Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 43 (1) 60–82

Manuel I Komnenos and the Stone of Unction*

Ivan Drpić
University of Pennsylvania
drpic@sas.upenn.edu

For John Duffy

This article explores the fate of the Stone of Unction — the marble slab upon which, according to tradition, the dead body of Christ had been anointed for burial — in twelfth-century Byzantium. Focusing upon the Stone's association with Manuel I Komnenos, the article examines the imperial handling of this Passion relic in relation to broader trends in the devotional culture of the contemporary Byzantine élite. The special bond between the emperor and the relic, it is argued, should be seen as a manifestation of the pervasive desire, much in evidence during the Komnenian era, to personalise and even privatise the sacred.

Keywords: Manuel I Komnenos; cult of relics; personal piety; *enkolpion*; epigram

The treasury of the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos houses a rather peculiar *enkolpion* (**fig. 1**). Possibly dating from the Late Byzantine era, this miniature pectoral pendant, a mere 3.6 cm in height, consists of a rectangular plaque of reddish marble with white spots set in a serrated silver-gilt mount supplied with a suspension loop.[1] The stone plaque seems to be a piece of *breccia corallina*, a type of marble quarried in Bithynia and other parts of Asia Minor in antiquity.[2] At first blush, the simplicity of the pendant's design, which fully exposes the surface of the stone, with its

* Robert Ousterhout provided insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article, for which I am deeply grateful. Thanks are also due to the anonymous reader for *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, as well as to the journal's editor, Ruth Macrides. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Greek are mine.

1 G. Oikonomake-Papadopoulou, B. Pitarakis, and K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Ἱερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου: Ἐγκόλπια* (Mount Athos 2000) 166–67 (no. 64). For the date of the *enkolpion*, see below n. 30.

2 On *breccia corallina*, also known as *marmor sagarium*, see R. Gnoli, *Marmora romana* (Rome 1971) 203–5; L. Lazzarini, 'The origin and characterization of *breccia nuvolata*, *marmor Sagarium*, and *marmor Triponticum*', in J. J. Herrmann, N. Herz, and R. Newman (eds.), *ASMOSIA 5: Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone* (London 2002) 58–67; G. Borghini (ed.), *Marmi antichi* (Rome 2004) 166–7 (no. 22 [A. Sironi]); D. Attanasio, A. B. Yavuz, and M. Bruno, 'White and colored marbles from Turkey in the ancient

DOI: 10.1017/byz.2018.25

Fig. 1. *Enkolpion* with a fragment of the Stone of Unction, late Byzantine period (?), Vatopedi monastery, Mount Athos (photo: after G. Oikonomake-Papadopoulou, B. Pitarakis, and K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Ἱερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου: Ἐγκόλπια* [Mount Athos 2000] 167).

constellation of irregular milky blotches and specks, might strike us as a medieval example of a pervasive and seemingly universal fascination with stones, if not as a piece of abstract art *avant la lettre*. Yet, within the context of a monastic treasury, the significance of the stone plaque lies not so much in its visual and tactile appeal—its 'intrinsic, infallible, immediate beauty, unanswerable to no one', to borrow a phrase from Roger Caillois[3]—but rather in its purported provenance. An inscription, which runs along the narrow side of the precious-metal mount, identifies the framed piece of marble as a relic. It reads: Ἐκ τοῦ ἁγίου λίθου ἐν ᾧ ἐτέθη τὸ κυριακὸν ἅγιον σῶμα ('From the holy stone upon which the holy body of the Lord was laid'). Mentioned neither in the Gospels, nor in the apocrypha, the stone slab upon which the dead body of Christ was placed after the descent from the cross and prepared for burial was one of the relics of Christ's Passion, highly venerated in the Middle Ages and beyond. In this article I wish to offer some thoughts on the fate of the Stone of Unction, as the relic came to be known in English, in twelfth-century Byzantium, and in particular to elucidate its association with the emperor Manuel I Komnenos. While this relic has

Roman world', in A. Tuğrul et al. (eds.), *V. Global Stone Congress, 22–25 October, 2014, Antalya* (Antalya 2016) 60–62. I am grateful to Gianni Ponti for his help with identifying the stone.

3 R. Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*, trans. B. Bray (Charlottesville 1985) 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

been a subject of scholarly inquiry, the available textual and visual evidence merits reconsideration.[4]

The Stone of Unction was the last major Passion relic to reach Constantinople. In 1169, this intriguing remnant of Christ's earthly existence was solemnly transported to the imperial capital from the city of Ephesos, where it seems to have been kept in the church of Saint John the Evangelist. The contemporary historians John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates report that, once the sacred *lithos* reached the Boukoleon harbour, the emperor Manuel I hoisted it on his back and in a remarkable display of piety carried it to the church of the Pharos in the Great Palace.[5] The *lithos* was reddish in colour and, as we shall see, apparently mottled — just like the fragment from the Vatopedi monastery. As for its size, Choniates states that the slab measured the length of a man (ἀνδρομήκης),[6] while a later source, the Spanish traveller Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo who visited Constantinople in 1403, specifies that it was nine palms long.[7]

The early history of the Stone of Unction is shrouded in obscurity. Kinnamos relates the tradition that Mary Magdalene was responsible for transporting this stone slab to Ephesos. As he writes,

> Mary Magdalene, they say, took the stone and set sail straight for Rome so that, coming in the presence of the caesar Tiberius, she might accuse Pilate and the

4 See especially C. Mango, 'Notes on Byzantine monuments', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–4 (1969–70) 372–5; R. Ousterhout, 'Architecture, art and Komnenian ideology at the Pantokrator monastery', in N. Necipoğlu (ed.), *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life* (Leiden 2001) 148–50; S. Lerou, 'L'usage des reliques du Christ par les empereurs aux XIe et XIIe siècles: Le Saint Bois et les Saintes Pierres', in J. Durand and B. Flusin (eds.), *Byzance et les reliques du Christ* (Paris 2004) 165, 169, 177–82; N. P. Ševčenko, 'The tomb of Manuel I Komnenos, again', in A. Ödekan, E. Akyürek, and N. Necipoğlu (eds.), *Change in the Byzantine World in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Proceedings of the First International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium, Istanbul 25–28 June 2007* (Istanbul 2010) 609–16; N. P. Ševčenko, 'The service of the Virgin's Lament revisited', in L. Brubaker and M. B. Cunningham (eds.), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Burlington VT 2011) 256–62; T. Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*: a study and critical edition', in S. Kotzabassi (ed.), *The Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople* (Boston 2013) 109–41. For another Stone of Unction that came to be venerated at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in the later Middle Ages and beyond, see Y. Rachman-Schrire, 'Christ's Unction and the material realization of a stone in Jerusalem', in R. Bartal, N. Bodner, and B. Kühnel (eds.), *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500* (Abingdon 2017) 216–29. Cf. also S. L'Occaso, 'Mantova, i Gonzaga, le reliquie di Gerusalemme', *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* s. 9, 19 (2008) 695–726.

5 John Kinnamos, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn 1836) 277.7–278.5; Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J.-L. van Dieten (Berlin 1975) 222.76–86. For the date of the translation, see Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*', 109, n. 3.

6 Choniates, ed. van Dieten, 222.77.

7 F. López Estrada, *Ruy González de Clavijo. Embajada a Tamorlán* (Madrid 1999) 138.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Jews as Jesus' unjust murderers. When by some chance she put into the harbor of Ephesos, she left it there, but she departed and went to Rome.[8]

If the Stone of Unction was, indeed, a large slab of *breccia corallina*, one is tempted to speculate whether its provenance may have been more proximate than the tradition associating the relic with Mary Magdalene would have us believe. Asia Minor, as already noted, was the principal source of *breccia corallina* in antiquity. As a matter of fact, several ancient quarries of this stone have been identified on the Karaburum peninsula, not far from Ephesos.[9] Did the sacred *lithos* originate at one of these sites? This is certainly a possibility. One should also bear in mind that *breccia corallina* was fairly popular in the Roman world, with its uses ranging from revetment panels and column shafts to basins and other decorative furnishings. It is quite conceivable that the Ephesian stone relic was a locally obtained piece of ancient marble that at some point, for reasons that we can only surmise, came to be recognized as a material trace of Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross.

By the time the Stone of Unction was deposited in the church of the Pharos, this palatine chapel had already been home to the majority of the relics of Christ's Passion, in addition to a host of other inestimable treasures.[10] The formation of this impressive assembly, unique in the Christian world, was tied to imperial piety and initiative. During the tenth and early eleventh centuries, a series of successful military campaigns

8 Kinnamos, ed. Meineke, 277.15–20; trans. C. M. Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus by John Kinnamos* (New York 1976) 207. The same tradition is recorded in an oration on Mary Magdalene attributed to the early Palaiologan scholar and cleric Nikephoros Kallistou Xanthopoulos: J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 147, col. 569D. Curiously, the late-twelfth-century *Ekphrasis of the Holy Places* by John Doukas (formerly mistakenly identified as John Phokas) mentions the presence of the stone 'upon which the Giver of Life was laid, dead and naked', within the tomb *aedicula* at the Holy Sepulchre. The author records that this stone was sheathed or somehow embellished (ἐνδεδυμένος) with pure gold by the emperor Manuel I: Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 133, col. 944A; A. E. Fadi, *Ἰωάννου Φωκᾶ Ἔκφρασις*, M.A. thesis (Aristotelian University of Thessalonike 2008) 49. The stone that Doukas saw is probably to be identified with the bed-like altar (*lectus*) shown to pilgrims within the tomb *aedicula* as early as the eighth century. See Y. Rachman-Schrire, 'Christ's Unction', 219. I am grateful to Yamit Rachman-Schrire for sharing her thoughts on Doukas' account. For the *Ekphrasis of the Holy Places* and the identity of its author, see also Ch. Messis, 'Littérature, voyage et politique au XIIe siècle. L'*Ekphrasis des lieux saints* de Jean "Phokas"', *Byzantinoslavica* 69 (2011) 146–66.

9 Attanasio, Yavuz, and Bruno, 'White and colored marbles', 61–62, 65.

10 On the Pharos church and its relics, see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin: Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique*, vol. 3, *Les églises et les monastères,* 2nd edn (Paris 1969) 232–6; P. Magdalino, 'L'Église du Phare et les reliques de la Passion à Constantinople (VIIe/VIIIe–XIIIe siècles)', in Durand and Flusin (eds.), *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 15–30; A. Lidov, 'A Byzantine Jerusalem: the imperial Pharos Chapel as the Holy Sepulchre', in A. Hoffmann and G. Wolf (eds.), *Jerusalem as Narrative Space / Erzählraum Jerusalem* (Leiden 2012) 63–103. See also M. Bacci, 'Relics of the Pharos Chapel: a view from the Latin West', in A. M. Lidov (ed.), *Vostochnokhristianskie relikvii* (Moscow 2003) 234–46; H. A. Klein, 'Sacred relics and imperial ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople', in F. A. Bauer (ed.), *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen—Gestalt und Zeremoniell* (Istanbul 2006) 79–99.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the East facilitated the procurement of numerous sacred objects from Christian shrines and communities formerly under Muslim rule. Their translation to the capital gave tangible expression to the programme of imperial renewal and helped articulate the idea of Constantinople as the New Jerusalem.[11] Between 1032, the year when the emperor Roman III Argyros acquired the Letter of Christ to King Abgar, and 1169 there were no major additions to the collection of relics in the Pharos church. The late arrival of the Stone of Unction thus may appear somewhat strange, especially since this relic had been kept in a celebrated shrine within the territory of the empire, not in a distant locale threatened by the 'infidel'. Paul Magdalino has argued that the translation of the *lithos* may have been a politically opportune act; not only did it proclaim continuity with the glorious epoch of relics-collecting under the Macedonians, but it also signalled a desire on the part of Manuel I to assert his supremacy over the Latin potentates who, at that time, controlled the Holy Land.[12] In the era of the Crusades, the church of the Pharos with its panoply of the Passion relics became increasingly important as a symbolically charged place, a locus where the Komnenian empire could claim its right to the land where the Son of God had assumed flesh, died, and was resurrected.[13] Recently, Theodora Antonopoulou has proposed that the translation of the *lithos* should be related to the contemporary theological controversy surrounding the interpretation of Christ's words, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28), in which Manuel took an active part. In her view, the relic's advent to the capital was a compelling public statement signalling the emperor's orthodoxy and his spiritual and physical proximity to the divine.[14] Be that as it may, one should recall that Manuel appropriated sacred objects from the provinces on more than one occasion. In 1149, he acquired the *prokalymma* from the tomb of Saint Demetrios in Thessalonike and, perhaps following the Norman sack of Corinth in 1147, had an icon of Saint Theodore *Teron* venerated in that city transferred to the palace. The emperor seems to have been eager to associate himself with select *proskynemata* from beyond Constantinople.[15]

11 On this idea, see especially B. Flusin, 'Construire une Nouvelle Jérusalem: Constantinople et les reliques', in M. A. Amir-Moezzi and J. Scheid (eds.), *L'Orient dans l'histoire religieuse de l'Europe: L'invention des origines* (Turnhout 2000) 51–70; R. Ousterhout, 'Sacred geographies and holy cities: Constantinople as Jerusalem', in A. M. Lidov (ed.), *Ierotopiia: Sozdanie sakral'nykh prostranstv v Vizantii i drevneĭ Rusi* (Moscow 2006) 98–116.

12 Magdalino, 'L'Église du Phare', 25.

13 According to Magdalino, 'L'Église du Phare', 25, the timing of the translation of the *lithos* may be significant in this respect, for in 1169, following Manuel's alliance with king Amalric I of Jerusalem, a joint Byzantine-crusader expedition attempted to conquer Egypt.

14 Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*', 118.

15 P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge 1993) 178–9; A. Avramea, 'Επαρχιακά ιερά κειμήλια στην Κωνσταντινούπολη από τον Μανουήλ Κομνηνό', in E. Kypraiou (ed.), *Ευφρόσυνον: Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη* (Athens 1991) I, 29–33; S. Kotzabassi, 'Feasts at the

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Stone of Unction did not stay in the Pharos church for long. Shortly after Manuel's death in September of 1180, the relic was transferred yet again to the Pantokrator monastery and placed near the emperor's tomb.[16] In the wake of the Fourth Crusade, the *lithos* did not share the fate of the majority of other Passion relics, which ended up in the West, but remained at the Pantokrator. It is repeatedly mentioned as the most precious possession of the monastery until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, when, as so many other treasures, the relic disappears from the scene.[17]

The second translation of the *lithos* only eleven years after its deposition in the palace and its insertion into the context of the imperial burial ground is arguably a rather unexpected gesture. The church of the Pharos certainly lost nothing of its prestige in the last decades of the twelfth century, continuing to receive praise as the New Ark of the Covenant and the Second Holy Land.[18] What is more, the *Akolouthia*, or Liturgical Office, composed by George Skylitzes on the occasion of the first translation of the relic from Ephesos to Constantinople unambiguously portrayed the Stone of Unction as a common good. The emperor presented it to the Christian populace at large. The stone slab, in Skylitzes' words, was given to the imperial city as an 'exceedingly precious ornament' (κόσμος ὑπέρτιμος) and 'foundation' (θέμεθλον).[19] Then why was the *lithos* separated from the other relics of Christ and transferred to the Pantokrator? How are we to account for this jarring expropriation? In what follows, I wish to propose that in late-twelfth-century Constantinople the Stone of Unction was perceived and treated not simply as yet another sacred treasure of the highest order, but also as a semi-private relic of sorts, a personal devotional object directly and intimately associated with Manuel I. Strange as it may appear, the Vatopedi *enkolpion*, with which I began, is an excellent object to think with when it comes to interpreting the peregrinations and handling of the Stone of Unction in the hands of the Komnenoi. But first we must turn to the Pantokrator.

Founded by the emperor John II Komnenos and his wife Irene, Manuel's parents, the monastery of Christ Pantokrator was the most important religious foundation in twelfth-century Constantinople.[20] The monastery's liturgical centre was a complex

monastery of Pantokrator', in Kotzabassi (ed.), *The Pantokrator Monastery*, 175–89; I. Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge and New York 2016) 347–9.

16 For the second translation of the relic and its display and veneration at the Pantokrator, see below.

17 For the possibility that, following the Ottoman capture of the city, the *lithos* may have been moved to the Seraglio, see Mango, 'Notes on Byzantine Monuments', 374–5.

18 See Nicholas Mesarites' account of the church in his *logos* on the failed palace revolt of John Komnenos the Fat in 1201: A. Heisenberg, *Nikolaos Mesarites. Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos* (Würzburg 1907) esp. 29–32.

19 Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*', 129.125–6.

20 The literature on the Pantokrator monastery is vast, but see Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, III, 175–6, 344, 515–23; W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls: Byzantion, Konstantinupolis, Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen 1977) 209–15;

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of three domed churches: the *katholikon*, or main church, dedicated to Christ Pantokrator to the south; the church of the Virgin *Eleousa* serving a lay congregation to the north; and sandwiched between them, the oratory of the archangel Michael (**fig. 2**). The latter, referred to as *heroon* in the sources, served as a mausoleum for the imperial family. Its western part accommodated the tombs of the founders, John II and Irene, their sons Alexios and Andronikos, and Manuel's first wife, Bertha of Sulzbach. These tombs were in the form of sarcophagi, either free-standing or attached to the walls and set underneath monumental arcosolia. Their original arrangement is not certain. The last of the imperial tombs to be installed was that of Manuel I. It was a large freestanding sarcophagus located most likely towards the centre or in the southern part of the oratory.[21] The Stone of Unction, as we learn from Choniates, was placed on a pedestal (κρηπίς) to the side of the emperor's tomb.[22] In all likelihood, the relic was displayed underneath the vaulted passageway that connected the *katholikon* with the imperial mausoleum. The restoration work conducted by Arthur H. S. Megaw in the early 1960s revealed an elongated cavity measuring 2.45 × 0.64 m in this location. The cavity, as Megaw has suggested, probably served as a setting for the relic's pedestal.[23] The area around the cavity was evidently important since the magnificent *opus sectile* paving of the *katholikon* was extended to encompass it.

In its new setting, the Stone of Unction was accompanied by a lengthy epigram in dodecasyllable, which, fortunately, has come down to us. Originally probably inscribed on the relic's pedestal, the epigram is recorded in a much later yet reliable source, the *Geography* written by Meletios, bishop of Athens, and published in Venice in 1728.[24] This remarkable poem, about which I shall have more to say shortly, indicates that the *lithos* was transferred to the Pantokrator and placed near Manuel's tomb at the order of his widow, the empress Maria of Antioch. It is possible that the removal was decreed by the emperor himself and that Maria simply fulfilled his wish.

Ousterhout, 'Architecture, art and Komnenian ideology'; and the studies collected in Kotzabassi (ed.), *The Pantokrator Monastery*.

21 On Manuel's tomb and its appearance, as briefly described by Choniates, see C. Mango, 'Three imperial Byzantine sarcophagi discovered in 1750', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962) 397–9; C. Sode, 'Zu dem Grab Kaiser Manuels I. Komnenos', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 94/1 (2001) 230–1; Ševčenko, 'The tomb of Manuel I Komnenos, again'.

22 Choniates, 222.76.

23 A. H. S. Megaw, 'Notes on recent work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963) 342.

24 *Μελετίου Γεωγραφία παλαιὰ καὶ νέα* (Venice 1728) 426. For two recent critical editions of the epigram, see I. Vassis, 'Das Pantokratorkloster von Konstantinopel in der byzantinischen Dichtung', in Kotzabassi (ed.), *The Pantokrator Monastery*, 239–42; and A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein. Nebst Addenda zu den Bänden 1 und 2*, vol. 3 of *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung* (Vienna 2014) 668–73 (no. TR78), with the argument that the verses may have been composed by George Skylitzes (see also Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, 95–6). Meletios almost certainly copied the epigram from a manuscript rather than *in situ*. He seems to suggest that the poem had been inscribed on the *lithos* itself, but this is improbable. It is much more likely that the verses graced the *krepis* mentioned by Choniates.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

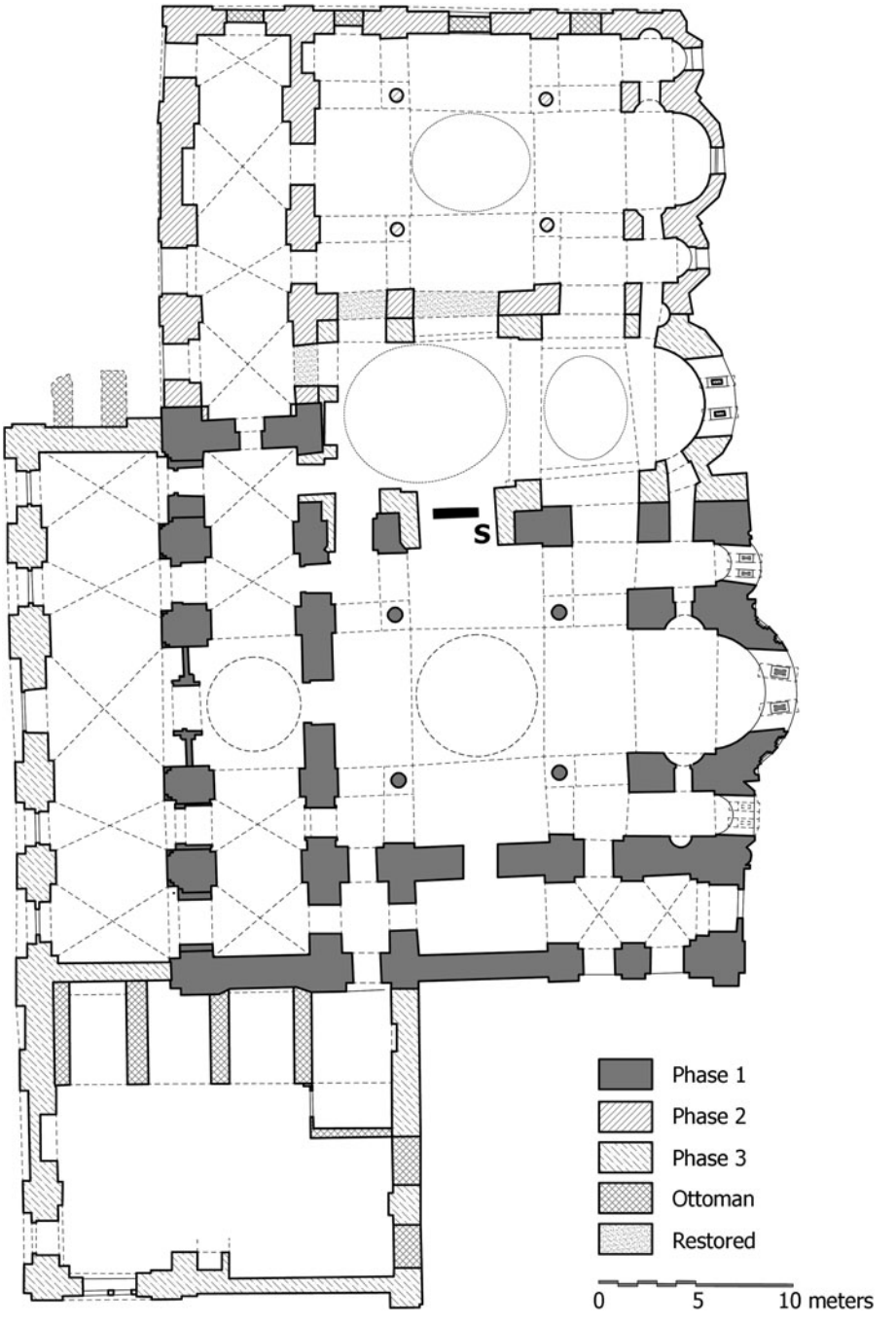

Fig. 2. Plan of the churches of the former monastery of Christ Pantokrator (Zeyrek Camii), Istanbul, with the location of the Stone of Unction (S) (drawing: Ljubinko Ranković, after R. Ousterhout, 'The Pantokrator monastery and architectural interchanges in the thirteenth century', in G. Ortalli, G. Ravegnani, and P. Schreiner [eds.], *Quarta crociata: Venezia – Bisanzio – Impero Latino*, 2 vols. [Venice 2006] II, fig. 3).

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The second translation of the relic may have been an act of considerable political significance for the empress.[25] Following Manuel's death, Maria was tonsured under the name of Xene. The empress-turned-nun continued to wield power as a regent to her underage son Alexios II. The status of her regency, however, was extremely unstable. As a foreigner, a Latin from the crusader state of Antioch, Maria was rather isolated, without a kinship network to support her regime. Besides, she met with a strong opposition headed by the princess Maria, Manuel's first-born daughter, and she also had to contend with the growing anti-Latin sentiments in the capital. The regency eventually collapsed when Manuel's cousin, the notorious Andronikos Komnenos, seized power in the spring of 1182. Soon afterward, Andronikos had first the empress and then her son strangled. In such precarious political circumstances, the transfer of the Stone of Unction to the Pantokrator and its placement next to Manuel's tomb may have been perceived as a symbolic gesture affirming Maria's faithfulness to the memory of her deceased husband and thus bolstering the legitimacy of her government. While this political reading of the relic's second translation is certainly plausible, even probable, I wish to shift the focus elsewhere and look at the *lithos* through the lens of personal piety. To understand the fate of this relic in late-twelfth-century Constantinople, we need to place it against the background of the devotional culture of the contemporary Byzantine aristocracy.

To begin with, the interest of Manuel I in the Stone of Unction should not be seen in isolation, but rather as part and parcel of what amounts to a veritable vogue for stone relics in Komnenian Byzantium.[26] This phenomenon is partly explained by the changes in the political map of the Eastern Mediterranean brought about by the Crusades. Ever since the transformation of Palestine into the Christian Holy Land in the fourth century, stones from places and structures associated with the individuals and events described in the Scriptures had been much prized sacred commodities.[27] Naturally, such rocky fragments of the *loca sancta* became more readily available in the aftermath of the crusader capture of Jerusalem in 1099 and the reopening of pilgrimage routes to the Holy Land.

Epigrammatic poetry is a good witness to the increasing interest in stone relics among members of the Byzantine élite. The celebrated anthology of epigrammatic verse preserved in the manuscript *Marcianus Graecus* 524 contains six epigrams on reliquaries with sacred stones, at least five of which were in the form of *enkolpia*. The

25 On Maria of Antioch, see K. Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 2 vols. (Thessalonike 1984) I, 459–60; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204* (London 1999) 201–09; B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium, 1025–1204: Power, Patronage and Ideology* (London 1999) 201–04.

26 The subject has already been addressed by Lerou, 'L'usage des reliques', 177–82.

27 On stones and rocks of the Holy Land and their place in pilgrims' experience and Christian piety more broadly, see P. B. Bagatti, 'Eulogie Palestinesi', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 15 (1949) *passim*; Y. Rachman-Schrire, 'Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae: Stones telling the story of Jerusalem', in Hoffmann and Wolf (eds.), *Jerusalem as Narrative Space / Erzählraum Jerusalem*, 353–66; and the studies collected in Bartal, Bodner, and Kühnel (eds.), *Natural Materials of the Holy Land*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

earliest among these is a mid-eleventh-century epigram on an *enkolpion* of the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, which contained fragments of the Stone of Unction and the sword of Saint George.[28] Built around a pun on the emperor's family name—Monomachos literally means 'the one who fights alone'—the poem presents the following appeal to Christ:

> Στέρνοις φέροντι τμῆμα, Χριστέ, τοῦ λίθου,
> ἐν ᾧ νεκρὸν σμύρνῃ σε σινδὼν συνδέει,
> καὶ μάρτυρός σου τῆς σπάθης Γεωργίου
> Κωνσταντίνῳ σῷ συμμάχει Μονομάχῳ.
>
> Fight along with him, O Christ, who carries on his chest a piece of the stone, upon which your dead body was wrapped in a linen cloth with myrrh, and <a piece> of the sword of your martyr George, with him, your Constantine Monomachos.

The other epigrams from the group date from the twelfth century. One was written on an *enkolpion* in the possession of the *megas domestikos* John Komnenos Batatzes, a nephew of Manuel I.[29] This pectoral pendant enshrined another piece of the Stone of Unction, a further indication that fragments of the great stone relic were in circulation.[30]

> Ὁ ζῶν θεϊκῶς καὶ θανὼν σαρκὸς νόμῳ
> λίθῳ τε κλιθεὶς βασιλικῶς ὡς λέων
> καὶ λιβανοσμύρνιστον εἰσδὺς σινδόνα
> φέροντα σεπτὸν τοῦδε τοῦ λίθου μέρος
> Ἰωάννην με Κομνηνόν, Σῶτερ, σκέποις
> ἅμα συνεύνῳ Δουκοβλάστῳ Μαρίᾳ.
>
> You who live as God, yet die according to the law of the flesh, who were laid upon a stone in a royal fashion, like a lion, and wrapped in a linen cloth scented with frankincense and myrrh, may you, O Saviour, protect me who

28 S. Lambros, 'Ο Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524', *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 8 (1911) no. 112; F. Spingou, *Poetry for the Komnenoi. The Anthologia Marciana: Syllogae B & C*, forthcoming, no. B168. My thanks to Foteini Spingou for allowing me to consult her unpublished edition of the anonymous epigrams from the *Marcianus*.

29 Lambros, 'Ο Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524', no. 328; Spingou, *Poetry for the Komnenoi*, no. C14. On John Komnenos Batatzes, see Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, II, no. 147.

30 In Oikonomake-Papadopoulou, Pitarakis, and Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Ἱερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου: Ἐγκόλπια*, 166–7 (no. 64), the Vatopedi *enkolpion* is tentatively assigned a post-1453 date on the assumption that this fragment of mottled reddish marble was chipped from the *lithos* after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. While the fate of the *lithos* in the wake of Byzantium's demise is unknown, the disruptions caused by this event, it is implied, may have facilitated the fragmentation of the relic. The *enkolpion*, in my view, is more likely to be placed in the late Byzantine era, a date that, I should add, would accord with the chronology suggested by the object's serrated mount. See Oikonomake-Papadopoulou et al., *Ἱερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου*, 166.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

carry a holy piece of this stone, John Komnenos, along with my wife Maria, an offshoot of the Doukai.

Two epigrams from the *Anthologia Marciana* accompanied *enkolpia* with pieces of stone from the Holy Sepulchre. One of these *enkolpia* belonged to John IX Merkouropoulos, titular patriarch of Jerusalem residing in Constantinople.[31] The verses on the patriarch's pectoral reliquary evoke the vision of the stone cut from a mountain without hands in Daniel 2:34–35, a common prefiguration of Christ's virginal birth.

Τμήμα τι, Σῶτερ, λατομητοῦ σου τάφου,
ὄρους ἀλατόμητε Παρθένου λίθε,
στήριγμα, δεσμὸς τῶν διεστώτων γίνου
τῷ πατριάρχῃ τῆς Σιὼν Ἰωάννῃ.

This is a piece of your rock-hewn tomb, O Saviour, you who are a stone unhewn from the mountain of the Virgin. Be a support, a bond joining those who have been separated,[32] for the patriarch of Zion [i.e., Jerusalem] John.

The second *enkolpion* with a stone fragment from the Holy Sepulchre recorded in the *Anthologia Marciana* belonged to a Russian prince by the name of Theodore.[33] The verses on this pectoral reliquary, too, playfully allude to the scriptural imagery of stone.

Τὸ τμῆμα λίθου τοῦ καλύψαντος τάφου
λίθον τὸν ἀκρόγωνον, ὃν βάσιν φέρει
Θεόδωρος Ῥὼς ἐκ φυλῆς βασιλέων.

This piece of stone is from the tomb that covered the corner stone [i.e., Christ; cf. Ephesians 2:20], which Theodore the Russian of royal stock carries as his foundation.

The *enkolpion* of one Michael Alousianos, sometimes identified with Michael Hagiotheodorites, a high official at the court of Manuel I, represented nothing less than a personal, portable replica of the Holy Land.[34] The *enkolpion* contained, in addition to pieces of the True Cross and the wood from the Garden of Gethsemane,

31 Lambros, 'Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524', no. 255; Spingou, *Poetry for the Komnenoi*, no. B88. On John IX Merkouropoulos, see F. Spingou, 'John IX Patriarch of Jerusalem in exile: A holy man from Mar Saba to St Diomedes/New Zion', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 109/1 (2016) 179–205, with further bibliography.

32 The phrase probably alludes to the patriarch's 'exile', his distance from Jerusalem, and his separation from his spiritual flock.

33 Lambros, 'Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524', no. 254; Spingou, *Poetry for the Komnenoi*, no. B87.

34 Lambros, 'Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524', no. 215; Spingou, *Poetry for the Komnenoi*, no. B52. The title attached to the epigram in the *Marcianus* begins by identifying the *enkolpion*'s owner as follows: Εἰς ἐγκόλπιον τοῦ Ἀλουσιάνου Μιχαὴλ τοῦ γραμματικοῦ τοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου τοῦ Ἁγιοθεοδωρίτου. Depending on how one punctuates this phrase, two readings are possible: 'On the *enkolpion* of Michael Alousianos, the *grammatikos* of the *epi tou kanikleiou* Hagiotheodorites' or 'On the *enkolpion* of the *grammatikos* and *epi tou kanikleiou* Michael Alousianos Hagiotheodorites'. For the question of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stone fragments from the Holy Sepulchre, the tomb of the Virgin, Mount of Olives, Golgotha, and Mount Sinai. The epigram on this precious objects inventories its contents as follows:

> Τόπου προσευχῆς ἐκφυὲν φέρω ξύλον
> σταυροῦ τε Χριστοῦ, καὶ τάφου μητρὸς Λόγου,
> ὄρους Ἐλαιῶν, Γολγοθᾶ, Σινᾶ λίθους.
>
> I carry the wood <from the tree> that grew at the place of prayer [i.e., Garden of Gethsemane] and <the wood> of the Cross of Christ, and stones from the tomb of the Mother of the *Logos*, Mount of Olives, Golgotha, and Sinai.

The final epigram from our group was dedicated to a piece of stone coming from the tomb of the Virgin.[35] Intriguingly, this piece featured a carved image of Mary. The poem opens by highlighting the theme of the Incarnation through reference to Daniel 2:34–35 and then proceeds to juxtapose the sculpted fragment with the whole to which it once belonged.

> Τὸ τμῆμα λίθου τοῦ καλύψαντος τάφου
> ὄρος νοητὸν οὗπερ ἐτμήθη λίθος,
> Χριστὸς νέᾳ χάριτι συνδήσας νόμον·
> ἣν δ᾽ οὐχ ὁ πᾶς ἴσχυσε φυλάξαι τάφος,
> γλύψασα χεὶρ σύνεσχεν ἐν τούτῳ κόρην.
>
> This piece of stone is from the tomb that covered the spiritual mountain [i.e., the Virgin], from which a stone had been cut, <namely> Christ who bound together the <old> law with a new grace. The Maiden, whom the entire tomb was unable to hold, is contained in this <piece of stone> by the carver's hand.

In contrast to the tomb itself, which failed to retain the Virgin's body—according to tradition, the Mother of God was bodily taken up into heaven after her death—the fragment of the tomb now contains her by means of the carved image. The title attached to the poem in the manuscript gives no information on the setting of the image-bearing stone relic, but in view of the poem's brevity, it is possible that the relic was enshrined in an *enkolpion*.

None of the objects recorded in the epigrams from the *Anthologia Marciana* has come down to us, but we do have contemporaneous Byzantine reliquaries designed to house sacred rocks. Perhaps the best known example is the reliquary that contained a large piece of stone from the Holy Sepulchre, formerly in the treasury of the

owner's identity, see E. Madariaga, *Η οικογένεια των Αγιοθεοδωριτών και τα σχετικά με αυτούς κείμενα*, Ph.D. thesis (University of Crete 2001) 40–3, 64–5, with references to the relevant bibliography.

35 Lambros, 'Ο Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524', no. 217 provides only the incipit. For the full text, see Spingou, *Poetry for the Komnenoi*, no. B54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and now in the Louvre.[36] Two plaques sheathed in gilded silver and adorned with repoussé reliefs of the Women at the Sepulchre and a *crux gemmata*, respectively, are the only remains of this object. The stylistic and paleographic features of the plaques indicate that the reliquary was made or refurbished in the twelfth century. Before its transfer to France in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade it was most likely kept in the Pharos church of the Great Palace.

The treasury of the Protaton on Mount Athos preserves another example, a precious-metal container with a collection of relics in its interior, including stones from the Holy Sepulchre, Golgotha, Bethlehem, and Gethsemane, each supplied with an identifying label on a sheet of silver.[37] The reliquary was thoroughly refashioned in the eighteenth century, but its sacred contents as well as its cover with a scene of the Crucifixion are medieval, likely datable to the early twelfth century. The verse inscription framing the Crucifixion commemorates two individuals:

> Τοὺς ζωοποιοὺς ἐκ τόπων σεβασμίων
> πίστει ζεούσῃ Ζωσιμᾶς πλουτεῖ λίθους·
> κοσμεῖ δὲ Νικόλαος τὴν θήκην πόθῳ.
>
> Zosimas is rich in the life-giving stones from the venerable places with ardent faith, and Nicholas adorns their container with desire.

Zosimas, who evidently acquired the sacred stones, perhaps while on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, is portrayed on the cover, kneeling at Mary's feet and addressing his prayer, inscribed above him, to Christ: Κύριε βοήθει Ζωσιμᾷ μοναχῷ ('Lord, help the monk Zosimas'). Zosimas' relationship with Nicholas, the second person mentioned in the verse inscription, is not clear, but the latter appears to have been a man of means, since he provided for the precious-metal adornment of the box.

A further example that may be added to this brief survey is the *staurotheke* from the Benedictine abbey of Mont-Saint-Quentin north of Péronne in Picardy, destroyed during the French Revolution but known through drawings and descriptions.[38] This elaborate reliquary, which can be dated to the eleventh or twelfth century, housed, apart from

36 J. Durand and M.-P. Laffitte (eds.), *Le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle* (Paris 2001) 73–7 (no. 20 [J. Durand]) with further bibliography.

37 A. A. Karakatsanes (ed.), *Θησαυροὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους* (Thessalonike 1997) 339–41 (no. 9.18 [K. Loverdou-Tsigarida]); B. Pitarakis, 'Byzantine works', in S. Papadopoulos and Ch. Kapiolidasi-Sotiropoulou (eds.), *The Treasury of the Protaton* (Mount Athos 2001) I, 48–55; G. Triantaphyllides et al., *Ἅγιον Ὄρος: Κειμήλια Πρωτάτου* (Thessalonike 2006) 119–20, 125 (no. 67 [B. Pitarakis]); A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst. Nebst Addenda zu Band 1 'Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken'*, vol. 2 of *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung* (Vienna 2010) 201–203 (no. Me34); B. Hostetler, 'Image, epigram, and nature in Middle Byzantine personal devotion', in Bartal, Bodner, and Kühnel (eds.), *Natural Materials of the Holy Land*, 172–79.

38 J. Durand, 'Le reliquaire byzantin du moine Timothée à l'abbaye du Mont-Saint-Quentin', in A. Erlande-Brandenburg and J.-M. Leniaud (eds.), *Études d'histoire de l'art offertes à Jacques Thirion des*

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

five pieces of the True Cross, several other relics associated with the Nativity and Passion of Christ. These included fragments of the swaddling clothes, the crib, the nails, and the crown of thorns, remains of Christ's blood, as well as stones from Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the inventory of the Xylourgou monastery on Mount Athos, drawn up in 1142, records an *enkolpion* with relics of the True Cross and an unspecified 'venerable stone' (λίθος τίμιος), presumably a piece of rock from the Holy Land.[39]

Manuel I's involvement with the Stone of Unction should be seen as the ultimate example of the fascination with stone relics in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium. Befitting his status and power, the emperor could afford to obtain not a small fragment, like the one mounted in the Vatopedi *enkolpion*, but the entire massive slab of marble upon which the body of the Lord had been laid. But the affinity between what may be termed the lithic piety of the Byzantines and the emperor's appropriation and handling of the Stone of Unction, I believe, runs deeper. As we have seen, the epigrammatic evidence indicates that, in the context of personal devotion, pieces of sacred stones were typically enshrined in pectoral reliquary pendants, some of which may have resembled the specimen in the Vatopedi monastery.[40] This kind of treatment was not fortuitous. Normally worn underneath the garments, close to the body, *enkolpia* were arguably the most personal and intimate of all devotional objects in Byzantium.[41] Protecting the wearer and providing a constant focus to his or her prayers, these small pendants were embraced, clasped in the hand, caressed, kissed, and intensely scrutinized. In the case of *enkolpia* with sacred stones, such haptic, even visceral engagement was uniquely appropriate, as

premiers temps chrétiens au XXe siècle (Paris 2001) 51–69; Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst,* 178–80 (nos. Me16–Me17), with further bibliography.

39 P. Lemerle, G. Dagron, and S. Ćirković (eds.), *Actes de Saint-Pantéléèmôn* (Paris 1982) 74.16–17.

40 Late Byzantine epigrammatic poetry offers further evidence for *enkolpia* with stone relics. See two epigrams by Maximos Planoudes in I. Taxidis, *Les Épigrammes de Maxime Planude* (Berlin 2017) 146–9 (nos. 25–6). A stone from the Holy Sepulchre recorded in a poem by Manuel Philes (*Manuelis Philae carmina ex codicibus Escurialensibus, Florentinis, Parisinis et Vaticanis*, ed. E. Miller, 2 vols. [Paris 1855–57] II, 202 [no. 188]) may have been kept in an *enkolpion*. For the presence of stones inside bronze reliquary crosses worn around the neck, see B. Pitarakis, *Les croix-reliquaires pectorales byzantines en bronze* (Paris 2006) 115–16, 125, 224 (no. 125), 271 (no. 272). Tellingly, Saint Sava of Serbia sent a stone, which he had found while on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, to the abbot Spyridon of Studenica with the instruction to carry it about himself (*pri sebe*): Gj. Daničić, 'Poslanica sv. Save arhiepiskopa srpskoga iz Jerusalima u Studenicu igumnu (*sic*) Spiridonu', *Starine Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 4 (1872) 231, with D. Popović, '*Eulogiae Terrae Sanctae* of St Sava of Serbia', *Balcanica* 45 (2014) 55–69.

41 On *enkolpia*, see H. Gerstinger, 'Enkolpion', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klauser et al. (Stuttgart 1950–) V, cols. 322–32; A. Kartsonis, 'Protection against all evil: function, use and operation of Byzantine historiated phylacteries', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 20 (1994) 73–102; Oikonomake-Papadopoulou, Pitarakis, and Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Ἱερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου: Ἐγκόλπια*; Pitarakis, *Les croix-reliquaires pectorales*; I. Drpić, 'The enkolpion: object, agency, self', *Gesta* 57/2 (2018) 197–224.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stone relics operated primarily through touch. Sanctified by means of direct, physical contact with the bodies of Christ, the Virgin, and other holy figures, they asked to be touched to release their sacred energy. Besides, because they were worn suspended around the neck, *enkolpia* could evoke, despite their small size, the notions of burden and weight. Stones—by nature heavy, hard, and solid—would make such association all the more apparent. Bits and fragments of rocks from the *loca sancta* carried on the chest may not have been literally heavy, but they would highlight the spiritual weight and metaphorical gravity of the suspended *enkolpion* with particular force.[42] Manuel's striking decision to carry the Stone of Unction on his own shoulders from the Boukoleon harbour to the church of the Pharos brings to the fore the same concerns with touch and weight. The emperor's physical proximity to the relic was compellingly dramatized in this spectacle of devotion and humility, as was the heavy burden of the sacred, which, in the case of the massive stone slab from Ephesos, was both literal and metaphorical.

Yet the drama of imperial piety that accompanied the first translation of the relic was envisioned primarily as a reenactment of Christ's burial. Indeed, Niketas Choniates explicitly states that Manuel carried the Stone of Unction ὡς ὁμόθεον σῶμα, 'as though it were the actual body of God'.[43] To be sure, the *lithos* was a 'secondary' relic, an object sanctified through contact with Christ's flesh and blood, but it could also function as an ersatz body, standing in for the now absent body of the Lord. The intimate link between this body and the stone slab was also emphasized in the liturgical office composed by George Skylitzes, where the Divine *Logos* is said to have been σύσσωμος, that is, 'in bodily contact' or, better put, 'bodily united' with the *lithos*.[44] This kind of union, if not conflation, was in part predicated upon the common notion of stone as a figure of Christ. Based upon the Scriptures—for instance, the well-known references to Christ as the cornerstone—this notion was a topos in Byzantine religious discourse.[45] But the visual appearance of the relic itself encouraged, too, its association with the body. The reddish colour of the *lithos* could readily bring to mind the sight of human flesh or the redness of blood, as though the stone slab had absorbed the blood of the Lord spilt upon it. As a matter of fact, Skylitzes in his *Akolouthia* states as much. He declares that the *lithos* was 'dyed by the stream of blood flowing from God' (ῥοῇ δὲ βαφεὶς τοῦ θεορρύτου αἵματος).[46]

At this juncture we should recall that the Middle Ages, like the ancient world, perceived stones rather differently from us. We tend to see rocks and mineral

42 On weight as an aesthetic and devotional category, albeit in a different context, see D. Y. Kim (ed.), *Matters of Weight: Force, Gravity, and Aesthetics in the Early Modern Period* (Emsdetten 2013).

43 Choniates, 222.80.

44 Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*', 134.247.

45 Psalm 117(118):22; Isaiah 28:16; Daniel 2:34; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6. See, e.g., G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford 1961) s.v. λίθος, B.2.

46 Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*', 131 (*Kontakion* 3–4). For the repeated references to Christ's blood in the *Akolouthia*, see ibid., 115–16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

formations as inert, unmoving, and intractable—the quintessential lifeless matter. By contrast, in the medieval understanding of the natural world, the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, between minerals, plants, and humans were surprisingly porous. In accordance with this understanding, stones—the precious varieties in particular—were perceived as quasi-organic entities, active, transformative things often endowed with distinct powers and agency. From the geological and mineralogical writings of Aristotle and Theophrastos to Michael Psellos' treatise *On the Properties of Stones*, from *ekphraseis* of marble-clad church interiors to epigrams on engraved gems, a range of texts bear witness to the currency of such views in Byzantium.[47] Far from being unyielding and intractable, the Stone of Unction was highly receptive, capable of transforming itself, in this instance, under the impact of bodily fluids. The blood of Christ coloured the stone, transforming it into a holy substance.

The susceptibility of the sacred *lithos* to transform, however, had another critical dimension. In his account of the relic, John Kinnamos relates that, upon Christ's death on the Cross, his mother 'laid him prone, as was customary, on this stone; falling down, she lamented deeply, as was reasonable, and the tears from her weeping reached the stone and still remain there, unexpunged (μυρομένης δὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῷ λίθῳ πελάζοντα ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἀναπόνιπτα μένουσι), something rather miraculous'.[48] Like the Vatopedi fragment, the *lithos* was evidently mottled, featuring white blotches and spots, which the Byzantines identified as Mary's miraculously preserved tears. Pilgrims' accounts repeatedly mention these white marks.[49] The Russian pilgrim Anthony of Novgorod, who saw the relic in 1200, likens them to drops of wax,[50]

47 Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 1.341b, 3.378a, 4.389a; D. E. Eichholz, *Theophrastus. De lapidibus* (Oxford 1965); J. M. Duffy and D. J. O'Meara, *Michaelis Pselli Philosophica minora,* 2 vols. (Leipzig 1989–92) I, 116–19 (no. 34). See, selectively, F. Barry, 'Walking on water: Cosmic floors in antiquity and the Middle Ages', *The Art Bulletin* 89/4 (2007) 627–56; E. Pietsch-Braounou, 'Manuel Philes und die übernatürliche Macht der Epigrammdichtung', in W. Hörandner and A. Rhoby (eds.), *Die kulturhistorische Bedeutung byzantinischer Epigramme* (Vienna 2008) 85–92; E. Avgoloupi, *Simbologia delle gemme imperiali bizantine nella tradizione simbolica mediterranea delle pietre preziose (secoli I–XV d.C.)* (Spoleto 2013); A. Bosselmann-Ruickbie, 'The symbolism of Byzantine gemstones: Written sources, objects and sympathetic magic in Byzantium', in A. Hilgner, S. Greiff, and D. Quast (eds.), *Gemstones in the First Millennium AD: Mines, Trade, Workshops and Symbolism* (Mainz 2017) 293–306. Cf. in addition K. Robertson, 'Exemplary rocks', in J. J. Cohen (ed.), *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects* (Washington, D. C. 2012) 91–121.

48 Kinnamos, 277.12–15; trans. Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus by John Kinnamos*, 207.

49 G. P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, D. C. 1984) 95, 153, 187, 292; I. Taxidis, 'The Monastery of Pantokrator in the narratives of Western travellers', in Kotzabassi (ed.), *The Pantokrator Monastery*, 99, 101–02. This interpretation of the white spots is surely behind the prominence accorded to the theme of the Virgin's tears in Skylitzes' *Akolouthia*. See Antonopoulou, 'George Skylitzes' *Office on the Translation of the Holy Stone*', 116.

50 K. M. Loparev, *Kniga Palomnik: Skazanie mest sviatykh vo Tsaregrade Antonia arkhiepiskopa Novgorodskago v 1200 godu = Pravoslavnyĭ palestinskĭ sbornik* 17/3 (1899) 24–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

while according to Clavijo, they appear as though they had been frozen.[51] Perhaps the most interesting is the statement of Rabban Sauma, a Nestorian monk from China who visited Constantinople in 1287. As he reports, 'Mary wept on that stone, and the place whereupon her tears fell is wet even at the present time; and however often this moisture is wiped away the place becometh wet again'.[52] Miraculously preserving the Virgin's tears, petrified yet liquid at the same time, the Stone of Unction was not only a Passion relic, but a Marian relic as well.

Depictions of the Lamentation best encapsulate the intimate link that the Byzantines established between the *lithos*, Christ, and Mary. As Ioannis Spatharakis has pointed out, following the transfer of the relic from Ephesos to Constantinople, the motif of the stone slab was gradually introduced into pictorial representations of the *Epitaphios Threnos*, or Burial Lament.[53] In an early-fourteenth-century fresco in the *katholikon* of the Vatopedi monastery, this new iconography finds a strikingly dramatic formulation (**fig. 3**).[54] Surrounded by a group of agitated mourners, the dead body of Christ is shown stretched half-naked on a large block of reddish stone with a pattern of curiously biomorphic and seemingly three-dimensional shapes highlighted in white. The compositional and emotional focus of the scene is the passionate embrace of the grief-stricken Mother of God, her face almost turned into a caricature, and her dead Son. The prominence accorded to the Stone of Unction in the Vatopedi fresco underscores the importance of this relic as a witness of and participant in the events of Christ's Passion. The variegated surface of the depicted stone block may not exactly resemble the fragment of the relic preserved in the same monastery, but its white streaks and highlights were undoubtedly meant to evoke traces left by Mary's tears. Quite remarkably, the odd organic forms of these markings also echo the muscles and sinews of Christ's recumbent body, thus allowing for a visual assimilation of the *lithos* into flesh.

The mutability and multivalence of the Stone of Unction rendered this relic not only a powerful carrier of presence and memory that afforded the worshipper a direct, physical contact with the protagonists of the sacred history, but also a potent site of mimetic identification. The relic accommodated and even called for an active, bodily reenactment of the drama of the Passion. Manuel's hoisting of the stone slab on his back, though by all means exceptional, exemplified this kind of self-dramatizing engagement.

51 López Estrada, *Ruy González de Clavijo*, 139. Clavijo, it should be noted, here speaks of the tears shed by the three Marys and Saint John the Evangelist.

52 M. Rossabi, *Voyager from Xanadu: Rabban Sauma and the First Journey from China to the West* (Tokyo 1992) 113.

53 I. Spatharakis, 'The influence of the Lithos in the development of the iconography of the Threnos', in D. Mouriki, C. F. Moss, and K. Kiefer (eds.), *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann* (Princeton 1995) 435–41.

54 E. N. Tsigaridas, 'The mosaics and the Byzantine wall-paintings', in *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi: Tradition, History, Art*, 2 vols. (Mount Athos 1998) I, 259–60, 269–71, figs. 223–4, 233.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Fig. 3. *Lamentation*, 1311/2, *katholikon* of the Vatopedi monastery, Mount Athos (photo: after E. N. Tsigaridas, 'The mosaics and the Byzantine wall-paintings', in *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi: Tradition, History, Art,* 2 vols. [Mount Athos 1998] I, fig. 224).

Mimetic identification is a leitmotif in the epigram once likely inscribed on the pedestal of the *lithos* at the Pantokrator monastery.[55] The poem, which in the transcription published in the *Geography* by Meletios of Athens runs to forty-four lines, but was originally longer, presents a generic mixture; best described as an epitaph, it also features elements of a dedicatory epigram. The highly personal outlook of the verses, enhanced by their emotional tenor, firmly anchored the stone relic within

55 On the epigram, see above note 24.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the private salvation program of the imperial burial ground and tied it directly to Manuel's tomb. The poem opens with an address to the reader:

Ὁρῶν τὰ καινὰ ταῦτα θαύμαζε, ξένε·
βουλὴν μαθητοῦ σχηματουργεῖ δεσπότης
ὥμοις βασιλεὺς Μανουὴλ λίθον φέρων,
ἐν ᾧ τὸ σῶμα συνταθὲν τοῦ Κυρίου
ἐσχηματίσθη πρὸς ταφὴν τῇ σινδόνῃ·
καὶ τοῦτον αἴρει, τὴν ταφὴν προμηνύων,
ὡς συνταφῇ θάνατον ἐσταυρωμένῳ
καὶ συναναστῇ τῷ ταφέντι Δεσπότῃ.

Admire these novel things as you see them, O stranger; our master, the emperor Manuel, reenacts the resolve of the Disciple [i.e., Joseph of Arimathea] as he bears on his shoulders the stone upon which the Lord's body was laid and prepared for burial in a winding sheet. He even lifts it up announcing in advance his own burial, that in death he may be buried together with the Crucified One and may arise together with our buried Lord.[56]

Commemorating Manuel's carrying of the relic to the church of the Pharos, the verses draw a parallel between the emperor and Joseph of Arimathea, the disciple who removed the dead body of Christ from the Cross. Manuel's feat is here explicitly presented as an act of deliberate identification with Joseph. The reference to the emperor's wish to be 'buried together with the Crucified One' suggests that the emperor himself may have arranged for the Stone of Unction to be removed from the palace and transferred to the Pantokrator.

The themes of identification and reenactment are further developed in the lines that introduce Manuel's widow, Maria of Antioch:

ἡ δ' αὖ βασιλὶς καὶ σύνευνος Μαρία,
τῇ δὲ στερήσει τοῦ φεραυγοῦς δεσπότου
αὐγοῦστα σεπτὴ βασιλὶς πάλιν Ξένη,
αὐτοκρατοῦντι σὺν Ἀλεξίῳ γόνῳ
ὡς μυροφόρος μύστις ἄλλη Μαρία
τὰ μύρα τοῖς δάκρυσι κιρνᾷ καὶ πάλιν,
οὐ τὸν λίθον ζητοῦσα τίς ἐκκυλίσει
ζωηφόρου μνήματος ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας,
ἀλλ' ὡς κυλίσῃ ζωτικὸν λίθον τάφῳ,
ἐν ᾧ τέθαπται σῶμα χριστοῦ Κυρίου,
τοῦ Μανουὴλ ἄνακτος, εἶτα Ματθαίου.

56 Trans. Mango, 'Notes on Byzantine Monuments', 373 slightly modified.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> The empress Maria, his wife, who, deprived of her resplendent master, is again our holy *augousta* and empress, <renamed> Xene, together with her son, the ruler Alexios, like that other Maria who secretly brought unguents, once again mixes unguents with her tears, not in seeking him who will roll the stone away from the door of the life-bringing tomb, but that she may roll that life-giving stone to the tomb wherein is buried the body of the Lord's anointed, the emperor Manuel, later <renamed> Matthew.[57]

Almost as a continuation of Manuel's imitation of Joseph of Arimathea, the bereft widow here appears in the guise of Mary Magdalene. Her rolling of the 'life-giving stone' to the tomb of her deceased husband is clearly an allusion to the transfer of the *lithos* to the Pantokrator.

The remainder of the poem praises Manuel's monastic vocation — shortly before his death, the emperor embraced the monk's habit under the name of Matthew — and elaborates at some length on Maria's heart-rending grief employing, quite appropriately, a rich imagery of stone. The epigram ends with an impassioned lament spoken in the voice of the widow.

ὦ καρδία, ῥάγηθι· δέξαι δεσπότην
σπλάγχνων ἐμῶν ἔσωθι τῶν πολυστόνων,
ὃν εἶχες ἐγκάρδιον, ὅνπερ ἐφίλεις·
οὗ νῦν θανέντος καὶ κρυβέντος ἐν λίθῳ
πέπηγα κἀγὼ τῷ πάθει καθὰ λίθος
καὶ συννεκροῦμαι τῷ τάφῳ καὶ τῷ λίθῳ,
ψυχῆς ῥαγείσης καὶ πνοῆς ἀποπτάσης·

> Break, my heart; receive my master within my much-sighing bosom—him whom you held very dear, whom you loved indeed. Since now he has died and has been hidden in stone, I too have turned into stone with sorrow and I am also dying because of <the sight of> the tomb and the stone, for my soul is broken and my breath has flown away.[58]

The mimetic identification on the part of the imperial couple is not limited, however, to the figures of Joseph of Arimathea and Mary Magdalene. More significant, if less explicit, is the parallelism that the verses draw between Manuel and Maria, on the one hand, and Christ and the Virgin, on the other. As Nancy Ševčenko has pointed out, the language of Maria's lament shows affinities with the verbal articulation of Mary's grief at the death of her Son, found in liturgical and homiletic texts.[59] Inscribed next to the *lithos*, Maria's mournful words would

57 Trans. Mango, 'Notes on Byzantine Monuments', 373 slightly modified.

58 Trans. Mango, 'Notes on Byzantine Monuments', 373 significantly modified.

59 Ševčenko, 'The service of the Virgin's Lament revisited', 259. See also A. Papalexandrou, 'Echoes of orality in the monumental inscriptions of Byzantium', in L. James (ed.), *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge 2007) 169.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have inevitably prompted the viewer to associate the empress with the Mother of God lamenting over the corpse of Christ laid upon this very stone. Similarly, the placement of the *lithos* in close proximity to the emperor's sarcophagus—a juxtaposition to which, as we have seen, the verses allude—made palpable the parallelism between Manuel and Christ. United in death and burial, the emperor and his Lord were also associated through the theme of anointment, aptly introduced in reference to the nature of the relic. As the χριστὸς Κυρίου, 'the Lord's anointed one', Manuel was laid next to the slab whereupon the body of Χριστός, Christ, had been anointed for burial.

The emperor's imitation of Christ was an important aspect of political ideology and imperial propaganda in Byzantium. In the public image that Manuel's encomiasts sought to project, the theme of *Christomimesis* received an unprecedentedly rich and daring elaboration.[60] Perhaps the most striking example is provided by an oration composed by Gregory Antiochos several months after Manuel's death, in which the emperor's toils and struggles against his many enemies are directly aligned with the Passion of Christ.[61] In the case of our epigram, however, *Christomimesis* was not so much a matter of ideology and propaganda as it was a function of the double status of the *lithos* in its new setting at the Pantokrator. In this context, the Stone of Unction figured as a substitute for the tomb of Christ, thus transforming the imperial mausoleum into a replica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, a proposition already explored by Robert Ousterhout.[62] But the relic also functioned as a kind of extension of Manuel's tomb. It is indicative that the inscribed verses place the grieving widow next to the Stone of Unction and not, as one would expect, at the side of the emperor's sarcophagus: 'the empress sheds tears like unguents and wears herself out before the stone' (ἡ γοῦν βασιλὶς δάκρυσιν ὥσπερ μύροις / ὅλην ἑαυτὴν ἐκκενοῖ πρὸς τὸν λίθον) (25–26). Cast in the image of the Mother of God, Maria is portrayed weeping and mourning the loss of her husband at the side of the stone relic.

This notion that the *lithos* and the emperor's tomb were not simply juxtaposed, but constituted a unified whole, brings me to my final point. I would argue that the status of the stone relic in its new setting at the Pantokrator monastery was to a certain extent comparable to that of a personal devotional object displayed at the burial place of its former owner. Tombs featuring religious items associated with the deceased seem to have been common in the Komnenian era, at least in the context of élite aristocratic burials. The tomb that Manuel's uncle, the *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos, planned to have installed at his foundation, the monastery of the Virgin *Kosmosoteira* near Bera

60 See Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos,* 413–88 *passim*. See also I. Kalavrezou, 'Imperial relations with the church in the art of the Komnenians', in N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Το Βυζάντιο κατά τον 12ο αιώνα: Κανονικό δίκαιο, κράτος και κοινωνία* (Athens 1991) 31–2.

61 W. Regel, *Fontes rerum byzantinarum: Rhetorum saeculi XII orationes politicae,* 2 vols. (St. Petersburg 1892–1917) II, 191–228, at 212–13, cited after Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos,* 487–8.

62 Ousterhout, 'Architecture, art and Komnenian ideology', 149–50; Ousterhout, 'Byzantine funerary architecture of the twelfth century', in *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: Rus i strany vizantĭskogo mira, XII vek* (St. Petersburg 2002) 9–12.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in Thrace, provides the best documented example. Isaac's *Typikon* for the monastery, dated to 1152, gives detailed instructions concerning the decorative apparatus of this monument, which was to be set up in the narthex of the monastery church.[63] Aside from the portraits of his imperial parents, Alexios I Komnenos and Irene Doukaina, two icons were to be displayed at Isaac's tomb, one of the Virgin *Kosmosoteira* and the other of Christ. The former icon was apparently an object to which the *sebastokrator* was particularly attached, for, as he states in the *Typikon*, this icon had been sent down to him from God (θεόθεν), and subsequently he had embellished it with a precious-metal revetment. In addition, rather than having his personal *enkolpion* buried together with him, as was the norm, Isaac arranged for it to be placed on the lid of his sarcophagus in a specially prepared silver setting. The devotional objects listed by the *sebastokrator* are, of course, vastly different from the Stone of Unction, but the association of this relic with Manuel's tomb followed the same logic. The display of the relic in conjunction with the emperor's final resting place was a function of its privatization. This is not to say that, once it was transferred to the Pantokrator, the stone slab lost its 'public' identity as a major Passion relic, brought to the imperial capital for the spiritual benefit of its populace. The placement of the relic at the Pantokrator is telling in this regard. As indicated above, the *lithos* was most likely installed under the vaulted passageway connecting the south, main church of the monastery and the oratory of the archangel Michael. This strategic location would have ensured that the relic was directly accessible from the *katholikon* and thus available for veneration by the monks and visitors alike, while at the same time remaining part of the more restricted space of the imperial mausoleum. Nonetheless, the very decision to expropriate the Stone of Unction from the collection of the Passion relics in the church of the Pharos and move it to the Pantokrator was justified by the notion that the stone slab, in a sense, belonged to the deceased emperor.

Studies of the imperial uses of relics have typically focused on political and ideological aspects of their cult — the role of relics as palladia of the Empire, symbols of power, guarantors of military victory, diplomatic gifts, or sureties for the repayment of loans.[64] The story of the Stone of Unction prompts us to reconsider the imperial

63 G. K. Papazoglou, *Τυπικόν Ἰσαακίου Ἀλεξίου Κομνηνοῦ τῆς Μονῆς Θεοτόκου τῆς Κοσμοσωτείρας (1151/52)* (Komotene 1994) 119–27, 145 (chaps. 89–90, 109). On the tomb of the *sebastokrator* Isaac, see also N. P. Ševčenko, 'The tomb of Isaak Komnenos at Pherrai', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29/2 (1984) 135–9; Ousterhout, 'Byzantine funerary architecture', 13–15; M. Parani, 'On the personal life of objects in medieval Byzantium', in A. Cutler and A. Papaconstantinou (eds.), *The Material and the Ideal: Essays in Medieval Art and Archaeology in Honour of Jean-Michel Spieser* (Leiden 2007) 170–4.

64 See, selectively, I. Kalavrezou, 'Helping hands for the empire: Imperial ceremonies and the cult of relics at the Byzantine court', in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, D. C. 1997) 53–79; L. James, 'Bearing gifts from the East: Imperial relic hunters abroad', in A. Eastmond (ed.), *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium* (Aldershot 2001) 119–31; S. Mergiali-Sahas, 'Byzantine emperors and holy relics: Use, and misuse, of sanctity and authority', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 51 (2001) 41–60; Lerou, 'L'usage des reliques'; Klein, 'Sacred relics and imperial ceremonies';

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

uses of relics from the point of view of personal piety.[65] What this article has attempted to highlight is the degree to which the manipulation of the 'God-receiving' stone slab under the late Komnenoi was informed by broader trends in the devotional culture of the twelfth-century aristocratic élite. Ultimately, the intimate association of the *lithos* with Manuel I should be seen as a particularly compelling manifestation of a larger phenomenon, much in evidence during the Komnenian era, namely, the increasing personalization and even privatization of the sacred. An intensely felt desire to pull the sacred into the personal sphere colours Komnenian piety. Its materializations are diverse and include such developments as the rise of privately orchestrated icon cults in aristocratic households, the popularity of dedicatory epigrams in the form of a personal prayer, or the proliferation of portraits of lesser mortals in the vicinity of holy figures. In twelfth-century Byzantium, across a variety of artistic genres and religious contexts, élite displays of devotion reflect a previously unparalleled urge to foreground and assert one's self.[66]

To state that Manuel's handling of the Stone of Unction simply reflected the dominant devotional style, however, would not be entirely accurate. Under the Komnenian emperors, the relationship between imperial and aristocratic expressions of piety was fundamentally a two-way relationship. For as much as Manuel's intimate rapport with the sacred *lithos* amounted to a self-conscious privatization of the venerable imperial tradition of relic veneration, it also elevated aristocratic practice to the imperial level. The same kind of mutual imbrication between the two domains informed the conception of the Pantokrator monastery as a dynastic monument. The religious house established by Manuel's parents, John II and Irene, was unmistakably aristocratic in character insofar as it was focused on the founders' family and conceived as a place of burial and commemoration. Yet, as Paul Magdalino has pointed out, the Pantokrator was also given an emphatically imperial dimension. In its sheer size and wealth, the multiplicity of functions it accommodated, and even its architecture, the Pantokrator echoed such quintessentially imperial monuments as the complexes of the Holy Apostles and Saint George of the Mangana, or the churches of the Great Palace.[67] Both the monastery and the stone relic it housed served to recast imperial piety in an aristocratic mold. They were mobilized to assert imperial power in terms that would have resonated particularly strongly among the uppermost echelon of Komnenian society, sending a clear message of the emperor's unique, superior status within this group.

S. Mergiali-Sahas, 'An ultimate wealth for inauspicious times: Holy relics in rescue of Manuel II Palaeologus' reign', *Byzantion* 76 (2006) 264–75.

65 Cf. D. F. Sullivan, 'Siege warfare, Nikephoros II Phokas, relics and personal piety', in D. Sullivan, E. Fisher, and S. Papaioannou (eds.), *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot* (Leiden 2012) 395–409.

66 Aspects of this phenomenon are explored in Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion*.

67 P. Magdalino, 'The foundation of the Pantokrator monastery in its urban setting', in Kotzabassi (ed.), *The Pantokrator Monastery*, 38–48.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2018.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press