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A "Divine Sanction" on the Revolt: The Cult of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica and the Uprising of Peter and Asen (1185–1186)

It is well known in the modern scholarship how widely cults of saints were applied to political practices in medieval Europe. Medieval Bulgaria was no exception[1]. Having adopted Christianity from Byzantium in 864 (or 865) and thus entered the Byzantine orbit, the Bulgarians imported much of the political and ecclesiastical heritage of the Empire. The tendency increased after the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria in 1018, since for more than 150 years the lands of the Bulgarians were to remain within the imperial borders. Yet in 1185–1186 the rule of Constantinople over the Bulgarians was put to an end due to the successful revolt of brothers Theodore-Peter and Asen-Belgun, who used as their stronghold the fortress of Tărnovo, in the northern-eastern part of the Bulgarian lands, and originated from the local nobility. Trying to justify their actions against the imperial power, the rebellious brothers openly appealed to a "Divine sanction" on the renovation of independent Bulgaria, having ascribed this to the holy protection of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica. According to the account, left by a contemporary, a prominent Byzantine government official, historian and theologian Nicetas Choniates (between 1155 and 1157–1217), the Bulgarians in Tărnovo at first feared to rebel against the Empire. But Peter and Asen constructed there a *house of prayer in the name of the all-praised martyr Demetrius*, where they brought together many *people of various kinds obsessed by devils*, who were told to prophesy that *God had decided upon the freedom of the Bulgarians and the Vlachs and upon the removal from their necks of the yoke they had been bearing for so long*. These *prophets* also proclaimed that St. Demetrius had left Thessalonica and his own shrine there, desiring for no more to dwell with the Byzantines and joining the Bulgarians to assist and to participate in their enterprise[2].

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[1] D. Polyviannyi, *The Cults of Saints in the Political Ideology of the Bulgarian Empire*, [in:] *Fonctions sociales et politiques du culte des saints dans les sociétés de rite grec et latin au Moyen Âge et à l'Époque Moderne. Approche comparative,* ed. M. Derwich, M. Dmitriev, Wrocław 1999, p. 401–416.

[2] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, rec. I.A. van Dieten, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1975, p. 371 (= *CFHB*, vol. XI/1).

At first sight, all of this does not cross the limits of the traditional Christian practice of appealing to saints for any kind of assistance. Nevertheless, the very fact of the detailed, though rhetorically ornate, account left by Choniates as well as his unconcealed indignation towards the Bulgarians indicates that – at least among the Constantinopolitan elite – the revolt in Tărnovo could be viewed as something extraordinary.

In the present paper I will try to examine what of the peculiarities of the Demetrian cult made it suitable for Peter and Asen as a tool of maintaining their own legitimacy. What exactly did they exploit to convince their compatriots of the "true" presence of their celestial patron? Obviously, to answer this question it is necessary to ascertain to what extent St. Demetrius was popular among the Bulgarians and the Byzantines by the end of the 12th cent., and what was the most attractive of his *emplois* in the eyes of his admirers.

So, according to the tradition, the "Great Martyr" Demetrius (feastday October 26th) was executed because of his fidelity to Christianity in Thessalonica early in the 4th cent., under Maximian (i.e. Galerius) (293–311) and Diocletian (284–305), and buried somewhere near the Thessalonican baths[3].

Though the origins of the cult, including the true biography of the saint, circumstances of his death and even the location of his burial place are covered with darkness[4], it is clear that it was Thessalonica and its environs where the cult primarily acquired wide popularity. Of all extant indications in favor of such an assertion the most impressive is probably a huge, more than 55 m long, 5-aisled (initially 3-aisled) cross-transept basilica, still existing (despite of numerous repairs) in modern Thessaloniki, dedicated to St. Demetrius and dating back to the second half of the 5th C. Circa the same time a special *ciborium* as the main focus of the cult was constructed within the basilica – i.e. a hexagonal wooden installation covered by silver plates, with a marble pedestal, a pyramidal roof on pillars, a double-folded door and a sphere crowned with a cross at the very top. On solemn occasions the door of the *ciborium* opened to secure veneration of the saint. Inside there was something reminding a couch and probably two thrones for icons of St. Demetrius and of a certain *Lady Eutaxia*, who could be identified as the Virgin Mary[5]. As such,

[3] For details concerning the history of the Demetrian cult see: J. Walter, *St. Demetrius: The Myroblitos of Thessalonika*, ECR 5.2, 1973, p. 157–178; D. Obolensky, *The Cult of St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki in the History of Byzantine-Slav Relations*, BS 15, 1974, p. 3–20; О.В. Иванова, А.А. Турилов, А.А. Лукашевич, А.С. Преображенский, *Димитрий Солунский*, [in:] *Православная энциклопедия*, vol. XV, Москва 2007, p. 155–195; В. Тъпкова-Заимова, К. Паскалева, *Между Солун и Търново. Още за култа и иконографията на свети Димитър,* ГСУ.НЦСВПИД 95(14), 2010, p. 249–263.

[4] Cf. M. Vickers, *Sirmium or Thessaloniki? A Critical Examination of the St. Demetrius Legend*, BZ 67, 1974, p. 337–350; P. Tóth, *Sirmian Martyrs in Exile. Pannonian Case-Studies and a Re-Evaluation of the St. Demetrius Problem*, BZ 103, 2010, p. 145–170.

[5] For the basilica and the *ciborium* see: D.I. Pallas, *Le ciborium hexagonal de St.-Démétrios de Thessalonique*, Зог 10, 1979, p. 46–58; А.Ю. Казарян, Е.М. Саенкова, В.Е. Сусленков, *Димитрия Солун-*

the *ciborium* was considered to be the "dwelling" of the "Great Martyr", although it is hardly possible that his relics have been stored there[6].

Having taken its primary devotional and artistic forms in Thessalonica, the cult soon enough became known in Constantinople, and already emperor Maurice (582–602) tried to obtain the relics of the saint to transfer them to the capital, although in vain. Yet fully imperial dimension the cult of St. Demetrius acquired only after the end of Iconoclasm in 843[7]. In the post-iconoclastic period numerous new texts devoted to St. Demetrius were composed[8], his feastday was finally set on its present date (October 26th) and significant changes were developed concerning his very image and the character of his official and popular veneration.

Thus, before Iconoclasm, St. Demetrius was imagined as a young patrician, helping pious Thessalonicans in their everyday life[9]. On the contrary, already in the 7th cent. – marked with disastrous invasions of the Avars and the Slavs – the saint transformed to a "fiery man", overwhelming the heathen enemies not only spiritually but also physically[10]. Now it was the image of a victorious warrior that was attached to St. Demetrius and deliberately exploited by the emperors for the consolidation of their authority.

Starting with the second half of the 9th cent., the cult of St. Demetrius clearly spread in Constantinople inspiring there a wide church-building activity. Of all the churches devoted to the saint in the Byzantine capital the earliest was built (or reconstructed) in the quarter of Deuteron, most probably under the patronage of the founder of the Macedonian dynasty Basil I (867–886)[11]. During the reign of his son, Leo VI the Wise (886–912), a special shrine of St. Demetrius (probably a *parekklesion*) appeared in the church of *Theotokos tou Pharou* – immediately within the complex of the Great Palace[12]. In turn, this so-called Pharos church was haloed with the most profound devotion not only among the dwellers of the imperial capital and other Byzantines, but also throughout the whole of the

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ского великомученика базилика в Фессалонике, [in:] *Православная энциклопедия*, XV, Москва 2007, p. 199–204.

[6] R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold. Byzantine Society and Its Icons*, London 1985, p. 63; А.Ю. Казарян, Е.М. Саенкова, В.Е. Сусленков, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[7] О.В. Иванова, А.А. Турилов, А.А. Лукашевич, А.С. Преображенский, *op. cit.*, p. 158–159.

[8] For the textual tradition devoted to St. Demetrius cf. Ф. Баришић, *Чуда Димитрија Солунског као историски извор*, Београд 1953; P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des Miracles de saint Démétrius*, vol. II, Paris 1981; V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, *Le culte de saint Démétrius à Byzance et aux Balkans*, MBu 5, 1987, p. 139–146; Д.М. Буланин, *Мучение Димитрия Солунского*, [in:] *Словарь книжников и книжности Древней Руси (XI – первая половина XIV в.)*, ed. Д.С. Лихачев, Ленинград 1987, p. 260–262; О.В. Иванова, *Комментарий к «Чудесам св. Димитрия»*, [in:] *Свод древнейших письменных известий о славянах*, ed. Г.Г. Литаврин, vol. II, Москва 1995, p. 182.

[9] R. Cormack, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[10] *Чудеса св. Димитрия Солунского*, [in:] *Свод*…, vol. II, p. 105.

[11] О.В. Иванова, А.А. Турилов, А.А. Лукашевич, А.С. Преображенский, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

[12] R.J. Macrides, *Subversion and Loyalty in the Cult of Saint Demetrios*, Bsl 51.2, 1990, p. 189–197.

contemporary Christendom. For it was there that the most treacherous and venerated collection of Christian relics was kept, including those of the Savior's Passion: Holy Crown of Thorns, Holy Lance, Holy Nail(s), Holy Sponge, Holy Tunic and many others[13].

At last, under the Comneni (1081–1185) the cult of St. Demetrius reached its peak. During this period the cult was put to the very focus of attention of the ruling family, as well as its relatives and clients, and acquired expressively official, imperial colouring. It was Manuel I Comnenus (1143–1180) who particularly accented the cult of St. Demetrius as a tool for the imperial consolidation. And it was him who in 1143 (or 1149) transferred the miracle-working shroud bearing an image of the saint[14] from his 'tomb' in the Thessalonican basilica to the monastery of Pantocrator in Constantinople which served as a burial place for the Comneni[15].

Consequently, by the end of the 12th cent. St. Demetrius must have become one of the most popular warrior-saints among the Byzantines, including the military. The latter is clearly indicated by lead seals of provincial military commanders (for example, that of Leo Brachamius[16]), steatite icons of the Chersonese origin (for example, those with St. Demetrius and St. Theodore[17] or with St. Demetrius, St. Theodore and St. George[18]) and numerous objects of private piety (such as the ivory icon from the second half of the 10th cent. in the Metropolitan Museum[19] or the steatite icon of the 11th cent. in the Moscow Kremlin[20]). The 'militarised' image of St. Demetrius is also present on the objects belonging to members of high-ranking nobility, such as ivory triptychs of the 10th–11th cent. (for example, that with the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia in the Hermitage Museum, Sankt-Petersburg[21], or the well-known Harbaville triptych[22]).

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[13] А.М. Лидов, *Церковь Богоматери Фаросской. Императорский храм-реликварий как константинопольский Гроб Господень*, [in:] *Византийский мир: искусство Константинополя и национальные традиции. К 2000-летию христианства (памяти О.И. Подобедовой)*, ed. М.А. Орлова, Москва 2005, p. 79–101 (=А.М. Лидов, *Иеротопия. Пространственные иконы и образы-парадигмы в византийской культуре*, Москва, 2009, p. 71–109).

[14] V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, *Quelques representations iconographiques de Saint Demetrius et l'insurrection des Assenides – premiere scission dans son culte «oecumenique»*, BBg 5, 1978, p. 263–264; eadem, *Изображенията на св. Димитър Солунски и писмената димитриевска традиция*, ГСУ. НЦСВПИД 94 (13), 2004, p. 151.

[15] A. Cutler, A.-M. Talbot, *Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople*, [in:] *ODB*, vol. II, p. 1575.

[16] *Искусство Византии в собраниях СССР. Каталог выставки*, А.В. Банк, М.А. Бессонова, [2]Москва 1977, p. 151, № 840.

[17] *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era (A.D. 843–1261),* ed. H.C. Evans, W.D. Wixom, New York 1997, p. 122, № 69.

[18] *Искусство Византии в собраниях СССР…*, p. 114, № 616.

[19] *The Glory of Byzantium…,* p. 135, № 81.

[20] *Искусство Византии в собраниях СССР…*, p. 112, № 613.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 103, № 592.

[22] *The Glory of Byzantium…*, p. 133, № 80.

Of no less importance for our study is the fact that precisely in the post-iconoclastic period the cult of St. Demetrius was also adopted by southern and eastern Slavs who had just entered the Byzantine orbit.

The penetration of the cult into the lands of the Slavs is immediately connected with the mission of St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher (826/827–869) and St. Methodius (ca. 815–885), who themselves were of Thessalonican origin and therefore from the very childhood could be concerned with the veneration of St. Demetrius. So, it is quite natural that St. Demetrius became the patron saint of the Pannonian archbishopric, established in Sirmium (869) and headed by St. Methodius until his death. Moreover, according to his *Vita*, it was exactly on St. Demetrius' day that St. Methodius finished his translation of the *Bible* into Slavonic[23]. And it is very probable that to express his gratitude for his patron St. Methodius composed then a special *akolouthia* for the "Great Martyr" of which unfortunately only the *canon* is extant[24]. Besides, a special *enkomion* for St. Demetrius was composed a little later by St. Clement of Ohrid (died 916), one of the most entrusted disciples of St. Constantine-Cyril and St. Methodius[25].

At least in the 10th cent. the cult of St. Demetrius was solidly implanted into the Slavic ground, judging from the fact that already in the first half of the century one of the local *župans* in Bulgaria bore the name Demetrius (as witnessed by a Cyrillic inscription discovered near Mircea Voda, Dobrudža, and dated to ca. 943)[26].

Much more evidence concerning the cult of St. Demetrius among the Slavs within the Byzantine orbit is extant from the 11th and the 12th cent. First of all, one should mention frescoes representing St. Demetrius in the churches of St. Panteleemon, Nerezi (1164)[27] and of St. George, Kurbinovo (1191)[28] – both within the lands of the First Bulgarian Empire conquered by Byzantium in 1018. St. Demetrius is also represented on frescoes (dated to the last third of the 12th cent.) in two churches at Castoria: those of St. Nicholas *tou Kasnitzes* and of the *Anargyroi*[29]. And it is probably him who figures on a poorly-preserved fresco in

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[23] Климент Охридски, *Събрани съчинения*, ed. Б.С. Ангелов, Х. Кодов, vol. III, София 1973, p. 191.

[24] Б.С. Ангелов, *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература*, София 1958, p. 19–23; С. Кожухаров, *Канон за Димитър Солунски*, [in:] КМЕ, vol. II, София 1995, p. 215–217; С.Ю. Темчин, *Этапы становления славянской гимнографии (863 г. – около 1097 года),* часть I, СЛ 2, 2004, p. 33–34.

[25] Климент Охридски, *Събрани съчинения*, vol. II, София 1970, p. 234–235.

[26] В. Гюзелев, *Добруджанският надпис и събитията в България през* 943 г., ИП 24.6, 1968, p. 40–48; П. Павлов, *Димитър*, [in:] Й. Андреев, И. Лазаров, П. Павлов, *Кой кой е в средновековна България. Исторически справочник*, София 1994, p. 88–89; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев *История на средновековна България (VII–XIV век)*, София 1999, p. 292.

[27] I. Sinkević, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 59, fig. 57.

[28] Ц. Грозданов, Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*, Скопје 1992, p. 49, 65–66, сл. 66.

[29] О.В. Иванова, А.А. Турилов, А.А. Лукашевич, А.С. Преображенский, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

the medieval church at Patalenitsa, near Pazardžik, presumably dating back to the 11th–12th cent.[30]

During the 11th and the beginning of the 12th cent. images of St. Demetrius appear also on various objects connected with the Byzantine administration in the Bulgarian lands of the Empire. Noteworthy are matrices for seals[31] and seals belonging to local Byzantine high-ranking functionaries: seals of Constantine, *anthypatos patrikios* and *doux* of Bulgaria[32], later *vestarchos* and *pronoites* of the "whole Bulgaria"[33], and those of Boril, a commander of foreign mercenaries in the imperial service[34]. Numerous steatite icons found in modern Bulgaria[35] also indicate the popularity of St. Demetrius among the local military, including persons of Slavic (Bulgarian) origin[36].

Hence, by the end of the 12th cent. the cult of the Thessalonican "Great Martyr" had been flourishing throughout the Byzantine Empire, without having cut its connection with its primary centre in Thessalonica.

As to Thessalonica itself, in the 12th cent. it was not only the second, after Constantinople, city of Byzantium, being a large commercial and military port, but also a major centre of pilgrimage. The main object of veneration was there a miraculous myrrh from the "tomb" of St. Demetrius dissembled within a special reliquary (*larnax*) inside a sarcophagus (*soros*) within the then marble *ciborium*[37]. The earliest data about the holy ointment (in the *Vita of St. Phantinus the Younger*) goes back probably to the late 10th cent.[38] Already in the 11th–12th cent. pilgrims,

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[30] For the church and the remnants of its wall-paintings see: П. Попов, За *техниката на стенописите в черквата «Св. Димитър» в село Паталеница*, [in:] *Древнерусское искусство. Балканы. Русь*, Санкт-Петербург 1995, p. 163–181; Л. Мавродинова, *Мястото на стенописите от църквата «Св. Димитър» в с. Паталеница, Пазарджишко, в историята на средновековната балканска живопис*, Pbg 23, 1999, p. 3–29.

[31] К. Тотев, *Византийски модели и традиции в приложното изкуство на Второто българско царство*, [in:] *Търновска книжовна школа*, vol. VI, Велико Търново 1999, p. 614.

[32] Н. Мушмов, *Монетите и печатите на българските царе*, София 1923, p. 166, № 253.

[33] *Ibidem, № 254.*

[34] *Искусство Византии в собраниях СССР*…, p. 140, № 756. See other seals of similar character: J. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria*, vol. I, Sofia 2003, p. 34–35, № 6.1, p. 136, № 58.1, etc; vol. II, Sofia 2006, p. 159–160, № 240; p. 160–162, № 241, etc.; vol. III, Sofia 2009, p. 487, № 1462, etc; J. Jordanov, Zh. Zhekova, *Catalogue of Medieval Seals at the Regional Historical Museum of Shumen*, Shumen 2007, p. 67, № 146, p. 144, № 377, etc.

[35] М. Ваклинова, *Паметник на средновековната дребна пластика*, Арх 12.2, 1970, p. 44–51; *La Bulgarie médiévale. Art et civilization*, Paris 1980, № 229.

[36] For detailes see: П.Х. Петров, *Възстановяване на Българската държава: 1185–1197*, София 1985, p. 77–80, 81, 86, 333–344; Н. Овчаров, *Още за култа към св. Димитър през Второто българско царство*, Век 16.1, 1987, p. 16–18; Й. Алексиев, *Предстоличният Търнов*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на акад. Димитър Ангелов*, ed. В. Велков, София 1994, p. 196–200; N. Ovcharov, *The Warrior Saints in Old Bulgarian Art. Legends and Reality*, Sofia 2003, p. 28–40; К. Тотев, *Солунски евлогии от България*, Арх 47.1/4, 2006, p. 210–219.

[37] CH. Bakirtzis, *Pilgrimage to Thessalonike: The Tomb of St. Demetrios*, DOP 56, 2002, p. 179–185.

[38] О.В. Иванова, А.А. Турилов, А.А. Лукашевич, А.С. Преображенский, *op. cit.*, p. 158–159.

visiting Thessalonica and hoping to take with them the holiness of the "Great Martyr", used special ampoules with images of St. Demetrius, St. George and the Virgin Mary, many of which are extant[39]. These ampoules with the myrrh, like other relics of St. Demetrius, taken from Thessalonica or acquired otherwise, were inserted into special reliquaries[40]. Other items of the "pious export" from Thessalonica appear to be copies of a certain icon of St. Demetrius, probably miracle-working, kept there in his basilica[41]. At least some of these copies could be simultaneously reliquaries, containing little ampoules with the myrrh – similar to a mosaic icon of the 14th cent., now in Italy[42].

Beside the tomb, the myrrh, icons and other relics of St. Demetrius, there was one more thing associated with Thessalonica that also contributed to the glory of the city – a fair, well-known throughout the Empire and even beyond its borders. It took place annually and, what is more important, was strictly timed to St. Demetrius' day. The latter was pompously celebrated for three days and, according to *Timarion*, an anonymous satirical dialogue of the 12th cent., it was *the greatest Macedonian feast*, attracting people even from *Scythia, Italy, Iberia, Lusitania and the Transalpine Celtic lands*[43].

Yet of especial complexity was the notion of Thessalonica among the Bulgarians for whom it was not only the city of St. Demetrius or an attractive example of urban prosperity, but also one of the focal points of their own history where it clearly intersected with that of the Empire and of the whole of Christendom[44]. It is quite natural that in the flood of the Slavonic apocryphal writings developed by the Bulgarians Thessalonica was treated as one of the holy cities in the universe – beside Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople[45]. Thus, in the Bulgarian apocryphal tradition Thessalonica was given a wide range of symbolic meaning: an impregnable fortress besieged by the forces of Antichrist[46], a place, where St. Constantine-Cyril was brought by the Divine Providence to baptize the Bulgarians and to grant them the script of their own[47], and meanwhile an extreme border-line of the

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[39] Д. Топтанов, *Оловна ампула от крепостта «Красен» край Панагюрище*, ПБА 1, 1992, p. 240–242; K. Totev, *Thessalonican Eulogia Found in Bulgaria (Lead Ampoules, Encolpia and Icons from the 12th–15th Centuries)*, Велико Търново 2011, p. 53–79.

[40] *Искусство Византии в собраниях СССР*…, p. 85, № 547; *The Glory of Byzantium*…, p. 77–78, № 36; *Христианские реликвии в Московском Кремле*, Москва 2000, p. 116, № 27.

[41] Э.С. Смирнова, *Храмовая икона Дмитриевского собора. Святость солунской базилики во владимирском храме*, [in:] *Дмитриевский собор. К 800-летию памятника*, Москва 1997, p. 239.

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 241.

[43] *Тимарион*, [in:] *Византийский сатирический диалог*, ed. С.В. Полякова, Ленинград 1986, p. 28.

[44] М. Каймакамова, *Византия и историческата култура на българите през XI–XII в.*, ИП 59.5/6, 2003, p. 5.

[45] V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, *Les légendes sur Salonique – ville sainte – et la conversion des Bulgares*, [in:] *The Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Kiev and Moscow*, Thessaloniki 1992, p. 133–141.

[46] *Стара българска литература*, vol. I, София 1982, p. 156.

[47] *Ibidem,* p. 300.

possessions of the glorious Bulgarian tsar Symeon (893–927)[48]. And it was exactly Thessalonica that, according to the Bulgarian version of the *Vision of Prophet Daniel* (extant in the so called *Dragol collection*), would become the capital of the future eschatological tsardom of tsar Michael – not Constantinople[49].

Therefore one can easily understand what a severe blow suffered the consciousness of the Byzantines, including those of Bulgarian origin, in 1185, when Thessalonica was attacked and ravaged by the Normans of Sicily[50]. Having taken the city on St. Bartholomew's day, the Normans carried out a true massacre and plundered not only the dwellers but the "Great Martyr" himself – that is the treasures of his Thessalonican shrine, including the golden crown and other details of the revetment of his icon kept there[51]. Even the holy ointment did not escape the fury and ignorance of the 'Sicilians', who, according to Nicetas Choniates, used it to fill pots, to cook fish and to lubricate their footwear[52].

The ravage of Thessalonica by the Normans came as a bombshell throughout the Empire. If relatively not long ago, in 1040–1041, the city of St. Demetrius could have been saved from the Bulgarian rebels led by Peter Deljan and Alousian[53], why was it then sacked in 1185 like in 904, when it fell to the Arabs[54]? What did that mean? Whether the "alignment of forces" within the celestial hierarchy had changed or the "Great Martyr" had seized his protection and left Thessalonica and the Byzantines because of their sins?

The shock caused by the sack of Thessalonica by the Normans as well as the tension provoked soon by extraordinary taxation because of the marriage of the emperor, Isaac II Angelus (1185–1195, 1203–1204) to Margaret of Hungary were skillfully exploited by Theodore-Peter and Asen-Belgun to pave the way for their insurrection, timed strictly to St. Demetrius' day, that very year (October 26th, 1185)[55].

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[48] *Ibidem*, p. 296.

[49] В. Тъпкова-Займова, А. Милитенова, *Историко-апокалиптичната книжнина във Византия и в средновековна България*, София 1996, p. 130, 134.

[50] A. Vacalopoulos, *A History of Thessaloniki*, Thessaloniki 1972, p. 42–46; A. Papagiannopoulos, *History of Thessaloniki*, Thessaloniki 1982, p. 83–86. Detailed description of the event cf. Eustazio di Tessalonica, *La espugnazione di Thessalonika,* ed. S. Kyriakidis, Palermo 1961; Eustathios of Thessalonica, *The Capture of Thessaloniki,* trans. J.R. Melville-Jones, Canberra 1988.

[51] Т.В. Толстая, *Икона «Димитрий Солунский»*, [in:] *Христианские реликвии в Московском Кремле*, ed. А.М. Лидов, Москва 2000, p. 119.

[52] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 305–306.

[53] Ioannes Scylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, rec. I. Thurn, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1973, p. 414 (= *CFHB*, vol. V).

[54] Ioannes Cameniates, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, ed. G. Böhlig, Berolini 1973.

[55] The date of the insurrection (October 26th, 1185) as well as the chronology of the subsequent events has been recently proved by G. Prinzing – *Demetrios-Kirche und Aseniden-Aufstand. Zur chronologischen Präzisierung der Frühphase des Aseniden-Aufstandes*, ЗРВИ 38, 1999/2000, p. 257–265. For details see recent studies: В. Гюзелев, *Чудотворна икона на св. Димитър Солунски в Търново през 1185–1186 г.*,

But what exactly could convince the compatriots of Peter and Asen of the "true" presence of St. Demetrius among them? The task was to gain support at least of the Bulgarian majority of the local population including, first of all, the nobility of Bulgarian origin – whose position could be of crucial importance for the outcome of the planned insurrection. Yet, this nobility, having risen during the Byzantine rule, had much to lose in the case of a failure and thus could demand for an absolutely solid proof of the "Divine sanction" on the revolt. Since, according to the epoch, it was only God Who always and forever wins through His saints and their admirers[56]. Meanwhile, the effect made by the construction in Tărnovo of the "house of prayer" in the name of St. Demetrius and by the words of the "prophets" gathered there by Peter and Asen (*see above*) allows us to conclude that there indeed must have been something visualizing the presence of the Thessalonican "Great Martyr". What could it be if, judging from the archaeological evidence concerning what is now believed to be the church of St. Demetrius in Tărnovo, in the very moment of the insurrection there was still no wall-painting or other figurative decoration[57]?

The most probable answer to this question, in the light of what we know now about the ecclesiastical practice within the Byzantine orbit, is that there must have been a miracle-working icon and/or a relic of St. Demetrius as the principal element of the celebration arranged in Tărnovo on St. Demetrius day, 1185. Unfortunately, the account left by Choniates gives no information concerning this sacral object – the more so, as for the Byzantines and their Slavic co-believers icons and relics were closely connected to each other and often taken as synonyms[58]. Still there is another source in our disposal – an epigram-*ekphrasis* of another contemporary, Theodore Balsamon (between ca. 1130/1140 – after 1195) written evidently in 1186 under the impression of primarily successful actions against the rebels undertaken by the emperor, Isaac II Angelus[59]. The description made by Balsamon witnesses rather in favor of an icon than of a relic. And in this case it must have been an icon from Thessalonica, rescued somehow from the city by Peter and Asen themselves or their associates – be it the patronal icon of the Thessalonican basilica

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[in:] *Любен Прашков – реставратор и изкуствовед. Материали от научната конференция, посветена на 70-годишнината на проф. доктор Любен Прашков, проведена във ВТУ «Св. Кирил и Методий», 14–15 декември 2001 г., София 2006,* p. 36–39; Г.Н. Николов, *Българите и Византийската империя (август–ноември 1185 г.)*, [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев*, София 2006, p. 597–617.

[56] И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *op. cit*., p. 423.

[57] Я. Николова, *Църквата «Св. Димитър» и въстанието от 1185 г.*, [in:] *Културата на средновековния Търнов*, София 1985, p. 9–16; Я. Николова, М. Ровов, *Храмът на първите Асеневци. Църквата «Св. Димитър» във Велико Търново*, Велико Търново 2005, p. 9–13.

[58] H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago 1994; И.А. Шалина, *Реликвии в восточнохристианской иконографии*, Москва 2005, p. 13–33.

[59] И.С. Дуйчев, *Проучвания върху българското Средновековие*, София 1945, p. 48–50.

or at least one of its easily identifiable copies[60]. Further history of this icon found in Tărnovo in 1186 by the then victorious Byzantines and described by Balsamon on this occasion is unclear: it could be returned back to Thessalonica or transferred in an appropriate manner to Constantinople[61]. Also unclear is the exact object of Balsamon's panegyric epithets: whether they refer to the very icon as a work of icon-painting, or to its revetment, be it the old one that survived the Norman greed or the newly-made revetment ordered by Peter and Asen or Isaac II, or at last to St. Demetrius himself[62].

In any case, the presence of such an identifiable (for contemporaries, if not for us) icon of St. Demetrius among the Bulgarian rebels must have produced an extremely strong impression on their compatriots. Since, according to a general belief, it was the saint himself who sanctioned any movement of any object connected with his sanctity. Thus, it was St. Demetrius who prevented translation of his relics to Constantinople under the emperor Maurice (*see above*). And it was also him who permitted the emperor Manuel I to transfer his miracle-working shroud from his shrine in Thessalonica to Constantinople — in exchange for a luxurious garment of the emperor (*see above*). The same took place with miracle-working icons. Thus, in 1185, according to Eustathius of Thessalonica, when the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, venerated as usual on Tuesday every week in a special procession, "refused" to return to the church of Hagia Sophia, it was taken by the Thessalonicans as a bad omen, foretelling the capture of the city by the Normans (*see above*)[63].

Yet going back to the celebration held in Tărnovo on St. Demetrius' day, 1185, one can neither exclude that the Bulgarian rebels, beside the icon, exploited one more sign of the presence of the "Great Martyr" among them: the holy ointment shed from some other relic. This can be drawn from the letter of patriarch Callistus I of Constantinople (1350–1354, 1355–1363) to the clergy of Tărnovo, in which he accused the Bulgarians of preparing the holy myrrh with the relics of St. Deme-

[60] *Ibidem*, p. 48; В.С. Гюзелев, *op. cit.*, p. 38; Г.Н. Николов, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

[61] И.С. Дуйчев, *Проучвания върху българското Средновековие*…, p. 51.

[62] As V. Tăpkova-Zaimova suggests, it was not the ancient and thus well-known icon of St. Demetrius (which had been transferred to Constantinople before the capture of Thessalonica), but a certain newly made and richly decorated one: В.К. Тъпкова-Заимова, *Изображенията на св. Димитър Солунски и писмената димитриевска традиция,* ГСУ. НЦСВПИД 94(13), 2006, p. 151. For other opinions on the character and the origin of this icon see: Э.С. Смирнова, *op. cit.*, p. 239–240; К. Паскалева, *Какво е открил Исаак II Ангел в Търново (една хипотеза*), SB 25, 2006, p. 634–647.

It also should be mentioned that for the Byzantines the word *icon* (*eikon* – i. e. 'image') meant holy images of various kinds regardless of their dimensions and artistic techniques: images on wooden or ivory panels, frescoes, mosaics or embroidery. It is also worth noting that the Byzantines did not differentiate their icons as "originals" and "copies", the latter being venerated equally with the former.

[63] А.М. Лидов, *Иеротопия*…, p. 53–54.

trius on their own, without any permission to do so[64]. However there is no source, more or less contemporary to the events of 1185–1186, informing us what kind of St. Demetrius' relics was (or were) then extant in Tărnovo[65]. Nevertheless, it really could be a certain contact relic from the "tomb" of the saint in Thessalonica: a particle of his clothes or what was marked on the reliquaries as "blood and myrrh"[66], that, having been transferred to Tărnovo together with the icon or separately, was also attached to the celebration by Peter and Asen.

If so, one could speak of a certain integral ceremony arranged around the church of St. Demetrius (*house of prayer*, mentioned by Choniates), his miracle-working icon (described by Balsamon) and, probably, his hypothesized relic shedding the holy ointment. And such a ceremony is actually documented in Thessalonica, although by later authors. Thus, according to Constantine Harmenopoulos (1320–1380/1383) and Symeon of Thessalonica (1416/1417–1429), the major component of the magnificent celebration, held annually in the city in honor of St. Demetrius, was a solemn procession with relics of the "Great Martyr", conjugated with public veneration of his icon (as a warrior-saint!) as well as those of the Virgin Mary, who also was viewed by the Thessalonicans as the Protector of their city[67].

This procession started in the church of the Virgin *Katafyge* (thought to be an asylum of the "Great Martyr"[68]), paused near the church of the Virgin *Acheiropoietos* and ended inside the basilica of St. Demetrius. According to a legend, the participants of the procession followed the way by which St. Demetrius himself had been brought to Maximian (Galerius) by the Roman guards[69]. Moreover, Symeon of Thessalonica specifies that at the head of the procession the participants carried a vessel with the myrrh covered by a woven veil with an image of

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[64] CFHB 19, vol. III, Vienna 2001: nr. 264 (= Darrouzès, Regest № 2442), dated between 1360/1362, p. 560–579.
The letter of patriarch Callistus was interpreted in this context for the first time by D.I. Polyviannyi, *The Cults of Saints in the Political Ideology…*, p. 404–405.
As V. Tăpkova-Zaimova states, it was not the myrrh prepared from the relics of St. Demetrius, so that the Bulgarians continued to receive it from Thessalonica: В. Тъпкова-Заимова, *Между Охрид и Търново (Оформяне на църковната и културна политика в Търновска България)*, [in:] *Търновска книжовна школа*, vol. VI, Велико Търново 1999, p. 346 (*Бележки*).

[65] For a medieval Christian the word *relic* (lat. *reliquiae* from *relinquo*, gr. *ta leipsana* from *leipo*) meant not only bodily remains of holy persons but almost everything sanctified by the contact with the saint: A.P. Kazhdan, R.F. Taft, *Relics*, [in:] *ODB*, vol. II, p. 1779–1780; В.М. Живов, *Святость. Краткий словарь агиографических терминов*, Москва 1994, p. 46–77; Е. Бакалова, *Реликвии у истоков культа святых*, [in:] *Восточнохристианские реликвии*, Москва 2003, p. 21.

[66] It is the so called *lythron* – the soil absorbed with the blood of the "Great Martyr", according to a legend. For detailed description of such reliquaries see: К. Тотев, *Реликварий св. Димитрия из региона Велико Тырново*, АДСВ 39, 2009, p. 314–326; idem, *Thessalonican Eulogia…*, p. 31–51.

[67] D.I. Pallas, *op. cit.*, p. 46–52.

[68] *Ibidem*, p. 49–50.

[69] A.E. Vacalopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 20–21; A. Papagiannopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

St. Demetrius and that in certain moments it was put near the icon of the "Great Martyr"[70]. The whole of the ceremony culminated in a liturgical vigil, the next morning traditional street festivities began and then obviously the famous Thessalonican fair opened.

Unfortunately, we do not know whether such a ceremony existed in Thessalonica in the 12th cent. But this appears to be very probable, if one takes into account the traditionalist character and thus the stability of the Byzantine liturgical rituals which is well known concerning Thessalonica, where the ancient tradition of the *asmatike akolouthia* lost in Constantinople after 1204 was still in use as late as the 15th cent.[71]

Hence, one can not exclude that it was precisely the Thessalonican procession in honor of St. Demetrius that was reproduced in Tărnovo on St. Demetrius' day, 1185, and that the whole of the celebration arranged there by Peter and Asen was aimed to replicate the sacred space of Thessalonica centered on the shrine of its "Great Martyr".

As far as goes to sacred spaces one should obviously refer to the concept of "hierotopy", recently introduced by Alexei Lidov. According to him, the term composed of two different words in Greek: *hieros* ('sacred') and *topos* ('place' or rather 'space'), designates both creating or re-creating sacred spaces by means of various forms of human activity and a related field of academic scholarship covering items usually treated separately by historians of art, historians of religion and even anthropologists[72]. Though still a point of academic discussion, the concept of "hierotopy" may be effectively applied to many phenomena concerning the cult of St. Demetrius[73]. Thus, it was certainly the sacred space of the Thessalonican basilica that was more than once translated to Constantinople by means of constructing special shrines there in honor of the "Great Martyr". Little is known about these "hierotopic projects", but there is clear evidence of the existence of a silver *ciborium*, identical to that of Thessalonica, in the church of St. Demetrius in the quarter of Deuteron built by Basil I. Another Constantinopolitan replica of the Thessalonican basilica was created within the shrine of St. Demetrius arranged in the Pharos church where a particle of the clothes[74] and even a miracle-working icon of the

[70] D. Pallas, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Э.С. Смирнова, *op. cit*, p. 236–237.

[71] R.F. Taft, *Asmatike akolouthia*, [in]: *ODB*, vol. I, p. 209; idem, *The Byzantine Rite. A Short History*, Collegeville 1992, p. 32–33, 43.

[72] A. Lidov, *Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History*, [in:] *Иеротопия. Создание сакральных пространств в Византии и Древней Руси*, ed. idem, Москва 2006, p. 32–58.

[73] See, for example: J. Bogdanović, *The Performativity of Shrines in a Byzantine Church: the Shrines of St. Demetrios*, [in:] *Пространственные иконы. Перформативные иконы в Византии и Древней Руси*, Москва 2011, p. 275–301.

[74] Л.К. Масиель-Санчес, *Описание святынь Константинополя в Латинской рукописи XII в.*, [in:] *Чудотворная икона в Византии и Древней Руси*, ed. А.М. Лидов, Москва 1996, p. 440.

saint shedding the holy ointment[75] were present. The same could be the case of the Pantocrator monastery, where the miracle-working shroud from the "tomb" of St. Demetrius was transferred to by Manuel I Comnenus (*see above*). Yet far more important for our study appears to be another example of "hierotopic" activity that most clearly indicates the notion of the Thessalonican basilica of St. Demetrius as a particular sacred space and the awareness of its translation (and/or re-creation) as a specific tool of maintaining one's political authority. This is the church of St. Demetrius in Vladimir-on-Kljaz'ma, Russia, built late in the 12th cent. by prince Vsevolod III the Great Nest (1154–1212), who housed there a certain "shirt" of St. Demetrius, probably given to Vsevolod's mother by the emperor Manuel I, and another relic from the saint's "tomb" in Thessalonica shedding the holy ointment — perhaps an icon[76].

The similarity between the "hierotopic project" accomplished by Vsevolod III and that of Peter and Asen is obvious. In both cases we deal with a particular church constructed in honor of St. Demetrius, a certain icon and/or other miracle-working relic connected with the Thessalonican shrine of the "Great Martyr". The final effect must have been the replication of the sanctity of Thessalonica as well as that of the political charisma of Manuel I, who definitely secured the Demetrian cult with the imperial authority.

Nevertheless, both "hierotopic projects", although almost synchronous, must have been inspired by clearly different causes: if Vsevolod III tried only to raise the authority of his power to that of the grand princedom, being an absolutely legitimate ruler, then Peter and Asen had to justify the legitimacy of their own, questioning that of the Byzantine Empire[77].

Abstract. The paper examines the role of the cult of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica as a tool of maintaining legitimacy of the anti-Byzantine revolt in Tărnovo, 1185–1186, led by brothers Theodore-Peter and Asen-Belgun, which is viewed in the modern scholarship as a starting point of the history of the so-called Second Bulgarian Empire.

Apart from the peculiarities of the official and popular veneration of St. Demetrius in Byzantium by the end of the 12th C., the main emphasis is made on the celebration, arranged in Tărnovo on St. Demetrius' day, 1185, by Peter and Asen. The fact of the construction there of a special *house of prayer in the name of the all-praised martyr Demetrius* (Nicetas Choniates) and the presence of a certain icon of the saint as well as, probably, that of his relic, shedding the holy ointment, can be interpreted

[75] Робер де Клари, *Завоевание Константинополя*, trans. М.А. Заборов, Москва 1986, p. 60.

[76] The event is recorded in Russian chronicles: ПСРЛ, vol. I, col. 414, 436–437, Москва 1997. For details see: Э.С. Смирнова, *Храмовая икона Дмитриевского собора*…, p. 220–253; И.А. Стерлигова, *Византийский мощевик Димитрия Солунского из Московского Кремля и его судьба в Древней Руси*, [in:] *Дмитриевский собор*…, p. 266–267; Т.П. Тимофеева, *К уточнению даты Дмитриевского собора*, [in:] *Дмитриевский собор*…, p. 38–41; ead em, А.В. Маштафаров, Н.П. Пивоварова, *Димитрия Солунского великомученика собор во Владимире*, [in:] *Православная энциклопедия*…, p. 208.

[77] See: А.С. Добычина, *Болгары в поисках легитимности во время восстания Петра и Асеня (1185–1186 годы)*, [in:] *Историки-слависты МГУ*, vol. VIII, Москва 2011, p. 67–78.

in terms of the concept of "hierotopy", introduced recently by A. Lidov. At any rate, one can speak of attempting to replicate in Tărnovo the sacred space of the Thessalonican shrine of St. Demetrius in order to convince the Bulgarian rebels of the "true" presence of St. Demetrius among them.

The parallel is drawn between the celebration in Tărnovo and another well-known "hierotopic project" of the late 12th cent., performed by prince Vsevolod III in Vladimir-on-Kljaz'ma, Russia, which also encompassed the construction of the church in the name of St. Demetrius, where his miracle-working relics from Thessalonica were housed. The similarity between the two "projects" is obvious, but they must have been inspired by clearly different causes: if Vsevolod III tried only to raise the authority of his power to that of the grand princedom, being an absolutely legitimate ruler, then Peter and Asen had to justify the legitimacy of their own, questioning that of the Byzantine Empire.

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