΓΙΟΣ /ΕΞ ΟΡΟΥ/Σ] (draw 3)⁷⁹, Jeremiah [11:18: Κ(ΥΠΙ)Ε ΓΝΩ/ΠΙΣΟ(Ν) /ΜΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΓΝ(Ο)ΣΟΜΑΙ ΤΟ/ΤΕ ΙΔΟΝ /ΤΑ ΕΠΙ[ΤΗΔΕΥΜΑΤΑ ΑΥΤΩΝ]] (draw 4)⁸⁰, Ezekiel [37: 1: ΕΓΕ(ΝΕ)ΤΟ /ΕΙΠ' ΕΜΕ /ΧΕΙΡ Κ(ΥΠΙΟ)Υ /ΚΑΙ ΕΞΗ/ΤΑΓΕΝ Μ(Ε) /ΕΝ ΠΙΝ(ΕΥΜΑΤ)Ι /Κ(ΥΠΙΟ)Υ.] (draw 5)⁸¹, Daniel (3:1 or 4:4: ΕΤΟΥΣ /ΟΚΤΩ/ΚΑΙΔΕ/ΚΑΤΩ /ΝΑΒΟΥΧΟ(ΔΟΝΟΣΟΡ)] (draw 6)⁸², Zachariah (9:9) or Sophonias [3:14: ΤΑΔΕ /ΛΕΓΕΙ Κ(ΥΠΙΟ)Σ ΧΑΙ/ΡΕ ΣΦΟ/ΔΡΑ] (draw 7)⁸³. The inscription held by the second prophet cannot be reconstructed, but the depicted figure can be identified with the prophet Aaron. The chosen quotations foreground the theme of the liberation of Jerusalem, indirectly voicing hopes for the return of the Byzantines to their old capital—Constantinople. Such references to the Old Testament captivity of Israel would have been highly meaningful in the Epirote context. Indeed, in a letter to the Patriarch Germanos II, George Bardanes expresses his hope for the return of the chosen people, that is, the Byzantines, from Babylon to Jerusalem⁸⁴. It bears emphasizing in this connection that some of the inscriptions held by the prophets in the Old Metropolis are unprecedented in monumental painting (Isaias 52:13, and Daniel 3:1 or 4:4), while others are very rare (Deuteronomy 28:66⁸⁵, Ezekiel 37:1⁸⁶, and Zachariah 9:9 or Sophonias 3:14⁸⁷), at least judging by the preserved examples from the Middle

79. "God shall come from Thaeman, and the Holy One from Mount".

80. "O Lord, teach me, and I shall know: then I saw their practices".

81. "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord".

82. "In the eighteenth year of Nabuchodonosor"

83. "Thus said the Lord: Rejoice, O daughter"

84. R.- J. LOENERTZ, *Lettre de Georges Bardanes, metropolite de Corcyre, au patriarche oecumenique Germain II, 1226–1227*, *ΕΕΒΣ* 33 (1964), 114–115 [=A. GALONI, as in n. 17 above]; ΠΑΠΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΗΣ, *Άγιος Δημήτριος του Κατσούρη*, 435.

85. This inscription is encountered in the Monastery of Myriokephala in Crete, in St Demetrios Katsuris, and in Omorphoklisia near Kastoria. T. ΠΑΠΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΗΣ, *Ο Διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της Παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική Χερσόνησο και την Κύπρο*, Athens 2001, 185.

86. [Cf.] Panagia Krina on Chios, St Nikolas tēs Rodias near Arta, and the Peribleptos church in Ohrid. The inscription was more common during the Palaeologan period. See ΠΑΠΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΗΣ, *Ο Διάκοσμος του τρούλου*. 212, 214.

87. The inscriptions on the scrolls held by the prophets Zachariah and Sophonias were rather rare enough before the Palaeologan period. The inscriptions on Zechariah's scroll is encountered in St Demetrios Katsuris, in Panagia Krina on Chios, and the Peribleptos church in Ohrid, while the one of the Sophonias's is preserved in St Demetrios Katsuris and the

Byzantine period and the thirteenth century. All this demonstrates that the creator of the iconographic program at Beroia purposefully selected excerpts from the Old Testament in order to articulate a very specific message.

Among the scrolls held by the prophets, one deserves closer analysis. This is the scroll carried by Daniel, which reads: “In the eighteenth year of Nabuchodonosor” (draw 6). It bears emphasizing that this inscription is unique in Byzantine mural painting. I would argue that the reference to the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign in Judaea does not pertain exclusively to the historical events alluded to in the inscriptions displayed by the other prophets in the series⁸⁸. It is possible that this specific chronological reference also alludes to the eighteenth year from the capture of Constantinople by the forces of the Fourth Crusade. In other words, this may be the year in which the figures of the prophets in the Old Metropolis were actually painted. Based on a document issued by Chomatenos, previously dated to 1215/1216, Papazotos and Kravari dates the liberation of Beroia to around this time, suggesting that certain wall paintings in the Old Metropolis were executed between 1215/1216 and 1224/1225⁸⁹. However, as Prinzing has demonstrated, the aforementioned documents should be dated to after 1220⁹⁰. Prinzing, with whom the late Angeliki Laiou agrees, suggests that Beroia was liberated in 1220⁹¹. After the conquest of the city, which occupied a strategically important position, Theodore’s way to the former Empire’s second city was open, and indeed, several years later he managed to capture Thessalonike. It is likely that the inscriptions held by the two westernmost prophets in the series allude to these historical events: “In the eighteenth year of Nabuchodonosor” (Daniel

Monastery of Archangel Michael at Thari. Cf. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Ο Διάκοσμος του τρούλου*, 236, 237, 239, 240. fig. 21, 22.

88. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562) was a king of Babylon and the founder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He besieged Jerusalem twice, in 597 and 586 BC, when he destroyed the city and exiled to Babylonian a large portion of its population. The events of his rule are recorded in the first chapters of the Book of Daniel and Chapter 24 of the Second Book of Kings.

89. V. KRAVARI, *Villes et villages de Macédoine occidentale*, Paris 1989, 41, 64; PAPAZOTOS, *Bégoia*, 39, 234-244.

90. G. PRINZING, Studien zur Provinz- und Zentralverwaltung im Machtbereich der epirotischen Herrscher Michael I. und Theodoros Dukas, Teil II, *Ἡπειρωτικά Χρονικά* 25 (1983), 41, 54, note 72. *Ponemata Diaphora*, 83.

91. A. E. LAIOU, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XI^e - XIII^e siècles*, Paris 1992, 145.

3:1 or 4:4), and “Thus said the Lord: Rejoice, O daughter” (Zachariah 9:9 or Sophonias 3:14). The continuation of the latter quotation from Zachariah (9:9) refers to the triumphal entrance of the King into Jerusalem: *Χαῖρε σφόδρα, θύγατερ Σιών, κήρυσσε, θύγατερ Ἱερουσαλήμ· ἰδοὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς σου ἔρχεται σοι, δίκαιος καὶ σῶζων αὐτός, πραῦς*⁹², while the continuation of the quotation from Sophonias (3:14-15) alludes to the ransom of Jerusalem from the hand of its enemies: *Χαῖρε σφόδρα, θύγατερ Σιών, κήρυσσε, θύγατερ Ἱερουσαλήμ, εὐφραίνου καὶ κατατέρπου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου, θύγατερ Ἱερουσαλήμ. Περιεῖλεν Κύριος τὰ ἀδικήματά σου, λελύτρωταί σε ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν σου; βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ Κύριος ἐν μέσῳ σου, οὐκ ὄψη κακὰ οὐκέτι*⁹³. The eighteenth year of the Latin occupation corresponds to 1222. Finding himself in the liberated Beroia, and simultaneously approaching Thessalonike, Theodore was on the way of fulfilling his final goal, which was the liberation of the New Sion, i.e. Constantinople.

Conceptually related to the series of prophets in the nave of the Old Metropolis is a scene showing the repentance of David before the prophet Nathan, which is depicted on a pillar below (fig. 6). This scene, too, carried ideological overtones⁹⁴. The comparison between Theodore and David was common in the writings of the Epirote literati. Referring to Theodore's accomplishments in the “Western parts” of the former Empire,

92. “Rejoice, O daughter of Sion; proclaim it aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King is coming to thee, just, and a Saviour; he is meek”.

93. “Rejoice, O daughter of Sion; cry aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; rejoice and delight thyself with all thine heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away thine iniquities, he has ransomed thee from the hand of thine enemies: the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more”. It should be noted that this biblical verse informs the comparison between Constantinople and Sion encountered in an oration that Nikephoros Chrysoberges delivered to the Emperor Alexios III Angelos at the beginning of 1202, after the emperor's campaign against Ivanko: *Σὺ δ' ἄλλ' ἐξ ἐθάδος πραότατος ἐπιδημεῖς ἡμῖν, καλλίνικε, μέτριος καὶ σχεδιάξεις τὴν ἐπάνοδον εὐσυντέλεστον, Χριστὸν ζηλῶν τὸν συγκαταβαίνοντα· ὥστε καὶ τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ λέγεσθαι διὰ σε· ἥραρει Σιών· ἰδοὺ, ὁ βασιλεὺς σου ἔρχεται σοι σῶζων τε ὁμοῦ καὶ πραῆς* (“But you, who are customarily exceedingly meek, come to us, O gloriously triumphant one, in modesty/humble and devise a perfect return, emulating Christ's condescension, so that in this city, too, the following may be said because of you: ‘Be of good courage, Sion; behold, your king is coming to you, having salvation and meek’”): *Nicephori Chrysobergae ad Angelos orationes tres*, ed. M. TREU, Breslau: Druck von O. Gutschmann, 1892, 21.

94. PAPAZOTOS, *Βέροια*, 243-245.

John Apokaukos praises him for his struggle against his enemies⁹⁵ and likens him to David⁹⁶. One reason for this comparison was the fact that Theodore was fighting with limited resources, but with an unfailing will and endurance⁹⁷; as Chomatenos puts it, he was “naked as David”⁹⁸. The representation of David’s repentance before Nathan is sometimes invested with royal connotations in the art of the Byzantine world⁹⁹. This theme is relatively rare in monumental painting. It appears, for instance, in Studenica¹⁰⁰, Mileševa¹⁰¹, in the prothesis of the church of the Holy Apostles at Peć¹⁰², in the gallery of the church of Hagia Sophia at Ohrid¹⁰³, etc. On the basis of the Serbian examples, S. Radojčić has interpreted this theme as a model for the Serbian rulers in their obedience to ecclesiastic authorities¹⁰⁴.

95. αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐγένετο ῥύστης μετὰ θεὸν καὶ σωτὴρ ἡμέτερος ... καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πάντα τὰ καθ’ ἡμᾶς μέρη ταῦτα τὰ θυτικὰ ἰδρῶσιν ἀμέτροις καὶ πόνων ὑπερβολαῖς ἀπαξάπαντα αἰχμαλωτισθέντα τε καὶ ἀφανισθέντα εἰς τὴν ἀρχαίαν χριστιανικὴν ἀποκαταστήσας διαγωγὴν καὶ κατάστασιν καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν καὶ δυσαρτίθιμους ἀνακαθάρας ὄχλους Λατινικοὺς τε καὶ Σκυθικοὺς. Πρᾶξις συνοδικὴ περὶ τῆς τοῦ δεσπότην Θεοδώρου εἰς βασιλεία ἀναγορεύσεως, in: A. PAPADOPOULOS - KERAMEUS, *Noctes Petropolitanae. Sbornik vizantijskih tekstov XII-XIII vekov*, S. Peterburg 1913, 258, 16-22; BEES, no. 107. col. 69-74.

96. ὁμάλιξε τοὺς ὄχθους, ὁπόσους ἡμῖν Ἰταλικὴ τυραννὶς ἐπεβόθρευσεν, ἀπογνάθου τούτους τοὺς λέοντας, γίνου τῷ ἄλλοφύλῳ ἔθναι νέος Δαυὶδ, βάλε ἐν τῷ πολεμικῷ σου καδίῳ τρεῖς λίθους, τῆς ἰσοσθενοῦς τριάδος τὴν δύναμιν, σφενδόνησον αὐτοὺς κατὰ τοῦ ἄλλοφύλου, πληξον τοῦτον ἐν τῷ ἀναισχύντῳ μετώπῳ θεοῦ παρὰτάξιν ὀνειδίζοντα, θανάτωσον αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ παρευθί: Πρὸς τὸν κραταιὸν Κομνηνόν, PAPADOPOULOS - KERAMEUS, *Noctes Petropolitanae*, 276, 14-19. For the comparison between Theodore and David, see also APOKAUKOS, (BEES), no. 71, 130, 7, no. 107, 157, 158, 69-72; PAPAZOTOS, *Béroiia*, 244.

97. STAURIDOU - ZAFRAKA, *The Political Ideology*, 135.

98. *Ponemata diaphora*, 110, 447.

99. Cf. G. DAGRON, *Empereur et prêtre; Étude sur le «césaropapisme» byzantin*, Paris 1996, 129-138; PAPAZOTOS, *Béroiia*, 244, note 479, fig. 35a.

100. Z. GAVRILOVIĆ, *Živopis vestibila Bogorodičine crkve u Studenici. Izbor tema i simbolika*, in: *Studenica et l'art Byzantin autour de l'anne 1200, Colloque scientifique international à l'occasion de 800 ans du monastere de Studenica et de centieme anniversaire de l'academie Serbe des sciences et des arts*, ed. V. KORAĆ, Beograd 1988, 185, 189, fig. 3.

101. See S. RADOJČIĆ, *Mileševa*, Beograd 1963, 76; B. TODIĆ, *Mileševa i Žiča - Tematske i ikonografske paralele*, in: *Mileševa dans l'histoire du peuple serbe*, (as in n. 1), 81.

102. V. DJURIĆ - S. ĆIRKOVIĆ - V. KORAĆ, *Pečka Patrijaršija*, Beograd 1990, 68, fig. 47.

103. C. GROZDANOV, *Ohridsko zidno slikarstvo XIV veka*, Beograd 1980, 75, fig. 48-50.

104. S. RADOJČIĆ, *Freska pokajanja Davidovog u ohridskoj Sv. Sofiji*, *Starinar* 9-10 (1958 - 1959), 135.

This understanding is also relevant in the Epirote context. The relationship between Theodore Komnenos Doukas and the highest clergy of Epiros was harmonious. Apokaukos repeatedly praises Theodore's piety and modesty, and underscores his wise obedience to religious leaders¹⁰⁵. But the image of David falling on his knees before Nathan also exemplified the virtues of humility and self-control that every ruler was expected to cultivate. As Gilbert Dagron has astutely noted, "Power was absolute, did not allow itself to be confined within legal limits and was deemed sacred; but he who exercised it, whoever he might be, was never considered wholly innocent and might at any moment be convicted of illegitimacy. The Church was there to make him kneel, to bind him and to loose him"¹⁰⁶. The representation of David's prostration before Nathan in the Old Metropolis should be understood in this context. Taken together, the date of the Beroia murals, the proximity of the penitent David to the politically charged sequence of the prophets above, as well as the relative rarity of this theme in monumental art, make its association with Theodore highly plausible.

The western side of the pillar with the scene of David's repentance is occupied by an unusual representation, which may also be dated to the early 1220s. St Eleutherios is here shown in the company of a smaller standing layman who turns towards him in prayer. Emerging from a segment of heaven in the upper left corner, Christ is depicted blessing the saint¹⁰⁷. The mortal supplicant at the saint's side is accompanied by an inscription which reads: ΔΕΗΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ Θ(ΕΟ)Υ ΙΩ(ΑΝΝΟΥ) ΤΟΥ ΑΜΑΡΙΑΝΟΥ ("Prayer of the servant of God John Amarianos"). This John Amarianos is unknown from other historical documents. Papazotos believes that this individual and a certain Marianos Konstantinos, mentioned in a document by Chomatenos¹⁰⁸, came from the same family¹⁰⁹. Amarianos' exact role, if any, in the decoration of the Old Metropolis is difficult to ascertain. Equally puzzling is the choice

105. STAUROIDOU - ΖΑΦΡΑΚΑ, *Νίκαια και Ήπειρος*, 126–136.

106. According to the English Translation by J. Birrell: G. DAGRON, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 124.

107. ΠΑΠΑΖΟΤΟΣ, *Βέροια*, 243–244, πίν. 35β.

108. ΠΑΠΑΖΟΤΟΣ, *Βέροια*, 92, refers to the following passage: *Γέγονεν ἡμέτερον ψηφηφόρημα ἐπὶ τῇ μέσῳ αὐτοῦ τὸ καὶ τοῦ Μαριανοῦ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ ἐπὶ θυγατρὶ γαμβροῦ τοῦ Κρητικοῦ ἐκείνου Κωνσταντίνου ἀνακνυσάσῃ ὑποθέσει*: *Ponemata diaphora*, 26, 1 (p. 100).

109. ΠΑΠΑΖΟΤΟΣ, *Βέροια*, 92.

of St Eleutherios as the object of Amarianos' veneration. This holy bishop of Illyricum¹¹⁰ is rarely depicted in monumental painting¹¹¹. Nonetheless, his representations do appear in several major fresco ensembles¹¹². St Eleutherios belonged to the eschelon of saints particularly venerated by the Byzantines for their prophylactic and therapeutic powers. He was renowned as a protector of the sick as well as of sailors and pregnant women¹¹³. If included in a fresco program, St Eleutherios is usually depicted in the sanctuary as a member of an assembly of holy bishops, whether he is shown frontally or while taking part in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In this regard, the representation of the saint in Beroia is unique¹¹⁴. It seems that the presence of the saint in the Old Metropolis should be related to the significance of his name, which derives from the adjective ἐλεύθερος, meaning "free." The saint, in other words, may be seen as an allegory of the desired freedom from a disease or more likely an enemy, the Latins in particular, as has been suggested by Papazotos¹¹⁵. Amarianos's depiction may indicate his involvement in the fresco decoration

110. His synaxis was held on December 15 in his martyrium near the area of Xerolophos in Constantinople (*Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, cols. 307ff).

111. The island of Crete is an exception. Depictions of St Eleutherios are here encountered with greater frequency. See I. SPATHARAKIS, *Dated Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, Leiden 2001, *passim*.

112. As e.g. in a mosaic portrait in Hosios Loukas, Phokida (ΕΥ. ΣΤΙΚΑΣ, *Τὸ Οἰκοδομικὸν Χρονικὸν τῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Ὁσίου Λουκᾶ Φωκίδας*, Athens 1970, πίν. 62), in the Church of St Panteleimon at Nerezi, (I. SINKEVIĆ, *The Church of St Panteleimon at Nerezi*, Wiesbaden 2000, 45), in the Monastery of Archangel Michael at Thari (M. ACHEIMASTOU - POTAMIANOU, *Στο Θάρι της Ρόδου. Ο ναός και οι τοιχογραφίες της Μονῆς του Ταξιάρχη Μιχαήλ*, Athens 2006, 33, 37, 40-42, 44-46, πίν. 2.), in the Virgin's church at Studenica (B. BABIĆ, V. KORAĆ, S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Studenica*, Beograd 1986, 65, 76), in the St George church at Episkope in the Mani, in the church of St Strategos at Epano Mpoularii in the same region (N. DRANDAKIS, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, 1995, 178-179, σχεδ. 29, 180, 396, 430, πίν. 101), etc.

113. See the Menaion for December 15: *Τῶν ἐπιτόκων γυναιῶν Πάτερ κηδόμενος, ἐλευθερίαν δίδως, τῷ Ναῷ σου φοιτώσας, εὐπλοῖαν δὲ πάλιν ἄλλοις θερμῶς, ἐξαιτοῦσιν ἐπέδωκας, καὶ τοῖς νοσοῦσιν ὑγίαν σὺ χορηγεῖς, διαλάμπων ἐν τοῖς θαύμασιν*. Undoubtedly this is the reason why St Eleutherios is depicted together with the holy physicians Panteleimon, Kosmas and Damian in the church of St Basil of the Bridge in Arta. See D. GIANNOULIS, *Οι τοιχογραφίες των Βυζαντινῶν μνημείων της Ἁρτας κατὰ την περίοδο του Δεσποτάτου της Ηπείρου*, Ioannina 2010 194, fig. 36.

114. GERSTEL, *Beholding the sacred mysteries*, 95.

115. PAPAZOTOS, *Βέροια*, 243-244.

of the Old Metropolis. On the other hand, one should not exclude the possibility that Amarianos was a military commander who commissioned his portrait after a successful campaign. The presence of a military saint on horseback on the south face of the pillar could point to a military context.

The stylistic features of the frescoes in the Old Metropolis, as well as the historical context, point to the years around 1220/1222 as the date of their execution. At this time, Theodore was already in Beroia, preparing for the liberation of Thessalonike. Theodore's ambition, however, eloquently voiced in the writing of the ecclesiastical luminaries of his time, was the liberation of the New Sion, i.e. Constantinople. The same ambition is also reflected in the Beroia murals. While there is no evidence that Theodore was personally involved in the decoration of the Old Metropolis, these murals subtly, yet unmistakably, promote Theodore's political and ideological program.

I wish to conclude this brief survey of the intersection between art and politics in the State of Epiros under Theodore's rule by turning to the fragmentary fresco decoration in the basilica of the Theotokos *Acheiropoietos* in Thessalonike. The decoration, preserved on the north wall of the south aisle, above the arcade, consists of a series of figures of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia, depicted alternately as standing or *en buste*, in medallions (Fig. 7)¹¹⁶. Of these figures, eighteen remain. Scholars typically date the frescoes in the *Acheropoietos* to the period of Theodore's short rule over Thessalonike¹¹⁷. Yet there is no direct evidence, neither historical, nor stylistic, to support this chronology. In my opinion, it is possible that the basilica was decorated with the frescoes of the Forty Martyrs after 1230, that is, after the battle of Klokotnitsa, in memory of the soldiers who had died in this battle. One should recall in this regard that the catastrophe at Klokotnitsa took place on 9 March, which is, significantly, the feast day of the Forty Martyrs. Flanking the solemn file of the Sebasteian saints in the south aisle of the *Acheiropoietos*—all depicted as martyrs, with crosses in their hands—are

116. E. KOURKOUTIDOU - NIKOLAIDOU - A. TOURTA, *Περίπατοι στη Βυζαντινή Θεσσαλονίκη*, Athens 1997, 194–195, εικ. 235, 236; A. XYNGOPOULOS, Αἱ τοιχογραφίαι τῶν Ἀγίων Τεσσαράκοντα εἰς τὴν Ἀχειροποίητον τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης, *ΑΕ* (1957), 6–30.

117. V. DJURIĆ, La peinture murale byzantine XIIe et XIIIe siècle, in: *Actes du XVe Congrès International d'études Byzantines*, Athens 1980, 217; TSIGARIDAS, Les Peintures murales de l'ancienne Métropole de Véria, in: *Mileševa dans l'histoire du peuple serbe*, 100; PAPAZOTOS, *Βέροια*, 243, note 476.

two large candlesticks, each with a lit candle (Fig. 8). In Byzantine art, this iconographic motif usually appears in funerary contexts, as, for instance, in the northwest chapel of Hosios Loukas, where two candlesticks are part of a decidedly funerary program¹¹⁸. Here, it may allude to the tragic death that the Epirote army met at Klokotnitsa. If my interpretation is accepted, the frescoes in the *Acheropoietos* were executed during the reign of Manuel Angelos, despot and emperor of Thessalonike (r. 1230-1237), who succeeded his brother Theodore on the throne of Thessalonike after the latter's defeat and captivity in the hands of the Bulgars.

After the disaster at Klokotnica in 1230, the territory of the State of Epiros was drastically reduced. The principality continued to weaken, and it never reached the level of power and influence it had had during Theodore's rule. Nevertheless, even after the recovery of Constantinople and the restoration of the Byzantine Empire under Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261, the Epirote rulers continued not only to maintain and defend the independence of their state, but also to vigorously promote their ideological claims to the heritage of Constantinople. In this process, Epirote art continued to serve as a potent political instrument.

118. T. CHATZIDAKIS - BACHARAS, *Les Peintures Murales de Hosios Loukas: les chapelles occidentales*, Athens 1982, 111, ill. 36.



Draw 1: Deuteronomy (28:66)



Draw 2: Isaiah (52:13)



Draw 3: Habbakkuk (3:3)



Draw 4: Jeremiah (11:18)



Draw 5: Ezekiel (37:1)



Draw 7: Zachariah (9:9) or Sophonias (3:14)



Draw 6: Daniel (3:1 or 4:4)



Fig. 1: Episkope Mastrou, Bema, apse. (photo: Leonela Fundić).



Fig. 2: Blacherna monastery near Arta, a view from the southwest (photo: Leonela Fundić).



Fig. 3: Electrum trachy of Theodore Komnenos Doukas from National Museum in Belgrade (photo: Vujadin Ivanišević).



Fig. 4: St Demetrios Katsouris, near Arta. Dome, prophets Sophonias and Joel (photo: Historic and Photographic archive of Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens)



Fig. 5: Beroia, Old Metropolis, the second zone of the north wall of the nave
(photo: Georgios Fousteris).



Fig. 6: Beroia, Old Metropolis, The repentance of David (photo: Thanasis Papazotos).



Fig. 7: Thessalonike, Theotokos Acheiropoietos, north wall of the south aisle, figures of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia, detail (photo: Georgios Fousteris).



Fig. 8: Thessalonike, Theotokos Acheiropoietos, north wall of the south aisle, detail – candlestick with a lit candle (photo Georgios Foustieris).

SUMMARY

The paper sets out to reconstruct the political context of art-making in the State of Epiros under its second ruler Theodore Komnenos Doukas (r. 1215-1230), paying particular attention to two aspects: first, the ways in which art reflected and articulated political ideology; and second, the role played by works of art in the formation of a Byzantine imperial identity in exile.