

# THE THEOTOKOS AS SELECTIVE INTERCESSOR FOR SOULS IN MIDDLE BYZANTINE APOCALYPTIC

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The *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos*, first edited from a single manuscript in 1866, has only recently become available in an English translation and commentary. However, the work enjoyed enormous popularity in the later Byzantine period of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when the Greek text was translated into almost a dozen other languages. An equally popular work of the mid-tenth century was the *Vision of Anastasia*. This paper considers Mary's role in the two *Apocalypses* of the ninth to eleventh centuries in the broader context of Byzantine apocalypticism of the period. In particular, I focus on Mary's role as a selective intercessor for Christian souls in torment, but not Jews. The increasing recognition of Mary's humanity in the cult of the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) emerges as the justification for her discrimination against those who were perceived as the murderers of her son.

This paper considers Mary's role in two *Apocalypses* of the ninth to eleventh centuries in the broader context of Byzantine apocalypticism of the period.\* The *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* has recently become available in an English translation and commentary by Jane Baun.<sup>1</sup> Selections of this text were edited from a single manuscript, Venice Marc. VII.43 in 1866.<sup>2</sup> Its relative inaccessibility to scholars does not reflect the enormous popularity of the work in the later Byzantine period of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when it was translated into almost a dozen other languages, including a sixteenth-century Romanian version and Old Church Slavonic versions,

\* Some of this material has been included in my chapter 'Mary as Intercessor in Byzantine Theology', *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>1</sup> Jane Baun, trans., *Tales from Another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 391-400. This paper was originally presented at the conference on *The Theotokos in the Oriental Churches*, 18-20 August 2015, University of Winchester, UK.

<sup>2</sup> Konstantin von Tischendorf, ed., *Apocalypses Apocryphae Mosis, Esdrae, Pauli, Iohannis, item Mariae dormitio, additis Evangeliorum et actuum Apocryphorum supplementis* (Leipzig, 1866; repr., Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966). A completed edition followed, made from Paris BN graecus 390, by Antoine Charles Gidel, 'Étude sur une apocalypse de la Vierge Marie', *Annuaire de l'association de l'encouragement des études grecques* 5 (1871): 92-113. Another two editions appeared in 1893, the first in Athanasius Vasiliev, ed., *Anecdota graeco-byzantina. Pars prior* (Moscow: Imperial University, 1893; repr., Moscow, 1992), 125-34, and the other in Montague R. James, ed., *Apocrypha Anecdota. A collection of thirteen apocryphal books and fragments*, Texts and Studies 2.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 109-26, the latter edition based on Oxford Bodleian Library MS Auct. E.5.12 (*olim* Misc. Greek 77).

as well as medieval Greek.<sup>3</sup> An equally popular work of the mid-tenth century was the *Vision of Anastasia*.<sup>4</sup> I intend to focus attention on Mary's role as a selective intercessor for souls in torment, Christians but not Jews, asking whether her discrimination reflects a standard anti-Judaism to be found in other Marian hymns and homilies of the early and middle Byzantine periods, or whether it is characteristic of the apocalyptic genre.<sup>5</sup>

### *Anti-Judaism in the Marian cult*

As observed by Leena Mari Peltomaa and Andreas Külzer, authors of an introduction to a recent study of the origins of Marian intercession, Mary's virginity at the birth of Christ (based on Isa 7:14) was disputed by the Jews.<sup>6</sup> This gave the perfect grounds for anti-Judaism in the Marian cult, a phenomenon which is usually characterised as of western rather than eastern origins. However, Stephen Shoemaker has shown that versions of the Dormition of the Virgin appearing in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in c. 500, were radically anti-Jewish:<sup>7</sup>

Although the narratives often differ greatly in detail, they are almost unanimous in their identification of the Jews as fierce enemies of both the Virgin in particular and the Christian faith more generally. With only one exception, the Dormition narratives indulge in anti-Jewish harangues and

<sup>3</sup> See Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Translated by Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 401-424. Translations of the *Vision of Anastasia* were limited to the Slavonic version, *Slovo Nastasiya Chernorizitsya*, surviving in two manuscripts (see Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 61 and 67-70).

<sup>5</sup> On the careful methodology required to use apocalypses as historical sources, see Paul Julius Alexander, 'Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources', *American Historical Review* 73.4 (1968): 997-1018. Examples of his methodology applied to the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius are found in Paul Julius Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. Dorothy de Ferranti Abrahamse (Berkeley: California University Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Leena Mari Peltomaa and Andreas Külzer, 'Presbeia Theotokou: An Introduction', in *Presbeia Theotokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium (4th - 9th Century)*, ed. Leena Mari Peltomaa, Andreas Külzer and Pauline Allen (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), 13-24; at 13n1: 'The reading of Isa 7,14 by Christians caused a bitter controversy of long duration with Jews, with ongoing impact on their mutual distrust.' Andreas Külzer, *Disputationes graecae contra Iudaeos. Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild*, Byzantinisches Archiv 18 (Stuttgart - Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1999), esp. 261-262, has more on its significance for 'Mentalitätsgeschichte in Byzanz'.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Shoemaker, 'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body': The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions', *Church History* 68.4 (1999): 775-823; at 777. Shoemaker, 'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body', 823, concludes: 'Thus the Dormition homilies portray Jews as dangerous enemies of the state, *deserving divine punishment*, which it was the state's duty to exact.' (my italics). See Klaus Schreiner, *Maria: Jungfrau, Mutter Herrscherin* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser, 1994), chapter 11, on the focus of Christian/Jewish conflict in the late-antique and medieval Marian cult. The divine punishment exacted from Jews for their hatred of Mary and violent treatment of her was treated in Boudewijn Dehandschutter, 'Anti-Judaism in the Apocrypha', *Studia Patristica* (1989): 345-350. The single exception that Shoemaker notes is the Dormition homily attributed (perhaps falsely) to Modestus of Jerusalem; see 'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body', 777n13.

report various episodes that depict the Jews as harassing and attacking the Virgin, actions for which they invariably receive violent divine punishment.

The refusal to admit salvation to the Jews is of a piece with descriptions of Jews that will be familiar to most readers, even in the works of a Father as universally esteemed as Maximos the Confessor, who characterised them as ‘the hateful Jews’ who might tomorrow seek peace with the Christians, saying, ‘Let us [...] remove circumcision and you [remove] baptism, and we won’t fight with each other anymore.’<sup>8</sup> Christian resentment towards the Jews as the murderers of Christ ran high for many centuries, and this is reflected in the many polemical works against the Jews, such as the Greek *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (‘The Teaching of Jacob, the Newly Baptized’) of c. 634-635.<sup>9</sup> This work appeared in the context of the forced conversions of Jews in Carthage, ordered by Emperor Heraclius in 632. Christian apocalyptic literature was generally anti-Jewish with an emphasis on the anti-Christ who would present himself as the new messiah, the one for whom the Jews were waiting. Apocalyptic literature of all kinds (that of Pseudo-Methodius being only the best known of a dozen examples from western Syria)<sup>10</sup> flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries as a response to the many crises that beset the Byzantine world, both internally and externally.

### *Middle Byzantine Other-world Travel Literature*

Another class of apocalyptic is psychagogic literature, or guided tours of the next world, that flourished in the Middle Byzantine period from the ninth to eleventh centuries. Jane Baun points out that there is no idea of descent or going down to a world under this one; it was rather a case of going outside this world. Before the Christian tradition, beginning with the *Apocalypse of Saint Paul* in Late Antiquity, there was a strong Jewish tradition of psychagogy in the pseudepigrapha. The main differences between these early texts and the medieval Byzantine tradition seem to be the latter emphasises the punishments of sinful humanity, rather than giving equal attention to rewards of the righteous, and the possibility of, indeed the need for, the

<sup>8</sup> Maximos the Confessor, *Relatio Motionis* 4, in *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions*, Oxford Early Christian Texts, ed. and trans. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 56-57.

<sup>9</sup> See Sarah Gador-Whyte, ‘Christian-Jewish Conflict in the Light of Heraclius’ Forced Conversions and the Beginning of Islam’, in *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* 121, ed. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil, (Berlin: EVA, 2014), 201-214. On anti-Jewish polemic in ancient and medieval Christian literature, see S. Morlet, O. Munnich and Bernard Pouderon, eds., *Les dialogues ‘adversus Iudaeos’. Permanences et mutations d’une tradition polémique. Actes du colloque international organisé les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Garstad, ed. and trans., *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 14 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

*Theotokos*' intercession between God and humanity.<sup>11</sup> Baun plausibly suggests that the reason for this emphasis is a darkening eschatological world-view: the medieval visions place such great emphasis on intercession because they construe the Other World almost exclusively in terms of grim realities of judgement, purgation, and punishment.<sup>12</sup>

The first of the other-world vision texts under investigation here (although not perhaps first chronologically, the date being impossible to determine more precisely than the ninth to eleventh centuries) is the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos concerning the Punishments*. The text presents the *Theotokos*' journey to the other world, where she acts as an intercessor for Christian souls in torment. She specifically excludes Jews from her intercessions, however. The other middle Byzantine text on similar themes, the *Vision of Anastasia*, comes from the mid-tenth century and relates a nun's vision of heaven and the punishment of sinners there, for whom 'prophets and apostles and martyrs' entreated.<sup>13</sup> In this text the *Theotokos* was just one of many intercessors for the sinful.

In these texts, Mary is all too human, badgering her son with intercessory pleas on behalf of Christian sinners.<sup>14</sup> One could consider her selective intercession characteristic of her humanity, her prejudices an aspect of her charm for Byzantine readers. Certainly in the climate that dominated in Constantinople at the time of writing, anti-Judaism would not have been worthy of note. My concern to identify whether this is an enduring part of her role as the Mother of God is, admittedly, entirely anachronistic.

The sins punished in the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* range from the serious to the trivial: 'eavesdropping, slandering, quarrelling, fornicating, ploughing or reaping beyond their furrow, weighing falsely, or taking interest [...]'.<sup>15</sup> Those guilty of failing to wake on Sundays were punished by being seated upon clouds of fire, and those who failed to rise on the entry of the priest were relegated to fiery benches.<sup>16</sup> The only excuse for not going to church on Sundays was if your house was on fire on all four sides. Eternal punishments awaited those who committed incest with their close relations or godparents, those who consorted with demons, denied Christ or

<sup>11</sup> See Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 97, on the new capriciousness and remoteness of God in the Middle Ages and the need for the Mother of God to intercede on the sinner's behalf.

<sup>12</sup> Baun, *ibid.* See especially the examples at the end of the *Vision of Anastasia*, trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 422-424.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Homburg, ed., *Apocalypsis Anastasiae ad trium codicum auctoritatem, panormmitani, ambrosiani, parisini* (Leipzig, 1903). *Vision of Anastasia*, §15, trans. Baun, 416.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Cunningham, 'Mary as Intercessor in Constantinople during the Iconoclast Period: The Textual Evidence', in *Presbeia Theotokou*, ed. Peltomaa, Külzer and Allen, 163-178; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 274-275, and 278-279. See also Jane Baun, 'Discussing Mary's Humanity in Medieval Byzantium', in *The Church and Mary*, Studies in Church History 39, ed. Robert N. Swanson (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 2004), 63-72.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Tonnig, Review of Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, in *New Blackfriars* 80 (2008): 740-741; at 740.

<sup>16</sup> *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* §§12-13, trans. Baun, 394.

their baptism, women who killed babies, and ‘the Jews who crucified our Lord Jesus Christ’, all of whom were consigned to the everlasting ‘outer fire’.<sup>17</sup> There are clearly two classes of person here: redeemable Christians in the dress circle suffering intermediate, temporary punishments, and those beyond the pale.

Mary views the former group, the Christians, as ‘her children’ and calls upon the Archangel Michael to ‘command the armies of the angels and raise [her] up to the height of Heaven and break [her] through into the presence of the invisible Father’ (§26), where she sways a reluctant master (God) first not to forsake those who call upon her name (§26), and then to grant respite to all souls in torment during the fifty days of Easter (§29). This is a God who is, as Tonning observes, angry, distant, and imperial.<sup>18</sup> Baun argues for an eastern provenance for the *Theotokos* text at some remove from the centre of imperial administration.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the *Vision of Anastasia* (§42) is markedly pro-imperial, supporting the cause of the late emperor, Nicephorus II Phokas (963-9), who was murdered by John Tzimiskes.

Judith Tonning’s question, raised in her review of Baun, is whether the punishments witnessed by the *Theotokos* and the nun in the *Vision of Anastasia* are eternal or temporal, and whether they take place in Hell, Hades, or some sort of purgatory.<sup>20</sup> This is pertinent to our enquiry. The idea of purgatory is not now accepted in the Eastern Orthodox church since the matter was settled at the Council of Florence in 1438-1439, after some 200 years of debate.<sup>21</sup> However, it may well have leaked across from the West where it was instigated by Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century. Certainly there were borrowings from Gregory’s *Dialogues* on this subject (especially Book 4) in Paul Evergetinos’ *Synagoge*.<sup>22</sup> The western doctrine of purgatory developed in parallel with a popular belief originating in Egypt in tax posts where government tolls were collected on goods for trade (*telonai*). The soul had to pass through a number of these (the number had increased from five to twenty-two by the tenth century) on its way to heaven, each being a reckoning for a certain set of sins. In the early fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria once preached in terrifying detail on the five toll-gates where the sins of each of the five senses were

<sup>17</sup> *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* §23, trans. Baun, 397-398.

<sup>18</sup> Tonning, Review of *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 741.

<sup>19</sup> Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 3: ‘The apocalypses project the viewpoint of people who lived on the margins of imperial power’, with the *Vision of Anastasia* perhaps hailing from central Greece but also possibly Macedonia, Crete or Cappadocia: see Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 233-235.

<sup>20</sup> Tonning, Review of *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 740.

<sup>21</sup> Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge, 1995; repr., 2002), 128, comments that Byzantine attitudes to purgatory before the discussions with the Latins began in the thirteenth century is ‘a neglected area of study’.

<sup>22</sup> Viktor Matthaïos, ed. and trans., *Evergetinos ētoi Synagōgē tōn theophthoggōn rhēmātōn kai didaskaliōn tōn Theophorōn kai hagiōn Paterōn*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Athens, 1966). These borrowings are traced by Andrew Louth, ‘Gregory the Great in the Byzantine Tradition’, in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Matthew Dal Santo (Leiden, 2014), 343-358. See also Gregory Collins, ‘A Neglected Manual of the Spiritual Life: the *Synagoge* of Paul Evergetinos’, *Sobornost/incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 12:1 (1990): 47-51.

interrogated, from one's youth to the moment of death.<sup>23</sup> On the day of judgement, fierce, monstrous, and merciless demons 'as black as Ethiopians' would accuse those souls who had committed sins of the tongue either knowingly or carelessly (e.g. those guilty of lying speech or gossip or false oaths or ribald laughter or gluttony or bold kisses or cheeky songs), while good angels defended those souls who were to be rewarded for right speech, singing psalms of praise, etc. At the Council of Florence, some Greek theologians, including as Gennadios Scholastikos, were happy to accept that these stages of interrogation were the equivalent of purgatory.<sup>24</sup> However, the differences between the East and West prevailed in the end.

A somewhat similar and contemporary tale is that of the elderly servant Theodora, in the mid-tenth century *Life of Basil the Younger*. Theodora expected to have to pass through twenty-two toll-gates on her way to heaven, where demons would interrogate her and collect fines for her wrong-doings. She is told by her spiritual guide, St Basil the Younger, that two angels have been watching her since birth: a good one who has recorded her good deeds, and a bad one who has recorded her sins.<sup>25</sup> She is spared the ordeal of the toll-gates, in the end, when Basil intervenes on her behalf by presenting a bag of gold coins to the woman's guardian angel from the store of his own good deeds.<sup>26</sup>

The power of Mary to intercede successfully, like that of St Basil, is proven in both our apocalyptic texts. In the *Vision of Anastasia*, her intercessory power seems to lie in the fact that she was Jesus' virgin mother, 'wholly undefiled'. Jesus sends Anastasia back to earth with the message: 'I wanted to destroy you utterly from the earth, but *through the entreaty of my wholly undefiled mother* [...] I was reconciled'.<sup>27</sup> In a reminder that not all shall be saved, Christ adds that 'whosoever does not believe these things, and blasphemes, shall have the curse of the 318 God-bearing Fathers, and his portion shall be with Judas and with those who cry out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!''<sup>28</sup> Here the power of the 'God-bearing fathers' at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE) to impose curses is invoked in op-

<sup>23</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Hom.* 14 (PG 77:1073-1076). See Claudia Rapp, 'Safe-Conducts to Heaven: Holy Men, Mediation and the Role of Writing', in *Transformations of Late Antiquity. Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis, 2 vols. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 2:187-204, esp. 195-198.

<sup>24</sup> See Nicholas Conostas, 'To Sleep Perchance to Dream: The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 91-124, esp. 105-109.

<sup>25</sup> *Βίος και πολιτεία και μερική θαυμάτων διήγησις του εν αγίοις πατρός ημών Βασιλείου του Νέου (Life of Basil the Younger)*, ed. A. N. Veselovskij, 'Razyskaniia v oblasti russkogo dukhovnogo stikha', *Sbornik Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti imperatorskoi Akademii nauk* 46 (1890): 28-29. Denis F. Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot and Stamatina McGrath, eds. and trans., *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger. Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Moscow Version*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 35 (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2014); and George Every, 'Toll-Gates on the Air Way', *Eastern Churches Review* 8 (1976): 139-151; at 144-148.

<sup>26</sup> *Life of Basil the Younger* 18.8. See Conostas, 'To Sleep', 108-109, and Morris, *Monks*, 128.

<sup>27</sup> *Vision of Anastasia* §48 (Paris version), trans. Baun, 412.

<sup>28</sup> *Vision of Anastasia* §50, trans. Baun, 412.

position to the God-bearer's power to intercede. Judas, the ultimate traitorous Jew, remains beyond redemption.

### *Marian intercession in Byzantine hymnography*

While the Middle Byzantine apocalyptic tradition depicts Mary as clearly biased towards her Christian children, it was not always so. A very different picture of Mary the intercessor is presented in the hymns of Romanos Melodes, writing in Constantinople in the sixth century. Although in Romanos' *kontakia* the prayers of Mary usually occur in the final strophe and are fairly formulaic,<sup>29</sup> there are at least two exceptional cases. The first, in Romanos' hymn *On Mary at the Cross*, is when Mary agrees to intercede for Adam and Eve, who are stuck in Hades. The crucified Jesus himself attributed to her this task of intercession, which she accepted.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, in Romanos' second hymn *On the Nativity*, a weeping Mary undertakes to intercede with her son for 'her ancestors', the lamenting Adam and Eve, 'for the mother shone forth in pity, being compassionate'.<sup>31</sup> These *kontakia* make a strong case for Mary the mother and God-bearer as universal intercessor. Many scholars have looked to Syriac homiletics to explain the influence on Romanos of the idea of Marian intercession, rare in Greek homiletics.<sup>32</sup> The seven-hundred verse homilies of Jakob of Serug (d. 521) reveal particularly striking examples. Jakob's lengthy festal homily for the feast of Christ's Nativity contains twelve couplets sung in the voice of Mary, who 'calls for the celebration of the new creation the Nativity brings'.<sup>33</sup> All are called to give praise to God: 'On this day let the people in all confines [of the world] give thanks because they were scattered among all kinds of religions [or: all forms of idolatry] but they are gathered by you'.<sup>34</sup> Among these, the Houses of David (the Jews) and Adam, the dispossessed heir, are singled out for special mention. This is

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions of Mary in Sixth-Century Constantinople: The *Kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist', in *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Lynda Garland (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 77-92, at 84-85, notes Romanos' use in his final strophe of formulaic lines such as 'through the prayers of the Holy *Theotokos* and Virgin', and 'through the intercessions of the one who bore you'. See also Jan H. Barkhuizen, 'An Analysis of the Form and Content of Prayer as a Liturgical Component in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist', *Ecclesiastikos Pharos* 75.2 (1991): 91-102.

<sup>30</sup> *Hymn* 19.Θ:7-10: 'so do not weep, mother, / but rather cry this: "Have mercy on Adam / and take pity on Eve, / my son and my God."'; trans. Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 84.

<sup>31</sup> *Hymn* 2.Γ:1-8, cited by Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 86.

<sup>32</sup> Among them Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 85 and n. 25, where she notes that the question of Syriac influence on Romanos is much debated. Some influence from the homilies of Jakob of Serug seems beyond doubt.

<sup>33</sup> Jakob of Serug, Festal Homily 1, *On the Nativity*, lines 985-1008, discussed by Susan Ashbrook Harvey, 'Including the "Despised Woman": Jakob of Serug at the Nativity Feast', in *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, ed. Denis Sullivan, Elizabeth A. Fisher and Stratis Papaioannou (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3-18 at 6.

<sup>34</sup> Jakob of Serug, Festal Homily 1, *On the Nativity*, lines 993-4; ed. Paul Bedjan, *S. martyrii qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia* (Paris: O. Harrassowitz, 1902), 767; trans. Thomas Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh, Select Festal Homilies*; with a foreword by Sebastian P. Brock (Rome: Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies; Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997), 87-88.

not, strictly speaking, Marian intercession, but it is a universalising call by Mary to recognise God's creative power and majesty, with none of the usual mid-Byzantine Greek exclusivity or anti-Jewish rhetoric about it. That is not to say that the medieval West was above such exclusive rhetoric; rather they adopted it with great enthusiasm, and with tragic consequences for later generations of Jews, for example, in Visigothic Spain in the seventh century.<sup>35</sup>

### *The evidence of Greek homilies*

Stephen Shoemaker has recently shown that the doctrine of Marian intercession seems to have arisen in Dormition Apocrypha composed in Palestine already in the third century.<sup>36</sup> However, images of Mary as intercessor, as indeed use of the epithet 'Theotokos', are virtually absent from sixth- and seventh-century Greek homilies, as Pauline Allen has pointed out.<sup>37</sup> There is one notable exception, to be found in a sixth-century homily of Abraham of Ephesus on the Feast of the *Hypapante* (Mary's presentation of the eight-day-old Jesus at the Temple).<sup>38</sup> In the genuine part of Abraham's second surviving homily, the author also attacks Jews and heretics.<sup>39</sup> The appearance of these two ideas, Mary as *Theotokos* and intercessor, and the guilt of the Jews, may be more than a coincidence.

There are also many instances of Mary as *Theotokos* and intercessor in the early eighth century in the homilies on the Dormition of Mary by Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, if he is to be identified with the patriarch to whom the hymns are usually attributed.<sup>40</sup> Similar themes occur in the hymns on the *Nativity of the*

<sup>35</sup> See Rachel L. Stocking, 'Forced Converts, "Crypto-Judaism," and Children: Religious Identification in Visigothic Spain', in *Jews in Early Christian Law. Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th – 11th Centuries*, Religion and Law in Medieval Christian and Muslim Societies 2, ed. John V. Tolan, Nicholas de Lange, Laurence Foschia and Capucine Nemo-Pekelman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 243–265.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Shoemaker, 'The Ancient Dormition Apocrypha and the Origins of Marian Piety: Early Evidence of Marian Intercession from Late Ancient Palestine', in *Presbeia Theotokou*, ed. Peltomaa, Külzer and Allen, 25–44. This is perhaps less realistic than his dating of such texts as appearing c. 500 in Syria, Egypt and Palestine simultaneously: Shoemaker, "Let Us Go and Burn Her Body", 777.

<sup>37</sup> Pauline Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature (6th–7th Centuries)', in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary Cunningham (London: Routledge, 2011), 68–88.

<sup>38</sup> (CPG 7381), ed. Marcel Jugie, *Homélies mariales byzantines*, Patrologia Orientalis 16/3 (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1907), 448–454, with a single reference to Mary as *Theotokos* (ed. Jugie, 448, line 9). See Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature', 80–81 and n. 79.

<sup>39</sup> At the end of Abraham's homily, there is 'a later addition', this judgement being based on the 'high-flown' praise for Mary in contrast to the sober language used in the rest of the piece, in which Mary is assigned an intercessory role: Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature', 81.

<sup>40</sup> Germanos, *Homily 1 on the Dormition* (PG 98:349B–351B), and *Homily 2 on the Dormition* (PG 98:361C–D), discussed by Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 280–281.

*Theotokos* by Andrew of Crete (d. 712 or 726),<sup>41</sup> and Germanos.<sup>42</sup> In the earliest manuscript of Germanos' hymn for the feast of Mary's Nativity, celebrated on 8 September, the *kanon* ends with a prayer to the Virgin Mary 'to pray without ceasing for her servants, because God the Logos dwelled in her and was ineffably born in flesh from her'.<sup>43</sup> The earliest evidence for the celebration of the feast of Mary's Nativity is believed to be a *kontakion* of Romanos Melodes,<sup>44</sup> suggesting that the feast probably originated in Constantinople. Germanos' homily *On the Consecration* also calls on Mary to intercede for sinners, calling her the 'consolation of Christians' and 'the breath and life of Christians',<sup>45</sup> but also asking, 'Who, after your Son, cares for the human race as you do?'.<sup>46</sup> In view of this evidence for a universally compassionate *Theotokos*, we must ask why she became the exclusive intercessor for the tormented souls of Christians by the ninth or tenth centuries, when our two *Apocalypses* appeared. The answer to this question seems to lie in the development of the cult of a more human Mary in the same period, when affective piety came into its own, and in the particular animus towards Jews that was felt in Byzantium from the seventh century onwards.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Andrew of Crete, *Homilies 1-4 on the Nativity of the Theotokos* (PG 97:805-881). See the translation by Mary Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven. Eighth-century Homilies on the Mother of God*, Popular Patristics Series 35 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 71-138. See also from a slight later period John of Damascus' *Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary*, 53-70, esp. 69-70.

<sup>42</sup> This significant hymnographic corpus, which has not yet been edited, is the subject of a forthcoming doctoral study by Kosta Simic, 'Liturgical Poetry in Eighth-Century Byzantium: The Hymnographic Works attributed to Germanos I (715-730), Patriarch of Constantinople' (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, Brisbane, forthcoming). I am grateful to Mr Simic for allowing me to cite his work before publication.

<sup>43</sup> Τὸν ἐν σοὶ Παρθένε· οἰκήσαντα Θεὸν Λόγον·καὶ ἐκ σοῦ ἀρρήτως σαρκί·προελθόντα ἀφράστῳ λόγῳ·δυσωπούσα μὴ παύσῃ ὑπὲρ δούλων τῶν ἀκαταπαύστως ἀννυμούντων σε (Sinaiticus gr. 552, f. 78v, 11th c.), trans. Simic, 'Liturgical Poetry in Eighth-Century Byzantium', forthcoming. The other two manuscripts are both from the fourteenth century: Sinaiticus gr. 645, ff. 29v-35, and Sinaiticus gr. 671, ff. 24v-29. Kosta Simic is preparing an edition of all three manuscripts.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Maas and Konstantine Trypanis, ed., *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 276-280. These editors count 59 genuine hymns of Romanos: Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 78n4.

<sup>45</sup> Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Consecration of the Venerable Church of Our Supremely Holy Lady, the Theotokos, and on the Holy Swaddling Clothes of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 9 (PG 98:372-84); trans. Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven*, 147-255; at 252.

<sup>46</sup> Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Consecration of the Venerable Church of Our Supremely Holy Lady*, 10, trans. Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven*, 253.

<sup>47</sup> The evidence of four middle-Byzantine apocalyptic texts for negative Byzantine attitudes towards the possibility of salvation for Jews is assessed by Paul Magdalino, "'All Israel Will Be saved'? The Forced Baptism of the Jews and Imperial Eschatology", in *Jews in Early Christian Law. Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th - 11th Centuries*, Religion and Law in Medieval Christian and Muslim Societies 2, ed. John V. Tolan, Nicholas de Lange, Laurence Foschia and Capucine Nemo-Pekelman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 231-242; at 232-33. Two of these texts are hagiographic with eschatological content: *The Life of Basil the Younger*, mentioned above, and the *Life of Andrew the Fool*. The other two are more obviously apocalyptic: *Diegesis Danielis* and *The Apocalypse of Leo of Constantinople*. Magdalino concludes that these texts do not display the ambiguity towards Jews that was characteristic of other examples of Byzantine literary production in this period. Instead, they are rigidly opposed to Jewish salvation.

*Jews in Byzantine Apocalyptic*

In Constantinople during the attempted siege of the city by combined Avar-Slav and Persian forces in 626, Mary was the intercessor *par excellence*.<sup>48</sup> It has been suggested by Averil Cameron that the cult practice of inducing Mary's intercession via icons arose in the sixth century as a desperate response to desperate times.<sup>49</sup> The Marian cult certainly received a boost on that occasion from the perambulations of the people, led by Patriarch Sergios (610-638), around the walls of the besieged city, even if he did not carry aloft an icon of the *Theotokos* as was posited until recently, in the absence of any contemporary historical witnesses.<sup>50</sup> The Byzantine sense of being besieged only increased with the pressure of Islamic military victories from the 630s onwards, the context in which Maximos lived and wrote.<sup>51</sup> The monk Maximos opposed Heraclius' moves towards the forced conversions of Jews in c. 632, claiming that it would dilute Christian purity, hastening the advent of the Antichrist (*Ep.* 8).<sup>52</sup> This was just one in a series of attempts to impose baptism on Jews in the seventh to ninth centuries.<sup>53</sup> As Shoemaker observes, 'The late sixth and early seventh centuries bear witness to increasing violence between Jews and Christians in the East, in the context of generally increasing social and religious unrest in the region.'<sup>54</sup> In the context of the general hardening of boundaries upon religious lines that is characteristic of apocalyptic literature from the seventh century onward, the later emphasis on eternal punishment of the Jews in psychagogic literature seems to have been an inevitable development. It is important to note that the four versions of the Greek text of the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos* give different emphases to Christ's anger towards the Jews and the imminence of the *Eschaton*, an area that Baun and Magdalino have suggested would repay further study.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Averil Cameron, 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople. A City Finds Its Symbol', *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series 29 (1978): 79-108; at 79-80, 104.

<sup>49</sup> Cameron, 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople', 101-102.

<sup>50</sup> The lack of contemporary evidence is surveyed by Bissera Pentcheva, 'The Supernatural Protector of Constantinople: the Virgin and Her Icons in the Tradition of the Avar Siege', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 26 (2002): 2-41, esp. 9-12 and 15-22, and Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 37-38, where she argues that such use of Marian icons in litanies did not occur until the second half of the tenth century.

<sup>51</sup> See further Pauline Allen, 'The Life and Times of Maximus the Confessor', in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3-17.

<sup>52</sup> Maximos the Confessor, *Ep.* 8 (PG 91:440-445). Magdalino, 'All Israel Will Be Saved', 236-38, 240-41, discusses the implications for the eventual salvation of Jews in both this letter and *Doctrina Iacobi*.

<sup>53</sup> Magdalino, 'All Israel Will Be Saved', 234-35, posits the forced conversions initiated by Heraclius in 632, Leo III in 721, and Basil I in 874, as a policy that some 'damnationist' apocryphal writers, who resisted the idea that Jews could be saved in the end times, criticised.

<sup>54</sup> Shoemaker, '"Let Us Go and Burn Her Body"', 782.

<sup>55</sup> Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 59; Magdalino, 'All Israel Will Be Saved', 242.

### Conclusion

This was not, however, the original tradition of the oriental churches, as represented by Jakob of Serug and Romanos Melodes in Constantinople, assuming that the latter was to some degree inspired by the former hymnographer. For them, the God-bearer was a generous and inclusive intercessor on behalf of those of all other religions, and especially the ancestral religion of the Jews. In sixth-century Asia Minor, by contrast, anti-Judaism and the *Theotokos* as intercessor were both current ideas in preaching, as we have seen in Abraham of Ephesus' homily on the *Hypapante*. In summary, we can say that the theme of Marian discrimination in intercession reflects an anti-Judaism found in some Marian hymns and homilies of the early Byzantine period, such as sixth-century Ephesus, but is not the standard in the hymns and homilies of John of Damascus, Andrew of Crete, or Germanos of Constantinople.

The *Theotokos* of Anastasia's other-world tour and of the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* seems to have taken her exclusionist cues from the tradition of Byzantine apocalyptic literature that flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries. Anti-Judaism was an unfortunately common feature of Byzantine Christian apocalyptic. It is difficult to judge on the basis of only two surviving witnesses, but the edifying sight of Christian souls being punished with temporary torments in the Byzantine apocalypses was obviously more powerful if contrasted with the negative exemplar of Jewish and other souls whose judgement was final and everlasting.

Pauline Allen notes that, in addition to allowing for social and regional variety in the early stages of development of the Marian cult, 'we have to accept some degree of contradiction or at least paradox in the evidence, even within the one genre'.<sup>56</sup> This is even more evident across the genres we have surveyed: Mary can be an intercessor in hymns but rarely in homilies of the same period; she can be a universal intercessor in Syriac liturgical poetry but an anti-Jewish judge of humanity in Greek apocalyptic three or four centuries later. The idea of the *Theotokos* interceding with her son for sinful Christians, and the idea that the mother of Jesus would not have wanted to intercede for the murderers of her Son, seem to have reinforced each other to justify discriminate intercession.

<sup>56</sup> Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature', 85.