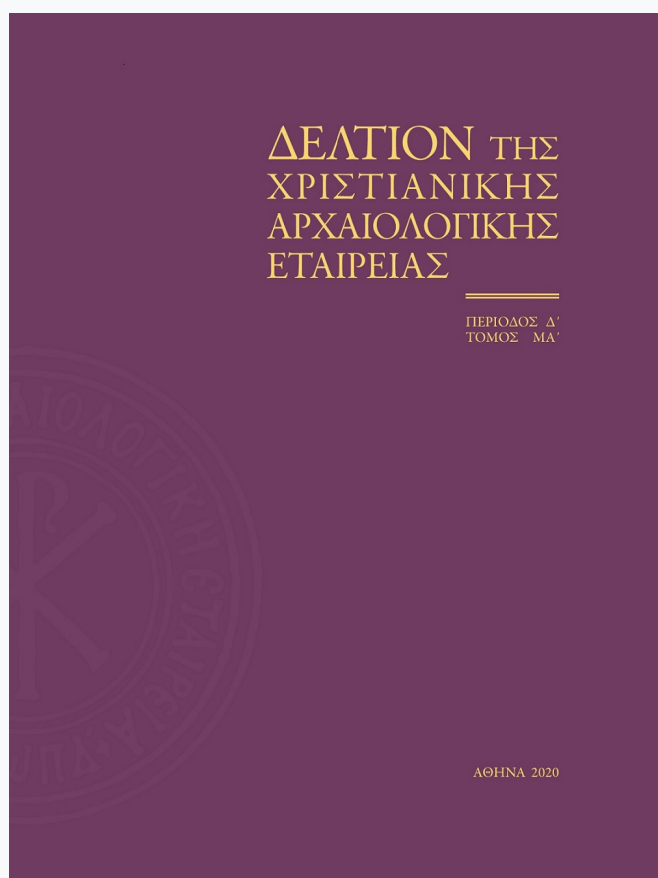


Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

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Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Πρόδρομος ο Ριγοδιώκτης. Ένας άγιος θεραπευτής των πυρετών στον ναό της Παναγίας στον Αρχατό της Νάξου (1285) .

Θεοδώρα ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΕΛΛΟΥ (Theodora KONSTANTELOU)

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SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST *RIGODIOKTES*.
A HOLY HEALER OF FEVERS IN THE CHURCH
OF THE PANAGHIA AT ARCHATOS, NAXOS (1285)

Σε απεικόνιση του αγίου Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου, που βρίσκεται στον ναό της Παναγίας στον Αρχατό της Νάξου και χρονολογείται με αφιερωτική επιγραφή την 1η Σεπτεμβρίου 1285, αναγράφεται η αθησαύριστη προσωνυμία Ριγοδιώκτης. Ο προσδιορισμός αυτός αναφέρεται στην ιδιότητα του Προδρόμου να διώκει τα ρίγη των πυρετών που προκαλούν διάφορες ασθένειες και κυρίως η ελονοσία. Σχετικές μαρτυρίες δεν εντοπίστηκαν έως τώρα στις βυζαντινές γραπτές πηγές. Προφορικές κυρίως ιστορίες γύρω από τον Πρόδρομο, που εξηγούν την εξεταζόμενη προσωνυμία, κυκλοφορούσαν την εποχή της οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας και στους νεότερους χρόνους. Μια ισχυρή τοπική εμφάνιση της ελονοσίας ίσως οδήγησε στην αποτύπωσή της στην εκκλησία μιας αγροτοποικινικής κοινότητας κατά την ύστερη μεσαιωνική εποχή.

On a depiction of St John the Baptist, located in the church of the Panaghia at Archatos on the island of Naxos and dated by inscription to the 1st of September 1285, the otherwise unknown epithet Rigodioktes (Ριγοδιώκτης) has been inscribed. This epithet refers to the ability of the Prodromos to dispel the shivering of fevers caused by a number of diseases and especially malaria. However, no evidence for this has been found to date in the Byzantine written sources. But, some oral narratives that shed light on this capacity of the saint were circulating in the Ottoman and Modern eras. A local outbreak of malaria may have caused this cult aspect of the saint to surface in the church of an agrarian-pastoral community in the Late Medieval period.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

13ος αιώνας, εικονογραφία, άγιος Ιωάννης ο Πρόδρομος ο Ριγοδιώκτης, αφιερωτικές επιγραφές, τιμή αγίων, αγροτικές κοινωνίες, ιστορία της υγείας, ελονοσία, Νάξος, Αρχατός, ναός της Παναγίας.

Keywords

13th century; iconography; Saint John the Baptist Rigodioktes; dedicatory inscriptions; the cult of saints; agrarian societies; history of health; malaria; Naxos; Archatos; church of the Panaghia.

The church of the Panaghia is situated in a large rural region known as Archatos in the southwest part of Naxos. Although the toponym probably refers to a place

with gardens and trees¹, scrub now dominates Archatos and today this area is used mainly for pasture.

The church of the Panaghia, built on the side of a low

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** This study is based on on-site research carried out on Naxos in 2016-2017 with funding from the Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture (Dissertation Grant 2016). Preliminary versions of this text were presented at two conferences, the first of which “Περὶ τῶν Κυκλάδων νήσων”, Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στις Κυκλάδες” was held at the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens in November 2017, and the second “Ημερίδα προς τιμήν της ιστορικού Κατερίνας Γαρδικά από τους μαθητές της”, took place at the Historical Archive of the University of Athens in December 2017. I am especially indebted to Katerina Gardika for encouraging me to examine this particular attribute of Saint John the Baptist. I would also like to thank,

Eirini Afentoulidou, Petros Bouras-Vallianatos, Agamemnon Tselikas and Manolis Patedakis for bringing to my attention material related to the topic. I am also grateful to Maria Panayotidi-Kesisoglou, Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, Ioanna Bitha, Angeliki Katsioti, Vasileios Marinis, Stratis Papaioannou, as well as Stephanos Efthymiadis who read the article and provided invaluable comments and suggestions. Ioli Vingopoulou and Aliko Asvesta helped to identify the provenance of the sketch of the “The Column of St John” in Athens. Valerie Nunn and Prodromos Papanikolaou improved with great care the style of the English.

¹I. K. Promponas, “Αρχατός ένας απόγονος ομηρισμού στο ναξικό ιδίωμα”, *Archatos* (February – April 1997/2), 5-6.



Fig. 1. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, view from the east.



Fig. 2. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, view from the southwest.

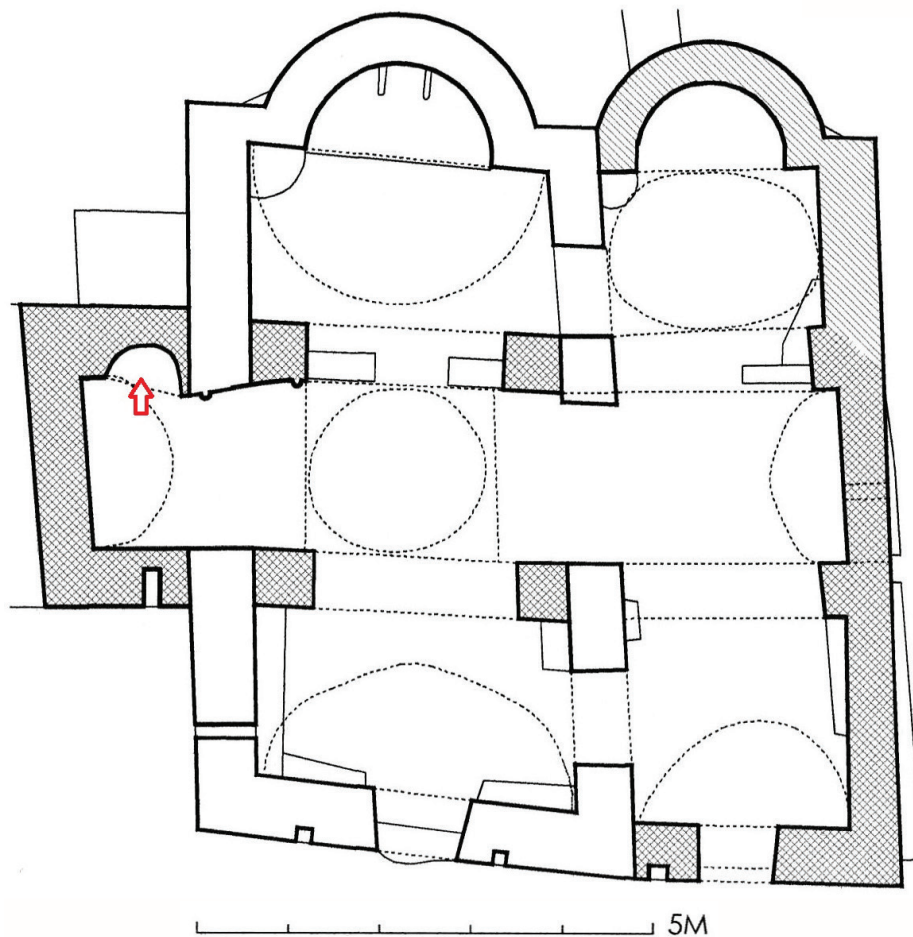


Fig. 3. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, plan. The three phases of the construction, according to Klimis Aslanidis.

hill, consists of a domed single-aisle church with two chapels attached to its south and north sides respectively² (Figs 1, 2, 3). The composite form of the church complex is the result of a series of successive alterations and additions. Initially the church was built as a single-nave, barrel-vaulted church, possibly in the Middle Byzantine period³. Later, probably in the thirteenth century,

the church acquired its new architectural form and additional devotional space with the construction of the dome and the addition of the two lateral chapels⁴.

Inside the church two layers of wall paintings have survived⁵. The second layer, which is dated by inscription

² Kl. Aslanidis, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Νάξο. Η μετεξέλιξη από την παλαιοχριστιανική στη μεσοβυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική* (Βυζαντινά Μνημεία 17), Thessaloniki 2017, 336-343.

³ Ibid, 338-339. Kl. Aslanidis, "The evolution from Early Christian to Middle Byzantine architecture on the island of Naxos", *Naxos and the Byzantine Aegean: Insular Responses to Regional Change* (Papers and Monographs from the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 7), eds J. Crow – D. Hill, Athens 2018, 317.

⁴ Aslanidis, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Νάξο*, op.cit. (n. 2), 338-339.

⁵ The wall paintings of the church are unpublished. For brief mentions see, G. Dimitrakallīs, "Ο ναός της Παναγίας Ἀρχατοῦ Νάξου", *1ο Συμπόσιο ΧΑΕ (Athens 1981)*, 15-16. G. S. Mastoropoulos, "Οἱ ἐκκλησίες τῆς περιοχῆς Φιλωτίου", *Φιλώτι*, 1, Athens 1986, 109-110. M. Panayotidi, "Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἁγίου Γεωργίου Λαθροῦν στη Νάξο", *DChAE* 16 (1991-1992), 150-151. Eadem, "Ἡ ἐκκλησία τῆς Γέννησης στο μοναστήρι τῆς Παναγίας Καλορίτισσας στη Νάξο. Φάσεις τοιχογράφησης", *Ἀντίφωνον. Αφιέρωμα στον καθηγητὴ Ν. Β. Δρανδάκη*, ed. V. Katsaros, Thessaloniki 1994, 550, 557. A. D. Mitsani, "Ἡ μνημειακὴ ζωγραφικὴ στὶς Κυκλάδες κατὰ

to the year 1285, is more extensively preserved and is found in the sanctuary, the dome and the two chapels. The fresco decoration follows the main principles found in the pictorial programs of Late Byzantine churches in general but with some marked peculiarities⁶. An unusual Deesis with the Virgin and Child in the center, flanked by the Archangel Michael and St John the Baptist, is depicted in the semi-dome of the apse. Co-officiating and frontally depicted bishops decorate the semicircular wall of the apse as well as the lateral walls of the sanctuary. The Mandyllion is faintly visible on the east wall above the apse, and immediately below are the prophets Solomon and David with excerpts from their prophecies on scrolls referring to the Annunciation that follows. The vault is painted with the scene of the Ascension in the usual way. The holy physicians Cosmas and Damian are prominently depicted here, on the lateral

το 13ο αιώνα”, *DChAE* 21 (2000), 96, 98-99, 100, 102, 107, 112, 118, 119. Eadem, “Η χορηγία στις Κυκλάδες από τον 6ο μέχρι τον 14ο αιώνα: Η μαρτυρία των επιγραφών”, *EEBS* 42 (2004-2006), 424. Ph. A. Drososyianni, “A ‘palimpsest’ wall and related paintings at Naxos”, *Θωράκιον. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Παύλου Λαζαρίδη*, Athens 2004, 343. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Monumental Painting on the Aegean Islands in the Thirteenth Century: Rhodes and Naxos”, *Byzantine Art in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade. The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences, International Congress, March 9-12, 2004*, dir. P. L. Vocotopoulos, Athens 2007, 27. Ch. Pennas, “Βυζαντινή παράδοση και τοπική κοινωνία στην έδρα του Δουκάτου της Νάξου. Η μαρτυρία των μνημείων”, *Το Δουκάτο του Αιγαίου, Πρακτικά Επιστημονικής Συνάντησης, Νάξος – Αθήνα 2007* (Institute of Byzantine Research - National Hellenic Research Foundation, International Symposium, 20), eds N. G. Moschonas – M.-G. Lily Stylianoudi, Athens 2009, 149-150, 185. On the wall paintings and the inscriptions of the church see most recently, Th. Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής στην ύπαιθρο της Νάξου (τέλη 13ου – αρχές 14ου αιώνα). Κοινωνικός χώρος και εικαστική δημιουργία*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Athens, Athens 2019, 143-219. E. Kountoura Galaki, “Women Living on Palaiologan Naxos: the epigraphic evidence”, *Women and Monasticism in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean: Decoding a Cultural Map* (Section of Byzantine Research - National Hellenic Research Foundation, International Symposium, 23), eds E. Kountoura Galaki – E. Mitsiou, Athens 2019, 172-175.

⁶ A full and comprehensive record and analysis of the iconographic program of this church is beyond the scope of this brief study. However, for a more detailed account of the church and its painted decoration, Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 162-211.

sides of the intrados of the eastern arch the center of which is decorated with a rare subject, that of the Hand of God holding the souls of the righteous (Fig. 4).

The dome's decoration includes a depiction of Christ Pantokrator in a medallion, and a bust of a prophet in the register below. The scene of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple is placed in an unusual position, that is on the west face of the eastern arch of the dome and above the entrance to the sanctuary. This location, along with the symmetrical “liturgical” formula of the scene, would have invited the congregation to contemplate the Eucharistic meaning. A tetramorph Cherub and two six-winged seraphim, elements inspired by prophetic visions and the liturgy alike, are represented on the east face of the western arch opposite the scene of the Presentation in the Temple. A unique place has been reserved for the depiction of one of the most popular saints of every rural society, St George, inscribed *Ο ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ* (the farmer?)⁷, who is painted on the south-eastern pendentive of the dome (Fig. 5). The holy physicians Cyrus and John (?) are depicted on the north and south parts of the western arch respectively.

A masonry proskynetarion highlights the dedicatee of the church, i.e. the Virgin, with a depiction of the Virgin and Child. This image is painted over an earlier layer with a representation of the Prodomos (Fig. 7).

In the south chapel apse a fragment from the face and the cruciform halo of a Christ Pantokrator survives over an earlier layer of painting, from which a depiction of St Mamas and a female saint are preserved. The decoration of the north chapel is quite interesting. The conch is decorated with the image of the Prodomos *Ο ΠΥΤΟΔΙΩ/ΚΤΗC*, which is the subject of this study. On the chapel's north wall, two panels each contain a saintly figure (Fig. 6). The first one depicts St George *Ο ΔΙΑCΟ/ΠΙΤΗC*, accompanied here by the epithet *Ο [CΩ]ΤΗ[P]* (the Savior). The other panel depicts either Kyriakos, Patriarch of Constantinople, or the legendary Kyriakos, bishop of Jerusalem, accompanied by the inscription *Ο ΤΩΝ ΠΕΜΑ/ΤΩΝ ΙΑΤΗΡ* (healer of rheums)⁸ (Fig. 6).

⁷ On the problem of whether the inscription should be read as *Γεοργός* or *Γοργός*, see Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 182-185. For details of St George Gorgos see, V. Katsaros, “Άγιος Γεώργιος ο Γοργός: η αλληγορική ερμηνεία στην εννοιολογική μετάλλαξη του επιθέτου”, *ZRVI* 50 (2013), 505-519.

⁸ On the problem of identifying the saint, see A. Semoglou, “Saint



Fig. 4. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, intrados of the eastern arch. Saints Cosmas and Damian and the Hand of God holding the souls of the righteous.



Fig. 5. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, south-eastern pendentive. Saint George Ο ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ.



Fig. 6. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, north chapel, north wall. Saint Kyriakos Ο ΤΩΝ ΠΕΜΑ/ΤΩΝ ΙΑΤΗΡ and Saint George Diasorites Ο CΩΤΗΡ.

The surviving decoration of the chapel is completed by the images of two more unidentified bishops and another military saint all of whom are painted on the lower register of the western wall. On the eastern part of the vault

fragments from the scene of the Marys at the Tomb and the Descent into Hades can be identified.

Eight rather faded dedicatory inscriptions have been preserved within the painted program⁹. Their locations

Cyriaque et la Vraie Croix. Essai d'interprétation d'une icône crétoise du Louvre", *La Revue du Louvre et des musées de France* 51/5 (décembre 2001), 35-40. On this depiction and its inscription, see Konstantellou, Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής, op.cit. (n. 5), 200-207.

⁹ Ibid., 145-158. Of these only two have been published to date. See below p. 184. It should be noted here that a large part of the frescoes has been destroyed or is heavily covered by salt deposits.



Fig. 7. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia. The conch with the depiction of the Prodomos in the north chapel and the built proskynetarion with the depiction of the Virgin Mary and Child.



Fig. 8. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, north chapel, the conch. Saint John the Baptist “Rigodioktes”.



Fig. 9. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, the conch. Saint John the Baptist "Rigodioktes" (drawing).

designate the area that each donor financed with his contribution, reflecting social groupings, kinship ties between donors and particular devotional preferences¹⁰. These inscriptions record two or possibly three priests, the wife of one of them, four lay couples, of whom one named their children in the inscription in addition to themselves, and two single individuals, a man and a woman. With the exception of the priests, none of the donors are given any titles or professions that could inform us about their social status. In areas under Latin rule using only a name to identify themselves in inscriptions has usually led scholars to assume that these people belonged to local families, who had managed to keep their land, or that they were peasant farmers with some sort of socioeconomic prominence¹¹.

Based on the above observations we can assume that the wall paintings of the second layer were the result of a series of individual donations made by people who had settled in this area and whose main occupation was farming and animal husbandry¹². And we can safely in-

Future conservation and cleaning of the wall paintings will probably shed more light on the inscriptions of the church.

¹⁰ S. Kalopissi-Verti, "Collective Patterns of Patronage in the Late Byzantine Village: The Evidence of Church Inscriptions", *Donation et donateurs dans le monde byzantin* (Réalités Byzantines, 14), eds J.-M. Spieser – E. Yota, Paris 2012, 133. It was normal for donors to commission depictions of saints who were their namesakes or closely related in some other way with reference to their familial state and their particular needs (e.g. health), see Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 159-161.

¹¹ Kalopissi-Verti, "Collective Patterns of Patronage", op.cit. (n. 10), 129. Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 158-159.

¹² Although no field survey has ever been made in the area, it can be stated that there is no other local evidence in the Middle Byzantine period of the sort of artistic and construction activity seen in Archatos in the 13th century. The only testimony to the habitation of the area during the Middle Byzantine period relies on the possible dating of the first phase of the church of the Panaghia to the 11th or 12th century, see Aslanidis, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Νάξο*, op.cit. (n. 2), 338-339. Curiously the site was not recorded in the list of villages named in the well-known census of 1670: A. E. Kasdagli, *Land and marriage settlements in the Aegean. A case study of seventeenth-century Naxos*, Venice 1999, 36, map 3. Therefore, it is possible that the settlement had a somewhat semi-permanent character or that it never acquired the fully established form of other settlements encountered in the central and more densely populated part of the island.



Fig. 10. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, north chapel, the conch. The epigram on the scroll of Saint John the Baptist "Rigodioktes" (detail of Fig. 8).

fer that the church of the Panaghia served their liturgical and devotional needs¹³. The iconographic program corroborates these assumptions, given that some scenes and saints have been chosen to highlight the importance of the celebration of the liturgy, and the need to protect agricultural produce, as well as to ensure the salvation and commemoration of the donors. As can be inferred from the selection of saints depicted, promoting good health in the community was a central and recurring preoccupation of the congregation.

¹³ Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 158-159.

The depiction of St John the Baptist inscribed *Ριγδιώκτης* (Rigodioktes)

In this church special attention has been paid to the depiction of St John the Baptist with the inscription *O PYTOΔΙΩ/ΚΤΗC*, which has been painted in the conch of the north chapel (Figs 3, 8, 9). The saint is shown standing against a red background with a bluish-colored zone at the bottom. The figure is barely preserved, since there are now considerable losses from the painted surface in the central part of the conch. Only the lower part of the Prodromos's goatskin and chiton are visible.

The name of the saint *O ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩ(ΑΝΝΗΣ) Ο ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΣ* (Saint John the Forerunner) is written on either side of the figure. The saint's right hand is raised in a blessing or speech gesture, while in his left hand he holds a staff and an inscribed scroll. On the latter the following metrical text is written (Fig. 10):

ΜΕΤΑΝΟΕΙ[ΤΕ] / ΠΑΝΤΕC·H/MΑΡΤΙΚΟΤΕC·/
Τ(ΩΝ) ΟΥΡΑΝΩΝ / ΓΑΡ Η ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙ·Α ΠΕΛΑC·
ΗΝ / Κ(ΑΙ) ΕΙΗΜΗΝ, ΟC / ὁρᾶν, ἅπας / σΘΕΝΗ+

The passage which can be restored as three lines of Byzantine dodecasyllabic verse is as follows: “Μετανοεῖτε πάντες ἡμάρτηκότες, τῶν οὐρανῶν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία πέλας, ἣν καὶ εἴη μὴν ὥς ὁρᾶν ἅπας σθένει” and can be translated as: “Repent all sinners, for the kingdom of heaven is near, which verily may everyone see, as he can”¹⁴.

To the saint's right and beneath his raised hand is the inscription + *O PYTOΔΙΩ/ΚΤΗC* (Figs 8, 9, 11). This uncommon position of the epithet, far from the name of the Prodromos, may be attributed to an attempt to



Fig. 11. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, north chapel, the conch. The inscription of “Rigodioktes” (*O PYTOΔΙΩ-ΚΤΗC*) and the dedicatory inscription on the right of the Prodromos (detail of Fig. 8).

connect it with the dedicatory inscription that follows. This inscription is written in white capitals and lower-case letters in six lines¹⁵. The inscription reads:

+ ΕΤΟΥC, ΨΔ' : ΙΝΔ(ΙΚΤΙΩΝΟ)C ΙΔ' : μΗν(ι)
CΕΠΤ(ΕΜΒΡΙΩ) α'. ΔΕ(ΗCΙ)C ΤΟΥ Δ(ΟΥΛ)ΟΥ
ΤΟΥ / Θ(ΕΟ)Υ μιχα(η)λ ΙΕΡΕ(ΩC) ΤΟΥ ΖΩ/
ΓΡΑΦΟΥ : ΡΗΧΟΥ : ΤΟΥ ΧΑΡΧΑΖΑΝΗ : ΚΑΙ
ΤΗC CΥΜΒΙΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΑΝΗC.¹⁶ (Fig. 11).

¹⁴ I am most grateful to Manolis Patedakis for the final reading of the inscription and restoration of the epigram. Although metrical texts are often found on depictions of the Prodromos, on both wall paintings and icons, this specific epigram has not been encountered before in any of the published representations of the saint from Naxos or elsewhere. See A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* (Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung, 25), Vienna 2009, passim. Idem, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst* (Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung, 23), Vienna 2010, passim. For the epigrams preserved in the wall paintings in Naxos, see Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 64-66, 196-197, 283-287.

¹⁵ Dimitrokallis, “Παναγία Ἀρχατός”, op.cit. (n. 5), 15-16. S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece*, Vienna 1992, 87. Mitsani, “Η χορηγία στις Κυκλάδες”, op.cit. (n. 5), 424. Pennas, “Βυζαντινή παράδοση”, op.cit. (n. 5), 150. Konstantellou, *Ένα «εργαστήριο» ζωγραφικής*, op.cit. (n. 5), 148, 150, 155-157. Kountoura Galaki, “Women Living on Palaiologan Naxos”, op.cit. (n. 5), 172-175.

¹⁶ + Έτους, Ψδ' : ἰνδ(ικτιώνω)ς ιδ' : μην(ι) Σεπ(εμβρίω) α'.



Fig. 12. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, north chapel, the conch. The dedicatory inscription on the left of the Prodromos (detail of Fig. 8).

To the left of the figure a three-line inscription is written in white capitals and lowercase letters:

ΔΕ(ΗCΙ)C ΙΩ(ΑΝΝ)ΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΑΡΖΑΗ / (ΚΑΙ)
Τ(ΗC) ΣΥΜΒΙΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ / ΕΥ[Γ]ΕΝΟΥC:¹⁷ (Fig. 12).

According to the first of these inscriptions the wall paintings were completed on September 1, 1285 by the priest and painter Michael, who paid for the depiction of the Prodromos, along with two couples, Richos and Anne Charchazanis, and Ioannis and Eugeno Charzais. It is worth noting the rare and similar sounding family names of the donors (Charchazanis, Charzais), which indicates a common and nonnative ancestry¹⁸, if not a

δε(ησι)ς τοῦ δ(ούλ)ου τοῦ / Θεοῦ Μιχα(ή)λ ἱερέω)ς του ζω/γράφου: / Ρήχου: τοῦ Χαρχαζάνη: / καὶ τῆς συμβίου αὐτοῦ Ἀνῆς. (In the year 6794 (=1285): the fourteenth indiction / on the first (day) of the month of September / prayer of the servant of / God Michael priest and painter / Richos Charchazanis: / and his wife Anne).

¹⁷ Δε(ησι)ς Ἰω(άνν)ου τοῦ Χαρχαζή / (καὶ) τῆς συμβίου αὐτοῦ / Εὐ[γ]ενοῦς: (Prayer of Ioannis of Charzais / and his wife / Eugeno:).

¹⁸ PLP 30628 (Χαρχαζής Ἰωάννης / Charzaes Ioannes), PLP 30706 (Χαρχαζάνης Πῆχος / Charchazanes Rechos). I was not able to locate other examples of the exact same form of these names. Similar family names such as Charzanas and Chazanis appear in the Middle and Late Byzantine period in certain regions, mainly in

possible kinship. One of the donors, Ioannis Charzais, who shares his first name with the depicted saint, is following a widespread practice in Byzantium of dedicating an image of his sainted namesake.

A rich decorative border –whose function is presumably apotropaic– surrounds the conch. The border consists of a series of motifs; a twisting tendril with red flowers, a medallion with a Maltese cross, another medallion with a schematic six-petalled rosette flanked by a brownish-red bird and a black feline, and a rhomboidal grid filled with dotted circles and stems arranged crosswise. This special framing emphasizes the significance of the representation of the Baptist in the context of communal worship and private piety¹⁹.

As the last of the prophets and the first martyr of the Incarnation, a model of asceticism and an important intercessor, the Prodromos is frequently portrayed in portable works of art and is regularly found in the iconographic programs of Byzantine churches, especially those of the Late Byzantine

Macedonia and Asia Minor, on which see E. Ragia, *Η κοιλάδα του Κάτω Μαιάνδρου, ca 600-1300. Γεωγραφία και ιστορία*, Thessaloniki 2009, 141. M. Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou, *Βυζαντινὰ ἔγγραφα τῆς Μονῆς Πάτμου. 2. Δημοσίων λειτουργῶν*, Athens 1980, 147-148. C. Pavlikianov, *The Byzantine Documents of the Athonite Monastery of Karakallou and Selected Acts from the Ottoman Period (1294-1835)*, Sofia 2015, 105-106. PLP 30629 (Χαρχαζάνης Γεώργιος). The names may possibly reflect an origin in the theme of Charsianon, either from the region known as Chorzini or Chorzani or Kortzeni or Chorzini (Χορχοζηνή), which was located at the northeast boundary of the empire in Asia Minor, bordering the kingdom of Iberia: G. Leveniotis, *Η πολιτική κατάρρηση του Βυζαντίου στην Ανατολή. Το ανατολικό σύνορο και η κεντρική Μικρά Ασία κατά το β' ἡμῖον του 11ου αἰ.*, Thessaloniki 2007, 57. Cf. also the last name Μωροχαρχαζάνης, known from the 9th century: A. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden*, 1, Vienna 2011, 364-365; for relevant examples and bibliography, and the names Charatzis and Charatzas, see PLP 30614-30616. For more examples see also, Kountoura Galaki, "Women Living on Palaiologan Naxos", op.cit (n. 5), 172-175.

¹⁹ G. Peers, *Sacred Shock. Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. S. Kalopissi-Verti, "The Proskynetaria of the Tempon and Narthex: Form, Imagery, Spatial Connections, and Reception", *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. S. E. J. Gerstel, Washington, D. C. 2006, 107-134.

period²⁰. However, his depictions are rarely accompanied by additional epithets, even though it was fairly common practice in the Late Byzantine period to include this sort of designation²¹. On a seal from the first half of the eleventh century the saint's image is accompanied by the word *προστάτης* (protector)²². On inscriptions in the church of the Zoodochos Pege at Geraki (1431)²³ the saint is referred to as apostle, martyr and angel, names known from both the hymnography and encomia dedicated to him. The inscription *Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΠΙΕΤΡΑ*, written on a depiction of the Baptist in the church of the Panaghia Agrelopousaina on Chios (dated slightly before 1317), is, most likely, associated with an icon once housed at the well-known monastery of the Prodomos in Constantinople²⁴.

However, the epithet *ῥιγοδιώκτης* that accompanies the representation of the Baptist in the church of Archatos is not, to my knowledge, found in any of the examples published to date. The compound word *ῥιγοδιώκτης* consists of two words: *ῥίγος* and *διώκτης*. The first is used to indicate the shivering caused by fevers²⁵. The

same term is used to describe feverish diseases related to malaria that Byzantine emperors often suffered from²⁶. Ioannis Stafidas makes special reference to tertiary shivers (*τριταῖον ῥίγος*) – a characteristic symptom of malaria – in his fourteenth-century *iatrosophion*²⁷. The second word *διώκτης*, from the verb *διώκω*, is often used meaning “expeller” of, for example, illness or demons²⁸. Could this particular epithet then have been used to attribute the ability to cure shivering, and particularly feverish bouts of malaria, to St John the Baptist?

Testimonies from the Byzantine world: the therapeutic power of the Prodomos's head

Tracking this quality attributed to the Prodomos back through the Byzantine world is a daunting task. In fact, there are few testimonies associating the saint with any healing qualities. Sporadic references to the saint and his relics and their healing powers are found in some fifth-century texts. According to the account of the anti-Chalcedonian bishop John Rufus there was a church dedicated to the Prodomos near Edessa in Mesopotamia, where incubation was practiced and there were some testimonies to a pilgrim's eyes having been healed by the water from the *hagiasma* of the church²⁹. In the story of

²⁰ From the vast literature on the saint, see: E. Sdrakas, *Johannes der Täufer in der Kunst des christlichen Ostens*, Berlin 1941. A. Katsioti, *Οι σκηνές της ζωής και ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος του Αγίου Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου στη βυζαντινή τέχνη*, Athens 1998. B. Pitarakis, “Wings of Salvation in Thirteenth Century Art”, *First International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium Proceedings. Change in the Byzantine World in the 12th and 13th Centuries*, eds E. Akyürek – N. Necipoğlu – A. Ödekan, Istanbul 2010, 604-608. Tz. Papageorgiou, “Η απεικόνιση του αγίου Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου στο ναό της Ζωοδόχου Πηγής στο κάστρο Γερακίου Λακωνίας: η εξέλιξη της εικονογραφίας της μορφής στην παλαιολόγεια και πρώιμη μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική”, *Ανταπόδοση. Μελέτες βυζαντινής και μεταβυζαντινής αρχαιολογίας και τέχνης προς τιμήν της καθηγήτριας Ελένης Δελιγιάννη-Δωρή*, eds Sm. Arvaniti et al., Athens 2010, 319-339.

²¹ This practice, attested as early as the 11th century, was fairly widespread in the Late Byzantine period. See recently, I. Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium*, Cambridge 2016, 351-373, with relevant bibliography.

²² W. Seibt – M. L. Zarnit, *Das byzantinische Bleisiegel als Kunstwerk: Katalog zur Ausstellung*, Vienna 1997, 152-153.

²³ Papageorgiou, “Η απεικόνιση του αγίου Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου”, *op.cit.* (n. 20), 320.

²⁴ On this image, see O. Vassi, “Ο παλαιολόγιος ναός της Παναγίας Αγρελωπούσαινας στη Χίο: η μνημειακή ζωγραφική”, *DChAE* 39 (2018), 325.

²⁵ E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, New York 1900, s.v. “ῥιγοπύ-

ρετος, ῥιγοπύρετον, ῥίγος, ῥιγώδης”. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, eds H. G. Liddell – R. Scott, 9th edition, with a Revised Supplement edited by P. G. W. Glare, with the assistance of A. A. Thompson, New York 1996, s.v. “ῥιγοπύρετος, ῥιγοπύρετον, ῥίγος”. S. Dimitrakos, *Μέγα λεξικόν ὅλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης*, 12, Athens 1953, s.v. “ῥιγοπυρέτιον, ῥιγοπύρετον, ῥιγοπύρετος, ῥίγος”. *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität*, 2/5-8, ed. E. Trapp, Vienna 2017, s.v. “ῥιγοπυρετώ, ῥιγοπυρέτιον ῥιγοπύρετον”.

²⁶ I. Lascaratos, *Νοσήματα βυζαντινῶν αυτοκρατόρων*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Ionian University, Corfu 1995, 458, 587. J. Lascaratos – S. Marketos, “The fatal disease of the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus III Paleologus (1328-1341 AD)”, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 90 (1997), 106-109.

²⁷ E. Legrand, *Bibliothèque grecque vulgaire*, 2, Paris 1881, 12.

²⁸ I. Anagnostakis – T. Papamastorakis, “St. Romanos *epi tēn sklepan*. A Saint Protector and Healer of Horses”, *Animals and Environment in Byzantium (7th-12th century)* (Institute of Byzantine Research - National Hellenic Research Foundation, International Symposium, 21), eds I. Anagnostakis – T. G. Kolias – E. Papadopoulou, Athens 2011, 147.

²⁹ F. Nau, “Jean Rufus évêque de Maïouma. Plérôphories: témoi-

the second Invention of the saint's head, in 452-453, contact with this relic restored the paralysed hand of a priest named Malchus, which had been shriveled by the prophet for having doubted the head's authenticity³⁰.

Further testimonies from the ninth century onward, record the miraculous agency of the most revered relic of the saint, his head³¹. In his *Chronographia* Theophanes the Confessor cites the therapeutic power of the head, which at that time was kept in a church dedicated to the saint at Emesa³². Its healing quality is highlighted in the hymnography of the feasts of the Invention and Beheading³³ and in the homilies written for those same

gnages et révélations contre le Concile de Chalcédoine. Version syriacque et traduction française”, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8, 5-208, 157-158. P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient. Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe*, Paris 1985, 352.

³⁰ E. Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques dans l'Empire romain d'Orient (IVe-VIe s.)*, Turnhout 2015, 73.

³¹ An exception to this is the icon of the Prodromos found in the monastery of Saint John Prodromos *tou Phoberou* which, according to the Continuator of Theophanes, accomplished many miraculous healings (mid-10th century). This icon was believed to have been the work of the well known painter Lazarus, who painted it after his release from prison, despite the injuries to his hands from the tortures inflicted on him by the Iconoclast emperor Theophilus (829-842). See C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents*, Toronto 1986, 159. Although this information is interesting, it should probably be understood in the context of post-iconoclastic narratives, and thus as an attempt to emphasize the importance of works made by iconodule painters.

³² *Τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει μετετέθη ἡ κάρα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ προδρομοῦ καὶ βαπτιστοῦ ἐκ τῆς μονῆς τοῦ Σηλαίου εἰς τὸν ναὸν αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν Ἑμεσηνῶν πόλιν περιφανῆ ὄντα, καὶ ἡ κατάβασις ἐκτίσθη, ἐνθα μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ὑπὸ τῶν πιστῶν προσκυνουμένη εὐωδία σωματικῇ τε καὶ πνευματικῇ τιμάται, βλύζουσα πᾶσι τοῖς πίστει προστρέχουσι τὰ ἰάματα*, Θεοφάνης, *Χρονογραφία*, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor, I, Leipzig 1883, 431.16-21.

³³ *Menaion* February 24: “Μνήμη τῆς εὐρέσεως τῆς τιμίας κεφαλῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Προφήτου, Προδρομοῦ καὶ Βαπτιστοῦ Ἰωάννου. [...] Δεῦτε, τὴν τιμίαν Κεφαλὴν, τὴν ἀποτιμηθεῖσαν τῷ ξίφει, τοῦ Βαπτιστοῦ οἱ πιστοί, σήμερον τιμῶμεν ἐν τῇ εὐρέσει αὐτῆς, ὑπαντῶντες ἐν ἁμασί, τιμῶντες ἐκ πόθου, χάριτας προχέουσαν, τῶν ἰαμάτων ἡμῖν [...]. Πάλαι, ὥσπερ θεῖος θησαυρὸς, στάμνῳ κεκρυμμένη ἡ Κάρα, τοῦ Βαπτιστοῦ ἐν τῇ γῇ, σήμερον τοῖς πέρασιν ἀποκαλύπτεται, ὥσπερ πλοῦτον προχέουσα, πηγὰς ἰαμάτων, νόσους θεραπεύουσα, ψυχὰς φωτίζουσα [...]. Ἐκ γῆς ἀνατείλασα ἡ τοῦ Προδρομοῦ κεφαλὴ, ἀκτῖνας ἀφίησι τῆς ἀφθαρσίας, πιστοῖς τῶν ἰάσεων, ἄνωθεν συναθροίζει [...]. Ἀφθόνου ἥνοιξας σὺ πηγῆς,

feasts³⁴. The Synaxarion of Constantinople refers to miracles and cures performed by the relic in passages that were read aloud on the feast days of the First and Second Inventions of the Head³⁵. Several phrases from hymnographic texts that emphasize the miraculous grace of the head are repeated in epigrams dedicated to these same feasts³⁶.

These texts refer to the famous relic as a source of remedies, relieving bodily pain and healing any illness. It was perhaps due to the healing power it possessed that the Studite patriarch Alexios presented the head from the Stoudios Monastery to the Emperor Basil II for a proskynesis shortly before the emperor's death³⁷.

πύλιν τοῖς ὑμνοῦσί σε ἡμῖν, πόθῳ αἰοῖδιμε Πρόδρομε, χάριτος τῆς θείας βλυζούσης νάματα, καὶ ῥεῖθρα ἰαμάτων πάντας εὐφραίνοντα [...]. Οὐκ ἔφερε κρύπτεσθαι, τῶν θαυμάτων ἡ πηγὴ, ὁ θησαυρὸς τῆς χάριτος, ἡ αἰοιδίμος Κάρα σου Βαπτιστά, Προφήτα καὶ Πρόδρομε, ἀλλ' ὀφθεῖσα προχέει ἰαμάτων πηγὰς. [...] Προφήτα Θεοῦ, καὶ Πρόδρομε τῆς χάριτος, τὴν Κάραν τὴν σὴν, ὡς ῥόδον ἱερῶτατον, ἐκ τῆς γῆς εὐράμενοι, τὰς ἰάσεις πάντοτε λαμβάνομεν.”

Menaion May 25: “Μνήμη τῆς τρίτης Εὐρέσεως τῆς τιμίας Κεφαλῆς τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἐνδόξου Προφήτου, Προδρομοῦ καὶ Βαπτιστοῦ Ἰωάννου. [...] Πάλαι, ὥσπερ θεῖος θησαυρὸς, σκεύει κεκρυμμένη ἡ Κάρα, τοῦ Βαπτιστοῦ ἐν τῇ γῇ σήμερον τοῖς πέρασιν ἀποκαλύπτεται, ὥσπερ πλοῦτον προχέουσα, πηγὰς ἰαμάτων, νόσους θεραπεύουσα, ψυχὰς φωτίζουσα [...]. Τὴν αἰοιδίμον Κάραν σου, μύρα ἰαμάτων ἀναπηγάξουσιν [...]. Ἐκ Κομάνων κομῶσαν, χάριν ἰαμάτων τὴν Κάραν σου Πρόδρομε, πρὸς τὴν Βασιλίδαν, εἰσοικίζεις τῶν πόλεων σήμερον [...]. Ἀπὸ γῆς, καθὼς πηγὴ τοῦ Παραδείσου, Κεφαλὴ θεοφιλῆς ἡ τοῦ Προδρομοῦ, ῥεῖθρα βλύζει χάριτος, καὶ θαυμάτων τὰ νάματα νέμει πᾶσι τοῖς χρῆζουσιν. Προσέλθωμεν οὖν πάντες, καὶ ἀντλήσωμεν προθύμως ἐκ ταύτης τῶν ἰαμάτων τοὺς θεῖους κρουνοὺς, ἀρδεύει γὰρ ψυχὰς ἐν δωρεαῖς ἀνάοις, καὶ κατακλύζει σωμάτων πόρους, καὶ πᾶσαν νόσον εὐθέτως αἶρει [...].”

Menaion August 29: “Μνήμη τῆς ἀποτομῆς τῆς τιμίας Κεφαλῆς τοῦ ἁγίου ἐνδόξου Προφήτου Προδρομοῦ, καὶ Βαπτιστοῦ Ἰωάννου: [...] Τῆς ἀποτιμηθείσης κεφαλῆς τοῦ Προδρομοῦ, τὰ μνημόσυνα τελέσωμεν, ποτὲ μὲν ἐπὶ πύνακι ἐκβλυζούσης αἵματα, νυνὶ δὲ ἐν τοῖς πέρασιν προχέουσης ἰάματα [...].”

³⁴ F. Halkin – A.-J. Festugière, *Dix textes inédits tirés du Ménologe impérial de Koutloulmou. Édition princeps et traduction française* (Cahiers d'orientalisme, VIII), Geneva 1984, 76.

³⁵ *Synaxarium CP*, 486-487.

³⁶ J. Christensen, “Inedita from the MS. Hauniensis 1899”, *Byzantina Symmeikta* 21 (2011), 348.

³⁷ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σκυλίτζη, *Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν*, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (CFHB, 5), ed. I. Thurn, Berlin – New York 1973, 368-369.89-92. Ἰωάννη τοῦ Ζωναρά, *Ἐπιτομὴ Ἱστοριῶν*, XVII.IX.X.2-12. *Ioannis Zonarae, Epitome Historiarum*,

However, apart from outlining a general picture of the relic's healing grace, none of the above sources connects it or the Prodomos with diseases affecting the head or with the shivering associated with fever. Surprisingly enough this specific property has not been recorded in texts where normally this sort of information could have been expected to surface; for instance in none of the published pilgrims' accounts that refer to the relics of the Prodomos in the monasteries of Constantinople is there any mention of their healing powers³⁸. The same holds true for the Byzantine service books (*euchologia*)³⁹ and Byzantine medical compendia (*iatrosophia*)⁴⁰.

IV (CSHB), eds M. Pinder – T. Büttner-Wobst, Bonn 1897, 125. Μιχαὴλ Γλυκαῖς, *Βίβλος χρονική*, IV. 14-16. *Michaelis Glycae annales* (CSHB), ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1836, 579. The aforementioned texts do not specifically state that the Patriarch presented the head of the Prodomos to Basil in order to cure him. But Vlada Stanković has proposed just that in, V. Stanković, "The Alexios Studites' patriarchate (1025-1043): A developmental stage in patriarchal power", *ZRVI* 39 (2001-2002), 73.

³⁸ R. Janin, "Les églises byzantines du Précurseur à Constantinople", *REB* 191-192 (1938), 312-351. Idem, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin. La Siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat œcuménique*. III. *Les églises et les monastères*, Paris 1953, 410-442. A. Effenberger, "Zur 'Reliquientopographie' von Konstantinopel in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit", *Millennium-Jahrbuch* 12 (2015), 264-328. Nevertheless the report by Nikos Atzamoglou, who recorded the *hagiasmata* in the churches of Constantinople and the surrounding area, is relevant here. Some of these holy springs, located in churches dedicated to the Baptist, were renowned for healing fevers, malaria and rheumatism. See N. Atzamoglou, *Τὰ ἁγίασματά της Πόλης*, Athens 1990, 75, 79, 83, 86, 86. However, caution should be exercised regarding the dating of these churches, as these buildings have not been the subject of any thorough archaeological investigation.

³⁹ I owe this information to Dr Eirini Afentoulidou, who also brought to my attention a magic spell for the cure of migraines: *Εἰς τὸ μεσοκέφαλον καὶ οἱ ὀδόντες*, Patm. 690, 179r: 1, 15th century. This makes a clear reference to the Prodomos but without giving any more information as to why this saint was considered the most appropriate healer to cure migraines. Future research into such texts may bring to light hitherto unknown attributes of the Prodomos pertaining to his healing powers related to the shivering brought on by fever.

⁴⁰ Research concerning Byzantine *iatrosophia* is still at an early stage and it should be noted that references to miraculous cures are thin on the ground. I thank Dr Petros Bouras-Vallianatos for this information. On the importance of studying Byzantine *iatrosophia*, see S. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*:

In fact, as we know from written or visual sources, attempts to explain or heal fevers do refer to demons, to other saintly figures or to famous healing shrines. From Greek papyri (third-fifth centuries) we learn that the best way to heal a fever was by invoking the archangels, and especially the Archangel Michael⁴¹. John Lydus (ca 490-560), in his well-known book on the Roman calendar, explains the disease of malaria in the section devoted to September by attributing malarial fevers to demons of fire, air, water, and earth⁴². On the other hand, according to the inscription on an epistyle from the Sinai Monastery, St Eustratios healed fevers among other illnesses (twelfth century)⁴³. In the fourteenth-century *iatrosophion* of Ioannis Stafidas it is recommended that, in order to cure a fever, an invocation be made to the Three Children in the Fiery Furnace⁴⁴. The therapy chosen to treat one of the attacks of fever that Emperor Andronikos III (1297-1341) suffered, possibly as a result of contracting malaria, involved water from the famous, miraculous fountain of the Zoodochos Pege shrine in Constantinople⁴⁵.

Since the examination of further texts relating to such cures is beyond the scope of this paper, it is rather difficult at this point to ascertain how well-known and widespread this aspect of the Prodomos's cult was. The lack of relevant testimonies in all the above texts could be explained by the literary genre to which they belong,

Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography, Cambridge 2015, 153-156, with relevant bibliography.

⁴¹ *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, ed. H. Dieter Betz, London 1986, 281, 300.

⁴² Ioannis Lydi, *Liber de mensibus*, ed. R. Wünsch, Stuttgart 1967, IV. 130. R. Sallares, *Malaria and Rome. A History of Malaria in Ancient Italy*, New York 2002, 53.

⁴³ N. Patterson-Ševčenko, "The Posthumous Miracles of Saint Eustratios on a Sinai Templon Beam", *Byzantine Religious Culture Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, eds D. Sullivan – E. A. Fisher – S. Papaioannou, Leiden 2012, 269, 270, 272.

⁴⁴ Legrand, *Bibliothèque grecque*, op.cit. (n. 27), 12.

⁴⁵ Νικήφορος τοῦ Γρηγοῦ, *Ῥωμαϊκῆς Ἱστορίας Λόγοι*, IX, 10, 5. *Nikephori Gregorae historiae* (CSHB), ed. L. Schopen, Bonn 1829, I, 442. Ἰωάννου τοῦ Καντακουζηνοῦ, *Ἱστοριῶν Βιβλία*, II, 17, 21. *Ioannis Cantacuzeni ex imperatoris Historiarum libri IV* (CSHB), ed. L. Schopen, I, Bonn 1828, 409-411, 426-427. Lascartos – Marketos, "Andronicus III Paleologus", op.cit. (n. 26), 107. S. Efthymiadis, "Le monastère de la Source à Constantinople et ses deux recueils de miracles. Entre hagiographie et patriographie", *REB* 64-65 (2006), 303.

the context in which they were composed or their specific use in the liturgy and the office on the saint's feast day. We cannot exclude the possibility that this absence actually does to some extent reflect some kind of reservation on the part of the official Church with regard to adopting "popular" aspects of a cult arising out of fictional narratives based on episodes from a Life of an important religious figure, such as the Prodomos⁴⁶. I shall attempt to demonstrate this below.

Moreover, there is a good chance that such aspects of the saint's cult were part of an unrecorded tradition that circulated orally. It should also be borne in mind here that other customs and popular beliefs pertaining to St John's attributes, e.g. his ability to foretell the future, or his miraculous conception, were current in Byzantium and have been recognized as such in the interpretation of specific artworks⁴⁷.

But what were those miracle stories, how do they relate to the subject in hand and from to which episodes in the saint's vita do they derive?

Ὁ Ἀγιάννης «ἦτο ἱατρός» ("St John was a doctor"): testimonies from the Ottoman and Modern periods

The evidence concerning the saint's "medical profile" that accounts for this uncommon attribute comes from the Ottoman and Modern periods. In his work on Ottoman

Athens, Demetrios Kampouroglou records an oral tradition that his mother Marianna Soterianou-Geronta shared with him and which was still current in his day. Through a misreading of the saint's name⁴⁸, Ἀγιάννης, as "the one who cures", St John had been transformed into a doctor, who could heal the fevers of malaria⁴⁹. The story continues with a fictional narrative about the actions of the willing ascetic, and refers to certain practices –such as burying clothing in a pit, placing a column on top of it, venerating columns, and the tying of strings on the columns– that are known to have been used to treat patients at the church on Euripidou Street in Athens, known as St John at the Column (Ἀι-Γιάννης στην Κολώνα)⁵⁰. These customs are illustrated in a sketch from an unpublished collection of drawings made for Frederick North, fifth Earl of Guilford, between the years 1812-1813 (Fig. 13)⁵¹.

⁴⁸ On the pseudo-etymology see most recently, K. I. Papadakis, *Λαϊκή πίστη και λατρεία. Άγιοι θεράποντες με "ειδικό χάρισμα" ιαμάτων. Προστάτες, έφοροι και επόπτες της ορθόδοξου ελληνικής εκκλησίας*, Athens 2018, 92-97, 205.

⁴⁹ "Ὁ Ἀγιάννης ἦτο ἱατρός, ἱατρούνων πρὸ πάντων τοὺς πυρετοὺς, «τῆς θερμῆς» ἔξη ὡς ἀσκητῆς καὶ «ἔκανε πολλὰς καλοσύνας». ὅταν ἐπλησίαζε νὰ ἀποθάνῃ, «ἔστησε μιὰ κολώνα καὶ στὸ θεμέλιό ἔδεσε ὅλαις τῆς ἀρρώστιας μὲ μετάξι λογιδὸ λογιδὸ χρώματα: τὴ θερμὴ μὲ μετάξι κίτρινο, τὴν κόκκινη μὲ κόκκινο καὶ τῆς ἄλλαις ἀρρώστιας μὲ τὰ ἄλλα χρώματα. Ἀφοῦ τὰ ἔχωσε πολλὴ βαθεῖα ἔβαλε ἀπὸ πάνω τὴν κολώνα καὶ εἶπε: σὰν πεθάνω ὅποιος ἀρρωστήσῃ νὰ ἔλθῃ νὰ δέσῃ ἓνα μετάξι στὴν κολώνα τρεῖς κόμπους, ὅ,τι χρώμα ἔχει ἡ ἀρρώστια του, καὶ νὰ λέῃ: Ἄγιε μου Γιάννη, ἐγὼ δένω τὴν ἀρρώστια μου καὶ ἡ χάρις σου νὰ τὴν λύσῃ. Καὶ γιὰτρεφεῖται". D. Kampouroglou, *Ἱστορία τῶν Ἀθηναίων. Τουρκοκρατία. Περίοδος πρώτη, 1458-1687*, Athens 1889, 221 and in the translation given by Mary Hamilton (M. Hamilton, *Greek saints and their festivals*, Edinburgh 1910, 66): "St John was a doctor and healed especially fevers. He lived as a hermit and did much good. When he was about to die, he set up a column, and to the foundation he bound all diseases with different kinds of coloured silks-fever with yellow silk, measles with red silk, and other diseases with other colours. When he had dug very deep, he put the column on top, and said: 'When I die, let any sick man come and bind a silk thread to the column with three knots according to the colour of his illness', and let him say: 'St John, I bind my disease, and the favour will be yours if you rid me of it'. And he will be cured." See also, K. Gardikas, *Landscapes of Disease. Malaria in Modern Greece*, Budapest – New York 2018, 287.

⁵⁰ N. G. Politis, *Μελέται περὶ τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς γλώσσης τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ: παραδόσεις*, II, Athens 1904, 764-765.

⁵¹ *A Collection of Seventy Five Drawings executed in Greece for*

⁴⁶ Papamastorakis and Anagnostakis considered St Romanos *Sklepodiotkes* an example of a "popular" cult. They also noted that information on these cults is rarely found in written sources. See Anagnostakis – Papamastorakis, "St. Romanos *epi tēn sklepan*", op.cit. (n. 28), 156, 163.

⁴⁷ See the case of Cleodas which has been linked to the Forerunner and his ability to prophesy. This folkloric event custom took place on the 24th of June, the day of the saint's birth. See F. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινὸν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμὸς*, A2, Athens 1948, 167-173. M. G. Varvounis, "Ὁ κλήδονας", M. G. Varvounis, *Λαογραφικὰ δοκίμια. Μελετήματα για τον ελληνικό παραδοσιακό πολιτισμό*, Athens 2000 53-77 and especially 57-59, where further sources are cited. St John was also known for his ability to help women to conceive and to protect children. See B. Pitarakis, "Female piety in context: understanding developments in private devotional practices", *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassilaki, Aldershot 2005, 158-162. I. Kalavrezou, "Female Popular Beliefs and Maria of Alania", *Journal of Turkish Studies* 36 (2011), 91-93. Gerstel, *Rural lives*, op.cit. (n. 40), 87.

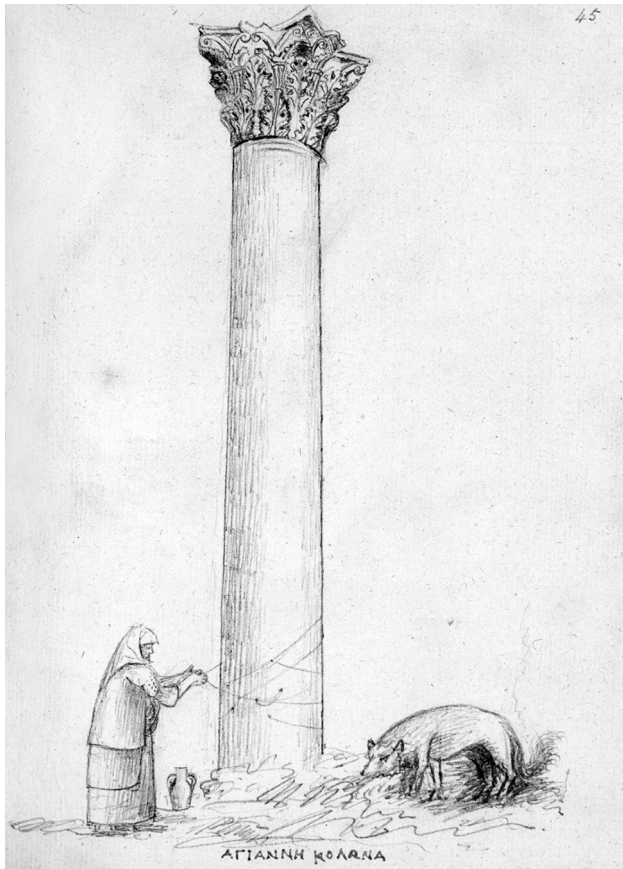


Fig. 13. Athens. The column of Saint John on Euripidou Street, sketch from a collection of drawings made for Frederick North (ca. 1812-1813).

During this period, other fictional narratives explaining this particular power are recorded for the first time. According to the oral testimony of the abbot of the monastery of Hagia Triada at Cydonia, recorded by the British traveler Robert Pashley in his well-known work entitled *Travels to Crete*, the severed head of the Baptist bounced off a salver before Herod's very eyes and caused shivering and fever in those present at the king's feast. Healing apparently only occurred through prayer⁵². In

lord Guilford, Gennadius Library, A 305.5.B, fol. 45. On this collection see A. Zambon, "Fauvel et les vases grecs", *Journal des Savants* 2006/1, 20-21.

⁵² "[...] I was told by the Hegúmenos, that when the head of St John the Baptist was brought to Herod, who was seated at table with a large dinner-party, it leapt from the charger. Fear fell upon every one present, and they were all attacked by a fever, which did not

the early nineteenth-century *iattrosophia*⁵³ and in later ones from the twentieth century⁵⁴, and particularly in the prayers employed for the healing of fever, the same story

leave them till they addressed their prayers to the Saint [...]": R. Pashley, *Travels in Crete*, I, London 1837, 23.

⁵³ *Iattrosophion* of Vatopedi Monastery (1805, Vatopedi Monastery MS 378, 2nd part, 14-15): "[...] Τίμιε Ἰωάννη Προφήτα καὶ Προδόρομε καὶ Βαπτιστὰ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ τιμία σου κάρα ἐπὶ πίνακος κειμένη δέος καὶ ῥίγος τοῖς θεασαμένοις κατέλαβε. Ἡ δὲ τιμία κεφαλὴ ἔκραξε καὶ ἔλεγε: Πυρετὸς τριταῖος, τεταρταῖος καὶ καθημερινὸς φεύγε ἀπὸ τὸν δούλον τοῦ Θεοῦ [...]. Νῦν ἡξεύρετε ὅτι τοῦτο τὸ τροπάριον ὅπου εἶναι νὰ ιατρευθεῖ ἐκεῖνος ὅπου ἔχει θέρμη [...]. Τότε νὰ τὸ διαβάσῃς αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέραν τρεῖς φορὲς τὴν ὥραν ὅπου νὰ τὸ γράψῃς καὶ τὴν δευτέραν ἡμέραν τοῦτο νὰ διαβάσῃς ἄλλες τρεῖς φορὲς καὶ καθὼς τὸ γράψῃς τὸ τροπάριον τοῦ Ἁγίου νὰ τὸ βαστάῃς ἀπάνω του διὰ τὸν παροξισμὸν ἕως οὔ νὰ γειάνῃ [...]. This manuscript is unpublished. I thank Agamemnon Tselikas for telling me about this source.

⁵⁴ P.-A. Clark, *A Cretan Healer's Handbook in the Byzantine Tradition: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Farnham 2011, 132-133: *Iattrosophion* of Nikolaos Konstantinos Theodorakis (Crete, 1930): "Ἐτερον περὶ θερμασίας. γράψον τό κάτωθεν τροπάριον ἡμέραν σάββατον, ἢ πέμπτην ὅχι ἄλλην ἡμέραν καὶ ἀνάγνωσον αὐτὸ ἐπάνω εἰς τὸν ἀσθενῆ τρεῖς φοραῖς καὶ ἄς τοῦ λητοργήσῃ καὶ βάλε καὶ ὕψωμα τῆς παναγίας καὶ ἄς τὸ βαστά ἐπάνω του ὁ ἀσθενὴς καὶ ἰᾶται. Τίμιε Ἰωάννη προφήτα καὶ βαπτιστὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν ἰησοῦ χρηστοῦ, ἡ τιμία σου κεφαλὴ, ἐπὶ πηνάκος βασταζομένη ἡδέως καὶ ῥίγιος τοῖς θεασαμένοις κατέλαβεν. ἡ δὲ τιμία σου κεφαλὴ ἔκραξε καὶ ἔλεγε πυρετὸς δυταῖος καὶ τριταῖος καὶ τεταρτέος ἡμερινός τε καὶ νυκτερινός, φύγε ἀπὸ τὸν δούλον τοῦ θεοῦ, .Σ. Μ. Κ. Α. Σ. Μ. Τ. Ρ. Θ. ἀμήν. Ἥλί, ἡλί, λιμά σαβαχθάνι τούτέστι θεὲ μου, θεὲ μου, ἵνα τὶ μὲ ἐγκατελήπεις τὸν δούλον του θεοῦ [...] χριστὸς εὐηγγελήσθη φύγε ῥίγος. χριστὸς ἐγενήθη φήγε ῥίγος. χριστὸς ἐβαπτίσθη φήγε ῥίγος ἀπὸ τὸν δούλον τοῦ θεοῦ [...] Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς νικά καὶ βασιλεύει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.", and in translation: "Write the hymn below on the seventh day [Saturday], or the fifth [Thursday], no other day, and read it above the patient three times and have them celebrate Mass for him and put also the blessed bread of the Virgin Mary and have the patient keep it on top of him and it heals. Holy John prophet and baptizer of our Lord Jesus Christ, your holy head carried gladly on a platter and a chill came upon those watching. And your holy head cried out and said, 'Fever of the second, third, and fourth both days and nights, flee from the servant of the Lord, .Σ. Μ. Κ. Α. Σ. Μ. Τ. Ρ. Θ. Amen. *Illi, illi, savachthani*, this is, my God, my God, to what purpose do you forsake me, the servant of the Lord [...] Christ is proclaimed, flee fever-chill. Christ is born, flee fever-chill. Christ is baptized, flee fever-chill from the servant of the Lord [...] Jesus Christ triumphs and rules for ever".

is basically repeated with the Baptist's talking head now taking on an active role in causing and expelling fever⁵⁵.

Other nineteenth-century travelers, as well as early twentieth-century novelists, recorded similar traditions. François Pouqueville (1770-1838) the French doctor and diplomat, during his travels in the Peloponnese in the early nineteenth century, described how he came across some merry-makers, who were returning from the Feast of the Prodomos at Farres, Achaia. There was a church built over the ruins of an ancient temple there, where the Prodomos was celebrated as a healer of fevers⁵⁶. In his novel *First Love* (*Πρώτη αγάπη*), written in 1919, Ioannis Kondylakis refers to malaria, to St John *Rigologos* (*Ριγολόγος*) and to the custom of tying strings on the candelabra and tempon in the church of St John the Baptist in order to ensure a cure from the disease⁵⁷.

The dissemination of this belief regarding the saint in modern times is further attested by a rich popular tradition from various regions in both Greece and Cyprus. Known as *Thermastes*, *Kryadites*, *Nisteutes*, *Thermologos*, and *Rigologos*, the Prodomos is considered as the protector saint of those suffering from malignant fevers and particularly malaria⁵⁸. According to oral tradition,

⁵⁵ The fever caused by the head of the Prodomos, described in these sources, brings to mind the head of the Medusa and its ability to instantly cause the death of anyone who looked at it. Quite frequently the core of these popular legends lies in earlier mythical material, see indicatively I. Anagnostakis, "Από την προφορική ή κειμενική αφήγηση στη μνημειακή απεικόνιση: Τρία βυζαντινά παραδείγματα του όψιμου Μεσαίωνα", *Χαρτογραφώντας τη δημόσια λογοτεχνία, 12ος-17ος αι.: Πρακτικά του 7ου Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Neograeca Medii Aevi*, eds S. Kaklamanis – A. Kalokairinos, Heraklion 2017, 41-84. The same is true of the motif of the talking head, see K. P. Charalampidis, *Ὁ ἀποκεφαλισμός τῶν μαρτύρων εἰς τὰς ἱστοριοφιλολογικὰς πηγὰς καὶ τὴν βυζαντινὴν τέχνην*, Athens 1989, 88-89. R. Mills, "Talking Heads, or, A Tale of Two Clerics", *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Intersections, Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture, 28), eds C. Santing – B. Baert – A. Traninger, Leiden 2013, 31-57.

⁵⁶ F. C. H. L. Pouqueville, *Voyage de la Grèce*, IV, Paris 1826, 374.

⁵⁷ I. Kondylakis, *Πρώτη αγάπη*, Athens ²1988, 70. Gardikas, *Landscapes of Disease*, op.cit. (n. 49), 286.

⁵⁸ Politis, *Μελέται*, op.cit. (n. 50), 763-765. G. Megas, *Ἑλληνικές γιορτές καὶ ἔθιμα τῆς λαϊκῆς λατρείας*, Athens ²1976, 231-232. Papadakis, *Λαϊκή πίστη καὶ λατρεία*, op.cit. (n. 48), 202-205. The epithets attributed to Prodomos present special interest. The

this healing power attributed to the saint had its origins in the shivers he felt at the moment of his beheading. The feast day on August 29th allocated to the saint in this capacity as healer of fevers is not a random choice. The celebration of St John's Beheading on that day coincided with the period known for outbreaks of malaria⁵⁹. Fasting or other dietary privations, as well as other practices, such as disposal of the patient's clothing, the tying of strings around structures, ingesting dust from the altar of a church dedicated to the Prodomos, and sacrificing animals, were considered parts of a ritual that would ensure healing.

This legend is also recorded on Naxos. According to the oral tradition of the village of Sagri, the Prodomos was a protector against malaria, because, when he was beheaded, everyone got a fever and started to shiver. The saint is known as *Tinachtes* (*Τιναχτής*) from the word *τιναχτό*, the term with which the Naxians described malaria⁶⁰. Therefore, it is not by chance that malaria patients would seek a cure by ingesting dust scraped from the altar of the church of St John at Gyroulas, which they drank as a potion mixed with water⁶¹.

The evidence presented above shows that there was a vast oral tradition and different practices linked with this particular cult aspect and capacity of St John the Baptist. These stories circulated widely during this era, undergoing subtle modifications with every retelling. Several variants may also be encountered in the epithets employed, but none records the *Rigodioktes* of our case study. The widespread nature of St John's cult can be considered not unreasonable, especially as regards the Greek mainland, since up to the late 1940s Greece was the country worst affected by malaria in Europe⁶².

choice of the epithets Thermologos and Rigologos could well be connected to the motif of the talking head.

⁵⁹ The end of summer/beginning of autumn (August, September) saw the climax of the malaria season, on which see D. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire. A Systematic Survey of Subsistence Crises and Epidemics* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 9), Aldershot 2004, 102.

⁶⁰ D. Oikonomidis, "Δημόδης ἱατρικὴ ἐν Νάξῳ", *Parnassos* 25/3 (July – September 1983), 374, 475. Papadakis, *Λαϊκή πίστη καὶ λατρεία*, op.cit. (n. 48), 202.

⁶¹ Oikonomidis, "Δημόδης ἱατρικὴ", op.cit. (n. 60), 386-387.

⁶² Gardikas, *Landscapes of Disease*, op.cit. (n. 49), passim.

Approximately one-quarter to one-third of the population would get infected by this disease every year, and it seems that, even after the adoption of quinine in the nineteenth century for the treatment of this illness, there were still many people and entire communities who would seek a remedy in the veneration of the Prodomos.

Testimonies from the West

The shivers that the saint felt at his execution were not only related to malaria. A slightly different cult tradition, indicative of the associations conjured up in the medieval imagination by the relic of the Baptist's head, the episode of the beheading, or the image of the quivering body, is recorded in various regions of Europe. In this tradition, the Baptist was mainly associated with healing epilepsy, another disease characterized by intense convulsions. The cathedral of Amiens, where part of the head of St John was translated, possibly in 1217, from the church of Saint George of the Mangana in Constantinople⁶³, was considered an important healing center for epilepsy, but also for other ailments, such as headaches, sore throat, female haemorrhaging, melancholy and erotic dysfunction⁶⁴.

Textual sources from as early as the eleventh century often mention that epileptics –who back then were known as sufferers from St John's disease– used to dance in the streets of medieval cities, mainly in Germany and Belgium, from the beginning of June until the day of the Feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist on the 24th of that month⁶⁵. In his *Centuriae* the French doctor Antoine Mizauld (1520-1578) mentions that the Feast of

the Nativity of St John the Baptist was a suitable day for the cure of epileptics⁶⁶.

The so-called *Johannesschüssel*, a popular western cult object, which depicts the head of St John on a platter in sculptural form, acquired therapeutic qualities as a result of this connection⁶⁷. To ensure the activation of these healing powers, various practices and customs developed, mainly in rural communities in Germany and Austria⁶⁸. When the *Johannesschüssel* became a favorite subject in painting as well, particularly in Italy, some of its depictions were associated with the patrons' desire for a cure. For instance, in 1507 according to his will, the French Cardinal George d'Amboise –after a period in which he suffered from colic spasms and feverish attacks– commissioned a depiction of the famous relic, to be painted by the Italian painter Andrea Solaris⁶⁹.

Back to Late Medieval Naxos: the Prodomos in the role of healer of fevers and the threat of malaria

Despite the fact that for now the available evidence does not allow us to securely identify the existence of this cult perception of the Prodomos and the way in which it spread, particularly in the Byzantine world, we can safely say that St John the Baptist of Archatos was deemed a healer of fevers. The word *ῥίγος*, as noted above, was connected to malarial fevers, while the compound epithet “*ῥιγοδιώκτης*” sounds similar to the word *ῥιγολόγος*, which we have encountered in the popular tradition. These associations are reinforced by the fact that the church's decoration was completed on September 1st according to the dedicatory inscription, which –it should be noted– is only a couple of days after the Feast of the

⁶³ L. Brook, “La translation de la relique de Saint Jean-Baptiste à la cathédrale d'Amiens: récits latin et français”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 91 (1990), 93-106. J. Durand, “Reliques et reliquaires constantinopolitains du chef de saint Jean-Baptiste apportés en Occident après 1204”, *La vénération de saint Jean-Baptiste. Actes du Colloque œcuménique du diocèse d'Amiens, 23-24 juin 2006*, *Contacts* 218 (2007), 188-221.

⁶⁴ C. F. du Cange, *Traité historique du chef de S. Jean Baptiste*, Paris 1665, 126-126. B. Baert, *Caput Johannis in Disco: Essays on a Man's Head*, Leiden 2012, 36-38, 71, with previous bibliography.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 66-70. O. Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, Baltimore 1945, 109-114.

⁶⁶ A. Mizauld, *Memorabilium, sive arcanorum omnis generis, per aphorismos digestorum*, Paris 1567, 59.

⁶⁷ Baert, *Caput Johannis*, op.cit. (n. 64), 70-82.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 72-82.

⁶⁹ B. Baert “Vision, piété et décapitation. Andrea Solaris (env. 1465-1524), la tête de Saint-Jean Baptiste revisitée”, *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 29 (2016), 264. B. Baert, “Wandering Heads, Wandering media. Framing the Head of Saint John the Baptist between Sculpture and Painting”, *Decapitation and Sacrifice: Saint John's Head in Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Text, Object*, eds B. Baert – S. Rochmes, Leuven 2017, 208.



Fig. 14. Naxos, Archatos, church of the Panaghia, sanctuary, the apse. The scroll of Saint Athanasios mentioning Saint John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist.

Beheading (August 29), which celebrates this particular cult aspect of the Forerunner. At the same time the completion of the decoration coincides with the period associated with outbreaks of fever.

In fact, the Prodomos seems to have enjoyed special reverence in this particular church. His depiction in the conch of the chapel and the existence of a base for a *perirrhantērion*, put there at some unknown time perhaps to be used as an altar, could be considered compelling evidence of the possibility of mass being celebrated there, presumably on the feast days of the saint and particularly on the day of the Beheading or whenever need arose⁷⁰. The rare text: *ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ / [ΤΟΥ] ΠΡΟ/ΦΗΤ(ΟΥ) ΠΡΟ-*

ΔΡΟΜΟΥ / ΚΑΙ Β[ΑΠ]ΤΙ/CΤΟΥ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ (*For the holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John*), written on the scroll of the co-officiating hierarch St Athanasios in the apse of the church's sanctuary⁷¹, should most likely be attributed to the particular significance that the Prodomos had in this church (Fig. 14).

At the same time, the place of the representation on the

⁷⁰ The testimony of the Naxian folklorist Demetrios Oikonomidis from the region of Filoti “Άμαν άποτής (τάξης) στών Άη Ιάννη καί κάμης μιά λειτρουϊά, φεύγει ή άρρώστια” (If you make a vow to St John and sponsor a liturgy, the illness goes away) may also be indicative of liturgies being held in time of need, on which see Oikonomidis, “Δημώδης ιατρική”, op.cit. (n. 60), 387.

⁷¹ This text is read by the priest during the service of the *proskomide*, when the fourth portion is offered in honor of the Holy Prophet John the Baptist, and during the Divine Liturgy after the “Εξαίρετως της Παναγίας” when the deacon reads the Diptychs of the living. See F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies: Eastern and Western*, I. *Eastern Liturgies*, Oxford 1986, 331, 388. Another similar text, which remains unpublished, is preserved on the depiction of a concelebrating hierarch in the apse of the south aisle, dedicated to the Baptist, in the church of Saint Fanourios at Valsamonero in Heraklion, Crete (1408). I owe this information to Dr Angeliki Katsioti. On the life cycle of St John Prodomos of this church see Katsioti, *Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Πρόδρομος*, op.cit. (n. 20), 181 and passim.

east wall and next to a masonry proskynetarium with the depiction of the dedicatee of the church, i.e. the Virgin, and its special framing transformed it into an “icon”, ideal for the congregation to venerate and pray to at any given moment (Fig. 6). The abrading of the surface of his image may be due to kissing by the faithful and even more probably to the scraping of pigment from the fresco to use as a powder for ingesting whenever someone was in need of a cure⁷².

However, arguably the saint did not lose his main and best-known role, that of the prophet of salvation, according to the metrical text on his scroll⁷³. In this text, as in every other biblical and liturgical text, there is no mention of the saint’s role as healer of fevers. The saint here, as is customary, preaches the need for repentance in order to fit the faithful to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It appears that it was in this initial, “erudite” context that the inscription *Rigodioktes* was added.

The reasons that may have led the Prodomos to be endowed with this extra power and that may have accounted for the prominence of his cult in this Naxian church are far from clear. Could the image donated by the two couples named in the inscriptions on either side of the figure be interpreted as a prayer for help or as thanksgiving for an isolated instance of a cure from the intense feverish shivering caused by malaria?

However, the decision to depict the prophet with this epithet in the conch of a small chapel, and in a place used for communal worship, must have assured the ritual celebration of this special power not only on the day of the Beheading but also at any time need arose. And, this would suggest that this debilitating disease most likely often afflicted many members of this particular rural community on Naxos⁷⁴ and that this image records

their anxiety about the serious effects the disease could have⁷⁵. Perhaps it was the intensity and spread of the illness on this occasion, which may have reached a peak not long before the wall paintings were completed on September 1st 1285, that led the priest and painter Michael to record in words and to visually promote the Prodomos in his capacity as “dispeller of shivers” in the church of the Panaghia at Archatos.

The expression of this particular cultic perception may also have been encouraged by the religious attitudes and practices of the congregation in this agrarian-pastoral community. Sharon Gerstel has already showcased the multiple ways in which country dwellers in the Late Byzantine period perceived and approached religious figures and the ways in which they rendered saints’ images in the painted decoration of their churches in order to fulfill particular needs⁷⁶. She also highlighted the role of the church as a place of healing, the agency of the priests in cures and of course the inclusion of a great number of healing saints in the layout of the iconographic programmes. These saints were expected to function as healers not only in accordance with certain aspects of their Lives, but also through a literal understanding of their names⁷⁷.

“Φιλότι”, op.cit. (n. 5), 109. No wall paintings have been preserved in this church.

⁷² The same viewpoint was espoused by Eleonora Kountoura Galaki in a recently published article, Kountoura Galaki, “Women Living on Palaiologan Naxos”, op.cit. (n. 5), 173. Malaria, as is well known, had afflicted the population of the Greek countryside since the prehistoric period. We have no clear, general picture of the frequency of the attacks, the epidemic crises, and the effects that malaria had, particularly in the Byzantine period. For a general view, see Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence*, op.cit. (n. 59), 101-103, 159-160. Lascaratos – Marketos, “Andronicus III Paleologus”, op.cit. (n. 26), 106-109. E. Barnes, “The Dead Do Tell Tales”, *Corinth. The Centenary: 1896-1996*, eds C. K. Williams – N. Bookidis, Princeton, N. J. 2003, 441. A rather late piece of evidence concerning the intensity of the phenomenon on Naxos and in the Cyclades in general is found in a description of the situation in this group of islands by a doctor named Ioannis Vouros in 1834. He noted that stagnant waters formed in flat areas on the islands after repeated rainfall were the main cause of malaria, see I. Vouros, “Νοσολογική κατάσταση των Κυκλάδων κατὰ τὸ 1834 ἔτος”, *Asklepios* 11 (1 June 1837), 373, 383-386.

⁷⁶ See recently, Gerstel, *Rural lives*, op.cit. (n. 40), 41-69 and passim.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 153-165.

⁷² V. Marinis, “Piety, Barbarism, and the Senses in Byzantium”, *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. S. M. Promey, New Haven 2014, 325-328. V. Katsaros, “Περὶ τοῦ ἱαματικῆς περιγρηγοῦ χειρογράφου Εὐαγγελίου τῆς μονῆς Μεταμορφώσεως τοῦ Σωτῆρος Καρδαμύλης τῆς ἐπαρχίας Οἴτουλος τῆς Μάνης”, *Επιστημονικὸ συμπόσιο στη μνήμη Νικολάου Β. Δρανδάκη για τη βυζαντινὴ Μάνη. Πρακτικά*, eds E. P. Eleutheriou – A. Mexia, Sparta 2008-2009, 113.

⁷³ See above p. 183.

⁷⁴ It may be that the dedication of a second church, found in the center of the same valley, to the same saint reflects the fame of the Prodomos in this capacity in this specific area. Mastoropoulos,

This is the case for the Archatos church, where saints known for their healing, intermediary and protective powers were invoked and displayed in all the prominent places, as noted above⁷⁸. In some cases their special roles were specified through the use of epithets, a practice that was fairly widespread in the Late Byzantine period⁷⁹. In fact, other portraits too have this same feature, e.g. St George *Diasorites*, who is accompanied by an additional epithet *O CΩTHP* (the savior), or the figure identified as Patriarch Kyriakos or as Kyriakos bishop of Jerusalem, who is accompanied by the inscription *O TΩN PEMATΩN IATHP* (healer of the rheums), and again another portrait of St George accompanied by the noun *ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟC* (the farmer?).

In this landscape of devotional particularism, where the most attractive thing about the saints was their ability to work miracles that would satisfy individual and local concerns, the otherwise unknown attribute of the Prodromos has been conceived according to the same strategy. In this way, the prophet of salvation, identified as such by the text of his scroll, could become a healer of fevers, thanks to the addition of an epithet inscribed on his image.

⁷⁸ See above p. 176-178.

⁷⁹ Drpić, *Epigram*, op.cit. (n. 21), 351-373.

The above information invites us to revisit the multiple ways in which the Byzantines may have perceived their religious figures, the stories they produced around the episodes of their Lives and their names, and the contexts and the ways in which these narratives were represented. In the light of this new evidence highlighting an attribute of the Prodromos that has previously gone unnoticed, we should perhaps also rethink some images of the Beheading, as well as depictions of the saint holding his severed head, as they too might once have served as symbolic reminders of the miraculous power discussed here. In our case it is likely that the intensity and spread in the region of an illness involving fever, in other words a critical situation, in the summer of 1285 was responsible for the explicit acknowledgment of an otherwise unrecorded power and epithet of the Prodromos, that of the healer of fevers, *Rigodioktes*, in the church of an agrarian-pastoral community of the Late Medieval period.

Illustration credits

Figs 1-2, 4-8, 10-12, 14: Photographs by Theodora Konstantellou. Fig. 3: Plan by Klimis Aslanidis. Fig. 9: Drawing by Giorgos Aslanis. Fig. 13. *A Collection of Seventy Five Drawings executed in Greece for lord Guilford*, Gennadius Library, A 305.5.B, fol. 45.

ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ Ο ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΣ Ο ΡΙΓΟΔΙΩΚΤΗΣ.
ΕΝΑΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΘΕΡΑΠΕΥΤΗΣ ΤΩΝ ΠΥΡΕΤΩΝ ΣΤΟΝ ΝΑΟ
ΤΗΣ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑΣ ΣΤΟΝ ΑΡΧΑΤΟ ΤΗΣ ΝΑΞΟΥ (1285)

Σε μεγάλη αγροτική περιοχή στα νοτιοδυτικά της Νάξου, που σχηματίζεται μεταξύ Μαραθού και Αγιασσοῦ και είναι γνωστή με το όνομα Αρχατός, βρίσκεται η εκκλησία της Παναγίας (Εικ. 1, 2). Το κτίσμα αποτελείται σήμερα από έναν μονόχωρο τρουλαίο ναό και δύο παρεκκλήσια στη βόρεια και τη νότια πλευρά (Εικ. 3). Στο εσωτερικό του διακρίνονται δύο τοιχογραφικά στρώματα. Η θέση της εκκλησίας, οι οκτώ αφιερωτικές επιγραφές που διατηρούνται στο δεύτερο στρώμα, όπως και το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα δείχνουν ότι η εκκλησία της Παναγίας εξυπηρετούσε πιθανότατα στη φάση αυτή τις λατρευτικές ανάγκες μιας αγροτοποικιλικῆς κοινότητας που είχε αναπτυχθεί στη μεγάλη αυτή αγροτική περιοχή.

Από το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα του δεύτερου στρώματος ειδικό ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζει η απεικόνιση του αγίου Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου με την επιγραφή *Ο ΡΥΓΟΔΙΩ/ΚΤΗΣ*, που βρίσκεται στην κόγχη του βόρειου παρεκκλησίου (Εικ. 3, 8, 9, 11). Η μορφή του διατηρείται σήμερα μερικώς και παρουσιάζει σημαντικές φθορές ειδικά στο κέντρο. Ο άγιος απεικονίζεται ολόσωμος σε βάθος κόκκινο με μια ζώνη σε κυανό χρώμα χαμηλά. Διακρίνεται σήμερα το δεξί χέρι υψωμένο σε στάση ευλογίας ή ομιλίας και το ενεπίγραφο ειλητάριο που κρατάει με το αριστερό χέρι. Σε αυτό διαβάζεται ένα άγνωστο από άλλες παραστάσεις του αγίου επίγραμμα (Εικ. 10). Από την ενδυμασία του διατηρείται χαμηλά μέρος της μηλωτής και του χιτώνα.

Δεξιά και αριστερά του Προδρόμου διατηρούνται δύο αφιερωτικές επιγραφές. Σύμφωνα με αυτές, οι εργασίες τοιχογράφησης ολοκληρώθηκαν την 1η Σεπτεμβρίου του 1285 από τον αφιερωτή, ζωγράφο και ιερέα Μιχαήλ (Εικ. 11, 12). Στην οικονομική προσφορά πιθανότατα του ίδιου και των Ρήχου και Άννης Χαρχαζάνη και των Ιωάννη και Ευγενούς Χαρχαζή οφείλεται πιθανότατα η ιστόρηση της παράστασής του.

Ο Πρόδρομος, ως τελευταίος των προφητών και πρώτος

μάρτυρας της ενσάρκωσης, ασκητικό πρότυπο και σημαίνων μεσολαβητής, εντάσσεται αρκετά συχνά στα εικονογραφικά προγράμματα των βυζαντινών ναών, ειδικά κατά την ύστερη εποχή. Σπάνια, ωστόσο, η απεικόνισή του συνοδεύεται από πρόσθετους προσδιορισμούς. Η προσωνυμία *ρίγοδιώκτης* που απαντά στην εξεταζόμενη περίπτωση, αναφέρεται στην ιδιότητα του Προδρόμου να διώκει τα ρίγη των πυρετών, τα οποία προκαλούν διάφορες ασθένειες και ειδικότερα η ελονοσία. Η συγκεκριμένη επιγραφή δεν είναι γνωστή από άλλη δημοσιευμένη απεικόνιση του αγίου στη Νάξο ή αλλού.

Οι πρώτες σχετικές μαρτυρίες για τη λατρευτική αυτή πτυχή του Προδρόμου είναι γνωστές από την εποχή της οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας και αργότερα. Περιηγητές του 19ου αιώνα, ιατροσόφια των αρχών του 19ου και του 20ού αιώνα, και μυθιστορήματα της ίδιας εποχής διασώζουν σχετικές πληροφορίες. Σύμφωνα με τις παραπάνω πηγές, ο «Άγιάννης» (αυτός που «γιαίνει») ήταν ένας γιατρός που κυρίως θεράπευε τις θέρμες, τον πυρετό δηλαδή της ελονοσίας. Σε άλλα κείμενα η κομμένη κεφαλή του Προδρόμου αποκτά πρωταγωνιστικό ρόλο, είτε προκαλώντας ρίγη και πυρετό, είτε συμβάλλοντας στην εκδίωξή τους.

Τη διάδοση της πίστης αυτής γύρω από τον Πρόδρομο στα νεότερα χρόνια μαρτυρεί και η πλούσια σχετική λαογραφική παράδοση από διάφορες περιοχές στην Ελλάδα και την Κύπρο. Ο Πρόδρομος, γνωστός ως *Θερμαστής*, *Θερμολόγος*, *Κρυαδίτης*, *Νηστευτής*, *Τιναχτής* και *Ριγολόγος*, θεωρείτο προστάτης των ασθενών που υπέφεραν από κακοήθεις πυρετούς, και ειδικότερα αυτών που υπέφεραν από ελονοσία. Το χάρισμα αυτό οφείλεται, κατά την προφορική παράδοση, στα ρίγη που ένωσε ο άγιος κατά τη στιγμή του αποκεφαλισμού. Δεν είναι, λοιπόν, τυχαία η επιλογή του εορτασμού του Προδρόμου με αυτήν την ιδιότητα στις 29 Αυγούστου, ημέρα εορτασμού της Αποτομής, που ημερολογιακά συμπίπτει με την περίοδο έξαρσης

των πυρετών. Νηστεία ή άλλες διατροφικές απαγορεύσεις και άλλες πρακτικές –όπως η απόρριψη ενδυμάτων, ο περιορισμός, η κατάποση σκόνης από τράπεζα εκκλησίας που ήταν αφιερωμένη στον Πρόδρομο, οι θυσίες ζώων– εξασφάλιζαν την ίαση της ασθένειας.

Παρά το πλούσιο υλικό που προκύπτει από την εξέταση πηγών της οθωμανικής εποχής και τη λαογραφική παράδοση για τη λατρευτική αυτή πτυχή του Προδρόμου, ο εντοπισμός αντίστοιχων μαρτυριών από τον βυζαντινό κόσμο παρουσιάζει δυσκολίες. Οι γραπτές πηγές που εξετάστηκαν, αναφέρονται κυρίως στη θεραπευτική δύναμη του σημαντικότερου λειψάνου του αγίου, της κάρας. Σε καμία, ωστόσο, από αυτές δεν γίνεται αναφορά στην ειδικότερη σχέση του συγκεκριμένου λειψάνου και του Προδρόμου με ασθένειες που προκαλούν πυρετικά ρίγη. Δεν αποκλείεται η απουσία σχετικών μαρτυριών να συνδέεται σε κάποιο βαθμό με τη γνωστή επιφύλαξη της Εκκλησίας να υιοθετεί επίσημα λατρευτικές αντιλήψεις που προέκυπταν –όπως τα ιατροσόφια, οι περιηγητές και η προφορική παράδοση αποκαλύπτουν– από παράλληλες φανταστικές αφηγήσεις γύρω από τα επεισόδια του βίου και τα λείψανα σημαντικών ιερών μορφών, όπως ο Πρόδρομος. Η πιθανότητα, ωστόσο, της κυκλοφορίας σχετικών ιστοριών, ίσως προφορικά, δεν θα πρέπει να αποκλειστεί. Άλλωστε, άλλα έθιμα και αντιλήψεις που συνδέονται με ιδιότητες του Προδρόμου, όπως αυτή του προφήτη, και με επεισόδια της ζωής του, όπως της θαυμαστής σύλληψής του, ήταν σε κυκλοφορία κατά τη βυζαντινή εποχή. Επίσης, όπως άλλες σχετικές μελέτες έχουν ήδη σημειώσει, σπάνια οι λατρείες αυτές αφήνουν ίχνη στις γραπτές πηγές.

Μια ανάλογη, τέλος, λατρευτική παράδοση και ενδεικτική των συσχετίσεων που το λείψανο της κεφαλής του Προδρόμου, το επεισόδιο του αποκεφαλισμού και η εικόνα του τρεμάμενου σώματος γεννούσαν στη μεσαιωνική φαντασία, καταγράφονται σε διάφορες περιοχές της Ευρώπης. Ο Πρόδρομος εδώ συνδέεται κυρίως με τη θεραπεία της επιληψίας, μιας ασθένειας δηλαδή που η βλάβη επικεντρώνεται στο κεφάλι και έχει ως χαρακτηριστικό τους έντονους σπασμούς. Μαρτυρίες ήδη από τον 11ο αιώνα κάνουν λόγο για χορευτικά κυρίως δρώμενα από τους επιληπτικούς, που λάμβαναν χώρα στους δρόμους μεσαιωνικών πόλεων, κυρίως στη Γερμανία και την Ολλανδία, από

τις αρχές του Ιουνίου μέχρι την ημέρα της γιορτής του Γενεσίου του Προδρόμου, στις 24 του ίδιου μήνα. Οι επιληπτικοί, μάλιστα, την εποχή αυτή ήταν γνωστοί ως φορείς της ασθένειας του αγίου Ιωάννη.

Αν και τα διαθέσιμα στοιχεία δεν μας επιτρέπουν προς το παρόν να εντοπίσουμε με ακρίβεια την ύπαρξη και το πλαίσιο διάδοσης της λατρευτικής αυτής αντίληψης γύρω από τον Πρόδρομο, ειδικά στον βυζαντινό κόσμο, η ταύτιση του Προδρόμου του Αρχατού με τον θεραπευτή των πυρετών θα πρέπει να θεωρηθεί ασφαλής.

Ο Πρόδρομος με αυτήν την ιδιότητα φαίνεται μάλιστα ότι έχαιρε ιδιαίτερης λατρευτικής τιμής στον ναό, όπως υποδηλώνει η τοποθέτηση της απεικόνισής του στην κόγχη ενός παρεκκλησίου. Με την εξέχουσα αυτή λατρευτική θέση θα πρέπει να συνδεθεί και το χωρίο που μνημονεύει τον Πρόδρομο στο ειλητάριο του συλλειτουργούντα ιεράρχη Αθανασίου στον ημικύλινδρο της αψίδας του ιερού (Εικ. 14). Παράλληλα, η ιδιαίτερη πλαισίωση της απεικόνισης και η θέση της δίπλα στο προσκυνητάριο με την παράσταση της βρεφοκρατούσας Παναγίας την μεταμόρφωναν σε «λατρευτική εικόνα» ιδανική για προσκύνηση και προσευχή ανά πάσα στιγμή από τους πιστούς (Εικ. 7). Στους ασπασμούς, άλλωστε, των τελευταίων, και πιθανότερα στη χρήση της σκόνης από την τοιχογραφία για κατάποση με στόχο τη θεραπεία, θα μπορούσε να αποδοθεί και η φθορά που φέρει σήμερα η παράσταση.

Οι λόγοι που οδήγησαν στην επισήμανση μιας ιδιότητας του Προδρόμου, που αφορούσε στη θεραπεία από τους πυρετούς της ελονοσίας και στην τοποθέτησή του στην κόγχη ενός μικρού παρεκκλησίου στον ναό του Αρχατού, δεν είναι εύκολο να διευκρινιστούν. Η πιθανή ένταση της ασθένειας τη χρονιά ανακαίνισης των τοιχογραφιών (1285), μια κρίσιμη δηλαδή συνθήκη, και το λατρευτικό περιβάλλον μιας αγροτοποικιμικής κοινότητας της ναξιακής υπαίθρου δημιούργησαν πιθανότατα τις συνθήκες εκείνες για την πρώτη και μοναδική ίσως αποτύπωση της ιδιότητας του Προδρόμου ως θεραπευτή των πυρετών.

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