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“Mary has filled me with amazement  
that she gave milk to the One  
who feeds the multitudes”:  
Notes on the Byzantine Iconography  
of Maria Galaktotrophousa

From 23 June to 9 October 2016 the National Museum in Cracow hosted an exhibition entitled *Maria Mater Misericordiae*, which was organised to celebrate World Youth Day in Cracow (26–31 July 2016).<sup>1</sup> The exhibition consisted of paintings and sculptures showing various depictions of the Virgin Mary that had been popular in European art in the period from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were arranged in six thematic groups, of which the largest, twenty-six paintings, comprised representations of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding the Christ Child. Representations of *Virgo lactans*, the Nursing Virgin, were not among the principal Marian images, but they were nevertheless popular throughout Europe. This beautiful and suggestive image of motherly tenderness must have spoken to the pious imagination of believers, who may have found it an echo of the most moving lines of poetry dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The iconographic formula, formerly considered to have originated in Egyptian images of Isis breastfeeding the infant Horus, is currently associated mainly with Italian art, in which it was present from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In general, however, Byzantine elements of the style and iconography of many early Italian representations have prompted questions as to the possible Byzantine origin of this image – the issue remains a topic of scholarly investigation. All that seems certain at the current stage of research is that images of the Nursing Virgin gained considerable popularity in the post-Byzantine icon painting of the Cretan school, chiefly in the circle of Andreas Ritzos (1421 to before 1503), as well as in the Italo-Byzantine circles in Italy.

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1 *Maria Mater Misericordiae*, exhibition catalogue, ed. P. Krasny, Cracow 2016.

## Literary sources

The description of the Virgin Mary feeding the Christ Child with milk from her own breast appeared in the Gospel of St. Luke: “How blessed is the womb that gave birth to you and the breasts that nursed you!” (Luke 11, 27).<sup>2</sup> A similarly laconic passage is found in the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James: “(...) the young child appeared: and it went and took the breast of its mother Mary” (19, 5).<sup>3</sup> Even though rather enigmatically presented, this topic could not fail to have attracted the attention of Christian commentators, as it shed light on the fundamental issues of Christ’s nature, Mary’s virginity and motherhood, as well as her place in the history of salvation of mankind. The natural contradiction between Mary’s virginity and her breastfeeding was addressed by Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) in *The Paedagogus* (Παιδαγωγός), in which milk was considered in terms of metaphysics and the Passion, e.g. “The blood of the Word has been also exhibited as milk” or “The same blood and milk of the Lord is [...] the symbol of the Lord’s passion and teaching”.<sup>4</sup> The treatise concludes with a laudatory hymn in which Christ is presented as the heavenly milk and Christians as the infants that feed on it:

Nourished by the milk of heaven,  
To our tender palates given;  
Milk of wisdom from the breast  
Of that bride of grace exprest;  
By a dewy spirit filled  
From fair Reason’s breast distilled;  
Let us sucklings join to raise  
With pure lips our hymns of praise  
As our grateful offering,  
Clean and pure, to Christ our King.<sup>5</sup>

This thought was developed by St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), an outstanding poet and fervent extoller of the Virgin Mary, whom he called “the queen of all”, “the most glorified, most excellent and most renowned”, or “brighter than sunrays and

2 Luke 11, 27 International Standard Version, <https://www.biblegateway.com> [accessed 24 August 2017].

3 Quoted after Book of James, or Protoevangelium, in: *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translated by and notes M. R. James, Oxford 1924, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/infancyjames-mrjames.html> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017].

4 Clement of Alexandria, *The Paedagogus*, Book 1, 6, after *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, translated by William Wilson, eds. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe, Buffalo, NY 1885, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02091.htm> [accessed 24 August 2017], cf. the Greek text in Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus und Paedagogus*, ed. O. Stählin, Leipzig 1905, p. 119, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, vol. 1.

5 Clement of Alexandria, *The Paedagogus*, Book 3: *A Hymn to Christ the Saviour*; cf. the Greek text in Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus und Paedagogus...*, p. 292.

lightning bolts”, to quote just a few of the lofty epithets.<sup>6</sup> Considering the mystery of Mary’s virginity in his *Song of the Most Holy Virgin*, he stated: “Women do not keep virginity and bring forth milk. Where there is milk, there is no virginity. A miracle happened in the Virgin Mary: she gave birth as a Maiden”.<sup>7</sup> He began his *The Song of Mary to the Holy Infant* with the words: “Mary has filled me with amazement that she gave milk to the One who feeds the multitudes”.<sup>8</sup> Another text, dating from the same period and associated with Pseudo-Ephrem, proclaims: “Your breasts were to Him as wellsprings”.<sup>9</sup>

In the original Christian tradition, these and similar views were based on the Eve/Mary antinomy, but gradually the conviction that Mary had been the Mother of God, *Theotokos*, and her physical motherhood had not infringed her perpetual virginity, became entrenched.

It is traditionally assumed that the Council of Ephesus (22 June – 22 July 431) finally sanctioned the term “Mother of God” (*Theotokos*) as Mary’s epithet.<sup>10</sup> It is worth remembering, however, that the title *Theotokos* does not appear in any canon accepted by the Council, but only in the so-called Letter of Union, which was signed two years after the conclusion of the Council:

We wish to briefly expound how we think and teach about the Virgin Mother of God and about the manner in which the uniquely existing Son of God became a man [...] Thus, we believe that Jesus Christ our Lord, the uniquely existing Son of God, is a perfect God and a perfect Man [...], begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from the Virgin Mary as regards his humanity; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity. This is because a union of two natures has occurred. For this reason we declare our faith in one Christ, one Son, one

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6 Quoted after St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Ku chwale Bożej Rodzicielki Dziewicy Maryi* [In praise of the Virgin Mary Mother of God], in: *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy. Teksty o Matce Bożej* [The Greek and Syriac Church Fathers. Texts on the Mother of God], translated and ed. by W. Kania, Niepokalanów 1981, p. 69 (unless otherwise noted, the Early Christian texts included herein have been translated from Polish solely for the purpose of the current paper).

7 Quoted after St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Song of the Most Holy Virgin*, translated by W. Kania, in: *Muza chrześcijańska* [The Christian muse], vol. 1: *Poezja armeńska, syryjska i etiopska* [The Armenian, Syriac and Ethiopian poetry], ed. M. Starowieyski, Cracow 1985, p. 229, *Ojcowie żywi* [The living fathers], vol. 6.

8 Quoted after *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy. Teksty o Matce Bożej...*, p. 44.

9 *Muza chrześcijańska*, vol. 1..., p. 268.

10 Cf. recently L. Brubaker, M. B. Cunningham, *Byzantine Veneration of the Theotokos: Icons, Relics, and Eighth-century Homilies*, in: *From Rome to Constantinople. Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. H. Amirav, Bas ter Haar Romeny, Leuven–Paris–Dudley, MA 2007, pp. 235–250; *Wider Than Heaven. Eighth-century Homilies on the Mother of God*, translated and ed. by M. B. Cunningham, New York 2008; *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. L. Brubaker, M. B. Cunningham, Burlington 2011; *Presbeia Theotokou. The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium (4<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> Century)*, ed. L. M. Peltomaa et al., Vienna 2015, *Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung*, vol. 39.

Lord. Considering the union without amalgamation, we believe that the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God, since the Word of God became flesh, became Man.<sup>11</sup>

This text repeats the argumentation offered by Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria (d. 444), in answer to the statement of Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople (428–431), that it would be more proper to call Mary the “Mother of Christ” (*Christokos*) or the “Mother of Man” (*Anthropokos*). Let it be added that during the Council, both adversaries, Cyril and Nestorius, were deposed from their sees and subsequently imprisoned by order of Emperor Theodosius II. In the end, Nestorius was exiled to a monastery in Antioch and Cyril was freed. The formula found in the Letter of Union (433) was confirmed by the Council of Chalcedon (451): “[...] our Lord Jesus Christ [...] was begotten [...] from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity”.<sup>12</sup> Both texts contain the epithet “the Virgin Mother of God” (*Παρθένου Θεοτόκου*). The title *Theotokos* was first used by Origen (d. 254), who in his lengthy *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* repeatedly referred to Mary as the “Mother of God” or the “Mother of the Saviour”. Origen’s phrases were borrowed by Athanasius (d. 373), who developed the teaching on Mary’s divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity; hence the epithet the “Ever Virgin” (*Aeiparthenos*).<sup>13</sup>

After Mary was recognised as the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), over the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century the emphasis gradually moved towards Christology aligned with the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Yet it would be an exaggeration to state that the pronouncements made at these two councils materially influenced the shaping of Marian iconography, i.e. more impact was exerted by the more readily available descriptions found in hymns and religious poetry and established through homiletics and liturgy.

In the eucharistic anaphoras of both John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, Mary is called the Mother of God in the prayer recited aloud by the priest: “And above all for the Most Holy, Most Pure, Blessed and Glorious Our Lady, the Mother of God and the Ever Virgin, Mary”.<sup>14</sup> This formula was introduced in the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century and cemented the image of Mary the Mother of God in the collective awareness. The term *Theotokos* does not appear in Byzantine art. Images of Mary bear the epithet “Mother of God” (Μήτηρ (του) Θεοῦ), written as the abbreviation MP ΘΥ. This principle, however, became popular only in post-iconoclastic

11 Quoted after *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych* [Documents of general councils], vol. I (325–787), ed. A. Baron, H. Pietras SJ, Cracow 2001, pp. 177–179. The English translation is based on the translation of the *Definition of the faith* in the documents of the Council of Chalcedon, [www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0451-0451,\\_Concilium\\_Chalcedonense,\\_Documenta\\_Omnia,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0451-0451,_Concilium_Chalcedonense,_Documenta_Omnia,_EN.pdf); the phrase “his uniquely existing Son” (John 3,16) comes from the International Standard Version; the King James Bible gives the more familiar phrase of “his only begotten Son” (translator’s note).

12 Ibid., p. 223.

13 Cf. W. Kania, *Wstęp*, in: *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy...*, pp. 10–12.

14 Quoted after *Wieczera mistyczna. Anafory eucharystyczne chrześcijańskiego Wschodu* [The mystical supper. Eucharistic anaphors of the Christian East], ed. H. Paprocki, Warsaw 1988, p. 128; cf. the Greek text in: J. Goar, *Euchologion: sive Rituale Graecorum*, Graz 1960, pp. 60–63.

monumental painting. Its earliest example seems to be a mosaic in the apse of the Constantinopolitan church of Hagia Sophia, dated to ca. 867.<sup>15</sup>

*The Greek Anthology* contains the following remark about a work entitled *An Eloquent Apology of a Homeric Cento* by one Patricius:

The book of Patricius, the God-fearing priest, who performed a great task, composing from the works of Homer a glorious song of splendid verses, announcing the deeds of the invincible God; how He came to the company of men and took human form, and was hidden when an infant in the blameless womb of a Virgin, He whom the infinite universe cannot hold; and how He sucked from the breast of the Virgin, once great with child from God, the stream of maiden milk it spouted (Book I, 119).<sup>16</sup>

Patricius (Patrikios) remains an enigmatic figure. It is assumed that he was active in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The passage quoted in the *Anthology* alludes to the theme of the incarnate God's human nature, made evident through a description of breastfeeding.

It is traditionally assumed that the most important hymn dedicated to the Mother of God is the *Akathist*, dated to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century and ascribed to the famous early-Byzantine poet Roman the Melodist or an anonymous poet of the same period. In the sixteen stanzas (*oikoi*) of this very intricately wrought, poetically complex text, historical and biblical themes are combined with a lyrical adoration of the Mother of God. Yet, although Mary's miraculous motherhood is its main theme, a reference to her feeding the Christ Child appears only once and, in addition, without explicitly mentioning feeding with milk: “Ἦκουσαν οἱ ποιμένες τῶν Ἀγγέλων ὑμνοῦντων τὴν ἔνσαρκον Χριστοῦ παρουσίαν· καὶ δραμόντες ὡς πρὸς ποιμένα, θεωροῦσι τοῦτον ὡς ἄμνον ἄμωμον ἐν γαστρὶ τῆς Μαρίας βοσκηθέντα, ἣν ὑμνοῦντες εἶπον”.

This passage in the translation is as follows: “On hearing the Angels praising the incarnate presence of Christ, the shepherds hastened as to a Shepherd, and beholding Him as a spotless Lamb, pastured in Mary's womb”.<sup>18</sup> Another variant of the translation has been proposed by N. Michael Vapori and Evie Zachariades-Holmberg: “The shepherds heard the appearance of Christ in the flesh being glorified; and hastening as to a shepherd, they beheld him as a spotless lamb who had been pastured in the womb of Mary”.<sup>19</sup> In this text, the recipient, referring to general knowledge,

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15 I. Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became Meter Theou”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1990, no. 44, pp. 165–170.

16 *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1, translated by W. R. Paton, London 1857, pp. 50–51.

17 Cf. M. D. Usher, “Prolegomena to the Homeric Centos”, *The American Journal of Philology*, 1997, vol. 118, no. 2, esp. pp. 315–319.

18 *The Akathist Hymn Preceded by the Brief Compline*, translated by Fr. George Papadeas, Daytona Beach, Florida 1980, <http://www.orthodoxchristian.info/pages/Akathist.htm> [accessed 23 November 2017].

19 *The Akathist Hymn and Small Compline*, translated by N. Michael Vapori and Evie Zachariades-Holmberg, [www.goarch.org/-/the-akathist-hymn-and-small-compline](http://www.goarch.org/-/the-akathist-hymn-and-small-compline) [accessed 23 November 2017]. For the Polish-language translations, cf. “Akathistos. Bizantyński hymn dziękczynny ku czci Matki Bożej” [Akathist. The Byzantine thanksgiving hymn in honour of the Mother of

most probably recognised this image as one of the breastfeeding Mary. In his other works, e.g. in the *Hymn on Mary at the Cross*, Roman the Melodist wrote explicitly about breastfeeding: "I bore Thee in my womb and I gave Thee milk from my breasts".<sup>20</sup>

In his *Sermon on the Annunciation*, Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem (d. 638), was more explicit: "[...] when God became man, when God was conceived without semen, when God was born from a woman, when God suckled milk from a woman's breasts".<sup>21</sup> John of Damascus expressed this thought in a similar manner: "From thee, the Creator was born, the elements of our human matter. His body sprang from thine body, His blood from thine blood. God fed on thine milk".<sup>22</sup>

The motif of Jesus being breastfed does not disappear in the middle-Byzantine literature altogether, but, similarly to the period before the iconoclasm, it is seen relatively rarely. Among the few examples is the phrase in the *Hymn to the Most Holy Mother of God* by John Kyriotes Geometres (d. ca. 990): "Hail, o thou who have fed the Giver of food! Thine radiant breast nourished one of the three Divine Persons like a wellspring".<sup>23</sup> Other examples could probably be found in Byzantine literature, but this would not alter the fundamental observation that the topic of Mary's breastfeeding the Christ Child was not in the centre of the mediaeval writers' attention.

## The relic of Mary's milk in Constantinople

Mary's milk is mentioned as one of the Marian relics venerated in Constantinople.<sup>24</sup> *The Life of the Virgin*, ascribed to Maximus the Confessor, mentions traces of milk

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God], translated by M. Bednarz SJ, *Znak*, 1965, no. 131, p. 640, and "Hymn Akathistos" [The Akathist hymn], in: *Muza chrześcijańska* [The Christian muse], vol. 3: *Poezja grecka od II do XV wieku* [Greek poetry from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century], ed. M. Starowieyski, Cracow 1995, pp. 196 and 207, *Ojcowie żywi* [The Living fathers], vol. 12; cf. also L. M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, The medieval Mediterranean, Leiden 2001, vol. 35, but she does not discuss the theme of Mary's breastfeeding.

20 After the Polish-language version, "Maryja pod krzyżem", translated by W. Kania, in: *Muza chrześcijańska*, vol. 3, pp. 181; cf. also the commentary, p. 363.

21 After the Polish-language version quoted in *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy. Teksty o Matce Bożej...*, p. 137.

22 Ibid., p. 226.

23 After the Polish-language version: Jan Kyriotes Geometres, "Hymn ku czci Najświętszej Bogarodzicy" [Hymn to the Most Holy Mother of God], translated by J. Birkenmajer, in: *Muza chrześcijańska*, vol. 3, p. 285; on the life and oeuvre of John Kyriotes Geometres, cf. F. Scheidweiler, "Studien zu Johannes Geometres", *Byzantion*, 1952, no. 45, pp. 277–319; M. D. Lauxtermann, "John Geometres, poet and soldier", *Byzantion*, 1998, no. 68, pp. 356–380; E. M. van Opstall, *Jean Géomètre. Poèmes en hexamètres et en distiques élégiaques. Edition, traduction, commentaire*, The medieval Mediterranean, vol. 75, Leiden and Boston 2008.

24 Recently on the Marian relics at Constantinople, cf. J. Wortley, "The Marian Relics at Constantinople", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 2005, no. 45, pp. 171–187; S. J. Shoemaker,

on the robe worn by Mary while feeding the Christ Child.<sup>25</sup> This remark does not derive directly from Maximus the Confessor, but was allegedly added in one of the versions of his text, edited by Theodore Synkellos in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and then repeated by Joannes Kyriotes Geometres (ca. 930–ca. 990) and Symeon the Metaphrast (d. ca. 1000). This remark was certainly intended to give credibility to the relic held in the Blachernae; according to the report ascribed to Theodore, it was to have protected the city against the invading Avars in the year 626.<sup>26</sup> This is an indirect indication that this theme was present in early Marian devotion, certainly as adopted from the literary tradition, i.e. homiletics and poetry.

Zosima, a deacon from the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius (Троице-Сергиева Лавра) in Sergiyev Posad near Moscow, a temple renowned throughout Rus', who visited Constantinople during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land made between the year 1419 and 1422, also mentioned the relic of Mary's milk.<sup>27</sup> As he reported in an account of his journey, which he entitled *The Xenos*, he had spent ten weeks in the capital of Byzantium.<sup>28</sup> According to Zosima, the relic of Mary's milk, as well as many other relics of the Passion of Christ which he mentioned, was kept at the monastery of St. John Prodromos at Petra (ἐν τῇ Πέτρᾳ).<sup>29</sup> This statement seems slightly enigmatic, considering that other travellers visiting this monastery in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century are silent on this subject.<sup>30</sup> The relic of Mary's milk was the only relic not to be mentioned among the Marian relics held in the chapel of the Pharos Palace, but it was among the twenty-two relics that Baldwin II sent from Constantinople to King Louis IX of France in the years 1239–1242: *Item de lacte matris Domini*, as stated by Gunther of Paris (1150–1220) in his famous *Historia Constantinopolitana*.<sup>31</sup>

The circumstances in which the monastery was founded are similarly unclear. Its foundation around the 5<sup>th</sup> century is reported by John Mauropous (ca. 1000 until 1075–1081), an outstanding humanist and writer who spent his twilight years there, having returned from Euchaita where he had been the metropolitan in the period ca. 1050–1075.<sup>32</sup> According to John Mauropous, the monastery was founded by an Egyptian monk by the name of Baras.<sup>33</sup> The first foundation most probably occurred

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“The Cult of Fashion: The Earliest “Life of the Virgin” and Constantinople’s Marian Relics”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 2008, no. 62, pp. 53–74.

25 Ibid., pp. 63–65.

26 Cf. A. Kazdhan, “Theodore Synkellos”, in: *The Oxford Dictionary...*, vol. 3, p. 2048.

27 G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, vol. 19, Dumbarton Oaks 1984, p. 166.

28 Ibid., p. 181.

29 Ibid., p. 189.

30 Ibid., p. 344.

31 Quoted after P. Riant, *Exuviae sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, Geneva 1877–1878, vol. II, p. 122.

32 Cf. A. P. Kazdhan, “John Mauropous”, in: *The Oxford Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1991, p. 1319; idem, “Some Problems in the Biography of John Mauropous”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 1993, no. 43, pp. 87–111; idem, “Some Problems in the Biography of John Mauropous”, *Byzantion*, 1995, no. 65, pp. 362–387.

33 X. Lequeux, “Jean Mauropous. Jean Mauropodès et le culte de Saint Baras au monastère du Prodrome de Pétra à Constantinople”, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 2002, no. 120, pp. 101–110,

in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and is associated with a group of monks who had arrived from Egypt. The second foundation is better documented. As ascertained by Elisabeth Malamut on the basis of an unpublished document, i.e. the so-called Testament of John (Cod. Ambros. 270 from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century), its founder was Hegumen John, particularly revered by “the *despoina* and mother of the God-crowned Alexios”, that is Anna Dalassene (d. 1101–1105), mother of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who also bore the title of “lady and empress”. Another prominent protector of the monastery mentioned in this text was the patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas III (August 1084–1111), which makes it possible to assume that the foundation occurred after the year 1084. The monastery owed its next flourishing, which occurred in the period of the Paleologian dynasty, to Emperor Andronicus II (1282–1328), and particularly to Stefan Uroš Milutin, the king of Serbia (1281–1321), married to the emperor’s daughter Simonis. King Milutin founded a hospital (*xenodocheion*) inside the monastery, while Emperor Andronicus II, in a chrysobull dated February 1321, made the monastery the seat of the hegumens of Hilandar during their sojourns in Constantinople. The Petra monastery’s rise in status was crowned with the decree (*sigillon*) of Nilus, the patriarch of Constantinople, from March 1381, by which the hegumen was accorded the rank of an archimandrite and protosynkellos, while the monastery itself was given the rank of the capital’s third principal monastery, after the Studion and the monastery of St. George of Mangana. Information that the monastery held numerous relics, not only of its patron, but also of other saints, as well as the relics of the Virgin Mary and of the Passion of Christ, recurs in reports of travellers who visited the monastery in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century; it must be noted that the relics of Christ were moved there from the Mangana monastery only in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century (between the year 1393 and 1403). In the last years of the empire the monastery at Petra was thus a depository of the most important relics of the Passion of Christ in all of Christendom, apart from those that had been taken away from the capital after the year 1204.

The location of the St. John Prodromos monastery at Petra is a matter of scholarly debate. Raymond Janin, an outstanding expert on the topography of Constantinople, situated it in the vicinity of the cistern of the city prefect Aetius, but its location is uncertain as well (it is usually assumed to have been located close to the Gate of Adrianople and the Palace of Blachernae, in the north-western part of the city).<sup>34</sup> Anthony of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople around the year 1200, noted: “[...] walking towards the Blachernae [one passes by] the monastery of St. John the Baptist”.<sup>35</sup> The earliest known plan of the city, made by Cristoforo

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questions Mauropous’s authorship and considers the account to have been written by John Mauropodes, a monk at the Prodromos monastery.

34 Cf. R. Janin, “Les sanctuaires du quartier de Pétra (Constantinople)”, *Échos d’Orient*, 35: 1936, no. 181, pp. 51–66; E. Malamut, “Le monastère Saint-Jean Prodrome de Pétra de Constantinople”, in: *Le sacré et son inscription dans l’espace à Byzance et en Occident*, ed. M. Kaplan, Paris 2001 (*Byzantina Sorbonensia* 18), pp. 219–233.

35 *Книга Паломник. Сказание мест святых во Цареграде Антония, архиепископа Новгородского в 1200 году*, ed. М. Лопарев, Санкт-Петербург 1899 (“Православный палестинский сборник”



Buondelmonti ca. 1422, shows the monastery at Petra as located between the imperial palace and the church of the Holy Apostles.<sup>36</sup> The monastery is mentioned by a succession of Russian pilgrims coming to Constantinople in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century: Stephen of Novgorod in the years 1348–1349,<sup>37</sup> Ignatius of Smolensk in 1389–1392,<sup>38</sup> the Anonymus,<sup>39</sup> Precentor Alexander ca. 1389–1392<sup>40</sup> and Deacon Zosima in 1419–1422.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo, a Castilian traveller and diplomat in the service of King Henry III of Castile, left a longer report on the monastery. Clavijo spent some months in late 1403 and early 1404 in Constantinople. He visited the Prodromos monastery on 30 October 1403, afterwards writing a detailed description of the church, its decorations and the relics held therein; but he did not mention the milk of Virgin Mary as one of them.<sup>42</sup>

## Maria Galaktotrophousa in Byzantine art

Byzantine Marian iconography hardly reflects the incredible wealth of verbal metaphors referring to the Mother of God as found in the homiletics and religious poetry. Also, many iconographic formulas were drawn from the repertoire of pagan art and modified accordingly. In the research on the genesis of the iconography of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding the Christ Child, usually described as the Galaktotrophousa (Greek: Παναγία Γαλακτοτροφούσα), *Virgo Lactans* or *Mlekopitatelnitsa* (Russian: Млекопитательница), questions as to the possible Byzantine origin of this pictorial formula have been posed since the very beginning. The debate was initiated in 1901 by Umberto Benigni, who explicitly pointed to the Italian provenance of this image.<sup>43</sup> The Russian scholar Nikolai Petrovich Likhachev was of a different opinion; having recognised the image on the seal of Romanos, the metropolitan of Kyzikos, dated to the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (held in the Hermitage), as the Galaktotrophousa, he assumed that this formula was present already in middle-Byzantine art.<sup>44</sup>

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T. 17, Вып. 3); Janin, op. cit., p. 57, assumes that Anthony's account more likely refers to the nearby monastery of St. Nicholas.

36 On Cristoforo Buondelmonti and his *Liber insularum archipelagi*, cf. e.g. H. Turner, “Christopher Buondelmonti and the Rise of the Isolaro”, *Terrae Incognitae*, 1988, no. 19, pp. 11–28; B. Bessi, “Cristoforo Buondelmonti: Greek Antiquities in Florentine Humanism”, *The Historical Review – La revue historique*, 2013, no. 9, pp. 63–76.

37 Majeska, op.cit., pp. 43–45.

38 Ibid., p. 95.

39 Ibid., pp. 151–153.

40 Ibid., p. 163.

41 Ibid., pp. 187–189.

42 Cf. De Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane 1403–1406*, translated by G. Le Strange, London 1928, pp. 62–64.

43 U. Benigni, “La Madonna Allattante è un motivo bizantino?”, *Bessarione*, 1900, no. 7, pp. 499–501.

44 Н. П. Лихачев, *Историческое значение итало-греческой иконописи. Изображения Богоматери в произведениях итало-греческих иконописцев и их влияние на композиции некоторых православных русских икон*, С.-Петербург 1911, pp. 163–164.

Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov, the author of the fundamental typology of Marian iconography, classified the image of the *Mlekopitatelnitsa* (which is the Russian term he decided to use) as belonging to the group of formulas developed in the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the circle of Syriac and Egyptian Christianity, since this is where the greatest number of such images has survived.<sup>45</sup> In Kondakov's view, this type appeared in Byzantine art only as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of Western models; he did not share Likhachev's view and he dated the seal of Metropolitan Romanos to the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup>

Recently, John Cotsonis confirmed the dating of the seal of Metropolitan Romanos as assumed by Likhachev, adding four more examples of seals with the image of the Galaktotrophousa, namely three seals of Romanos of Kyzikos and one of the court official Michael Ophridas.<sup>47</sup> Also worth noting is Cotsonis's statistical observation that of the 9202 known seals with religious representations dating from the period from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, 3870 contain an image of the Virgin Mary, but only four of them are in the Galaktotrophousa type.<sup>48</sup>

The hypothesis on the Byzantine provenance of the representations of the Galaktotrophousa was taken up by Viktor N. Lazarev (Lasareff) in his outstanding work on the iconography of the Virgin Mary; its English-language version was first published in 1938.<sup>49</sup> Lazarev considered a fresco in the catacombs of Priscilla, which he dated in accordance with the then-current state of knowledge to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, to be the earliest representation of the Virgin Mary feeding the Christ Child.<sup>50</sup> Currently, this fresco is dated to the middle or the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (ca. 280?), and interpretations of the presented scene differ, also because of its poor condition, which makes it impossible to precisely discern all of the fresco's iconographic and compositional features.<sup>51</sup> The partially preserved image consists of a fragment of a seated female figure with an infant in her lap and a standing male figure (a prophet?) to her right, pointing to a star above the woman's head with his right hand. The infant is resting his right hand on the woman's breast, but his face is turned towards the observer.

45 Н. П. Кондаков, *Иконография Богоматери*, vol. 1, Санкт Петербург 1914–1915, pp. 255.

46 Ibid., pp. 257–258.

47 J. Cotsonis, "The Image of the Virgin Nursing (Galaktotrophousa) and a Unique Inscription on the Seals of Romanos, Metropolitan of Kyzikos", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 2011–2012, no. 65/66, pp. 193–207.

48 Ibid., p. 195.

49 V. N. Lasareff, "Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin", *The Art Bulletin*, 1938, no. 20, esp. pp. 27–36; idem, "Этюды по иконографии Богоматери", in: В. Н. Лазарев, *Византийская живопись*, Москва 1971, pp. 276–281.

50 Lasareff, "Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin"..., p. 277; J. Wilpert, *Roma sotterranea: Le pitture delle catacombe romane*, Rome 1903, vol. 1, pp. 172–175, vol. 2, plate 22.

51 Cf. F. Bisconti, "La Madonna di Priscilla: Interventi di restauro ed ipotesi sulla dinamica decorativa", *Rivista di archeologia cristiana*, 1996, no. 72, pp. 7–34; V. Fiocchi Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, Regensburg 1999, pp. 124, Fig. 140.

Lazarev accepts Likhachev's view, complementing the latter's argumentation with an example of a miniature in a manuscript of *The Smyrna Physiologus* (cod. B 8), which was lost after the city burnt down in September 1922 during the Greek-Turkish war.<sup>52</sup> The miniature on p. 163 (165v) shows the enthroned Virgin Mary who, according to Lazarev, is breastfeeding the Christ Child.<sup>53</sup> Lazarev did not see the original manuscript but only a black-and-white photograph of mediocre quality showing the miniature itself; his interpretation is therefore questionable, all the more so considering that Josef Strzygowski, who had known the manuscript first hand, did not see this iconographic feature.<sup>54</sup>

The first synthetic analysis of Byzantine representations of the Virgin Mary Galaktotrophousa was published by Anthony Cutler in 1987.<sup>55</sup> Among the early representations, Cutler pointed to the relief on a beautiful crater in the Museo Nazionale Romano delle Terme.<sup>56</sup> The enthroned Galaktotrophousa is shown in it in the epiphanic scene of the adoration of the Magi. On the opposite side is a representation of the enthroned Christ among the apostles. Hans-George Severin dates this crater to the reign of Emperor Valens (364–378) and associates it with a Constantinople workshop.<sup>57</sup> If Severin's argumentation is considered valid, this is the earliest representation of the Virgin Mary Galaktotrophousa and, at the same time, the only work known to have been produced in Constantinople in the circle of imperial art. It must be noted, however, that the condition of the relief does not make it possible to indisputably identify the features of a Galaktotrophousa image, which Severin does not fail to point out.<sup>58</sup>

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52 *The Smyrna Physiologus* was analysed by, above all, J. Strzygowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus, des Kosmas Indikopleustes und Oktateuch nach Handschriften der Bibliothek zu Smyrna*, Leipzig 1899, Byzantinisches Archiv, vol. 2; O. Demus, “Physiologus von Smyrna”, *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 1976, no. 25, pp. 235–257; M. Bernabò, *Il Fisiologo di Smirne. Le miniature del perduto codice B. 8 della Biblioteca della Scuola Evangelica di Smirne*, Florence 1998; K. Corrigan, “The Smyrna Physiologus and Eleventh-century Monasticism”, in: *Work and Worship in the Theotokos Evergetis 1050–1200*, ed. M. Mullet, A. Kirby, Belfast 1997, pp. 201–212; G. Peers, “Peter, Iconoclasm and the Use of the Nature in the Smyrna Physiologus (Evangelical School, B. 8)”, *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 2000, no. 50, pp. 267–292.

53 Lasareff, *Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin...*, p. 30, Fig. 1; his interpretation was rejected by O. E. Etingof, cf. O. E. Этингф, *Образ Богородицы: очерки византийской иконографии XI – XIII вв.*, Москва 2000, pp. 48–49.

54 Strzygowski, op. cit., p. 57, Fig. XXVII.

55 A. Cutler, “The Cult of the Galaktotrophousa in Byzantium and Italy”, *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 1987, no. 37, pp. 335–350 (reprinted in: *Byzantium, Italy and the North: Papers on Cultural Relations*, London 2000, pp. 164–89).

56 Ibid., pp. 336–337.

57 H.-G. Severin, “Oströmische Plastik unter Valens und Theodosius I”, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 1970, no. 12, pp. 211–252.

58 Ibid., pp. 237–238.

An excellent, if little known, study by Lazar Mirković presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of Byzantine Studies in Rome in September 1936 remains on the margins of the scholarly debate on the subject.<sup>59</sup>

Summing up the current state of research on the Byzantine iconography of the Virgin Mary Galaktotrophousa, it must be accepted that, in the period until the iconoclasm, the largest number of representations was produced in the circle of Coptic art, where images of the breastfeeding Virgin occupy a prominent position in ecclesiastical interiors.<sup>60</sup> According to many scholars, the popularity of this theme in Coptic art indicates that the Christian artists modelled their works on representations of Isis feeding the infant Horus.<sup>61</sup> It cannot be ruled out, however, that what was reworked in the circle of Early Christian Roman art was one of the variants of the allegorical formulas of *Fecunditas* (fertility/happy motherhood) or *Pietas* (motherly love), derived from the Hellenistic images of a breastfeeding mother.<sup>62</sup> The cult of *Fecunditas* acquired the rank of an official one during the reign of Nero, who erected a temple to this goddess as a sign of gratitude for Poppea Sabina's successful delivery in 63. In numismatic iconography, the motif of breastfeeding is discernible only as late as in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century; in the course of this century it was gradually transposed to sepulchral iconography as well.

The sarcophagus of Marcus Cornelius Staius, dating from ca. 150, is decorated with scenes from the life of the deceased young man; the first scene on the left shows his mother breastfeeding him and his father watching them tenderly.<sup>63</sup> The sarcophagus was commissioned by the parents of Marcus Cornelius, as stated by the inscription in its lower section: "M(arco) Cornelio M(arci) f(ilio) Pal(atina) Statio P[3] fecer[unt]".<sup>64</sup> The scene of suckling an infant (γαλακτοτροφία) has

59 L. Mirković, "Die nährende Gottesmutter (Galaktotrophousa)", in: *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di studi bizantini*, vol. 2, Rome 1940, pp. 297–303; idem, "Bogorodica Mlekopitateljnica", in: *Ikonografske studije*, Novi Sad 1974, pp. 239–251.

60 Coptic representations of the Virgin Mary Galaktotrophousa were listed by L. Langener, *Isis Lactans – Maria Lactans. Untersuchung zur koptischen Ikonographie*, Altenberg 1996; recently, cf. E. S. Bolman, "The enigmatic Coptic Galaktotrophousa and the cult of the Virgin Mary in Egypt", in: *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassilaki, Burlington 2005, p. 13, note 3; A. Effenberger, "Maria als Vermittlerin und Fürbitterin. Zum Marienbild in der spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Kunst Ägyptens", in: *Presbeia Theothokou...*, pp. 49–108.

61 Cf. Langener, op. cit.; S. Higgins, "Divine Mothers: The Influence of Isis on the Virgin Mary in Egyptian Lactans – Iconography", *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies*, 2012, nos. 3–4, pp. 71–90.

62 Cf. T. Mikocki, *Zgodna, pobożna, płodna, skromna, piękna... Propaganda cnót żeńskich w sztuce rzymskiej* [Amiable, pious, fertile, modest, beautiful... The propaganda of female virtues in Roman art], Wrocław 1997, esp. pp. 121–185.

63 The Louvre, inv. no. Ma 659.

64 F. Baratte, C. Metzger, *Musée du Louvre. Catalogue des sarcophages en pierre d'époques romaine et paléochrétienne*, Paris 1985, pp. 29–31; J. Huskinson, *Roman Children's Sarcophagi. Their Decoration and its Social Significance*, Oxford 1996, pp. 10–13, 22; cf. also Mikocki, op. cit., Fig. 81.

a clearly discernible genre character and is a touching reminder of a son that died far before his time.

Elisabeth Bolmann's study, *Milk and Salvation: The Nursing Mother of God in the Eastern Mediterranean*, which is currently in preparation, may offer important findings.

## The epithet “Feeding with milk” – Galaktotrophousa

The epithet ‘Galaktotrophousa’ (Γαλακτοτροφούσα) is composed of the words γάλα (= milk) and τροφούσα (= food/she who nourishes). The origins of the term are unclear. It was certainly used in post-Byzantine art, as demonstrated by inscriptions on icons. Also Dionysius of Fourni mentions this epithet in his *Hermeneia* as one of “the names and epithets which are written on the images of the Mother of God”.<sup>65</sup> Mediaeval Byzantine authors customarily described the action of breastfeeding, referring it, according to need, to the Virgin or to Christ.

Not all scholars have employed the term Galaktotrophousa in their analyses; as it has already been stated, N. P. Kondakov preferred the term *Mlekoopitel'nitsa*. Dmitrij W. Ainalov used the charming epithet *Detopitel'nitsa* (детопитательница), typically referring to Aphrodite.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of credibility, the above examples of representations of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding the Christ Child, e.g. the fresco in the catacombs of Priscilla and the relief on the crater held in the Museo delle Terme in Rome, are questionable. Another work of Early Christian art, namely the relief on a funerary stele from Medinet el-Fayum, is similarly open to debate.<sup>67</sup> The small stone slab bears a frontal representation of a seated woman breastfeeding an infant. According to Klaus Wessel, this is the earliest representation of the Virgin Mary dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, but the identification is now being questioned, as Arne Effenbergger deciphered the Greek inscription containing a typical funerary formula: the name (illegible) of a woman who died at the age of 21 and an invocation: “Be of good cheer, O Good One”.<sup>68</sup>

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65 *The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fourni*, translated by Paul Hetherington, Sagittarius Press 1974, p. 88. For the Polish-language text, see Dionizjusz z Furny, *Hermeneia, czyli objaśnienie sztuki malarskiej*, translated by I. Kania, introduction by M. Smorąg-Różycka, Cracow 2003, p. 285.

66 Д. В. Айналов, “Византийские памятники Афона”, *Византийский временник*, 1899, no. 6, p. 75.

67 Berlin, Frühchristlich-byzantinische Sammlung, inv. no. 4726, size 50 cm × 34 cm.

68 Cf. K. Wessel, “Eine Grabstele aus Medinet el-Fayum: Zum Problem der Maria Lactans”, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 1954/1955, vol. IV, no. 3, pp. 149–154; idem, *Coptic Art*, London 1966, p. 97; J. Beckwith, *Coptic Sculpture 300–1300*, London 1963, p. 17; E. Effenbergger, “Die Grabstele aus Medinet el-Fayum. Zum Bild der stillenden Gottesmutter in der koptischen Kunst”, *Forschungen und Berichte*, 1977, no. 18, pp. 158–168; idem, *Maria als Vermittlerin...*, p. 72; P. van Moorsel, “Galaktotrophousa”, in: *Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Atiya, vol. 4, New York 1991, pp. 531–535; Bolman, op. cit., p. 13.

The identification of the Galaktotrophousa on a painting in the so-called Pantocrator Grotto in the monastic complex at Latmos, first reported by Oskar Wulff, remains unresolved. Marcel Restle confirmed his claim, but moved the dating from the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>69</sup>

The question regarding the Byzantine provenance of the cult and iconography of the Virgin Mary Galaktotrophousa remains open as well, since traces of this tradition in the post-iconoclastic period are insignificant and debatable.

## The seals of Romanos, metropolitan of Kyzikos<sup>70</sup>

The obverse of the seal shows the enthroned Virgin feeding the Christ Child. The circular inscription reads: Κ(ύρι)ε ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς μ]ου, ὁ εἰς σὲ ἐ[λ]πί[ζ]ων οὐ κ]αταισχύνε(αι) (“The Lord is my God. He whose hope is in Him will not be disappointed”).<sup>71</sup> The Greek legend on the reverse of the seal contains information about its owner: Θ(εοτό) κε β(οή) θ(ει) [τ]ω σω δού[λ(ω)] Ρ(ω)μανω [μ(η)ρ]οπολίτη [Κυ]ζίκου (και) συνκέλλω – “Mother of God, support your servant Romanos, metropolitan of Kyzikos and synkellos”.<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting that, despite some simplification of the figural forms, the artist’s intention is unambiguous: the shape of the Virgin’s breasts and the position of the Infant’s head are clearly discernible.

Reliable information on Bishop Romanos is as follows: he participated in the Synod of Constantinople in 1072, where, in keeping with the protocol, he took fifth place among twenty-seven metropolitans.<sup>73</sup> During his stay in Constantinople he moved around in the circle of the local elites, being acquainted by, for example, John Xiphilinus, Michael Psellos or John Mauropous. His close ties with Psellos are confirmed by correspondence; three letters from the latter to Metropolitan Romanos have survived. With his characteristic propensity towards flattery and elaborate rhetorical figures, their author emphasises the metropolitan’s erudition.<sup>74</sup> It is still not known, however, what made Metropolitan Romanos choose the image of the

69 O. Wulff, “Die Malereien der Askethehlen des Latmos”, in: T. Wiegand, *Der Latmos*, Berlin 1913, pp. 196–198, Fig. 122; cf. K. Restle, *Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasien*, vol. 1, Recklinghausen 1967, p. 78; Cutler, op. cit., p. 341.

70 On the Kyzikos metropolis, see R. Janin, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins: Bithynie, Hellespont, Latros, Galésios, Trébizonde, Athènes, Thessalonique*, Paris 1975, pp. 193–214; C. W. W. Foss, “Kyzikos”, in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, vol. 2, pp. 1164–1165.

71 Cf. Cotsonis, op. cit., p. 193, translated by MSR.

72 Н. П. Лихачев, *Историческое значение итало-греческой иконописи. Изображения Богоматери в произведениях итало-греческих иконописцев и их влияние на композиции некоторых православных русских икон*, С.-Петербург 1911, pp. 163–164.

73 N. Oikonomides, “Un Décret Synodal Inédit Du Patriarche Jean VIII Xiphilin”, *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 1960, no. 18, p. 60; *The Letters of Psellos. Cultural Networks and Historical Realities*, eds. M. Jeffreys, M. D. Lauxtermann, Oxford 2017, p. 399.

74 Oikonomides, op. cit., pp. 63–64.

Galaktotrophousa for his seal, as traces of her cult in Kyzikos have not been found so far. The most famous acheiropoietic icon venerated there was that of the Phaneromeni Virgin (Παναγία Φανερωμένη) in the Hodegetria type.<sup>75</sup> According to John Cotsonis, what we are dealing with here is a visualisation of literary tropes, fixed in the collective awareness by means of liturgy, homiletics and religious poetry – a process that was typical of the Middle Byzantine period.

## Icons of Maria Galaktotrophousa

Traces of Maria Galaktotrophousa iconography in middle-Byzantine art remain enigmatic, even though they indicate that such images were known at that time. The largest number of representations has survived in post-Byzantine icon painting, even though the exact figure has not been ascertained. In only one collection, i.e. the one held by the Museo Nazionale di Ravenna, Patrizia Angiollini-Martinelli identified forty-two icons of the Virgin Mary belonging to this type that originated from Cretan and Dalmatian workshops and were kept in the Graeco-Italian stylistic manner.<sup>76</sup> Icons dating from the period of the Byzantine Empire are still rare. The icon from the monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai, shown at the New York exhibition *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* in 2004, is assumed to be the earliest known one.<sup>77</sup> This icon is absent from Georgios and Maria Sotiriou’s catalogue of icons held at Mt. Sinai.<sup>78</sup> Doula Mouriki, who was the first to publish this work, dated it to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup> In her note in the catalogue of the aforementioned exhibition, Annemarie Weyl Carr opted for a broad dating bracket from ca. 1250 to 1350.<sup>80</sup>

The representation of Maria Galaktotrophousa in a half-figure was painted in tempera on a small-sized board.<sup>81</sup> She is shown in the typically Byzantine style: with an oval face, a narrow, slightly curved nose and large, almond-shaped eyes. Her head is surrounded with a purple maphorion edged with gold. The manner of showing the Christ Child contrasts with this strictly Byzantine type: he has the Byzantine face of the Emmanuel, but he is wearing a long white tunic with a characteristic pattern of slanted checkers and with a narrow red edge. Damaged paint in the central part of the body reveals the original (?) golden chiton, which indicates that this part of the icon may have been altered.

Two more icons of the Galaktotrophousa from Mt. Sinai show the Kykkotissa variant with a typical patterned veil on top of the maphorion. The Infant is shown

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75 Cotsonis, op. cit., pp. 196–198.

76 P. Angiollini-Martinelli, *Le icone della collezione classense di Ravenna*, Bologna 1982, pp. 71–111.

77 *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. H.C. Evans, New York 2004, pp. 356–357.

78 G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icons du Mont Sinai*, vol. 1: *Album*, Athens 1956, vol. 2: *Text*, Athens 1958.

79 D. Mouriki, “Variants of the Hodegetria on Two Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons”, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 1991, no. 39, p. 168–169, Fig. 31.

80 *Byzantium: Faith and Power...*, p. 356.

81 19.3 cm × 17.5 cm.

holding the Virgin's breast with both hands; the breast is barely visible between the folds of the maphorion.<sup>82</sup> The graphic and decorative style of both icons is close to many other works made at Mt. Sinai in the period of the Latin Empire.

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention an enigmatic icon (ζ) of the Galaktotrophousa as mentioned by Pope Gregory II in the so-called second letter to the emperor of Byzantium, Leo III (717–741). Views regarding the letter's authenticity and origin vary, but generally it is assumed that it was either written in Rome by some learned monk or fabricated in Constantinople in the circle of the iconodules.<sup>83</sup> While not trying to resolve this issue, it must be remembered that the letter contains an answer to the argumentation of the iconoclasts and a justification relying on, among others, the central meaning of images seen inside churches. One of those images to be mentioned there is that of the "Holy Mother with our Lord God in her arms, holding him at her breast and a circle of angels reciting the *trishagion*".<sup>84</sup> The phrase "Kyrion kai Theon (...) galouchounta" as used in the text, i.e. "our Lord God (...) suckling milk" indicates clearly that the described image is that of the Virgin Mary in the Galaktotrophousa type. If the text is authentic, this would be the earliest icon or painting of the Galaktotrophousa to be confirmed in the sources and, consequently, resolving the issue whether the letter had been written in Rome or in Constantinople would be of fundamental importance.

## Italo-Byzantine icons

Post-Byzantine icons, usually termed Italo-Byzantine ones, encompass a far more numerous group of representations of Maria Galaktotrophousa.

While trying to trace the paths along which the image of the Galaktotrophousa came to Post-Byzantine icon painting, it must be remembered that at the current state of research the Venetian Italo-Byzantine school, characterised by a diversity of iconographic and formal features, is considered distinct from the Cretan school, which is characterised by general stylistic and iconographic homogeneity and a clearly discernible tendency to imitate patterns known from the Paleologian art of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Master Teophanes the Cretan, active 1527–1559, is considered to have been the precursor of the Cretan school, and its main centre was the Cretan city of Candia (Heraklion), the administrative capital of the entire Aegean region under Venetian rule.<sup>85</sup> With the above distinction in mind, it is necessary to

82 J. Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, from the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291*, Cambridge 2005, Figs. 293 and 295.

83 Cf. L. Guérard, "Sur les lettres de Grégoire II à Léon l'Isaurien", *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 1890, no. 10, pp. 44–60; H. Grotz S. I., "Beobachtung zu den zwei Briefen Papst Gregors II. an Kaiser Leo III", *Archivum Historiae Pontificae*, 1980, no. 18, pp. 9–40.

84 Cf. the Greek text, Guérard, op. cit., p. 289.

85 Fundamental findings were determined by M. Chatzidakis, *Études sur la peinture postbyzantine*, London 1976 (Variorum Reprints); A. Embiricos, *L'école crétoise*, Paris 1967; M. Garidis,



assume that representations of the Galaktotrophousa in these separate currents of icon painting had a similarly distinct, Italian or Byzantine, source. It is also worth remembering that the ateliers of Candia usually made their icons in the manner desired by the commissioning party, painting the images of the Virgin Mary either *a la greca* or *all'italiana*.<sup>86</sup> This stylistic dichotomy, which does not depend on the chronological caesura, is evident in the icons of the Virgin Mary Galaktotrophousa.

The image of the Galaktotrophousa in the collection of Rena Andreadis is a typical rendering *a la maniera italiana* with a characteristic white veil showing from under a purple maphorion edged with a golden trim and clasped with a round golden brooch on the breast. In the lower section of the icon's field there is a conventional inscription in Latin capitals: REGINA CELI ORA PRO NOBIS. The icon is dated to the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is compared with a similar image of the Galaktotrophousa in the Byzantine Museum in Athens.<sup>87</sup> A similar Italianate style can be observed in the icon in the collection of Antonio Papadopoulos shown at the exhibition in Cracow; here, however, the artist retained the Byzantine features of the original.<sup>88</sup>

A much later icon of the Galaktotrophousa in the collection of A. S. Onassis, in turn, signed by a painter named Ioannis in 1778, has typically Byzantine features.<sup>89</sup> The image of the Virgin is provided with the toponymical epithet *Spelaiotissa* (Η ΣΠΗΛΑΙΩΤΙΚΑ), derived from the Mega Spelaion monastery. According to an inscription running along the bottom edge, it is a copy of the icon painted by St. Luke.

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*La peinture murale dans le Monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance (1450–1600) et dans les pays sous domination étrangère*, Athens 1989; here a discussion of the state of research on post-Byzantine art, pp. 18–25, and an extensive bibliography, pp. 369–382; cf. also *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art* [exhibition catalogue], ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou et al., Athens 1986. The issue of the Greek diaspora in Western Europe is presented by I. Manoussacas, “Structure sociale de l'hellénisme post-byzantin”, in: XVI. *Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Akten I/2*, Wien 1981, pp. 791–821, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 1981, no. 31.

86 M. Chatzidakis cites a contract drawn up in 1499 by two merchants, a Venetian and a Greek, and three painters from Candia, binding the painters to produce 700 icons of the Virgin Mary in the course of 45 days, where it is precisely noted that 500 icons are to be painted *in forma alla latina* and the remaining 200 *in forma alla greca*; cf. M. Chatzidakis, “Les début de l'école crétoise et la question de l'école dite italogrecque”, in: Chatzidakis, *Études sur la peinture postbyzantine...*, p. 206.

87 A. Drandaki, *Greek Icons, 14th–18th century. The Rena Andreadis Collection*, translated by J. Avghe-  
rinos, Athens–Milan 2002, pp. 84–87.

88 *Maria Mater Misericordiae...*, pp. 198–199.

89 N. Chatzidakis, *Ikonen der Sammlung Velimezis*, Athens 2001 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., in Greek, 1997], pp. 406–409; M. Vassilaki, *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete*, Burlington 2009, pp. 317–322, Fig. 15.1.

## Maria Galaktotrophousa in the depictions of the Nativity

As far as Byzantine art is concerned, only two such depictions are known to exist outside the former borders of the Empire. The first is a painting in the church of Saints Theodoroi on Aegina, known as the *Omorphi Ecclesia*. Presumably erected in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the church was renovated in 1282 during the reign of Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282–1328), when Athanasius I was patriarch of Constantinople (1289–1293, 1303–1309). This information may be read on an original inscription on the church's façade, to the left of the entrance. At the time, Aegina was a part of the Duchy of Athens, a state that had been set up by the Crusaders in 1205.

The Nativity scene, included in the cycle of images from the New Testament, is represented in a manner typical of post-iconoclast Byzantine art. It is, however, unique due to the depiction of the Virgin Mary, who is shown with the Christ Child wrapped tightly in a white cloth. The Virgin is sitting by the manger and breastfeeding the child lying in her lap. The artist chose to present this motif with a substantial dose of realism. Virgin's bared breast is discernible between the folds of the maphorion; she is holding it between her two fingers and extending it towards the parted (?) lips of the Infant.

A similar image is found in the Nativity scene in the church of St. Nicholas of the Roof (*Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis*) in Kakopetria in Cyprus. The church was built early in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and expanded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The interior features several layers of painted decoration dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Nativity scene, included in the cycle of images from the New Testament, is dated to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, which means it was painted during the rule of the French House of Lusignan that controlled Cyprus from 1192. Again, Virgin is depicted sitting by the manger breastfeeding the Christ Child who is resting in her lap. The Child is, again, wrapped in a decorative cloth and the Virgin's breast is visible between the folds of the maphorion. However, unlike on the Aegina fresco, Mary is not holding her breast but embracing the Child with both hands.<sup>90</sup>

Both of the compositions are in keeping with the stylistic and iconographic convention of Byzantine art. At the time when they were painted, Orthodox art in Aegina and Cyprus was gradually being infused with Western iconographic models. Thus, it is possible that the motif of the breastfeeding Mary in these Nativity scenes had Western origins.<sup>91</sup>

90 A. and J. A. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus. Treasures of Byzantine Art*, London 1985, pp. 53–75, Fig. 28; E. Hain, A. Jakovljević, B. Kleidt, *Zypern – byzantinischen Kirchen und Klöster. Mosaiken und Fresken*, Ratingen 1996, Fig. 45.

91 Cf. S. Kalopissi-Verti, "Representations of the Virgin in Lusignan Cyprus", in: *Mother of God...*, pp. 305–319; the author neglects to mention the representations of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa.

## The Virgin Mary in the Return from Egypt

Scenes from the life of the Virgin as depicted in the Basilica of St. Mark in Venice feature a depiction of the Return from Egypt, in which the Virgin is portrayed riding a donkey and breastfeeding the Infant held in her lap. The image also includes St. Joseph leading the donkey and a boy with a bundle of belongings walking behind the Holy Family.<sup>92</sup> Since this depiction differs from traditional Byzantine imagery, A. Cutler came to the conclusion that the motif of feeding the Christ Child could have been introduced to the original scene by a local artist employed to restore the piece, or that the mosaic had originally depicted St. Anne feeding the infant Mary.<sup>93</sup>

## Maria Galaktotrophousa in the Akathist cycle

Akathist cycles were among the most popular types of narrative art in the Paleologian period. Many examples have survived in a series of monumental paintings, icons and book illustrations from Serbia, Macedonia, Rus', Moldova and Wallachia.<sup>94</sup> Only two of them feature a depiction of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa in different iconographic and compositional variants. This means that they did not belong to typical images.

The first of the above-mentioned depictions is found on the southern wall of the narthex in the Orthodox church complex of the patriarchate of Peć. The complex comprises four interconnected churches – the Holy Apostles, St. Demetrius, the Holy Mother of God Hodegetria and St. Nicholas – built during the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. Three of the churches are joined by a sizable narthex located to the west. The interior of the narthex, erected by Archbishop Danilo II (1324–1337), is divided into two transepts (eastern and western) by a row of five pillars supporting a barrel vault with transverse arches. Only fragments of the original painted decoration commissioned by the archbishop c. 1332 have survived to the present day. These include the family tree of the house of Nemanjić, the figure of King Dušan and a depiction of an enthroned Maria Galaktotrophousa. The remaining frescoes date from the final quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century or from 1565.<sup>95</sup>

The depiction of the Galaktotrophousa is located in the highest section of the decoration beneath the vault on the southern wall of the eastern nave of the narthex, opening towards the garden with a beautiful Diocletian window. The scene is arranged in an irregular field delineated by the curve of the vault and the archivolt

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92 O. Demus. *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, Chicago 1984, vol. 1, p. 138, Fig. 156.

93 Cutler, op. cit., pp. 347–348.

94 Cf. A. Pätzold: *Der Akathistos-Hymnos: die Bilderzyklen in der byzantinischen Wandmalerei des 14. Jh.*, Stuttgart–Wiesbaden 1989; L. M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, Leiden 2001, *The medieval Mediterranean*, vol. 35; I. Spatharakis, *The Pictorial Cycles of the Akathistos. Hymn for the Virgin*, Leiden 2005, here, older bibliography on the subject.

95 Cf. B.J. Ђурић, С. Ђирковић, В. Кораћ, *Пећка патријаршија*, Београд 1990.

of the Diocletian window. The Virgin Mary, seated on an ornamental throne, is breastfeeding the Christ Child seated on her right thigh. The throne is flanked by two archangels in poses of adoration; further to the left, three female figures can be seen, along with an inscription in Cyrillic, taken from the 12<sup>th</sup> oikos (incantation) of the *Akathist to the Holy Virgin*: “Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin”.<sup>96</sup> The painter made use of the conventional representation of the enthroned Virgin with Child accompanied by the archangels. Such imagery frequently appeared in the apses of post-iconoclast churches, including the already mentioned Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The image is completed by motifs of a ciborium and a censer, which accentuate its liturgical and mystic significance. The presence of the three women, in turn, evokes associations with the custom of amphidromia (Greek: ἀμφιδρόμια), i.e. the ceremonial visit paid to a puerpera, which was practised since Antiquity. It hints at the historical, factual aspect of the Incarnation. In this context, the image of the Galaktotrophousa becomes one of the emblems of the dogma of Incarnation as well as a visualisation of its reality as a historical event.

The second image of Maria Galaktotrophousa may be seen in the Orthodox church of the Holy Virgin in Matejić near Kumanovo. The church was founded by Tsarina Helena (Yelena) when she was acting as regent for the underage king, her son Stefan Uroš V (1355–1371). The paintings are dated to between 1348 and 1352. The Galaktotrophousa appears as a part of the Akathist cycle comprising 24 scenes arranged in the altar space, on the southern wall of the nave and on the southern pillar of the nave.<sup>97</sup> The depiction of the breastfeeding Virgin found on the southern wall of the nave refers to the 16<sup>th</sup> stanza, which begins with the following passage: “All angel-kind was amazed by the great deed of Your Incarnation; for they saw the inaccessible God as Man accessible to all, dwelling among us and hearing from all”.<sup>98</sup> The Virgin Mary is shown surrounded by a spherical blue mandorla and standing on a subpedion, feeding the Child held in her arms. She is flanked by angels – a six-winged seraph on the right and two archangels in ceremonial robes with *loroi* on the left. As in Peć, the depiction of breastfeeding differs from typical representations of the motif as used in Akathist cycles. As Ioannis Spatharakis recently demonstrated, the usual depiction featured an enthroned Virgin with Child, an enthroned Christ-Emmanuel or Christ Pantocrator, always with an entourage of angels.<sup>99</sup> The depiction of Christ enthroned is also recommended by Dionysius of Fournia in his *Hermeneia*: “Christ seated on a throne, blessing; above him is heaven, and all the

96 J. Radovanović, “Bogorodica Mlekoviteljnica iz Pečke patrijaršije. Novo tumačenje”, *Balkanica*, 2002, no. 31–32, pp. 253–263; the English translation: *The Akathist Hymn Preceded by the Brief Compline*, translated by Fr. George Papadeas, loc. cit.

97 Cf. Spatharakis, op. cit., following the index.

98 *The Akathist Hymn Preceded by the Brief Compline*, translated by Fr. George Papadeas, loc. cit. For the Polish translation, cf. Akathistos. Bizantyjski hymn dziękczynny ku czci Matki Bożej, translated by M. Bednarz SJ, *Znak*, 1965, no. 131, p. 643.

99 Spatharakis, op. cit., pp. 143–144; the author does not note the motif of breastfeeding in this representation.

choirs of the angels in wonder, ascending and descending to it”.<sup>100</sup> Unusually, in the Tomić Psalter completed ca. 1360 (Moscow, the Historical Museum, cod. 2752), the so-called Serbian Psalter dated to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Slav. 4) and the icon from the Orthodox church of Our Lady in Livadia (Skopelos) painted in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this stanza is illustrated with a nativity scene.<sup>101</sup> All of the above-mentioned depictions convey a single message, congruous with the 16<sup>th</sup> stanza of the Akathist, focusing on the supernatural significance of the Incarnation, believed to have been also a historical occurrence. The same idea is communicated by the image of Maria Galaktotrophousa, in which the naturalistic depiction of the act of breastfeeding (*γαλακτοτροφία*) emphasises the humanity of the Incarnated Logos. However, one cannot help but wonder whether the Byzantine recipients of art were willing to accept images that were so suffused with naturalism, and whether Byzantine artists would dare to create an image so different from the accepted canon? According to the Orthodox concept of an image, the credibility of a holy depiction depended on its affinity with the painterly tradition and carefulness in repeating the features of the prototype. The existence of this normative principle rooted in theology may lead to the conclusion that Byzantine art ossified in its repetition of established models and that all works which are at variance with this tradition were a result of external influences. In the case of the depiction of Maria Galaktotrophousa, scholars point to the art of ancient Egypt and to Italian 12<sup>th</sup>-century models. However, as noted above, in Roman art the meaning of *galaktotrophia* is both allegorical (*Pietas*, *Fecunditas*) and realistic. The same duality is embedded in the image of Maria Galaktotrophousa, which proves that it is rooted in tradition. Evidence for this hypothesis may also be found in other examples of *galaktotrophia* in Byzantine art – the infant fed by Saphora in the illustration depicting the journey to Egypt from an Octateuch dated to ca. 1070 (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, cod. gr. 747, fol. 76v), John the Baptist in an illustration in the Homilies of Jacob Kokkinobaphos dated to the second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, cod. gr. 1162, fol. 159r) and, most of all, the infant Mary breastfed by Anna, from paintings, for example, in the Orthodox churches of St. George in Kurbinovo (1191), St. Stephen in Kastoria (13<sup>th</sup> century) and St. Naum in Ohrid (formerly Holy Mary Peribleptos, dated to 1361).

Our knowledge regarding the depictions of Maria Galaktotrophousa in Byzantine art is still very limited, though it has been considerably expanded by research undertaken by many scholars in recent years. There can be no doubt that the new research reveals a specific aspect of Byzantine art, in which spiritualism blends with naturalism. An ordinary *galaktotrophia* constitutes an indisputable testimony of motherhood, but also a powerful sign of the Incarnation of the Logos. It insults no one, and captivates many.

*Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz*

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100 *The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fourni*, p. 52.

101 Spatharakis, op. cit., Figs. 207, 232, 246, 589–591.

## Abstract

The image of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding the Christ Child belongs to the most fascinating and yet least researched themes of Byzantine Marian iconography. In the past it has been assumed that the images of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa derived from the art of the Italian Duecento and Trecento in the post-Byzantine period. However, there is sufficient ground to assume that these images were known already in the Middle Byzantine period and were popular during the period of the Paleologian dynasty.