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Elena Ene D-Vasilescu

Heavenly Sustenance
in Patristic Texts and
Byzantine
Iconography

Nourished by the Word

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ideas within this book are mainly supported by Byzantine, Patristic, and connected religious texts that refer to the spiritual needs of the human soul and to the saints. The first thought about writing it came when I discovered a particular fresco during my research that concerned the cult of St. Anne along the *Via Egnatia*. The image it depicts survived from 1361 in the Church of St. Mary Zahumska, on Ohrid Lake, Macedonia. It represents St. Anne breastfeeding the infant Mary.¹ My study about this piece has established that a local lord, Grgur Brankovic, ordered the shrine to be built and this holy person to be frescoed within—Grgur and his wife were praying for a child, and through their generous act they were hoping for the saint's intercession towards such an end (given the fact that Anne gave birth late in life, she is considered instrumental in mediating supplications with respect to maternity). Such a patronal gesture would have been in line with a long Byzantine tradition. For me personally it was important to determine the Biblical and Patristic sources that allowed such a rendering to be included among the traditional ecclesiastical images.

While doing research for the British Academy and History Faculty in Oxford, I came across seven more churches that have on their walls depictions of Anna breastfeeding. Despite the fact that none of them is dedicated to the saint, they contain the scene *Anna Galaktotrophousa*. All are located along the *Via Egnatia* or within easy access from it (this does

¹ Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, "A Case of Power and Subversion? The fresco of St. Anna nursing the child Mary from the Monastery of Zaum, Ohrid", *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 70, 2012, nos. 1–2, pp. 241–272.

not mean that those are the only ones in the world containing this depiction—even though I doubt that there are many—but just that those which I found are concentrated in this area). This cannot be a coincidence. Obviously, barren women wishing children existed in other places of which culture was influenced by Byzantium. Especially the conspicuous absence of this iconographic motif in the vast territory of Russia is significant from this point of view; I have tried to find it depicted in the culture of that land with no positive results. Therefore, it does not seem that all these churches have been founded out of yearnings for an offspring. What is more intriguing is the fact that the representation of this iconographic scene began simultaneously (in the twelfth century) at both ends of the above-mentioned Southern European route. This also makes it impossible for the visual representations of *Anna lactans* to be the product of the same iconographic school, especially because the period between one illustration and the other is lengthier than 50 years. Even when the interval between two renderings is shorter, the places in which they occur are too far from one another to allow us reasonably affirm that they were accomplished by the same hand or conceived by the same mind. That observation and the existence of similar instances in history made me think that depictions of Anne breastfeeding scenes are reactions opposed to a particular strand in the theology of the time. As is known and will be further developed in the book, the appearance and rapid proliferation of icons as, for example, “The Embrace of the Apostles Peter and Paul”, was one of the expressions of the hopes espoused by the organisers (some of them patrons of religious establishments) of Council of Ferrara-Florence concerning a reunion of Orthodox and Catholic churches.² Also Nicole Thierry provides an example through the decorative programme in the Church of Sts. Joachim and Anne, *Kızıl Çukur*, Cappadocia. She considers that it was created as “an attempt to comply with various understandings about the nature of Christ”³ specific to the sixth–seventh centuries, particularly to those taking place during the

²Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Christian unity: the Council of Ferrara-Florence 1438/9–1989*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991.

³Nicole Thierry, “La Cappadoce de l’antiquité au moyen âge”, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen Âge*, vol. 110, no. 2 (1998), p. 888 [pp. 867–897]; republished in *Bibliothèque de l’Antiquité tardive* 4, Turnhout: Brepols, 2002.

reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–641), who supported monenergism⁴ to the detriment of monothelism.⁵

In a similar vein, the peculiarity of St. Anne breastfeeding image to the Southern European areas and to the period twelfth–fourteenth centuries makes it plausible that this was a response to the Bogomil Docetism, which devalued the importance of the matter and especially of the human body. Similarly, as Saska Bogevska-Capuano indicates, a representation as that of Trinity in Omorphokklesia Church near Kastoria (thirteenth century) as a *tricefalous* man could be interpreted as a counterreaction to the Manicheism of the Bogomils, even though she personally considered it rather a mark of Western influence in Byzantine iconography (unfortunately she does not say where in the West one can find a counterpart to it). An image like this suggests extra-corporality; I do not think however that the patron and/or the iconographer necessary conceived it having in mind for this figure to be an indicator from this perspective. Of course, the depictions of *Maria lactans* that circulated in the same period were also a factor in the portrayal of Anne suckling—they can even be considered a subtype of that representation—but the fact that the episode of the saint breastfeeding ceased being painted after the last remains of the Bogomils were eradicated, while that referring to Mary was still represented in the nineteenth century, as I have pointed in some detail somewhere else,⁶ supports my theory.

During my visit to Ohrid and Macedonia in general, and also to Serbia, I noticed how powerful the cult of this holy figure still is in that part of Europe. I already knew how much Sts. Nicholas, George, Dimitrios, and Catherine of Alexandria are revered in the south of the continent from my work on Byzantium and its heritage. During visits in northern countries, I discovered churches dedicated to the same saints. To shortly exemplify, Munich has two dedicated to St. Anne: one monastic and one parochial, both in an area called in its entirety the suburb of St. Anne's/St. Anna-Vorstadt. Also Eindhoven in the Netherlands has a church dedicated to St. George (Sint-Joris Kerk, Eindhoven-Stratum) and one to Saint Catherine of Alexandria (Catharina Kerk). Some of these places of worship hold well-attended evensongs in which they exclusively perform and listen to

⁴ Monenergism was the movement maintaining that in Christ there are two natures but a single energy.

⁵ Monothelism asserted that in Christ there are two natures but one will.

⁶ “A Case of Power and Subversion? The fresco of St. Anna nursing the child Mary from the Monastery of Zaum, Ohrid”, *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 70, 2012, nos. 1–2, p. 267.

Byzantine music—their clergy publicise these religious services as being “Byzantine”.

My curiosity was incited to find out how the cult of the native southern saints has arrived in the North and survived so well in spite of its distance from the territories of the empire where it originates. Also the discovery of iconography representing breastfeeding compelled me to find out what determined the Byzantine artists to start rendering such scenes concomitantly at the extremities of the Egnatian Way. And I began researching both these topics; they are logically connected since the circulation of the cult of a saint entailed the proliferation of iconographic scenes and motifs related to him or her.

The results of this effort lead to the conclusion that at least in the case of saints’ veneration—and in many others, notably in trade—the divide East-West with which historiography operates should be replaced by a South-North one. There is no need for me to explicitly point out in the book each case which illustrates this necessity; it will be evident throughout. I had discussed the idea with colleagues and students when I came across an article rich in substance, as all his writings are, published by Peter Brown in 1976, “Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways”, in *The Orthodox Churches and the West* journal.⁷ I was glad to discover in that material the same idea and to find out that it derives from Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*⁸—a fact acknowledged by the Princeton scholar. Then I obtained a grant from the British Academy to follow my deductions through library and field work and thus the book came into being. Therefore, my thanks go to this institution for sponsoring the project whose results I include in the volume and to the colleagues at the Faculties of History and Theology, University of Oxford, especially those from the Byzantine, Patristics, Late Antiquity, as well as Classical and Mediaeval Studies, who shared their expertise and friendship with me and offered me opportunities to present extracts from the book to students and colleagues. Among them, I am especially grateful to Mark Edwards, Averil Cameron, Jonathan Shepard, Jane Humphries, Alexander Lingas, Mary

⁷ Peter Brown, “Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways”, in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, Oxford: Blackwell, vol. 13 (ed. Derek Baker) 1976.

⁸ Edward Gibbon, “Introduction. Notes to the second edition”, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, 1776; London: Strahan & Cadell, second edition, 1814, vol. 1.

Cunningham, Sebastian Brock (a good friend, who, with his wife Helen, has always been kind and encouraging towards me and my work), Cyril and Marlia Mango, Ralph Cleminson, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Alina Birzache, Mallica Kumbera Landrus, Paul Fiddes, Elizabeth Theokritoff, Bryan Ward-Perkins, the Right Rev. Dr Kallistos Ware, Yoanna Tsvetanova Planchette, John Watts, and Chris Wickham. I thank also the colleagues at San Marco's Procuratoria, especially those from the Technical Office for allowing me to take all the photos from Venice included here. David Smith, the librarian of Saint Anne's College in Oxford; Gilia Slocock, the editor of *Saint Anne in History and Art* (1999) published by the same institution; and their colleagues who put at my disposal all the material they hold in connection to its patron saint. Also the librarians in the Old Bodleian, History, Theology, Sackler, Wolfson College, and Christ Church in Oxford were very solicitous to my efforts in bringing this work to fruition. Peter, my husband, patiently endured my busy schedule and I am grateful to him for this. Other friends and colleagues were involved professionally and morally, sustaining me through discussions, indications regarding bibliography, and in various other ways. I truly regret that I cannot mention all of them here. Of course, all shortcomings of the book are my own responsibility.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASS	<i>Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur</i> [Acts of the saints worshiped throughout the world], Antwerp and Brussels, 1643–1940; original ed., 67 vols.—J. Bolland et al. (eds.)
ABull	The Art Bulletin
AnBoll	Analecta Bollandiana
Apocrypha	<i>Apocrypha. Revue internationale des literatures Apocryphes</i>
BCH	Bulletin de correspondance hellenique
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica</i> —S. J., (ed.), vols. 1–3, third edition, Brussels, 1957
Bibliotheca veterum Patrum	Bibliotheca veterum Patrum antiquorumque scriptorium ecclesiasticorum graecorum, postrema Lugdunensi longe locupletior atque accuratior—Andreas Gallandi (ed.), 1765–1788—J. B. Albritii Hieron, Venice, vols. 1–14
BMMA	The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
BNJ	Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbuche
Byz	Byzantion. Revue internationale des etudes Byzantines
ByzSlav	Byzantinoslavica
ByzZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CFBS	Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae
CMP	Corpus Marianum patristicum—Sergius Alvarez Campos (ed.), Burgos, 1970–1985, vols. 1–8

CPG	Clavis Patrum Graecorum: qua optimae quaeque scriptorum patrum Graecorum recensiones a primaevis saeculis usque ad octavum commode recluduntur—M. Geerard, F. Glorie; F. Winkelmann, and J. Desmet (eds.), Turnhout: Brepols, 1974–1987, vols. 1–6
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
HER	English Historical Review, 1886–present
JMEMS	<i>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</i>
JTS	<i>The Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JWI	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	The Septuagint
MARIANUM	<i>Marianum Journal</i>
MonPiot	Monuments et Mémoires de la Fondation Eugene Piot
MS	Mediaeval Studies
NCE	<i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i>
NPNF	Selected Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; H. Wace and P. Schaff (eds.)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NRSV 1995	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible: general articles & introduction, commentary & reflections for each book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical books in twelve volumes.</i> v. 9 [The Gospel of Luke, The Gospel of John], Nashville
NT	Novum Testamentum
Numen	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> A. P. Kazhdan, A. M. Talbot et Alii (eds.), I–III, New York/Oxford, 1991
ODCC	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
PG	Patrologia cursus completus, Series Graeca
PL	Patrologia cursus completus, Series Latina
SC	Sources Chrésiennes
SCH	Studies in church history
Speculum	<i>Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies</i>
SVTQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>

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