

THE CULT OF ST. DEMETRIUS OF THESSALONIKI
IN THE HISTORY OF BYZANTINE-SLAV RELATIONS

Many historians, I suppose, feel from time to time the urge to fit a particular problem in which they happen to be interested into a wider conceptual framework, by combining the method of analysis with an attempt to paint on a broader canvass. When I was asked to deliver a lecture in your city, under the auspices of the Institute for Balkan Studies, I naturally felt honoured by, and grateful for, this invitation¹. And then, in searching for a subject, I thought that this urge might be satisfied if I chose a theme at once restricted and capable of being viewed within a wider context. The cult of St. Demetrius, which, as you know better than I, occupies a central position in the history of Thessaloniki both in medieval and modern times, can also, it seems to me, be regarded as a particular instance—and one singularly rich in historical content and dramatic overtones—of a process which I have endeavoured to study for a number of years: the transmission of Byzantine civilisation to the Slav peoples of Eastern Europe.

In the history of the encounter between Byzantium and the Slavs we may distinguish, without perhaps too much oversimplification, three successive stages. The first has been termed the «Dark Age» of Byzantium. It covers, broadly speaking, the period from the late sixth to the early ninth century. In the European sector—the only one with which my paper is concerned—it was marked by the Empire's desperate attempts to defend, first its northern frontier on the Danube, then its lands in the Balkan peninsula, and finally its very life, against the attacks of its enemies from the North—Slavs, Avars and Bulgars. In this struggle for survival, during which most of the North Balkan area, and much of the countryside in central Greece and the Peloponnese, were lost, permanently or temporarily, to these invaders, the Empire was saved by its ability to retain control of the more important coastal cities, above all, of course, Constantinople and Thessaloniki. The defence of Thessaloniki against the barbarian attacks of the late sixth and of the seventh century are among the outstanding military achievements of the late Roman and early Byzantine state. In this achievement the cult of St. Demetrius played a role which it is impossi-

1. Except for the notes and a few minor changes, this article is identical with the text of a paper read by the author at the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki on 18 December, 1973.

ble to over-estimate. The theme of my paper has thus a particular relevance to the earliest phase of Byzantine-Slav relations.

The second phase begins in the early ninth century and ends in the late twelfth. It was, for Byzantium, an age of recovery and expansion. This resurgence, at home and abroad, was crowned by many remarkable achievements. Two of them are of special relevance to my theme: during the ninth and tenth centuries the Slav tribes, who had occupied much of continental Greece and of the Peloponnesus during the preceding «dark age», were subdued, converted to Christianity and finally civilized by the Byzantines, thus becoming, in the only meaningful sense of this word, Greeks. Further north, beyond the Empire's borders, Byzantine civilization, spreading throughout the Balkans and thrusting deep into the lands beyond the Danube and the Black Sea, brought in this period the nascent states of Central and Eastern Europe into the orbit of Greek Christianity. In the history of Byzantium's foreign missions there is no more remarkable period than the sixties and seventies of the ninth century. During these two decades, through the initiative of rulers and churchmen—especially the Emperors Michael III and Basil I, and the Patriarch Photius—the Bulgarians, the Russians and the Serbs were all converted to the Christian faith, and a mission, led by Cyril and Methodius, planted Byzantine Christianity and civilization in the heart of Central Europe. Of these ninth-century missions that of Cyril and Methodius is particularly germane to the theme of this lecture: for, as I hope to show, these two Byzantine missionaries were sustained in their arduous task in this remote land by their conviction that St. Demetrius was there to assist them in their hour of need.

This age of expansion, associated with the Macedonian and Comnenian dynasties, came to an end, at least on the political plane, in the last two decades of the twelfth century. It was then that the Bulgarians and the Serbs revolted against direct Byzantine rule, and the Empire's hegemony in the northern regions of the Balkan peninsula came to an end for ever. In this third and last period, which spans the later Middle Ages, Byzantine civilization remained a dominant force in Eastern Europe. Politically, however, the Empire was a dying body. Taking advantage of the new balance of power, several East European nations, although they owed their religion and much of their culture to Byzantium, or perhaps just because of this fact, began to harbour ambitions to supplant their former masters and mentors. Some of their rulers began to claim that the centre of the Christian *oikoumene*, by the supernatural dictate of Divine providence, had moved, or would soon move, from the shores of the Bosphorus to the capital of their own kingdom. These imperialist dreams were but a mirror-image of Byzantine political thought: their roots lay in the idea of the eternal Rome and in the concept of its translation, or migration, which the Byzantines them-

selves had used to support their belief that Constantinople was the New Rome. On the political plane, this concept was first explicitly extended to an East European country in the mid-fourteenth century: we find it in the claim, made by the court panegyrists of the Bulgarian *tsar* John Alexander, that the centre of the «renovated» Christian Empire had moved from Constantinople to his capital, Trnovo. A century and a half later, after the Byzantine Empire had ceased to exist, these claims were carried a step further in the celebrated theory of «Moscow the Third Rome».

The connection between the idea of the «translatio imperii» and the cult of St. Demetrius may not be immediately apparent. I believe, however, that a link, albeit tenuous and perhaps indirect, can be detected between the two. For if a «copy», or a «mirror-image», of Constantinople, destined to supplant it, could be created in a Slavonic country, there was no inherent reason why the same transposition could not be applied to Thessaloniki. It was, after all, the second most important city in the Empire, and, for so many foreign nations who desired to possess it, appeared, almost as much as Constantinople itself, as a κοσμοπαμπόθητος πόλις¹. And Thessaloniki, of course, was indissolubly identified with, and personified by, its patron saint Demetrius. So it is not surprising to find, in several Slavonic countries of the Middle Ages, a desire to set up a mirror-image of Thessaloniki. This desire, as I will show in the concluding part of this paper, occasionally even led their rulers or writers to claim that St. Demetrius had forsaken his city and was now extending his posthumous help to the enemies of Byzantium.²

Our first period, then, has as its main theme the role of St. Demetrius in defending his city against the attacks of the Avars and Slavs. This theme is vividly illustrated in one of the earliest datable hagiographical works devoted to the saint: the seventh-century document known as the Θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου, or *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*³. Let me say in passing that I am not so rash as to plunge into the many still unresolved problems involved in the dating and mutual relationship of the numerous medieval writings devoted to St. Demetrius. Halkin's recent edition of the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* lists some 40 of these works³. They include Μαρτύρια, Θαύματα, Ἑγκώμια, and liturgical hymns stemming from widely different periods. Before they can be safely used by the historian, they must be subjected to a thorough *Quellenkritik*. In the meantime, we can but treat them with caution, and echo the hope,

1. For this expression see E. Legrand, «Description des Oeuvres d'Art et de l'Eglise des Saints-Apôtres de Constantinople. Poème en vers iambiques par Constantin le Rhodien», *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, ix, 1896, p. 38.

2. *P.G.*, cxvi, cols. 1203-1384.

3. F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 3rd. ed., i, Brussels, 1957, pp. 152-165.

expressed by Professor Paul Lemerle in 1953¹, that this considerable body of writings will one day be classified, dated and critically edited within what he called a *Corpus Demetrianum*.

The *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* are a shining exception in this fog of textual uncertainty. The first section, or book, was written, between 610 and 620, by John, Archbishop of Thessaloniki. The second book has been reliably dated, on internal evidence, to the ninth decade of the seventh century. The text, it is true, stands in need of a modern critical edition: one has been promised us by Professor Lemerle. But there is no lack of scholarly works devoted to the *Miracula*: three of them appeared, almost simultaneously and independently, some twenty years ago: articles by Lemerle² and the Bulgarian historian Alexander Burmov³, and a book by the Yugoslav scholar Franjo Barišić⁴. More recently, the relevance of this work to our subject has been illustrated by a Greek scholar, Mr. Antonios Papadopoulos⁵.

The first two books of the *Miracula* are so rich in historical content that I can only enumerate some of the types of evidence they provide for the historian: in no other contemporary work will he find so much precise and first-hand information on the military organisation and topography of Thessaloniki during one of the most dramatic centuries of its history; on the methods of warfare and the technique of siege-craft used in the Balkan wars of the time; and on the strategy and tactics of the northern barbarians who, thrusting southward in successive waves down river valleys and across mountain passes, sought in the sixth and seventh centuries to gain a foothold on the warm Aegean coastland and to seize its commanding metropolis which always eluded their grasp. And in no other document stemming from the Christian world of the Middle Ages is the belief held by the citizens of a beleaguered city that they stood under the supernatural protection of a heavenly patron so vividly and poignantly expressed. They were convinced—and to this innumerable passages in the *Miracula* bear witness—that St. Demetrius saved Thessaloniki from epidemics, famine, civil war, and above all from barbarian attacks. Archbishop John de-

1. P. Lemerle, «La composition et la chronologie des deux premiers livres des *Miracula S. Demetrii*», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, xlv, 1953, p. 349.

2. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-361.

3. A. Burmov, «Slavyanskite napadeniya sreshchu Solun v 'Chudesata na sv. Dimitra' i tyakhnata khronologiya», *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya Universitet, Filosof.-Istor. Fak.*, xlvii, 1952, 2, pp. 167-215. See the critical review of Burmov's article by S. Maslev in *Izvestiya na Instituta za Bŭlgarska Istoriya*, vi, 1956, pp. 671-691.

4. F. Barišić, *Čuda Dimitrija Solunskog kao istoriski izvori*, Belgrade, 1953.

5. A. Papadopoulos, *Ὁ ἅγιος Δημήτριος εἰς τὴν ἐλληνικὴν καὶ βουλγαρικὴν παράδοσιν*, Thessaloniki, 1971.

scribes in detail the first major siege of the city by the Avars and the Slavs¹; modern scholars date this event variously either to 586 or 597; I personally, for reasons too long to enumerate here, prefer the first of these dates². His account is so precise and vivid that it is hard to resist the impression that he must, at that time, have been a soldier, fighting on the city walls. The barbarian army, he tells us, numbered some 100,000 men and attacked the city with elaborate and fearsome siege-engines. When the assault was delivered, St. Demetrius appeared on the walls in the guise of a warrior (ἐν ὁπλίτου σχήματι)³ and speared the first assailant who had scaled a ladder. Throughout the week-long siege he continued to instil courage into the hearts of the defenders and fear into the enemy. The defeat of the assailants and the salvation of Thessaloniki were thus his personal victorious achievement (τοῦ ἀθλοφόρου...τὸ κατόρθωμα)⁴.

The role played by Archbishop John as a historian of his city and panegyrist of its patron saint was taken up, some sixty years later, by the anonymous author of Book II of the *Miracula*. His account of the successive sieges of Thessaloniki by Avars and Slavs in the seventh century, his description of military technology, and the picture he paints of the gradual settlement of Slav tribes in northern Greece, are of considerable value to the historian. The role he ascribes to Demetrius in these military operations is unchanged. Time and again the saint saves Thessaloniki from disaster, encouraging his compatriots by running round the city walls clothed in white (χλαμύδα λευκὴν φέρων)⁵, striking fear into the enemy fleet by walking on the sea, and appearing on horseback to guard the city gates.

The second book of the *Miracula* provides some valuable information about the basilica of St. Demetrius. This building, according to the Μαρτύρια of the saint, was built in the fifth century by Leontius, Prefect of Illyricum. I shall not discuss the controversial problem of the precise time in the fifth century when the church was constructed. Nor do I feel qualified to assess the results of the archaeological work carried out in and beneath the basilica by Greek scholars such as Professors Xyngopoulos and Pelekanides⁶, and above all by the late George Soteriou who, in collaboration with his wife, pub-

1. *Miracula* I, 13-15, P.G., cxvi, cols. 1284-1324.

2. See the arguments in favour of 586 in Barišić, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-64; cf. *ibid.*, p. 10, and, more recently, A. Avenarius, «Die Awaren und die Slaven in den *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*», *Byzantina*, v, 1973, pp. 17-18.

3. *Mir.* I, 13, 112, col. 1288.

4. *Ibid.*, col. 1289.

5. *Mir.* II, 1, 164, col. 1332.

6. S. Pelekanides, *Γραπτή παράδοση και εικαστικές τέχνες για την προσωπικότητα του ἁγίου Δημητρίου*, Thessaloniki, 1970.

lished in 1952 his magisterial book on the basilica of St. Demetrius¹. In deliberately side-stepping these complex problems, I can plead in justification that the history of this building before the seventh century, and the nature of the site on which it was erected², are of no direct relevance to the theme of this lecture: my concern here is with the later role played by the basilica as the focus of the medieval cult of St. Demetrius. The *Miracula* describe a great fire which burnt down the church; and the same document tells us that, at the saint's inspiration, a new and splendid one was, before long, built on the same site³. It is now generally accepted that the fire occurred between 629 and 634⁴. It is clear, however, that the building was not wholly destroyed, and some of the mosaics, whose fragments have survived on the church's west wall, have been reliably dated to the fifth or the sixth century⁵. As for the later cycle of mosaics, executed after the basilica was rebuilt, and which include the two famous panels on the piers at the entrance to the sanctuary, representing St. Demetrius between the two restorers of the church and St. Demetrius with two children, they are dated by virtually all the authorities to the seventh century. It is curious that they are not mentioned in the *Miracula*; remarkable that they were not destroyed by the Iconoclasts; and interesting to note that several authorities believe that the bishop who, in the first of these panels, stands beside St. Demetrius, is none other than Archbishop John, the author of the first book of the *Miracula*⁶.

This remarkable prelate must have done much to shape and propagate the cult of St. Demetrius not only in Thessaloniki, but throughout the Greek-speaking world. We may surmise that he and the anonymous author of the second book of the *Miracula* contributed something to the growing tendency to depict Demetrius as a military saint: the change in his portrayal from a no-

1. G. and M. Soteriou, *Ἡ βασιλικὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης*, Athens, 1952.

2. For a discussion of these problems see P. Lemerle, «Saint-Démétrius de Thessalonique et les problèmes du Martyrion et du Transept», *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, lxxvii, 1953, pp. 660-694; J. Walter, «St. Demetrius: The Myroblytos of Thessalonika», *Eastern Churches Review*, v, 2, 1973, pp. 159-160; and the forthcoming article by M. Vickers, «Sirmium or Thessaloniki? A Critical Examination of the St. Demetrius Legend». I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Michael Vickers for letting me see the typescript of his article before publication.

3. *Mir.* II, 3, 183, col. 1348; A. Tougaard, *De l'histoire profane dans les actes grecs des Bollandistes*, Paris, 1874, pp. 144-148.

4. G. and M. Soteriou, *op. cit.*, p. 25; A. Xyngopoulos, *The Mosaics of the Church of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki*, Thessaloniki, 1969, p. 6.; Cf. R.S. Cormack, «The Mosaic Decoration of St. Demetrios, Thessaloniki», *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, no. 64, 1969, pp. 43-45.

5. A. Xyngopoulos, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-17.

6. G. and M. Soteriou, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-194; A. Xyngopoulos, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

bleman, clothed in a chlamys with its senatorial tablion, to a warrior, clad in armour, bearing a shield and carrying a sword or a spear, is particularly apparent from the tenth century onwards¹. But the authors of the *Miracula* must have done much to pave the way for this metamorphosis. The epithets they lavish on the saint is evidence of this. St. Demetrius for them is not only the φιλόπατρις², the σωσίπατρις³ and the κηδεμών⁴ of his city; he is also the ἀθλοφόρος⁵ and the ὑπέρμαχος⁶. And the latter epithet calls to mind an even greater power, whose heavenly protection was already then believed to rest on the mother of all Christian cities, the Πόλις itself. The conviction that Constantinople was placed under the guardianship of the Theotokos is expressed in several contemporary Greek works describing how the Byzantine capital was saved in 626 from the assault of the Avars and Slavs⁷. The origin and date of the Akathistos hymn are no doubt still a subject of debate among scholars. But it is at least possible that the words of its celebrated *kontakion*, τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ, were composed at that time as a token of the Byzantines' triumph and gratitude at the salvation of their city⁸. Be that as it may, it is worth noting that in the first half of the seventh century, when the Avaro-Slav invasions threatened to engulf the two foremost cities of the Empire, their citizens were sustained in their struggle by the belief that they enjoyed the supernatural protection of their respective patrons, the Mother of God and St. Demetrius. In this respect the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* is a work symptomatic of an age when the Byzantines became more convinced than ever before that their empire was divinely protected, and that its victories were those of the Christian religion.

The period of recovery which followed the dark age of Byzantium was marked, as I have mentioned, by a remarkable resurgence of the missionary activity of the Byzantine Church. Freed, after 843, from the burden of the lengthy Iconoclast crisis, this Church was able not only to play an active role in the christianization and the hellenization of the Slavs in Greece; its missionaries abroad, with the support of the imperial government, now gained the al-

1. See J. Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-177.

2. *Mir.* II, 1, 164, col. 1332; *Mir.* II, 6, 215, col. 1384.

3. A. Tougaard, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

4. *Mir.* II, 2, 169, col. 1336; *Mir.* II, 4, 185, col. 1349.

5. *Mir.* I, 13, 112, col. 1289; *Mir.* II, 1, 167, col. 1333.

6. *Mir.* II, 4, 187, col. 1352.

7. For these sources see F. Barišić, «Le siège de Constantinople par les Avars et les Slaves en 626», *Byzantion*, xxiv, 1954, pp. 371-395; A. N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, i, Amsterdam, 1968, pp. 173-196, 370-375.

8. See *The Akathistos Hymn*, introduced and transcribed by E. Wellesz, Copenhagen, 1957 [*Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*, ix], pp. xx-xxxiii; E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd. ed., Oxford, 1961, pp. 191-197.

legiance of a substantial part of the vast Slav world. The history of the mission of Cyril and Methodius, the outstanding achievement of the Byzantine Church in the ninth century, is too well known to require any detailed exposition here. I will only remind you that the embassy led by these two brothers to Central Europe in 863, whose original purpose was to preach Christianity in the language of the Moravian Slavs, resulted in the rise of a whole Slavonic culture, rooted in native traditions yet deeply permeated by the civilization of Byzantium. Its success was due initially to the invention by Cyril and Methodius of a Slavonic alphabet which enabled them to create a new literary language, based on the spoken dialect of the Macedonian Slavs, modelled on Greek, and intelligible to the whole Slavonic world. This language, Old Church Slavonic, into which the Scriptures, the liturgy and many works of religious and secular content were translated from the Greek, remained throughout the Middle Ages the third international language of Europe and the sacred idiom of those Slavs—the Bulgarians, the Serbs and the Russians—who received their religion and much of their culture from Byzantium. It proved the most potent of all channels for the transmission of Greek Christianity to Eastern Europe. Among the many hagiographical writings translated into Slavonic during the Middle Ages, the works extolling St. Demetrius occupied a conspicuous place. But the relationship between the Cyrillo-Methodian mission and the cult of St. Demetrius had another, and more personal, aspect. Cyril and Methodius, as you all know, were natives of Thessaloniki. They could not fail to be deeply devoted to the memory of their city's patron saint who, by the ninth century, had become intimately associated with every aspect of its religious and social life. Their ninth-century biographies clearly show that, in the far-away lands of their missionary work—in Moravia where they translated the Greek liturgy and scriptures and trained their disciples, in Venice where they disputed with their Frankish opponents, and in Rome where St. Cyril died in 869—they never ceased to regard the Byzantine Empire as their fatherland¹. It is thus not surprising to find that Methodius, acting as Papal legate to the Slavs of Central Europe, beset during the last ten years of his life by countless difficulties due to the hostility of the Franks and the growing indifference of Rome, turned in his loneliness his thoughts to his native city and its patron saint. His biographer tells us that, shortly before his death (which occurred in 885), after completing the translation of most of the Old Testament, he celebrated a liturgy in honour of St. Demetrius on his feast day, the 26th October². The Slavonic biographers

1. See, in particular, *Vita Constantini*, xviii, 3: *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicens.* *Fontes*, ed. F. Grivec and F. Tomšič, Zagreb, 1960 (*Radovi Staroslavenskog Instituta*, iv), p. 140; *Vita Methodii*, xvii, 7, *ibid.*, p. 165.

2. *Vita Methodii*, xv, 3, *ibid.*, p. 164.

of Cyril and Methodius generally show themselves very conscious of the symbolic significance of the acts performed by their heroes. The eucharistic sacrifice offered by Methodius in memory of St. Demetrius immediately followed the completion of his and his brother's life work: the Christian liturgy and Scriptures had now been made available to the Slavs in their own language. It is perhaps not straining the evidence too much to suggest that the ninth-century author of the *Life* of Methodius wished to imply that their mission had been accomplished under the special patronage of St. Demetrius.

There is another piece of evidence linking Cyril and Methodius with St. Demetrius: and, from the human standpoint, it is more poignant still. The earliest Old Church Slavonic text of the *Μηναῖα*, preserved in a Russian manuscript dated to the year 1096, contains a canon sung to St. Demetrius on his feast day¹. The canon, ὁ κανὼν, is a central part of the office of Matins (the ὄρθρος), and consists of nine (or eight) odes (ὥδαί), each of which is formed of an εἰρμός and a number of τροπάρια. No Greek original has been discovered for the canon, and its Old Church Slavonic text is ascribed by most present-day scholars, on strong internal evidence, to St. Methodius². Much of it is fairly conventional in content, though local colour is provided by repeated references to Thessaloniki and by the description of the saint, in the first ode, as «the glorious patriot of the glorious Thessaloniki». The word I have translated, somewhat inadequately, as «patriot» —*otčestvoljubec*— is obviously a calque of the Greek φιλόπατρις, a term frequently applied to St. Demetrius in the *Miracula*. But in the final ode of the canon, the author seems unable any longer to restrain his personal feelings, and his pent-up emotion bursts through the austere impersonality of the liturgical text. It would surely be hard to find, in the whole corpus of Orthodox hymnography, a more poignant expression of nostalgia for one's native city. Let me quote, in translation, two *troparia* of this ninth ode.

«Hearken, o glorious one, to us who are poor and belong to you, and pity us, for we are parted and far away from your radiant temple. And our hearts burn within us, and we desire, o holy one, to be in your church and, one day, to worship within it through your prayers».

«Why, o wise one, are we, your poor servants, deprived of your radiant

1. The text of this canon was published by V. Jagić, *Sluzhebnyya Minei za sentyabr', oktyabr' i noyabr', Pamyatniki Drevnerusskogo Yazyka*, St. Petersburg, 1886, i, pp. 179-190; see also D. Čyževskij, «Neue Lesefrüchte», *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie*, xxiv, 1956, pp. 79-81; and B.S. Angelov, *Iz starata bŭlgarska, ruska i srŭbska literatura*, Sofia, 1958, pp. 19-35.

2. See R. Jakobson, «Methodius' Canon to Demetrius of Thessalonica and the Old Church Slavonic Hirmoi», *Sbornik Praci Filosofické Fakulty Brněnské University*, Ročník xiv, 1965, Řada Uměnovědná, F. 9, pp. 115-121.

splendour as, driven by the love of our Creator, we wander through alien lands and cities as warriors fighting, o blessed one, for the humiliation of trilinguals and fierce heretics?»¹

It has long been apparent to scholars that the mention of «trilinguals» provides a clue linking this canon with the Moravian and Pannonian mission of Cyril and Methodius. For the «trilinguals» were those, mainly Frankish, opponents of the two brothers who attacked the legitimacy of their Slavonic translation of the liturgy by claiming that it was permissible to celebrate the divine office only in three languages—Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Against them Cyril and Methodius and their disciples fought their hardest verbal battles². And, as Roman Jakobson has observed, these troparia, apart from their yearning for Thessaloniki and its basilica, end with what is in effect a battle-cry³. Directed against the enemies of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission, it re-echoes with equal force in the ninth century biographies of the two brothers. And so the last ode of this canon, with its nostalgia and note of defiance, gives us an authentic glimpse into the hearts and minds of the Apostles of the Slavs. Methodius, its probable author, has revealed himself to us at the end, like an artist who has left his signature inconspicuously at the bottom of a picture.

The work of Cyril and Methodius and their disciples did much to spread the cult of St. Demetrius among those Slavonic peoples who, by their conversion to Byzantine Christianity and their adoption of the vernacular tradition which they created, became the beneficiaries of their life-work. These were the Bulgarians, the Serbs and the Russians. The main centres of the propagation of this cult were cities in which St. Demetrius was especially venerated: Ohrid in Macedonia, which became, after the collapse of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission in Central Europe, a leading centre of Balkan Slav Christianity; Sirmium in the northern Balkans, where, according to several *Μαρτύρια* of the saint, a basilica in his honour was built in the fifth century by Leontius, the Prefect of Illyricum⁴, and where a monastery of St. Demetrius, inhabited by Greek, Hungarian and Slav monks, was founded in the eleventh century⁵; later also, as we

1. Jagić, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

2. For «the trilingual heresy» see I. Dujčev, «Il problema delle lingue nazionali nel medio evo e gli Slavi», *Ricerche Slavistiche*, viii, 1960, pp. 39-60; *Id.*, «L'activité de Constantin Philosophe—Cyrille en Moravie», *Byzantinoslavica*, xxiv, 1963, pp. 221-223; F. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs. SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius*, New Brunswick, 1970, pp. 115, 129-130, 144.

3. R. Jakobson, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

4. *Passio altera, auctore anonymo*, P.G., cxvi, col. 1184; *Passio tertia, auctore Simeone Metaphraste*, *ibid.*, col. 1201.

5. See K. Jireček, «Das christliche Element in der topographischen Nomenclatur der

shall see, the cities of Trnovo in Bulgaria and Vladimir in Russia¹; and pre-eminently, of course, Thessaloniki itself. Early in the Middle Ages, its basilica of St. Demetrius became an object of pilgrimage for the whole East Christian world. Some of the Slav pilgrims, whose writings have survived, display in their descriptions of this church almost the same open-eyed wonder and religious awe which they reveal in their accounts of the sanctuaries of the Holy Land and Constantinople². In no small measure was this veneration due to the holy *myron*, which was believed to flow from the saint's relics, and samples of which, endowed with therapeutic and apotropaic powers, were taken back by these pilgrims to their homelands. Within the basilica, they offered their homage and prayers to St. Demetrius in front of the silver hexagonal ciborium, with six columns supporting a dome, standing on the left side of the central nave and which popular piety regarded as the place of the saint's tomb³.

The earliest unambiguous evidence of the veneration of St. Demetrius in Slavonic lands comes from the late ninth century. In the Macedonian province of Bulgaria, at the turn of the century, the leading disciple of Cyril and Methodius, St. Clement of Ohrid, wrote an *encomium* for his feast. It is a somewhat conventional and undistinguished work; yet it is noteworthy as the earliest non-liturgical text composed in the saint's honour in the Old Church Slavonic language. Clement describes him as «the most glorious martyr» and as «the firm foundation of his fatherland»⁴.

Balkanländer», *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosoph.-hist. Classe*, Vienna, cxxxvi, 1897, Abhandlung xi, pp. 93-98; J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes dans les provinces danubiennes de l'Empire Romain*, Paris, 1918, pp. 81-83; K. Dieterich, «Zur Kulturgeschichte und Kulturgeschichte des byzantinischen Balkanhandels», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, xxxi, 1931, p. 55; V. Popović, «Sirmium, ville impériale», *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie*, Vatican-Berlin, 1969, pp. 665-675.

1. See D.S. Iliadou, «'Ο Ἅγιος Δημήτριος καὶ οἱ Σλάβοι», *Πεπραγμένα τοῦ Η' Διεθνoῦς Βυζαντινολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1953, iii, Athens, 1958, p. 138.

2. Ignatius of Smolensk (1405): *Khozhenie Ignatiya Smolnyanina*, ed. S.V. Arsen'ev, *Pravoslavnyi Palestinskiy Sbornik*, iv, 3, St. Petersburg, 1887, p. 25; French transl. B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, I, i, Geneva, 1889, p. 147; Monk Zosimus (c. 1420): *Khozhenie inoka Zosimy*, ed. Kh. M. Loparev, *Pravoslavnyi Palestinskiy Sbornik*, viii, 3, 1889, p. 12; transl. Khitrowo, p. 208; Isaiah of Chilandar (1489), *Skazanie o sv. gore Afonskoy*, ed. Archimandrite Leonid, Moscow, 1882; transl. Khitrowo, pp. 263-264.

3. The role played by the ciborium in the development of the cult of St. Demetrius is discussed by G. and M. Soteriou, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20, by P. Lemerle, «Saint-Démétrius de Thessalonique et les problèmes du Martyrion et du Transept», *loc. cit.*, pp. 664-673, by N. Theotoka, «Περὶ τῶν κιβωρίων τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου», *Μακεδονικά*, ii, 1953, pp. 395-413, and by J. Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-163.

4. Kliment Okhridski, *Sŭbrani Sŭchineniya*, i, ed. B.S. Angelov and others, Sofia, 1970, pp. 221-237.

Of greater interest is the iconographic evidence of the popularity of St. Demetrius in medieval Serbia. Two biographical programmes, each consisting of two scenes, are painted at Dečani and in the Church of St. Demetrius at Peć. The fourteenth-century wall paintings at Dečani represent the saint defending Thessaloniki—anachronistically—against the Cumans, and rebuilding a tower on the city walls. The paintings at Peć, which have been dated to the seventeenth century, depict Eusebius, archbishop of Thessaloniki in the late sixth century, praying before the relics of St. Demetrius, while to the right of this scene, in answer to his prayer, the saint, clad in armour, forces back with a lance a group of enemy soldiers attempting to scale the walls. These paintings were clearly intended to illustrate the story of the Avaro-Slav siege of Thessaloniki in 586 told in the first book of the *Miracula*. They follow the written account with clarity and precision. Mrs. Anka Stojaković, who has studied these paintings, has plausibly suggested that their connection with the text of the *Miracula*, however close, is indirect, and that a pictorial intermediary should be postulated¹. It is indeed likely that these Serbian paintings reproduced, in summary form, the elements of a biographical cycle from the basilica of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki. We know from the second book of the *Miracula* that at least one scene of this cycle existed in the seventh century²; and several frescoes of this biographical programme were discovered in the church in 1907-8; they perished in the great fire of 1917³.

These paintings at Dečani and Peć are interesting for several reasons: they show that works of art which once existed in the centres of the Byzantine world can sometimes be reconstructed with the help of copies or imitations preserved on the periphery of this world; they illustrate the impact of the cult of St. Demetrius on the cultural life of late medieval Serbia; and, depicting as they do the repulse of the Slavs from the walls of a city they so often desired to capture and possess, they testify to the ecumenical spirit which animated the medieval Byzantine Commonwealth, a community in which there was little or no scope for the growth of nationalism in the modern sense of the word.

The Russians did not lag behind the Bulgarians and the Serbs in their veneration of the μεγαλομάρτυς and μυροβλήτης of Thessaloniki. His name—Dimitri or Dmitri in Russian—has from the eleventh century to the present day been widely popular in all sections of Russian society. Already in the pre-Mongol period of Russian history it was borne by several members of the ruling

1. A. Stojaković, «Quelques représentations de Salonique dans la peinture médiévale serbe», *Χαριστήριον εις 'Αναστάσιον Κ. 'Ορλάνδον*, ii, Athens, 1966, pp. 25-48.

2. *Mir*, II, 1, 167, col. 1333.

3. A. Xyngopoulos, 'Ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου, Thessaloniki, 1970, pp. 49-52; J. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

dynasty. It was the Christian name of Izyaslav, Prince of Kiev (with two interruptions) from 1054 to 1078. During his reign in the Russian capital Izyaslav founded and richly endowed a monastery dedicated to St. Demetrius which, as the Russian Primary Chronicle tells us, he hoped would eclipse in importance the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, Russia's foremost monastic foundation¹. Several seals of the same prince have been found, on which is represented the standing figure of St. Demetrius, ringed by a Greek inscription². An even more notable bearer of this Christian name was Vsevolod III, Grand Prince of Suzdal' and Vladimir from 1176 to 1212³. In 1162, as a young boy, he was exiled by his elder brother to Constantinople⁴. Whether he visited Thessaloniki we do not know; but in the closing years of the twelfth century, when Vsevolod had become the most powerful ruler in Russia, he built in his capital, Vladimir, the magnificent cathedral of St. Dimitri, whose compact majesty and celebrated stone relief carvings belong to the finest achievements of medieval Russian art⁵. On that occasion he had a relic connected with St. Demetrius, which a contemporary Russian chronicler tantalizingly describes as «a tomb slab», transported from Thessaloniki to his capital⁶.

The cult of St. Demetrius in medieval Russia was also fostered by numerous hagiographical writings. Most of them were translations from the Greek, but several are local and original products. The most popular native saints in the Kievan period were Boris and Gleb, the sons of St. Vladimir, the Russian ruler who converted his country to Christianity. In 1015 they were murdered for political motives. Their Christian resignation at the moment of death, and their refusal to defend themselves from their assassins, caused their compatriots to regard them as martyrs, not in the sense that they were killed for the Christian faith, but because, by their act of non-resistance, they chose to die as innocent and voluntary victims in conscious imitation of Christ. Boris and Gleb

1. *Povest' Vremennykh Let* s.a. 1051, ed. D.S. Likhachev and V.P. Adrianova-Peretts, i, Moscow-Leningrad, 1950, p. 107; English transl. S.H. Cross and O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, Mass., 1953, p. 141.

2. V.L. Yanin, *Aktovye pechati drevney Rusi X-XV v.*, i, Moscow, 1970, pp. 35-36, 167, 249.

3. *Novgorodskaya 4-aya Letopis'*, s.a. 1154: *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisey* iv, 1, Petrograd, 1915, p. 153.

4. *Ipatévskaya Letopis'*, s.a. 1162: *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisey*, ii, Moscow, 1962 (reprint of St. Petersburg ed., 1908), col. 521.

5. See G.H. Hamilton, *The Art and Architecture of Russia*, London, 1954, pp. 37-38, 48-49, 52-53; N.N. Voronin, *Zodchestvo severo-vostochnoy Rusi XII-XV vekov*, i, Moscow, 1961, pp. 396-437.

6. *Lavrentévskaya Letopis'*, s.a. 1197: *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisey*, i, Moscow, 1962 (reprint of Leningrad ed., 1926), col. 414; cf. *Nikonovskaya Letopis'*, s.a. 1197, *ibid.*, x, Moscow, 1965 (reprint of St. Petersburg ed., 1885), p. 30.

were canonized by the Russian Church soon after their death; and by a strange paradox, these champions of non-resistance came to be regarded as the heavenly protectors of the Russian people, in war and in peace¹. One of their Russian biographers, writing in the eleventh or early twelfth century, draws a significant parallel: addressing these murdered princes, he exclaims: «You fight for and help your fatherland, just as the great Demetrius did for his own fatherland»². And the town of Vyshgorod near Kiev, where the bodies of Boris and Gleb were laid to rest, is termed by the same author «a second Thessaloniki»³. It would be hard to find a better example of the spell cast on the minds of the medieval Slavs by the holy places of the Byzantine Empire than this attempt by the Russians, at the dawn of their Christian history, to create in their own country a copy, or a mirror-image, of the shrine of Thessaloniki.

Among the Slavonic texts relating to St. Demetrius for which no Greek model has been found, one, attributed to a late medieval or sixteenth century Russian author, is particularly curious. It tells the story of a pagan chieftan who, while unsuccessfully besieging Thessaloniki, captured two maidens, and took them back home to his country. He then said to them: «I hear that you have a great god called Demetrius, who works many miracles. Embroider me his likeness on an image, so that I might venerate him and defeat my enemies, while I carry his image in front of my army». The maidens, thinking that their captor intended to blaspheme the embroidered image, refused. But threatened with death, they finally consented. The image completed, they tearfully fell asleep. During the night, they were miraculously transported by St. Demetrius to his church in Thessaloniki, where the image remained beside the saint's tomb⁴.

The obviously folkloristic features of this story no doubt explain the fact that it—or perhaps its written source—inspired one of the oral religious poems of Russia. These poems, the *dukhovnye stikhi*, believed to have been composed between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, were recited until recently by groups of itinerant professional singers. One of them tells much the same story, though with several interesting modifications. The image embroidered by the two maidens becomes a magic carpet, on which, with the help of Demetrius and a strong wind, they are carried through the air from the clutches of their tormentor to the safety of Thessaloniki. During the siege St. Demetrius rises from his tomb and defeats the enemy, mounted curiously, but not without pointed symbolism, upon a white donkey. Finally, the poem names the

1. See G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, i, Cambridge, Mass., 1966, pp. 94-110.

2. *Zhitiya svyatykh muchenikov Borisa i Gleba*, ed. D.I. Abramovich, Petrograd, 1916, p. 50; *A Historical Russian Reader*, ed. J. Fennell and D. Obolensky, Oxford, 1969, p. 37.

3. *Zhitiya*, p. 50; *A Historical Russian Reader*, p. 37.

4. D.S. Iliadou, 'Ο "Άγιος Δημήτριος καὶ οἱ Σλάβοι, *loc. cit.*, p. 134.

barbarian ruler who besieged Thessaloniki: it is the Tatar Khan Mamai, whose armies were defeated in 1380 by the Russian forces, commanded by Prince Dimitri of Moscow¹. The anachronistic attempt to graft the story of a miracle performed by St. Demetrius onto the historic victory gained over the Tatars by a Muscovite prince who bore his name may serve to measure the impact which the cult of the Thessalonian saint had upon the poetic imagination of the Russian people.

We have seen how the Russians, by linking the veneration for their national saints Boris and Gleb with the cult of St. Demetrius, created in their country a «copy», or a «mirror-image» of Thessaloniki. But the mirror-image, in certain circumstances, could be used not only to reflect, but also to supersede, its model. As I suggested in my opening remarks, something of the kind was attempted on the political plane in the late Middle Ages, when rulers and writers in several Slavonic countries began to lay exclusive claim to the heritage of Byzantium: the concept of the Empire's *renovatio* could thus be used to support the idea of its *translatio*. We must now, in conclusion, consider briefly how far the shift from imitation to substitution can be observed in the attitudes adopted by the Slavs in the Middle Ages towards St. Demetrius and his cult.

The idea that Demetrius has forsaken his city, has changed his allegiance and is actively assisting the enemies of the Empire, may well have originated in the attempt, made by the Bulgarian rebels, to seize Thessaloniki in 1041. The chronicler Scylitzes tells us that during the siege of the city the soldiers of the garrison spent a whole night in prayer by Demetrius' grave, annointed themselves with the *myron* which flowed from his tomb, and on the next day sallied forth to inflict a crushing defeat on the enemy. The Bulgarian prisoners told the Thessalonians that, in the heat of the battle, they had seen a young horseman, leading the Byzantine army and discharging fire which consumed the enemy. This, Scylitzes assures us, was St. Demetrius himself². It was perhaps only natural that the Bulgarians, who in the eleventh and twelfth centuries repeatedly tried to free themselves from Byzantine domination, were tempted to draw a lesson from their defeat, and to enlist on their side the supernatural aid of so formidable a champion. Surprisingly enough, however, the first recorded attempt to make St. Demetrius change sides was made by the Russians. In 907, according to the Russian Primary Chronicle, Oleg, prince of Kiev, besieged Constantinople. The Byzantines, in this hour of peril, attempted to save themselves by sending the Russian ruler poisoned food and wine. The latter,

1. A. Kirpichnikov, «Osobyi vid tvorchestva v drevne-russkoy literature», *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, 1890, April, pp. 306-313.

2. Georgius Cedrenus, *Historiarum Compendium*, ed. I. Bekker, ii, Bonn, 1839, p. 532; Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin, 1973, pp. 412-414.

however, was too cunning to fall for this trick, and declined to partake of the gifts. Whereupon, the chronicler writes, «the Greeks were afraid, and said: 'This is not Oleg, but St. Demetrius, whom God has sent against us'»¹. This astonishing statement, ascribed to the Byzantines by a Russian monastic chronicler, writing two centuries later and recounting a period when his compatriots were still pagans, has puzzled many a scholar. To my knowledge, the only attempt to explain the appearance of Oleg as an *avatar* of St. Demetrius was made in 1934 by the Danish scholar Stender-Petersen. He has argued, on the whole convincingly, that some of the stories in the Primary Chronicle, particularly those describing military stratagems, go back to a cycle of Viking sagas created by the Scandinavian mercenaries of Byzantium. The story of how Oleg outwitted the Greeks may well be a fragment of one of them. And it is possible, though by no means certain, that the bizarre appearance of St. Demetrius in this tale was the work of the great Viking Harold Hardrada and his retinue, who served in the emperor's Varangian Guard and are believed to have been in Thessaloniki in 1041, the very year of the miraculous defeat of the Bulgarians by the city walls, described by Scylitzes².

The second attempt to appropriate St. Demetrius was made by the Bulgarians. As it is more widely known, I need only refer to it very briefly. In 1185, in northern Bulgaria, the two brothers Peter and Asen raised a revolt against Byzantine rule. The revolt became a war of liberation, and in 1187 the Empire was forced to acknowledge the existence of an independent Bulgaria between the Balkan Mountains and the Lower Danube. Byzantine dominion over this area, which had lasted for 169 years, was at an end. The contemporary Greek chronicler Nicetas Choniates, our main source for these events, states that in the early stages of the revolt Peter and Asen built in Trnovo, the future capital of the «Second Bulgarian Empire», a church dedicated to St. Demetrius, and announced to their followers assembled in it that God had decided to restore their freedom to the Bulgarian people. And, they added, «for this reason Christ's martyr Demetrius had deserted the metropolis of Thessaloniki and the church there in which he had dwelt among the Byzantines, and had come to them (i.e. to Bulgaria) to help and support them in their enterprise»³. The

1. *Povest' Vremennykh Let*, s.a. 907, i, p. 24; English transl. p. 64.

2. A. Stender-Petersen, *Die Varägersage als Quelle der altrussischen Chronik*, Aarhus-Leipzig, 1934, p. 96.

3. Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn, 1835, p. 485; Cf. V.N. Zlatarski, *Istoriya na Bŭlgarskata Dŭrzhava prez srednite vekove*, ii, Sofia, 1934, pp. 413-414, 431, 440, 472; I. Dujčev, «Vŭstanieto na Asenevtsi i kultŭt na sveti Dimitriya Solunski»: *Prouchvaniya vŭrkhu bŭlgarskoto srednovekovie*, *Sbornik na Bŭlgarskata Akademiya na Naukite i Izkustvata*, xli, 1, 1945, pp. 44-51.

effect of these claims on the morale of the rebels was, as Nicetas himself admits, considerable; the more so since a few months earlier Thessaloniki had been captured by the Normans.

The Byzantines did all they could to deprive the Bulgarians of this powerful weapon of psychological warfare. This became easier when they recaptured Thessaloniki from the Normans. In 1207 the Bulgarian King Kalojan laid siege to the city, which was then part of the Latin Empire of the Crusaders. Just before he was to deliver the main assault, he died in mysterious circumstances. Once again the Thessalonians ascribed their delivery to the intervention of their patron saint. John Stauracius, the thirteenth-century Chartophylax of the Metropolis of Thessaloniki, asserts that in the night Kalojan was mortally wounded by St. Demetrius, who appeared before him in the guise of a warrior on a white horse¹. This story, it is true, was viewed with some scepticism by the contemporary Byzantine historian George Acropolites². But it is symptomatic of the rivalry displayed by the East European peoples of the Middle Ages for the favours and the military assistance of St. Demetrius. The episode of Kalojan's death at his hands could be regarded by the Thessalonians as a kind of revenge for the attempt of his elder brothers Peter and Asen to appropriate the saint for themselves and their country.

We must not, to be sure, exaggerate the importance of this rivalry, nor try to read too much into these factitious efforts of the Slavs to engage in hagiological larceny. It is doubtful whether they were ever intended to be more than temporary expedients or tactical manoeuvres. At times when a Slavonic nation was at war with the Empire, to have St. Demetrius fighting on your side was no doubt encouraging for your armies and gratifying to your national pride. But, on a deeper and more permanent level of consciousness, the Slavs knew well, of course, that the supernatural presence of the μεγαλομάρτυς was vouchsafed above all places to his own basilica; and for this reason Thessaloniki always remained in their eyes a holy and prestige-laden city. Of this belief we have seen many instances: Russian pilgrims flocked to its basilica; the saint's victories over the Slavs were depicted on the walls of Serbian and Bulgarian churches; all the Slavs described him by the epithet *Solunski*, derived from the Slavonic name of his city. So great were the healing properties attributed to the *myron* flowing from his basilica in Thessaloniki that it was sometimes used by the Bulgarian church in the fourteenth century instead of the

1. «Ἰωάννου Σταυρακίου λόγος εἰς τὰ θαύματα τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου», *Μακεδονικά*, i, 1940, pp. 371-372; Cf. Zlatarski, *op. cit.*, iii, Sofia, 1972, pp. 252-261.

2. George Acropolites, *Opera*, ed. Heisenberg, i, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 23-24.

holy chrism in the sacrament of baptism: a practice deprecated by the Byzantine Patriarch Kallistos in a letter to the clergy of Trnovo¹.

In the last resort, I believe, the attempts sometimes made by the Slavs in the later Middle Ages to appropriate St. Demetrius reflect no more than a certain capacity for «double-think», and a measure of ambiguity in their attitude towards their Byzantine teachers in the Christian faith. This ambiguity is likewise apparent in the realm of political thought: however tempted some of the Slav rulers may have been to lay claim to the universal heritage of Byzantium, few if any of them were seriously or for long disposed to challenge the belief, inherited from their ancestors, that Constantinople was the true centre of the Christian Commonwealth, and that he who reigns in that city is its divinely appointed master. Much the same, it seems to me, could be said of the cult of St. Demetrius. To claim his special or exclusive favours may have flattered the national vanity of this or that Slav people. But this embryonic nationalism was, in the Middle Ages, sublimated by the belief that these countries were part of a wider and greater society. For the Slavs, as for all the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe, St. Demetrius was not only a local saint whose cult had spread throughout the Greek-speaking world. He was also, in an exact and literal sense, ὁ ἅγιος τῆς οἰκουμένης.

1. *Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani*, ed. F. Miklosich and I. Müller, i, Vienna, 1860, pp. 436-442.