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SIRMIUM OR THESSALONIKI?

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ST. DEMETRIUS LEGEND

M. VICKERS / OXFORD

The texts relating to St. Demetrius, the patron saint of Thessaloniki, have been frequently invoked in connection with the date of the foundation of the basilica at Thessaloniki which bears his name, but with inconclusive results. Thus G. de Bije associated the Leontius, prefect of Illyricum, mentioned in the *Passions* as founder of the basilica, with the prefect of 412/413.¹ In this he was followed by G. L. F. Tafel,² Ch. Texier,³ and Ch. Diehl⁴ amongst others, and in his earlier works at least, by G. Soteriou.⁵ O. Tafrali, too, accepted this identification, but he was careful to point out that if it should prove not to be correct, at least the foundation must have occurred before 441, for according to the *Passions*, Leontius returned to Sirmium after his church-building activities at Thessaloniki, and Sirmium was destroyed by Attila in c. 441.⁶ A. Grabar formerly accepted the 412 dating,⁷ and as recently as 1965 it was still being seriously proposed as the foundation date of the church.⁸

The researches of R. Kautzsch into late-Roman capitals in the thirties brought about a radical change in approach. He argued that none of the capitals of St. Demetrius could be earlier than 475 in date, and personally favoured a date of c. 500.⁹ His arguments seemed plausible at the time,

¹ Acta Sanctorum, Oct. 4 (Brussels, 1780) 68.

² G. L. F. Tafel, *De Thessalonica ejusque agro, dissertatio geographica* (Berlin, 1839) 116, n. 98.

³ Ch. Texier and R. P. Pullen, *Byzantine Architecture* (London, 1864) 123–30.

⁴ Ch. Diehl, M. le Tourneau and H. Saladin, *Les monuments chrétiens de Salonique* (Paris, 1918); Diehl, *Manuel d'art byzantin*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1925) 211.

⁵ G. Soteriou, 'Εκθεσις περὶ τῶν ἐργασιῶν τῶν ἐκτελεσθεισῶν ἐν τῇ ἡρειπωμένῃ ἐκ τῆς πυρκαϊᾶς βασιλικῇ τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 1917–1918, *Ἀρχ. Δελτ.* 4 (1918) Παράρτημα, 4; idem, *Χριστιανικὴ καὶ βυζαντινὴ ἀρχαιολογία* 1 (Athens, 1942) 295.

⁶ O. Tafrali, 'Sur la date de l'église et des mosaïques de Saint-Démétrius de Salonique', *Rev. Arch.* 4th series, 13 (1909) 1, 99–101; idem, *Topographie de Thessalonique* (Paris, 1913) 170–1; idem, *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'épigraphie byzantines* (Paris, 1913) 28–9.

⁷ A. Grabar, *Martyrium, recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique* 1 (Paris, 1946) 299, 351, 450.

⁸ By V. Popović, 'Sirmium, ville impériale', *Akten des 7. Internat. Kongresses f. Christl. Archäologie, Trier, 1965* (Vatican City/Berlin, 1969) 671. See now also N. Nikonanos, in E. Melas (ed.), *Alte Kirchen und Klöster Griechenlands* (Cologne, 1972) 66.

⁹ R. Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien, Beiträge zu einer Geschichte des spätantiken Kapitells im Osten vom 4. bis ins 7. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1936) 73–5.

and most scholars fell in with his views, including Soteriou who, in the publication of the basilica he wrote in collaboration with his wife, seems to have had a last-minute change of heart and, going most of the way with Kautzsch, decided on a date "in the middle or the second half of the fifth century". In doing so he did no little violence to the sources, which are regarded in the opening chapters of the Soterious' volume as though they were Holy Writ, but in the epilogue dealing with the chronology of the church are treated in an extremely cavalier manner. Since Sirmium had been displaced as the seat of the prefect in 442/3, it was clearly no longer possible for Leontius to return there after he had founded his church. The Soterious' solution is to claim that Sirmium was refounded after Attila's departure (which it was), and that the seat of the prefecture subsequently alternated between there and Thessaloniki (which it most certainly did not).¹⁰

More recently, there has been a trend towards making Kautzsch's dates earlier by several decades. W. E. Kleinbauer has argued from the style of the earliest mosaics for a date for St. Demetrius of 450-475,¹¹ and most recently M. Panayotides has resorted to the story of Leontius returning to Sirmium as a basis for her dating 'shortly before 441'.¹² But the most telling argument against Kautzsch's dating has been Professor Mango's demonstration that the Studios Basilica in Constantinople - practically the only closely dated monument of the period, or so it was thought - was completed in 453/4, and not in 463.¹³ This church was the keystone of Kautzsch's chronology; with the keystone dislodged, the whole structure inevitably tumbles down. Finally, the present writer has been able to show from brickstamps dated to a first (and possibly a second) indiction occurring in St. Demetrius, Acheiropoietos, a basilica underlying the present St. Sophia, the extensions to the Rotunda, the Byzantine palace, and the city walls, and an inscription on the latter referring to Hormisdas, prefect of Illyricum in 447/448, that all these buildings were erected shortly after the move of the prefect from Sirmium to Thessaloniki in 442/443, as part of a programme to make Thessaloniki a suitably prestigious seat of government.¹⁴ With a sure date for the foundation of the St.

¹⁰ G. and M. Soteriou, 'Η Βασιλική τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης (Athens, 1952) 246-7. Kautzsch's chronology is also accepted by inter alios R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, (Harmondsworth) 1965, 96-7, and R. S. Cormack, 'The mosaic decoration of S. Demetrius, Thessaloniki', *Annual Brit. School at Athens* 64 (1969) 42-3.

¹¹ W. E. Kleinbauer, 'Some observations on the dating of S. Demetrius in Thessaloniki', *Byzantion* 40 (1970) 44.

¹² M. Panayotides, 'Βυζαντινά κιονόκρανα με ἀνάγλυφα ζώα', *Δέλτιον τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἀρχαιολογικῆς ἐταιρείας*, 5th series, 6 (1972) 91.

¹³ Based on a re-reading of Anth. Pal. 1, 4. An article is forthcoming.

¹⁴ M. Vickers, 'Fifth century brickstamps from Thessaloniki', *Annual Brit. School at Athens* 68 (1973) 285-94. See too, the writer's 'The Late Roman walls of Thessalonica', *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yılığ* 15-16 (1969) 313-8; 'The date of the mosaics of the Rotunda at Thessaloniki', *Papers Brit. School at Rome* 35 (1970) 183-7; 'A note

Demetrius basilica, it ought now to be possible to make more sense of references to it in the texts of the Demetrianic corpus than hitherto.

The Miracula

The relevant texts differ somewhat in character. The *Miracula*, unlike other collections of miracles which usually recount favours granted to anonymous individuals, are an important source of contemporary information for the history of Thessaloniki. The *Passions*, on the other hand, are late and unreliable sources, and the later they are, the more unreliable they become.

The content and chronology of the *Miracula* have been discussed by P. Lemerle. He has shown that Book I (the only one of the three with which we shall be concerned) is the work of a single author, living at Thessaloniki and writing for natives of that city in the first half of the reign of Heraclius, around 610-620. Several manuscripts attribute the work to the archbishop John of Thessaloniki, the successor of Eusebius, from whom he received accounts of some of the events he describes; others he saw himself. An important point drawn by Lemerle from a detailed analysis of Book I is that Archbishop John appears not only not to know of the existence of the tomb of Demetrius, but even of the existence of any relics of the saint. Thus, in Chapter I, he mentions in sceptical terms the belief held in some quarters that a silver ciborium stood over the mortal remains of Demetrius. His use of the words *φασίν τινες* implies that the view was far from generally held in the early seventh century. In Chapter V we learn of two fruitless attempts made to locate the remains of the saint carried out at the request of the emperors Justinian and Maurice. (The first attempt was thwarted by flames suddenly belching forth from the ground and a voice telling the excavators to stop.) Eusebius stresses the spiritual nature of the laity's devotion to their martyrs, for he adds that "they do not even know where they are buried". In Chapter VI the same point is made as in Chapter I: the ciborium "is said" - *λέγεται* - to enclose the tomb of the martyr. Such doubts expressed by the archbishop of Thessaloniki in a work intended for his fellow-citizens, taken together with the elusive nature of the relics when searches were ordered, raise strong doubts as to whether the relics were ever in Thessaloniki at all.¹⁵

Before we approach the thorny problem of the origin of the cult of Demetrius, there is a further point arising from the *Miracula*, which, so far as the present writer is aware, has never been considered before. This concerns the identity and date of Marianus, the prefect of Illyricum who is miraculously cured inside the already completed basilica in Chapter I.

on the Byzantine palace at Thessaloniki', *Annual Brit. School at Athens* 66 (1971) 369-71.

¹⁵ P. Lemerle, 'La composition et la chronologie des deux premiers livres des *Miracula S. Demetrii*', *B. Z.* 46 (1953) 349-61; idem, 'Saint-Démétrius de Thessalonique et les problèmes du martyrium et du transept', *Bull. Corr. Hell.* 77 (1953) 660-94.

A likely candidate is the Marianus about whom the Suidas lexicon contains a notice at M 194. This Marianus was the son of Marsus; he was of Roman origin, but his father left Rome to live in Eleutheropolis in Palaestina Prima; he was ex-consul, ex-praetorian prefect and *patricius* in the time of Anastasius (ἀπὸ ὑπάτων καὶ ὑπάρχων καὶ πατρικίος γεγονώς, τὸ ἐπιφανέστερον, κατὰ τὸν βασιλέα Ἀναστάσιον); he presumably owed his inclusion in the Suidas lexicon to his literary endeavours: the translation from dactyls into iambs of many poetical works, including Theocritus, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, works by Callimachus and Aratus, and the *Theriaca* of Nicander.¹⁶ Mr. John Martindale has kindly made the following comments: "Marianus' consulship is not in the *Fasti* of *consules ordinarii* and should accordingly be regarded as an honorary consulship. The prefecture could have been titular (i. e. *vacans*) or honorary (*honorarius*), but in view of the reference in the *Miracula* to a Marianus at Thessalonica it is worth considering whether he may not have been PPO of Illyricum.¹⁷ There is plenty of room for him in the list of known prefects, particularly under Marcian, Leo, Zeno and Anastasius. The period suggested by the Suidas dating would preferably be in the last quarter of the century, under Zeno or Anastasius. This would fit in more happily with the honorary consulship, since the earliest one attested appears to be that conferred by Zeno on Adamantius in 479 (Malchus, fragment 18). The date under Anastasius may be when he indulged in the (somewhat barren) literary exercises to which he no doubt owed his inclusion in the Suidas lexicon, and these could fairly be placed after his administrative career (if any). Of course, one cannot omit the possibility that he was given his splendid titles as a reward for rewriting the classics, but on the assumption that he did hold an actual prefecture one can comfortably assign the prefecture to e. g. Zeno's reign and the literary activities to that of Anastasius."

There is, unfortunately, no indication in the *Miracula* of the date of Marianus' alleged cure, but in an account by Nicetas, archbishop of Thessaloniki, writing in the reign of Manuel I Comnenus (1148-1180),¹⁸ based no doubt on the *Miracula*, but possibly also relying on independent sources says that it took place οὐ πολλοῖς ὕστερον χρόνοις - "not long after" the construction of the basilica.¹⁹ As seen over the perspective of seven centuries, a prefecture in Zeno's reign (471-5 and 476-491) is certainly

¹⁶ Taken from the provisional entry at the time of writing in A. H. M. Jones, J. Morris, J. R. Martindale, the Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire ii (forthcoming).

¹⁷ Mr. Martindale observes that Leontius the praetorian prefect of Illyricum in 510 (Joh. Lyd. de mag., 3, 17; C. Just. 7, 39, 6, and cf. Marcell. com. s. a. 510 and C. Just. 1, 17, 2, 9) had exactly the same titles as Suidas' Marianus, only in Latin: 'praefectorius et consularis et patricius' - i. e. another honorary consul, but this man was certainly an actual prefect.

¹⁸ A. Sigalas, 'Νικηῖτα ἀρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης, εἰς τὰ θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου', Ἐπετ. Ἐτ. Βυζ. Σπουδ. 12 (1936) 334.

¹⁹ Loc. cit.

"not long after" the foundation of the church in 447/8, and its completion presumably some years later. If correct, this is a useful independent indication that Kautzsch's dates were a little too low.

The Passions

The *Passions*, as has already been indicated, are late sources. The Bollandist G. de Bije,²⁰ followed by H. Delehaye,²¹ divided them into three groups which represent the various stages of the legend of Demetrius. At each stage new details are added. The first stage is represented by a passage of the *Bibliotheca* of Photius (c. 856),²² a brief account by an anonymous writer,²³ and a Latin translation by Anastasius Bibliothecarius (written for Charles the Bald in 876).²⁴ Demetrius is merely a zealous Christian, whose position in society is not mentioned. He was executed by Galerius in a fit of pique caused by the death of his favourite gladiator Lyaeus; later, when miracles showed where the saint was buried, Leontius, prefect of Illyricum, built an oratory in his honour.

The second stage consists of the work of another anonymous writer who adds fresh details to satisfy the curiosity of the saint's devotees: Demetrius is now born of a senatorial family, served in the army with the status of *exceptor* and had reached the rank of proconsul of Hellas. The author adds a detail which will prove to be relevant later, namely, that Lyaeus the gladiator had killed many people at Sirmium before arriving at Thessaloniki. As in the first stage, Leontius is seen building a basilica at Thessaloniki in honour of the saint, but he takes some bloodstained garments which had belonged to the saint to Sirmium, where he builds another church to house them.²⁵ The third stage of the legend is an account by Simeon Metaphrastes containing even more information, often highly coloured and full of hagiographical *topoi*.²⁶

The clue to the elucidation of the texts lies in the identity of Leontius, prefect of Illyricum, who is mentioned in all the stages of the legend. The better to understand the situation, it will be necessary to examine those parts of the *Passions* in which he appears. It will soon become clear also how the story grows in the telling, and how the text progressively deteriorates. The earliest, and simplest version is that of Photius, who writes:

Λεόντιος δέ τις ἀνὴρ θεοφιλέστατος χρόνοις ὕστερον τῆς ἐπαρχότητος, ἢ διεῖπε τὸ Ἰλλυρικόν, τὸν θρόνον λαχών, περικαθάρας τὸ χωρίον ἐν ᾧ τὸ τοῦ

²⁰ A. S. Oct. 4, 50-209 (= P. G. 116, 1081-1426).

²¹ H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris, 1909) 103-9. A useful summary is to be found in R. Aubert 'Démétrius de Thessalonique', *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, 14 (1960) 1493-99.

²² P. G. 104, pp. 104-5.

²³ Edited by Delehaye, *op. cit.*, 259-63.

²⁴ A. S. Oct. 4, 87-9; P. G. 116, 1168-1172 (= P. L. 129, 715-7).

²⁵ A. S. Oct. 4, 90-95; P. G. 116, 1173-84.

²⁶ A. S. Oct. 4, 96-103; P. G. 116, 1185-1201.

μάρτυρος ἀπέκειτο λείψανον, καὶ εὐρύνας ἀνεγείρει τὸν περιώνυμον οἶκον τῷ μάρτυρι, κοινὸν ἱλαστήριον καὶ προσφύγιον οὐ τῇ Θεσσαλονικέων μόνῃ πόλει, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς πέρασιν.

A straightforward, simple account.

More detail is to be found in the account of the anonymous writer of stage one and in the Latin translation, but there is no substantial development in the plot:

... Λεόντιος ὁ θεοφιλέστατος ἀνὴρ, κατακοσμῶν τὸν τῆς ἐπαρχότητος κατὰ τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸν θρόνον, τὴν περιέχουσαν τὸ πανάγιον λείψανον οἰκίαν ἐπὶ μικροῦ πᾶν τοῦ σχήματος ὑπάρχουσαν καὶ φορυτοῖς περιεχωσμένην καὶ στενουμένην ὑπὸ τῶν περιβόλων τοῦ δημοσίου λουτροῦ καὶ τοῦ σταδίου περιελῶν καὶ περικαθάρως χωρίως τε εὐρυτέροις ἐμπλατύνας, ἀνήγειρε τὸν εὐκτῆριον οἶκον, τῇ Θεσσαλονικέων πόλει οἰκεῖον μάρτυρα καὶ πολίτην λαμπροτέρας τοῦ ναοῦ κατασκευαῖς εἰς ἐτοιμοτέραν εὐηκοίαν αὐτὸν ἐπαγόμενος.

And:

“... Leontius quidam Deo amabilis, vir adornans thronum Illyricorum praefecturae, domum, quae sanctissimum continebat martyris corpus, cum humillima esset, et undique obruta et coangusta a porticibus publici balnei ac stadii, universa nocentia mundavit et expurgavit, paedibusque ampliari-bus dilitavit eam, et erexit ibi oratorium in honore sancti martyris Demetrii.”

It is perhaps a significant point that there is no mention made of Thessaloniki at the end of the Latin translation, possibly implying that it was added to the Greek text after the translation was made, i. e., after 876. Otherwise the texts are very similar.

New developments occur in the anonymous text which represents the second stage:

... Λεόντιός τις ἀνὴρ τοὺς ἐπαρχικοὺς τῶν Ἰλλυριῶν κατακοσμῶν θρόνους, ἀπερχόμενος ἐν τῇ Δακῶν χώρα, νόσῳ ἀνιάτῳ ληφθεὶς, λεκτικῶ ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκειῶν ἐν τῇ Θεσσαλονικέων ἀπηνέχθη πόλει, καὶ ἀνεκλίθη ἐν τῷ σεβασμῶ σπηρῶ ἐνθα ἦν ὑπὸ γῆν κείμενον τοῦ ἀγίου τὸ λείψανον. He is cured and δὲ αὐτίκα κατὰ τὰς τῶν καμίνων καμάρας ἅμα καὶ τοῦ τῶν θερμῶν ὕδατων^{26a} οἴκου καθελῶν καὶ περικαθάρως μετὰ τῶν ἐκεῖσε ὄντων δημοσίων ἐμβόλων καὶ προπινῶν, ἀνήγειρε πάνσεπτον οἶκον τῷ μάρτυρι, δαψιλῆα κατακοσμήσας χρεειῶν μέσον τοῦ δημοσίου λουτροῦ καὶ σταδίου.

The author goes on to describe how before his departure for Illyricum, Leontius decided to take a relic back with him with a view to founding a church at Sirmium in Demetrius' honour, but was prevented from doing so

^{26a} A point that is not really relevant to the argument, but which nevertheless might be made here, is that C. Edson in 'Notes on the Thracian phoros', *Class. Philol.* 42 (1947) 101, n. 93, following Tafel, *op. cit.*, 12-13, claimed that these references to what is clearly the caldarium of the public baths were evidence for natural hot springs, and hence an explanation for the name of the archaic Greek city, Therme, the predecessor of Thessaloniki. This is clearly impossible.

by a nocturnal vision of the saint. Instead he took a bloodstained cloak and *orarium* which he put in a casket. Bad weather held him up at the crossing τοῦ Δανουβίου ποταμοῦ, and he was in despair when a further vision of the saint encouraged him to press on regardless. He arrived safely at Sirmium and proceeded to build his church near that of St. Anastasia, πλησίον τοῦ σεβασμίου οἴκου τῆς καλλινίκου μάρτυρος Ἀναστασίας.

The first point that calls for comment is the introduction of Dacians into the narrative. A scribe clearly misunderstood τὸν θρόνον λαχῶν, reading ΔΑΚΩΝ for ΛΑΧΩΝ, and rationalised his mistake. Secondly, gratuitous detail has been added to the description of the surroundings of the site of the church. But the most important development is the reference to a journey to Sirmium to found a church there. This element had been absent from the earlier accounts and makes its first appearance here. Then the miraculous intervention of the saint recalls the similar supernatural event which had dissuaded the relic-hunters sent by Justinian from persisting with their search, and sounds suspiciously like an attempt to explain the lack of mortal remains. Finally, the author's geography is at fault, for it is not necessary to cross the Danube on a journey from Thessaloniki to Sirmium, which lies on the Save.

The most verbose account is that of Symeon Metaphrastes who compiled his martyrology between 961 and 964. Leontius is introduced rather as before:

... Λεόντιός τις ἀνὴρ τὴν τε δόξαν λαμπρὸς, τὴν τε πρὸς Χριστὸν πίστιν μάλα θερμὸς τοὺς μὲν ἐπαρχικοὺς τότε τῶν Ἰλλυρικῶν κατακοσμῶν θρόνους, εἰς δὲ τὴν Δακῶν ἀπὼν νόσῳ βαρυτάτῃ κάτοχος γίνεται . . .

but his symptoms and cure are described in greater detail. Otherwise, the plot is the same. He wants to take relics back to Sirmium (τινὰ τῶν μερῶν τοῦ ἱεροῦ σώματος λαβεῖν βουληθεὶς) for a church, but is again prevented from doing so by the saint. He takes clothing instead, has an even more exciting and supernaturally eventful crossing of the Danube (τοῦ Ἰστρου, this time) and builds his church at Sirmium, next to that of Anastasia.

The Origins of the Cult of St. Demetrius

Before approaching the question of the identity of Leontius, it will be necessary to consider what is known about the origins of the cult of St. Demetrius.²⁷ Nineteenth-century rationalists tried to argue that it was directly derived from some pagan cult. H. Usener connected Demetrius with Dionysus, on the somewhat tenuous grounds that the St. Demetrius fair which took place between October 20th and 28th occurred at the same time of year as the Ionian feast of Apaturia.²⁸ H. Gelzer thought that the titles and rôle accorded to Demetrius were such that they smacked of the

²⁷ R. Aubert, *op. cit.* (n. 21, above) has proved a useful source of references.

²⁸ H. Usener, 'Göttliche Synonyme', *Rhein. Mus.* 53 (1898) 370-2.

earlier, pagan religion.²⁹ E. Lucius was the first to suggest a direct relationship between Demetrius and the god Cabirus, a warlike divinity who was normally represented, as was Demetrius later on, dressed in a *chlamys*, and whose cult was extremely widespread in Macedonia, Thessaly and Greece.³⁰ A less far-reaching connection between the cult of Cabirus and that of Demetrius was proposed independently by C. Edson, who thought it "very possible that the cult of Cabirus contributed elements to the characteristic form which the worship of Saint Demetrius assumed in the later Christian city".³¹ This is a reasonable view, but the extreme rationalist explanations must be dismissed since they rest on analogies which are frequently superficial, and in particular do not take account of the fact that Demetrius does not seem to have been honoured originally as a military saint.³²

A much more serious challenge to the traditional story arose from an observation of Lucius to the effect that the way the legends were slanted made one almost suspect that the Thessalonian church was founded from Sirmium, rather than the other way about.³³ H. Delehaye took this suggestion up and adduced very strong arguments in its favour.³⁴ He remarked that the references in the texts to the fact that Demetrius' remains were abandoned until the intervention of the prefect Leontius, as well as the position of his tomb in the middle of the city among secular buildings "donnent je ne sais quel aspect anormal à la gloire posthume de S. Démétrius: ce n'est pas ainsi que les églises particulières avaient coutume de rendre à leurs martyrs propres les honneurs publics". An even more telling fact is that early martyrologies do not know of a Demetrius of Thessaloniki, whereas they do mention, on April 9th, a Demetrius at Sirmium. The Syriac martyrology simply says, at that date: ἐν Σιρμίῳ Δημήτριος,³⁵ and the three principal manuscripts of the Hieronymian Martyrology agree on the reading: *in Sirmia Demetri diaconi*.³⁶ The Syriac text was written in 411,³⁷ even earlier than the earliest date that

has been attributed to Leontius' basilica (412/13), and points to a Demetrius having been honoured at Sirmium before the arrival of the relics of which the legends speak. In view of all this, Delehaye suggested that what might well have happened was that the cult of Demetrius of Sirmium first became popular; then, through the generosity of the prefect of Illyricum, Thessaloniki was granted a relic of the saint and a basilica was built there in his honour, but that it soon eclipsed the first sanctuary dedicated to the martyr in his native town. Many scholars have accepted Delehaye's arguments, including Ch. Diehl,³⁸ J. Zeiller³⁹ and R. Egger.⁴⁰ Zeiller added the point that the move of the prefect from Sirmium to Thessaloniki perhaps aided the movement of the cult.⁴¹ This will be taken up again later. For the moment it is sufficient to observe that any serious attempt to explain the Demetrianic texts must take into account the likelihood that the cult of Demetrius moved from Sirmium to Thessaloniki rather than *vice versa*.

The Status of Sirmium

Another relevant point is the status of Sirmium in the fifth century. This has recently been discussed in the light of the somewhat limited knowledge available to us by M. F. Hendy.⁴² His succinct observations are quoted here: "It seems that the prefecture of Illyricum (i. e. the dioceses of Dacia and Macedonia) was allotted to Honorius in 395, but that very soon after (probably in 396) it was transferred to Arcadius, and that – despite the machinations of Stilicho – it never reverted to the west.⁴³ The seat of the prefect remains unknown. Justinian⁴⁴ and Theodoret⁴⁵ both mention that he resided at Thessalonica – after having been forced to move there: *Attilanis temporibus . . . de Sirmiana civitate*, according to the former. 'These *Attilana tempora* are now generally dated to 441/2.⁴⁶ But how long had Pannonia Secunda, in which Sirmium stood, been part of the (eastern) Illyrian prefecture? J. B. Bury suggested that the province was ceded to the east as late as 437, on the occasion of Valentinian's marriage to Licinia

²⁹ H. Gelzer, 'Die Genesis der byzantinischen Themenverfassung', *Abh. phil.-hist. Classe der Kgl. sächs. Ges. d. Wiss.* 18/5 (1899) 53–64: 'Es ist in der That sehr merkwürdig, noch im X. Jahrhundert alten Hellenenglauben vollkommen lebenskräftig in leichter christlicher Verhüllung bei einer griechischen Polisgemeinde vorzufinden' (p. 64).

³⁰ E. Lucius, *Die Anfänge des Heiligenkults* (Tübingen, 1904) 214–228. Cf. V. Popović, *op. cit.* (see n. 8 above), 672, who still accepts the Cabirus theory.

³¹ C. Edson, 'Cults of Thessalonica', *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948) 188–204.

³² See H. Delehaye, 'Les recueils antiques de miracles des saints', *Anal. Bolland.* 62 (1925) 63–4, and B. Kötting, *Peregrinatio religiosa, Wallfahrten in der Antike und Pilgerwesen in der Alten Kirche* (Münster, 1950) 223–5.

³³ Lucius, *op. cit.*, 227, n. 3.

³⁴ H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris, 1909) 103–9; *idem*, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, 2nd edn (Brussels, 1933) 228–9.

³⁵ A. S. Nov. 2, p. [LV].

³⁶ A. S. Nov. 2, 41.

³⁷ Popović, *op. cit.* (n. 8, above) 671.

³⁸ Ch. Diehl, M. le Tourneau and H. Saladin, *op. cit.*, (n. 4, above) 61.

³⁹ J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes dans les provinces danubiennes de l'empire romain* (Paris, 1918) 82–3.

⁴⁰ R. Egger, *Die Christianisierung der pannonischen Provinzen, Südostforschungen* 22 (1963) 11.

⁴¹ Zeiller, *op. cit.* 83, n. 3: 'le transfert administratif a peut-être favorisé dans une certaine mesure le transfert de la tradition hagiographique'.

⁴² M. F. Hendy, 'Aspects of coin production and fiscal administration in the late Roman and early Byzantine period', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th series, 12 (1972) 136, n. 1.

⁴³ See E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain 395–410* (Paris, 1951) 119–374.

⁴⁴ Nov. xi (535).

⁴⁵ *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 17.

⁴⁶ E. g. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602*, i (Oxford, 1964) 193; iii, 37 (n. 48).

Eudoxia.⁴⁷ It is therefore probably significant that it is listed in Hierocles' *Synecdemus* – which is an eastern document and, according to Jones,⁴⁸ basically dateable to the reign of Theodosius II. J. R. Palanque supposed that, before 437, the prefect of Illyricum had resided at either Naissus or Serdica, both in the diocese of Dacia.⁴⁹ Certainly it is clear that the *Notitia* regards the whole of the diocese of Illyricum (i. e. the former Pannonia), including Sirmium, as part of the (western) prefecture of Italy,⁵⁰ and it also seems clear that, in omitting an entry for a *vicarius Daciae* and his *officium*, the *Notitia* implies that the prefect was then resident in that diocese.⁵¹ Sirmium was itself, at any rate, still regarded as eastern in 505, when Theodoric occupied it: recaptured from the Gepids in 567, it was finally lost to the Avars in 582.⁵²

The Identity of Leontius

There now remains the problem of identifying the prefect Leontius. The solution that has usually been adopted has been to identify him with the Leontius who is on record as prefect of Illyricum in 412 and 413,⁵³ but about whom we otherwise know very little. This man, though, could not have been the Leontius of the *Passions*, for several reasons.

The first is that the basilica of 447/8 at Thessaloniki was the first ecclesiastical structure to have been built on the site. The contention of G. and M. Soteriou that a small sanctuary, or martyrion, preceded the basilica on the same site, and was destroyed at the time of its construction has been adequately disposed of by P. Lemerle. Their argument was based on the discovery of an apsidal structure within which was found a small cruciform depression, approached by narrow steps, and which housed a small flask containing some brownish powder. This, they maintained, had been the centre of devotion when the martyrion had existed. They explained the absence of any substantial remains by claiming that when the basilica was built the saint's body had been removed to the silver ciborium in the nave. In support of their archaeological arguments for their earlier building, they adduced the *οικία, σεβάσμιος σηκός*, or the *μικρός οίκισκος* which is said to have preceded the basilica in some of the texts.⁵⁴ Lemerle, however,

⁴⁷ J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian (395–565)* I (London, 1923) 225–6, n. 5. [Mr. Martindale points out, however, that the date when Sirmium was transferred to the East could be as early as c. 425, the *betrothal* of Valentinian III and Licinia Eudoxia having been arranged in 424 (Marcellinus comes, *Chronicon* ad a. 424.)

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, iii, 381.

⁴⁹ J. R. Palanque, *Essai sur la préfecture du prétoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris, 1933) 123 ('à Naissus'), Errata, facing p. 144 ('au lieu de: Naissus; lire Sardique').

⁵⁰ *Occ.* 9, 18; 11, 47; 32, 49, 50, 54.

⁵¹ E. g. Jones, *op. cit.*, iii 79, n. 18.

⁵² References *ibid.*, 44, n. 20, 57, n. 3, 58, n. 11.

⁵³ See notes 1–8, above.

⁵⁴ *Ἡ Βασιλική*, 35–63.

has successfully demonstrated that the 'apse' was merely part of a retaining wall of a nymphaeum-like structure belonging to the Roman baths which underlie the basilica, and which were partially razed to accommodate it. In any case the cruciform depression was situated too close to the walls of the apse for comfort, which suggests that they never really did belong together. It makes much more sense if it is interpreted as the *ἐγκαίνιον* of the later basilica, for it is in precisely the correct position directly beneath the altar, and its contents are more likely to be a scrap of a bloodstained garment than the mortal remains of the saint. The explanation proposed by the Soterious to explain the absence of the body – that it had been removed to the ciborium – does not stand up in the face of the evidence from Book I of the *Miracula*: the doubt expressed by Archbishop John as to the presence of the saint's relics, and the difficulties encountered when attempts were made to locate them.⁵⁵ It will be seen below, however (p. 349), that there is perhaps a grain of truth in the references to an *οίκισκος*; Lemerle is too hasty in dismissing them as mere hagiographical fantasies.

The second reason why this Leontius will not do is that in 412/13 Sirmium and Thessaloniki were in different parts of the empire. Leontius could not have gone to Sirmium and built a church there since he would have been trespassing in another prefecture.⁵⁶ Nor could it happen at this stage that the cult was brought by official means from Sirmium to Thessaloniki. Clearly, this Leontius is an impossible candidate, and another Leontius is called for; one who held the right sort of rank to qualify for the prefecture of Illyricum, and who was available after 437^{56a} which was when, as we have seen, Pannonia Secunda was probably added to the east, and Sirmium and Thessaloniki were brought together in the same prefecture.

This other Leontius is probably to be found in the person of that name who was city prefect of Constantinople in 434 and 435.⁵⁷ (It *was* possible for a city prefect subsequently to become praetorian prefect of Illyricum: Flavius Anthemius Isidorus, city prefect in 410–12,⁵⁸ became praetorian prefect of Illyricum in 424,⁵⁹ on his way to becoming the praetorian prefect of the East in 435–6⁶⁰). The only information we have about Leontius is that while city prefect he was involved in an abortive attempt to restore

⁵⁵ *Bull. Corr. Hell.* 77 (1953) 669–71.

⁵⁶ J. Zeiller, *op. cit.*, (n. 39, above) 83, n. 3, was aware of this difficulty, but chose to overlook it.

^{56a} Or else 425 (see n. 47 above).

⁵⁷ *C. Th.* 14, 16.3 (November 434); *C. Th.* 6, 28.8 (January 435); *C. Th.* 16, 5.66 (August 435).

⁵⁸ *C. Th.* 8, 17.2, *C. Th.* 8, 17.3, *C. Just.* 1, 19.6, *C. Just.* 8, 57.2 *C. Just.* 8, 58.1 (September 410); *C. Th.* 15, 1.50 (November 412). Again, Mr. Martindale's advice has proved invaluable.

⁵⁹ *C. Th.* 15, 5.4 (May 424); *C. Th.* 11, 1.33 (October 424).

⁶⁰ The earliest reference is *C. Th.* 6, 28.8 (February, 435) and the latest *C. Th.* 12, 1.192 (August, 436).

the Olympic games formerly held at Chalcedon, but was deterred from doing so by the opposition of Hypatius and the monks.⁶¹ He is not on this account to be thought of as a pagan, and consequently an unsuitable basilica-builder, for even Eulalius the bishop of Chalcedon, on being asked by Hypatius to protest, told the latter to mind his own business. Indeed, Leontius' reaction on hearing that a deputation of monks was on its way – he feigned a diplomatic illness – points to a Christian's guilty conscience rather than to unyielding paganism.

If this is to be the Leontius of the texts, and there is no other eligible Leontius in sight, then he must have been praetorian prefect of Illyricum at some time between August 435 and 441,⁶² when Sirmium fell to the Huns. If the texts are literally true, then he had to build the basilica of St. Demetrius at Thessaloniki during this time. There is, though, a strong archaeological argument against this having been the case. Many of the bricks of the fifth century basilica bear stamps which can be dated to a first (and possibly a second)⁶³ indiction, but 435 fell in a fourth indiction, and 441 in a tenth. Another possibility must therefore be considered: that he built a basilica at *Sirmium* which was, after all, his seat and is also known to have had a local cult of St. Demetrius. It was not unusual for a praetorian prefect to spend money on a church: an inscription from Narbonne dated 445, records the restoration of the damaged cathedral of the city by the bishop Rusticus and others, including Marcellus, the praetorian prefect of Gaul, who contributed the greater part of the cost of the restoration (2, 100 solidi) derived from the proceeds of his two years' administration of the prefecture.⁶⁴ It is possible that Marcellus was contributing towards the adornment of what was quite possibly his native town, but there is nevertheless at least one obvious parallel: the church at Sirmium was probably also built out of public funds; so much is clear from Leontius' deep involvement in the scheme.

But how to explain the move to Thessaloniki? We know that Sirmium was evacuated in c. 441/2 and that Thessaloniki then became the seat of

⁶¹ Vita Hypatii, 107–9. Cf. A. H. M. Jones, *Later Roman Empire* ii, 978.

⁶² Probably between Eubulus and Thalassius. Eubulus was praetorian prefect of Illyricum on April 3rd, 436 (C. Th. 8, 4.30 and 12, 1.187–8); Thalassius held the post in 439 on August 11th (Theod. II, Nov. 13) and September 7th (C. Just. 2, 7.7). For the year 439 cf. also Sozomen 7, 48.4 (information from Mr. Martindale).

A praetorian prefect of Illyricum named Leontius is mentioned in a laudatory epigram from Gortyna (Inscriptiones Creticae iv., 325). L. Robert identified him with the prefect of 412/13 (Hellenica iv, 14–15), but he could equally well be Leontius (2).

⁶³ G. and M. Soteriou, 'H Βασιλική, 235: 'Συχνότερον ὑπάρχει ἢ συντετηρημένη λέξις ΕΝΤ συνοδευομένη ἐνίοτε ὑπὸ ἐνὸς τῶν γραμμῶν Α ἢ Β, ἥτις σημαίνει προφανῶς 'Ἰνδικτιῶν (Indictio).'

Cf. M. Vickers, 'Fifth century brickstamps from Thessaloniki', *Annual Brit. School at Athens* 68 (1973) 285–94.

⁶⁴ CIL 12, 5336. Cf. J. F. Matthews, 'Gallic supporters of Theodosius', *Latomus* 30 (1971) 1087; H. I. Marrou, 'Le dossier épigraphique de l'évêque Rusticus de Narbonne', *Riv. Arch. crist.* 46 (1970) 331–49 (good photographs figs 2–4, 335–7). Professor Alan Cameron reminds me of Cyrus' church-building activities at Constantinople in

the prefect. It seems highly probable, as Zeiller has already hinted, that this was also the occasion for the transfer of the cult.⁶⁵ The picture we derive from the legends of Leontius' enthusiastic adherence to St. Demetrius is perhaps a reflection of the special place his cult had achieved in the prefect's court at Sirmium. The proximity of the basilica at Thessaloniki to the prefect's palace reinforces this impression.⁶⁶ What would be more natural, then, than to bring a relic down to the new seat? The flask containing the brownish powder found in the *ἐγκαίνιον* is probably the relic in question. But why was the body itself not brought down to Thessaloniki? Could it be that the original relics were destroyed during the sack of Sirmium by Attila in 441, and that the powder was the only part to have survived? This does seem to be the most likely explanation: the inhabitants of Sirmium would hardly have evacuated the relics, for they would have regarded their presence as a defence against the foe, and, in any case, they could hardly have foreseen that the invasion would have had such disastrous results. But if this was the case, it is perhaps a little surprising that not so very long afterwards – in c. 460 – the relics of St. Anastasia (whose church was next to that of St. Demetrius) were transferred from Sirmium to Constantinople.⁶⁷ They had presumably survived the sack. An interesting feature of this translation is the fact that the dates given for her feast day in the Hieronymian Martyrology differ from her feast day at Constantinople. The latter is probably the feast of the translation, and such an explanation might well account for the difference in date between the feast of St. Demetrius at Sirmium (April 9th) and that at Thessaloniki (October 26th). Indeed, the latter date would correspond well with a retreat from Sirmium; the prefect would have been anxious to reach a safe refuge before the onset of winter, and October 26th would be just the right time to arrive. Having arrived, though, what happened to the relic? Could this be where the *οὐλίσιος* came in? Was it perhaps a temporary structure erected on the proposed site for the new basilica? There must have been some method of housing it while the plans for the building programme of 447/8 were being prepared, and while the necessary finance was being raised.⁶⁸ Thus, with Sirmium desolate, it was

(441), which were conducted at a time when he was both city prefect and praetorian prefect of the East, and which were presumably paid for out of public funds (R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin I, Constantinople byzantine 3, Les églises et les monastères* 201).

⁶⁵ Zeiller, *op. cit.* (n. 39, above) 83, n. 3.

⁶⁶ See M. Vickers, 'A note on the Byzantine palace at Thessaloniki', *Annual Brit. School at Athens* 66 (1971) 369–71.

⁶⁷ For full references to the Passion of, and hagiographical problems relating to St. Anastasia see M. V. Brandi, 'Anastasia di Sirmio', *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* I (Rome, 1967) 1046. Cf. Zeiller, *op. cit.* (n. 39, above) 84–5.

⁶⁸ A near parallel for this is the occasion in 391 when the head of John the Baptist, which had somehow been discovered 'in the possession of a Macedonian woman in Cyzicus', was temporarily housed in a church at Chalcedon while the church of St

natural that the cult of Demetrius should have become centred on Thessaloniki, and this would explain how in later centuries it came to be thought that the Leontius story concerned the latter city. Finally, there is the problem of the references in the texts, especially the later ones, to well-known land-marks of contemporary Thessaloniki, such as the baths and the stadium.⁶⁹ This, however, is not an insuperable difficulty for, as Lemerle has already observed, the existence of the baths and the proximity of the stadium could well have contributed towards creating the form of the legend.⁷⁰

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John the Baptist at the Hebdomon in Constantinople was being built (R. Janin, *op. cit.*, 426-7). (Information from Dr Matthews.)

⁶⁹ The 'Stadium' was probably in fact the Odeion recently found in Plateia Dikasteriou. See S. Pelekanides, 'Τὸ θέατρον τὸ καλούμενον στάδιον τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης', *ΚΕΡΝΟΣ*, τιμητικὴ προσφορά στὸν καθηγητὴ Γεώργιο Μπακαλάκη (Thessaloniki, 1972) 122-133, pl. 39. The present writer's attempt to locate it immediately to the south-east of St. Demetrius is now less plausible: M. Vickers, 'The Stadium at Thessaloniki', *Byzantion* 41 (1971) 339-48, pl. 1.

⁷⁰ Lemerle, *Bull. Corr. Hell.* 77 (1953) 672.

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