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Reconstructing the Image of an Empress in Middle Byzantine Constantinople: Gender in Byzantium, Psellos' Empress Zoe and the Chapel of Christ Antiphonites*

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Abstract

In Byzantium the choice of a specific site for imperial patronage represented a means for the emperor and empress to make visible their own conceptions of rulership and the religious values that they wished to promote. However, in the case of female ruler, the issue is more complex, raising issues of gender with regard to the significance and the visibility itself of a woman's 'matronage'.¹ From this perspective, this paper analyses the case of the chapel dedicated to Christ Antiphonetes which the empress Zoe (AD 1028 – ca. 1050), belonging to the last generation of the Macedonian dynasty, chose as her personal burial place. This study considers and discusses the most important sources which allow us to understand the significance of these expressions of imperial display and the meanings they convey.

This paper addresses, in brief, an aspect of the public image of the empress Zoe (AD 1028 – ca. 1050), the last representative, together with her younger sister Theodora, of the Macedonian dynasty. In this analysis a series of aspects concerning the meaning of Zoe's portrait are taken into consideration. Along with the images, metaphors and language used to build this image, provided by the eleventh century historian Michael

* A recent contribution by Titos Papamastorakis, 'The Empress Zoe's Tomb', in H AYTOKRATOPIA ΣΕ ΚΡΙΣΗ (;). ΤΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟ ΤΟΝ 11ο ΑΙΩΝΑ (1025-1081) (Athens, 2003), 497-511 uses and quotes the great majority of sources with which I deal in the present paper. However, while his principal aim is to demonstrate through textual evidence that Zoe did not rebuild but simply embellished the chapel of the Antiphonites, my intentions are quite different. I am most interested in putting the empress Zoe's persona and patronage in the broader context of contemporary culture and imperial ideology. I will also underline the subtle play with gender and manipulation of which characterises Psellos' portrait of this empress.

¹ Term introduced by L. Brubaker in her discussion about the Augusta Helena's building activity and a subsequent, plausible imitation of her as a model of devotion expressed through and empowered by building endeavours promoted by fifth and sixth century women of imperial rank. L. Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns of Imperial Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', in L. James, ed., *Women, Men and Eunuchs. Gender in Byzantium* (New York and London, 1997), 52-75, esp. 52-53.

Psellos in his major work *Chronographia*,² a comparison between Zoe's literary image and her public standing as imperial patron and woman is addressed within the broader context of Middle Byzantine imperial ideology.

An anonymous eleventh-century poem attributes to Zoe the commission of a precious marble floor at the chapel of the Antiphonetes (which means 'Guarantor').³ It therefore shows that the heiress of the Empire, already at the time of her first marriage with the eparch of Constantinople, Romanos Argyros (AD 1028-1034) patronised the embellishment of the chapel that the empress later chose as her burial place. The chapel belonged to the church complex of the Theotokos in-the-Chalkoprateia, one of the most important churches in the imperial capital, situated in the area of the copper market.⁴

The symbolic value of Zoe's act of patronage as an expression of female imperial self-representation has not received much comment, although imperial patronage always represented in Byzantium a crucial means to make visible a ruler's conception of authority and the religious values they intended to promote.⁵ This is possibly due to the fact that material traces of the chapel are virtually non-existent and that references

² For some considerations on modes and aims of Psellos' historical writing, see R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C. N. Constantinides et alii, eds., *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝ. Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice, 1996), 213-215; most recently, see the collected essays in C. Barber and D. Jenkins, eds., *Reading Michael Psellos*, Leiden and London, 2006. Discussion on Psellos' Zoe is found in A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia* (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 1999), 95-97, 108-112.

³ Text and translation in Papamastorakis 'The Empress Zoe's Tomb', 503 and for discussion, 509-510. Papamastorakis, I think reasonably, corrects P. Magdalino, 'Constantinopolitana', in I. Ševčenko and I. Hutter, eds., *Aetos. Studies in honour of Cyril Mango* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998), 220-232, who thinks Zoe commissioned a thorough reconstruction of this chapel. See also note 5 below.

⁴ See esp. Magdalino, 'Constantinopolitana', 220-232. and also P. Magdalino, *Constantinople médiévale*, 33-34, 67, where Zoe's chapel of the Antiphonetes is referred to as a refurbishment of a previous building. In the former contribution he discusses Zoe's intervention as a thoroughly new foundation, an hypothesis which Papamastorakis convincingly reconsiders. Nonetheless, Magdalino, 'Constantinopolitana' provides an interesting focus upon the origin and original context of the holy icon of Christ Antiphonetes; it also discusses more extensively topographical issues.

⁵ See, for instance, some important contributions on Middle Byzantine imperial portraiture, its visual as well as conceptual language, the patterns of communication it conveys and their relation to contemporary panegyrics: A. Eastmond, 'Between Icon and Idol: The uncertainty of imperial images'; in A. Eastmond and L. James, eds., *Icon and Word. The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies Presented to Robin Cormack* (Aldershot, 2003), 73-85; I. Kalavrezou, 'Imperial relations with the Church in the art of the Komnenians', in N. Oikonomides, ed., *TO BYZANTIO KATA TON 12o AIQNA* (Athens, 1991), 25-36; R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold. Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (London, 1985), 180-194; H. Maguire, 'Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art', *Gesta*, 28/2 (1989), 217-231, at 228-229; reprinted in *Idem, Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art* (Aldershot, 1998): essay XII.

to it disappeared from the written record a century after the empress was buried there.⁶ Nonetheless, a closer study shows that this intervention is a compounded and noteworthy topic. The chapel of Christ Antiphonetes embodied an empress' performance of public array, and as such brought to the fore issues of gender and imperial ideology. These aspects, Zoe's commission and her mosaic panel in Hagia Sophia, all contribute to revealing the complex and polysemous character of the empress' image, while showing the interplay of sources in creating the image of Zoe herself.

In what follows, three main points are taken into consideration: (1) the image of the empress Zoe as transmitted by our major source about her – Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* – and issues regarding gender in the definition of female imperial image;⁷ (2) the significance of the site chosen by Zoe for her resting place; and as a conclusion, (3) a brief discussion on the value of such intervention in the broader context of contemporary imperial patronage.

I. Gender in Byzantium and Psellos' Zoe

After the death of her father Constantine VIII in AD 1028, Zoe theoretically held the right to the throne as a member of the Macedonian family and unmarried heiress of

⁶ There still exist, however, some legible traces of the basilica in-the-Chalkoprateia. See R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. I, Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique. Tome III: Les églises et les monastères*. 2nd edition (Paris, 1969), 246-251, *ODB*, I, 407-408 (entry 'Chalkoprateia') and T. F. Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul. A Photographic Survey* (University Park and London, 1976), 319-321, both with earlier bibliography; also *ODB*, I, 439-440 (entry 'Christ Antiphonetes'). The apse and portions of the south and north walls of the church are still preserved: see below.

⁷ In these last few years gender in Byzantium, and even more in the medieval West, has become an important field of reflection for scholars, and the bibliography is now extensive. To the titles listed in note 8, one can add – among the others – J. W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91, 1053-1075; Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena'; Eadem, 'The Age of Justinian: Gender and Society', in M. Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), 427-447; J. Herrin, 'The imperial Feminine in Byzantium', *Past and Present*, 169 (2000), 3-35, with a remarkable range of discussion about the institutional place of the empress and the political significance of being the mother of the heir to the throne. On languages and modes of representation of Byzantine empresses, see L. James, 'Goddess, whore, wife or slave? Will the real Byzantine empress please stand up', in A. J. Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 1997), 125-139 and Eadem, *Empresses and Power in Middle Byzantium* (London and New York, 2001), 1-4 and A. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York, 2002), esp. chaps 5 and 6. More specifically concerned with Middle Byzantine imperial women is D. C. Smythe, 'Behind the Mask: Empresses and Empire in Middle Byzantium', in A. J. Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship*, 141-152.

the deceased ruler.⁸ However, although she embodied the source of legitimacy in a truly exceptional circumstance, she was not supposed effectively to exercise rulership. Instead, she acted as a pathway to the throne for her three husbands and her adoptive son, while the ‘rhythm of imperial renewal’⁹ that her long-lasting presence at court ensured, appears to have been thoroughly divorced from the exercise of power. As recently pointed out by J. Smith, ‘gender is in essence about power relationships and the language which legitimates or denies their existence. A gendered approach insists upon attention to hierarchies of power’;¹⁰ accordingly, female imperial portrayals may illuminate ideological and gender-specific views which informed textual representations and simultaneously uncovered cultural biases and distortions expressed from the standpoint of male power.

The assumption that women were inferior by nature, for instance, made the idea of a woman invested with imperial power itself a kernel of inner contradiction.¹¹ This paradox found expression in imperial ideology as well as in textual representations, historiography in particular being a primary means to express male cultural conceptions and expectations.

From this perspective, Psellos’ portrayal of the empress Zoe in his historical work *Chronographia* (ca. AD 1060s) constitutes an important case study. The rhetorical allusion to a ‘legitimacy of continuity’¹² constitutes a crucial leitmotif which traverses many passages in the *Chronographia* devoted to the Macedonian dynasty. From this standpoint, Zoe’s image is conceived of as twofold; on the one hand, there is emphasis on the empress belonging to the Macedonian dynasty and the constant

⁸ On the problematic concept of ‘dynastic succession’ in the ideology of Byzantine rulership, see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003), 21-24, 32-40.

⁹ I quote here the phrase from B. Hill, L. James, and D. C. Smythe, ‘Zoe: The Rhythm Method of Imperial Renewal’, in P. Magdalino, ed., *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 215-229. It is worth noting that this contribution, while analysing and commenting on the miniatures from the Madrid Skylitzes portraying Zoe’s marriages, an especially that of Constantine IX, which shows Zoe already crowned and wearing purple shoes (f 221v), implicitly addresses the contradiction between the visual rendering of Zoe’s imperialness and her actual trivial function in real politics.

¹⁰ J. M. H. Smith, ‘Introduction: Gendering the early medieval world’, in L. Brubaker and J. M. H. Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World. East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge, 2004), at 7; also 17-19.

¹¹ From this perspective the image of Eve, the first woman and the first sinner, was of great importance. Not by chance, the antagonist image of the Virgin Mary as a ‘second Eve’ as road to salvation had been a deep-rooted theme in Christianity.

¹² I borrow this expression from Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 36ff.

recollection of her ancestors that this relation implies; on the other hand, a gender-specific portrayal, which repeatedly brings to the fore Zoe's unsuitability for imperial government and behaviour that may be defined as highly capricious at best.¹³ As far as the first aspect is concerned, Psellos appears to be much concerned, with regard to an heiress apparent, to distinguish between the imperial 'dignity' or 'patrimony' (κλήρος), which exclusively pertains to descendants of imperial dynasts,¹⁴ and the more practical handling of the imperial government ('the helm of power'),¹⁵ which reflected the sanctioned status of rulership as an indisputably male prerogative.¹⁶

Psellos does not seem, however, very preoccupied with Zoe's legitimacy *per se*. His priority seems rather to formulate an implicit praise – chronologically elongated through dynastic continuity – of Basil II, whose greatness is projected on and enhanced by the persistence of his family on the imperial throne up to the fifth generation (Zoe's).¹⁷ Psellos significantly makes Zoe evoke how Basil would allegedly swaddle his infant niece in purple garments, recognising her as 'porphyrogenneta'¹⁸ and addressing her as 'tiny living sparkle of our lineage', while many people at court would notice their respective resemblance.¹⁹ Yet, such rhetorical posture is elsewhere replaced by a sarcastic attitude towards the empress. In a variety of passages in the text, the empress' mood is unpredictable in the guise of sea waves; at times, such an attitude might have degenerated into pure cruelty, had not a male authority promptly intervened; some of her devotional practices, though sincere, could

¹³ See discussion below.

¹⁴ Psellos ingeniously puts the idea that 'according to patrimonial right, the imperial power belongs to the empress (Zoe)' (Chron. IV 22, 13) in the mouth of the eunuch John the Orphanotrophos, influential official who aimed at replacing the Macedonians with his own family by convincing Zoe to adopt his nephew Michael. For a discussion on imperial succession and dynastic continuity in Byzantium, see Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 21-24, 32-40.

¹⁵ Psellos, Chron., II. 1, 5: *τῆς ἡγεμονίας τοῦ οἴακας*.

¹⁶ The ninth-century collection of laws Basilika still echoes Justinian's ideal of the emperor as *lex animata*. For discussion on the range of use and significance attached to the imperial title of *Augusta*, see E. Bensammar, 'La titulature de l'impératrice et sa signification', *Byzantion* 66 (1976), 272ff.; also see James *Empresses and Power*, 119-125 (with regard to the early Byzantine epoch). For some considerations on the limits of female imperial power and further recent bibliography, J. L. Nelson, 'Basilissai: Power and its Limits', *Basilissa* 1 (2004), 124-135.

¹⁷ Reference to the five-generation long dynasty as unquestionable source of legitimacy: *ἐκ γὰρ πενταγονίας ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτῆ κλήρος κατήγετο*: Psellos, Chron. V.22, 6-7, in the dramatic moment in which Zoe's adoptive son, Michael V, sends her to exile in the island of Prinkipos.

¹⁸ See ODB, III, 1701 (entry 'Porphyrogennetos') and especially G. Dagron, 'Nés dans la pourpre', *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), 115-119, 129-135.

¹⁹ Psellos, Chron., V. 22, 10ff.

have ambiguously appeared pagan.²⁰ Accordingly, a key connotation for her is a blatant tendency towards excess, which finds possibly its most damaging expression in Zoe's money-wasting on exotic incenses and perfumes imported from India and Egypt.²¹ The splendour of her dynastic ancestry is sternly contrasted with her complete ineptitude for rulership and her extravagant attitudes. Zoe is essentially depicted as unsuited to imperial government, mainly due to the fact that both Basil II and her father had not properly educated the young woman as presumptive imperial heiress.²² For the greater part of her life, especially in her later years, she totally disregarded imperial affairs and never left her apartments (the *gynaikonitis*),²³ at a time when she seems to have lost her mental firmness.²⁴ Throughout his narrative, however, Psellos seems to look at female quarters in the palace not simply as a place, but rather as a symbolic *topos* of gendered rhetoric. In other words, the *gounaikonitis* constituted the metaphorical limit wherein Zoe was, if not allowed, at least excused for expressing all her extravagances and for not being able to conceal her ineptitude for ruling. On a variety of occasions, Zoe is relegated to the *gounaikonitis* by her husbands,²⁵ but otherwise, when she leaves her apartments, Psellos portrays her losing the appropriate countenance of an empress.²⁶

Significantly, we gain no information from Psellos about what the empress might do *outside* her quarters. He describes her precious tomb (τύμβος) – a coffin embellished probably with a ciborium-like structure with silver-gilded columns²⁷ – but does not locate it. I believe this silence, as much as lack of mention about any kind of patronage associated with Zoe, is significant and consistent with Psellos' viewpoint on the Macedonian heiress. Psellos, as we have seen, secures Zoe within her imperial apartments, as she appears totally freed, due to choice or circumstance, from the dignified display of any imperial attitude. Building patronage, as a prominent posture

²⁰ See, respectively, Psellos, Chron., IV. 17, 3-4; VI. 157, 9-16; Ibid., 20-25; and VI. 62, 64, and 67.

²¹ Ibid., 64, 6-12 and 159, 7-9.

²² Chron., II. 5 and 9.

²³ Chron., IV. 1, 5-6 and VI. 159, 1-3.

²⁴ Chron., VI. 157, 1-4.

²⁵ Chron., IV. 16, 4-11 (Michael IV) and the attempted coup of Zoe's adoptive son Michael V, V. 21-22.

²⁶ Chron. IV. 53, 9-10: by leaving the palace to visit her husband Michael IV, who has just left the throne for the monastic life, Zoe literally 'dares take a male attitude, betrays her own nature, and walks to him' (*κατατολμᾷ μὲν πάσης ἀρρενος ὄψεως, τὴν δὲ φύσιν παραβιάζεται καὶ πεζῇ πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀπεισιν*).

²⁷ Chron., VI. 183, 4-7.

among expressions of (male) imperial display, plays no role in her portrayal while, on the contrary, although a constant source of criticism, is a crucial feature in the biographies of the men who shared the throne with her. Nonetheless, as it will be seen in the following pages, the shrine Zoe chose as her resting place was an important place.

II. The Chapel of Christ Antiphonetes

Only Anna Komnena (mid-twelfth century) and the author so-called ‘Theodore Skoutariotes’ (thirteenth century) inform us that the empress Zoe was buried at the chapel of Christ Antiphonetes, although the latter’s statement that the empress founded the chapel has probably to be rejected.²⁸

Zoe's deep devotion towards an image of Christ Antiphonetes, described in detail by Psellos, draws a significant correlation between the palace and the city beyond the palace precincts. Psellos devotes a chapter in Book VI to the special, and apparently not totally orthodox,²⁹ devotion the empress demonstrated towards an icon portraying Christ ‘Guarantor’, which ‘she had made herself, with great accuracy, and [...] by means of its colours [the image] displayed what had been asked and its incarnate foreshadowed the future’.³⁰ This icon reproduced a miraculous image, to which a homily dedicated to ‘the icon of the Lord at the Chalkoprateia...called Antiphonetes’ attributed the conversion of the Hebrew merchant Abraham and his household at the

²⁸ For Anna Komnena’s reference, see discussion below. ‘Skoutariotes’ in Sathas, ed., *Μεσαυτοική βιβλιοθήκη*, VII, 163, states that *‘Επί τούτου θνήσκει ἡ βασίλισσα Ζωὴ καὶ θάπτεται λίαν φιλοτίμως καὶ βασιλικῶς ἐν τῷ παρ’ αὐτοῦ (ἡρ. αὐτῆ) ἀνεγερθέντι ναῶ τοῦ Ἀντιφωνητοῦ’*. A number of reasons seem to justify this refutation. The eleventh-century poem to which I have referred above mentions only Zoe’s commission for a new floor for that chapel. Secondly, the memory of the miraculous icon of Christ Antiphonetes is older than the eleventh century, and refers already to a shrine which housed the sacred image. Secondly, the Book of the Ceremonies refers to an unnamed chapel wherein the emperor prayed and made offers on the day of the Theotokos’ Annunciation, located on the left-hand side of the Chalkoprateia’s *sancta sanctorum*. It is with all probability the chapel of the Antiphonetes. The third chapel which belonged to the complex of the Theotokos-in-the-Chalkoprateia, the chapel of the apostle James, was probably found next to the basilica’s narthex, and so seems incompatible with the movements inside the church as described in the Book of Ceremonies, PG, 112, § xxx, col. 405B. For the chapel of St. James and the octagonal structure which stood underneath it, see C. Mango, ‘Notes on Byzantine Monuments’, DOP 23 (1969-70), 369-372. See discussion below.

²⁹ Psellos, *Chron.*, VI 66-67 and 159.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, VI 66, 1-5. (*‘[Ἰησοῦν] διαμορφώσασα ἀκριβέστερον, ...[τὸ εἰκόνημα] ἐπεσημαίνετο γὰρ τοῖς χρώμασι τὰ αἰτούμενα καὶ ἐδήλον τὰ μέλλοντα ἢ χροιά’*). The passage, although not very clear in the technical qualities of the artefact and its changing colours, nonetheless reveals Zoe’s pictorial skills.

time of emperor Herakleios (ca. AD 630s).³¹ The conversion was celebrated with a huge donation of silver to the Chalkoprateia by Abraham's guarantor, Theodore.³² Since then, the story had remained vivid in the city's popular memory, since the so-called *Anonymous Mercati*, a Latin translation of a Byzantine guide-book dated to the first half of the twelfth century, reports the story in detail. References both to our chapel and to its icon are found.

“Exactly in the vicinity of Hagia Sophia, one finds the church of Mary Mother of God, which is called Chalkoprateia. In the same complex, thus, there are three churches: one dedicated to the Virgin, one to Christ, and the other one to St. James, Jesus' brother. [...] In the church of Christ an image is kept over the altar and through that very image a great miracle was performed at the time of the emperor Herakleios [...]. Theodore donated all his wealth to the poor and gave out his silver to both Hagia Sophia and the church of Christ, which is called *Antiphonetes*, that is to say 'Guarantor'. And with that silver they decorated Hagia Sophia, the church of our Lord, and that of St. Mary.”³³

The account reflects and emphasises the importance of the complex at the Chalkoprateia, which served in the story as the topographical reference point to locate the miraculous image of Christ, which might have been located at the end of the Mese (Constantinople's major thoroughfare), near Hagia Sophia, as assumed by C. Mango, at a 'doomed tetrastyle'.³⁴ Be that as it may, the association with the Theotokos-in-

³¹ The homily was published in Combefis' *Historia haeresis Monothelitarum* (Paris, 1648), 12-648, and is quoted in Magdalino, 'Constantinopolitana', 220, n. 4. Also see *Ibid.*, 227 for some reflection about a possible relationship between the cult of this icon at the time of Zoe and Constantine IX policy about the Jews.

³² Magdalino, 'Constantinopolitana', 220-222.

³³ The translation is mine. Text in Ciggaar, 'Une description de Constantinople traduite par un pèlerin anglais', *REB* 34 (1976), 250 and 255: 'Iuxta autem Sanctam Sophiam est ecclesiae sanctae Mariae Dei Genitricis quae vocatur Calcopracia. In ipsa ergo ecclesia sunt ecclesiae tres: una Christi sanctae Mariae et alia sancti Iacobi fratris Domini [...]. In ecclesia autem Salvatoris est imago eius supra in altare commissa et in ipsa immagine Christi factum magnum miraculum in tempore Eracli imperatore [...]. Theodorus autem omnem substanciam suam dedit pauperibus et argentum totum dedit in Sanctam Sophiam et in ecclesiam Salvatoris quae vocatur Antiphontis, hoc est fideiussor. Et ex illo argento ornaverunt templum Sanctae Sophiae et templum Sancti Salvatoris et Sanctae Mariae'.

³⁴ C. Mango, *The Brazen House. A Study on the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959), 144-146, and also Magdalino, 'Constantinopolitana', 224. It is interesting to observe that a seventh century hagiographic source called the *Miracles of the Saints Cyrus and John* bases in Alexandria a healing miracle performed by an image of Christ which was to be found at the 'Great Tetrastylon' (Mango, *The Art*, 136): perhaps an early tradition used to associate such miraculous images with monumental urban features of passage and dwelling. Mango's identification of the place

the-Chalkoprateia appears to be old. At a certain point the sacred image must have been incorporated within its complex of chapels. This church was an important monument in Constantinople; if the empress Zoe, though sincerely moved by her personal devotion to the Antiphonetes, had decided to embellish the chapel and make it her own resting place, she surely did not fail to consider the prestige deriving from the association of her own patronage with this site.

The shrine dedicated to the Virgin, apparently a former synagogue,³⁵ was most probably founded in the fifth century, possibly by the empress Verina (AD 457-484);³⁶ the church was connected to the Mese by means of a colonnaded street, perpendicular to the former and ending with a portico.³⁷ This street might have connected the Mese directly to the narthex of the Chalkoprateia, as the *Book of Ceremonies* suggests.³⁸ The emperor Zeno (AD 476-491) later had it embellished with a wooden vaulted roof and mosaics and enlarged it with annexes on both sides of its

of the Antiphonetes with the Milion is still valid: the so called ‘Chalkun (bronze) Tetrasyon’, which signalled the entrance to the Forum Tauri, is really too distant from the area considered. Furthermore, the concentrations of silversmiths and bankers along the last branch of the Mese, the money dealers, those whom the Chronicle of Theophanes calls the argyropatai or antiphoneteai (Theoph., Chronographia, 184), and therefore the relation between this kind of activity and the presence of the icon of the ‘Guarantor’ is further corroborated. One will also observe that according to Patria, III, 247, at the time of the emperor Theodosios, an elephant was brought to Constantinople and guided through the Mese, where, near the Milion, it destroyed a banker’s stall.

³⁵ W. Lackner, ‘Ein byzantinisches Marienmirakel’, *Byzantina* 13/2 (1985), § 3. So too, in a more fancy version, *Patria*, III, § 32, 227, according to which the site was originally bestowed on the Jews of the new imperial capital by Constantine the Great himself; later, Theodosios II had the Jews moved from the site, purified it, and afterwards had the new shrine built.

³⁶ The most recent discussion on the early Marian shrine of Constantinople is found in C. Mango, ‘Constantinople as Theotokoupolis’, in Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan, 2000), 17-25, with further bibliography. Some remains of the church were found northwest of Hagia Sophia, at the end of the present Çatalçeşme Sokağı, which however do not suggest a very big building (roughly 30 by 20m.): see C. Mango, ‘The Chalkoprateia Annunciation and the Pre-Eternal Logos’, *Deltion Tes Christianikes Archaïologikes Etaireias* (1994), 165 and J. Bardill, ‘The Palace of Lausus and Nearby Monuments in Constantinople: A Topographical Study’, *AJA*, 101/1 (1997), 78, n. 45 for the relevant bibliography. For an overview on this church’s history, Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique*, 237-242.

³⁷ Already in 1929 three aligned column bases were found along the Çatalçeşme Sokağı which suggest the existence of a street connecting the shrine to the Mese. See discussion in Bardill, ‘The Palace of Lausus’, 76-83 and reconstruction at 70; also see the reconstruction in-the-Chalkoprateia complex reproduced in Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches*, 321.

³⁸ See *Book of Ceremonies*, PG, 112, col. 401-403, I, § xxx on the occasion of the feast of the Virgin’s Annunciation (25 March), when the liturgy performed at the Forum of Constantine is completed, ‘the emperor descends from the pedestal, and once left one of the processional candles to the praepositous, he – escorted by all the people mentioned before – goes through the antiform and reaches the embolos near [the palace] tou Lausous and from there he moves to the church of the whole holy Theotokos Chalkoprateia and, once entered the narthex, he stands [there] waiting for the patriarch’.

porticoed street.³⁹ In the late seventh century Justin II and his wife Sophia (AD 685-695) added a new golden ceiling, mosaics and precious doors and possibly built the chapel known as *Hagia Soros*,⁴⁰ which was to house the precious relics of Mary – her belt (ζώνη) and robe (ἔσθής) – both possibly transferred from Jerusalem by the late fifth century.⁴¹ These sacred objects represented two of the most holy relics in Constantinople, those belonging to the ‘supernatural protector’ of the imperial city, well known also amongst the Latins who visited Byzantium.⁴² Since the seventh century these had been the core of an annual celebration, the deposition of the Theotokos’ belt.⁴³ It was also an area used for charitable assistance for the poor people who regularly gathered under its porticoes.⁴⁴

By the Middle Byzantine period, therefore, the Chalkoprateia constituted one of the major religious complexes in Constantinople. It had received, along with the chapel of the *Hagia Soros*, extensive restoration and embellishment by Basil I who, according to his biography, had both the apses and the roof raised and the interior made brighter thanks to new decoration and the insertion of precious marbles.⁴⁵ It might be tempting to draw an association with the founder of the Macedonian dynasty, Basil I,⁴⁶ however other reasons might be traced for the choice of this site. In the first place, a deep

³⁹ ‘Marianmirakel’, § 4-9; a different version is found in *Patria*, III, 32. For the mosaics of the Virgin described in the ‘Marianmirakel’ text, see Mango, ‘The Chalkoprateia’.

⁴⁰ ‘Marianmirakel’, § 12-22. The foundation of the *Hagia Soros* is attributed to Justin II by *Patria*, III, 147, which specifies the division of the Theotokos’ relics between the Chalkoprateia and the shrine of the Blachernae, which kept the Virgin’s veil. The gilded doors might well have been those from which, some four hundred years later, Alexios I Komnenos, according to Leo the Chalkedon’s accusations, would strip off the silver and golden revetment to fund his campaign against the Normans (see *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, D. R. Reisch and A. Kambylis, eds., Berlin and New York, 2001, V, 2).

⁴¹ See Ch. Angelidi, *Pulcheria. La castità al potere* (Milan, 1996), 81-83.

⁴² For the ζώνη, see patriarch Germanos’ homily in PG, 98, esp. 377A-C. The Westerners recognised the great importance of this relic, and often named the church ‘Sancta Maria de Cinctura’ (Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique*, 238).

⁴³ See J. Mateos, ed. and trans., *Le typikon de la Grande Église, I. Le cycle des douze mois* (Rome, 1962), 31 April. For the earlier celebrations of the Virgin in Constantinople, see A. Cameron, ‘The Theotokos in Sixth Century Constantinople. A City Finds its Symbol’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978), 79-108, and Eadem, ‘The Virgin’s Robe: An Episode in the history of early seventh century Constantinople’, *Byzantion* 49 (1979), 42-56, now to be compared with the critical reappraisal of the current view about Byzantine icons in B. V. Pentcheva, ‘The Supernatural Protector of Constantinople: The Virgin and her icons in the tradition of the Avar siege’ *BMGS* 26 (2002), 2-41 and Ead., *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium*, 37-59.

⁴⁴ Magdalino, ‘Constantinopolitana’, 224 and Mango, *Brazen House*, 50-51. The tenth century narrative of Paul of Monemvasia devotes the fifth Book of his work to ‘the poor people praying at the church of the Theotokos at the Chalkoprateia’, where reference is made of many poor people who stood outside *Hagia Sophia* as well (see J. Wortley, ed. and trans., *Les récits édifiants de Paul, évêque de Monembasie, et d’autres auteurs*, Paris, 1987, V, i.).

⁴⁵ *Theoph. Cont.*, *Vita Basilii*, PG, 112, col. 356, A-B.

⁴⁶ Papamastorakis, ‘The Empress Zoe’s Tomb’, 510.

personal devotion towards the sacred image of the Antiphonetes, but also the established connection between the Chalkoprateia and imperial patronage. According to the *Book of Ceremonies*, during the feast of the Annunciation it was customary to stop at the Chalkoprateia for liturgy and this was associated with a triple donation, each for the major shrines in the complex of the Chalkoprateia, that is the main basilica, the chapel of the *Hagia Soros*, and a third unnamed chapel on the left-hand side of the main apse, which is likely to have been that of the Antiphonetes. By means of her own intervention as patron, Zoe could therefore recall such a ceremony and emphasise her autonomous imperial act of piety and financial support to an important institution. It is worth observing, especially, that association with the imperial heiress must have had important implications for the urban fame of the icon housed in the chapel.

The name of the chapel is not mentioned until Zoe's time. The icon and the legend attached to it start achieving renown during the eleventh century, also outside Constantinople, mainly due to the accounts of travellers and pilgrims,⁴⁷ as we have seen in the case of the *Anonymous Mercati*.⁴⁸ A long-established association with the empress Zoe, which surely must have developed throughout the years up to her death, could have been a crucial source of public promotion for this shrine in the centre of Constantinople; the chapel, in Zoe's time, would therefore embody a remarkable display of prestige and imperial welfare, which simultaneously conveyed a well-orchestrated display of personal piety. Furthermore, the foundation appears to have been endowed with properties outside Constantinople and to have possessed annexes.⁴⁹ A 'chapter' (*sekretion*) in fact existed with administrative functions,⁵⁰ while

⁴⁷ It is certain that the account of the icon of the Antiphonetes (and possibly the icon itself) must have been known in the West between the late eleventh and the twelfth century. The account, at last, reached – possibly via a number of writings – Naples, in Italy, where the legend of Theodore and the 'Deum fideiussorem' generated a local version of the story (see J-M. Sansterre, 'La Caution de Saint Euphebius. Une variante napolitaine de la légende Byzantine du "Christ garant"', *AnBol* 113 (1995), 293-296.

⁴⁸ See above.

⁴⁹ John Tzetzes addressed a poetic epistle 'to the most illustrious secretary of the census of the Antiphonetes' (ΤΩΙ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΕΠΙΦΑΝΕΣΤΑΤΩΙ ΑΝΑΓΡΑΦΕΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΚΕΨΕΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΑΝΤΙΦΩΝΙΤΟΥ) who resided at Thebes. See Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae, ed., P. A. M. Leone, (Leipzig, 1972): n. 71, heading; there might have been also connection with the city of Antioch: see the following note.

⁵⁰ Anna Komn. *Alexiad*, VI, 3: the Antiphonetes received yearly money incomes (see below), to which those from its estates must be added: surely it had personnel charged with administrative functions. Reference to the 'σεκρέτον τοῦ Παντάνακτος τοῦ Ἀντιφωνήτου' is found in a lead seal from Antioch which belonged to a pious confraternity (δοῦλοι, 'attendants' of Christ): see J.-C. Cheinet and C.

another adjunct must have housed the confraternity which served the chapel. This is testified by two lead seals, both dated to the eleventh century, which bear the inscription of the ‘stewardship’ (*diakonia*) of the Antiphonetes. One bears an image of Christ, whilst the other shows an engraved image of the bust of the Theotokos holding the baby Jesus on her left-hand side, an *Hodegetria* type.⁵¹ This iconography had a number of precedents during the first half of the eleventh century on imperial coins or lead seals, though usually in full length, the most famous example being Romanos III’s *miliaresia* (silver coins).⁵² The seals suggest that a bath-house or a charitable institution might have belonged to Zoe’s chapel.⁵³

A passage from Anna Komnena’s *Alexiad* mentions the Theotokos-in-the-Chalkoprateia and the chapel of the Antiphonetes as a whole centre of religious celebrations, for the performance of which the latter had its own confraternity, whose members served at the liturgical services performed in the shrine. The passage refers to the grants of money that Alexios I Komnenos made around AD 1084 in order to make amends for the plundering of the church’s treasure (its gilded doors apparently included) that he had perpetrated two years before to fund his campaign against the Normans:

“So he [Alexios] decided that an adequate sum of gold should be paid annually by the officials of the public treasury to the chapter of the Christ Antiphonetes – [a custom] which had lasted with no interruption up to the present day (there, indeed, the chapel of the aforementioned empress [Zoe] rests), while he

Morrisson, ‘Texte et image sur les sceaux byzantins: les raisons d’un choix iconographique’, in N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*, 4 (Washington, D. C., 1995), entry 73. The image of the Virgin in this *miliaresion* might have had connection with the uncovering of an old icon at the Blachernai shrine in ca. 1031; see below.

⁵¹ See A. Weyl Carr, ‘Icons and the Objects of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople’, *DOP* 56 (2002), 75-92 and B. V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, 2006), 110-117.

⁵² For this coin type, see Ph. Grierson *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, III. Leo III to Nicephoros III (717-1081) (Washington, D. C., 1973), entries 712 and 719. Further comments on V. Penna, ‘The Mother of God on Coins and Lead Seals’, in M. Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God*.

⁵³ For the two lead seals, see V. Laurent, *La collection de C. Orghidan : documents de sigillographie byzantine* (Paris, 1952), entry 193 and Id., *Le corpus des sceaux de l’Empire Byzantin*, VI/2 (Paris, 1965), entries 1207-1208. For a general introduction to brotherhoods in Byzantium, see P. Horden, ‘The Confraternities of Byzantium’, in W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds.), *Voluntary Religion. Studies in Church History*, 23 (Worcester, 1986), 25-45. On bath-houses and their charitable function in Middle Byzantine Constantinople, see P. Magdalino, ‘Church, Bath and Diakonia in Middle Byzantine Constantinople’, in R. Morris, ed., *Church and People in Byzantium* (Birmingham, 1990), 165-188.

[Alexios] ordered that a yearly income of gold was bestowed by the imperial treasury to the *Chalkopratoi*, those who usually performed hymns at the sacred temple of the Mother of God.”⁵⁴

Regrettably, we do not know anything much more than this about the *Chalkopratoi*. However, one may trace them through a legendary account, dated to the eleventh or twelfth century, which informs us of the existence of a Marian icon called *Maria Romaia*.⁵⁵ According to this narrative the miracle-working image was housed in the shrine of the Chalkoprateia and integrated into the weekly procession of another important Marian icon, that of the Hodegetria, which took place on Tuesdays.⁵⁶ Indeed, confraternities devoted to the care of sacred objects and to the performance of religious ceremonies and processions are found much earlier in Byzantium and, for the time being, these pious associations charged with the preservation and worship of images constituted a widespread phenomenon.⁵⁷

From the passage of Anna Komnena it is possible to infer that, almost a century after Zoe’s death, her name and the association with the chapel of the Antiphonetes and her presence were still well acknowledged, proof that the activity of patronage promoted therein had actually preserved the empress’ memory. The efficacy of the intervention is witnessed, in the same text, through the evidence of long-lasting

⁵⁴ Anna Komn., *Alexiad*, VI, 3, 64-71: ‘καὶ παραχρῆμα τῶ μὲν σεκρέτῳ τοῦ Ἀντιφωνητοῦ χρυσίου ὑποσητήτα ἱκανὴν ἐλογίσαστο κατ’έτος εἰκομιζόμενον τοῖς τοῦ δημοσίου φροντισταῖς, ὁ καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἀπαρασάλευτο διαμεμένηκει (ἐκεῖσε γὰρ ἡ τῆς δηλωθείσης βασιλίδος σορὸς ἐναπέκειτο), τοῖς δὲ Χαλκοπρατίοις ἐτησίαν εἰσοδος χρυσίου ἀρκοῦντος τοῖς τῷ θεῷ τεμένει θεομήτορος συνήθως τοῦς ὕμνος ἐπιτελοῦσιν ἐκ τῶν βασιλικῶν ταμείων πρυτανεῦεσθαι παρεκελεύσατο’ (translation is mine).

⁵⁵ For the text, see E. von Dobschütz, ‘*Maria Romaia: Zwei unbekannte Texte*’, *ByzZeit* 12 (1903), 173-214, who dates the text to the eleventh century, while the text has been dated to the twelfth century by A. Ehrhardt. See also the late text of the ‘Hodegoi’ βασaccount in Ch. Angelidi, ‘Un texte patriographique et édifiant: le “Discours narratif” sur les Hodègoi’, *REB* 52 (1994), 105-112. On the relation between the icon called *Maria Romaia* and the monastery of the Hodegoi, see now Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 120-127. For discussion on the Hodegetria procession and the story of the *Maria Romana* icon and their cultural context, see A. Weyl Carr, ‘Icons and the Objects of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople’, *DOP* 56 (2002), 78-81, 89-90.

⁵⁶ Angelidi, ‘Un texte patriographique’, 202, 3-10.

⁵⁷ In the seventh century *Vita* of St. Artemios we find reference to a confraternity of St. John Prodromos, which among its members featured cantors (*psaltes*) and candle bearers, committed to escorting during processions and vigils τὰ ἅγια, relics and contact relics. See V. Crisafulli and J. Nesbitt, eds., *The Miracles of St. Artemios: a collection of miracle stories by an anonymous author of seventh-century Byzantium. The Medieval Mediterranean*, 13 (Leiden, 1997), 116. 23. The most famous example of the time, indeed the only one properly documented, is that of the confraternity whose members ministered to the icon of the ‘*Theotokos Naupaktitissa*’ kept in the church of the Archangel of the female monastery of Naupaktos, near Thebes. The original document dated to the year 1048: see J. Nesbitt and J. Wiita, ‘A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era’, *ByzZeit* 68 (1975), 360-384.

funding at the Antiphonetes. This suggests the existence of some kind of charitable service for the poor, that had always stood under the porticoes of the Chalkoprateia, and for pilgrims as well – an idea corroborated by the survival of the two lead seals. One might also observe that the misleading testimony provided by ‘Skoutariotes’ with regard to a new foundation of the chapel may be interpreted symbolically. This could implicitly be witness to a much-changed status in appearance, importance, and function which may have characterised the shrine as a consequence of the patronage sponsored by Zoe, who was to be buried there ‘truly sumptuously and in a manner proper to an emperor’.⁵⁸ Her patronage must have been constant and long, and did not certainly end after the commission of the new floor.

III. The Significance of Zoe’s Patronage

At this stage one may consider briefly the public standing of Zoe, heiress to the Macedonian dynasty and legitimiser of the men she co-opted with the imperial throne. One problem with her status as a patron is determined mainly by the fragmented nature provided by the few sources concerned with it (or, rather, incidentally referring to it). This is a situation which seriously compromises the possibility to assess the true relevance and impact of such patronage over the urban audience.

I have already commented on the particular nature I attribute to Psellos’ silence to the matter, yet one has to admit that, contrary to what can be verified with regard to her husbands, information about Zoe is mainly fortuitous; an important source for the eleventh century such as the *Synopsis Historion* composed by Ioannes Skylitzes is totally silent on her role as a patron.

Omission of any reference about Zoe’s patronage contrasts dramatically with the extensive attention the historian devotes to her husbands’ astonishing building enterprises for their own burial places. Romanos III’s church of the Peribleptos, Michael IV’s extra-urban complex of the Saints *Anargyroi*, and especially Constantine Monomachos’ residential complex at the *Manganes* are all harshly criticised (or warmly praised, in the case of Michael IV’s foundation) for their

⁵⁸ ‘Skoutariotes’, Μεσαιονική βιβλιοθήκη, VII, 163 (ἡ βασίλισσα Ζωῆ... θάπτεται λίαν φιλοτίμως καὶ βασιλικῶς).

requirement of huge financial expenditure and for their extravagant and, one might say, experimental architectonic solutions, for the creation of true botanical 'paradeisoi' within the city's precincts.⁵⁹ Psellos, as we have seen, secures Zoe within her imperial apartments and she appears totally freed, due to choice or circumstance, from the dignified display of any imperial attitude. Building patronage, as a prominent posture among expressions of (male) imperial display, plays no role in her portrayal.⁶⁰ From this perspective, Zoe's patronage appears to be framed within a general condition of marginality and limitation from which it is difficult to extricate it. However, the precise historical situations should be kept in mind; the fact that both her second husband Michael IV and her adoptive son Michael V prevented Zoe from access to the imperial treasury had obvious implications in her capacity to act as a sponsor. One will notice further how there appears to have been a difference with regard to status and quality in the kind of patronage pursued by Zoe and that of her spouses. It is well known that the new foundations of Zoe's husbands possessed hospices and hospitals, therefore revealing a concern with the city's welfare. With regard to the empress, the lead seals reading 'Antiphonetes' are positive evidence for the existence of charitable activities connected with this shrine; furthermore, the fame Zoe's liberality may well suggest her involvement in welfare activities.⁶¹ The urban upheaval which took place against Michael V when he tried to depose the legitimate empress with the intention of creating his own dynasty,⁶² testifies to the degree of

⁵⁹ See, respectively, Psellos, Chron., III. 13-16 (the Peribleptos); IV. 31 (monastery of the Anargyroi); and VI. 185-187 (palatine complex of the Manges). Compare the testimony left in 1200 by Anthony of Novgorod about Romanos' Peribleptos: 'Ce monastère, par ses jardins, ses champs, et son or, est plus riche que tous les autres monastères de Constantinople' (in B. de Khitrovo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, Genève, 1889, 102).

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that a similar attitude is found in Prokopios' portrait of Theodora, wife of the emperor Justinian I (527-565), which is subtly gender-orientated. While in the propagandistic catalogue of imperial interventions, the Buildings, Prokopios exclusively praises Justinian for his building intervention, in the *Secret History* – a work hardly suitable for divulgation during his life-time – he fully exploits the literary creation of an imperial woman acting out of character and Christian morality, that is Theodora herself, to attack Justinian. See E. A. Fisher, 'Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*: History and/or Fiction', *Arethusa* 2 (1978), 253-279; L. Brubaker, 'Sex, lies and textuality: the *Secret History* of Prokopios and the rhetoric of gender in sixth-century Byzantium', in Brubaker and Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, 83-101, and Eadem, 'The Age of Justinian. Gender and Society', in M. Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), 427-447.

⁶¹ Psellos, Chron., IV, xxii, 13-15. However, she seems not to have been directly involved in the emperor's welfare politics. For instance, the problem of prostitution in Constantinople seems to have been faced by Michael IV alone, with the patronage of a huge monastic community in the attempt to convert to a saintly life women in the streets (see Psellos, Chron., IV, xxxvi).

⁶² Chron., V, xxv-xxvi; compare the account in Ioannis Sklitzae, *Synopsis*, ed., *Historiarum*, J. Thurn, ed. (Berlin and New York, 1973), 417f.

consciousness with which Zoe's legitimising role was recognised publicly among broader audiences.

The nature of Zoe's patronage, so far as it is possible to reconstruct it, seems to have focused primarily on the personal financial funding of other individuals' religious offerings and displays of piety; so much that, according to Psellos, Zoe acted almost as if she wanted to sit at God's right-hand side through who benefited from her funding.⁶³ From this viewpoint, a remarkable difference emerges between her position and that, for instance, of Eirene the Athenian, who reigned as a sole ruler between AD 797 and 802 and is credited with a remarkable list of patronal intervention in Constantinople, partly devoted to public welfare as well as to considerable monumental works.⁶⁴ From this perspective, it is possible to argue for a certain discrepancy between the symbolic and fully recognised authority which dynastic standing attributed to Zoe and the relatively limited (both topographically and chronologically, when she had access to the imperial treasuries) extent of her public initiatives in Constantinople. On the other hand, one will notice that association with the chapel of the Antiphonetes was conceived as an imperial concern and possibly the key-aspect of Zoe's public image, as an *histamenon* (gold coin) dated to AD 1041/1042 which bears on its reverse an image of Christ labelled 'Antiphonetes' suggests.⁶⁵ One can therefore emphasise that the association with the Antiphonetes (its place and, especially, its cult) and the choice to be buried there were meant to

⁶³ I try to paraphrase a quite unclear passage (Chron., VI, clviii, 3-4); however, its general significance as an implicit critique against Zoe's excessive expenditure is sufficiently clear. Also see Psellos, Chron., VI, 5, 10-12. At a certain point, Psellos maintains that Zoe's expenditures were so huge to have the Empire sink towards the severest financial ruin (Chron., VI, 5, 10-12). This appears another of the author's *topoi* against the empress.

⁶⁴ Our major source for Eirene's programme of building and refurbishment in Constantinople is found in the *Patria*. Although this source is often unreliable and fanciful, attributions are precise and finds some corroboration in other sources. Part of these buildings were sponsored along with her son and legitimate ruler Constantine VI, whom she later blinded. See *Patria*, III, 217, §9 (the restoration of the church of St. Eirene at the Hippodrome); III, 219 (foundation of the church of St. Anastasius, with her son); III, 243, § 77 (the monastery of St. Euphrosyne); III, 246, § 85 (the church and the triklinia of St. Luke with hospitals for travellers and the old); III, 260, (restoration of the church of the Theotokos at the Spring, with her son); III, 269, § 173 (the palace of Eleutheiros and its little hippodrome, together with her son). Full discussion on Eirene's patronage in J. Herrin, *Women in Purple. Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London, 2002), 102-107 and also 119-120. Herrin has maintained that after Basil I seized the imperial throne and therefore founded a new dynasty, women's position changed and became more limited (op. cit., 256); in my view, this statement is partly valid also for Zoe. Very little is known about the patronage of Macedonian empresses. We know that Constantine VII's wife Helen founded a *xenodokion* at 'old Petron' (the Eleniai quarter?) and at her death the emperor granted the new foundation with suburban land donations according to her will (Theoph. Cont., *Vita Constantinii*, PG, 109, col. 476D).

⁶⁵ Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins*, III/1, 162-163; III/2, plate LVIII.

provide the empress with a personal and more characterised public image, an image which united in itself piety and imperial prestige, and one which could symbolically suggest her position as earthly ‘guarantor’ of the continuity and stability of the Empire under her dynasty.⁶⁶ Zoe did not apparently consider the possibility of being buried at the monastery of St. Euphemia at the Petrion, founded by Basil I, where his mother, his four daughters (for whom the monastery had been built), and Constantine VII’s mother had been buried.⁶⁷

As a likely consequence of Zoe’s sponsorship, the Antiphonetes by the late eleventh century may have become a renowned shrine. As we have seen, a few decades later, the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (AD 1081-1118), in order to rectify his position with the clergy after stealing precious objects at the Chalkoprateia, provided the chapel of the Antiphonetes with a yearly grant of gold. Therefore, he wanted to connect his own name to this same shrine by means of a new, remarkable act of liberality.⁶⁸ And this would point to the importance and prestige acquired at the time by the shrine where Zoe rested.

In the *Chronographia*, Psellos, in his painstaking effort to mould multifaceted portraits for his imperial characters, recognises the capacity that Zoe possessed to use and manipulate imperial ceremony and to exploit her public appeal.⁶⁹ One can observe Zoe’s capacity to use symbols of Empire according to circumstances and aims. For instance, one can compare the choice of the image of the blessing Christ in the AD 1041/42 *histamenon* or that in the chapel’s lead seal, and the different iconography she chose during the two months in AD 1042 when (unsuccessfully) she ran personally the state along with her sister Theodora.⁷⁰ For an *histamenon* they chose to

⁶⁶ Papamastorakis ‘The Empress Zoe’s Tomb’, 511.

⁶⁷ According to the *Patria*, III, 186 Basil founded the monastery of St. Euphemia at the Petrion for his four daughters who were all consecrated to monastic life (a traditional solution in order to avoid that brothers-in-law could seize the throne) and afterwards buried there as well. Basil associated to the monastery a *loutrion*, that is a charitable institution with a bath (compare the *Vita Basilii*: Theoph. Cont., PG, 109, col. 280D, with a different version). Also Basil’s mother, Pangalo, was buried there, and later also Zoe Karbonopsina, mother of Constantine VII (*De. Cer.*, PG, 112, II, § 42).

⁶⁸ On Alexios I, see above.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, the ceremony for Michael IV’s coronation (Psellos, *Chron.*, IV, ii-iii); her capacity to capture her subjects’ love through her liberality (*Chron.*, IV, 22, 13-15); and especially, Zoe’s ability in exploiting subtle differences in ceremonial and visual display to impose the superiority of her own position in comparison with her sister (*Chron.*, VI, 3).

⁷⁰ Psellos makes clear (*Chron.* VI. 3) that, in the ceremonial, Theodora, being the younger sister, was in a slightly inferior position in comparison to Zoe,

strike an image of the Theotokos *orans*. This was an important image, which was connected with the deep-rooted symbolism of the Virgin as ‘supernatural palladium’ of Constantinople and her privileged relationship with (male) rulership and companion of the emperor on the battlefield;⁷¹ on the other side of the coin the two sisters, with a luxury attire and crowns, together hold a *labarum* in the centre, symbol of imperial mastery and victory.⁷² The coin was conceived, in other words, as a very clear statement about their right to rule alone.

It is possible to contextualise Zoe’s association with the Antiphonetes also in relation to this careful display of imperial symbols. Not only as a powerful display of personal faith but also as a part of Zoe’s imperial identity, with regard to which the integration of the Chalkoprateia complex into imperial ceremonial practice should not be overlooked. Although Zoe never had the possibility to exercise properly and extensively her right to rule, her language of power seems to have been nonetheless careful and sophisticated, a powerful proof of being born ‘in the purple’.

Abbreviations

ODB. Kazhdan (A. P.) 1991. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, I-III*. New York and Oxford.

⁷¹ Various passages in Psellos’ *Chronographia* introduce a series of episodes in which the relation between the emperor and Marian images clearly emerges: see *Chron.*, I. 16, 4-5 (Basil II); III. 10, 22-27. For a good résumé about the Theotokos’ function as the emperor’s companion and token of victory see now Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 62-69; also see L. James, ‘The empress and the Virgin in early Byzantium: piety, authority and devotion’ in M. Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005) 151-152. Already in the sixth century the emperor Justinian I in building the Marian shrines of the Blachernai and of the Spring (τῆς Πηγῆς) at the edges of the Theodosian walls in order for them to work as ‘invincible buttresses for the city’s precincts’ (Procopios, *Buildings*, H. B. Dewing, ed. and trans., (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1940), I. 3, 12-16.

⁷² Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins, 731-732*, III, 2 (plate LVIII). On the *labarum*, see A. Pertusi ‘*Insegne del potere sovrano e del potere delegate a Bisanzio e nei paesi di influenza bizantina*’, in *Simboli e simbologia nell’alto medioevo. Settimane di studio del centro italiano per lo studio sull’alto medioevo*, XXIII (Spoleto, 1976), 497-516.

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