

Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople

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“When the city was captured [...] and the palaces were taken over, [...] they found in them riches more than a great deal. [...] And the palace of Bukoleon was very rich [...] and in it there were fully thirty chapels, great and small, and there was one of them which was called the Holy Chapel, which was so rich and noble that there was not a hinge nor a band nor any other part [...] that was not all of silver, and there was no column that was not of jasper or porphyry or some other rich precious stone. [And] within this chapel were found many rich relics: [...] two pieces of the True Cross as large as the leg of a man [...], and the iron of the lance with which Our Lord had his side pierced, and two of the nails which were driven through his hands and feet; and one found there in a crystal phial quite a little of his blood and [...] the tunic which he wore [...] when they led him to Mount Calvary. And one found there also the blessed crown with which he was crowned [...] and the robe of Our Lady and so many other rich relics that I could not recount them to you [...].”¹

Like no other Western account, the preceding passage from Robert of Clari’s famous description of the Latin conquest of Constantinople conjures up before our mind’s eye the wealth and splendor of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos, a precious architectural reliquary that, for centuries, housed the Byzantine empire’s most sacred possessions: the relics of Christ’s Passion and certain other important relics of Christendom.² First mentioned by Theophanes the Confessor in connection with the betrothal of Irene of Athens to Leo IV (775-780),³ the small church of the Virgin of the ‘lighthouse’ was located “in

¹ Robert of Clari 68-69 Lauer (engl. translation: McNeal 1936, 102-103). For an earlier Byzantine description of the splendors of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos, compare the famous tenth homily of Patriarch Photios, most likely delivered on the occasion of the church’s rededication in 864: Mango 1958, 177-190. Jenkins – Mango 1955-56, 130 with note 38.

² Ebersolt 1910, 104-109; Ebersolt 1921, 23-29; Janin 1969, 232-236.

³ Theoph. 444 (engl. translation: Mango – Scott 1997, 613).

the very midst of the palace”⁴ (ἐν μέσοις αὐτοῖς ἀνακτόροις), in immediate proximity to the imperial apartments and the throne room, the Chrysotriklinos.⁵ It was, as its name suggests, also located close to the famous beacon or lantern (φανάριον) of the palace.⁶ Like the Chrysotriklinos, the church of the Virgin had been rebuilt and lavishly refurbished by emperor Michael III (842-867) after the end of Iconoclasm and gradually assumed the role of the empire’s most important repository of sacred relics, a place that, by the time of the Latin conquest of Constantinople, was hailed as “another Sinai, a Bethlehem, a Jordan, a Jerusalem, a Nazareth, a Bethany, a Galilee, a Tiberias”⁷ (τόπος οὗτος Σίναιον ἄλλο, Βηθλεέμ, Ἰερουσόλυμα, Ναζαρέτ, Βηθανία, Γαλιλαία, Τιβεριάς) by virtue of its sacred content – a *locus sanctus* at the very heart of the Byzantine Empire.

The church of the Virgin of the Pharos was, however, not the only structure within the confines of the Great Palace that housed an array of prominent Christian relics. Other churches and chapels, most notably the so-called Nea Ekklesia,⁸ built by emperor Basil I (867-886) between 876 and 880 directly adjacent to the imperial palace, and the smaller oratory of St. Stephen,⁹ added to the complex of the Daphne palace already during the early fifth century, likewise contained important pieces of sacred matter.¹⁰ Taken together, these sacred treasures and their location inside the imperial palace underscored two major tenets of Byzantine imperial ideology: the empire’s god-guarded status and privileged position among the nations of the Christian *oikoumene* and the emperor’s role as its divinely appointed guardian and protector. The conquest of Constantinople in 1204 and the subsequent dissemination of most of its sacred treasures by the more distinguished participants of the Fourth Crusade and the Latin rulers of Constantinople radically changed the basis of such claims.¹¹ However, the concept of a ‘Holy Chapel’, built to contain the most sacred relics of Christendom within the residence of the most powerful Christian ruler, lived on for centuries, first in Saint Louis’ (1226-1270) Sainte Chapelle in Paris, dedicated in 1248 to house the newly acquired relics of Christ’s Passion from Constantinople, and subsequently in emperor Charles IV’s (1346-1378) relic chapel at Karlstein Castle near Prague, which successfully used the Parisian and Constantinopolitan models to support the idea of a *renovatio* of the Western Roman Empire under Charles, who styled himself as a new Charlemagne and Constantine.¹²

⁴ Phot. Hom. 83 = II 430 Aristarchis (engl. translation: Mango 1958, 185). On the rebuilding of the Chrysotriklinos and the church of the Virgin of the Pharos under Michael III, see Jenkins – Mango 1955-56, 139-140.

⁵ On the topography of the lower palace see J. Bardill in this volume p. 23-40.

⁶ On the ‘lighthouse’ and its location, see Janin 1964, 409. See also Jenkins – Mango 1955-56, 139-140.

⁷ Nikolaos Mes. 31-32 and 66 Heisenberg. This passage has been interpreted to refer to a cycle of mosaics. See Ebersolt 1910, 108-109; Jenkins – Mango 1955-56, 138-139; Mango 1958, 183.

⁸ On the Nea Ekklesia and its relics, see Janin 1969, 361-364; Magdalino 1987, 57-60.

⁹ On the oratory of St. Stephen, see Ebersolt 1910, 52; Janin 1969, 473-474; Kalavrezou 1997, 57-61.

¹⁰ For a survey of relics kept in the sanctuaries of the Great Palace, see Ebersolt 1921, 17-30.

¹¹ See most recently Klein 2004b.

¹² On the Sainte Chapelle and its collection of relics, see most recently Trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle 2001. On Charles’s imperial ideology and his relic chapel at Karlstein Castle, see Möseneder 1981, 47-54.

While the history and fate of the relics of Christ's Passion and several other important relics that were kept inside the Great Palace of Constantinople have received much attention in past and recent scholarship, it is the aim of this study to take a fresh look at the genesis of this 'imperial' relic collection, to examine its subsequent growth, and to investigate the ceremonial use of some of its more prominent holdings within and without the confines of the imperial palace.¹³

The Imperial Origins of the Cult of Relics in Constantinople

It is a common belief – based by and large on Ambrose's funerary oration for Theodosius the Great, some passages in the church histories of Sokrates, Sozomenos, and Theodoret, and much later patriographic records – that Constantinople's rise as a cult center for the relics of Christ's Passion has its origins in the time of the city's foundation under Constantine the Great.¹⁴ According to these sources, Constantine himself received part of the relic of the True Cross and the Holy Nails from his mother Helena, who allegedly discovered them on Mount Golgotha during her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the capital, Constantine is said to have enclosed these relics – together with holy chrism, the crosses of the two thieves, and the *palladion* of Athena – inside the honorific column and statue that adorned the emperor's Forum.¹⁵ While the historical reliability of these various accounts has justly been questioned, the sources certainly reveal an early need to link the cult of the most prominent Christian relics to Constantine, his family, and to the newly founded capital.¹⁶ As much as Ambrose, who is the first to credit Helena with the insertion of one of the Holy Nails into her son's imperial diadem and another one into the bridle of his horse, contemporary authors such as Sokrates Scholastikos and Paulinus of Nola likewise emphasize Constantine's use of relics as a measure to ensure the safety of the empire and its capital. According to Sokrates, Helena had sent the smaller part of the relic of the True Cross from Jerusalem to her son Constantine, who, being persuaded that the city would be perfectly secure where that relic should be preserved, secretly enclosed it in his own statue, which stands on a large column of porphyry in the forum called Constantine's in Constantinople.¹⁷

¹³ Still basic is Ebersolt 1921. See also Kalavrezou 1997; Mergiali-Sahas 2001.

¹⁴ Ambrose of Milan, de obitu Theodosii p. 369-401 Faller (CSEL 73).

¹⁵ For this tradition, see Patria II 20 = 161_{9,13} and 174₁₋₆ Preger; Par. 23 = 33₁₂₋₂₁ Preger. See also Mergiali-Sahas 2001, 41-42.

¹⁶ Koenen 1996, 175. Koenen's suggestion that Ambrose associated the relics with Constantine in order to diffuse doubts about their authenticity seems to fall a bit short as it ignores the legitimizing power inherent in Constantine's alleged use of the relics – especially the Holy Nail – as a tangible proof of the emperor's divine (Christian) mandate.

¹⁷ Sokr., Hist. Eccl. I 17, 8, p. 57₁₋₅ Hansen: ὅπερ δεξάμενος καὶ πιστεύσας τελείως σωθήσεσθαι τὴν πόλιν, ἔνθα ἂν ἐκεῖνο φυλάττεται, τῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἀνδριάντι κατέκρυψεν, ὅς ἐν τῇ Κωνσταντινουπόλει ἐν τῇ ἐπιλεγομένῃ ἀγορᾷ Κωνσταντίνου ἐπὶ τοῦ πορφυροῦ καὶ μεγάλου κίονος ἴδρυται. English translation after Schaff – Wace II, 1890, 21. For Sokrates' sources and dependence on the Latin Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia, see Geppert 1898. See also Chesnut 1986, 175-198.

A similar motivation is cited by Paulinus of Nola for Constantine's alleged translation of the bodies of Sts. Andrew and Timothy to the capital in 336:¹⁸ "When Constantine was founding the city named after himself and was the first of the Roman kings to bear the Christian name, the god-sent idea came to him that since he was embarking on the splendid enterprise of building a city that would rival Rome, he should also emulate Romulus' city with a further endowment, by gladly defending his walls with the bodies of the apostles. He then removed Andrew from the Achaeans and Timothy from Asia. And so Constantinople now stands with twin towers, vying with the eminence of great Rome, or rather resembling the defenses of Rome in that God has counterbalanced Peter and Paul with a protection as great, since Constantinople has gained the disciples of Paul and the brother of Peter."¹⁹ As noted by Cyril Mango, the Christian belief that relics of saints and martyrs are a more potent protection for cities than walls and towers is already reflected in the writings of John Chrysostom, whose homilies on the Egyptian martyrs and on St. Phocas provide good evidence for similar convictions some twenty years prior to Paulinus' writings.²⁰

If Constantine's and Helena's involvement in the translation of relics to Constantinople remains ambiguous and difficult to substantiate, there can be no doubt that Roman emperors from Constantius II onward played an active role in the acquisition of holy relics and their translation to the capital.²¹ According to the *Chronicon Paschale* and other sources, it was under Constantius II (337-361) and not under his father Constantine that the body of St. Timothy was brought to Constantinople from Ephesos in 356 and deposited under the altar of the newly constructed church of the Holy Apostles.²² For the following year, the same emperor is credited with the translation of the bodies of Sts. Andrew and Luke from Greece; they were likewise deposited in the church of the Holy Apostles.²³ Less certain than Constantius' involvement in the translation of the three 'apostles' to the capital is his role in the relocation of the Palestinian martyrs Pamphilus, Theodulus, and their companions from Antioch to Constantinople in 360, as it is mentioned only in much later textual sources; these suggest that the saints' "whole and intact" bodies were deposited in the *κύκλιον* of the Great Church before its dedication and that they were henceforth commemorated on 16 February.²⁴

¹⁸ According to Jerome and other trustworthy sources, the translation of the bodies of Sts. Timothy, Andrew, and Luke occurred in 356/57, i. e. during the reign of Constantius (see below). Various recensions of the *Alexandrian Chronicle*, however, support a date of 336. See Mango 1990, 52-53 and 434.

¹⁹ Paulinus of Nola, *carm.* 19. 317 ff. Translation by Mango 1990, 53.

²⁰ John Chrys., in *martyres Aegyptios*, PG 50 693-698, here 694; *idem*, *De sancto hieromartyre Phoca*, PG 50, 699-706, here 699.

²¹ For the reasons that might have convinced Constantius to translate the bodies of Sts. Timothy, Andrew, and Luke to Constantinople, see Mango 1990, 59-60.

²² *Chron. Pasch.* 542₇₋₁₁.

²³ *Chron. Pasch.* 542₁₄₋₁₈.

²⁴ See Georg. Kedr. I 523₇₋₉; *Synax. Eccl. Const.* 467₅₃₋₅₅ (*Synaxaria selecta*). See also Maraval 1985, 93; Ebersolt 1921, 5-6.

The next attempt to enrich Constantinople with a saintly body was once again the direct result of imperial intervention. At some point during his reign, so we hear from Sozomen, emperor Valens (364-378) ordered the head of St. John the Baptist to be removed from Cilica, where it was kept by a community of Semiarian monks, and brought to the capital.²⁵ However, a short distance from Constantinople, the mules carrying the sacred load refused to go any further. The relic was thus left behind in a small village near Chalcedon, called Kosilaos. It was Valens' successor Theodosius, who moved the relic again, not into the capital proper, but to the Hebdomon, where he built and richly endowed a new church to house it.²⁶ As recorded by the *Chronicon Paschale*, the relic was transferred to the new church on 18 February 391 from Chalcedon, where it had been laid to rest in the meantime.²⁷

Theodosius the Great (379-395) can also be credited for relic translations into the city proper as he ordered the repatriation of Paul the Confessor, whose body was laid to rest in a church originally built for his rival Makedonios.²⁸ According to Theodore Anagnostes, Theodosius was furthermore responsible for the translation and deposition of the relics of two African martyrs, Terentius and Africanus, in the church of St. Euphemia ἐν τῇ Πέτρῳ.²⁹ As in the case of the Pontian martyr Phocas, whose body is likewise thought to have arrived in Constantinople during the reign of Theodosius, it is difficult to ascertain what guided the emperor's choice of saints and what led him to determine their new resting places in the capital.³⁰

During the reign of Arcadius (395-408), imperial interest in saintly relics seems to have intensified. Towards the end of 398, empress Eudoxia ordered the transfer of relics of some anonymous martyrs from Constantinople to the church of St. Thomas at Drypia, a site located about nine miles west of the city on the seashore.³¹ As we learn from two homilies presented by John Chrysostom at this occasion, the translation ceremony started at midnight in the church of Hagia Sophia. Despite the great distance, the empress and other distinguished members of the court joined the procession of faithful and accompanied the saintly bodies all the way to Drypia.³² The following day, Arcadius and his court likewise visited the shrine and paid homage to the martyrs.³³

²⁵ Soz., *Hist. Eccl.* VII 21.1-3 = 333₇₋₂₀ Bidez – Hansen. Maraval 1985, 93-94.

²⁶ Soz., *Hist. Eccl.* VII 21.4-9 = 333₂₀₋₃₃₄₂₄, esp. 334₃ Bidez – Hansen (engl. translation: Schaff – Wace II, 1890, 391).

²⁷ *Chron. Pasch.* 564₁₃₋₁₉ (engl. translation: Whitby – Whitby 1989, 54).

²⁸ Soz., *Hist. Eccl.* VII 10.4 = 313₁₉₋₂₄ Hansen. On the triumphant return of the saint's body from exile, see BHG 1472. For the church, see Janin 1969, 394-395.

²⁹ *Acta Ss. Aprilis* 1, 860A-862F; Theod. Anagn., *Hist. Eccl.* II 62 (= PG 86, 213A); Maraval 1985, 94, note 165. On the history of this church, see Janin 1969, 126-127.

³⁰ The identity of the Pontian martyr is somewhat uncertain, since it is only based on the title of John Chrysostom's homily. See John Chrys., *de sancto hieromartyre Phoca*, PG 50, 699-706.

³¹ For the church and site, Janin 1964, 445; Janin 1969, 251-252. See also Dagron 1984, 102; Maraval 1985, 94.

³² The procession arrived at Drypia before dawn. On this occasion, the patriarch delivered his first homily, full of praise for the empress and her religious zeal. See John Chrys., *homilia dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum*, PG 63, 468-472.

³³ After Arcadius's departure, the patriarch delivered a second homily, this time in praise of the emperor. See John Chrys., *homilia dicta praesente imperatore*, PG 63, 473-478.

If other members of the imperial family, namely the emperor's daughter Arcadia, were likewise involved in the translation of holy bodies, as suggested by Maraval, remains uncertain as the princess's attested foundation of a church of St. Andrew does not necessarily imply the arrival of new relics in the capital.³⁴ On 19 May 406, however, Arcadius himself is said to have ordered the translation of relics of the prophet Samuel from Palestine to the capital.³⁵ According to the *Chronicon Paschale*, the prophet's body arrived in Constantinople "with Arcadius Augustus leading the way, and Anthemius, pretorian prefect and former consul, Aemilianus, city prefect, and all the senate."³⁶ But even before his arrival in the capital the prophet had attracted "one great swarm of people", who had welcomed and praised him all along the way from Palestine to Chalcedon.³⁷ When the prophet finally arrived at the 'Chalcedonian jetty',³⁸ his body was carried to the Great Church, where he was "laid to rest for a certain time".³⁹ A few years later, on 5 October 411, the relics were removed from Hagia Sophia and laid to rest in a sanctuary newly built near the church of St. John the Baptist at the Hebdomon.⁴⁰

It may be more than a mere coincidence that under Theodosius II (408-450) additional relics of Old Testament figures were brought to Constantinople.⁴¹ In late August or October 415, the bodies of Joseph, son of the Old Testament patriarch Jacob, and Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, arrived in the capital, once again via the Chalcedonian jetty; they were "borne in two caskets by Atticus, patriarch of Constantinople, and Moses, bishop of Antaradus in Phoenicia [...] and laid to rest in the Great Church with Ursus, city prefect, in attendance, and all the senate."⁴² The timing of the translation, probably instigated by the clerics who accompanied the holy bodies, could not have been chosen more fittingly as the relics arrived just in time for the inauguration of the Great Church on 10 October 415.⁴³

³⁴ See *Chron. Pasch.* 566₁₄₋₁₅. On the hypothetical identification of this church with St. Andreas en Krisei, see Janin 1969, 28-31, here 30.

³⁵ This seems to be implied by Jerome, *contra Vigilantium*, PL 23, 343C.

³⁶ *Chron. Pasch.* 569₁₂₋₁₈.

³⁷ Jerome, *contra Vigilantium*, PL 23, 343C.

³⁸ Little is known about the Chalcedonian jetty (σκάλα Χαλκηδονησία), a landing gate reserved for the inhabitants of Chalcedon. Janin 1964, 235 identifies it as part of the Portus Prosporianus.

³⁹ The choice of the Great Church as the (temporary) repository of the prophet's relics seems surprising considering that the church must have been – at least partially – damaged by the fire of 404 (*Chron. Pasch.* 568₁₄₋₁₇). A few years later, on 7 November 410, they were removed from the Great Church and translated to a church newly built to contain the prophet's remains at the Hebdomon. This church suffered great damage during an earthquake on 14 December 557. Janin 1969, 449-450.

⁴⁰ According to Theoph. 231₁₇₋₂₀ this church suffered great damage during the earthquake of 14 December 557. Since the church is not mentioned in later sources, Cyril Mango suggested that it might never have been rebuilt. See Mango – Scott 1997, 340, note 3.

⁴¹ Maraval 1985, 94.

⁴² *Chron. Pasch.* 572₁₅₋₅₇₃₂.

⁴³ *Chron. Pasch.* 572₁₃₋₁₅; see also Marc. Com. 72₁₋₄. For the date given by the *Chronicon Paschale* for the relic's arrival, see Whitby – Whitby 1989, 64, note 218.

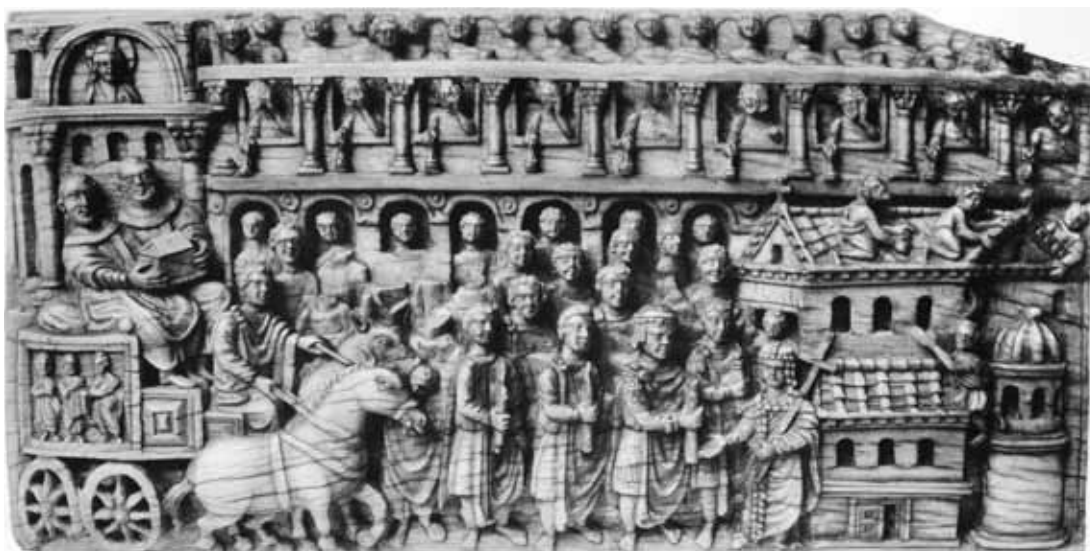


Fig. 1 Trier, Cathedral Treasury, So-called 'Trier Ivory'.

The involvement of clerics in the translation of relics to the capital is once again suggested by a passage in John Rufus's biography of the Georgian prince and later bishop Peter of Maiuma († ca. 488). Peter, who grew up as a hostage at the court of Theodosius II, was fortunate to obtain a portion of the relic of the True Cross from certain clerics, who, coming from Jerusalem, used to present the emperor with gifts of precious relics. Peter is said to have covered this relic "with a bit of wax, wrapped it in fine cloth and preserved it [...] with due care and reverence [...] in a golden container. Each Sunday, particularly on high feast days, he brought it forth. And after he had blessed himself with it and had kissed it, he put it back to its accustomed place."⁴⁴

Apart from relics intended for private use and possession by members of the court, there were others that should develop a more prominent profile. One such relic arrived in the capital from Jerusalem around 421.⁴⁵ Granted in exchange for an imperial gift of money for distribution to the needy and a golden, gem-studded cross to be erected on Mount Golgotha, the archbishop of Jerusalem sent the right arm of St. Stephen to Constantinople, where it was received with great honor and deposited in a small church, newly built by the emperor's sister Pulcheria Augusta inside the Great Palace (fig. 1).⁴⁶ Further relics of St. Stephen arrived in the capital in 438. As recorded by Marcellinus Comes, they were brought back from Jerusalem by the emperor's wife Eudokia and deposited in the church of St. Laurence, another church associated with the name of Pulcheria.⁴⁷ Earlier the same year, on 27 January 438, Constantinople had celebrated the arrival of the relics of St. John Chrysostom, whose body was brought to the capital from Komana, the city of his exile. As

⁴⁴ Joh. Rufus, *Vita Petri* Ib. 41 [39] Raabe.

⁴⁵ Maraval 1985, 94 (428); Janin 1969, 473-474.

⁴⁶ Theoph. 86₂₆-87₅. Kalavrezou 1997, 57-62. See also Holum 1977, 163 note 46; Holum – Vikan 1979; Holum 1982.

⁴⁷ Marc. Com. 80_{4,8}, 85₃₈₋₄₀. For the church, see Janin 1969, 301-304.



Fig. 2 Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Menologion of Basil II (Vat. gr. 1613):
Arrival of Relics of St. John Chrysostom.

seen and described in the Menologion of Basil II (fig. 2), the saint's body was received with great honor by both the emperor and the patriarch – the latter having initiated the translation – and deposited in the church of the Holy Apostles.⁴⁸ Other relic translations associated with members of the Theodosian family, namely those of the Prophet Isaias and Sts. Laurence and Agnes, are mentioned only in very late sources and should therefore be treated with caution.⁴⁹

One case of a miraculous invention of relics, however, deserves notice. As recorded by the *Chronicon Paschale* and described in more detail by Sozomen, who was an eyewitness of the events, Pulcheria miraculously discovered the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste inside the church of St. Thyrsus, a building constructed some fifty years prior by Flavius Caesarius, consul of 397.⁵⁰ After the relics' discovery, the empress "honored the martyrs with the costliest casket; and on the conclusion of a public festival which was celebrated with befitting honor and with a procession to the accompaniment of psalms [...] the relics were placed alongside those of the godlike Thyrsus."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Sokr., *Hist. Eccl.* VII 45 = 392₁₈₋₂₄ Hansen. For the date, see also Marc. Com. 29-32.

⁴⁹ Maraval 1985, 95.

⁵⁰ The date given for the relics' discovery is ambiguous. Soz., *Hist. Eccl.* IX 1 = 394 Bidez – Hansen, places it in the episcopate of Proclus (434-346). In the *Chron. Pasch.* 590₁₆₋₂₀ it is listed under 451. For the church, see Janin 1969, 247-248. On Flavius Caesarius, see PLRE, I 171. See also Holum 1982, 137.

⁵¹ Soz., *Hist. Eccl.* IX 1.17 = 394₂₃₋₂₆ Bidez – Hansen (engl. translation after Schaff – Wace 1890, 421). Indirectly, Sozomen's report suggests that the foundation of the church of St. Thyrsos in 397 coincided with the arrival of his body in the capital. See also Maraval 1985, 94.

While the emperor's role in securing relics for the capital remained prominent during the second half of the fifth century – Leo I (457-474) removed the relics of Symeon the Stylite from Antioch in 468,⁵² Zeno (474-491) brought a copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew to Constantinople from Cyprus, which had been found on the body of St. Barnabas,⁵³ and Anastasius (491-518) received a finger of St. Sergios from Resafa⁵⁴ – one can likewise note an increase in translations associated with both ecclesiastical and state officials.⁵⁵ As noted by Maraval, however, this development seems to have had little effect on the imperial family's continued interest in the acquisition of relics and their distribution among the churches of the capital.⁵⁶ In 472, for instance, Leo I ordered the Virgin's robe, which, according to some sources, had been brought to the capital by two patricians from Palestine, to be placed in a precious reliquary and deposited in the church of the Virgin in the Blachernai, a foundation once again associated with empress Pulcheria.⁵⁷ However, not all imperial efforts to endow the capital with sacred matter were successful. Well known are the fruitless attempts of emperor Justinian (527-565) to acquire bodily remains of Sts. Peter, Paul and Laurence from Pope Hormisdas in Rome and relics of St. Demetrius from the archbishop of Thessalonike – he was given contact relics instead.⁵⁸ Justinian's successor Justin II (565-578) is likewise known for his efforts to enrich the capital with precious relics. While not supported by contemporary sources, two twelfth-century authors, Michael the Syrian and George Kedrenos, relate that Justin ordered the removal of the relic of the True Cross from Apameia to Antioch in 574.⁵⁹ Here, the relic was allegedly split into two, one half sent back to Apameia and the other to Constantinople, where it was solemnly received by the emperor and the populace and venerated for ten days. Michael the Syrian further notes that Justin, much like Leo I before him, ordered a precious container to be made for the relic, and translated it to the church of Hagia Sophia.⁶⁰ Another relic translation

⁵² For the translation of the relics of St. Symeon from Antioch, see Vita Danielis styl. p. 56-57; Holum 1982, 103-104.

⁵³ For the translation of the gospels of St. Matthew from Cyprus, see Theod. Anagn., Hist. Eccl. 121₁₉₋₂₃ Hansen (= PG 86, 184C); Janin 1969, 473.

⁵⁴ For the translation of the finger of St. Sergios, see Theod. Anagn., Hist. Eccl. 156₁₇₋₁₉ Hansen.

⁵⁵ Prominent among the clergymen involved in the translation of relics are St. Marcian, presbyter and oeconomus of the Great Church, who is said to have brought the relics of St. Isidore to the capital and to have deposited them in the church of Hagia Eirene, and St. Markellos the Akoimetos, who is said to have received relics from Rome, Illyria, and elsewhere. Evidence for the translation of relics by imperial officials is often limited to notices about the foundation of churches such as the ones endowed by the patricians Sphorakios (consul of 452), Studios (consul of 454), and Anthemios (consul of 455). See Maraval 1985, 95.

⁵⁶ Maraval 1985, 97.

⁵⁷ According to Georg. Hamart. II, 617₅₋₁₀, the relic was found in Jerusalem and sent to the capital by a pious Jewish woman. Synax. Eccl. Const. 793₅₋₉, on the other hand, claims that the Virgin's robe was sent by two *patrikioi* from Galilee and deposited in the church on July 2. See also Wenger 1955, 294-303 and 306-311; Maraval 1985, 98. On the building and its history, see Janin 1969, 161-171.

⁵⁸ For the relics of Sts. Peter, Paul, and Laurence, see Epistulae Romanorum pontificum genuinae et quae ad eos scriptae sunt, ed. A. Thiel (1867-1868, repr. 1974), 873-875. See also Regesta Pontificum romanorum ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCLIII, ed. P. Jaffé, I (1885, repr. 1956), Nr. 829, 106. For the relics of St. Demetrius, see Lemerle 1979, 89₂₅₋₉₀₁₃; see also Bakirtzis 2002, 177.

⁵⁹ Georg. Kedr. I 685; Mich. Syr. II 284-285.

⁶⁰ Mich. Syr. II 285.

associated with Justin II is that of the famous *acheiropoietos* icon of Christ, which, according to George Kedrenos, arrived in the capital “from those of Kamoulia, a village in Cappadocia”⁶¹ during the same year – the ninth of Justin’s reign – as the relic from Apameia. Further relics associated with this emperor are cited in the Patria. According to this source, Justin II “built the church of St. James [Chalkoprateia] and placed the relics of Saint Symeon (ὁ θεοδόχος), Zacharias, and James (ὁ ἀδελφόθεος) in the shrine of the Holy Innocents and within the Holy Shrine [he placed] the hair of St. John the Baptist on the left, and the bodies of the myrrh-bearing women on the right.”⁶² While the reliability of the historical record has justly been questioned, it may be more than a mere coincidence that the very emperor who transformed the churches of the Virgin in the Blachernai and Chalkoprateia into shrines for her most venerated relics in Constantinople, is also credited with the transfer of the *acheiropoietos* from Kamoulia, the relic of the True Cross from Apameia, and other important relics to the capital.⁶³

Less successful were attempts to obtain relics from the Western half of the empire. When Emperor Maurice (582-602) requested relics of St. Demetrius from Thessalonike at the end of the sixth century, he was politely informed that the location of the saint’s tomb was unknown and his body thus unavailable for distribution.⁶⁴ Maurice’s wife Constantia was similarly denied relics of St. Paul, which she had requested from Pope Gregory in Rome. As was the case in the time of Justinian, the pope refused to break with the Roman custom not to disperse the bodies of saints and instead reprimanded the queen for her pious desire.⁶⁵

The Persian invasion of Syria-Palestine in 614 and the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 637/38 resulted in a number of important relic translation during the reign of emperor Herakleios (610-641) and changed Constantinople’s status as a repository of sacred relics for centuries. As suggested by the Chronicon Paschale, the relic of the Holy Lance, Sponge, and the True Cross from Jerusalem were recovered from the Persians during the fall of 629, transferred to the capital, and exhibited for public veneration in the church of Hagia Sophia for several days.⁶⁶ While emperor Herakleios, according to some sources, triumphantly returned the relic of the True Cross from Constantinople to Jerusalem and exalted it in the church of the Holy Sepulcher on 21 March of the following year, the unexpected loss of the Holy City to the Arabs soon necessitated the relic’s transfer back into the capital, where it was now safeguarded by the emperor and kept inside the confines of the imperial palace.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Georg. Kedr. I 685.

⁶² Patria III 148, p. 263₁₁₋₁₇ Preger.

⁶³ For an assessment of the reliability of this source, see Wortley 2004, 154.

⁶⁴ Lemerle 1979, 90₁₃₋₁₇. Like his predecessor Justinian, the emperor was given contact relics instead.

⁶⁵ Gregory the Great, reg. ep. IV 30 = 248-250 Norberg (CCSL 140).

⁶⁶ The date of 614, under which the return of the Holy Lance and Sponge is listed in the Chronicon Paschale is problematic. See Klein 2001, and Klein 2004a, 34-40.

⁶⁷ The sequence of events cannot be determined with certainty as the testimonies of Theophanes the Confessor and Patriarch Nikephoros contradict each other. For a brief summary of arguments, see Klein 2004a, 41-43.

Palace Relics and Rituals

The forced relocation of the ‘larger part’ of the relic of the True Cross from Jerusalem to Constantinople and its presumed deposition in the imperial palace not only ensured the empire’s safety and prosperity for the future. It also re-affirmed the emperor’s role as the guardian and protector of Christianity’s most sacred treasure. While a smaller portion of the relic, associated with Constantine the Great and set in a bejeweled processional cross, had already been used in imperial processions in the beginning of the sixth century, and is known to have preceded the imperial army on military campaigns during the reign of emperor Maurice, it was the alleged return of the True Cross from Jerusalem that effectively transformed Constantinople into a ‘New Jerusalem’ and the imperial palace into a *locus sanctus* at the heart of the empire.⁶⁸ The possession of the True Cross not only reinforced the emperor’s divine mandate but also rendered him the most important distributor of relics of the True Cross in the Christian world, a position future emperors should eagerly exploit in building political alliances with Christian rulers and potentates in Western Europe.⁶⁹

Where the relic of the True Cross from Jerusalem was originally kept cannot be determined with certainty. In the second half of the seventh century, when Bishop Arkulf visited Constantinople on his way back from the Holy Land, a portion of the relic was, at least for the time of its public veneration during Holy Week, kept inside Hagia Sophia in a “very large and beautiful chest [...] to the north of the interior of the building.”⁷⁰ Arkulf’s testimony has often been considered as an indication that the main relic of the True Cross had, by the seventh century, been entrusted to the care of the patriarch. Judging from later accounts, however, it is more likely that the relic of the True Cross from Jerusalem and the so-called ‘Cross of Constantine’, first mentioned by Theodore Anagnostes, were both safeguarded inside the imperial palace, presumably in the *skeuophylakion*, and removed only temporarily for specific liturgical and ceremonial functions.⁷¹ As recorded in Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos’ Book of Ceremonies, important relics of the True Cross were still kept in the *skeuophylakion* of the imperial palace during the tenth century and taken out on specific feasts and occasions. One such feast was a six-day-long festival celebrated in mid-Lent that included a public display and veneration of the relic of the True Cross inside Hagia Sophia and a related imperial ceremony performed in the palace.⁷²

⁶⁸ For the emperor’s processional and military use of the True Cross in the sixth century, see Theod. Anagn., Hist. Eccl. 13 Hansen; Theophyl. Sim. 74 (engl. translation: Whitby – Whitby 1986, 156). See also Klein 2004a, 33-34.

⁶⁹ See Klein 2004b.

⁷⁰ Adamnani de locis sanctis 228 Geyer (engl. translation Wilkinson 2002, 202).

⁷¹ Theod. Anagn., Hist. Eccl. 13 Hansen, only reveals that the ‘Cross of Constantine’ was kept inside the imperial palace, but gives no indication on where exactly it was deposited. Holum – Vikan 1979, 130, identify the ‘Cross of Constantine’ with a processional cross that is known to have been kept at the Helenianai palace in the late fourth century and support the hypothesis that it was transferred to the imperial palace by Pulcheria and Theodosius II. For the cross at the Helenianai palace, see Cer. I 91 = 414 Reiske; Tiftixoglu 1973, 52 and 78.

⁷² Cer. II 11 = 549-550 Reiske.

According to the Book of Ceremonies, celebrations started on the third Sunday of Lent in the *skeuophylakion* of the imperial palace. Between the third and sixth ode of *orthros*, the “three glorious and life-giving crosses” (οἱ τίμιοι καὶ ζωοποιοὶ τρεῖς σταυροὶ), were removed from the treasury, embalmed by the *protopapas*, and taken to the Nea Ekklesia, to be venerated by all. After *orthros* was concluded, the crosses were taken to the gallery of the church, where the clergies of the Nea and the imperial palace jointly intoned the *troparia* of the Crucifixion (τὰ σταυρώσιμα). At this time, the emperor and his co-emperors were given the opportunity to venerate and kiss the precious and life-giving relics. Then, the three crosses were separated from each other. Accompanied by the clergy of the Nea, a deacon carried one of them back down to the main level of the church to be displayed for further veneration. The second cross was taken over by the *papias* of the Great Palace, who, accompanied by the palace clergy, the *protopapas* of the church of St. Stephen, and the *diaitarioi* of the palace, carried it in festive procession through the Heliakon [of the Chrysotriklinos] and the Chrysotriklinos into the Lausiakos, where it was displayed for the veneration by members of the senate.⁷³ The cross was then taken to the church of the protomartyr Stephen in the Daphne palace, where it remained over night. On the following day, the *papias* took the relic to Hagia Sophia, where it was displayed for veneration by the faithful during the rest of the week. The third cross never left the gallery of the Nea. After *none* on Friday, when public veneration had ended at Hagia Sophia, the *papias* and the clergy of the Nea brought the respective crosses back into the palace. Finally, between the third and sixth ode of *orthros* on Sunday, the *protopapas* and the *skeuophylax* returned all crosses to the *skeuophylakion*.

What is striking about this description is not only the fact that, by the tenth century, three crosses of the glorious and life-giving wood, were kept in the *skeuophylakion* of the imperial palace, but also that these relics were employed in a complex ceremony that involved their display in three distinct locations within the imperial palace – the Nea Ekklesia, the Lausiakos, and the church of St. Stephen – as well as in the church of Hagia Sophia.⁷⁴

Another, closely related ceremony involving the True Cross is described in the Book of Ceremonies for the week before and the two weeks following August 1.⁷⁵ Once again, the ceremony started between the third and sixth ode of *orthros* in the *skeuophylakion* of the palace. After the relic was embalmed, it was taken to an unspecified church within the imperial palace, where it was displayed for veneration by the emperors. The relic was then taken to the Lausiakos, where it was set up to be venerated by the members of the senate. Afterwards, the cross was taken to the church of St. Stephen, from where it was carried through each of the quarters of the capital to “cleanse and sanctify all places and houses

⁷³ On the Lausiakos, see Guiland 1969, I, 154-160.

⁷⁴ One may assume that the three crosses mentioned here were once contained in a single reliquary such as the one formerly preserved in the treasury of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. While the reliquary itself has not survived, an engraving in Morand 1790, 44, records the appearance of its interior. For a reproduction of Morand’s engraving and additional information on this reliquary, see Klein 2002, fig. 3; Trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle 2001, Nr. 17, 63-64 (J. Durand). See also Frolow 1961, Nr. 530.

⁷⁵ Cer. II 8 = 538₁₃-541₁₀ Reiske.

of the god-guarded and imperial city; and not only the buildings, but also the walls of the city and its suburbs.”⁷⁶ When the relic returned from its journey on August 13, it was first brought to the Chrysotriklinos and placed on the imperial throne. Then, the *papias*, accompanied by the *protopapas* and the clergy, took the relic through the rooms of the imperial palace to cleanse and sanctify them as well. For a short while thereafter, the relic was kept in the oratory of St. Theodore, before the *papias* carried it back to the church of the Virgin of the Pharos after vespers. Here, the relic was received by the *skeuophylax* of the palace and returned to the treasury between the third and sixth ode of *orthros*.

It is interesting to note that the relic of the True Cross used in this ceremony was once again displayed in three distinct locations within the imperial palace before it was carried through the quarters of the city: an unnamed church within the palace, the Lausiakos, and the church of St. Stephen. While it would be tempting to identify the unnamed church, in which the relic was displayed for veneration by the emperors, as the Nea Ekklesia, the later mentioning of the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos rather suggests that the relic was displayed in the latter. If this identification is correct, the Nea Ekklesia, the church of the Virgin of the Pharos, and the church of St. Stephen played a similar and important role in two ceremonies involving relics of the True Cross. In addition, the oratory of St. Theodore features as a temporary resting place for the relic on its way back to the *skeuophylakion* of the imperial palace. Why these structures were chosen as a stage for the ceremonies performed is difficult to answer. However, all of them are known as important repositories for sacred relics.

The church of the Virgin of the Pharos, for instance, contained the Great Palace’s most important collection of relics and, at some point between the eighth and the tenth century, developed into “the emperor’s chapel par excellence”.⁷⁷ While the exact circumstances of this development are unknown, the rise in prominence of the Pharos church may be associated with an extensive rebuilding and redecoration of the structure under emperor Michael III (842-867).⁷⁸ During the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (944-959), two precious relics, the Holy Lance and a portion of the True Cross are already known to have been kept there.⁷⁹ Other important relics, brought to Constantinople as a result of successful military campaigns in the East, are likewise known to have arrived in the Pharos church during the tenth century. In 944, the famous Mandyllion of Christ was brought to

⁷⁶ Cer. II 8 = 539₁₈-540₂ Reiske

⁷⁷ Jenkins – Mango 1955-56, 134.

⁷⁸ In addition to his rebuilding and redecoration of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos, which was concluded in 864, Michael III is also credited with the restoration of the Chrysotriklinos, the imperial throne room. For the description of the new decoration of church of the Virgin of the Pharos, see Phot., Hom. X = II, 428-439 Aristarchis (engl. translation: Mango 1958, 184-190). For a description of the new mosaic decoration in the Chrysotriklinos, see Anth. Graeca I 106 (engl. translation: Paton I, 1927, 44-47).

⁷⁹ For the presence of a relic of the True Cross and a processional cross newly made by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, see Cer. I 29 = 161-162 Reiske; II 8 = 538-540 Reiske; II 11 = 549 Reiske; II 40 = 640 Reiske. For the court’s veneration of the Holy Lance on Good Friday, see Cer. I 34 = 179-180 Reiske. See also Jenkins – Mango 1955-56, 136; Kalavrezou 1997, 56.

the capital from Edessa by Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944) and deposited there.⁸⁰ A year later, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos transferred the relic of the right arm of John the Baptist to Constantinople and likewise deposited it in the Pharos church.⁸¹ Two more prominent relics, the Holy Keramion and the sandals of Christ, entered the collection under Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) in 968 and under John I Tzimiskes (969-976) in 975.⁸² A third one, namely Christ's famous letter to King Abgar, was added to the collection by emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034) in 1032, who received it from George Maniakes after the capture of Edessa.⁸³ By the end of the twelfth century, the church was renown as the home of some of the most important relics of Christendom: the Mandylion of Christ, the Holy Keramion, the Crown of Thorns, the Holy Nail, Christ's iron collar shackle, the linen sheets in which his body was wrapped in the tomb, the linen towel with which he dried the apostle's feet, the Holy Lance, Christ's purple robe, the reed which he held in his right hand, Christ's leather sandals, and a piece from his tomb stone.⁸⁴ While earlier Western sources such as the spurious letter of emperor Alexis I to Count Robert of Flanders⁸⁵ and Anthony of Novgorod's pilgrimage account mention a number of other prominent relics allegedly kept at the Pharos church, Nikolaos Mesarites, who served as skeuophylax at the Pharos church, should still be considered the most reliable witness on the relic content of the palace chapel.⁸⁶

The Nea Ekklesia likewise contained a number of extraordinary relics, among them the sheepskin cloak of the Prophet Elijah, which is recorded for the church already in the tenth century, the table at which Abraham had entertained the three angels in disguise, the horn from which Samuel had anointed David, and relics associated with Constantine the Great.⁸⁷ Other relics that are mentioned by Western and Russian pilgrims during the twelfth century, such as the rod of Moses and the 'Cross of Constantine' were clearly deposited in the Nea at some later date, as the Book of Ceremonies still recorded them for

⁸⁰ Joh. Skyl. 231₆₆-232₇₂. For general information on the Mandylion of Christ, see Mandylion 2004; Cameron 1984; Runciman 1931.

⁸¹ Joh. Skyl. 245₂₇-32.

⁸² Leon Diak. 71, and 166. While Leon records that the sandals of Christ were brought from Hierapolis in Syria (Mempetze), Matthew of Edessa's Chronicle preserves a letter of emperor John I Tzimiskes to the Armenian king Ašot III in which he names the city of Gabala as the location where this and other relics were found: Matthew of Edessa, Chronicle I 20 (engl. translation by Dostourian 1993, 32). See also Schlumberger 1896, 290; Adontz 1965, 141-147.

⁸³ Georg. Kedr. II 501. For Yahā of Antioch's description of the letter's arrival in the capital, see Schlumberger 1905, 119. The letter disappeared during the plundering of the palace in 1185. See Nik. Chon. 347₁₇₋₁₈; Magoulias 1984, 191.

⁸⁴ See Nikolaos Mes. 30-31 Heisenberg.

⁸⁵ See Epistula Alexii 134. For an assessment of the authenticity and historical value of the letter, see Schreiner 1998, 111-140; Gastgeber 1998, 141-185; Cutler 1995, 239-240.

⁸⁶ Among the more noteworthy relics mentioned by Anthony of Novgorod was an "iron staff mounted by a cross" that had belonged to St. John the Baptist. See Anthony of Novgorod, p. 57 Ehrhard. See also Kalavrezou 1997, 68.

⁸⁷ For the sheepskin cloak of the prophet Elijah, see Cer. I 19 = 117₂₁ Reiske. For a more extensive list of relics, see Anthony of Novgorod 57-58 Ehrhard; Cigaar 1976, 211-267; Janin 1969, 362-363. On the significance of the relics, see Magdalino 1987, 57-60.

the oratory of St. Theodore, one of the chapels directly adjacent to the Chrysotriklinos, and the church of St. Stephen respectively.⁸⁸ According to tradition, the rod of Moses (ἡ τοῦ Μωσέως ῥόβδος) had been brought to Constantinople during the reign of Constantine the Great, later transferred to the Great Palace, and carried in imperial processions together with the 'Cross of Constantine'.⁸⁹

Among the churches, chapels, and oratories of the imperial palace, the church of St. Stephen holds a place of special importance as it was built to hold the relic of the right arm of the protomartyr St. Stephen, which arrived in the capital in 421.⁹⁰ In the centuries that followed, the oratory of St. Stephen began to assume an important ritual function as a church in which coronations – especially of empresses – and imperial marriages took place.⁹¹ As Ioli Kalavrezou has convincingly shown, it is no mere coincidence that the church and relic of saint 'Stephanos', which literally means 'crown' or 'wreath', should become associated with two imperial ceremonies that involve coronations, namely the *stepsimon* and *stephanoma*.⁹² Apart from a number of significant ritual objects such as scepters, *ptychia*, and golden *kandidatika*, the treasury of this church also contained two other important relics, namely a fragment of the True Cross embedded in the great 'Cross of Constantine' and a copy of the Gospel of Matthew written by St. Barnabas and removed from his tomb in Cyprus under emperor Zenon.⁹³

The church of the Virgin of the Pharos, the Nea Ekklesia, and the oratories of St. Theodore and St. Stephen thus share in a long history of imperial relic collecting and define locations within the imperial palace, which, through their sacred content, became historically, symbolically, and politically charged. Their dual function as permanent repositories of sacred matter and temporary stages for ceremonies involving relics not normally kept on site, such as the True Cross, reflect the Great Palace's gradual transformation from an imperial residence into a *locus sanctus*. This development seems to have started in the early fifth century, when relic translations into the imperial palace were first recorded and sanctuaries built within it to receive the sacred matter. However, it was not until the ninth and tenth centuries that the palace of the emperor began to be transformed into the 'House of Christ', first through the building and decorating campaigns of Michael III and Basil I, and then through the deposition of sacred relics associated with Christ, St. John, and other biblical figures under their tenth-century successors.

⁸⁸ Cer. II 40 = 640₁₆₋₁₈ Reiske. Dagron 1996, 224; Janin 1969, 472-474. Magdalino 1987, 58.

⁸⁹ For the alleged arrival of the rod of Moses during the reign of Constantine, see Patria III 88, p. 247 Preger. For the relic's use in imperial processions, see Cer. I 1 = 6-7 Reiske (see also Vogt I, 1935, comm. 23-24). See also Ebersolt 1921, 22 with note 7.

⁹⁰ See above, p. 85.

⁹¹ For a list of imperial coronations and marriages, see Kalavrezou 1997, 60 with note 30.

⁹² Kalavrezou 1997, 61-64.

⁹³ For the 'Cross of Constantine' and other ritual objects, see Cer. II 40 = 640 Reiske. See also Kalavrezou 1997, 59. For the Gospel of St. Matthew, deposited in the church by the order of emperor Zenon, see Georg. Hamart. 619; Georg. Kedr. 618-619. See also Ebersolt 1921, 18, and above, p. 81-82.

Apart from the more prominent sanctuaries mentioned above, there were others in the palace that received relics as a result of imperial patronage. A lock of the hair of St. John the Baptist, for instance, which John Tzimiskes had brought to the capital together with the sandals of Christ, did not enter the Pharos church.⁹⁴ It was instead deposited in the oratory of Christ at the Chalke gate, which the Tzimiskes had recently enlarged to serve as his burial place.⁹⁵ Little is known about the relics of a number of anonymous saints, which were deposited in a narrow passageway close to the oratory of the Holy Trinity.⁹⁶ However, their location in the Daphne complex of the imperial palace may indicate a translation in the Early Byzantine period.⁹⁷

As far as the ritual and processional use of ‘palace relics’ are concerned, historical sources provide a certain amount of information. The emperor’s solemn swearing of oaths on relics of the True Cross, for instance, is recorded several times. Among the earliest such records is a reference in Patriarch Nikephoros’ Short History, which relates that Herakleios II (641) swore on the life-giving wood that the children of his deceased brother Constantine III (641) would not be harmed by him or anybody else.⁹⁸ Such oaths are also recorded in a military context. Before the beginning of a campaign against the Bulgars in 917, for instance, the generals of the Byzantine army are said to have sworn a solemn oath on the “*venerated and life-giving wood* (σεβάσμια καὶ ζωοποιὰ ξύλα) *brought by Konstantinos Kephala, the archpriest of the imperial palace,*” which seems to imply that the relic used for this purpose had been taken out of the Great Palace.⁹⁹ Finally, when the armies of the First Crusade passed through Constantinople in 1097, it was Emperor Alexios I (1081-1118), who made their leaders swear “*on the cross of the Lord and the Crown of Thorns, and many other holy objects*” (super dominicam crucem et spineam coronam, et super multa alia sancta) not to keep for themselves any formerly Byzantine city or castle they would reconquer from the infidels.¹⁰⁰

The use of the True Cross was, however, not limited to the swearing of oaths by Byzantine emperors, generals and leaders of foreign armies. A portion of the relic is known to have accompanied the emperor into battle already in the late sixth century, functioning as a token of divine protection and victory over the empire’s worldly enemies.¹⁰¹ The efficacy of the True Cross in military defense matters is also recorded during the period of iconoclasm, when Theophilos, son of Emperor Michael II (820-829), and the Patriarch Anthony

⁹⁴ According to Joh. Skyl. 271₆₂₋₆₃ it was Nikephoros Phokas who brought this relic to Constantinople in 968.

⁹⁵ The church was originally built by Romanos I Lekapenos. See Ebersolt 1910, 22; Ebersolt 1921, 20; Kalavrezou 1997, 56 note 15. For the assumed location and significance of this church, see Mango 1959, 149-169.

⁹⁶ Cer. I 1 = 8 Reiske; I 23 = 129 Reiske. See also Ebersolt 1921, 18; Ebersolt 1910, 56.

⁹⁷ One may think of Eudoxia’s discovery and translation of relics of anonymous martyrs to the church of St. Thomas at Drypia as a related case. See above, p. 83.

⁹⁸ Nikeph. 30 de Boor (80₂₀₋₂₃ Mango). See also Klein 2004a, 49-50 with note 153; Frolow 1961, Nr. 62, 193.

⁹⁹ Theoph. Cont. 388-389 and 723; Georg. Hamart. 881. See also Klein 2004a, 66; Frolow 1961, Nr. 133, 231.

¹⁰⁰ Raymond d’Aguilers, 93. See also Klein 2004a, 66; Frolow 1961, Nr. 256, 286.

¹⁰¹ Theophyl. Sim. 220. See also Whitby – Whitby 1986, 156.



Fig. 3 Limburg an der Lahn, Cathedral Treasury, Staurotheke.

carried the relic of the True Cross and the robe of the Virgin in solemn procession over the city walls to counter an assault of Thomas the Slav.¹⁰² Despite the fact that imperial uses and misuses of relics during the iconoclastic controversy are difficult to assess, the relic's continued veneration in the capital can be assumed with reasonable certainty.¹⁰³ As far as other instance for the use of relics in a military context are concerned, detailed

¹⁰² Joh. Skyl. 34₈₁₋₈₅; Theoph. Cont. 59₁₁₋₁₄; Jos. Gen. 28₄₃₋₄₉; Georg. Kedr. II 81₁₂₋₂₂. See also Frolow 1961, Nr. 90, 216.

¹⁰³ For a continuing imperial interest in the cult of the True Cross during iconoclasm, see Klein 2004a, 47-58.

information is more readily available in sources of the tenth century. One of them specifies exactly what should be observed when the emperor goes on a military campaign: “In front of the emperor march the *praipositoï* and the *koubouklion*, and in the middle of the *praipositoï* marches a *koubikouarios* carrying the holy and life-giving wood of the Cross with the case about his neck.”¹⁰⁴ Instead of being set atop a golden pole, as recorded for Emperor Maurice’s campaign, the relic was now kept in a special container and carried by a *koubikouarios* around his neck, an arrangement reminiscent of several Middle Byzantine *staurothekai*, especially the famous reliquary in Limburg an der Lahn (fig. 3).¹⁰⁵ Later emperors such as Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180) and Isaac II Angelos (1203-1204) carried similar reliquaries with them on campaigns.¹⁰⁶ By taking a relic of the True Cross into battle, the Byzantine emperor modeled himself consciously and recognizably in the image of Constantine the Great, who was the first to experience the victory-bearing power of the sign of the cross in battle and was believed to have brought the relic of the True Cross to Constantinople.¹⁰⁷

Unfortunately, information about other relics carried in imperial processions is scant. One instance that deserves notice, however, is a procession recorded for the year 1037, in which the swaddling clothes of Christ and other relics were taken from the palace and paraded around the city after a prolonged drought.¹⁰⁸ As in previous moments of despair and crisis, the emperor and his family once again appealed to the city’s most powerful protectors, Christ, the Virgin, and the saints, whose relics were safeguarded inside the imperial palace. Once again, the emperor was able to enlist the divine powers and deliver his city from distress and danger. He could do so, because his predecessors had collected the most powerful relics of Christendom for centuries and gradually transformed the Great Palace into a place, where emperors resided and Christ and his saints dwelled among them in both relics and icons.

Summary

This study examines the history and fate of the Great Palace’s famous collection of sacred relics from the time of its alleged creation under Constantine the Great through the twelfth century. Focusing on the early history of the cult of relics in the capital and the emperor’s role as a collector, guardian, and distributor of sacred matter, the article outlines the gradual transformation of the Great Palace from an imperial residence into the world’s most important repository for sacred relics, a *locus sanctus* at the heart of the empire.

¹⁰⁴ Const. Porph. 124.

¹⁰⁵ On the ‘Limburg Staurotheke’, see most recently Klein 2004a, 105-112. See also Ševčenko 1994, 289-294, with further literature.

¹⁰⁶ For the reliquary commissioned by Manuel, see Frolow 1961, Nr. 367, 342-343 and Frolow 1944, 105-106. For the reliquary taken on campaign by Isaac II, see Georg. Akrop. 19-20.

¹⁰⁷ For a summary of the early history of the relic of the True Cross and Constantine’s involvement in the foundation of its cult in Constantinople, see Klein 2004c.

¹⁰⁸ Joh. Skyl. 400₄₁₋₄₄.

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Credits

Fig. 1: R. Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (1929), Taf. 67. – Fig. 2: *Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana*. – Fig. 3: Dom- und Diözesanmuseum Limburg.



BYZAS 5

VISUALISIERUNGEN VON HERRSCHAFT

FRÜHMITTELALTERLICHE RESIDENZEN GESTALT UND ZEREMONIELL

Internationales Kolloquium, 3./4. Juni 2004 in Istanbul

Herausgegeben von
Franz Alto Bauer

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