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[col. 904]

## &lt;LIFE OF THEODORA, EMPRESS OF ARTA&gt;

This celebrated and blessed empress Theodora was of a family *from the East*,<sup>8</sup> her parents were John and Helena. Her <origins> were as follows: while Alexios,<sup>9</sup> a descendant of the Komnenoi family, was ruling the Romans, Michael Komnenos,<sup>10</sup> who was related to the emperor himself and to the emperors that bore the name of Angelos, was entrusted with rule over the Peloponnese. And Senacherim<sup>11</sup> was sent to Aitolia and Nikopolis. They originally married two first cousins, who were blood relatives of the emperor. And John, the father of the blessed Theodora, whose surname was Petraliphas,<sup>12</sup> being of distinguished and splendid lineage, was married by the emperor to a woman [Helena] who was a member of one of the leading families of Constantinople. After being honored with the title of *sebastokrator*<sup>13</sup> of the Romans, he was appointed to rule over<sup>14</sup> Macedonia and Thessaly. But alas, with God's for-

<sup>8</sup> Job 1:3. This is a puzzling statement, since the Petraliphas family originated in Italy; their 11th-century eponymous ancestor, Peter of Alifia (a town in Italy near Casserta), participated in the First Crusade and settled at Didymoteichon in Thrace. Perhaps ἐξ ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν refers to eastern Greece instead of Anatolia or the Levant, its normal meaning.

<sup>9</sup> Alexios III Angelos, Byzantine emperor from 1195 to 1203. His great-grandfather was Alexios I Komnenos, whose daughter Theodora married Constantine Angelos, the first-known member of the Angelos family.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Angelos Komnenos Doukas, sometimes called Michael I Angelos, was the first ruler (1205-15) of an independent Epiros following the fall of Constantinople in 1204. As the illegitimate son of the *sebastokrator* John Angelos Komnenos, he was first cousin of Alexios III Angelos. In 1204 he was governor of the Peloponnese.

<sup>11</sup> Little is known of this man, except that he was governor of the theme of Nikopolis (on the western coast of Epiros) and was married to a member of the Melissenos family. He was murdered late in 1204. Cf. Loenertz, "Origines," 377.

<sup>12</sup> John Petraliphas, the *sebastokrator*, served as governor of Thessaly and Macedonia during the reign of Isaac II Angelos (1185-95, 1203-4); according to the *vita*, he died while Theodore Angelos was emperor in Thessalonike, i.e., between 1224 and 1230 (see also note 32, below). It is therefore unlikely that he should be identified with the John Petraliphas who was *chartoularios* of John Vatatzes in 1237, as Nicol suggests (*Epiros I*, 67, 215).

<sup>13</sup> A very high title normally conferred on a member of the imperial family.

<sup>14</sup> Reading κατά τὴν for κατάχρην, as in Moustoxydes edition.

bearance, the Latins conquered Constantinople, and the emperor Alexios was taken captive by them together with many others.<sup>15</sup> And the boy Laskaris was blinded in Anatolia by Michael Palaiologos, who then seized the throne;<sup>16</sup> and everything was filled with tumult and confusion. Then Senacherim<sup>17</sup> was plotted against by the inhabitants of Nikopolis, and summoned Michael Komnenos to help him; but before he arrived, Senacherim was murdered. When Michael arrived, he killed all the murderers. And he married Melissene, the wife <of Senacherim>. For he had previously lost his own wife who had died. And he appropriated for himself all of Senacherim's wealth as well as his political power: When the Latin fleet came down from Constantinople and anchored in the harbor called Salagora,<sup>18</sup> <Michael> Komnenos ransomed the emperor Alexios, whom <the Latins had taken> as a slave, since they did not recognize him; and <Komnenos> secured his release, after lavishly bestowing<sup>20</sup> many gifts upon them [the Latins] first.<sup>21</sup> Wherefore the imperial authority was given by the emperor <Alexios III> as a bequest to Michael and his descendants. Four sons were born to him and Melissene: Michael Doukas, Theodore, Manuel, and Constantine.<sup>22</sup> [col. 905] The eldest son Michael,<sup>23</sup> after the

<sup>15</sup> Actually Alexios III fled Constantinople in July 1203 before it fell to the Crusaders. The hagiographer may have confused Alexios III with Alexios V Doukas (Mourtzophos), who was briefly emperor at the time of the Latin conquest in April 1204. Later that year Alexios V was captured by the Latins and thrown to his death from the Column of Theodosios.

<sup>16</sup> The hagiographer, who has totally confused the chronological sequence of events, is here referring to the blinding of the youthful John IV Laskaris, heir to the empire of Nicaea, by the usurper Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261. The blinding took place after, not before, Michael's seizure of the throne in 1259. Subsequently the Lascarid prince was imprisoned in the fortress of Daklybye in Bithynia.

<sup>17</sup> Reading *αὐτός* for *αὐτοῦς*, as in Moustoxydes edition.

<sup>18</sup> Reading *τὴν* for *οὐ*, as in Moustoxydes edition.

<sup>19</sup> The harbor of Arta, 17 km southwest of the city; cf. *TIB* 3:253-54.

<sup>20</sup> Reading *δεξιόχρονο* for *δεξιόχρομείνας*.

<sup>21</sup> Alexios III, who had fled the capital in July 1203, was captured by Boniface de Montferrat in late 1204. He was held captive in Montferrat until his ransom by Michael I in 1209 or 1210. Cf. K. Barzos, 'Ἡ γενομένη τῶν Κομνηνῶν, II (Thessalonike, 1984), 793-98; Loenertz, "Origines," 370-76.

<sup>22</sup> Again the hagiographer is confused: he has added an extra generation. Michael, Theodore, Manuel, and Constantine were the sons of the *sebastokrator* John Angelos Komnenos.

<sup>23</sup> This is Michael I Komnenos Doukas, who was Melissene's husband.

death of his father, took on all his rule. He was an energetic man, sharp-witted and a skilled administrator. He conquered Bellegrada and Ioannina and Bondiza.<sup>24</sup> He also acquired the island of Corfu and Dyrrachion and Oehrid,<sup>25</sup> and all of Vlachia and Hellas,<sup>26</sup> and greatly expanded the extent of his territory. But he soon fell victim to the sword and died,<sup>27</sup> leaving his brother Theodore Doukas<sup>28</sup> as his heir. And Theodore disregarded as immature his brother's son, Michael Doukas,<sup>29</sup> inasmuch as he was a small baby. So he seized total power and, elated at his good fortune, devised a treacherous plot against the child. But when his mother found out <about it>, she forestalled it by traveling with the child to the Peloponnesus.

Theodore was shown to be very experienced in battle, and after freeing Thessalonike from Latin tyranny, he was proclaimed emperor.<sup>30</sup> And he held sway over all of the west as far as Christoupolis.<sup>31</sup> <Meanwhile> the *sebastokrator* Petraliphas, after bearing sons in Thessaly, became the father of Theodora, who is deserving of eternal memory. And coming to the end of a life in Christ,<sup>32</sup> he left his power to his sons. And they skillfully served the emperor Theodore, protecting their baby sister as the apple of their eye. What happened next?

<sup>24</sup> The date of Michael's conquest of Bellegrada (= Berat) in Albania is unknown. Michael was granted the region of Ioannina in a treaty of 1210 (Nicol, *Epiros I*, 30-31). He had taken the fortress of Bonditza (= Vontisa) on the Ambracian Gulf by 1207.

<sup>25</sup> Corfu fell to Michael ca. 1214 and Dyrrachion in 1213, while Oehrid was captured by Michael's successor, Theodore Komnenos Doukas, in 1216.

<sup>26</sup> Vlachia must here refer to Thessaly (cf. Loenertz, "Origines," 367-68), and Hellas to south central Greece (north of the Gulf of Corinth). Michael took Salona in 1210, Larissa, Velesino, and Demetrias in 1212; cf. Nicol, *Epiros I*, 34-41.

<sup>27</sup> Michael I was murdered by one of his servants at Bellegrada (Berat) ca. 1215; cf. Nicol, *Epiros I*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Komnenos Doukas, ruler of Epiros from ca. 1215-30. He was actually Michael's half-brother.

<sup>29</sup> Michael, who was to become Michael II Komnenos Doukas, was actually about nine or ten when his father was murdered; cf. Nicol, *Epiros I*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Theodore recovered Thessalonike from the Latins in 1224 and was subsequently proclaimed *basileus*.

<sup>31</sup> A seaport in northeastern Greece, modern Cavalla.

<sup>32</sup> The exact date of John Petraliphas' death is unknown, but it must have been between 1224 and 1230, while Theodore Angelos was emperor in Thessalonike. John's sister Maria was Theodore's wife; hence Theodora and her brothers were the niece and nephews of Theodore.

The emperor went on campaign in Zagora,<sup>33</sup> and made war against Asan, the emperor of the Bulgarians. And he was defeated and taken prisoner by him, and deprived of his sight.<sup>34</sup> Michael, who was already a young man, was recalled from exile, and after inheriting all his father's territory, went to Vlachia.<sup>35</sup> And when he arrived at the castle of Servion,<sup>36</sup> he saw the beautiful young Theodora, and was completely smitten with her. He entered into an agreement with her brothers (of the Petralliphas <family>), took her as his lawful wife, and returned with her in brilliant style to Akamania,<sup>37</sup> which was at that time unfortified. And he concerned himself with ruling his own territory. As for Theodora, she was neither carried away by her <newly acquired> glorious position, nor did she succumb to her youth, nor did she indulge in luxury. Neither was she puffed up by pride in her imperial power. Instead she decided to devote herself<sup>38</sup> to God, to cultivate the pursuit of virtue, and to conduct her life in a chaste manner. So she embraced humility, avoidance of anger, love, meekness, compassion, and mercy, being successful above all others <in her quest>, and always venerating God with her entire soul.

But the enemy of the righteous [i.e., the Devil] could not in any way endure to see this, nor could he bear to see this admirable course of the young

<sup>33</sup> The name Zagora or Zageria, a Slavic toponym meaning "beyond the mountains, in the mountains," was applied to several different regions of the Balkans, for example, in the 14th and 15th centuries to a mountainous region north of Ioannina (77B 3.278), or the western Black Sea coast. The name was also used for the middle Strymon valley (region of Melenikon) or the Bulgarian lands between the Haimos Mountains and Danube River (77B 6.503). In this context, the toponym seems to be a synonym for Bulgaria.

<sup>34</sup> Theodore went on campaign against the Bulgarian tsar John Asen II (1218–41) in 1230, but was defeated at the battle of Klokotnica (located on the road between Adrianople and Philippopolis), captured and blinded. The Bulgarians soon conquered Didymoteichon and many other towns in the southern Maritza valley; cf. Nicol, *Epiros I*, 109–11. Theodore was succeeded as ruler of Epiros by his nephew, Michael II Komnenos Doukas.

<sup>35</sup> I.e., Thessaly.

<sup>36</sup> A city in southern Macedonia (or northern Thessaly), also called Servia and Serbia. It had fallen to the Latins in 1204, but was recovered for the Greeks ca. 1216 by Theodore Komnenos Doukas. It may have served as the headquarters of the *sebastokrator* John Petralliphas when he was governor of Thessaly and Macedonia.

<sup>37</sup> I.e., Epiros.

<sup>38</sup> Reading  $\rho\pi\omicron\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  for  $\rho\pi\omicron\kappa\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ , as in Moustoxydes edition.

woman. So he took up weapons against her, and made her husband weak with lust for women; and thus he brought upon the blessed <Theodora> the worst trial of any that have ever been recounted.<sup>39</sup> For Michael was consumed with lustful passion for a noblewoman named Gangrene,<sup>40</sup> and as his sanity was beguiled by her sorcery, he developed an implacable hatred for his own wife. And after he rejected her, in an insane fashion he took this maenad as his consort. And he issued a decree to his subjects that they should not support Theodora, nor should they deem her worthy of any veneration, nor even mention her name. When the noble <Theodora> was afflicted with these tribulations, she was not at all swayed in her purpose, nor did she deviate from her excellent way of life, but endured like adamant, continuing to venerate God in the same manner. Driven into exile, she lived in the open air, made wretched by the cold<sup>41</sup> and the burning heat. Oppressed by hunger and thirst and other hardships, [col. 908] she was anxious to find shelter. Contending for five years with boundless hardships, she neither uttered an ignoble word, nor did she neglect to say a word <of prayer> to the Lord, but strove for virtue to an even greater extent, and every day was exalted to Him, lifting herself up through her endurance. She was also carrying a baby<sup>42</sup> in her arms, since she was pregnant with him when she was sent into exile.

A priest from the village of Prenisie,<sup>43</sup> who found her picking wild greens in a field, while holding her baby, inquired of her with oaths to tell her name. And when he learned her identity, he took her home and concealed her, deeming her worthy of every consideration. Then the magistrates and leading officials of Michael Doukas suddenly seized that malicious woman [Gangrene] and after they suspended her in the air,<sup>44</sup> the whole wicked affair came to light. And when Michael came to his senses, he was thoroughly shaken,<sup>45</sup> and he

<sup>39</sup> Reading  $\mu\upsilon\eta\eta\lambda\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu\sigma\omicron\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omega\nu$  for  $\mu\upsilon\eta\eta\lambda\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu\sigma\omicron\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omega\nu$ .

<sup>40</sup> An unusual name, unattested in the *PLP*. It may be the name of a family that originated from Gangra, or may be a derivative name modeled on  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\gamma\gamma\alpha\iota\nu\alpha$ , gangrene.

<sup>41</sup> Reading  $\delta\epsilon$   $\kappa\rho\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  for  $\delta\alpha\kappa\rho\upsilon\epsilon\iota$ , as in Moustoxydes edition.

<sup>42</sup> The future Nikephoros I Komnenos Doukas, the eldest child of Michael II and Theodora.

<sup>43</sup> Also called Prinista, a village on the slopes of Mt. Tzoumerka (modern Korphonion), 9 km north of Arta; cf. 77B 3.243.

<sup>44</sup> I.e., torturing her.

<sup>45</sup> Reading  $\epsilon\nu\sigma\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\eta$  for  $\epsilon\nu\sigma\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon\nu$ , as in Moustoxydes edition.

took the blessed <Theodora> again <into his house>. And all things were filled with joy and rejoicing. Thereafter they both spent their life in peace and love for God, taking care for their own salvation. And they were honored with the rank of *despotes*,<sup>46</sup> and bore children, and were elevated to a height of great glory, and both fought the good fight for virtue. When the celebrated Theodora saw the *despotes*, her husband, establish two very beautiful and sacred monasteries, called the Pantanassa<sup>47</sup> and the Panagia,<sup>48</sup> she erected a holy monastery to the great martyr George and established it as a female <convent>.<sup>49</sup> When her husband the *despotes* Michael departed to the heavenly abodes after leading a good and pious life,<sup>50</sup> she immediately donned the monastic habit. And living on for <several?> years, she adorned the church in various ways and beautified it with offerings and <liturgical> vessels and vestments. She also enhanced <the piety> of her life, training herself with toilsome labors and increasing the fruit of her virtues. She spent her time in vigils and all-night stances, conversing <with God> through psalms and hymns; she wore out her body with fasting, and served all the nuns unceasingly, and acted as champion of those who were wronged. She helped orphans and widows, assisted the poor, consoled the oppressed, and with humility of heart was *everything to everyone*.<sup>51</sup> And when she foresaw her death, she tearfully entreated

<sup>46</sup> *Despotes* was one of the highest titles in the Byzantine hierarchy, here applied to the ruler of Epirus.

<sup>47</sup> The ruins of the church of the Pantanassa are found 13 km northwest of Arta, near Philippias. K. Giannelos dates the construction of the church to the mid-13th century; cf. *Tà βυζαντινά μνημεία τῆς Ἁπυρίας* (Arta, 1990), 67-68. See also P. Yokotopoulos, "Ταυράνοσσα Φιλαντινάδος," *Arch/Del* 27.2 (1972), 463-64; *TIB* 3:225.

<sup>48</sup> The church of the Kato Panagia (or Πατωγία τῆς ὁδοῦ Βρυόκας) is located 2 km south of Arta; cf. *TIB* 3:223. The patronage of Michael II is proved by monograms on the exterior walls; cf. Nicol, *Epirus I*, 200-201.

<sup>49</sup> The convent of St. George later took the name of St. Theodora. Theodora may have founded the convent, but the three-aisled basilica dates to the mid-12th century. She added a domed narthex to house her tomb; cf. A. Orlandos, "Ἡ Ἁγία Θεοδώρα τῆς Ἁπυρίας," *ABME* 2 (1936), 88-104; *TIB* 3:114; and Nicol, *Epirus I*, 201-3.

<sup>50</sup> Michael II most probably died in 1267 or 1268; cf. B. Ferjančić, "Kada je umro Despot Michailo II Angeo?" *ZRYV* 9 (1966), 29-32; A. Faillet, "Chronologie et composition dans l'histoire de Georges Pachymère," *REB* 39 (1981), 183-84; *PLP* (no. 220) prefers a death date of 1266/67.

<sup>51</sup> I Cor. 9:22-23.

the all-pure Mother of God and the all-glorious martyr George to mediate with God for an <additional> six months<sup>52</sup> in order to complete the church, which came to pass. And when her <appointed> time arrived, she summoned the nuns; and after instructing them well on necessary matters, and praying for their salvation, she joyfully delivered her spirit into the hands of God. And she was buried in the monastery which she had erected.

And when God glorified her later, she was seen to work many great miracles, healing the sicknesses and diseases of those who approached her <tomb>, and driving demons from humans, and curing all sorts of incurable afflictions on a daily basis. She also healed the disease of cancer, and performed and continues to perform other awesome marvels, countless in number. For when she is invoked, she comes not only to those who prostrate themselves at her holy tomb,<sup>53</sup> but also to those near and far and at sea and on islands and at the ends <of the earth>, and helps them warmly. And may we be deemed worthy to attain salvation through her holy prayers to God and enjoy the lot of those who are saved in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Cf. with Hezekiah, who was granted an additional fifteen years of life as a result of his prayer to the Lord (4 Ki. 20:1-6; Is. 38:1-5).

<sup>53</sup> A reconstruction of this tomb can still be seen today in the narthex. It incorporates a marble slab depicting Theodora and a small figure (probably her son Nikephoros) flanked by archangels; cf. A. Orlandos, "Ο τάφος τῆς Ἁγ. Θεοδώρας," *ABME* 2 (1936), 105-15; Nicol, *Epirus I*, 202-3; Th. Paziras, *Ἀνάγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι καὶ ἐπιτάφιας πλάκες τῆς μέσης καὶ ὑστερῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου στὴν Ἐλλάδα* (Athens, 1988), 42 and pl. 36γ-δ, 37. Paziras assigns a late 13th-century date to the relief slab, while Orlandos and Nicol think it is a copy of a 13th-century original. An article which has recently appeared (after this volume had gone to the press) challenges the traditional identification of the figures sculpted on the tomb, and proposes that they represent instead Theodora a daughter-in-law, Anna Kantakouzene Palaiologina, and her son Thomas; cf. B. Cvetković, "The Investiture Relief in Arta, Epirus," *ZRYV* 33 (1994), 103-13.

<sup>54</sup> The final words of the Greek text (καὶ τῆς μερῆος ἀπολαύσαι τῶν σωζομένων ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. Ἀμήν), missing in the PG edition, have been supplied from Marc. gr. II 50 by M. Petta, "Inni inediti di Iob Monaco," *Boll/Govr*, n. s. 19 (1965), 82 n. 7.