

# HOLY WOMEN OF BYZANTIUM

TEN SAINTS' LIVES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Edited by Alice-Mary Talbot

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## 9. LIFE OF ST. THOMAS OF LESBOS

*translated by Paul Halsall*

### *Introduction*

Like Mary the Younger, Thomais of Lesbos is a rare example of a married laywoman who achieved sanctity through her daily life. Her story survives in two anonymously written *vitae*, one perhaps datable to the mid-tenth century, the other of unknown date. The first, a more detailed account edited by Hippolyte Delehayé from a fourteenth-century manuscript (Florence, Bibl. Naz. 50 [Conventi soppr. B.1.1214]), is translated here. In addition to the two *vitae*, there is an encomium of Thomais written by the noted hagiographer Constantine Akropolites in the late thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The *vita* presented in this volume is especially interesting for the light it sheds on Constantinople, where Thomais spent most of her life; for its treatment of marriage; and for its presentation of what constitutes holiness for a Byzantine woman. The *Life* is strongly focused on Constantinople, and one must assume that the author was an inhabitant of the capital, familiar with its topography. He has written in a fairly high style, in several places resorts to plays on words, and reveals his classical education by quoting from Hesiod and Homer and echoing Plato and Plutarch.

There is some uncertainty about the date of the *vita*. Internal evidence (Chap. 26) indicates that it was originally written during the reign of “Romanos,” usually identified as Romanos II (959–963), the only emperor of that name “born in the purple.” Another passage (Chap. 25) might be read as implying that the composition took place twelve years after Thomais’ death, at age thirty-eight (Chap. 16), which would place her birth sometime between 909 and 913 and her death sometime between 947 and 951.<sup>2</sup> This latter conclu-

<sup>1</sup> It is based on the *vita* edited by Delehayé, but includes some additional information such as the residence of Thomais’ parents in Chalcedon.

<sup>2</sup> A. Laiou places her activity in the early decades of the 10th century, and her death ca. 930 or shortly thereafter (“Historia henos gamou,” 239 n. 7).

sion needs to be treated with caution, however; the passage might only refer to twelve years of the hagiographer's experience of Thomaïs' shrine. Delehayé concluded that one could only generalize that Thomaïs lived during the first half of the tenth century.

Alexander Kazhdan has expressed doubts about the traditionally assigned tenth-century date for the *vita*;<sup>3</sup> he points out, for example, that Thomaïs is not included in the late tenth-century *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, and proposes that the Romanos who is addressed may have been Romanos IV Diogenes (1067–1071), even though he was not “born in the purple.” Moreover, the hagiographer does not name most of the individuals miraculously healed by Thomaïs, thus suggesting a significant lapse of time between her death and the date when her miracles were recorded. The conflicting internal indications of chronology as well as certain repetitions and inconsistencies suggest the possibility that the *vita* was originally written in the tenth century, and revised later.

Although Thomaïs was born in Lesbos, the *vita* is limited to her activities in Constantinople. The text presents a sacred topography of the city; most sites are specified in relation to some church or monastery. Within this space Thomaïs is able to move freely, by day and night, as she visits shrines and participates in religious processions. She is also able to frequent marketplaces and other crowded areas. Her freedom of movement contrasts with that of Mary the Younger. While Mary was living in a village with her husband after their marriage, it was acceptable for her to walk alone to church each day. Once she moved to the much larger town of Vizye, however, Mary, unlike Thomaïs, had to curtail her activities outside the house and worship at home.<sup>4</sup> It may be that Thomaïs' lower social status gave her more latitude than Mary, but her excursions into the streets and marketplaces may also reflect the security and stability of urban life in tenth-century Constantinople.

The *Life* of St. Thomaïs, although it echoes that of Mary the Younger—a pious married woman driven to death by her husband—presents, within hagiographic constraints, a distinct structure and story about Christian marriage and holiness. In contrast to the author of the *Life* of Mary the Younger,

<sup>3</sup> A. Kazhdan, in *ODB* 3:2076; and, at greater length, in *List of Saints*, s.v. Some of his other objections are discussed in the notes to the translation.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Life* of Mary the Younger, Chap. 5, and the remarks of A.-M. Talbot, “Byzantine Women,” 110–12 and A. Laiou, “Historia henos gamou,” 242–43.

Thomas' hagiographer takes great care to describe the marriage and lives of the saint's parents, Michael and Kale, who are real characters in the story, and indeed dominate the first quarter of the *Life*. Their marriage is carefully presented as happy and God-pleasing; indeed they are referred to as a "golden team" (Chap. 3) and compared to Anna and Joachim, the parents of the Virgin Mary. Against this background the disastrous marriage of Thomas and Stephen unfolds as an aberration, and Thomas' persistence in good works becomes heroic. If the tenth-century dating for the *Life* is accepted, the background here may reflect the contemporary ecclesiastical concern over the marriage laws of Leo VI (d. 912).<sup>5</sup> The references to the crowning ceremony of marriage (Chap. 6) and the wordplay with the name "Stephen" (i.e., "crown") may be an allusion to the increased prominence of marriage in religious discourse. If so, it would be a marginal confirmation of the earlier date for the *Life*.

While the special interest of the *Life* of St. Thomas is its portrayal of the activities of a middle-class woman in Constantinople, there are other points to note. The issue of domestic violence, also raised in St. Mary the Younger's *Life*, will concern modern readers. Thomas' story also contains one major oddity in describing her life pattern: like other Byzantine women she remained under her parents' control until marriage, but was able to postpone marriage until the age of twenty-four, ten years later than usual.<sup>6</sup> The author connects this with Thomas' desire to avoid marriage, a commonplace of hagiography, but the saint also apparently had no children (unlike the fertile St. Mary the Younger). Thus, there is a continuing conflict between ideals of domesticity and ideals of sanctity.

The hagiographer uses a number of strategies to confirm Thomas' claim to heroic sanctity, the basis of public recognition of a saint. This was an issue, because she did not fit any of the traditional criteria for female holiness, such as virginity, adoption of male monastic habit, or extreme asceticism. It was not enough that she was simply a pious woman—her mother Kale also ful-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the remarks of A. Laiou in "Historia henos gamou," 237–38.

<sup>6</sup> A. Laiou ("Historia henos gamou," 240–41) suggests that the hagiographer may have deliberately changed her age at marriage (as provided by his original source?) to emphasize her desire to remain a virgin; this would explain the discrepancy in Chap. 7 where Thomas is described *after her marriage* as still being of a tender age, interested in childish playthings.

filled that role without any call for a cult—and, given the tumult of her relationship with her husband Stephen, married life is presented as a problem for Thomais, not the source of her sanctity. The author first establishes that Thomais was conventionally pious: she attended church services and processions, and special note is made of her charitable activities (see especially Chap. 6). Second, the author embellishes the saint's conventional piety by assimilating her to well-understood categories of sanctity: with some confidence Thomais is claimed as a *martyr* because of her husband's brutality and, in a move which even the author admits is "bold," a conceit is unfolded in which Thomais is named as equal to the *apostles*, the single point of comparison being that St. Paul was also involved in conflict (Chap. 9). What makes Thomais more worthy of veneration than her mother then was not her good works alone, but her perseverance and willpower through conflict. Finally, the *Life* illustrates Thomais' holiness in ways more typical of hagiography: by her foreknowledge of her own death (Chap. 16), and by her many miracles, performed both during her lifetime and posthumously. Although two of her miracles involved the cure of prostitutes suffering from specific female complaints, overall she cured more men than women; her *vita*, among others, suggests that there was no gender-based differentiation in the miracles performed by Byzantine saints.<sup>7</sup>

Thomais never acquired a major cult: she is absent from the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* and her feast day, 1 January, coincided with the major feast of St. Basil the Great, a fact noted by the hagiographer (Chap. 26). Furthermore, no iconographic image of her was ever developed. There is some evidence, however, that her cult became more popular in the late Byzantine period. Both her *vitae* are preserved in fourteenth-century manuscripts and Constantine Akropolites' encomium was written around 1300, at the time of the restoration of the church at the convent of the Virgin τα μικρα Ῥωμαιοῦ.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> It is my impression that male and female saints perform very similar thaumaturgical roles. Male saints such as Daniel the Stylite; Theodore of Sykeon; Nikon "ho Metanoieite"; and Athanasios I, patriarch of Constantinople, all cure women's maladies, while female saints effect miraculous cures for male clients. A task for the future is the tabulation of the distribution of miracles in the Lives of male and female saints to see if any pattern of gender-based differences appears.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A.-M. Talbot, "Old Wine in New Bottles: the Rewriting of Saints' Lives in the Paleologan Period," in *The Twilight of Byzantium*, ed. S. Curcic and D. Mouriki (Princeton, 1991), 19, and Laiou, "Historia henos gamou," 248 n. 40.

Russian pilgrims to Constantinople in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries describe visiting the tomb of the saint at this convent.<sup>9</sup> In their accounts, as frequently happened with Byzantine saints, the story of Thomas of Lesbos was conflated with that of another Thomas, a sixth-century Alexandrine saint (feastday 14 April), who had been beaten to death by her father-in-law. It is not clear if this confusion was particular to Russian travelers, or to the local population as well. In either case it is startling to note that prayers at the tomb of Thomas were considered effective in quieting “carnal passion.”

<sup>9</sup> Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 321–25.

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[p. 234]

THE LIFE AND CONDUCT OF THE BLESSED AND  
MIRACLE-WORKING THOMAS

1. Since the Holy Scriptures say that the *memory of the righteous is praised*,<sup>10</sup> should we not praise one who is an adornment to the female sex? I exclude from <this> discussion the Mother of God, She Who has been lifted above the cherubim, since She is beyond all created beings. As I said then, we should praise one who was more righteous than all the righteous women, the admirable Thomas, for whom <we keep> the present festival.<sup>11</sup> By her family<sup>12</sup> and life she was well known to all, she who was adorned by all forms of virtue and sparkled like a light. By her holy habits, modest character, still more modest lifestyle, as well as her asceticism, Thomas adorned her family by her ways, rather than being one who was adorned by her family's glory, renown, and brilliance.

2. It was Lesbos,<sup>13</sup> virtually another *island of the blessed*,<sup>14</sup> that was her homeland, having given birth to the blessed one and brought her forth into the present life as a great good, praised and beloved, a <woman> who exceedingly surpassed all Lesbian women in her beauty and greatness. She was <a woman> adorned with bodily graces, whom all the virtues bedecked. The nature of her body was equal to that of the incorporeal powers.<sup>15</sup> She lived an angelic<sup>16</sup> life,

<sup>10</sup> Prov. 10:7.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas' feastday was 1 January.

<sup>12</sup> γένος, meaning "family" or "lineage," but also "sex" or "gender." Here and later in the prologue it has been translated as "family" (as also in 240c, where γενει λαμπρῶ clearly means "brilliant lineage" or "family"), mainly because it would be unusual for a Byzantine author to write of the "glory, renown, and brilliance" of the female sex. It is also usual for a hagiographer to praise the lineage of a saint.

<sup>13</sup> Lesbos is a large Aegean island close to the coast of northwestern Asia Minor.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 171, and Leutsch-Schneidewin, *Corpus* 1:78. The author may also be referring to Lesbos as the birthplace of saints such as Theoktiste.

<sup>15</sup> I.e., the archangels.

<sup>16</sup> Since Thomas was married, and there is no specific claim in the *Life* that she abstained from marital intimacy, this seems at first a surprising statement. "To live like the angels" is a common circumlocution for a monastic or celibate life, and the reference may be to her attempt to live an ascetic life, even though married, as if she were

and trampled down the powers of darkness, indeed she drove away pleasure like so much refuse. She raised the cross upon her shoulders<sup>17</sup> and walked in the divine steps of the Lord. She was totally devoted to Christ, so as to reflect Him in all <ways> and be completely overpowered by His beauty. She *crucified herself to the world*,<sup>18</sup> or rather was outside of <the world>, devoting her whole mind to the first and brightest light, and so became a second light, receiving reflections from such light. She was the nobler offspring of a noble root for, as is said, the fruit is of the same quality as the tree.<sup>19</sup>

3. Her father, a man who lived in a way pleasing to God and maintained an angelic lifestyle, was named Michael.<sup>20</sup> He was upright in character, holy in his way of life, firm of purpose, prematurely gray-haired, possessed of a perfect and advanced understanding because of his mature age. So that, to tell the truth, there is no <virtue> at all worthy of words and praise, neither innate nor attained by practice, which did not accrue to him; frequently reading the holy books<sup>21</sup> in which the divine revelations have been recorded; searching out the assemblies<sup>22</sup> in the divine churches when the Divine is warmly praised; paying attention to his manner of speech; examining his mind; humbling the spirit of his flesh; adorning his character; dignifying his life; covering his head in the most pure faith of Christ. And he was an intelligent man as well, making use of a good four-horse chariot, I mean the quartet of the virtues,<sup>23</sup> as a result of which he very often spoke with God.

His wife and life companion was Kale,<sup>24</sup> who was most beautiful in char-

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in a convent. We may also note that the *Life* mentions no children from her thirteen years of marriage. On the other hand, in the next chapter her father is also described as having “maintained an angelic lifestyle,” so the phrase may just refer to pious and God-pleasing behavior.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:24.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gal. 6:14.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:17–18.

<sup>20</sup> Michael was of course a fitting name for a man who lived “the life of angels.”

<sup>21</sup> Literally, “unfolding the tablets.”

<sup>22</sup> Or “services.”

<sup>23</sup> The four cardinal virtues of antiquity were courage or manliness (ἀνδρεία), righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), prudence or moderation (σωφροσύνη), and prudence or good sense (φρονησις); cf. *ODB* 3:2178.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas’ mother, whose name means “good” or “beautiful.”

acter, and more beautiful in soul. <She was> quite temperate, and, to speak truly, was of one mind with her husband. She <was> praiseworthy in conduct, intelligent in her mind, and good in her disposition. This then ["God"] was the woman's personal name<sup>25</sup> and it found such an appellation from her exceedingly good disposition, because her character was indeed revealed to be appropriate to her name. And so Kale was given <in marriage> to be a companion for the aforementioned man, and they were revealed to be a golden team, a team thrice happy and blessed, vigorously bearing the evangelical yoke<sup>26</sup> and observing the divine precepts. Thus both were blessed like that prophet [Isaiah], on whose lips shone a seraphic and purging coal,<sup>27</sup> because they had *seed in Sion and household friends in Jerusalem*.<sup>28</sup> But, to return to my subject, Kale, who was God-pleasing in her lifestyle, was lawfully united with a man of the same habits. And one could often see both of <these> wise <individuals> holding in contempt the fine things of life, since they were of one mind and accord. They had enough wealth and money that they were neither enslaved by poverty, nor were they swollen by the weight of money, but they proceeded along in a middle path, which is a clear sign, I think, of their virtue.

4. The fetter of sterility strongly grieved this <couple>, as of old the shackle of childlessness had bound the forefathers of the Lord.<sup>29</sup> It agitated them mightily, upset them deeply, and tore apart their soul. They constantly went to the holy churches, remaining all night singing hymns, [p. 235] indeed singing to the Lord both night and day. For they had not turned to marriage

<sup>25</sup> Κυριον ονομα, a relatively rare expression. There is a parallel in the *vita* of the 9th-century saint Theophanes the Confessor, where it is said that as a youth he was usually called by his father's name Isaac rather than by his given name (τῷ κυρίῳ τῆς θεοφανεϊας ἐπονυμηματι); cf. V. Latysev, *Vita s. Theophanis confessoris* (St. Petersburg, 1918), 5. 7. Up to the 10th century Byzantines generally had only a baptismal name, and no surname; cf. *ODB* 2:1435.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Mt. 11:29–30.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Is. 6:6–7.

<sup>28</sup> Is. 31:9.

<sup>29</sup> This could be a reference to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 16), or to Joachim and Anna; see, for example, the *Protevangelion of James*, chaps. 1–2, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, I (Louisville, Ky., 1991), 426. See note 29 in the *vita* of Elisabeth for further discussion of the theme of infertility in the *vitae* of saints.

for the sake of bodily pleasure, quite the contrary, but out of desire for a good child; I speak of the wondrous Thomais, toward whom this account is hastening. But let it pause a little, so as to tell its tale as clearly as possible.

This good <couple> suffered <then>, being troubled by their desire for a child, as had the ancestors of my Lord Christ. You surely know <who they are>; <my> account<sup>30</sup> has alluded to some of them. They were afflicted with despondency and composed words of lamentation. They entreated God unceasingly; they kept falling down on their knees in supplication, and were mourning and of sad countenance all day long. They did not know what they could do. Since they had no consolation of their own, they used to sing frequently the song of David: “*Many are the scourges of the sinner but him that hopes in the Lord mercy shall compass about.*”<sup>31</sup> And indeed mercy did encompass them, nor did it wholly reject those who were entreating: “*Hearken to us, O God our savior; the hope of all the ends of the earth and of them that are on the sea afar off.*”<sup>32</sup>

Thus the Lord looked down from heaven and hearkened to the lamentation of this couple which was bound<sup>33</sup> <in sterility>, and He loosed the fetters of childlessness, which were like iron collars laid upon them and binding them all around, and removed from them their disgrace, I mean the heavy collar of childlessness that was laid upon on them. And in accord with His promise<sup>34</sup> the aforementioned <couple> obtained a fruit beautiful in appearance and in character. The fruit was beautiful to see, but even more beautiful in soul. But my previous account has already explained how much and in what ways the parents of the blessed <Thomais> suffered in being deprived <of a child>.

5. As so often when God is entreated greatly, He gave ear to those who call <on Him>, and healed <them> at the right season,<sup>35</sup> testing their endurance by this, <to see> whether they would be fainthearted in the face of temptations, whether they would forsake <Him>, <to see> if they would dedi-

<sup>30</sup> Or “Scripture.”

<sup>31</sup> Ps. 31 (32):10.

<sup>32</sup> Ps. 64 (65):5.

<sup>33</sup> Reading πεπεδεμενων for πεπηδημενων.

<sup>34</sup> Or possibly “as a result of their vow,” although there is no mention of any vow made by Michael and Kale.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Eccl. 3:3.

cate everything to God, even as surely they had been doing. And, indeed, frequenting often the divine churches, they *praised the Lord seven times in a day*.<sup>36</sup> And continually reading the divine Scriptures, and devoting themselves to all-night prayer and fasting, they entreated the Lord that a child be given to them. They emulated the supplications of the righteous Anna and Joachim, the parents of the Mother of God; they frequently beat their breasts, and bathed their beds with tears.<sup>37</sup> And from the Lord they heard “*Why criest thou to me?*”<sup>38</sup> for indeed they were crying to the Lord with cries of woe and lamentations, “*Hearken to us, O God our savior; the hope of all the ends of the earth and of them that are on the sea afar off.*”<sup>39</sup> Be the defender of those that call upon Thee. Reveal Thyself as helpmate to our intention. Grant a fruit of the womb to Thy servants who petition Thee. Do not drive away empty-handed Thy pitiable servants who prostrate themselves before Thee.” They continually uttered these and similar words to the Lord, “Let not our adversaries rejoice against us.<sup>40</sup> Let them not say ‘*where is their God? But our God has done in heaven and in earth whatsoever He has pleased.*’”<sup>41</sup>

What then did the God of wonders bring about in this situation? He did not overlook their entreaty, nor disregard their lamentations. But one night the all-immaculate and ever-virginal Virgin was seen in a dream by the wondrous woman Kale, truly good<sup>42</sup> in character and manner, and said these very words: “Do not be of sad countenance about these things, O woman, and do not be upset on account of your childlessness. In a short while you shall bear a female child, who will chase as far as possible from you all despondency, O good woman.”<sup>43</sup> While nearly awake, she heard these things from the Mother of God, and waking from her sleep she said words of this sort to her husband: “*While I was asleep a divine dream came;*<sup>44</sup> *therefore I awaked and beheld and*

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ps. 118 (119):164.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ps. 6:6.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ex. 14:15.

<sup>39</sup> Ps. 64 (65):5. This quotation, and indeed the whole chapter, repeats elements from Chap. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ps. 34 (35):19; Ps. 37 (38):16.

<sup>41</sup> Ps. 115:2–3; cf. also Ps. 78 (79):10.

<sup>42</sup> Another pun on her name.

<sup>43</sup> Or “O woman Kale.”

<sup>44</sup> Homer, *Od.* 14:495; *Il.* 2:56.

*my sleep was sweet to me.*"<sup>45</sup> And she narrated everything that she had seen. Indeed shortly thereafter, having conceived, she brought forth a child in fulfillment of the promise of the ever-virgin Maiden and Mother of God. The name "Thomais" <was given> to her, a child who was born in accord with a promise, who by nature was female, but by virtue and ascetic discipline much more male than men.

6. After these events, then, the parents of the blessed <Thomais> departed from Lesbos and settled in the area of the Bosporus<sup>46</sup> where they lived for a long time. They devoted themselves to fasting and all-night prayer, *rejoicing in the Lord*<sup>47</sup> in the words of the apostle, giving thanks in all things, and living their lives in a way pleasing to God.

As <Thomais> grew up, she continued to be strengthened in the virtues, devoted to the worship of God, and adorned by all forms of goodness. She disclosed her hidden beauty by its external manifestation and revealed the grace of her soul by her bodily features; <revealing her> invisible <virtues> by the visible, her internal <virtues> by her external <beauty>. One could see in her a perfect bodily harmony, which suggested the spiritual beauty <of her soul>.<sup>48</sup> She was not raised in an ignoble manner by her parents, but with discipline, understanding, and frequent admonition.

After <Thomais> was thus reared and trained and reached the age of about twenty-four years, she was forced by her parents to take a husband even though she preferred to remain a virgin;<sup>49</sup> she wished to remain ignorant of

<sup>45</sup> Jer. 38:26 [= Jer. 31:26 in King James version].

<sup>46</sup> The strait leading from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara; it separates Europe from Asia. The much later evidence of Constantine Akropolites' *Laudatio*, chap. 3 (AASS, Nov. 4:242F), specifies the city of Chalcedon.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Phil. 4:4.

<sup>48</sup> As Kazhdan (*ODB* 3:2076) points out, this *Life* takes pains to emphasize Thomais' physical as well as spiritual beauty. This stress on the saint's youthful physical beauty reflects an established *topos* in the *Acts* of female martyrs and ascetics; cf., for example, chap. 7 of the *vita* of Synkletike (PG 28:1489; Eng. trans. in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. V. L. Wimbush [Minneapolis, Minn., 1990], 268). The notion that physical form is a mirror of the soul is first found in hagiography in chap. 67 of the *vita* of Antony the Great; cf. PG 26:940 and Eng. trans. in R. T. Meyer, *St. Athanasius. The Life of Saint Antony* (Westminster, Md., 1950), 77.

<sup>49</sup> It would be unusual for a woman to remain unmarried until this age, and so perhaps Thomais had successfully resisted marriage when she was younger. A Byzantine

bodily pleasure and to trample on fleshly desires so as to present herself as a pure and undefiled temple to the pure God.<sup>50</sup> But she had both to *guard her virginity* and to *respect marriage*,<sup>51</sup> since these things are appreciated and revered by all.

<And so> she obeyed her parents. Agreeing to marriage, she bowed her head to the <marriage> crown<sup>52</sup> and took a lawful husband. But he, who was Stephen<sup>53</sup> by name, but not by <his> lifestyle, did not devote himself to her as companion but as an opponent, not as a helpmate but rather as an enemy. For, as the saying goes, “It was necessary *for evil to be fixed next to virtue* and <for her> to *live side by side*” with it somehow.<sup>54</sup>

But what a noble mind she had, what a staunch spirit, what praiseworthy judgment again of her way of life! She did not cease to give thanks continually to God, to spend her free time in the divine churches, to take care of the poor, to pour out her wealth, and to give back her own <property> to God. She used to sing constantly these <verses> of the odes of David, “*He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures* [p. 236] *for evermore*,”<sup>55</sup> and again “*The good man is he that pities and lends*.”<sup>56</sup> For she fixed her whole mind on readings from the divine scriptures, and did not cease to chant these psalms, indeed she did not weary in putting into practice these <injunctions>. She put her whole hand to the spindle.<sup>57</sup> She worked skillfully and artfully to weave on the loom fabrics of various colors. Her hands made

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girl reached maturity at about age twelve and normally married soon after; see A. E. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” *JOB* 31.1 (1981), 236 n. 16. Objections to marriage until parental pressure made it unavoidable was a frequent *topos* of hagiography; cf. L. Garland, “The Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women,” *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 367.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7:37.

<sup>52</sup> The most distinctive rite of the Byzantine marriage ceremony was the “crowning” of the couple; see “Marriage Crowns,” *ODB* 2:1306.

<sup>53</sup> There is a pun here. The Greek name for Stephen, Στεφανος, means “crown” or “garland.”

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nazianzos, *or.* 43 (*In laudem Basilii Magni*), chap. 64.3 (PG 36:581B). Cf. Chap. 15 and note 113, below.

<sup>55</sup> Ps. 111 (112):9; cf. also 2 Cor. 9:9.

<sup>56</sup> Ps. 111 (112):5.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Prov. 31:19.

cloth and the bellies of the poor ate to their content. Her hands labored for the sake of the poor and wove tunics for the naked.<sup>58</sup> Her feet walked eagerly to the divine churches and kept vigil there all the night, her *feet stood always in an even place*.<sup>59</sup> O feet which frequently moved toward <acts of> generosity, and always preferred to walk in paradise, O truly blessed feet!

7. After departing from Lesbos <then>, the parents of the blessed <Thomais> moved from there and took up residence in the region of the Bosphorus. But since it was indeed necessary that <God>, Who arranges everything for the best, Who originally yoked them together in marriage, should separate them again by death in ways known only to Himself, the father of the blessed <Thomais> passed on to his blessed end.

Her mother then had her hair cut off<sup>60</sup> and cut off along with it the distractions of daily life. She embraced the monastic life and entered a convent,<sup>61</sup> <there> to be enclosed in a stifling cell. She added virtues to her virtues; she began to communicate with God; *every <night> she washed her bed with tears*;<sup>62</sup> she dedicated herself to sleepless prayer; she persevered in continuous fasting; and *praised* the Lord *seven times in a day*.<sup>63</sup> In this way she put a good roof on a strong foundation. Since she wanted to live in an angelic manner, she engaged in ascetic conduct and did not cease to undertake these and these kinds of activities both night and day.

But <as for> her daughter who was<sup>64</sup> of a tender age at which it was more customary to occupy herself with childish playthings,<sup>65</sup> <who> discerned the tumult of life, and <who> was married to a husband, was she unmindful of virtue, or did she neglect the zealous and God-pleasing life, or have a lazy

<sup>58</sup> These two sentences suggest that Thomais not only made clothes for the needy, but may have also sold some of the cloth she wove and distributed the profits to the poor.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ps. 25 (26):12.

<sup>60</sup> I.e., she received the monastic tonsure.

<sup>61</sup> Presumably the convent of τα μικρά Ῥωμαίου, because we learn from Chap. 22 that Kale became mother superior of this convent. See note 131, below, for more information.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ps. 6:6.

<sup>63</sup> Ps. 118 (119):164.

<sup>64</sup> Reading *ov* for *ov*.

<sup>65</sup> This passage is puzzling because it suggests a much younger girl than the woman of twenty-four mentioned in the previous chapter; cf. introduction, p. 293 and note 6.

disposition? By no means! She continued to hold more readily to her aforementioned virtues.<sup>66</sup> And one could see in this situation an unusual married couple; for the wife was manly and masculine in virtue, and strove to surpass her own nature [i.e., sex] by works of zeal <done> for virtue's sake. (For it is not ignoble thus to outstrip<sup>67</sup> parents who have struggled with works of zeal on behalf of virtue.) <Thomas was> always stretching her hands up to heaven, kneeling, weeping, conversing with God, and kindling the divine love without interruption. And in doing the things pleasing to God—clothing the naked,<sup>68</sup> raising up and encouraging those who had fallen—in this way she used every effort,<sup>69</sup> she sought out every method, she devised every purpose through which she might bring to fruition the teachings of the Lord, even though she might be hindered by Stephen, to whom she was married, as our account has related above. For he opposed completely the wondrous intentions of Thomas, and while she was hastening to give away her wealth to the poor, he was opposing her like a Satan. How many times he heard from her, “*Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men,*”<sup>70</sup> the words which the Savior addressed to Peter, the chief of the apostles (who did not <yet> know the mystery of the salvific passion), instructing him most clearly to walk behind him.

<And> he [Stephen] used to strike the noble <Thomas> frequently, mocking greatly and sneering <at her>. But she remained steadfast, like an iron tower that is not at all shaken even when being savagely attacked, meditating constantly on the words of the Gospel, “*Blessed are ye, when <men> shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely.*”<sup>71</sup> Who then could separate her from the love of Christ? Not fire, not sword, not peril,<sup>72</sup> nor the foolish chatter of the foolish-minded Stephen.

8. But lift up your ears to me and turn your mind to the divine life of the blessed martyr. For our account has no intention of separating her from the

<sup>66</sup> Or, “she clung <to these virtues> even more readily than her aforementioned <parents>.”

<sup>67</sup> Literally, “to defeat.”

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Mt. 25:36.

<sup>69</sup> Literally, “let out every reef”; cf. Leutsch-Schneidewin, *Corpus* 1:145.

<sup>70</sup> Mk. 8:33.

<sup>71</sup> Mt. 5:11.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:35.

company of martyrs, since she <also> received many beatings, <and> was scourged unbearably for the sake of the divine revelations of our Lord. She was not wantonly outraged by a tyrant, nor punished terribly by instruments of torture,<sup>73</sup> nor scourged horribly by foreigners (for truly such would be bearable), but by her aforementioned husband who tyrannically oppressed her and violently prevented her from living in a God-pleasing manner. For she used to visit the divine churches <constantly> and exerted not a little but the greatest effort to do this each <day>. <Once>, as she was going to a holy church, she encountered a poor and naked man who was pierced with the greatest poverty. But look at what she did about it. She stripped off her own garments, and went naked for the sake of Christ;<sup>74</sup> indeed, she suffered for the sake of Christ. And <as a result> she was beaten by Stephen so that she might obtain from Christ the lordly crown,<sup>75</sup> <for> this <act of charity> was made known to her husband, and <consequently> the wondrous Thomais endured many blows. She was flogged by that wretched husband of hers, a man of wicked thoughts, a man who did not desire Christ but loved the world and held to the things of the world, a man who was altogether unloving of the Good, and, in short, did not receive the things of the Spirit<sup>76</sup> as a spiritual person, but he was rather a worldly man similar to senseless beasts. The abominable man loathed her and considered her most wicked even though she did no evil. He who was worthy of aversion rejected her, while she, although suffering, had much concern not to lose heart nor indeed to give up and neglect her praiseworthy works, her good intentions, but she bore the blows with good grace, like a martyr rejoicing in Christ, and clung to them to an <even> greater degree.<sup>77</sup> She struck her husband <spiritually> when she was struck for the sake of Christ. When she

<sup>73</sup> Literally, “catapults.” These devices are described in Maccabees (4 Macc. 8:13; 9:26; 11:9) as instruments of torture to which prisoners were bound for flaying and dismembering.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 4:11.

<sup>75</sup> Another pun on the name Stephen. Thomais receives beatings from her husband Stephen, and receives a “lordly crown” (δεσποτικῷ στεφάνου) of martyrdom from Christ.

<sup>76</sup> 1 Cor. 2:14.

<sup>77</sup> An anonymous referee has commented that married women were not the only saintly personages to endure beatings patiently; similar behavior can be observed in the “holy fools,” such as the nun who feigned madness in the *Lausiac History* of Palladius (C. Butler, *The Lausiac History of Palladius* [Cambridge, 1898], 98–100, Eng. trans.

was hit for the sake of the poor, she hit <him>.<sup>78</sup> She exulted and she rejoiced, “*My soul rejoicing shall exult in the Lord*,<sup>79</sup> for He hath clothed me in the garment of salvation and the tunic of gladness.” For [p. 237] she clothed herself all over with the blows from the aforesaid Stephen as with a garment of salvation.

9. Our account <now> hastens to take a bold step, by comparing her husband to the odious coppersmith,<sup>80</sup> and the blessed <Thomas> to the blessed Paul, the divine herald; for she is indeed equal to the apostles,<sup>81</sup> and one could indeed see that her struggle here <was> a struggle equal to that of the aforementioned <Paul and the coppersmith Alexander>. For the most wicked coppersmith did not stop beating Paul, but neither did he [Paul] stop preaching the Gospel. And he entreated the Lord earnestly on his [Alexander’s] behalf, even if his goal for him was not accomplished. Indeed Stephen, too, did not stop striking with unbearable blows his good helpmate, the noble worker of virtue, rather he strove to push her upstream, while she was being carried toward the good by stronger currents. She was distressed to be restrained frequently from her good <work> (and why not?). Since she had such good purpose, she devoted herself to God, broke away from the world, and attached her entire self to God. But she did not entreat the Lord, as did Paul,<sup>82</sup> to be saved from her tormentor, rather she applied herself even more readily to the God-pleasing and virtuous life, lying like a razor to the whetstone<sup>83</sup> of her aforesaid husband, receiving blows that can neither be expressed in words nor were bearable in reality. Rather she bore them for the sake of Christ, hav-

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in *Palladius: The Lausiaca History*, trans. R. T. Meyer [Westminster, Md., 1965], chap. 34, pp. 96–98).

<sup>78</sup> Perhaps an allusion to the New Testament injunction to “turn the other cheek” (Mt. 5:39), i.e., she struck a blow for Christ when she did not retaliate?

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Ps. 34 (35):9.

<sup>80</sup> Alexander, an opponent of St. Paul, of whom virtually nothing is known; cf. 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Tim. 1:20.

<sup>81</sup> “Isapostolos” is a title given to a number of saints, male and female, such as Thekla (cf. *ODB* 3:2033–34), who emulate the apostles in some way. See Lampe, *Lexicon*, s.v.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 12:7–8.

<sup>83</sup> Leutsch-Schneidewin, *Corpus* 1:284, 2:123, 549. The saying refers to people who achieve what they want.

ing Christ before her eyes. She adorned herself with wounds as with pearls, with hurts as with most precious stones; she was embellished by thrashings as with golden <coins>, and henceforth presented herself as a *queen clothed and arrayed in divers colors*<sup>84</sup> before the Ruler of all. She was adorned by insults as with expensive earrings, her beauty was enhanced by the beatings, <and> she was cheered by the mockeries.

This then was the situation of the wondrous Thomais; thus she was prevented by her husband from attendance at the divine churches and was restrained in her charity to the poor. She had as an obstacle to all virtuous behavior the one whom our story earlier compared to the coppersmith, and <so> she sang the ode of David, saying “*I would rather be abject in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of sinners,*”<sup>85</sup> because *mercy and truth went before*<sup>86</sup> her and she continued to take care of the poor and to engage in hymnody to God. And indeed, <though> suffering, she did not relax her zeal, rather she enlarged her purpose. And one could see a new struggle over this. He [Stephen] did not cease restraining the blessed <woman> from her blessed and customary purpose and activity, while she, on the other hand, increased her charitable purpose and disposition, showing manly courage for the superior and better <course>.

But let us move our tale on to the narration of the miracles of the most blessed Thomais, one by one, and <I will try> to recount her wondrous deeds to the best of my ability.

10. *Beginning of the miracles.* My narrative has shown us that <Thomais> constantly visited the divine churches, and most frequently attended <services at churches> where all-night hymnody to God was being performed. She used to go regularly to the most divine church at Blachernai,<sup>87</sup> and would walk the

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Ps. 44 (45):9.

<sup>85</sup> Ps. 83 (84):10.

<sup>86</sup> Ps. 88 (89):14.

<sup>87</sup> Blachernai, near the northern end of the Theodosian walls, was the site of a major Constantinopolitan shrine of the Virgin built by the empress Pulcheria ca. 450. A circular chapel called the “Soros” was erected by Emperor Leo I (457–474) next to the church to hold the robe of the Virgin, brought from Palestine in 473. The church was burned down in 1070; it was rebuilt by 1077 by either Romanos IV Diogenes (1067–71) or Michael VII (1071–78) and then destroyed again in 1434. See *ODB* 1:293; Janin, *EglisesCP*, 161–71; Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 333–37.

whole way at night sending forth hymns of supplication to God and entreating His all-pure Mother.<sup>88</sup> Then she would prostrate herself before Her all-honored and all-holy shrine,<sup>89</sup> entreating Her with tears and begging grace for the whole world, <that is>, to intercede with Her Son to postpone and delay His punishment and to grant a respite from the wickedness <that afflicts> the world because of <our> sins. For she did not petition and entreat the Lord on her own behalf, but for the salvation and redemption of the community and the world. In the words of the apostle she strove *not for her own but for another*,<sup>90</sup> and indeed she carried out this saying by her very deeds.

For when <in the course of the procession?> the most sacred images of the all-pure Mother of God arrived at that place which is usually called Zeugma<sup>91</sup> by the locals, a man tormented by a demon suddenly sprang out <and> rolled in front of the feet of the blessed <Thomas>, calling out loudly, and revealing the power of the virtue which she had kept hidden for a long time: “How long will you hide yourself, O servant of God, and be unwilling to proclaim these works clearly? Let God’s name be magnified through you. Reveal to me as wondrous, Thomas, the mercy of God. Let my repentance be proclaimed through you and immediate forgiveness for my sins, because of which I am now punished by God’s will. And I beg <you>, while rolling at your holy feet, make yourself manifest. Show that the God of wonders works great wonders through you. Let the <demon> who overpowers me be crushed by your hand. Let the Adversary [the Devil] be crushed by the might of your power. *The pangs of death compassed me; the dangers of hell found me.*”<sup>92</sup> How

<sup>88</sup> This might allude to the weekly procession from Blachernai to the church at Chalokoprateia (cf. note 91, below, and Laiou, “Historia henos gamou,” 242), but Thomas is described as going in the opposite direction, i.e., *toward* Blachernai.

<sup>89</sup> The Soros, the chapel of the Virgin’s robe, was covered in silver and considered a “reliquary shrine of architectural dimensions.” Lay people were not allowed inside the Soros, but could pray in the main church; cf. *ODB* 3:1929. A specific icon type, the Virgin Hagiosoritissa, was associated with this shrine; cf. *ODB* 3:2171.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 10:24.

<sup>91</sup> This passage apparently refers to the procession that took place each Friday from Blachernai to the church of the Chalokoprateia, near Hagia Sophia; cf. Janin, *Eglises CP*, 169–70. The Zeugma was an area roughly halfway between Blachernai and the Chalokoprateia, just north of the present-day Suleymaniye Mosque; cf. Janin, *CP byz.*, 441–42.

<sup>92</sup> Ps. 114 (116):3.

long might the demon move the hand of Briareos<sup>93</sup> against me?" These things he called out to the Lord through Thomais. The saint was then inclined to mercy and spread out her arms to God, from Whom *every perfect gift*<sup>94</sup> is sent down. And after she rubbed her hands with oil from the utterly pure Mother of the Word<sup>95</sup> and anointed the aforementioned <demoniac>, one could immediately see the demoniac being completely cured and magnifying God, Who works great wonders, makes the dead live, and drives out demons. And as a result those who happened to be present, <and> saw the swift cure of that demon-possessed man, sent up loudly a hymn to God, because He has been made wholly wondrous in His saints and His name is both proclaimed and magnified through His blessed servants, who work the same miracles, banish demons, heal every sickness, and glorify the Lord.

11. *Miracle 2*. I should add to my narrative [p. 238] another more wondrous miracle of the blessed <Thomais>. A certain man once lived in the monastery named after Ankourios.<sup>96</sup> He was a eunuch, <and> his name was Constantine. For many years the fetters of paralysis bound him, so to speak, and made him suffer like the man <in the Gospels> who was paralyzed for thirty-eight years.<sup>97</sup> Later the most dreadful disease of quinsy<sup>98</sup> afflicted him and for a long time constricted <his throat>, so that he kept seeing the danger <of death> before his eyes. One night, while he was sleeping, someone appeared and spoke to him. He added and interjected advice about how he should find

<sup>93</sup> A huge monster with one hundred hands, also known as Aigaion; cf. Homer, *Il.* 1:403.

<sup>94</sup> James 1:17.

<sup>95</sup> The source of this oil is not specified; it was no doubt oil from a lamp hanging before an icon of the Virgin, perhaps at Blachernai.

<sup>96</sup> The location of this Ankourios (a word meaning "cucumber") monastery is unclear. On the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus was a monastery τοῦ Ἀγγουρίου, whose origin is unknown, but which is mentioned in 11th- and 12th-century sources; cf. Janin, *EglisesCentres*, 27–28. Within Constantinople there was also a *metochion* τοῦ Ἀγγουρίου built by Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) for the Chian monastery of Nea Mone; cf. Janin, *EglisesCP*, 9. In his encomium of Thomais, Akropolites described the monastery τοῦ Ἀγγουρίου as "one of the monasteries of the City" (*AASS*, Nov. 4:244B). The fact that no monastery of Ankourios is attested before the 11th century is yet another indication that the *vita* may have been written after the 10th century.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:5.

<sup>98</sup> Literally, "dog-quinsy," an inflammation of the throat caused by infected tonsils.

quick deliverance from his illnesses, saying thus: “If you wish to be freed speedily from your present danger, send quickly without any delay to the blessed Thomas,” (in this way he added her name), “and, taking the water with which she has washed<sup>99</sup> her holy hands, anoint that part of your body which threatens you with <mortal> danger and you will thereby obtain a swift cure.” Such were the <instructions> of that wondrous and divine dream. The sick man was persuaded and, upon awaking from his sleep, carried out all the <instructions> from his dream. He sent to the holy woman, anointed the whole of his body with the washwater from her hands, and was cured immediately of his suffering. He <then> loudly proclaimed this miracle everywhere, praising the God of all, <and> magnifying the One Who magnifies His saints.

12. *Miracle 3.* And still I shall add to the previous <miracle tales> this even more unusual and more divine <story>, <which> prompts every ear and mind to a hymn in praise of God.

<Thomas>, who was accustomed to frequent the divine churches and rejoice in the all-night hymnody, went once to the holy church of the Hodegoi (which is now called the Hodegetria).<sup>100</sup> And here she stood near one of the all-holy icons of the Mother of God and made her customary prayers. And while she was visiting, as was her wont, the aforementioned holy church, from which the all-holy icon of the completely immaculate Virgin is carried in procession every Tuesday very early in the morning,<sup>101</sup> revered and venerated by all according to custom, a certain woman, who had been afflicted for a long time by a demon, leapt out and fell down at the feet of the holy woman, who

<sup>99</sup> For the meaning of ἀπολούμα, see Sophocles, *Lexicon*, s.v., and *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Graecitat*, ed. E. Trapp, fasc. 1, s.v.

<sup>100</sup> The monastery τῶν Ὁδηγῶν (lit., “of the guides”) was located near Hagia Sophia. Built (according to tradition) by the empress Pulcheria in the 5th century, it was later famous as the location of the Hodegetria icon; see *ODB* 2:939, Janin, *EglisesCP*, 199–207; Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 363–66; C. Angelidi, “Un texte patriographique et édifiant: le ‘discours narratif’ sur les Hodegoi,” *REB* 52 (1994), 113–49; and note 101, below. Kazhdan (*ODB* 3:2076 and *List of Saints*) argues that the use of the name Hodegetria, which seems to have come into use in the 11th or 12th century, indicates a later date of composition for the *vita*; the parenthetical phrase could, however, be a marginal gloss that was later incorporated into the text.

<sup>101</sup> On the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, reputed to have been painted by St. Luke, see *ODB* 3:2172–73. The icon, which was honored at the site from the mid-5th century, was used in a variety of processions and ceremonies at different periods. See Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 364.

was standing and devoting herself to prayer, and called out words like this to her: "Have mercy on me your servant, O servant of God, and let not this demon maltreat me to such an extent and lead me around here and there like a prisoner of war. My affliction has lasted long enough; will the day of salvation never come, but the night of despair crush me? And will the demon continue to harass me in the future, and <is there> no one to help?" The aforementioned woman did not cease to utter this sort <of lament>, wailing inconsolably and crying beyond all measure. The woman was indeed an object of great pity. And <Thomas> was quickly inclined to mercy by the wailing and lamentation of the woman, and <so> she anointed the woman with holy oil. And immediately the demon fled and disappeared, and all the crowd that happened to be present was seen to be full of amazement at the sudden cure of the aforementioned woman, for she reached out to the holy woman and entreated her that she be delivered from the tormenting demon, which indeed had happened.

13. *Miracle 4.* Let my story hasten then, with all possible zeal, to other miraculous deeds of the wondrous Thomas.

A woman who lived wantonly and licentiously in every way<sup>102</sup> suffered from hemorrhaging for more than six years and was terribly afflicted by this sickness. But the holy woman, realizing that the woman's illness <came> from God, spoke to her as follows: "If you, woman, desire to be released from this illness which afflicts you, abandon all intercourse with men during the divine and great feasts, and <abandon also> the prohibited activities you habitually perform. Cast as far away as possible your wallowing in the mud of passions." When the woman then promised to abstain from these activities and rejected with loathing her filthy acts, the holy <Thomas> healed the woman, anointing her with the usual oil. So the words and counsel of the saint released the long-suffering woman from her serious affliction. And after having been sick for so many years, she was restored to health and promised to sin no longer. For indeed she had heard from the saint that which was truly <said by Christ>: "*Behold, thou art made well! Sin no more.*"<sup>103</sup> For she realized that it was indecent to engage in sexual pleasure and intercourse.

14. *Miracle 5.* Another woman who followed a like career and way of life

<sup>102</sup> She was evidently a prostitute, as the introductory sentence of Chap. 14 indicates.

<sup>103</sup> Jn. 5:14.

did the same things; and she was of the same mind as courtesans, indeed she performed worse and soul-destroying <actions>, squandering her livelihood for the most part and spending large sums <of money> inappropriately. And performing every abominable and unseemly <act>, she rolled about in the slime of passions, engaging in frenzied fornication and illicit sex.<sup>104</sup>

This woman, having fresh in her ears the cure of the previous woman, fell down before the feet of the saint and shed warm tears. She rushed toward the aforementioned servant of Christ, and showed her affliction. For she had a cancer in her breast, which terribly troubled and distressed her. At any rate, she made a confession with all her soul and begged for mercy with warm tears. She then heard from Thomais <words> such as these, “If you wish to regain your health, avoid abnormal and filthy fornication. Do away with your passion for this and take a lawful husband,<sup>105</sup> and you will quickly obtain a cure.” She promised the saint to do these things and, vowing with great reverence to do them, attained her goal.

These and similar miracles the truly divine Thomais accomplished during the course of her life, while those <that follow occurred> after her departure to Christ, as marvelous and extraordinary deeds. [p. 239]

15. But let our account pause a little and recount in detail her husband’s treatment of her. Her husband used to lie in wait then, like a violent tyrant with beetled brows, grimly regarding the blessed <Thomais>, and with furrowed brows displaying a wild-looking glance and the coarse nature of his face. She suffered terrible beatings, she bore unmerciful torments, she endured chastisements by virtue of her noble thoughts, maintaining continually a conduct in accordance with God. <Although> she was restrained by her aforesaid husband, she continued to devote herself constantly to prayers, <and> continued to abide in the God-pleasing life. She *meditated* constantly on *all the works* of God,<sup>106</sup> as was her wont, even though the blessed woman’s pain was renewed, since she was wickedly attacked <by her husband>, who prevented her from doing such <works of mercy>. Even though she lived with a lame man

<sup>104</sup> Reading *κασωρευουσα* for *κασσωρευουσα*.

<sup>105</sup> Unlike earlier repentant harlots (e.g., Mary of Egypt), this woman did not become a hermit, but was urged by Thomais to marry, yet another indication of the promotion of marriage at this time; cf. Laiou, “Historia henos gamou,” 245.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Ps. 142 (143):5.

and was taught by him to limp,<sup>107</sup> she never ceased to walk in a straight path.<sup>108</sup> For her husband viewed her actions in a contrary fashion and reckoned them extravagant, and he condemned her for living in a prodigal fashion and criticized and scorned her for squandering their livelihood. But <her actions> were rather charity, carrying out mercy in accordance with the divine and holy scriptures, concerning which <mercy> indeed God Himself said: “*I will have mercy and not sacrifice;*<sup>109</sup> *if you bring incense before me, it is an abomination to me.*”<sup>110</sup>

He considered such <charitable work> to be in vain, but the person who does not do evil is viewed as evil by evil people; the prudent<sup>111</sup> person <is viewed> as foolish by the licentious;<sup>112</sup> the brave person is reviled by the craven as over bold; and charity to the poor is suspiciously viewed as prodigality. For *evil deeds are affixed beside virtues and are very close to them.*<sup>113</sup> For while her aforementioned husband lived in a rustic<sup>114</sup> manner, earned their daily bread by going to sea, and enjoyed a modest standard of living, the following occurred: whenever he returned home, he made inquiry about the expenditure of his assets and, calculating on a daily basis, he reckoned up how much of their livelihood she was spending. And he constantly tried to prevent her from <carrying out> the <charitable> activity I have frequently described <above>. For one could see her each day abundantly supplying gifts to the poor: clothing the naked and giving those in rags splendid clothes; distributing food to orphans; and furnishing the necessities of life to the destitute. Making her gifts more splendid, she wanted to go naked for Christ’s sake rather than to clothe this burdensome appendage of earth and clay;<sup>115</sup> <she wanted instead> to perform every deed in the service of Christ. But her lawless husband did not stop his cruel beating of this woman who was so disposed, calling extrava-

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *The Education of Children*, 6, in *Plutarch’s Moralia*, with trans. by F. C. Babbitt, I (London-Cambridge, 1986), 16.

<sup>108</sup> Literally, “with a straight foot.”

<sup>109</sup> Mt. 9:13, 12:7; cf. Hos. 6:7.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Is. 1:13.

<sup>111</sup> Or “chaste.”

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 507c.

<sup>113</sup> Gregory of Nazianzos, PG 36:581B; cf. note 54, above.

<sup>114</sup> I.e., “boorish.”

<sup>115</sup> I.e., her body.

gant this woman who labored hard for the sake of Christ. For indeed she exerted a great effort on His [Christ's] behalf: through her work for the poor she clothed Him when He was clad in rags and going naked, when He was homeless, hungry, thirsty, and in need of medical attention.<sup>116</sup> She used to go all round the marketplace, searching the shadows, groping around in the darkness, in case she might find on occasion a poor man (or better to call him "Christ") sleeping <outside>, that she might lend him the money <to pay his debts>.

16. Here <in this world> she was repaid this <debt> a hundredfold, according to the true word of the Lord,<sup>117</sup> and in the world to come <she will receive> a ten-thousandfold <reward>, and in addition the kingdom of Heaven, the greatest and most perfect <reward>, toward which she was hastening with all fervor, toward which she lifted up her whole mind, which she yearned after and strove with all haste to attain, for the sake of which she had been beaten, endured unbearable blows, and carried wounds.

She used to provoke her tormentor, saying, "Strike <this> body that will soon perish and return again<sup>118</sup> to the earth from which it came." And at the same time she expressed prophetic words which foretold her death, for the wondrous Thomas was already all but at the point of departing to the Lord. She had adorned her life by God-pleasing works; she had found her support in the words of the Gospel; she had adorned her inner person with spiritual graces; she had delighted in the Lord frequently; she had very wisely blended and combined contemplation with activity; she had scorned the present life; she had preferred the ornament of virtues and despised the flux of this world<sup>119</sup> here; she had loathed her worldly husband, but was given in marriage to Christ as a most beautiful bride and fair virgin who preferred the adornment of virtues to the vanity of silken clothes.

Thus after the saint had endured<sup>120</sup> her many afflictions for a considerable time (for she had already borne for thirteen years that violent abuse, painful wounds, <those> immoderate bruises <and> blows), she received her blessed end and was transported to the ageless life without end, having lived in all

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Mt. 25:35–40.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:29.

<sup>118</sup> Literally, "be corrupted and dissolve again into."

<sup>119</sup> There is a pun here on the two meanings of κόσμος, "ornament" and "world."

<sup>120</sup> Literally, "lived together with?"

thirty-eight years of the present life, <it being> the first day of January, when she departed to the Lord.

While still alive she had commanded those she lived with<sup>121</sup> not to place her <body> inside the holy church,<sup>122</sup> but outside in the forecourts until the all-compassionate God might desire to work miracles through His grace and show where she should be laid. She foretold these <events> while speaking, humbling herself or rather displaying to her listeners<sup>123</sup> an example and model of humility. And one could see a certain prophetic gift and humility both observed and understood in these words of the blessed one. For she spoke as follows: “When my spirit departs from its present dwelling, I command all of you not to bury this earthly body inside the divine church, but in the forecourt,” as has <already> been said “until divine providence should work miracles about me.”

And this is what happened: by the time forty days had passed after her departure to the Lord, many miracles had already occurred, since her holy remains provided cures readily to those approaching them, and wrought extraordinary wonders. Our account has already spoken of those miracles she accomplished while alive, and <I will now describe> those after her death as strange and wondrous.

17. *Miracle 6.* A certain man, who was originally from the land of the Nikomedians,<sup>124</sup> was being attacked by a violent demon, [p. 240] and ran to the coffin of the saint with supplications <for aid>. After remaining there a short time <only> and making entreaties to be freed from the demon that tormented him, he quickly obtained a cure. When the holy nuns who resided at the convent saw the wondrous miracle and recalled the words of the blessed <Thomais>,<sup>125</sup> they marveled at her foresight and placed the remains of the

<sup>121</sup> The text is vague on many points of Thomais' life. The identity of “those she lived with” (in the masculine plural) is unclear. No other family than her parents, by this time dead, or her husband is mentioned in the *Life*. Perhaps it is a generic reference to the members of her household.

<sup>122</sup> I.e., the church of the convent of τὰ μικρὰ Ῥωμαίου. This was the convent where Thomais' mother Kale was superior; cf. Chap. 22 and note 131.

<sup>123</sup> Reading ἀκουουσιν for ακουσιν.

<sup>124</sup> Nikomedeia was a city of Bithynia, in northwestern Asia Minor.

<sup>125</sup> I.e., that they wait to bury her in the church until such time as God gave indications of her sanctity through posthumous miracles.

saint in the divine church with befitting honor, thus carrying out her instructions.<sup>126</sup>

18. *Miracle 7.* Not long afterwards <occurred the miraculous cure of> a woman who had led a pious life, dedicating herself completely to God, and spending her time in God-pleasing works. She had chosen the monastic way of life, which gives special pleasure to God, as <a way of> living quietly, conversing with God, and abiding by His teachings. She began to be terribly tormented by the demon who envies our race, and who cast an evil eye on it from the beginning and has inflicted harm on us from <the time of our> forefathers. He had insinuated himself into the aforementioned woman and was wickedly contriving to kill her, just as he previously subjected our foremother [i.e., Eve] to death. She therefore went to the tomb of the saint and wept with warmest tears. She made supplication and earnestly entreated the Lord that through her [Thomas] she be delivered from her tormentor, for she was being torn apart by the demon and was grievously distressed, emitting piteous cries which moved one to compassion, <saying>, “Have mercy on me, servant of God, and set me free from the present demon.” And dashing her head against the tomb, she found the customary mercy and was set free from the abuse and torment of the demon.

19. *Miracle 8.* Our account <now> adds still another miracle to those already reported, one by no means inferior to the previous ones, in fact even greater in its magnitude and worth.

<There was> a man from this great city [i.e., Constantinople] by the name of Eutychianos. He lived somewhere near the divine church of the Oxeia, in which is highly honored the commander of the heavenly hosts.<sup>127</sup> He [Eutychianos] prided himself on his wealth, was laden with and exulted in a mass of titles, gloried in a brilliant lineage, and was widely known to all. This man then was bewitched by some sorcerers and wizards with the assistance<sup>128</sup> of demons, and by sinking to the worst behavior he thus became palsied. Therefore he was distressed and lamented loudly and spent his entire livelihood on

<sup>126</sup> Her relics were still at the church of τὰ μικρὰ Ρωμῶν in the Palaiologan period, when they were venerated by Russian pilgrims; cf. introduction, p. 295, and note 9.

<sup>127</sup> The church of St. Michael the Archangel was near the church of St. Loukilianos in the Oxeia district, on the slope that descends toward the Golden Horn; cf. Janin, *Eglises CP*, 343–44, and Janin, *CP byz.*, 400–401.

<sup>128</sup> Reading σνεργια for σνεργια.

physicians, since he longed for bodily health. Then he ran to her shrine and threw his entire self on <the tomb> of the wondrous Thomais and uttered cries such as this, saying, "Pour forth your mercy equally on me and on the others who call upon you, show forth your fervent succor, deliver me from this most excessive bodily suffering with which I am wretchedly afflicted. Show your great compassion to me your unworthy servant, who has sought refuge with you with much faith." And after he made this prayer and his inconsolable lament, the blessed <Thomais> awarded him a cure, delivering the palsied man from his disease. And just as the paralytic of old, finding release from his lengthy affliction, *took up his bed*,<sup>129</sup> so also through her the aforementioned man was cured and leaped about, and he who previously was completely unable to walk was seen to pass swiftly from place to place with rapid movement.

20. *Miracle 9.* But now let our account pass on to another still more divine miracle; let it demonstrate the wonders of God and magnify His glory as is fitting. There was a man who was afflicted with epilepsy. His foot along with his hand was useless, and there was no natural cure for the malady. But the report <of the saint's miracles>, which spread very quickly in every direction, soon reached the ears of the above-mentioned man and drew him, without a moment's hesitation, to the saint's dwelling place. Once he had been cured, he returned to his home healthy, without sickness, free from the above-mentioned illness, exalting God and acknowledging the glorious grace of the saint.

21. *Miracle 10.* Another man, who was a fisherman, had cast his fishing nets as was his wont, but lost them when they were scattered by a huge wave and violent storm. The man's loss was twofold, since he not only missed out on the haul of fish but also completely lost the tools of his trade, as one says. What then <could he do>? He begged help from the blessed <Thomais>, mixing his supplications with tears and wailing. Nor did he fail to obtain his request. For the blessed one appeared to the fisherman and revealed where the nets were lying full of many enormous fish. The place was called Hebdomon<sup>130</sup> by the locals. When he went to the place, he found the nets filled with a very plentiful catch as had been predicted by the blessed <Thomais>. And he returned <home> with much pleasure and good cheer. But let my account continue with subsequent <miracles>.

<sup>129</sup> Mt. 9:6.

<sup>130</sup> Hebdomon was a suburb of Constantinople, southwest of the city on the Sea of Marmara; cf. *ODB* 2:907 and note 68 in the *vita* of Elisabeth the Wonderworker.

22. *Miracle 11.* <There was> a monastery established in this great city [i.e., Constantinople], in which was honored and especially glorified the name of the all-blameless Maiden and Mother of God (it was called <the convent of> Ta Mikra Romaiou<sup>131</sup> by those who praised it). It was located very near the church of the wonder-working Mokios.<sup>132</sup> The remains of the saint were entombed there, and the earthly mother [i.e., Kale] of the blessed and wondrous Thomais had been appointed the mother superior. It happened that on one occasion the nuns there lost a book. When it could not be found, the nuns were quite despondent, [p. 241] and were terribly distressed and upset. The most compassionate and merciful Thomais, however, did not allow these women to remain long in despondency, but appearing <one> night she said to them: “Know, sisters, that I am truly alive, even if I have died as far as you are concerned. The book is lying on my tomb where it is being kept safely by me.” Straightway they went to the holy tomb and found the book lying safely just as the saint had described. They were all filled with delight and astonishment, and were moved to thanksgiving and praise of God, Who at all times works wondrous miracles through His saints. One of them is the miracle I will recount now, adding it to the earlier <miracle tales>.

23. *Miracle 12.* A woman who made her home very near the so-called Forum of the Ox<sup>133</sup> was worn down by a severe affliction; she had abdominal distress and was assailed by very sharp pains. Despairing of all other hope, she went to the revered coffin of the saint, and with the most fervent faith pleaded for her assistance. After <the woman> persevered both night and day and shed many tears, she received a cure very quickly and was completely

<sup>131</sup> The *Life* of Thomais is one of the principal sources of information on this convent. Its exact location is unknown, but as it was near St. Mokios it must have been in the southwestern part of the city; cf. Janin, *EglisesCP*, 197, and Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 321–25. By coincidence, at an earlier period Elisabeth the Wonderworker lived in the same convent, which was then dedicated to St. George and called Mikrophos or “Little Hill”; see note 50 of the *Life* of St. Elisabeth, above.

<sup>132</sup> St. Mokios was martyred under Diocletian. His church was traditionally said to have been built by Constantine I on top of a temple to Zeus. It was rebuilt either by Pulcheria and Marcian or by Justinian I, and restored in the 9th century by Basil I. It was located somewhere between the walls of Constantine and the Theodosian walls, perhaps west of the cistern of St. Mokios. See Janin, *EglisesCP*, 354–58.

<sup>133</sup> An old Roman forum on the Mese, the main street of Constantinople; it took its name from an enormous bronze sculpture of an ox head. It is now the site of Aksaray Square. See Janin, *CP byz.*, 69–71.

released from the illness that oppressed her. But having received such a favor, the woman was seen <to be> neither ungrateful for this good deed, nor cold-hearted and thoughtless, so to speak, <in her> conduct.<sup>134</sup> Rather she repaid <the favor> with a small token <of appreciation>, appropriate to her means, to the <holy woman> who had granted her a very great and much desired favor. With much love she had an arch<sup>135</sup> erected over the tomb of the saint, adorning it with pictures of holy images. And it survives until the present day as a great memorial of this <saint>. And who could pass by this <memorial> there which is most wondrous and pleasing? Therefore we should not then pass over <this memorial> without telling its story.

24. *Miracle 13.* <There was> a man who from childhood had chosen the monastic and celibate way of life and exerted himself completely in godly work. His name was Symeon and his homeland was the most famous of cities [i.e., Constantinople]. He possessed a highly valuable and skillfully made prayer stool<sup>136</sup> (for it was made of precious materials), which he lost in this way. It came about that a friend of his asked to borrow this <prayer stool>. On account of his simple and friendly character, he did not suspect anything unusual and readily gave his friend what he had asked to borrow. But <the friend>, having acquired it and taken it home, wanted to conceal it with the help of the devil. Thus the aforesaid God-loving man later forgot what he had given and to whom he had given it, and was not a little despondent and upset. The saint then appeared in a dream to the aforesaid man and spoke as follows: “Do you know to whom you gave the prayer stool which you used to have?”

<sup>134</sup> Or “character.”

<sup>135</sup> Possibly some sort of ciborium or baldachin; cf. A.-M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Late Byzantium: The Posthumous Miracles of the Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople by Theoktistos the Stoudite* (Brookline, Mass., 1983), 56.21, where the same word ἄψις is used for a baldachin over a saint’s tomb. Alternatively, following a suggestion of Henry Maguire, this may be an arcosolium set into a wall rather than a free-standing structure.

<sup>136</sup> Or “prayer book.” The meaning of προσευχάδιον as “prayer stool” (it is rendered as “prie-Dieu” by da Costa-Louillet, “Saints de CP,” *Byzantion* 27 [1957], 839) is assured by the context in which the word is used in the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene convent (ed. Gautier, “Kecharitomene,” 79.1083); cf. also DuCange, *Glossarium*, s.v. It should be noted, however, that Akropolites interpreted the word as “prayer book” (προσευχῆς βιβλίον) in chap. 18 of his encomium (*AASS*, Nov. 4:246c), as does A. Lete in her modern Greek translation of the text in Tsames, *Meterikon*, 4:361.

But, if you have forgotten, be reminded <of it now>!” And she simultaneously revealed <the identity of> the man who had taken it and jogged his memory, speaking these very words: “Your friend John has the object you are seeking.” And after being reminded and seeking out <the prayer stool>, he quickly regained his property and promised great gifts to the saint because of her concern for him.

25. *Miracle 14*. I should also mention the sufferings of her [Thomas'] husband, and not be silent about them nor pass over them, but should in the present account make plain and describe to the best of my ability the kind of compensation he had to pay for his most wicked and base life. For he encountered a demon of terrible might and was forcefully driven by it this way and that. And so, wailing inconsolably, he came to the tomb of the saint. And although the demon attacked him terribly there and was unwilling to be driven out of that place, by prayer to this <saint> he attained salvation <from the demon>.

Just <as it is impossible> to reckon the amount of *sand of the sea*<sup>137</sup> or the tracks of a *ship passing through the sea*,<sup>138</sup> so <it is impossible> to set down a detailed narration of the miracles of the saint. But just as one gets a notion of the lion from its claws, and of the whole garment from its edges,<sup>139</sup> so one might understand the whole from a partial <narration> of her miracles. For over a period of twelve years she has not stopped performing cures for those who approach her with faith night and day. In fact, up to this day she does not cease to supply cures in abundance to those who call on her fervently for aid.

26. But, O partner of the blessed ones, equal of the righteous, associate of the angels, do not cease by your fervent supplications to entreat earnestly the all-merciful Lord, Who loves mankind, to protect the scion of the purple, the most flourishing Romanos,<sup>140</sup> the most Christ-loving ruler among the lov-

<sup>137</sup> Cf., e.g., Jer. 15:8; Hos. 1:10.

<sup>138</sup> Prov. 30:19.

<sup>139</sup> Leutsch-Schneidewin, *Corpus* 1:252.

<sup>140</sup> See introduction to this *vita* for discussion of his identity. This concluding paragraph, couched in the form of a prayer for the reigning emperor, is an unusual feature of this *vita*. It is somewhat reminiscent of the so-called imperial menologion, in which each *vita* concludes with a prayer in verse form for the emperor; cf. F. Halkin and A.-J. Festugiere, *Dix textes inédits tires du menologe impérial de Koutloumous* (Geneva, 1984), 18, 30, 42, etc., and F. Halkin, *Le menologe impérial de Baltimore* (Brussels,

ers of Christ, who glistens with all forms of goodness. Grant to him <the power of> putting to flight all the leaders of foreign nations and all their semi-barbarous seed.<sup>141</sup> And <may you award> to him the victory prize, as to a most precise discernor and guardian of righteousness, as to a guide-rule of truth, and as to one who provides and awards all good things to all. And do not cease to honor him, you who award all things <that lead> toward salvation. Stand by his side assiduously and be his helpmate and a vigilant guardian through your supplications. Come, shelter and watch over everyone who approaches you, giving to them an acceptable and pleasant year, because on this the first and most beautiful of days you received the end of your life, and journeyed toward the Lord. This <day> is the first of the calends,<sup>142</sup> on which Basil,<sup>143</sup> great among the high priests, journeyed to the Lord. Together with him [Basil] may you always intercede for and stand beside our leader, the most powerful and pious emperor. Remember also me, your miserable [p. 242] servant, who has grown a little weary in singing your praise and in the recital<sup>144</sup> of your miracles, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be glory together with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and unto everlasting generations, Amen.

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1985), 37, 58, 72, etc. These menologia have been traditionally assigned to the reign of Michael IV (1034–41); for the most recent discussion of their date, see N. P. Sevcenko, “The Walters ‘Imperial’ Menologion,” *JWalt* 51 (1993), 43–64, esp. 44 and 58.

<sup>141</sup> Reading φυλαρχίαν for φιλαρχίαν. The term *phylarchos* (lit., “tribal leader”) was normally (but not exclusively) applied to Muslim rulers; cf. DuCange, *Glossarium*, s.v. and *ODB* 3:1672. It is therefore plausible that the author is referring to the (successful) campaign of Nikephoros Phokas against the Arabs of Crete, which took place in 961 during the reign of Romanos II. The term *mixobarbaros* (“semibarbarous”) could be applied to Slavs or Muslims; cf., e.g., *Anne Comnene. Alexiade*, ed. B. Leib, III (Paris, 1945), p. 14.11 and 205.11.

<sup>142</sup> Thomais’ feast day was 1 January. The calends are the first days of Roman months.

<sup>143</sup> The feast day of Basil of Caesarea, the 4th-century theologian, is also 1 January.

<sup>144</sup> Reading ἀφήγησιν for ἀρηγησιν, a typographical error.