

Andrei Dumitrescu

**THE VISIONARY EMPEROR: CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AND  
THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL IN LATE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY  
MOLDAVIAN REPRESENTATIONS**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization  
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University Private University

Vienna

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(Romania)

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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External Reader

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External Supervisor

# Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Andrei Dumitrescu**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 17 May 2023

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# Abstract

This thesis analyzes the depictions of St. Michael as protector of Emperor Constantine the Great in mural cycles of angelic miracles from late fifteenth-century Moldavia. In the narthex programs of the churches in Rădăuți (ca. 1480–95) and Bălinești (before 1499), the involvement of the Archangel in the legend of the holy emperor is depicted in two individual scenes: 1) Constantine's Baptism by Pope Silvester and 2) the Apparition of the Holy Cross. The iconographic schemata of these images lack any direct parallel in both visual and textual cultures of the late and post-Byzantine world. The present study offers an integrated examination of the literary, pictorial, and devotional background that facilitated the emergence of these highly unusual images in late medieval Moldavia. Moreover, it provides a detailed investigation of the iconographic programs in which the two episodes were assimilated. I argue that the mural cycles of angelic miracles were designed as a narrative framework for an ideal representation of Christian rulership. The scenes of Constantine's life contributed to a broader discourse on the synergy between the secular and spiritual authorities. In addition, the figure of the first Christian emperor participated in a symbolic genealogy connecting exemplary rulers from the Old Testament with images of Christian monarchs.

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# List of Abbreviations

*AB – Analecta Bollandiana*

*AII – Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A. D. Xenopol”*

*Ana – Anastasis: Research in Medieval Art and Culture*

*AP – Analele Putnei*

*AT – Ars Transsilvaniae*

*B – Byzantion*

*BF – Byzantinische Forschungen*

*BHG - Halkin, François. Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1986.*

*BMGS – Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*

*ByzSlav – Byzantinoslavica: Revue internationale des études byzantines*

*BZ – Byzantinische Zeitschrift*

*CA – Cahiers archéologiques*

*CB – Cahiers balkaniques*

*CC – Classica et Christiana. Revista Centrului de Studii Clasice și Creștine*

*Cyr – Cyrillomethodianum*

*DOP – Dumbarton Oaks Papers*

*ΔΧΑΕ – Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*

*F – Francia*

*FS – Frühmittelalterliche Studien*

*G – Gesta*

*JRA – Journal of Roman Archaeology*

*JRS – The Journal of Roman Studies*

*PG* – Jacques-Paul Migne, ed. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 1–161. Paris: Jacques-Paul Migne, 1857–1866.

*RA* – *Revue de l'Art*

*RO* – *Roma e l'Oriente*

*RRH* – *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*

*RRHA* – *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art, Série Beaux Arts*

*SB* – *Series Byzantina*

*VCh* – *Vigiliae Christianae*

*Z* – *Zograf*

*ZRVI* – *Zbornik radova Vizantinološkog Instituta*

## Introduction

In the “manual of kingcraft”<sup>1</sup> conventionally titled *De Administrando Imperio*, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (r. 913–59) taught his son, Romanos, how to negotiate with northern nations if they would ever request “some of the imperial vesture or diadems or state robes (...) in return for some service or office performed by them.”<sup>2</sup> Constantine VII advised his envisaged successor to excuse himself by saying that the imperial ceremonial vestments were not made by any human craft. According to some “secret stories of old history,” when God granted the imperial dignity to Constantine the Great (r. 306–37), he sent an angel to offer him the diadem and the ritual robes. Since then, these hallow *insignia* have been piously kept above the altar of the Great Church in Constantinople, not to be touched by anyone, except for the patriarch on special occasions.<sup>3</sup> The legend narrated by the Macedonian emperor relied on the broader belief that the imperial institution had a privileged connection with the celestial powers.<sup>4</sup> Angels were expected to act as protectors of the Christian ruler and, at the same time, as purveyors of sacred legitimacy.

My thesis deals with a much later, post-Byzantine echo of this idea concerning the angelic assistance received by exemplary monarchs.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, it examines the representation of the Archangel Michael as the protector of the ideal sovereign, embodied in

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<sup>1</sup> R. J. H. Jenkins, “General Introduction,” in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio* XIII, 66–67.

<sup>3</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio* XIII, 66–69. The treatise claims that Constantine the Great had even put a dreadful curse on anyone who would dare to touch the imperial *stemma* and robes.

<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between archangels and the imperial office, see Ovidiu Victor Olar, *Împăratul înaripat. Cultul Arhanghelului Mihail în lumea bizantină* [The winged emperor: the cult of the Archangel Michael in the Byzantine world] (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2004), 221–222, 228–238. The imperial dimension of angelic figures in Byzantium has been examined, with a special emphasis on visual sources, by Cyril Mango, “St. Michael and Attis,” *ΔΧΑΕ* 12 (1984): 39–69, Henry Maguire, “Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art,” *G* 28, no. 2 (1989): 222–223, and Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, “Note sur la représentation des archanges en costume impérial dans l’iconographie byzantine,” *CA* 46 (1998): 121–127.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘post-Byzantine’ only to set the chronological framework of my thesis. However, when it comes to the continuity of Byzantine artistic and spiritual tradition in Eastern Europe, I do not believe that the period immediately after the fall of Constantinople (1453), Mystras (1460), and Trebizond (1461), should be so drastically differentiated from what was before, especially in regions that had never been under the empire’s political control.

the figure of Constantine the Great, in late fifteenth-century wall paintings from the Principality (*Voivodat*) of Moldavia.<sup>6</sup> The mural programs of several churches patronized by Voivode Stephen III (r. 1457–1504) and local nobility contain extensive narrative cycles devoted to the Archangel’s interventions in the history of salvation. Within this broader narrative framework, a series of episodes whose pictorial schemata lack any direct parallel to Eastern European visual culture, depicts St. Michael’s involvement in the story of Constantine’s conversion and the foundation of the Christian Empire.

### 1. The Cycles of Angelic Miracles in Byzantine and Moldavian Iconography

Resembling earlier Byzantine and Balkan models, which have been extensively discussed by Smiljka Gabelić, Moldavian cycles of angelic miracles bring together a vast selection of otherwise disparate biblical and hagiographical episodes.<sup>7</sup> These visual narratives emphasize St. Michael’s role as divine messenger and mediator between God and humankind. The commander of heavenly hosts is, thus, identified with the rather enigmatic “the angel of the Lord” (ἄγγελος κυρίου) mentioned on various occasions in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>8</sup> The composite character of these visual narratives echoes the modular structure of some earlier Byzantine and Slavonic literary works that compile various stories of the Archangel’s miracles, transforming them into a unitary, chronological tale. Such a configuration can be encountered in the ninth-century encomium and *diegesis* on St. Michael composed by Pantaleon, a rather

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<sup>6</sup> On Constantine as model of rulership in Byzantium, see Ruth Macrides, “The New Constantine and the New Constantinople—1261?,” *BMGS* 6 (1980): 13–41; Paul Magdalino, ed., *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Papers from the Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate Pub. Co., 1994). The echoes of this tradition in the political culture of the Balkans have been discussed by Vojislav Djurić, “Le nouveau Constantin dans l’art serbe medieval,” in *Lithostroton. Studien zur byzantinischen Kunst und Geschichte. Festschrift für Marcell Restle*, ed. Brigitt Borkopp-Restle and Thomas Steppan (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 2000), 55–65. Some general implications of the Constantinian archetype in the self-fashioning of Moldavian and Rus’ian rulers, without any reference to the relationship with the Archangel, have been analyzed by Liviu Pilat, “The ‘New Constantine’ and Eastern European Political Thought After the Fall of Byzantium,” *CC* 10 (2015): 303–314.

<sup>7</sup> Smiljka Gabelić, *Ciklus arhandela u vizantinijskoj umetnosti* [The cycle of the Archangel in Byzantine art] (Belgrade: The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, The Department of Historical Sciences; Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Art History, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> On the “angel of the Lord” in biblical texts, see Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

obscure deacon and *chartophylax* of the Great Church in Constantinople (*BHG* 1284–1289).<sup>9</sup> Pantaleon's works obtained an ample diffusion across the Byzantine world.<sup>10</sup> In the early tenth century, their narrative structure was likely used as a reference point by Archbishop Clement of Ohrid (d. 916), who wrote a similar Slavonic homily on the Holy Archangels.<sup>11</sup>

In late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Moldavian churches, the cycles of angelic miracles are usually situated in the upper registers or on the vaults of the westernmost chambers, in close vicinity to the tombs of noblemen and high clerics. As noted by Vlad Bedros, a significant portion of these visual narratives, comprising apocryphal scenes such as the Fall of Lucifer, the Archangel Preventing the Devil from Stealing Moses' Dead Body, or his Fight with a Demon, reflects the psychopomp and apotropaic function of St. Michael's figure (Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> In both Eastern and Western Christianity, the commander of the heavenly hosts acted as a guide of souls in their afterlife and protector against malevolent forces.<sup>13</sup>

However, the composite character of these visual narratives facilitated the development of multiple layers of meaning. Similar to Pantaleon's Greek orations, a significant portion of

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<sup>9</sup> The Latin versions of both texts have been edited by Jacques-Paul Migne; see Pantaleon, *Encomium of the Great and Most Glorious Michael, the Prince of the Celestial Army*, ed. Migne, *Encomium in maximum et gloriosissimum Michaellem coelestis militia principem*, in *PG*, vol. 98, 1259–1266 and *Narrative on the Miracles of the Great Archangel Michael*, ed. Migne, *Narratio miraculorum maximi archangeli Michaelis*, *PG*, vol. 140, 573–592. On the author's background, see Cyril Mango, "The Date of the Studius Basilica at Istanbul," *BMGS* 4 (1978): 117–118. Hans Georg Beck dates Pantaleon's encomia to the twelfth century without any justification, see *Kirche und Teologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1959), 636. This hypothesis is not tenable since the encomia were already circulating during the tenth and eleventh centuries: see Bernadette Martin-Hisard, "Le culte de l'Archange Michel dans l'Empire Byzantin (VIIIe–Xe siècles)," in *Culto e insediamenti micaelici nell'Italia Meridionale fra tarda antichità e medioevo. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Monte Sant'Angelo 18–21 novembre 1992*, ed. Carlo Carletti and Giorgio Otranto (Bari: Edipuglia, 1994), 351–373 and Olar, *Împăratul înaripat*, 190–194.

<sup>10</sup> Pantaleon's works have been transmitted in over forty Greek manuscripts: see Martin-Hisard, "Le culte," 367n83.

<sup>11</sup> Clement of Ohrid, *The Encomium of Michael and Gabriel*, ed. Yordan Ivanov, *Pohvalno slovo na Mihaila i Gavriila*, in *Balgarski starini iz Makedonija* (Sofia, 1931), 334–337.

<sup>12</sup> Vlad Bedros, "Cultul arhanghelilor, surse literare și iconografice. Moldova secolelor XV–XVI" [The cult of the archangels, literary and iconographic sources: fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Moldavia], in *Arhangheli și îngerii* (Bucharest: Deisis, Stavropoleos, 2011), 120–123, 128–129. Bedros' observation refers to sixteenth-century cycles. However, it is equally valid for earlier examples.

<sup>13</sup> For the origins and use of the funerary and eschatological themes related to St. Michael in Byzantine iconography, see Smiljka Gabelić, "The Fall of Satan in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art," *Z* 23 (1993–1994): 65–74 and "The Archangelos Xorinos, or the Banisher," *DOP* 50 (1996): 345–360.



the mural cycles in late fifteenth-century Moldavia, comprising episodes such as Moses receiving the Law and the Penance of King David, illustrate Michael's deeds as the guardian angel of Israel, the elect nation, and of its God-anointed rulers (Fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> The scenes from the Old Testament provide a broader symbolic context for the depiction of Constantine's legend. St. Michael's participation in the emperor's story, which constitutes an unexplored feature of Moldavian frescoes, spotlights his role as purveyor of divine legitimacy, alluding to the transfer of the royal charisma from the Jewish kings of the Old Testament to the Christian monarchs portrayed as rulers of the "New Israel."<sup>15</sup> One of the main premises of my thesis is that Moldavian series of angelic miracles were designed as a narrative framework for the symbolic representation of ideal rulership. Within these mural cycles, Constantine was integrated into a genealogy of power mediated by the Archangel. In my view, this rhetoric of symbolic continuity aimed to promote a self-defining discourse of the Moldavian voivode, who was presented as an heir of pious rulers invested by God, through an implicit association with the first Christian emperor.

## 2. The Churches at Rădăuți and Bălinești: Historical Background

My investigation focuses on some of the earliest known representations of the Archangel's involvement in Constantine's legend, attested in the late fifteenth-century frescoes at the churches in Rădăuți and Bălinești. Erected at the end of the fourteenth century, the church of St. Nicholas in Rădăuți functioned both as a dynastic necropolis of Moldavian voivodes and as a cathedral for the third bishop of the realm, whose jurisdiction comprised the so-called

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<sup>14</sup> Pantaleon emphasizes the Archangel's role as divine messenger, connecting the Old and New Testaments. An unprecedented element in his *diegesis* is the integration of historical miracles related to Byzantine emperors into the narrative of St. Michael; see Martin-Hisard, "Le culte," 367–368. The Latin edition omits almost all these miracles, including the apparition to Constantine.

<sup>15</sup> On the use of this *topos* in the Byzantine rhetoric of power, see Shay Eshel, *The Concept of Elect Nation in Byzantium* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018).

Upper Land (*Țara de Sus*).<sup>16</sup> In the late 1400s, during the tenure of Bishop Ioanichie (in office 1472–1504), Voivode Stephen III supported a lavish restoration of the church, as part of a broader legitimation campaign built on the exaltation of his illustrious genealogy.<sup>17</sup> In this period, sometime between 1480 and the mid-1490s, the prince commissioned new frescoes for the cathedral, replacing an earlier decoration of uncertain date.<sup>18</sup>

The mural program devised under the patronage of Stephen III puts special emphasis on the collaboration between exemplary rulers and angels. The mural decoration of the narthex displays an extensive cycle of the Archangels' miracles, originally comprising the twenty-five scenes, which are not arranged in chronological order.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the iconographers at Rădăuți favored the configuration of thematic clusters, by assembling series of three to five episodes on the vaults of the four lateral bays of the chamber. The symbolic association between the first Christian emperor and the heavenly *Archistrategos* is depicted in two individual episodes. On the southwestern vault, the Archangel reveals the miraculous sight of the cross to the mounted figure of the basileus (Fig. 3). This visionary scene is correlated with Constantine's legendary Baptism by Pope Silvester of Rome, located in the upper zone of the central bay. Here, the Archangel appears above the baptismal font blessing both the pontiff and the emperor (Fig. 4).

A few years later, this twofold sequence was replicated in the court chapel of a local magnate, Grand Logothetes (*Logofăt*) Ioan Tăutu (d. 1511). The church of St. Nicholas in

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<sup>16</sup> The necropolis at Rădăuți has been investigated by Lia and Adrian Bătrâna, *Biserica Sf. Nicolae din Rădăuți. Cercetări arheologice și interpretări istorice asupra începuturilor Țării Moldovei* [The St. Nicholas church in Rădăuți: archeological research and historical interpretations on the beginnings of the Realm of Moldavia] (Piatra Neamț: Ed. Constantin Matasa, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Matei Cazacu and Ana Dumitrescu, "Culte dynastique et images votives en Moldavie au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: L'importance des modèles serbes," *CB* 15 (1990): 14–64.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of the murals, see Tereza Sinigalia, "Entre Pierre I<sup>er</sup> et Étienne le Grand," *Ana* 6, no. 2 (November 2019): 9–30 and Emil Dragnev, "Programul iconografic al unei biserici episcopale în vremea lui Ștefan cel Mare. Picturile murale de la Sf. Nicolae din Rădăuți în urma intervenției restauratorilor" [The iconographic program of an episcopal church from the time of Stephen the Great: the wall paintings at the church of St. Nicholas in Rădăuți after the restoration], in *Monumentul, XXI, Lucrările Simpozionului Internațional Monumentul—Tradiție și viitor, Ediția a XXI-a, Iași, 2019*, ed. Lucian-Valeriu Lefter and Aurelia Ichim (Iași: Editura Doxologia, 2020), 11–35.

<sup>19</sup> Tereza Sinigalia, "L'Archange des commencements," *Ana* 9, no. 1 (May 2022): 9–44.

Bălinești, a village not far from Rădăuți, was built and decorated with frescoes before 1499, as indicated by the dedicatory inscription on the southern façade.<sup>20</sup> The cycle of angelic miracles in the narthex at Bălinești follows the model set by the slightly earlier murals at the bishopric in Rădăuți. This time, however, the scenes of Constantine's Vision and Baptism are integrated into a unified sequence, situated on the northwestern wall of the polygonal narthex (Figs. 5–7).<sup>21</sup> While episodes from the emperor's legend are a recurring element in later sixteenth-century angelic cycles from Moldavia, the hagiographical sequence centered on the story of the emperor's conversion to Christianity represents an outstanding feature of the mural programs at Rădăuți and Bălinești.<sup>22</sup> Its exceptional character is further enhanced by the fact that the Archangel's participation in the two scenes is not explicitly mentioned in any known hagiographical or historical account.

Until recently, these images were almost completely unknown. Prior to the restoration completed in 2021, the fifteenth-century murals at Rădăuți and Bălinești were covered by a thick layer of dust, smoke, and modern retouches. Even so, in the 1960s, Sorin Ulea was able to discern the general iconographic schema of the Emperor's Vision in the narthex at Bălinești,

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<sup>20</sup> The inscription was published by M. Berza, ed., *Repertoriul monumentelor și obiectelor de artă din timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare* [The repertoire of monuments and artworks from the time of Stephen the Great] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1958), cat. no. 167, 172. Most historians connected the date inscribed on the façade—December 6, 1499—with the completion of the building and used it as a *terminus post quem* for dating the murals. Corina Popa argued that the interior was decorated around 1510–11, before Tăutu's death; see *Bălinești* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1981), 37. Ștefan S. Gorovei initially proposed an earlier dating, approximately between 1501 and 1505; see Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, "Un tablou votiv și o necropolă familială. Biserica logofătului Tăutu de la Bălinești" [A votive composition and a family necropolis: the church of Logothetes Ioan Tăutu in Bălinești] *AP* 11, no. 1 (2015): 7–30. However, in the paper titled "Bălinești. Comentarii cronologice și diplomatice" [Bălinești: chronological and diplomatic commentaries], presented at the *Twenty-seventh Symposium of Medieval Art and Civilization* hosted by the National Museum of History in Suceava (November 2022), Gorovei has convincingly shown that the inscription indicates the year of the consecration of the church after the completion of both its interior and exterior decoration.

<sup>21</sup> Emil Dragnev, "Observații și precizări privind ciclul Faptelor Arhanghelului Mihail de la biserica 'Sfântul Nicolae' din Bălinești după restaurarea picturilor din pronaos" [Observations and mentions concerning the cycle of the Deeds of the Archangel Michael at St. Nicholas church in Bălinești after the restoration of the wall paintings in the narthex], in *Monumentul XXIII: Lucrările Simpozionului Internațional "Monumentul – Tradiție și viitor,"* Ediția a XXIII-a, Iași, 2021, ed. Lucian-Valeriu Lefter, Aurica Ichim, and Alexandru Gorea (Iași: Editura Doxologia, 2022), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Bedros, "Cultul arhanghelilor," 116–117, who comments on sixteenth-century representations.

albeit without noticing the presence of the Archangel.<sup>23</sup> When the conservation process had already begun, Bedros mentioned the partially cleaned scene of the Baptism in the narthex of the same church.<sup>24</sup> Since then, the images have started to receive more scholarly attention. In 2022, Tereza Sinigalia and Emil Dragnev published extensive iconographic repertoires of the angelic cycles at Rădăuți and Bălinești, in which the scenes inspired by the Constantinian legend are briefly referred to.<sup>25</sup> However, both scholars adopt a rather descriptive approach, without focusing on the broader implications of the images in the context of late fifteenth-century Moldavian culture.

### 3. Research Aims and Methods

This study aims to expand the current understanding of the recently restored murals at Rădăuți and Bălinești through an integrated and interdisciplinary examination of the visual, literary, and liturgical background that made possible the emergence of the ‘tangled’ narrative of Constantine and St. Michael in fifteenth-century Moldavia. The scenes of the Emperor’s Baptism and Vision are discussed in separate chapters, which follow two main research directions. On the one hand, my analysis focuses on the visual and textual sources likely employed by Moldavian iconographers; on the other hand, it explores the symbolic use of the depictions of Constantine’s life in the iconographic programs of the churches at Rădăuți and Bălinești.

First, I intend to show that these images were situated at the intersection between several pictorial and narrative traditions of Constantine’s story. The painters hired by Stephen III and

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<sup>23</sup> Sorin Ulea, “L’origine et la signification idéologique de la peinture extérieure moldave,” *RRH* 2 (1963): 287–288n13.

<sup>24</sup> Vlad Bedros, “Selectia sfinților ierarhi în absidele moldovenești (secolele XV–XVI)” [The selection of saintly hierarchs in Moldavian apses (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries)], in *Polychronion Profesorului Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca la 70 de ani*, ed. Lia Brad Chisacof and Cătălina Vătășescu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2012), 66.

<sup>25</sup> Sinigalia, “L’Archange,” 38–39, who mentions only Constantine’s Vision; Dragnev, “Observații și precizări,” 25–26.

his grand logothetes drew on a vast iconographic repertoire containing both Eastern and Western elements. The literate advisors of these unknown craftsmen, most likely clerics who proposed the selection and arrangement of the scenes, must have been aware of multiple Byzantine and Slavonic versions of the Constantinian legend. In order to support this hypothesis, I will rely especially on the texts that were copied in contemporary Moldavian manuscripts. At the same time, I also take into consideration how written sources might have interacted with the oral transmission of stories. Of course, this phenomenon is almost impossible to trace. However, I believe that acknowledging its importance in medieval culture is essential for developing a flexible view on the available textual material.

Second, the present thesis assesses the meaning and function attributed to Constantine's Baptism and Vision within the broader iconographic configuration of the cycles of angelic miracles at Rădăuți and Bălinești. After dealing with potential sources of inspiration and their 'distillation' in the composite narrative of SS Constantine and Michael, each chapter turns to the meaning attributed to individual scenes as elements of complex iconographic configurations. I model this section of my research on the "serial and relational" iconographic approach proposed by Jérôme Baschet.<sup>26</sup> According to Baschet, meaning is not to be found in autonomous visual units but rather in the configuration of broader programs conceptualized as "representational networks" or "nodes of relations." A proper understanding of medieval iconography, Baschet argues, entails both the integration of individual images into specific programs and a comparative analysis of visual networks within the broader context of iconographic series.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the present thesis examines how Moldavian iconographers created a multitude of pictorial and spatial analogies between the scenes of Constantine's

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<sup>26</sup> Jérôme Baschet, *L'iconographie médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 155–162. A similar methodological framework has recently been employed by Roland Betancourt to unravel the meaning of a sixth-century *opus sectile* situated on the western wall of the nave of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople; see *Performing the Gospels in Byzantium: Sight, Sound, and Space in the Divine Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 235–282.

Baptism and Vision, other episodes from the cycles of angelic miracles, and connected iconographic themes. Within this complex system of visual associations, the joint depiction of Constantine and Pope Silvester within the scene of the Baptism is connected to other images of the interaction between spiritual and secular powers, thus contributing to a broader pictorial discourse on the ideal synergy between secular and spiritual powers. In addition, the figure of the holy emperor was set alongside other exemplary monarchs, both from Old Testament and Christian stories, prompting a rhetoric of symbolic legitimation elaborated by the political elites of late fifteenth-century Moldavia.

## Chapter 1: Constantine's Baptism between Bishops and Angels

In the narthex of the episcopal church in Rădăuți, the Baptism is located in the upper zone of the central bay, occupying one of the most prominent spots in the entire chamber (Fig. 4).<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the Apparition of the Cross, in which the emperor has the conventional physiognomic traits of a middle-aged bearded man, the Baptism depicts a much younger, beardless Constantine. Portrayed with his customary *regalia*, the emperor stands next to the baptismal font, facing Pope Silvester and a deacon who holds a precious casket likely meant to contain incense or perhaps the Eucharist itself. Silvester is represented as the celebrant of the rite, wearing a patriarchal *sakkos* decorated with crosses, ornamented *epimanikia*, an *omophorion*, and a Latin miter.<sup>29</sup> He raises his hands before the font in a gesture of prayer possibly related to the blessing of the water.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, during the last decade of the fifteenth century, the hagiographical sequence comprising the emperor's Baptism and the Apparition of the Cross was replicated in the church of St. Nicholas in Bălinești (Fig. 5). The Baptism of Constantine is situated in the middle register of the northwestern wall, next to the epiphany of the cross. The image follows the same iconographic schema as the mural at Rădăuți. However, the painters at Bălinești represented Silvester and his deacon with additional liturgical attributes: the pope carries a closed Gospel book, while his assistant holds not only a golden vessel, but also a censer.<sup>30</sup> The scene bears a Slavonic *titulus*, which has not been preserved in the fresco at Rădăuți: **КРЪЩЕНІЕ КОНСТА(Н)ТИНОВО** ("The Baptism of Constantine").<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The scene is not mentioned in the repertoire of the angelic cycle at Rădăuți by Sinigalia, "L'Archange." The Baptism is located on the northern wall. The corresponding scene on the southern wall does not exist anymore.

<sup>29</sup> Since, the upper part of the composition is not preserved anymore, only half of the head covering is visible. Nonetheless, Silvester is represented with a Latin miter in an *imago clipeata* on the south-eastern wall of the naos at Rădăuți and, as we shall see, in the analogous representation of Constantine's Baptism at Bălinești.

<sup>30</sup> Although the deacon in the scene at Rădăuți only carries the golden container in his left hand, his right hand still seems to hold the ring of a censer, which either was never painted or is no longer visible. The mural's mediocre state of preservation does not allow us to obtain a clearer idea about such details.

<sup>31</sup> The inscription at Bălinești has been recently published by Dragnev, "Observații și precizări," 18.

Although St. Michael's participation in the episode is not referred to in Byzantine and Slavonic literary accounts, the conversion of the Roman emperor is included in the two pictorial cycle of angelic miracles.<sup>32</sup> In the wall paintings at Rădăuți and Bălinești, a diminished bust of the "Great Angel" (Daniel 12: 1) appears above the baptismal font blessing the officiating pontiff and the approaching basileus. In the scene at Bălinești, St. Michael's figure mirrors the iconographic features assigned to him in the adjacent composition of Constantine's Vision. Both mural panels depict the Archangel opening his arms toward the other characters. Yet, the meaning of his gesture is slightly different in each episode. While in the image of the Baptism, St. Michael performs the benediction sign over Constantine and Silvester, in the Vision, his palms are wide open in a deictic gesture, marking his role as mediator in the revelation of the cross. Unfortunately, the Archangel's representation in the fresco at Rădăuți was almost completely destroyed due to the modern addition of a wooden beam. In the current state of preservation, one can only discern a fragment of the Archangel's fluttering mantle and some traces of the feathers on his right wing. Even so, these few remaining elements are enough to substantiate his presence at the center of the composition. This reconstruction is strengthened by the fact that, apart from the minor additions at Bălinești, the iconographic schemata of the two murals are identical in almost every detail.

The representation of Constantine's Baptism among the Archangel's miraculous interventions has no clear parallel in the earlier visual culture of the Byzantine world. During the eleventh century, an image of Silvester presenting the portraits of SS Peter and Paul to Constantine—an episode preceding his conversion—was engraved on the upper arm of a fragmentary silver cross currently in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (Figs. 8–9). Two other metal pieces which seem to have belonged to the same object depict St. Michael appearing to Joshua outside the walls of Jericho, to the right, and his miracle at the sanctuary in Chonae, to

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<sup>32</sup> Dragnev mentions the scene at Bălinești but provides no explanation; see "Observații și precizări," 25.



the left.<sup>33</sup> However, the connection between the episode from the story of Constantine's conversion and the two manifestations of the "Great Angel" is rather loose.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the Moldavian iconography of the Baptism, on, St. Michael is not directly involved in the emperor's tale in the depiction on the Dumbarton Oaks cross. Unless new pictorial material is discovered, the frescoes at Rădăuți and Bălinești remain an outstanding example whose significance has not been fully understood yet.

The present chapter analyzes the meaning of the two Moldavian renditions of Constantine's Baptism and their symbolic implications within the iconographic programs which they belong to. St. Michael's unexpected participation alongside Pope Silvester in the conversion of the Roman emperor raises some important questions concerning the narrative content of the scene and its use in the cultural context of late fifteenth-century Moldavia. By exploring the narrative and pictorial backgrounds of the murals at Rădăuți and Bălinești (Section 1 and 2), I aim to understand what versions of the tale circulated in Moldavia and how they were interpreted by the local literati who may have advised the painters hired by noble patrons. The final part of the chapter (Section 3) addresses the broader religious and political factors that motivated the visual actualization of this particular episode from the emperor's legendary biography during the reign of Voivode Stephen III.

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<sup>33</sup> J. H. Jenkins and Ernst Kitzinger, "A Cross of the Patriarch Michael Cerularius with an Art-Historical Comment," *DOP* 21 (1967): 235–249. Jenkins proposes a rather stretched correlation between the iconographic program of the cross and the ambitious patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Keroularios (in office 1043–59). According to Jenkins, Keroularios compared his central role in the Church both to the Archangel Michael, his namesake, and to Pope Silvester. However, there is no concrete evidence to connect the fragments of the silver cross with the eleventh-century patriarch. Cf. Cyril Mango, "La croix dit de Michel le Cérulaire et la croix de Saint-Michel de Sykéôn," *CA* 36 (1998): 41–48.

<sup>34</sup> Mango does not exclude the possibility that the three fragments currently exhibited together belonged to two different crosses—one dedicated to the Archangel, the other to St. Constantine or Pope Silvester. These crosses were serial objects and, therefore, tended to be extremely similar. There is no evidence about the conditions in which the pieces were discovered. Moreover, Mango points out that the Greek inscriptions attached to the scenes of the Archangel's miracles and the names of Constantine and Silvester display some formal differences; see "La croix," 44–47.

## 1. Competing Narratives on Constantine's Baptism

After the emperor's death in May 337, historical reports offered conflicting versions of his baptism.<sup>35</sup> The *Life of Constantine* by Eusebius of Caesarea recounts that the monarch spent most of his life as a catechumen. Eusebius argues that the emperor wished to receive the sacrament of initiation in the river of Jordan, where Christ himself had been baptized by John (Matthew 3: 13–17, Mark 1: 9–13, and Luke 3: 21–23). However, in the spring of 337, when he felt that his end was approaching, Constantine summoned several bishops to the suburbs of Nicomedia and asked them to perform the baptismal rite. Thus, Eusebius continues, “alone of all the emperors from the beginning of time, Constantine was initiated by rebirth in the mysteries of Christ and exulted in the Spirit on being vouchsafed the divine seal.”<sup>36</sup>

Focusing on the symbolic and spiritual significance of the moment, Eusebius leaves aside several important details concerning the circumstances in which the baptism was officiated. His omissions gloss over certain problematic aspects related to the religious tensions between Homoousian Christians, who identified themselves as defenders of the Nicene Creed of 325, and their adversaries polemically labelled as followers of the heresiarch Arius of Alexandria (d. 336).<sup>37</sup> Eusebius' account contains only a generic reference to the officiating bishops, without dwelling on their identity or affiliation to one of the competing forms of Christianity. Nevertheless, toward the end of the fourth century, the Latin *Chronicle* of Jerome (ca. 342/47–420) mentioned that Constantine's baptism *in articulo mortis* was officiated by another

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<sup>35</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the late antique variants of the tale and their historical background, see Garth Fowden, “The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and Their Influence,” *JRS* 84 (1994): 146–170. The present chapter will only refer to the narratives with direct implications for the iconography of Constantine's Baptism in late fifteenth-century Moldavia.

<sup>36</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, IV, 62, ed. Averil Cameron and Stuart Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> It is widely accepted that the traditional representation of the fourth century as the battleground between two ‘Nicene Orthodoxy’ or ‘Catholicism’ and ‘Arianism’ is far from being accurate. The unifying denomination of ‘Arians’ was a polemical construct used by Athanasius of Alexandria (in office 328–39; 346–73) to discredit a wide spectrum of doctrinal positions concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son, supported by his adversaries; see David Gwynn, *The Eusebians. The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the ‘Arian Controversy.’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007).

Eusebius, at that moment bishop of Nicomedia and future archbishop of Constantinople (in office 339–41). Eusebius was a notorious opponent of Homoousian theology, also related to the imperial family.<sup>38</sup> The *Chronicle* stresses the fact that, by receiving the baptism from him, Constantine succumbed to “Arian dogma.” His fall caused “seizures of churches and discord of the whole world” throughout the following period, in which Jerome lived.<sup>39</sup>

The story centered on Pope Silvester I (p. 314–35) was likely fashioned during the fifth century as an orthodox reaction to the rather embarrassing reality of Constantine’s non-Nicene baptism.<sup>40</sup> Elaborated within the Roman milieu, as Wilhelm Pohlkamp convincingly argues, the tale known as the *Actus Silvestri* was transmitted in three Latin versions conventionally labelled as A, B, and C.<sup>41</sup> The earliest of them, version A, which may have relied on some unknown older narratives, is almost unanimously dated around or after 450. Version B was composed either in the same period or slightly later, while version C is a medieval reworking of the tale.<sup>42</sup> The only published text of the *Actus* belongs to this later redaction.<sup>43</sup> The story purports that Constantine was baptized in Rome, not at the end of his life, but in the initial part of his reign. The emperor enters the scene as a persecutor of Christians, whose gruesome

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<sup>38</sup> On Eusebius’ doctrinal views, see Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 105–120.

<sup>39</sup> Jerome, *Chronicle* 279<sup>th</sup> Olympiad, 31.a, ed. R. Helm, trans. Benoît Jeanjean and Bertrand Lançon, *Saint Jérôme, chronique: Continuation de la chronique d’Eusèbe, années 326–378. Suivie de quatre études sur les chroniques et chonographies dans l’antiquité tardive (IV<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004); *Constantinus extremo uitae suae tempore ab Eusebio Nicomedensi episcopo baptizatus in Arrianum dogma declinat. A quo usque in praesens tempus ecclesiarum rapinae et totius orbis est secuta discordia.*

<sup>40</sup> On the history of the *Actus Silvestri*, see W. Levison, “Konstantische Schenkung und Silvester-Legende,” in *Miscellanea Francesco Ehrle: Scritti di storia e paleografia* (Rome: Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, 1924): 159–247, Wilhelm Pohlkamp, “Textfassungen, literarische Formen und geschichtliche Funktionen der römischen Silvester-Akten,” *F* 19 (1992): 115–196, Tessa Canella, *Gli Actus Silvestri. Genesi di una leggenda su Costantino imperatore* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2006), and Sessa, “Constantine and Silvester,” 77–91.

<sup>41</sup> Pohlkamp, “Textfassungen,” 157. For a survey of the abundant scholarship dedicated to this hagiographical text and its versions, see Canella, *Gli Actus Silvestri*, XIII – XXIV, 1–46.

<sup>42</sup> Tessa Canella, “Gli *Actus Silvestri* tra Oriente e Occidente: Storia e diffusione di una leggenda costantiniana,” in *Enciclopedia costantiniana sulla figura e l’immagine dell’imperatore del cosiddetto Editto di Milano*, 313–2013, vol. 2 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 2013), 243.

<sup>43</sup> There is no critical edition of the *Actus Silvestri*. Most scholars refer to the fifteenth-century edition of F. Mombricitus, ed., *Sanctuarium sive Vitae sanctorum collectae ex codicibus mss.* vol. 2, (Milan, 1475), f. 279v–293v, republished by Pietro De Leo, *Vita seu Actus Sancti Silvestri Pp. et Conf.* (hereafter *Actus Silvestri*), in *Ricerche sui falsi medioevali I: Il Constitutum Constantini; compilazione agiografica del sec. VIII. Note e documenti per una nuova lettura* (Reggio Calabria: Editori meridionali riuniti, 1974), 152–221.

measures prompted Pope Silvester and the Roman clergy to flee from the city and seek refuge on Mount Soracte. When Constantine was punished by God through leprosy, the pagan priests of the Capitolium advised him to bathe in fresh blood of infants to recover his health. Yet, moved by the laments of the mothers whose children were about to be slaughtered, the emperor refused to commit such an atrocity.<sup>44</sup> As a reward for his righteous act, God granted Constantine both bodily and spiritual salvation by means of a dream in which SS Peter and Paul exhorted him to summon Silvester back to Rome and receive another kind of healing bath from him.<sup>45</sup> Following the instructions of the apostles, the repenting Constantine was miraculously cured through the baptismal sacrament administered by the pope.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the emperor issued a series of edicts granting privileges to the Church and encouraged the citizens of Rome to convert through his personal example.<sup>47</sup>

The version of the emperor's baptism in the *Actus Silvestri* was soon embraced by the vast majority of Christian authors and was widely disseminated in several languages, including Greek, Syriac, and Armenian.<sup>48</sup> In the early sixth century, the Silvester legend had already reached the Byzantine intellectual environment. The final part of the monumental epigram at the church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople, the lavish foundation of Anicia Juliana (462–527/8), refers to a mural depiction of Constantine's baptism located on the western façade: “There you may see a marvelous creation of the holy pencils above the center of the porch, the wise Constantine, how escaping from the idols he quenched the impious fury of the heathen and found the light of the Trinity by cleansing his limbs in water.”<sup>49</sup> Cyril Mango and Ihor

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<sup>44</sup> *Actus Silvestri* I, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Actus Silvestri* I, 5–7.

<sup>46</sup> *Actus Silvestri* I, 7–9.

<sup>47</sup> *Actus Silvestri* I, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Canella, “Gli *Actus Silvestri*,” 248–250.

<sup>49</sup> “On the Church of St. Polyeuctus, the Martyr,” in *The Greek Anthology* I, 10: 71–73, trans. William Roger Paton., *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1 Books 1–5 (London and New York: William Heinemann and G. B. Putnam's Sons, 1920). On the meaning of the epigram, see Mary Whitby, “The St. Polyeuktos Epigram (AP 1.10): A Literary Perspective,” in *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (London: Routledge, 2006), 159–187.

Ševčenko have interpreted the mention of bodily purification in the last verse of this passage (ἐν ὕδασι γυῖα καθήρας) as an allusion to Constantine's leprosy cured by the baptism, suggesting that the image at St. Polyeuktos followed the Silvester narrative.<sup>50</sup> Although this observation is both plausible and insightful, the epigram at St. Polyeuktos remains rather ambiguous. Even so, the circulation of the story in early sixth-century Byzantium is proven by the *Chronography* of John Malalas, which contains an overt reference to Constantine's baptism in Rome: "After fasting and having taken instruction, he was baptized by Silvester, bishop of Rome—he himself and his mother Helena and all his relatives and his friends and a whole host of other Romans. And so, the emperor Constantine became a Christian."<sup>51</sup>

In later periods, this episode became a constant feature of Byzantine historical writings, such as the ninth-century chronicles by George the Monk and Theophanes the Confessor and the mid-twelfth-century *Epitome of Histories* by John Zonaras (ca. 1080–98–ca. 1161).<sup>52</sup> The tale was also adopted into the Byzantine lives of SS Constantine and Helena.<sup>53</sup> Alexander Kazhdan identified three main versions of the emperor's *vita*, giving them conventional titles following the names of their editors or of a *codex unicum*.<sup>54</sup> Based on minute analysis of their narrative structure and content, Kazhdan shows that the so-called "Guidi," "Opitz," and

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<sup>50</sup> Cyril Mango and Ihor Ševčenko, "Remains of the Church of St. Polyeuktos at Constantinople," *DOP* 15 (1961): 245. The hypothesis concerning the use of the Silvester legend as a source of the representation at St. Polyeuktos is further developed and problematized by Garth Fowden, "Constantine, Silvester, and the church of S. Polyeuctus in Constantinople," *JRA* 7 (1994): 274–284. On the original configuration of the church, see Martin Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana's Palace-Church in Istanbul* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989).

<sup>51</sup> John Malalas, *Chronography* XIII, 2, ed. Ioannes Thurn, *Chronographia* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2000); English translation from *The Chronicle of John Malalas. A Translation*, trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott, with Brian Croke, Jenny Ferber, Simon Franklin, Alan James, Douglas Kelly, Ann Moffatt, and Ann Nixon (Melbourne: The Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> George the Monk, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor, *Georgii monachi chronicon*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904), 485–487; Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronography* 17–18, ed. Carolus de Boor, *Theophanis chronographia*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883); and John Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories*, ed. Theodor Büttner-Wobst, *Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum libri XIII–XVII* (Bonn: Weber, 1897), 7–12.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Kazhdan, "Constantin Imaginaire: Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great," *B* 57 (1987): 200–202, 239–240.

<sup>54</sup> Kazhdan, "Constantin Imaginaire," 200–202. On the pre-Metaphrastic lives of Constantine, see also Friedhelm Winkelmann, "Die vormetaphrastischen griechischen hagiographischen Vitae Constantini Magni," in *Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Études Byzantines, Ochride 10–16 Septembre 1961*, vol. 2 (Belgrade: Comité Yugoslave des Études Byzantines, 1964), 405–415.

“Patmos” legends (*BHG* 364, 365, and 365n) can be reasonably dated to the ninth century.<sup>55</sup> The first one, which will be used as a reference point throughout this thesis, was undoubtedly the most popular version in the middle and late Byzantine periods. The “Guidi” life obtained a wide dissemination, being transmitted in two secondary redactions copied in over forty manuscripts. Furthermore, the section on Constantine’s reign in the *Church History* by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca. 1256–ca. 1335) incorporates various passages from it.<sup>56</sup> Similar to the other Medieval Greek *vitae* of the first Christian emperor, the “Guidi” version brings together various stories about its protagonist within a unified narrative framework. The Silvester legend is, of course, one of them. An extensive account, comprising Constantine’s leprosy, the rejection of the blood bath, the intervention of the apostles, and the miraculous healing through the baptism, is included after the Emperor’s Vision of the cross and the defeat of Maxentius (r. 306–12) at the Milvian Bridge.<sup>57</sup>

An analogous sequence of events is presented by the late fourteenth-century Slavonic *Encomium of the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena* by Patriarch Euthymios of Tarnovo.<sup>58</sup> Copied by the monk Iacov of Putna under the patronage of Voivode Stephen III, this text was one of the main hagiographical sources on Constantine’s life that could be read or listened to in

<sup>55</sup> *The Life and Conduct of the Holy, Glorious, Reverend, and Great Emperors Constantine and Helena and the Revealing of the Venerable and Life-giving Cross of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ*, ed. Michelangelo Guidi, “Un Bios di Costantino” (hereafter, following Kazhdan’s conventional title, “Guidi” Life), *Rendiconti della Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 5.16 (1907): 306–340, 637–655, *The Life of Constantine*, ed. H. G. Opitz, “Die Vita Constantini des Codex Angelicus 22,” *B* 9, no. 2 (1934): 535–593, *The Life of the Great Emperor among Saints and Equal to the Apostles Constantine*, ed. François Halkin, “Une nouvelle vie de Constantin dans un Légendier de Patmos,” *AB* 77, no. 1–2 (1959): 60–107. On the “Opitz” legend, see also Peter Heseler, “Neues zur Vita Constantini des Codex Angelicus 22,” *B* 10, no. 2 (1935): 399–402.

<sup>56</sup> Winkelmann, “Die vormetaphrastischen,” 406 and Kazhdan, “Constantin Imaginaire,” 201. Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *Church History VII*, ed. Migne, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in *PG* vol. 145 (Paris: Jacques-Paul Migne, 1857), 1327–1332.

<sup>57</sup> “Guidi” Life, 328–330.

<sup>58</sup> Euthymios of Tarnovo, *Encomium of the Holy, Great Emperors, Equal to the Apostles, Constantine and Helena*. VII, 1–5, ed. George Mihăilă, *Похвалное Сѣмымъ Великимъ и Равноап(с)льнымъ Црѣмъ Кѡнстантиноу и Ѡленѣ*, in *Cultură și literatură română veche în context european: Studii și texte* [Pre-modern Romanian culture and literature in the European context: Studies and texts] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979), 281–332.

fifteenth-century Moldavia.<sup>59</sup> It is generally accepted that the reception of this encomium in had a fundamental role in shaping the aulic devotion to Constantine the Great in the time of Stephen III.<sup>60</sup> Euthymios borrows and adapts narrative patterns and motifs from various Church historians, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Xanthopoulos in an ample display of literary erudition and rhetorical skill.<sup>61</sup> Euthymios not only summarizes the tale of Pope Silvester in the same manner as the “Guidi” legend and Xanthopoulos’ *Church History*, but also defends its veracity against those who claim that Constantine had only been baptized before he passed away in Nicomedia. This apologetic digression is not attached to the narrative section devoted to the baptism in Rome, as one may expect, but precedes the account of the emperor’s death in the final part of the text:

But others said that [Constantine] wanted to set out to Jerusalem and receive there the grace of baptism in the river Jordan, where the Lord of the whole world sank the sin, but since illness had seized [him] then, he gathered the bishops to receive the gift of baptism. However, this was considered by many as untruthful. For how was he worthy of such great gift without the gift of baptism, what could he do of the divine things? How come he wanted to gather that ecumenical synod and be endowed with its blessing, if he had not been worthy of the gift of baptism?<sup>62</sup>

For the Bulgarian patriarch and implicitly for his Moldavian readers, there was no room for questions about the fact that Constantine was baptized by St. Silvester at the beginning of his imperial career. The Slavonic encomium is not original in this respect. Similar arguments

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<sup>59</sup> The manuscript is kept in the library of Putna Monastery (inv. nos. 571/II/ 1863 and 551/1952). This miscellany contains several lives of saints organized in accordance with the liturgical calendar. The Encomium of the Holy Emperor Constantine and Helena corresponds to their feast day on 21 May, f. 136r–161v.

<sup>60</sup> Mihăilă, “Tradiția literară constantiniană de la Eusebiu al Cezareei la Nichifor Calist Xanthopoulos, Eftimie al Târnovei și domnii Țărilor Române” [The Constantinian literary tradition from Eusebius of Caesarea to Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, Euthymios of Tarnovo, and the voivodes of the Romanian Principalities], in *Cultură și literatură*, 259–267.

<sup>61</sup> Mihăilă, “Tradiția literară,” 217–80.

<sup>62</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* XXIV, 6: Нѣцѣи же рѣша, како ѡ(т) тѣдоу хотѣше къ Іе(с)лмоу поити и тамо крѣщеніа приати блг(д)тъ, на Іурданстѣи рѣцѣк идеже Гѣ въсемирныи потопи грѣхъ, нѣ, недѣгоу тогда постигшоу, епи(с)кпы събравъ, крѣщеніа приати дарь. Се же мнѡсѣмь невѣрно быти мнит сѧ. Како бѡ тѡлики<м> и такѡвы<м> и великыи(м) дарѡва<ні>омь спо(д)бивыи сѧ комѣ крѣщеніа дара творити можаше ѡ(т) вестѡвны(х) что? Какоже ли и великыи онъ и въселенскыи събрати хотѣше съборъ и ѡ(т) него бл(с)веніа спо(д)вити сѧ, аще не спо(д)ви(л) сѧ би крѣщеніа дароу?. The translation is my own.

can be found in the Byzantine lives of Constantine, as well as in the *Chronography* by Theophanes the Confessor and the *Church History* by Xanthopoulos.<sup>63</sup> All of them mention that some “Arian-minded” people in the East maintain that the emperor was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia before his death. These claims are dismissed as calumnies that wither before the true history recorded by the Catholic Church.<sup>64</sup> It is important to notice that, although Euthymios used Xanthopoulos’ work, he chose to ignore the issue of the Arian baptism. His concern appears to be primarily chronological. The sacrament of initiation is regarded as a *sine qua non* for the emperor’s role as protector of the Church. Euthymios could not even imagine that Constantine convoked bishops from all across the oikumene and presided over them at Nicaea, where Arius was condemned, without being baptized.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the patriarch’s excursus about the date of Constantine’s baptism was aimed to stress the legitimate framework of his actions in relation to the Church. It is likely that, although Euthymios must have known it, the story of the Arian baptism seemed too preposterous to be even alluded to in an encomiastic oration dedicated to the holy emperor.

The above-quoted passage from Euthymios’ writing offers a potential key for interpreting an iconographic peculiarity of the Baptism images at Rădăuți and Bălinești. As I have already mentioned, these wall paintings do not portray Constantine as a bearded middle-aged man, as was common in both Byzantine and Western medieval visual cultures.<sup>66</sup> The two Moldavian depictions present him, instead, as a beardless youth with curly hair (Figs. 4–7). The same pictorial type is featured in the scenes of Constantine’s Vision and of the Elevation of the Holy

<sup>63</sup> “*Guidi*” *Life*, 329–330; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 33; and Xanthopoulos, *Church History* VII, 35. Xanthopoulos writes a full section about this issue right after the story of Constantine’s baptism in Rome (VII, 34).

<sup>64</sup> The term “Arian-minded” (ἀρειανόφρονες) is used in the “*Guidi*” *Life*, 329 and Theophanes, *Chronography*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> The previous sections on the First Ecumenical Council and Constantine’s relationship with the high clergy are particularly prominent in Euthymios’ narrative; see *Encomium* XII–XV.

<sup>66</sup> On Constantine in Western medieval imagery, see Devis Valenti, “L’iconografia di Costantino nell’arte medioevale italiana,” in *Niš and Byzantium, Fifth Symposium, Niš, 3–5 June 2006: The Collection of Scientific Works V*, ed. Miša Rakocija (Niš: NKC, 2007), 331–355 and Gerhard Jaritz, “Constantine in Late Medieval Western Art. Just the Son of a Holy Mother?,” in *The Life and Legacy*, 198–215.



Cross at the church of hetman Luca Arbore (d. 1523) in the homonymous village near Rădăuți (ca. 1502–23) (Fig. 10).<sup>67</sup> It has been remarked that the painter hired by Arbore employed an eclectic visual repertoire combining not only Byzantine and Balkan motifs, but also a vast array of late Gothic elements of Central European filiation.<sup>68</sup> Thus, one could look for a parallel to these uncommon depictions of the saintly emperor in Western imagery. Indeed, some of the relatively rare representations of a beardless Constantine are attested in late medieval Italy and Central Europe.<sup>69</sup>

Regardless of its plausible Western origins, however, it is more important to notice that the beardless depiction of the emperor at Rădăuți and Bălinești acquired a specific role within the narrative configuration in which it was integrated. The exceptional appearance of the basileus is particularly striking in comparison to the scene of the Vision, where he appears on horseback with his customary brown beard. In this context, I argue, the emperor's different rendition in the Baptism functions as a chronological marker within the hagiographical sequence of his life. The fact that Constantine is turned into a young monarch suggests that the episode took place at the beginning of his career. If one accepts that the designers of the two Moldavian frescoes were familiar with the encomium by Euthymios of Tarnovo, one can assume that Constantine's portrayal as a youth was also meant to refute the claims that he only received the "gift of baptism" *in articulo mortis*.

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<sup>67</sup> The church is located in the village of Arbore, on the road that links Suceava to Rădăuți. The dating of its frescoes is a debated topic. The most plausible solution has been proposed by Ion Solcanu, "Datarea ansamblului de la biserica Arbore (I). Pictura interioară" [The dating of the ensemble at the church in Arbore (I). The interior paintings], *AII* 12 (1975): 35–55, who argues that the frescoes were commissioned during the lifetime of the founder, that is, before 1523. Cf. Corina Popa, Oliviu Boldura, Maria Magdalena Dobrotă, and Anca Dină, *Arbore. Istorie, artă, restaurare* [Arbore. History, art, restoration] (Bucharest: Editura ACS, 2017), 142–147, who, following an older historiographical trend, date the murals to 1541.

<sup>68</sup> Popa, Boldura, Dobrotă, and Dină, *Arbore*, 132–135.

<sup>69</sup> Valenti, "L'iconografia di Costantino."

## 2. “A Hand from Heaven:” A Hidden Angel in the *Life of Silvester*?

The encomium by Patriarch Euthymios provides a narrative framework for understanding some important features of the scenes at Rădăuți and Bălinești, as well as their position within the broader context of Constantine’s life. However, it does not offer any convenient explanation for the involvement of the Archangel. A solution to this thorny issue has to be sought in other narrative sources available in late fifteenth-century Moldavia. The hagiography of Silvester might help to explain Michael’s presence at the scene, as it contains a detailed account of the baptism, introducing a series of miraculous elements. The tale claims that, after the congregation responded “Amen” to the baptismal prayer recited by the pope, when the ruler was immersed into the water, the chamber was miraculously filled with divine light.<sup>70</sup> At this point, there is a major difference between the medieval redaction C and the late antique version B. The former only mentions that, after he came out of the font, Constantine was miraculously cured of leprosy.<sup>71</sup> In the ancient version, however, the emperor also confesses that, while being in the water, he felt and saw with his own eyes a hand descending from heaven and touching him.<sup>72</sup> I suggest that St. Michael’s insertion into the narrative setting of the Baptism in the wall paintings at Rădăuți and Bălinești was likely informed by an *interpretatio angelica*, so to speak, of a Slavonic adaptation of this passage. If my assumption is correct, the designers of the two late fifteenth-century Moldavian murals should have seen the mysterious hand felt by

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<sup>70</sup> *Actus Silvestri* I, 9: *Cumque omnes respondissent: ‘Amen,’ subito quasi fulgur lux intolerabilis per mediam fere horam emicuit quae omnium et mentes exterruit et aspectus obtexit.*

<sup>71</sup> *Actus Silvestri* I, 9: *et ecce sonus in aqua quasi sartaginis stridentis exortus veluti piscium ingentium Christum totam illam piscinam repletam ostendit.*

<sup>72</sup> Like the other late antique redaction, version B has not been published yet. I have consulted the text in a manuscript dated between the ninth and eleventh centuries, likely copied at the Abbey of Fulda: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, *Clm 14704*, f. 101r–119r. The relevant fragment is located on f. 106v: *et ecce son(us) fact(us) in aqua quasi sartaginis stridentis unde surgens totus mundus et sanctus augustus tota(m) illa(m) aquam quasi crustis piscin(am) plena(m) reliquit inqua(m) aqua(m) manu(m) de celo veniente(m) et se c(on)tingente(m) ipse c(on)stantin(us) ea hora c(on)fessus e(st) qui induit(us) vestim(en)tis albis.* I am grateful to my colleague Zorana Cvijanović for providing me with the transcription of the passage.

Constantine as a manifestation of the “Great Angel.” The difficult question is how and why they arrived at this interpretation.

The *Actus Silvestri* represented the main source for middle Byzantine hagiographies of the pope, as evidenced by the short *vita* compiled in the ninth-century Constantinopolitan *Menologion* as an entry for January 2 (*BHG* 1632e).<sup>73</sup> Later, in the mid-twelfth century, John Zonaras composed an extended *vita*, which became particularly popular across the Byzantine world (*BHG* 1633–4).<sup>74</sup> In the absence of a comprehensive philological study, the exact relationship between the Greek hagiographies of Silvester and the Western versions of the tale remain an open problem. Nonetheless, given the purpose of my research, it suffices to acknowledge the assimilation of the Roman narrative, with its abundance of details, into the literary culture of the Byzantine world.<sup>75</sup> In the later medieval period, at an uncertain date, the *Life of Silvester* by Zonaras was translated into Church Slavonic.<sup>76</sup> This variant reached the intellectual milieu of fifteenth-century Moldavia and, I argue, inspired the pictorial cycles at Rădăuți and Bălinești.

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<sup>73</sup> *The Life of St. Silvester, Pope of Rome*, ed. François Halkin, *Vita Sancti Silvestri papae Romae*, in *Le ménologe impérial de Baltimore* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1985), 20–33.

<sup>74</sup> John Zonaras, *The Life and Conduct of Our Father Among the Saints Silvester, Pope of Rome, Composed by The Most Wise and Eloquent among Monks, Kyr John Zonaras*, ed. Eleni Kaltsogianni, *Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σιλβέστρου πάπα Ῥώμης, συγγραφεὶς παρὰ τοῦ σοφωτάτου καὶ λογιωτάτου ἐν μοναχοῖς, κυροῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ζωναρᾶ*, in *Τὸ ἀγιολογικὸ καὶ ὁμιλητικὸ ἔργο τοῦ Ἰωάννη Ζωναρᾶ* (Thessalonike: Κέντρο Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 2013), 530–558. Prior to Kaltsogianni’s groundbreaking research, the authorship of the *Life of Silvester* was still uncertain, since not all later manuscripts explicitly ascribed it to Zonaras. However, no serious doubt remains about the text’s paternity. As for the dating, the *Epitome of Histories*, written in or after 1143 but not later than the early 1150s, provides a *terminus ante quem* for the *Life of Silvester*. Kaltsogianni argues that the long section devoted to the reign of Constantine the Great in the historical work contains abridged passages from the pope’s hagiography; see Kaltsogianni, *Τὸ ἀγιολογικὸ καὶ ὁμιλητικὸ*, 341–343, 466–475. This observation implies that the *Life* should have been written before the 1140s. On Zonaras’ hagiographical writings, their relation to the *Epitome*, and their diffusion, see Theofili Kampianaki, *John Zonaras’ Epitome of Histories: A Compendium of Jewish-Roman History and Its Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 15–23.

<sup>75</sup> The story accounted in the Latin *Actus Silvestri* had been known to Byzantine literati long before the hagiographies devoted to the pope himself were composed. The expanded narrative of the Baptism, including the mention of the celestial hand, is featured in the *vitae* of Constantine; see “*Guidi*” *Life*, 328–330. However, no such life of the emperor has been transmitted in Slavonic manuscripts from Moldavia. This fact makes the *Life of Silvester* an essential piece of our puzzle.

<sup>76</sup> Zonaras’ *Epitome of Histories*, together with several other Byzantine historical writings, was translated into Church Slavonic during the fourteenth century; see Panos Sophoulis, “Byzantine Chronicles and their South Slavonic Translations in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Cyr* 20 (2016): 204. Nonetheless, it is very likely that the *Life of Silvester* was translated earlier. This requires further research, which goes beyond the limits of my thesis.

*The Life and Conduct of Our Father among the Saints Silvester, Pope of Rome* (Житіє и жителство иже въ стыхъ оца нашего сѣлвестра папы римскаго), without an explicit attribution to its middle Byzantine author, was included in at least two codices from the scriptoria of Moldavian monasteries.<sup>77</sup> Dating to the fifteenth century, the earlier copy, now in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (*M. Slav. 150*, f. 14r–33v), was produced at Neamț Monastery, a regional center of Slavonic manuscript culture.<sup>78</sup> The text is part of a liturgical miscellany (*sbornik*) containing several homiletic and hagiographical works related to the most important feasts of Christ and commemorations of saints in January.<sup>79</sup> Assigned to the hierarch’s celebration on the second day of the month, the *Life of Silvester* is one of the longest texts in the codex, comprising almost forty pages. Moreover, it is the only hagiographical work introduced between the commemoration of St. Basil of Caesarea, solemnly celebrated on January 1, and the commentaries of the Holy Fathers on the great festival of the Epiphany (or The Baptism of the Lord) on January 6.<sup>80</sup> The length of Silvester’s life as well its prominent place within the selection of texts testify to an intense veneration of the saintly pope in fifteenth-century Moldavia.

<sup>77</sup> Ion Radu Mircea, *Répertoire des manuscrits slaves en Roumanie. Auteurs byzantins et slaves*, ed. Pavlina Bojčeva and Svetlana Todorova (Sofia: Institut d’Études Balkaniques, 2005), no. 646; this repertoire mentions two Moldavian manuscripts, one from the fifteenth century, now in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (*M. Slav. 150*), and the other from the early sixteenth century, currently in the Library of Dragomirna Monastery (*Dragomirna 1773*).

<sup>78</sup> Petre P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrisele slave din Biblioteca Academiei R. P. R.* [Slavonic manuscripts from the Library of the Academy of the People’s Republic of Romania], vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1959), cat. no. 150.

<sup>79</sup> On this type of Slavonic manuscripts, see Riccardo Picchio, “Compilation and Composition: Two Levels of Authorship in the Orthodox Slavic Tradition,” *Cyr* 5 (1981): 1–4; Dumitru Năstase, “Unité et continuité dans le contenu de recueils manuscrits dits miscellanés,” *Cyr* 5 (1981): 22–48; and William Veder, “Elementary Compilation in Slavic,” *Cyr* 5 (1981): 49–66.

<sup>80</sup> St. Basil the Great is commemorated together with the Circumcision of Christ. The *M. Slav. 150* ascribes to this double feast two writings attributed to Basil’s brother, Gregory of Nyssa: an oration on the Circumcision of the Lord attributed to Gregory of Nyssa (f. 1r–4v), but in reality, belonging to Pseudo-Amphilochios of Ikonion (see Mircea, *Répertoire*, cat. no. 307), and the funerary oration for St. Basil (f. 4r–14r). As for the Epiphany, the miscellany contains an ample selection of ten texts: on oration by Basil the Great (f. 33v–41r), six by John Chrysostom (f. 41–48r, 50v–63v), one by Hesychios of Jerusalem (f. 48r–49r), one by Antipater of Bostra (f. 49v–50v), and the last one by bishop Julian (f. 63v–68v); see Panaitescu, *Manuscrisele Slave*, cat. no. 150.

Iconographic programs confirm this exceptionally strong devotion to the bishop of Rome. On the walls of the chancels of two other churches patronized by Stephen III, Silvester appears among the most important hierarchs celebrating the divine liturgy around the image of Christ the Child in the paten.<sup>81</sup> In the monastic church at Pătrăuți, the pope is located in the northern half of the liturgical procession. He stands in the second position, between John Chrysostom, who leads the celebration, and Athanasius the Great, facing the figures of Basil and Gregory the Theologian situated on the northern side of the apsis (Fig. 11).<sup>82</sup> Likewise, in the princely chapel of St. Nicholas in Botoșani (after 1496), Silvester is the second figure to the south. The pontiff is located behind Basil, but before Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, corresponding to Gregory and Chrysostom, the first two bishops in the northern zone (Fig. 12).<sup>83</sup> Both at Pătrăuți and Botoșani, the pope is attached to the group of the Three Holy Hierarchs Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom, a place usually reserved for the most revered saintly bishops, such as Nicholas of Myra. The liturgical calendar might have played a significant role in the configuration of this holy quartet since both Silvester and the three great fathers had feast days in January.<sup>84</sup>

Within this general devotional atmosphere, it is almost certain that the monks at Neamț read the pope's life every year on January 2.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the narrative was familiar to the local

<sup>81</sup> On the depiction of hierarchs in Byzantine apses, see Christopher Walter, "La place des évêques dans le décor des absides byzantines," *RA* 24 (1974): 81–89 and "L'évêque célébrant dans l'iconographie byzantine," in *L'Assemblée liturgique et les différents rôles dans l'assemblée, Conférences Saint-Serge XXIII<sup>e</sup> semaine d'études liturgiques, Paris, 28 Juin–1<sup>er</sup> Juillet 1976* (Roma: Edizioni Liturgiche 1977), 321–331.

<sup>82</sup> Vlad Bedros, "Selectia," 66–67, 73 and "The Popes of Rome in Post-Byzantine Wall Paintings from Romania," *Ana* 6, no. 2 (November 2019): 52–53. For a broader contextualization of the iconic figures of popes in Byzantine visual cultures, see Branislav Todić, "Représentations de Papes Romains dans l'église Sainte-Sophie d'Ohrid. Contribution à l'idéologie de l'archevêché d'Ohrid," *ΔΧΑΕ* 29 (2008): 105–118.

<sup>83</sup> Bedros, "Selectia," 74 and "The Popes," 52.

<sup>84</sup> The Three Holy Hierarchs had feast days on January 1 (Basil), 25 (Gregory), and 27 (the *translatio* of Chrysostom's body to Constantinople); see Juan Mateos, S. I., *Le Typicon de la Grande Église, Ms. Sainte-Croix no 40, X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 1 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1962), 172–173, 210–211, 214–217. In addition, they had a common commemoration on January 30. Established in the early Komnenian period, this joint celebration emphasized their shared role as great teachers of the Catholic Church; see Constantinos G. Bonis, "Worship and Dogma. John Mavropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita (11<sup>th</sup> Century): His Canon on the Three Hierarchs and its Dogmatic Significance," *BF* 1 (1966): 1–23.

<sup>85</sup> The practice of public reading is attested by a type of ritual indication consistently placed after the title of each homily: "β(ε)λ οψε" ("Bless, father!"); see *M. Slav.* 150, f. 14r. After announcing the title and the author of the

monastic community and was probably transmitted to other ecclesiastical centers of the land, such as the bishopric in Rădăuți. The text copied by the anonymous scribe of Neamț contains a verbatim translation of the story of Constantine’s baptism as it is narrated in the Greek *Life of Silvester* by Zonaras.<sup>86</sup> Having recovered his health by means of the sacramental bath, the now Christian basileus donned a bright garment and “said to the bystanders that he had felt a hand: It had stretched out from above and touched me while I was descending into the font.”<sup>87</sup> Similar passages appear in the shorter ninth-century *vita* of the hierarch and in the lives of Constantine.<sup>88</sup> In the “Guidi” legend, the emperor’s confession is specifically addressed to the pope: “Servant of God, as I was standing in [the water] of the holy baptism, I felt a hand touching me and cleaning the sickness of the flesh.”<sup>89</sup> Unlike the hagiographical account by Zonaras, this fragment from the “Guidi” *vita* is not attested in the manuscript culture of the East-Carpathian environment.

Even if it does not include this passage in the section on Constantine’s baptism, the encomium by Patriarch Euthymios contains an allusion to the motif of God’s hand. Upon waking up from the dream in which SS Peter and Paul offered him the cure of baptism, the emperor dismissed the pagan healer (βραχά) who attended him and said that: “(...) from now on, I need no human help, for the hand of God Almighty (ρῥκα βω βῤσεδρῥκατελῥκῆ βῤ) helped me.”<sup>90</sup> Although it anticipates the baptism, this statement is a merely symbolic reference to the divine power that came to Constantine’s aid, not a description of a miracle occurring during the

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sermon, but before starting the reading in the presence of the congregation, the selected lector asked for the blessing of the abbot or the celebrant priest.

<sup>86</sup> *M. Slav.* 150, f. 20r–20v.

<sup>87</sup> Zonaras, *The Life of Silvester* 29: Ἐσθῆτα γοῦν λευκὴν ἐμφώτιον ἐνδυσάμενος, αἰσθέσθαι χεῖρα πρὸς τοὺς παρόντας εἶπεν, ἄνωθεν ἐκταθεῖσαν καὶ ἀψαμένην μου, ἔτι τῇ κολυμβήθρα καταδυομένου. The translation is my own.

<sup>88</sup> *The Life of St. Silvester* 44: Εἶπεν δὲ ὡς· Ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν ὧν ἡσθόμην ὅτι χεῖρ τις ἦσατό μου ὡς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κατελθοῦσα.

<sup>89</sup> “*Guidi Life*,” 328: δοῦλε τοῦ θεοῦ, ὡς ἰστάμην ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος, χειρὸς ἡσθόμην ἀπτομένης μου τῶν σαρκῶν καὶ καθαριζούσης τὴν νόσον. The translation is my own.

<sup>90</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* VII, 3: (...) нє κ τομοу βω члчѣскыѧ потрѣбуѧж помощи, ρῥκα βω βῤσεδρῥκατελῥκῆ βῤ поможє ми. The translation is my own.

ceremony. The Slavonic translation of the *Life of Silvester* by Zonaras thus remains the only account that constitutes a plausible narrative background for St. Michael's involvement in the scenes at Rădăuți and Bălinești. However, there is no need to assume that the designers of our frescoes used a specific copy somehow related to the manuscript at Neamț. Once it had been integrated into the liturgy, the legend of Pope Silvester might have developed an independent circulation through storytelling. My hypothesis is that Constantine's confession about the divine hand that touched him in the water was interpreted by the local audience as a sign of the aethereal presence of the Archangel as pictured in the compositions of the baptism.

As I have mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter, the visualization of St. Michael's involvement in Constantine's baptism has no direct precedent in Byzantine and Balkan iconography. Nevertheless, comparable pictorial interpretations of this episode can be encountered in the visual culture of Latin Christendom.<sup>91</sup> On a twelfth-century enamel triptych of the True Cross, formerly at the abbey of St. Remaclus in Stavelot, the scene is surmounted by a representation of the *Manus Dei* emerging from the open heavens (Fig. 13).<sup>92</sup> A slightly modified iconographic schema appears in an illuminated manuscript produced in the early 1200s at the French Abbey of St. Bertin in St.-Omer, currently at the Royal Library in the Hague (Fig. 14).<sup>93</sup> In this case, the Hand of God was replaced by the figure of an androgynous youth—an angel or Christ himself—pouring water on Constantine's head.

The structural similarities notwithstanding, it would be rather difficult to posit a connection between this Western illumination and the much later Moldavian examples. Rather, these images should be treated as separate cases attesting, nonetheless, to similar interpretative patterns in the reception of the legend of Constantine and Silvester by medieval imagemakers.

<sup>91</sup> For an overview on the Western depiction of the Silvester legend, see Jaritz, "Constantine in Late Medieval Western Art," 198–215.

<sup>92</sup> The Mosan triptych is now at the Morgan Library in New York. The literature devoted to this reliquary and its context is huge; see e.g., Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 80–132.

<sup>93</sup> Royal Library, the Hague, *M. 76F5*, f. 36v.

Western representations show that the divine presence that sealed the sacramental conversion of the first Christian emperor was widely perceived as an essential part of the legend and tended to be subject to various readings. What has to be explained is why Moldavian iconographers chose to present the ambiguous apparition of the celestial hand as a manifestation of the Archangel Michael.

Since late antiquity, Christian believers were encouraged to acknowledge and even seek the presence of angels in the liturgy. Ellen Muehlberger points out that preachers of the patristic age, such as John Chrysostom, trained their audience “to imagine angels leaving heaven to become spectators to Christian rituals as they took place on earth.”<sup>94</sup> In his authoritative treatise on priesthood, Chrysostom stresses the gravity of the sacerdotal ministry by showing that, at the moment of the Eucharistic sacrifice, “angels attend the priest, and the whole bema and the sanctuary are all thronged with heavenly powers in honor of Him who lies there.”<sup>95</sup> Similar assumptions surrounded the context of the baptism liturgy. This interpretation was projected into the context of the baptism liturgy as well. Chrysostom’s instructions to the catechumens in Antioch contain a similar statement concerning the act of exorcism traditionally performed at the beginning of the ceremony:

Now let us get back to the sequence of our discourse. Then the priest has you say: ‘I renounce you Satan, your pomps, your service and your works.’ The words are few, but their power is great. The angels who are standing by and the invisible powers rejoice at your conversion, receive the words from your tongues and carry them up to the common Master of all things. These are inscribed in the books of heaven.<sup>96</sup>

The unseen presence of angels, regarded as agents of grace and mediators between the human and the divine realm, ensures the efficacy of the ritual. Chrysostom suggests that the

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<sup>94</sup> Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 179, 193–200.

<sup>95</sup> John Chrysostom, *Six Books on Priesthood* VI, 4, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964); see Muehlberger’s comments on this passage as well, *Angels*, 193–194.

<sup>96</sup> John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* II, 20, trans. Paul W. Harkins (New York, NY and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1963), with minor adjustments.



rejection of the devil pronounced by the catechumens has power because angels testify to it and pass it on to God. The image of incorporeal witnesses attending the baptism might have contributed to the peculiar interpretation of the celestial hand felt by Constantine in the frescoes at Rădăuți and Bălinești. The catechetical orations by Chrysostom were at least partially known in late fifteenth-century Moldavia.<sup>97</sup> Even so, the theme of angelic participation in the liturgical life of Christians was far from confined to a specific text. An unedited Slavonic work titled *Oration on How One Should Stand at Church* (сѡ како пѡбѡе стоати въ црѣкѡ) has been recently discovered by Vlad Bedros in a fifteenth-century *sbornik* at Putna Monastery.<sup>98</sup> The first part of the tale explains how the priest is assisted by an “angel of the Lord” (аггѡль гнѡ) from the moment when he enters the sanctuary and puts on the liturgical vestments. Moreover, the celestial being defends the members of the congregation against demonic attacks meant to deprive them of the grace of the Eucharistic mass.<sup>99</sup>

The involvement of angels in the liturgy also constituted a fundamental theme in late and post-Byzantine church painting.<sup>100</sup> This idea was expressed through a variety of symbolic compositions, such as the image of angels flanking the Eucharistic Christ displayed at the core

<sup>97</sup> Mircea, *Répertoire*, cat. no. 372. An oration to the candidates to baptism was included in a Slavonic collection of Chrysostom’s works copied by the scribe Gavriil at the Neamț Monastery in 1443; see the Library of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, M. Slav. 136, f. 341v–349r, described by Panaitescu, *Manuscrisele slave*, vol. 1, cat. no. 136. Mircea also identified the text in a similar miscellany at Sucevița Monastery, M. 7<sup>IV</sup> (427<sup>II</sup>), dating to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

<sup>98</sup> The Library of Putna Monastery, inv. no. 50 (46), f. 83v–88v. I am indebted to Dr. Vlad Bedros for having shared with me the transcription of this still unpublished text presented in the paper “Un text mistagogic inedit în Moldova secolului al XV-lea și implicațiile sale iconografice” [An unedited mystagogical text in fifteenth-century Moldavia and its iconographic implications] at the conference *Date noi în cercetarea artei medieval și premoderne din România* [New data in the research of medieval and early modern art in Romania], 19<sup>th</sup> Edition, April 20–21, 2023, National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest.

<sup>99</sup> Putna, inv. no. 50(46), f. 83v–85v.

<sup>100</sup> In this context, an important iconographic theme is the so-called ‘Heavenly Liturgy.’ Developed throughout the Palaiologan period, this complex depiction is usually centered on the figure of Christ as High Priest standing behind the altar table at the moment of the Great Entrance. The Savior is surrounded by a procession of angels dressed as deacons and presbyters, who carry the sacred vessels toward him. On this iconographic theme in late Byzantine church painting, see, among many others, Vasileios Marinis, “On Earth as it is in Heaven? Reinterpreting the Heavenly Liturgy in Byzantine Art,” *BZ* 114, no. 1 (2021): 255–268. The theme of the angelic liturgy is attested in iconographic repertoire of Moldavian murals only in the late 1520s and the early 1530s, more than three decades later than the churches discussed in the present study; see Tereza Sinigalia, “La liturgie céleste dans la peinture murale de Moldavie,” *Ana* 2, no. 1 (May 2015): 28–50.

of chancel programs. From the late twelfth century onwards, the central spot of Byzantine sanctuaries was customarily devoted to the representation of Christ the Child on the altar surrounded by officiating hierarchs.<sup>101</sup> In late fifteenth-century Moldavia, the depiction of Christ is usually located in the intrados of the eastern window of the apsis, while the standing bishops appear on the lateral walls. Visualizing the mystical reality of the Savior’s bodily presence in the Eucharist, the lying figure of the Infant—the sacrificial “Lamb of God”—is frequently accompanied by a pair of angels holding seraphim-shaped liturgical fans (*rhipidia*) over him.<sup>102</sup> Such is the case of the murals at the bishopric in Rădăuți, the monastic church of the Prophet Elijah near Suceava (after 1488), Voroneț Monastery (ca. 1496), and the court chapel in Bălinești (Figs. 15–17).<sup>103</sup> In all these churches, the two angels are identified as SS Michael and Gabriel by means of abbreviated Slavonic inscriptions. With the exception of the Voroneț fresco, which depicts them in the conventional *all’antica* vests, the archangels appear as deacons. In addition, in the wall painting at Bălinești, the *Taxiarches* are flanked by four human deacons, whose name is no longer legible (Fig. 17). Resembling St. Silvester’s assistant in the scene of the Baptism, both of them bear golden caskets and censers. The life-size figure of another holy deacon is depicted in the southern zone of the lower tier, at the back of the

<sup>101</sup> Christopher Walter, “The Christ Child on the Altar in Byzantine Apse Decoration,” in *Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès international d’études byzantines, Athènes, Septembre 1976*, vol. 2 (Athens: Association Internationale des Études Byzantines, 1981), 909–914 and Chara Konstantinidi, *Ο Μελισμός. Οι συλλειτουργούντες ιεράρχες και οι άγγελοι-διάκονοι μπροστά στην Αγία Τράπεζα με τα τίμια δώρα ή τον ευχαριστιακό Χριστό* [The *Melismos*: celebrating hierarchs and deacon-angels before the holy table with the venerable gifts or the Eucharistic Christ] (Thessalonike: Κέντρο Βυζαντινών Έρευνών, 2008). On the doctrinal background of the theme, see Gordana Babić, “Les discussions christologiques et le décor des églises byzantines au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les évêques officiants devant l’Hétimasie et devant l’Amnos”, *FS* 2 (1968): 374–386.

<sup>102</sup> The Byzantine liturgical commentary attributed to Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople, commonly known as the *Ecclesiastical History*, compares the deacons and *rhipidia* to the six-winged seraphim and many-eyed cherubim that fly around God’s throne chanting “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth...” (Isaiah 6: 3); see *On the Divine Liturgy* 41, ed. and trans. John Meyendorff (New York, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984).

<sup>103</sup> An overview on the local renditions of the theme was published by Vlad Bedros, *Modele bizantine, filtre balcanice și interpretări locale în iconografia medievală românească. Cazul absidei altarului în bisericile din Moldova (cca.1490–1550)* [Byzantine models, Balkan filters, and local interpretation in medieval Romanian iconography: the case of the apse in Moldavian churches (ca. 1490–1550)] (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2015), 50–56. However, at the moment when this study was published, most of the late fifteenth-century churches discussed in this thesis were not yet restored. Therefore, Bedros’ otherwise insightful analysis should be taken with some necessary amendments.

bishops. The representation of deacon-saints alongside the Archangels Michael and Gabriel had a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it expresses the common liturgical ministry performed by humans and heavenly powers before God, whose presence is actualized in the Eucharistic sacrifice. On the other hand, it enhances the connection between the central image of the Eucharistic Christ and the procession on the walls of the apsis. Thus, the program of the lower tier of the chancel becomes an ample representation of the divine liturgy in which humans and angels celebrate the mystical sacrifice side by side.

The devotional atmosphere created by these images and by edifying texts such as Chrysostom's instructions and the anonymous oration in the miscellany at Putna, provided an adequate background for the angelic interpretation of the celestial hand perceived by Constantine in the story of his baptism. The late fifteenth-century Moldavian audience might have been inclined to identify an angel's intervention in the ritual context of the narrative. Similar to the generic Eucharistic liturgy described in the *Oration on How One Should Stand at Church*, the Baptism officiated by Pope Silvester is attended by an "angel of Lord." The iconographic program at Bălinești makes this parallel particularly evident. In the apsis, the Archangel Michael attends the divine liturgy together with his sibling, Gabriel, alongside saintly bishops and deacons. In the narthex, he appears above Constantine's baptismal font, while Pope Silvester and his assistant perform the sacrament of initiation. The question that still has to be answered is why the iconographers at Rădăuți and Bălinești thought about St. Michael in particular, out of the "thousands of archangels and myriads of angels" who could act as the Hand of God.<sup>104</sup> As we have seen, he was not an exclusive choice for the role of angel-deacon.

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<sup>104</sup> According to the secret prayer recited by the priest in the initial part of the *anaphora* before the *Sanctus*, God is surrounded by "χιλιάδες ἀρχαγγέλων καὶ μυριάδες ἀγγέλων, τὰ Χερουβίμ, καὶ τὰ Σεραφίμ ἐξαπτέρυγα, πολυόμματα;" see *The Order of the Divine and Sacred Liturgy of Our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom* 12, ed. Jacobus Goar, *Διάταξις τῆς Θείας καὶ Ἱερᾶς Λειτουργίας τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου*, in *Εὐχολόγιον sive rituale graecorum complectens ritus et ordines divinae liturgiae* (Venice: Typographia Bartholomaei Javarina, 1730). The translation is my own.

The solution to this question is partially related to the mediating role more broadly attributed to the Archangel. The visualization of his miracles at Rădăuți and Bălinești presents the “Great Angel” as the celestial guide of pious rulers appointed to lead God’s people on its path of salvation. As evidenced in earlier Greek and Slavonic orations, St. Michael intervened in their favor at crucial moments of the sacred history. The conversion of the first Christian emperor, the leader of the ‘New Israel,’ could not make an exception in this sense. Despite the fact that the Baptism was never correlated with him in textual sources, Byzantine literary tradition regarded the Archangel as a heavenly protector of Constantine and, by extension, of all Christian rulers following him.<sup>105</sup> According to a legend narrated in the sixth-century *Chronography* of John Malalas, the emperor witnessed an apparition of St. Michael at the pagan sanctuary in Sosthenion in the region of Anaplous, near the city of Byzantion. Long ago, the chronicle says, a deity resembling “a tremendous man with wings on his shoulders” helped the Argonauts in the battle against King Amykos. Having defeated their enemy, the mythical sailors erected a temple and a statue in honor of the supernatural being that granted them victory.<sup>106</sup> After many centuries, Constantine the Great discovered the idol in the hinterland of his recently conquered capital and recognized it as a depiction of an “angel in the clothing of monk of the Christian faith.” The emperor prayed to find out what apparition was represented by the statue and spent the night at the pagan shrine. Within this setting which resembles an ancient ritual of incubation, the basileus experienced a vision of St. Michael.<sup>107</sup> Upon waking up, Constantine realized that the statue was nothing else than an image of the *Archistrategos* and decided to transform the temple into a chapel dedicated to him.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Olar, *Împăratul înaripat*, 221–222, 228–238.

<sup>106</sup> Malalas, *Chronography* IV, 13.

<sup>107</sup> The *Michaelion* in Sosthenion-Anaplous, located on the shores of the Bosphorus, was indeed connected by Byzantine Christians with miraculous healings through incubation, as noted by Mango, “St. Michael and Attis,” 59–60. On the later history of the sanctuary, see Kalliroe Linardou, “A resting Place for ‘the first of the angels:’ the Michaelion at Sosthenion,” in *Byzantium, 1180–1204: ‘The Sad Quarter of a Century?’*, ed. Alicia Simpson (Athens: The National Hellenic Research Foundation), 245–259.

<sup>108</sup> Malalas, *Chronography* IV, 13.

The legend recorded by Malalas had a broad diffusion in later Byzantine hagiography, as evidenced by the amplified variant from the mid-ninth-century *Account of the Miracles of the All-great Archangel* composed by Pantaleon, deacon and *chartophylax* of the Great Church in Constantinople.<sup>109</sup> The narrative was also incorporated into writings devoted to the first Christian emperor, such as his ninth-century *vitae* and the relevant section of the Palaiologan *Church History* by Xanthopoulos. The “Guidi” life offers a particularly dramatic rendering of the Archangel’s apparition: “(...) [the emperor] fell asleep in that place [i. e., the shrine in Sosthenion] and heard, as in a vision, a mighty voice: I am Michael, the commander of the powers of the Lord Sabaoth, the leader and champion of Christians, he who worked with you invisibly against all impious tyrants and barbaric nations, as with a faithful servant (πιστῷ θεράποντι) of my Master, Christ!”<sup>110</sup> The Archangel introduces himself as the unseen assistant of Constantine, thereby opening the possibility to identify his presence in other miraculous events from the emperor’s life.

Although Malalas’ chronicle circulated in Church Slavonic versions, its presence is not directly attested in fifteenth-century Moldavia.<sup>111</sup> The *Encomium of the Holy Emperors* by Euthymios of Tarnovo refers to the sanctuary “of the revered *Archistategos* Michael in Anaplous and Sosthenion” as part of a long list of churches founded by Constantine but omits the tale of the vision.<sup>112</sup> Yet, in sixteenth-century Moldavia, this story was systematically

<sup>109</sup> Hisard, “Le culte,” 367–370.

<sup>110</sup> “*Guidi*” *Life* 339: (...) ἐκοιμήθη ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ τόπῳ, καὶ ἤκουσεν ὡς ἐν ὀράματι φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐγὼ εἰμι Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος τῶν δυνάμεων κυρίου Σαβαώθ, ὁ τῶν χριστιανῶν πρωτοστάτης καὶ προασπιστής, ὁ συνεργήσας σοὶ κατὰ τῶν δυσσεβῶν τυράννων καὶ πάντων τῶν ἀπίστων καὶ βαρβάρων ἐθνῶν ἀοράτως ὡς πιστῷ θεράποντι τοῦ δεσπότου μου Χριστοῦ;” the translation is my own. Xanthopoulos’ *Church History* contains an almost identical passage: Ἐγὼ εἰμι, ἔλεγεν, οὕτωςι Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος Κυρίου Σαβαώθ τῶν δυνάμεων, ὁ τῆς Χριστιανῶν πίστεως ἔφορος· ὁ καὶ σοὶ συνασπίσας κατὰ τῶν δυσσεβῶν τυράννων ἀνισταμένῳ, οἷα δὴ πιστῷ καὶ γνησίῳ ἐκείνου θεράποντι (VII, 50). The translation is my own. In Xanthopoulos’ version, St. Michael, the “watcher” (ἔφορος) of Christians, presents Constantine not only as “faithful,” but also as a “legitimate” servant of God. The role of God’s θεράπων has been constantly attached to Constantine’s figure ever since Eusebius of Caesarea; see *Life* I, 12: 2, where Constantine is compared to Moses based on their common status as “servants of God.”

<sup>111</sup> Sophoulis, “Byzantine Chronicles,” 203.

<sup>112</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* XI, 3; “ч(с)тнѣго архістрати҃га Михаїла въ Янаплѣ и Сѡстеніи;” It is not clear whether the patriarchs had in mind only a *Michaelion*, to which he attached both place names, or if he referred to

alluded to in cycles of the Archangel Michael. Unlike their fifteenth-century forerunners at Rădăuți and Bălinești, the frescoes in the *katholika* of the Monasteries of Humor (ca. 1535) and Moldovița (ca. 1537) do not depict Constantine’s miraculous conversion to Christianity. They represent, instead, the apparition of the Archangel outside the walls of Byzantium, an implicit reference to the vision at the sanctuary in Sosthenion (Figs. 18–19).<sup>113</sup> This iconographic choice shows that the designers of mid-sixteenth-century Moldavian programs were familiar with the tale recounted in Malalas’ *Chronography* and in later narratives on Constantine and St. Michael. One should not dismiss the possibility of oral transmission. Stories could easily travel by word of mouth and, once they were in the air, the direct use of a text was not necessary anymore. In this scenario, the tale of the Byzantine *Michaelion* could have functioned as a premise for the Archangel’s representation as the protector of the holy emperor even in the cycles painted throughout the previous decades.

### 3. A Saintly Bishop for a Holy Emperor

The legend of the sanctuary in Sosthenion-Anaplous introduces St. Michael as Constantine’s guardian angel, emphasizing their shared commitment as servants of a common Master. In the compositions of the Baptism at Rădăuți and Bălinești, the Archangel is assigned a similar role. However, within this new narrative setting, St. Michael does not exclusively act as the protector of the emperor. As I have mentioned above, the “Great Angel” bestows his blessing both upon Constantine and Pope Silvester. The symbolic triangle created by his powerful gesture poses further questions about the broader meaning attached to the theme of the emperor’s Baptism in the cultural context of late fifteenth-century Moldavia. Byzantine

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two sanctuaries. A seventeenth-century Wallachian translation of the encomium mentions only one church dedicated “to the revered *Archistrategos* Michael in Anaplous” (“cinstitului Arhistratiḡ Mihail în Anapla”); see *By Euthymios, Patriarch of Tarnvo, Praise to the Holy Great and Equal to the Apostles Constantin and Helena (Wallachian Translation)* XI, 3, ed. George Mihăilă, *Al lui Eftimie Patriarhul de la Târnovsca, Lauda Sfinților Marilor și întocma cu Apostolii Constantin și Elena (Traducerea românească veche)*, in *Cultură și literatură*. Therefore, it is more likely that the passage uses two toponyms for the same shrine.

<sup>113</sup> Marina Ileana Sabados, “La peinture d’icônes aux temps de Pierre Rareș,” *RRHA* 31 (1994): 43–48.

political imagination invested the figures of Constantine and Silvester with an exemplary dimension.<sup>114</sup> Thus, the mural composition of the emperor's Baptism likely provided the local community of viewers with an ideal image of the relationship between royal power and the authority of the Church. The problem that arises now concerns the type of connection envisaged by Moldavian frescoes.

The political significance of the two depictions of the scenes at Rădăuți and Bălinești has never been discussed in previous scholarship. Nonetheless, it has been suggested that the prominence of Silvester's figure in the broader context of Moldavian churches reflected a self-fashioning discourse of the Church, in which spiritual authority was granted a superior stance in relation to temporal power. The present section assesses the possibility of applying this reading to the late fifteenth-century depictions of the emperor's Baptism and then proposes an alternative mode of understanding its symbolic function. I argue that the narrative association between Constantine and Silvester was assigned a pivotal position within a complex pictorial rhetoric on the synergy between the monarch and the high clergy. Its centrality attests to a local interpretation of earlier Byzantine ideas on Christian rulership, which likely established an ideal framework for the interaction between the Moldavian voivode and the bishops of his realm.

Many scholars have connected the use of the Silvester legend in Byzantine political thought with the ambitions of powerful churchmen who aimed to establish a moral ascendancy over secular rulers.<sup>115</sup> Dimiter G. Angelov suggests that the *Constitutum Constantini*, commonly known as the *Donation of Constantine*, functioned as a key argument within this

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<sup>114</sup> Kristina Sessa, "Constantine and Silvester in the Actus Silvestri," in *The Life and Legacy of Constantine. Tradition through the Ages*, ed. M. Shane Bjornlie (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 79. On Silvester in Byzantine political thought, see Ioli Kalavrezou, Nicolette Trahoulia, and Shalom Sabar, "Critique of the Emperor in the Vatican Psalter gr. 752," *DOP* 47 (1993): 195–219.

<sup>115</sup> Petre Guran, "Nouveau Constantin, Nouveau Silvestre," in *Les cultes des saints souverains et des saints guerriers et l'ideologie du pouvoir en Europe Centrale et Orientale. Actes du colloque international, 17 janvier 2004, New Europe College, Bucarest*, ed. Radu Păun and Ivan Biliarsky (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2007), 134–164.

rhetoric of clerical supremacy.<sup>116</sup> Composed during the mid-eighth or ninth century, the *Constitutum* adapted the Latin *Acts of Silvester* in the shape of a two-part document comprising Constantine's confession (*confessio*) about his conversion and an edict (*donatio*) allegedly issued in the aftermath of the baptism. The second part grants a number of imperial-like privileges to the pope of Rome, setting an authoritative example of the ruler's legitimate attitude toward the Church.<sup>117</sup> Since the twelfth century, the edict (θέσπισμα) had circulated in several Greek versions.<sup>118</sup> Although the *Donation* was originally elaborated as an argument for the primacy of the See of St. Peter, most Byzantine canonists turned it into the favor of Eastern hierarchy. The special prerogatives of the Roman pontiff were, therefore, interpreted as equally applicable to the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople and, by extension, to other powerful bishops of the Greek Church.<sup>119</sup>

Angelov notes that the *Donation of Constantine* became particularly important in late Byzantium. It is widely held that, during the Palaiologan period, the Church reached the peak of its power and symbolic prestige, depriving the imperial office both of its aura of sacrality and of the right of taking action in religious matters.<sup>120</sup> The jurisdiction of ecumenical patriarchs went far beyond the territory of the much-diminished Byzantine state, virtually encompassing the entire Eastern Christian world, on which the *basileis* could not exert a controlling influence

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<sup>116</sup> Dimiter G. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61–84.

<sup>117</sup> On the *Constitutum Constantini*, see De Leo, *Ricerche sui falsi*, 5–88 and Johannes Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini: The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and its Original Meaning* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>118</sup> On the reception of this famous papal forgery across the Byzantine world, see Francis Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 252, 288–299, Paul Alexander, “The Donation of Constantine at Byzantium and Its Earliest Use against the Western Empire,” *ZRVI* 8 (1963): 11–26, and especially Dimiter G. Angelov, “The Donation of Constantine and the Church in Late Byzantium,” in *Church and Society in Late Byzantium* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), 92–157; the scholar offers a comprehensive overview on the Greek adaptations of the *Donation* between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries.

<sup>119</sup> Angelov, “The Donation,” 95, 105–117.

<sup>120</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 66–67 and Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 351–416.



anymore. According to Angelov, this increase of patriarchal authority had an impact on political thought. Ambitious members of the high clergy formulated “hierocratic ideas” about the Church’s dominant role in society and “in regard to the emperor and the imperial office.”<sup>121</sup> The *Donation of Constantine* provided both a legal and a narrative framework for this asymmetrical view on the relationship between Church and State. The story gives the upper hand to Pope Silvester. Constantine not only grants him political dominance over the Western part of the empire before moving to the East, but also submits himself to the pontiff by performing the “groom service” (*officium stratoris*).<sup>122</sup>

Since the earliest Moldavian depiction of Constantine’s Baptism is located in an episcopal center, namely, the bishopric of St. Nicholas in Rădăuți, an interpretation in the key of the discourse on clerical supremacy is rather tempting. The centrality of Silvester’s representation in in Moldavian iconographic programs was previously connected with the circulation of the *Donation of Constantine* in Slavonic environments. In the sixteenth-century sanctuaries at Dorohoi (ca. 1520s) and Dobrovăț (ca. 1529), as well as in the exterior wall paintings at Voroneț (1547), Silvester or other saintly popes, such as Gregory the Dialogist, wear open crowns instead of Latin miters (Figs. 20–21). Petre Guran suggests that the royal depiction of popes was meant to express the symbolic transfer of the attributes of power from the rulers to the high clergy. This interpretation draws on Guran’s broader ideas about the gradual dissolution of the imperial office in Byzantine Christianity and its symbolic replacement with the authority of the Church, which culminated after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.<sup>123</sup>

The period when Stephen III commissioned the frescoes of the church in Rădăuți was marked by the tenure of the influential Bishop Ioanichie, whose tombstone is still preserved in

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<sup>121</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 351.

<sup>122</sup> During the late Byzantine period, Constantine’s ritual submission to Silvester was at least once re-enacted within the courtly milieu, when the future emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259–82) led the horse mounted by Patriarch Arsenios Autoreinaos (in office 1255–9, 1261–5) in Magnesia; see Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 364.

<sup>123</sup> Petre Guran, “Nouveau Constantin,” 142.

the southeastern bay of the narthex.<sup>124</sup> The scene of Constantine's Baptism was, therefore, an element of the iconographic setting of his burial place. It would be plausible to assume that the bishop of Rădăuți used the iconographic program of his cathedral to make a statement about the prestige of his office. One can only wonder if Ioanichie and perhaps some other churchmen around him followed the same line of thought as their Byzantine predecessors by using the joint image of Constantine and Silvester to spotlight the moral ascendancy of spiritual authority over temporal power. Guran's observations on the local portrayal of crowned popes seem to point in that direction. Although it did not assign royal attributes to the pontiff, the theme of Constantine's Baptism would have been suitable in this sense. After all, the iconographic schema of the fresco at Rădăuți, as well as its slightly later adaptation in the chapel of Grand Logothetes Ioan Tăutu in Bălinești, depicts the pope in a superior stance. Within the ritual setting of the Baptism, the venerable bishop offers to the young basileus both the gift of salvation and sacramental legitimation of his reign.

At first glance, the cultural circumstances of late fifteenth-century Moldavia seem to favor this explanatory model. Manuscript evidence indicates that local literati could encounter the *Donation of Constantine* in Byzantine collections of canon law which were intensely used in centers of ecclesiastical power. In the twelfth century, an abbreviated form of the edict was introduced in the popular commentary on Pseudo-Photios' *Nomocanon* by Theodore Balsamon (1140–99).<sup>125</sup> Later, the mid-fourteenth-century canonist Matthew Blastares (ca. 1290–1360) compiled another summarized variant in his alphabetical collection known as the *Syntagma*.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Although historical notices information about him are relatively scarce, Ioanichie had an exceptionally long tenure of more than thirty years and was sometimes styled as a metropolitan. This title exceeded the normal dignity of his see, which was just a suffragan diocese of the metropolitan in Suceava, the primate of Moldavia. In addition, Ioanichie seems to have been actively involved in the politics of the realm. His name appears in various documents of the princely chancellery; see Dimitrie Dan, *Cronica Episcopiei de Rădăuți* [The chronicle of the bishopric of Rădăuți] (Vienna: Editura Fondului Religionar Gr. Or. al Bucovinei în Cernăuți, 1912), 39–40.

<sup>125</sup> Angelov, "The Donation," 95–100.

<sup>126</sup> Matthew Blastares, *Syntagma* E, XI ed. M. Potles and G. A. Rhalles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων τῶν τε ἀγίων καὶ πανευφύμων ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν οἰκουμενικῶν καὶ τοπικῶν συνόδων, καὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἀγίων πατέρων* (Athens: 1859).

Blastares' compilation was translated into Church Slavonic towards the end of the 1300s.<sup>127</sup> Approximately eight decades later, in the same period as Ioanichie's installation as bishop of Rădăuți, two copies of the Slavonic *Syntagma* were produced in the scriptoria of Moldavian monasteries.<sup>128</sup> The first one was completed in April 1472 or 1474 by the hieromonk Ghervasie of Neamț, while the second one was copied in 1475 by the monk Iacov of Putna, under the patronage of Voivode Stephen III.<sup>129</sup> Iacov seems to be the same scribe who produced the miscellany containing the *Encomium of the Holy Emperors* by Patriarch Euthymios one year earlier. Included under the letter *Epsilon*, in the section about the attributes of bishops (ἐπίσκοποι), the *Edict of the Great Constantine* insists on the privileges granted by the basileus to the Roman pontiff. Furthermore, the canonist's commentary proposes this text as a perfect example of how rulers should treat God's Church.<sup>130</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that, similar to Euthymios' encomiastic oration on SS Constantine and Helena, the edict attributed to the holy emperor became part of a shared culture of Moldavian ecclesiastical elites, such as Bishop Ioanichie and his entourage. However, does that necessarily mean that the two renditions of Constantine's Baptism were aimed to express a hierarchic relationship between the bishop and the ruler, in accordance with a "hierocratic" reading of the *Donation*? In my understanding, such an interpretation would prove to be fallacious for two main reasons. First, this interpretation would draw on the hypothesis that late Byzantine political thought, which indeed had great impact on Moldavian culture, affirmed a clear superiority of spiritual authority in relation to temporal power. Yet, regardless of its popularity among scholars, this idea has in itself some shortcomings that impede us to project it into the context of the East Carpathian principality. Second, a closer look at the iconographic

<sup>127</sup> Victor Alexandrov, *The Syntagma of Matthew Blastares. The Destiny of a Byzantine Legal Code Among the Orthodox Slavs and Romanians, 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Frankfurt am Main: Löwenklau Gesellschaft, 2012), 81–86.

<sup>128</sup> Alexandrov, *The Syntagma*, 100–102.

<sup>129</sup> The Library of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest *M. Slav. 131*; see Panaitescu, *Manuscrisele slave*, vol. 1, cat. no. 131, and the Library of Putna Monastery, inv. no. 742; see Alexandrov, *Syntagma*, 101.

<sup>130</sup> *M. Slav. 131*, f. 84r–84v.

schema of the scenes at Rădăuți and Bălinești does not lend support to an asymmetrical interpretation of the interaction between Constantine and Silvester.

The universal validity of the “hierocratic thesis” among late Byzantine thinkers has been rightly challenged by Ruth Macrides in an article from 2012.<sup>131</sup> Although the model of an imperial institution stripped of sacral prerogatives and completely subjected by the Church was advanced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it only belonged to a rather isolated group of ecclesiastics, such as Makarios of Ankyra (in office 1397–1405) and Simeon of Thessalonike (in office 1416/7–29).<sup>132</sup> Based on a thorough re-evaluation of sources on Palaiologan ceremonies, Macrides concludes that, contrary to the common assumption, the imperial office never ceased to possess the aura of holiness that enabled rulers to intervene in religious affairs. Therefore, one cannot talk about a clear vertical relationship between spiritual authority and secular power, but rather about a dynamic process of symbolic exchanges in which the two parties validated and often controlled each other.<sup>133</sup> Macrides’ conclusions shed new light on the intellectual context in which the *Donation of Constantine* was interpreted by its late Byzantine audience. Angelov himself admits that the rhetoric of clerical supremacy was not the only possible reading of the edict. When they had to contend with the original function of the *Donation*, namely, the legitimation of papal primacy, representatives of the Greek Church highlighted that the Roman pontiff received special honor among the other patriarchs only because the emperor bestowed it upon him. In other words, the story of Constantine and Silvester not only stresses the emperor’s submission to the Church, but also legitimizes his agency in relation to it. As Angelov insightfully puts it, “Byzantine political imagination was

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<sup>131</sup> Ruth Macrides, “Emperor and Church in the Last Centuries of Byzantium,” *Studies in Church History* 58 (2012): 123–143.

<sup>132</sup> Macrides, “Emperor and Church,” 141.

<sup>133</sup> Macrides, “Emperor and Church,” 140–143.

flexible enough to accommodate” alternative modes of understanding the relationship between ecclesiastical and imperial powers.<sup>134</sup>

The amendments to the “hierocratic” use of the *Donation* in Byzantine tradition invite us to a more judicious assessment of the interaction between Constantine and Silvester in the two Moldavian representations of the Baptism. The frescoes at Rădăuți and Bălinești create an intriguing balance of power between the emperor and the bishop. Their configuration differs from earlier renderings of the theme, which have been frequently associated with claims of clerical supremacy. The common iconographic schema employed by Byzantine and Western painters focuses on the monarch’s humility. For example, in the decoration of the St. Silvester chapel at SS Quattro Coronati in Rome (ca. 1248), as well as in a later fresco from the Cretan church of St. Constantine in Kritsa (ca. 1354–5), the emperor appears as a naked figure immersed into the font by the pontiff (Fig. 22).<sup>135</sup> Moldavian versions of the episode, however, do not present the same hierarchical relationship. As mentioned above, in the murals at Rădăuți and Bălinești, Constantine and Silvester stand next to the font, in more or less equal positions. Of course, the ritual setting of the scene still emphasizes the pope’s role as the celebrant of the baptism, granting him certain prominence. Constantine himself acknowledges Silvester’s sacramental authority by bowing his crowned before the pope. Nonetheless, this gesture of reverence makes the emperor just marginally submissive in relation to the bishop.

Moreover, East-Carpathian wall paintings counterbalance Silvester’s liturgical centrality through a series of pictorial elements likely intended to confer additional symbolic weight to the ruler’s figure. The images at Rădăuți and Bălinești not only maintain all attributes of Constantine’s imperial dignity, namely, the open crown and the sumptuous ceremonial garments, but also construct a privileged connection between him and the Archangel. In the

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<sup>134</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 361.

<sup>135</sup> The mural at SS Quattro Coronati even depicts the emperor as a leper. On the meaning of this cycle, see Jaritz, “Constantine in Late Medieval Western Art,” 204, with a review of previous scholarship.

mural at Bălinești, whose excellent state of preservation allows us to examine such details, the emperor is the focal point of the composition. All characters, including St. Michael, direct their gaze toward him. In addition, Constantine and the “Great Angel” wear matching costumes (i.e., green tunics and red mantles). An analogous visual correspondence might have existed at Rădăuți, where the figure of St. Michael is no longer preserved. In any case, the two Moldavian murals are far from visualizing a vertical relationship between the basileus and the pope. Rather, they create a dynamic exchange of legitimation gestures. Within its framework, Constantine and Silvester are engaged in a mutually empowering interaction, receiving further symbolic validation through the Archangel’s blessing.

This symmetrical interpretation of the Baptism is more consistent with the version of the emperor’s life conveyed by hagiographical sources that circulated in late fifteenth-century Moldavia. A similar exchange of legitimizing gestures between the ruler and the high clergy is described in the *Encomium of the Holy Emperors* by Euthymios of Tarnovo. The Slavonic text contains a long section devoted to Constantine’s encounter with the bishops gathered at the Council of Nicaea to condemn the teachings of Arius. This episode stresses the emperor’s agency in ecclesiastical matters. His role as guardian of orthodoxy and mediator within Christian society is unanimously acknowledged by the Church hierarchy. Conversely, the emperor recognizes the prestige of episcopal dignity, displaying utmost reverence and even self-effacement in his interactions with senior clergymen. Similar to the murals at Rădăuți and Bălinești, the Slavonic encomium weaves gestures of power and humility within the same narrative fabric, imagining a mutually legitimizing dialogue between the monarch and the bishops.<sup>136</sup>

This symbolic exchange is particularly evident at the opening of the council’s sessions. While the assembly of holy fathers was respectfully waiting for Constantine’s arrival in order

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<sup>136</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium XIII*, 1–4.

to commence the debates, the emperor made a dramatic entrance as a divine envoy appointed to preside over them: “And he, as an angel sent by God with luminous rays, so to say, stood [before them] shining in a radiant purple robe.”<sup>137</sup> The rhetorical comparison between the imperial office and the angelic ministry was a commonplace of Byzantine political imagination. Just like angels, the monarch was believed to act as a divine messenger sent to guide humanity in crucial moments of its history.<sup>138</sup> Euthymios of Tarnovo alludes to this *topos* for highlighting Constantine’s leading position at the Ecumenical Council and in the defense of the right faith. The fifteenth-century painters at Bălinești and perhaps at Rădăuți might have envisaged a similar analogy when they represented Constantine and the Archangel in almost identical clothing.<sup>139</sup>

Nevertheless, like the Moldavian renditions of the Baptism, in which the angellike emperor bows his head before Silvester, the Slavonic encomium counterbalances Constantine’s otherworldly splendor and authority over the council with gestures of humbleness. Euthymios accounts that the basileus “showed himself smaller than everyone,” bowed before the bishops, and implored them to bless him with their prayers. Moreover, as a sign of reverence, he reversed the protocol by refusing to sit down on his throne before all conciliar fathers took their seats.<sup>140</sup> This submissive conduct, however, does not diminish the symbolic prestige of Constantine’s

<sup>137</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium XIII*, 4: **Он же, яко ω(т) Бѣ посланъ аггль, свѣтлыми лоучами, якоже рещи, вѣщѣ сѧ, свѣтлоѣ прѣ(д)ста вѣрѣницеѣ.** The translation is my own.

<sup>138</sup> On the role of the angels in relation to humanity, see Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* 9. 2–3, in *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De coelesti hierarchia, De ecclesiastica hierarchia, De mystica theologia, Epistulae*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf M. Ritter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>139</sup> The analogy between Constantine’s and the Archangel’s costumes could have been equally related to the New Testament metaphor of baptism as spiritual clothing. In Galatians 3: 27, the Apostle Paul states that “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” This passage was intensely referred to in theological writings and sermons; see, e. g., Basil of Caesarea, *The First Oration on the Baptism*, ed. Migne, *Περὶ βαπτίσματος λόγος πρῶτος*, in *PG*, vol. 31, 1564. The fragment was also turned into a hymn that replaced the common *Trisagion* before the *prokeimenon* of the Apostle during the baptism liturgy and the service of certain major feasts; see, e. g., *The Office of the Holy Baptism*, ed. Goar, *Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος*, in *Εὐχολόγιον* 13, 4: **Εἶτα ποιεῖ ὁ Ἱερεὺς μετὰ τοῦ ἀναδόχου καὶ τοῦ βρέφους, σχῆμα κύκλου. Καὶ ψάλλομεν. Ὅσοι εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε, Ἀλληλοῦϊα, ἐκ γ’. Εἶτα τὸ προκειμένον. Κύριος φωτισμὸς μου** [“Then the priest, together with the godfather and the infant, makes a circular movement. And we sing ‘You who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, Alleluia’ on the third (tone). Then the *prokeimenon* ‘The Lord is my illumination.’”]. The translation is my own.

<sup>140</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium XIII*, 4.

imperial office but integrates the virtue of humility into the ideal profile of the Christian monarch. As noticed by Jacques Dalarun, in medieval Christian societies, the display of humbleness was an essential aspect of leadership, in line with the definition formulated by Christ in Matthew 20: 26–28: “(...) whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant; and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”<sup>141</sup> Suggested both by Euthymios’ hagiographical work and by the compositions at Rădăuți and Bălinești, Constantine’s reverence towards the bishops was not only meant as an acknowledgement of the prestige of spiritual authority, but also as further validation of the ruler.

The mutually legitimizing interaction between Constantine and Silvester is also emphasized by the general iconographic context of late fifteenth-century Moldavian churches. The thematization of the synergy between the temporal and spiritual powers is a defining feature of the pictorial programs at Rădăuți and Bălinești. This idea is most eloquently expressed in the cycles of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, in which pious emperors preside over assemblies of bishops and contribute to the definition of orthodoxy (Figs. 23–24).<sup>142</sup> During the late and post-Byzantine periods, the depiction of Holy Synods was usually located in the upper zones of the narthex. However, at Rădăuți, the Councils were relocated into western compartments of the three-aisled naos, in a much more prominent position.<sup>143</sup> This unusual enhancement of the theme was probably motivated by the church’s twofold function as a princely necropolis patronized by Stephen III and as an episcopal center.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Jacques Dalarun, *To Govern Is to Serve: An Essay on Medieval Democracy*, trans. Sean L. Field, M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, and Anne E. Lester (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023). The New Testament understanding of leadership as service has had a lasting influence up to the present day. For example, Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 20 were explicitly alluded to in the prayer recited by Charles III before his anointment and coronation as king of Great Britain.

<sup>142</sup> On Ecumenical Councils in Byzantine art, see Christopher Walter, *L’iconographie des conciles dans la tradition byzantine* (Paris: Institut français d’études byzantines, 1970).

<sup>143</sup> Dragnev, “Programul iconografic,” 26.

<sup>144</sup> I have previously addressed this issue; see Andrei Dumitrescu, “Între o retorică a puterii și intercesiune: câteva observații cu privire la selecția figurilor iconice din naosului bisericii Sf. Nicolae din Rădăuți (cca. 1480–1500)” [Between the Rhetoric of Power and Intercession: Some Remarks on the Selection of Iconic Figures in the Naos



In contrast to the iconographic program at Rădăuți, where the Councils are only indirectly connected with the joint depiction of Constantine and Silvester, the murals at Bălinești create a spatial link between the two themes. Following a widespread iconographic practice, also attested in the churches at Botoșani and Arbore, the Synods are located in the upper register of the narthex, above the cycle of the Archangel. The iconographers positioned the two episodes of the Constantinian legend, namely, the Baptism by Pope Silvester and the Vision of the cross, beneath the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople convoked by Justinian I (r. 527–65) in 553. The analogy between the interaction of Constantine and Silvester and the visualization of Holy Synods is enhanced by the fact that, similar to the frescoes at Botoșani and Arbore, all emperors are flanked by representatives of the Pentarchy, that is, the incumbents of the sees of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Flanking the imperial throne, the popes of Rome and the ecumenical patriarchs of Constantinople are differentiated from the other bishops, including the Eastern patriarchs, by means of richly ornamented miters. The Roman pontiffs wear the same head coverings as Silvester does in the scene of the Baptism. The introduction of miters highlights the prestige of the Roman and Constantinopolitan sees, as well as their privileged connection with the imperial office, which generates a broader context for the relationship between Constantine and Silvester.

The pictorial association between the cycle of Ecumenical Councils and the Baptism of the first Christian emperor testifies to a special interest in displaying models of the ideal cooperation between monarchs and bishops. The abundance of visual references to this theme in the mural programs at Rădăuți and Bălinești is indicative of its centrality within the local

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of St. Nicholas Church in Rădăuți (ca. 1480–1500)], *AP* 17, no. 1 (2021), 77–78. Situated in the upper tiers of the western wall of the nave and on the vaults of the corresponding aisles, the original cycle at Rădăuți must have comprised seven episodes. However, only two of them are in a relatively good state of conservation, namely, the Fourth Council of Chalcedon (451), on the western wall of the nave, and the Sixth Council of Constantinople (680–1), on the tympanum of the northwestern bay. Considering the normal sequence of the episodes, the first three Ecumenical Councils, convoked by Constantine the Great, Theodosius I (r. 379–95), and Theodosius II (r. 402–50) at Nicaea, Constantinople (381), and Ephesos (431) were situated on the tympanum and vault of the southwestern bay.

representation of Christian rulership in relation to the high clergy. Unfortunately, the scarce documentary material, as well as the lack of comprehensive studies on Moldavian episcopal centers, impede us to assess the exact impact of these ideas on the relationship between Stephen III and Bishop Ioanichie of Rădăuți.

There is evidence, however, that the voivode of Moldavia engaged in a mutually validating interaction with another powerful hierarch of his period, namely, Metropolitan Theoktistos I of Suceava (in office 1453–78). Identified by later traditions as a former Bulgarian deacon of Mark Eugenikos, the anti-unionist metropolitan of Ephesos (d. 1444), Theoktistos made a crucial contribution to Stephen's ascension to power.<sup>145</sup> In April 1457, the metropolitan revived the late Byzantine rite of the ruler's anointment in order to confer sacramental legitimacy to the young prince before the boyars and the people.<sup>146</sup> As a result, during the first decades of Stephen's reign, Theoktistos remained close to the court, acting as a constant member of the princely council. The metropolitan officiated the dedication of the katholikon at Putna Monastery, the main religious foundation and princely necropolis of Stephen III, on September 3, 1470. It is significant that, in the Byzantine liturgical calendar, this date corresponds to the commemoration of the metropolitan's namesake, the holy hermit Theoktistos. This detail is symptomatic for the esteem received by the metropolitan within the courtly milieu. When he passed away in November 1478, Theoktistos was buried in the exonarthex of the church at Putna, in close vicinity to the tombs prepared for Stephen III and his family. No other state or Church dignitary in late fifteenth-century Moldavia received such a great honor.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> On Metropolitan Theoktistos, see Dan Ioan Mureșan, "De l'intronisation du métropolite Théoctiste I<sup>er</sup> au sacre d'Étienne le Grand," in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine*, ed. Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan Sorin Gorovei (Putna Monastery: Editura Mușatinii, 2004), 337–374.

<sup>146</sup> Mureșan, "De l'intronisation," 357–359.

<sup>147</sup> Berza, ed., *Repertoriul*, cat. no. 52.

Although it implied an ongoing exchange of symbolic gestures, it would be rather far-fetched to assume that the attitude of the Moldavian voivode toward his metropolitan was directly inspired by Constantine's relationship with Silvester or the conciliar fathers gathered at Nicaea. However, Stephen's reverence toward Theoktistos, which might have set a model for the prince's conduct in relation to local bishops, provided the depictions of Constantine's Baptism with an appropriate historical context to be interpreted as a mutually empowering dialogue. The miraculous presence of St. Michael depicted by late fifteenth-century iconographers enhanced the exemplary character of the tale by introducing an element of divine legitimation. Under the shelter of the Archangel's wings, the holy emperor and his saintly bishop enact the perfect synergy between the temporal and spiritual powers, establishing an ideal definition of the prerogatives possessed by the princely and episcopal offices.

## Chapter 2: Constantine's Vision and Its Iconographic Context

In the episcopal church at Rădăuți, Constantine's Vision of the Cross is situated on the vault of the southwestern bay of the narthex. The composition focuses on the emperor's equestrian figure accompanied by a group of soldiers on horseback (Fig. 3).<sup>148</sup> Constantine raises his eyes and left hand towards heaven, where the floating figure of St. Michael—significantly smaller in size—opens his arms in a symmetric gesture, revealing the miraculous sight of the cross inscribed in stars (Fig. 25). This iconographic interpretation of what Lactantius calls the *caeleste signum Dei* is most unusual.<sup>149</sup> Framed by an arc of heaven, which constitutes the traditional setting of theophanic scenes, the hallow sign is portrayed as a constellation enshrined within the radiant beams of the cross. This exceptional element is further enhanced by the Slavonic *titulus*: “The cross revealed itself to Emperor Constantine by means of stars” (КРСТЪ ИВИ СѦ КОСТАНТИНЪ ЦРЪ ЗВЪЗДАМИ).

While the scene of the emperor's Baptism occupies a rather distant spot in the central part of the narthex, the Apparition of the Cross is set alongside other angelic miracles depicted on the tympanum and on the vault of the southwestern bay, which is divided into four rectangular panels (Fig. 26). Constantine's Vision occupies the northeastern one. The other compartments, including the lunette, are devoted to Jacob's Dream of the Ladder to Heaven (southwest), his Fight with the Angel (southern tympanum), St. Michael's Miracle at the Church in Chonae (northwest), and the Vision of Emperor Justinian about the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (northeast) (Figs. 27–31).<sup>150</sup> Designed as a symbolic counterpart to the

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<sup>148</sup> Sinigalia, “L'Archange,” 38.

<sup>149</sup> Lactantius, *On the Deaths* 44: 5, ed. and trans. J. L. Creed, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). On the representation of Constantine's Vision in middle and late Byzantine painting, Christopher Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great. Emperor and Saint. With Associated Studies* (Leiden: Alexander Press, 2006), 53–65, 111–126. In most versions of the scene, the depiction of the cross is rather schematic.

<sup>150</sup> The image is mentioned by Sinigalia, “L'Archange,” 40–41. The scenes from the Old Testament are based on Genesis 28:10–17 and 32: 24–32.

Apparition of the Cross, this uncommon scene depicts Justinian and his retinue contemplating the celestial model of the Great Church revealed by an ‘angel of the Lord’ (Fig. 30). The image is surmounted by the customary Slavonic inscription which reads: “The Revelation of Justi<nian> about St. Sophia” (ПОКАЗАНИЕ ЮВСТИ... ѿ ГТОИ СОФІИ).<sup>151</sup> The pictorial association between the angelic visions of the two Roman emperors lacks any direct parallel in the visual culture of the late and post-Byzantine world. Whether it relied on some unknown prototype or not, the mural at Rădăuți represents an exceptional case. Its only echoes are attested at a local level, namely, on the historiated border of a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century icon of St. Michael and within the Archangel’s cycle from the exonarthex of the Resurrection church at Sucevița Monastery (ca. 1601) (Fig. 32).<sup>152</sup>

In contrast to the wall paintings at Rădăuți, the cycle of angelic miracles at Bălinești brings Constantine’s Baptism and the Apparition of the Cross into a unified sequence positioned in the middle register of the northwestern wall (Fig. 5). The representation of the emperor’s Vision is almost identical to its forerunner at Rădăuți, except for the visual treatment of the

<sup>151</sup> Unfortunately, the last part of the emperor’s name is still covered by a small portion of the nineteenth-century repainting left by the restorers as a testimony of the mural’s previous condition. In a similar early seventeenth-century fresco from the katholikon of Sucevița Monastery, the monarch is erroneously identified as Justin: <ПОК>АЗАНІЕ ИЮСТИНОВА ѿ ГТО СОФІИ [The Revelation of Justin about St. Sophia]; on this scene, see Bedros, “Cultul Arhanghelilor,” 120. Since the titulus at Rădăuți is not completely cleaned, one cannot determine if the overlapping between Justinian and Justin was caused by the perpetuation of an earlier error or by a *lapsus calami* of the painters at Sucevița. Of course, there is the third option of postulating a conscious choice, which, nonetheless, requires further investigation. However, the missing portion of the *titulus* at Rădăuți is long enough to accommodate the fully spelled genitive of Justinian’s name (ИЮСТИНИАНОВА). I also have to mention that ‘revelation’ is just a contextual translation of ПОКАЗАНИЕ. Derived from the verb ПОКАЗАТИ, the term can also mean ‘display’, ‘manifestation’, and even ‘teaching’; see the entries on ПОКАЗАНИЕ in *Digital Old Church Slavonic Dictionary, Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Czech Academy of Sciences, GORAZD: An Old Church Slavonic Digital Hub*, accessed May 7, 2023, <http://gorazd.org/gulliver/?recordId=30311>. However, all these versions stress the angel’s agency in revealing the church’s divine image to Justinian.

<sup>152</sup> Sabados, “Icônes roumaines du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” 42 and Bedros, “Cultul Arhanghelilor,” 120. In terms of subject matter, these later variants of Justinian’s vision are certainly related to the fifteenth-century wall painting at Rădăuți, as evidenced by the striking similarity of their Slavonic inscriptions. Nevertheless, from an iconographic perspective, the two compositions are only vaguely connected with their predecessor. The physiognomic traits of the emperor, as well as the posture of the heavenly messenger, seem to be a reworked version of earlier sixteenth-century representations of Constantine’s vision of the Archangel, such as the fresco in the porch of the monastic church at Moldovița. Unlike the mural at Sucevița, the inscription on the icon of the Archangel even attributes the vision of Hagia Sophia to Constantine; see Constanța Costea, “La sfârșitul unui secol de erudiție: pictura de icoane din Moldova în timpul lui Ieremia Movilă. ‘Ambianța Suceviței’” [At the end of a century of erudition: icon painting in Moldavia in the times of Ieremia Movilă. ‘The milieu of Sucevița’], *AT 3* (1993): 86–87.

celestial sign.<sup>153</sup> In accordance with a widespread iconographic model encountered both in earlier Southeastern European imagery and in contemporary Moldavian frescoes, such as the composition at Arbore (Fig. 10), the cross is simply delineated with brown paint alluding to the materiality of the sacred wood.<sup>154</sup> This difference is also reflected in the Slavonic inscription. The preserved fragments of the text seem to constitute an abridged version of the *titulus* at Rădăuți, which omits the reference to the stars: “The cross <revealed itself> to Constantine” (<ИВИ ГА> КОСТА(Н)ТИНЪ КР(С)ТЬ).<sup>155</sup> Resembling the selection of scenes at Rădăuți, Constantine’s Vision is linked to the depictions of Jacob’s Fight with the Angel and the Ladder to Heaven, located on the northern wall (Fig. 33–34). However, the Miracle of St. Michael at the Church in Chonae is situated farther away, at the eastern end of the same wall, while the Revelation of Hagia Sophia is completely omitted (Fig. 35).<sup>156</sup>

Their iconographic peculiarities notwithstanding, the programs at Rădăuți and Bălinești introduce the theme of Constantine’s Vision into a twofold narrative framework. The Apparition of the Cross is, on the one hand, integrated into a hagiographical sequence concerning the Archangel’s involvement in the story of the holy emperor. On the other hand, the scene is correlated with other angelic interventions in the tales of exemplary rulers of God’s nation, from both the Old Testament and Christian history. The present chapter examines the multi-layered meaning attached to Constantine’s Vision within this twofold network of visual associations.

<sup>153</sup> Dragnev mentions the composition at Bălinești but does not make any comparison to the analogous scene at Rădăuți, in “Observații și precizări,” 26. The version at Bălinești also displays minimal variations in the colors of the characters’ costumes. In the church at Rădăuți, the emperor wears a red tunic and a dark purple mantle, while the Archangel is dressed in a blue chiton and a red himation. The fresco at Bălinești depict both Constantine and St. Michael with green tunics and red mantles, creating a visual correspondence between them. In both cases, however, the basileus has the same ceremonial vestments in the scenes of the Baptism and of the Vision.

<sup>154</sup> Such a representation of the cross is included in the narthex program of the church of the Decollation of St. John the Baptist in Arbore; see Popa, Boldura, Dobrotă, and Dină, *Arbore*, 92.

<sup>155</sup> Dragnev proposes a different reconstruction of the inscription: “<The angel shows> the Cross to Constantine,” see “Observații și precizări,” 18. The scholar does not offer any explanation for this hypothesis. The version ИВИ ГА КОСТА(Н)ТИНЪ КР(С)ТЬ is attested, however, on the historiated borders of the sixteenth-century icon of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel commissioned by the Moldavian Treasurer Theodore, currently in the collection of the Orthodox Metropolis in Iași, Romania; see Bedros, “Cultul arhanghelilor,” 111 and Dragnev, “Poziționarea iconografică,” 50.

<sup>156</sup> Dragnev, “Observații și precizări,” 26.

Its first section explores the dynamic interaction between the two Moldavian interpretations of the scene and the narrative background set by the literary tradition of Constantine's life. The second section focuses on the joint depictions of the angelic visions of Constantine and Justinian, as they are featured in the southwestern bay of the narthex at Rădăuți. I aim to understand the function of this unusual association as part of the ideal representation of Christian rulership developed by the elites of late fifteenth-century Moldavia.

### 1. Associative Patterns in the Representation of Constantine's Vision

Previous scholarship has correlated the mural in the narthex at Rădăuți with the apparition of the cross that preceded Constantine's victory over Maxentius in the battle at the Milvian Bridge (October 312).<sup>157</sup> Tereza Sinigalia suggests that its "literary source" was the late antique report provided by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Life of Constantine*.<sup>158</sup> Although there is no evidence for the direct circulation of this text in late medieval Moldavia, Sinigalia points out that the local audience was familiar with the Slavonic adaptation of the Eusebian narrative included in the *Encomium of the Holy Emperors* by Euthymios of Tarnovo.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, the patriarch's oration contains a relatively short section on Constantine's vision near Rome, modelled on the story recorded by Eusebius. However, contrary to Sinigalia's assumption, this passage could not have been the only textual source employed by Moldavian iconographers.

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<sup>157</sup> The most influential account of this episode is provided by Eusebius, *Life* I, 28: 2; "About the time of the midday sun, when the day was just turning, he said he saw with his own eyes, up in the sky and resting over the sun, a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, 'By this conquer' (τούτῳ νικά). Amazement at the spectacle seized both him and the whole company of soldiers which was then accompanying him on a campaign he was conducting somewhere and witnessed the miracle." The fourth-century accounts of the vision are analyzed by an enormous number of studies, among which Arnold Hugh Martin Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London: The English University Press Ltd, 1949), 79–102, Barbara Saylor Rodgers, "Constantine's Pagan Vision," *B* 50, no. 1 (1980): 259–278, Ramsay Macmullen, "Constantine and the Miraculous," in *Changes in the Roman Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 81–96, and Oliver Nicholson, "Constantine's Vision of the Cross," *VCh* 54, no. 3 (2000): 309–323.

<sup>158</sup> Sinigalia, "L'Archange," 38–39, who purports that Constantine is depicted with a scroll in his right hand. This motif is supposed to allude to "the letter sent together with Licinius from Milan to the governor of Bithynia in 313," through which Christians were granted religious freedom within the empire. However, there is no such *rotulus* in the image. Constantine simply holds the red bridle of his horse.

<sup>159</sup> Sinigalia, "L'Archange," 39, based on Mihăilă, "Tradiția literară," 220–259.

In line with the narrative tradition of Byzantine hagiography, Euthymios claims that the emperor experienced three visions of the cross. Although they are presented as distinct episodes, the apparitions are built on the same narrative pattern: Constantine is unable to defeat a strong enemy on his own, but the sign of the cross reveals itself in heaven granting him victory. The multiplication of visions is attested as early as the ninth-century Greek *vitae* conventionally designated as the “Guidi,” “Opitz,” and “Patmos” legends.<sup>160</sup> Xanthopoulos’ *Church History*, which was extensively used by Euthymios, replicates this structure.<sup>161</sup> The epiphanies of the cross occur at different stages of Constantine’s imperial career, marking a series of pivotal moments throughout the story. I argue that the mural at Rădăuți, as well as its slightly later adaptation at Bălinești, should not be regarded as an illustration of any specific episode from Euthymios’ Slavonic oration. The two Moldavian images integrate elements from the narrative setting of more than one apparition of the cross into a new iconographic framework focused on Constantine’s symbolic role as a visionary emperor. In my view, the Archangel’s presence as a mediator of the epiphany was a key element in this process of reshaping existing narratives in the late fifteenth-century Moldavian milieu. In order to substantiate this hypothesis, it is necessary to have a closer look into Euthymios’ accounts of the three visions and reassess the visual configuration of the frescoes at Rădăuți and Bălinești.

The first apparition took place at the beginning of Constantine’s campaign in Italy. The young emperor realized that the tyrant Maxentius, who controlled Rome at that time, set a trap at the Milvian Bridge over the Tiber. Fearing his rival’s machinations, Constantine sought the aid of the God worshiped by his father, Constantius Chlorus (r. 305–6). Thus, while the emperor was marching on a field together with his troops, the sign of the cross revealed itself on the afternoon sky, shining brighter than the sun, alongside an exhortation inscribed “by means of

<sup>160</sup> Kazhdan, “Constantin imaginaire,” 222–227.

<sup>161</sup> Xanthopoulos, *Church History*, VII, 29, 47–48.



a starry form:” “By this you shall conquer, Constantine!”<sup>162</sup> Similar to Eusebius, Euthymios mentions that the miracle was also witnessed by the emperor’s troops. The significance of the vision was subsequently clarified by Christ who appeared to Constantine in a dream advising him to carry a cross-shaped labarum before his armies in order to defeat Maxentius.<sup>163</sup> Following the structure set by Byzantine hagiographical works, such as the “Guidi” legend, and by Xanthopoulos’ *Church History*, Euthymios presents the apparition of the cross as a decisive step toward the emperor’s conversion to Christianity.<sup>164</sup> The episode is part of a narrative crescendo leading to the tale of Constantine’s leprosy and miraculous healing through the baptism officiated by Pope Silvester.<sup>165</sup>

The second revelation of the celestial sign occurs after the emperor’s official conversion. Having defeated his treacherous colleagues in the East, the righteous Constantine became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. The vision is staged before the next important event of his reign, namely, the conquest of Byzantion (or “Viz,” as Euthymios calls it), “a small city (...) that Manasseh, the emperor of the Jews, [had] built in his days.”<sup>166</sup> This time, however, the cross did not reveal itself in daylight, but in the middle of the night.<sup>167</sup> Having been repeatedly

<sup>162</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* IV, 1. (...) κρ(с)таwбpазно себе показоу жици свѣ(д)ныимъ въwбраженіемъ и Римскыи словесы: Симъ повѣждан, Кѡнстантинѣ. The translation is my own. In the pre-Metaphastic *vitae*, the account of the first vision has a more dynamic configuration structured in two consecutive stages. At first, the emperor saw a cross of light shining in heaven brighter than the sun. Then, the luminous apparition turned into a divine exhortation inscribed in stars with “Roman letters:” ἐν τούτῳ νικά (“By this conquer!”); see “Guidi” *Life*, 322; cf. Eusebius, *Life* I, 28–29, which is somewhat closer to Euthymios. Xanthopoulos maintains the twofold configuration of the epiphany created by earlier hagiography; see Xanthopoulos, *Church History* VII, 29.

<sup>163</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* IV, 2. Eusebius mentions that after the apparition of “the Christ of God” in the ruler’s dream, the meaning of the vision was further explained by Christian “experts” or “initiates” (μύστας); see *Life* I, 32: 1–2. Euthymios most likely omits this element in order to emphasize Constantine’s direct connection with divinity.

<sup>164</sup> “Guidi” *Life*, 322–330 and Xanthopoulos, *Church History* VII, 29–35.

<sup>165</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* IV–VII.

<sup>166</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* X, 1: Градецъ оубо бѣше малъ, възъ именовъ, егоже създа въ дни свои Манасія, црѣ Юудейскы (...). The translation is my own.

<sup>167</sup> The vision also takes place at nighttime in the “Guidi” *Life*, 335 and Xanthopoulos, *Church History* VII, 47. The nocturnal setting of the vision had a precedent in the *Church History* by Philostorgios, an early fifth-century work of non-Nicene orientation, whose content survives only through the epitome included by Patriarch Photios of Constantinople (in office 858–67; 877–86) in his *Myriobiblion*, Codex 256, ed. René Henry, Bibliothèque, vol. 7 (Codices 246–256) (Paris: Société d’Édition des Belles Lettres, 1974). On the meaning of the stars as signifiers in Philostorgios’ version of the story, see István Perczel “Hagiography as a Historiographic Genre: From Eusebius to Cyril of Scythopolis, and Eustratius of Constantinople,” in *Christian Historiography Between Empires (4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup>)*

defeated by the wicked Byzantines, Constantine became uncertain about the outcome of the siege. One night, he looked to the sky and saw an “inscription written by means of stars:” “Call me on the day of your sorrow and, saving yourself, you will glorify me!” When the emperor raised his eyes again, the stars had moved forming the cross and another message from God: “By this sign, you shall destroy all your enemies!”<sup>168</sup> Following the “Guidi” *vita* and Xanthopoulos’ *Church History*, Euthymios imagines the second vision as an individual experience of the emperor. In contrast to the first scene, no other witnesses are mentioned. Nevertheless, the general pattern is preserved. As he had done before with the labarum, Constantine fashioned a material representation of the celestial sign. In the aftermath of the vision, the emperor carved a wooden cross with his own knife and carried it in battle. Once again, the symbol acted as a bearer of victory, enabling the emperor to conquer the city of Byzantium.<sup>169</sup> Under divine inspiration, Constantine chose that place to build the capital of his empire, the “New Rome,” dedicated to Christ.<sup>170</sup>

Significantly less detailed, the account of the third vision is integrated immediately after the foundation of Constantinople and the erecting of the porphyry column in its midst.<sup>171</sup> The episode is part of a military expedition against the Scythians, a northern barbaric population

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*Centuries*), ed. Hagit Amirav, Cornelis Hoogerwerf, and István Perczel (Leuven- Paris-Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2021), 192–196. Some scholars speculate that Lactantius’ reference to the *caeleste signum* was, in fact, an astral alignment resembling the Chi-Rho monogram; see Michael DiMaio Jr, Jörn Zeuge, and Natalia Zotov, “Ambiguitas Constantiniana: the *Caeleste Signum Dei* of Constantine the Great,” *B 58* (1988), 341–344. However, this interpretation is only based on conjecture.

<sup>168</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium X*, 2: (...) и видѣ писаніе, звѣздами написано сице: Призови мѧ въ днѣ печали твоѣж, и избавѧ тѧ, и прославиши мѧ. (...) видѣ кр(с)тъ звѣздами стоѣщъ на нѣси, и писаніе, гл҃ащее сице: Симъ знаменіемъ погоубиши всѧ врагы свои. The translation is my own.

<sup>169</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium X*, 2.

<sup>170</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium X*, 3. The “Guidi” *Life* mentions that Constantine’s original intention was to build his new capital “in the field before Ilios, over the tomb of Ajax” (ἐν τῷ πρὸ τοῦ Ἰλίου πεδίῳ ὑπὲρ τὸν Αἴαντος τάφον). However, God prevented the emperor from pursuing his Trojan project by means of a dream. Constantinople was founded, instead, on the site of the recently conquered Byzantium; see “Guidi” *Life*, 336. Euthymios omits this story, perhaps because the Homeric connection was less relevant for his late fourteenth-century Bulgarian audience.

<sup>171</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium X*, 3.

settled on the Danube.<sup>172</sup> The emperor managed to subdue them “because the most venerable sign of the cross had revealed itself in heavens in that place , as [it had done] before.”<sup>173</sup> The third manifestation of the celestial sign marks the final stage in Constantine’s ascension as *monokrator*. After the conquest of Rome and the establishment of the new Christian capital bearing his name, the God-protected ruler secured the borders of the empire by defeating the barbarians who were threatening it from the north. At this point, the narrative focus moves to the administration of the state, emphasizing the emperor’s wisdom in taking care of both political and ecclesiastical affairs. Like earlier Byzantine hagiographers, Euthymios compiles a long list of churches founded by Constantine, beginning with the basilica of Christ in Lateran, erected on the site of a former imperial palace in Rome, and culminating with the sanctuary “of the *Archistrategos* Michael in Sosthenion and Anaplous.”<sup>174</sup>

The iconographic schema at Rădăuți and Bălinești does not overlap with the narrative unfolding of any vision described in the Slavonic *Encomium of the Holy Emperors*. Nevertheless, the murals comprise motifs connected with all three accounts provided by Patriarch Euthymios. Most likely, the Archangel’s figure functioned as a catalyst within the combinatorial framework elaborated by the designers of the compositions at Rădăuți and Bălinești. According to the tale of the sanctuary in Sosthenion-Anaplous, the *Archistrategos* informed the emperor of having supported him “against all impious tyrants and barbaric nations.”<sup>175</sup> St. Michael’s words invited the audience of the legend to retroject his assistance

<sup>172</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* XI, 1, cf. “*Guidi*” *Vita*, 337. The story was first attested in a self-standing narrative piece likely dating to the fifth century; see *The Vision of Constantine* 1, ed. De Leo, *Visio Constantini*, in *Richerche sui falsi*. In this version, the battle against the Scythians precedes the emperor’s baptism by “Eusebius of Rome.”

<sup>173</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* XI, 1: (...)**ВЪСЕЧ(С)ТНОМОУ ЗНАМЕНІО(У) КР(С)ТНОМО(У) ТАМО ТОМО(У) ПАВЪШО(У) СЛ.** The translation is my own.

<sup>174</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* XI, 3, cf. “*Guidi*” *Life*, 338–339, where mention of the *Michaelion* is accompanied by an extensive account of the apparition of the Archangel to Constantine. The tale is missing from the Slavonic *encomium*.

<sup>175</sup> “*Guidi*” *Life*, 339.

both into the story of the emperor's confrontation with Maxentius, the pagan tyrant *par excellence*, and into the campaigns against the Byzantines and the Scythians.

In Medieval Greek versions of the emperor's life, the Archangel's manifestation at the shrine in Sosthenion-Anaplous was presented as the corollary of Constantine's visions, being narrated shortly after the third apparition of the cross.<sup>176</sup> Although this episode is strangely omitted from the Slavonic hagiography of the holy emperor, the iconographic schema of the frescoes at Rădăuți and Bălinești illustrates a similar logic by interposing the Archangel's figure between Constantine and the celestial sign. Like earlier Byzantine accounts, the images suggest that the basileus received his victories not only through the power of the cross, as the Slavonic encomium claims, but also due to the intervention of the Archangel, "the leader and champion of Christians."<sup>177</sup> This striking parallelism shows once again that stories could bypass the limitations imposed by the regional circulation of specific texts. The tale of the sanctuary in Sosthenion-Anaplous enabled Moldavian imagemakers to reinterpret the available hagiographical material, such as the encomium by Patriarch Euthymios, within the visual framework set by the cycles of the Archangel's miracles. Thus, instead of picturing an individual episode from the Constantinian legend, the wall paintings at Rădăuți and Bălinești allude both to the vision near Rome, which led to the emperor's conversion, and to the nocturnal apparition of the cross preceding the conquest of Byzantium and the foundation of Constantinople. However, this new iconographic configuration does not represent a mere conflation of episodes, but rather a symbolic depiction of Constantine's role as a visionary emperor.

The group of mounted soldiers galloping behind Constantine evokes the collective character of the first vision. Equipped with helmets and armor, as if they were marching into

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<sup>176</sup> "Guidi" *Life*, 338–339.

<sup>177</sup> "Guidi" *Life*, 339.

battle, the warriors experience the revelation of the cross together with their leader. The soldiers' agency as witnesses is emphasized by the fact that they turn to each other, perhaps commenting on the miraculous event. In addition, all characters are located in the generic rocky landscape of Byzantine painting, which could have been easily associated with the indeterminate "field" mentioned in the encomium.<sup>178</sup>

In sharp contrast to the literary account of the first epiphany, which says that the cross revealed itself on the afternoon sky, the designers of the frescoes at Rădăuți and Bălinești integrated the scene of Constantine's Vision into a broader series of nocturnal miracles. The different setting suggested by the iconographic context of the episode is a defining feature of the apparition of the cross during the siege of Byzantium, as it is narrated by Euthymios.<sup>179</sup> In both churches, the emperor's Vision is associated with the angelic interventions in the story of Jacob, which, according to the Old Testament, occurred at nighttime.<sup>180</sup> The first scene visualizes the patriarch's Dream of the Ladder on which "angels were ascending and descending" between heaven and earth (Genesis 28: 10–17). The other one depicts Jacob wrestling with the angel "until morning" (Genesis 32: 24–32 and Hosea 12: 3–5). Similar to Constantine's Vision, the angel who acts as Jacob's adversary is identified as St. Michael by means of the repetitive blue (or green) chiton and red himation which ensure the narrative cohesion of the cycle.<sup>181</sup> The typological parallel between Jacob and Constantine is equally emphasized by the implicit reference to the themes of victory and divine legitimation of leadership introduced by the biblical narrative. After Jacob had resisted until the end of the fight, the angel of the Lord blessed him and gave him a new name indicating his position as patriarch of God's elect nation: "From now on your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but

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<sup>178</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium IV*, 1.

<sup>179</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium X*, 2.

<sup>180</sup> Sinigalia, "L'Archange," 19–20 and Dragnev, "Observații și precizări," 26.

<sup>181</sup> In Byzantine homilies, the mysterious man or angel who fought Jacob in *Genesis* 32 is commonly identified as St. Michael; see Olar, *Împăratul înaripat*, 190–191.

Israel shall be your name, because you have prevailed with God, and with humans you are powerful.” (Genesis 32: 28). Likewise, the revelation of the cross mediated by the Archangel validates Constantine’s status as the ruler of the Christian Empire—the “New Israel”—and grants him power to defeat his enemies.<sup>182</sup>

The analogy between Constantine’s Vision and the two episodes from the Old Testament is particularly evident in the southwestern bay of the narthex at Rădăuți. The Apparition of the Cross and Jacob’s Dream of the Ladder are facing each on the barrel vault, framing the Fight with the Angel, which is featured on the southern tympanum (Figs. 26–27).<sup>183</sup> The compositions display symmetrical constructions. The ascending diagonal marked by the ladder to heaven is echoed by the imaginary axis connecting the emperor’s fluttering mantle and stretched arm with the Archangel’s hand and, finally, with the horizontal beam of the cross. In addition, the iridescent arcs of heaven depicted in the upper corners of the two scenes, namely, on top of the ladder and around the cross-shaped constellation, are almost perfectly aligned in a semicircle.<sup>184</sup> Both segments of heaven mark a *locus* of divine revelation (Figs. 26, 28). In Jacob’s story, the God of the patriarchs appeared at the upper end of the ladder, renewing the promise he had once made to Abraham (Genesis 12: 1–3): “And the Lord leaned on it and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac, as for the land which you are sleeping on, I will give it to you and to your offspring’” (Genesis 28: 13). Like Jacob, Constantine witnessed a revelation of the unique deity worshipped by his father, Constantius Chlorus, and received the promise of victory and dominion over the whole empire.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> The transfer of sacred rulership from the patriarchs and kings of the Old Testament to the Christian emperors is a major theme in Byzantine writings on the Archangel’s miracles; see Olar, *Împăratul înaripat*, 192–193.

<sup>183</sup> Sinigalia, “L’Archange,” 20.

<sup>184</sup> Seen from below, the two segments of heaven are slightly offset. However, the small gap between them decreases and becomes almost imperceptible when the frescoes are viewed from the middle of the southwestern bay or from the central area of the narthex.

<sup>185</sup> This parallel could have worked for both visions. Constantine’s father is explicitly referred to in the account of the first apparition; see Euthymios, *Encomium* IV, 1. However, the nocturnal setting in *Genesis* 28, the individual character of Jacob’s dream, and the elaborate promise made by God is closer to the second vision; see Euthymios, *Encomium* X, 2.

Both arcs of heaven are situated above the window on the southern wall of the narthex, facilitating an interplay between the depiction of spiritual light as manifestation of God's presence and the natural light that penetrates the chamber.<sup>186</sup> The program of the southwestern bay creates a symbolic solidarity between the visionary figures portrayed in the frescoes and the real beholders situated in front of the window. The visual experience generated by the skillful coordination of architecture, images, and light re-enacts the painted narrative, in which Constantine and Jacob are illuminated by the divine grace that comes out from the radiant segments of heaven above them.<sup>187</sup> These pictorial and spatial analogies suggest that the scenes of Constantine's Vision and Jacob's encounters with the Lord and his angels were meant to be interpreted as a thematic cluster comprising symbolic actualizations of night as a time of visions and revelations.

Within the nocturnal setting suggested by the murals in the southwestern bay of the narthex at Rădăuți, late fifteenth-century viewers might have drawn further parallels to the apparition of the cross before the conquest of Byzantium. For example, the explicit rendition of the celestial sign as a constellation could have been interpreted as a depiction of the miraculous movement of the stars witnessed by Constantine in his camp. A literate beholder might have even noticed that the Slavonic *titulus* of the composition emphasized this particular aspect: "The cross revealed itself (...) *by means of stars* (ЗВѢЗДАМИ)" (emphasis added). The plural

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<sup>186</sup> Vlad Bedros has noticed an analogous link between the window of the southwestern bay of the narthex at Rădăuți and the fresco of the Prophet Elijah fed by the raven, situated beneath it. The prophet is depicted in the darkness of his cave, raising his eyes towards the window, as if he was contemplating the light. Since Elijah was regarded as an archetype of monks and ascetics, his representation in the narthex at Rădăuți might have been connected with the monastic practice of Hesychast prayer that led to the spiritual contemplation of divine light; see "The Prophet Elijah in Moldavian Iconography, ca. 1480–1530: Liturgical and Devotional Contexts," *Ana* 9, no. 1 (May 2022): 47. The relationship between images, space, and light in Moldavian churches has been recently discussed in Alice Isabella Sullivan, Gabriel-Dinu Herea, and Vladimir Ivanovici, "Space, Image, Light: Toward an Understanding of Moldavian Architecture in the Fifteenth Century," *G* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 81–100. For an overview on this topic in the broader context of Christian architecture, see Alice Isabella Sullivan and Vladimir Ivanovici, eds., *Natural Light in Medieval Churches* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023).

<sup>187</sup> In the early seventeenth-century wall paintings at Sucevița, the scene of Justinian's revelation about Hagia Sophia is positioned in a window jamb. The natural light projected on the representation of the Great Church enhances the visionary dimension of the image (Fig. 32).

instrumental form of ЗВѢЗДА (star) is also used by Euthymios of Tarnovo in the account of the second vision: “(...) he saw a cross made of stars (ЗВѢЗДАМИ), standing in the heavens (...)”<sup>188</sup>

Yet, such a subtle link between the textual narrative and the inscription at Rădăuți, if ever intended, was certainly reserved for a narrow audience who possessed detailed knowledge of hagiographical works.

Nevertheless, the entwined references to the visions that preceded the emperor’s conversion to Christianity and the foundation of the “New Rome” must have been addressed to a broader community of viewers. The twofold connection actualized by the murals at Rădăuți and Bălinești was a central theme in Byzantine liturgical poetry devoted to the holy emperor, as evidenced by the *apolytikion* of his commemoration on May 21: “Having seen the imprint of your cross in heaven and, as Paul, having received the call not from humans, your apostle among emperors, Lord, put an imperial city (i.e., Constantinople) in your hand. Save her forever in peace, through the intercession of the *Theotokos*, only human-loving!”<sup>189</sup> Also known as the “dismissal-hymn,” the *apolytikion* is a poetical piece of one strophe (*troparion*), which encapsulates the central meaning of a feast in Byzantine liturgy. Such hymns were sung at several key moments of a saint’s service, beginning with the vespers and culminating with the

<sup>188</sup> Euthymios, *Encomium* X, 2. The instrumental form is a perfect equivalent of the Greek δι’ἀστέρων, a phrase indistinctively employed in the account of the emperor’s first two visions in the “*Guidi*” *Life*, 22 and Xanthopoulos, *Church History* VII, 47. In contrast to Byzantine hagiography, the first apparition of the cross, which occurred in the afternoon, is only described as similar to the stars. Euthymios writes that the celestial sign revealed itself “by means of a starry form” (ЗВѢ(Д)НЫМЪ ВЪОБРАЖЕНІЕМЪ) and not through the stars themselves; see *Encomium* IV, 2.

<sup>189</sup> *Apolytikion on the Fourth Plagal Mode*, ed. S. D. Gassisi, *Απολυτίκιον, Ήχος πλ. δ΄*, in “Innologia greca in onore dei Ss. Costantino ed Elena,” *RO* 6 (1913), I, 7: Τοῦ σταυροῦ σου τὸν τύπον ἐν οὐρανῷ θεασάμενος, καὶ ὡς ὁ Παῦλος τὴν κλήσιν οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων καταδεξάμενος, ὁ ἐν βασιλεῦσιν ἀπόστολός σου, Κύριε, βασιλεύουσαν πόλιν τῇ χειρὶ σου παρέθετο· ἦν περισώζε διαπαντὸς ἐν εἰρήνῃ πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου, μόνε φιλόνητο. The translation is my own. Byzantine hymnography is extremely difficult to date. Andrea Luzzi argues that some hymns of the feast of the Holy Emperor, including this *apolytikion*, have late antique origins; see “Il *Dies Festus* di Costantino il Grande e di sua Madre Elena nei libri liturgici della Chiesa Greca,” in *Costantino il Grande. Dall’Antichità all’umanesimo. Colloquio sul Cristianesimo nel mondo antico. Macerata, 18–20 Dicembre 1990*, vol. 2, ed. Giorgio Bonamente and Franca Fusco (Macerata: Università degli Studi di Macerata, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1993), 597–598.



divine liturgy.<sup>190</sup> Given their conciseness and repetitive character, *apolytikia* could have been easily memorized both by the clergy and the congregation and even assimilated into private devotion. Consequently, these hymns must have constituted an important reference point in the design and reception of church paintings.

The *apolytikion* for May 21 summarizes the most significant ideas associated with Constantine's vision (or visions) in Byzantine Christianity. The first part of the hymn refers to the apparition of the cross as the main cause of the emperor's miraculous conversion. The comparison to St. Paul, whose vocation came directly from Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3–9), evokes the emperor's status as "Equal to the Apostles."<sup>191</sup> Constantine's attribute as the "New Paul" was emphasized in Moldavian iconographic programs, such as the fifteenth-century frescoes in the naos of St. Elijah church near Suceava. There, the iconic representation of the holy emperor is painted on the western wall alongside the Apostle Peter, replacing the figure of St. Paul (Fig. 36). The second part of the *apolytikion* presents the foundation of the "imperial city" dedicated to Christ as a consequence of the same visionary experience that led to the emperor's conversion. Similar to the compositions at Rădăuți and Bălinești, this hymn was not meant to convey a narrative representation of certain episodes from Constantine's life. On the contrary, it suggested a direct link between the emperor's privileged connection with divinity and the two main achievements of his reign: the miraculous conversion to Christianity and the foundation of the new capital of the empire.

## 2. Constantinople, the City of Angels: Justinian's Revelation of Hagia Sophia

The association between Constantine's role as a visionary emperor and the history of the "imperial city" was given special emphasis in the iconographic program at Rădăuți. In the southwestern bay of the narthex, the Apparition of the Cross is set alongside the depiction of

<sup>190</sup> *Μηναία τοῦ ὅλου ἐνιαυτοῦ* [*Menaia* for the whole year], vol. 5 (Rome, 1899), 139 and Mateos, ed., *Le Typicon*, 296–297.

<sup>191</sup> Luzzi, "Il *Dies Festus*," 629, 634. This is a broader theme of Byzantine hymns of the Holy Emperor Constantine.

the Foundation of Hagia Sophia by Emperor Justinian (Fig. 30).<sup>192</sup> Presented as Constantine's illustrious heir, Justinian receives a vision of the Great Church from an angel dressed in bright *all'antica* vests. The narrative content of the two episodes, as well as their compositional structure, mirror each other thus forming a symmetrical configuration that is reminiscent of a diptych. Constantine and Justinian are placed alongside one another on each side of the decorative border that separates their panels. The emperors' ceremonial costumes and open crowns are almost identical. Moreover, both of them raise their hands toward the angels depicted in the opposite parts of the compositions. The celestial envoys respond in an analogous manner by opening their arms in a gesture marking their role as mediators of divine revelation. In both scenes, the miraculous sights presented by the angels are not exclusively addressed to the rulers. Just as Constantine experiences the epiphany of the cross together with his soldiers, Justinian is accompanied by a bearded dignitary with a tall hat and by a young courtier.

The symmetrical construction of the two images makes them appear as a unified thematic cluster that complements the typological association between the Apparition of the Cross and the story of Jacob (Fig. 30). Positioned in a circular configuration, the episodes on the vault of the southwestern bay form a micro-narrative within the cycle of angelic miracles that points to the transfer of royal legitimacy from the patriarchs of the Old Testament to the pious rulers of the Christian Empire, the "New Israel." The present section delves deeper into the meaning of this symbolic genealogy of power by focusing on the analogy between the angelic visions of Constantine and Justinian. The image of the Revelation of Hagia Sophia raises questions about the local reception of medieval legends on Constantinople and their role in shaping the ideal representation of Christian rulership in late fifteenth-century Moldavia.

The theme of angelic interventions in the foundation of Hagia Sophia was likely inspired by a popular Byzantine account commonly known as the *Narrative (Diegesis) about the*

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<sup>192</sup> Sinigalia, "L'Archange," 40–41.

*Construction of the Temple of the Great Church of God Which Is Called the Holy Wisdom.*

Most scholars agree that the *Diegesis* was composed as a self-standing work during the ninth century, perhaps in the time of Emperor Basil I (r. 867–86) or shortly after his reign.<sup>193</sup> The story already circulated before the mid-990s, when it was incorporated into the fourth book of the *Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, a widespread collection of legends concerning the monuments and churches of the Byzantine capital.<sup>194</sup> The *Diegesis* begins in the time of Constantine, who is described as “the first to build the Great Church.” However, the basilica he founded was just a forerunner of Justinian’s grandiose architectural enterprise.<sup>195</sup> In the aftermath of the massacre in the Hippodrome, that is, the Nika riot of 532, the emperor was inspired by God to “build a church such as had never been built since Adam’s time.”<sup>196</sup>

Similar to the sixth-century *ekphraseis* by Prokopios of Caesarea (ca. 500–ca. 565) and Paul the Silentiary (d. ca. 575–80), the *Diegesis* praises the otherworldly splendor of Justinian’s foundation, focusing on the laborious process of its construction.<sup>197</sup> In doing so, however, the middle Byzantine tale not only employs a more accessible literary style, but also proposes an

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<sup>193</sup> Gilbert Dagron dates the Narrative to the period between the reigns of Theophilos (r. 829–42) and Leo VI (r. 886–912), advancing a hypothetical connection with Basil I and the construction of the *Nea Ekklēsia*; see *Constantinople imaginaire: Étude sur le recueil des “patria”* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), 265–269. The ninth-century dating is also endorsed by Cyril Mango, “Byzantine Writers on the Fabric of Hagia Sophia,” in *Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present*, ed. Robert Mark and Ahmed Ş. Çakmak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45 and Leslie Brubaker, “Talking about the Great Church: Ekphrasis and the Narration on Hagia Sophia,” *ByzSlav* 63, no. 3 (2011): 80. Dagron’s hypothesis has been slightly adjusted by Stephanos Efthymiadis, who links the *Narrative* to the milieu of Patriarch Ignatios (in office 847–56, 867–77); see “Diegeseis on Hagia Sophia from Late Antiquity to Tenth-Century Byzantium,” *ByzSlav* 73, no. 1–2 (2015): 11–18.

<sup>194</sup> *Narrative about the Construction of the Temple of the Great Church of God Which is Called the Holy Wisdom*, in *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria* (hereafter, *Patria*), trans. Albrecht Berger, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). All quotes from the Greek Narrative are taken from Berger’s translation. For an examination of the *Patria*, including the *Diegesis*, see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*.

<sup>195</sup> *Patria* IV, 1. In reality, the first basilica was built by Constantius II (r. 337–61). Dagron points out that the anonymous author of the *Narrative* avoids any reference to non-Nicene emperors and makes the heretics responsible for the devastation of the building during the reign of Theodosius I (r. 379–95). In other words, the text provides “an ‘orthodox’ history of the architecture of St. Sophia;” see *Constantinople imaginaire*, 274.

<sup>196</sup> Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 273. Constantine’s church was built “on a basilica plan similar to St. Agathonikos and St. Akakios;” see *Patria* IV, 1.

<sup>197</sup> Prokopios of Caesarea, *On Buildings* I, trans. H. B. Dewing, Glanville Downey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940) and Paul the Silentiary, *The Description of St. Sophia. The Description of the Ambo*, ed. Claudio de Stefani, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae. Descriptio Ambonis* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

alternative sequence of events, in which supernatural elements play a crucial role.<sup>198</sup> According to the legend, the completion of the Great Church required multiple interventions of heavenly powers. Angels enter the scene at critical moments of the story, offering divine approval to Justinian's endeavor and solving major technical difficulties or financial problems that prevented the continuation of the works.<sup>199</sup> Within the broader framework of the *Patria*, the involvement of angels in the construction of Hagia Sophia is related to analogous stories concerning the foundation of Constantinople itself. For example, the third book of the collection claims that an angel walked before Constantine and showed him where to set up the walls of the city.<sup>200</sup> Similar to the later iconographic program at Rădăuți, the various tales of angelic miracles recorded in the *Patria* create a symbolic continuity between the reigns of the two emperors.

During the later Middle Ages, the *Diegesis* was translated into Latin, Church Slavonic, and even Persian, thus having an ample diffusion not only across Byzantine and Western Christendom, but also in the Islamic world.<sup>201</sup> The story most likely reached the *Voivodat* of Moldavia through the mediation of the East Slavic lands. Old Russian adaptations of the *Narrative* were copied in several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century codices produced in the Grand Duchy of Moscow.<sup>202</sup> In addition, the tale was frequently alluded to in fourteenth-century accounts of Russian pilgrims to Constantinople.<sup>203</sup> The transmission of the *Narrative*

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<sup>198</sup> On the relationship between the legendary account provided by the *Diegesis* and the historical chronology of the building process, see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 270–271.

<sup>199</sup> *Patria* IV, 8, 10–12, with the commentary in Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 292.

<sup>200</sup> *Patria* III, 10.

<sup>201</sup> Mango, “Byzantine Writers,” 45.

<sup>202</sup> The Russian redaction was first published by the archimandrite Leonid, *Сказание о св. Софии Цареградской: Памятник древней русской письменности исх. XII века: По рукописи исх. 14 века, № 902* [The narrative about St. Sophia of Constantinople: a monument of ancient Russian writing from the twelfth century according to manuscript No. 902 from the fourteenth century”] (St. Petersburg: 1889) and later by S. G. Vilinskij, *Византийско-славянские сказания о создании храма Св. Софии Цареградской* [Byzantine-Slavic legends about the building of the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople] (Odessa: 1900); all quotations from the Slavonic version of the tale will follow the second edition (hereafter, *Narrative*).

<sup>203</sup> George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), 200–206.

into the East-Carpathian milieu might have been facilitated by the broader cultural and artistic connections with Kyiv and Moscow, which have been repeatedly highlighted in previous scholarship.<sup>204</sup>

The iconographic schema of the fresco at Rădăuți conflates two different episodes from the *Diegesis* creating a new pictorial configuration focused on Justinian’s interaction with the angel and on the latter’s role as protector of the church. The subject matter indicated by the Slavonic *titulus*— “The Revelation (ПОКАЗАНИЕ) of Justinian about St. Sophia”—expands on a rather brief note from the first part of the legend. The *Diegesis* mentions that “an angel of the Lord showed the emperor in a dream the outline (σχῆμα) of the church.”<sup>205</sup> The Old Russian variant of the fragment is almost identical, except for the omission of the term *schema*, which is simply paraphrased: “An angel of the Lord showed (ПОКАЗА) the emperor in a dream how the church would be.”<sup>206</sup> The mural’s connection with this episode is enhanced by the Slavonic title, which presents the scene as the “revelation” or “display” (ПОКАЗАНИЕ) of Hagia Sophia to its founder.

However, the portrayal of the celestial envoy in white garments, which constitutes an outstanding feature of the scene among the other representations of angelic miracles at Rădăuți, refers to another vision experienced by the teenage son of Justinian’s chief architect, Ignatios.

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<sup>204</sup> The matrimonial alliances promoted by Stephen III constituted the basis for extensive cultural and artistic exchanges between Moldavia and the Rus’. For example, after the Monastery of Putna had been devastated by fire in 1484, Stephen III commissioned a new iconostasis for the katholikon of the Virgin’s Dormition to a Muscovite workshop that traveled to the Carpathian principality; see Enghelina Smirnova, “Icoane ale maeștrilor ruși din secolul al XV-lea la Mănăstirea Putna. Registrul apostolilor și prăznicarele” [Icons of Russian masters from the fifteenth century at the Monastery of Putna. The register of the apostles and the icons of the great feasts], *AP* 6, no. 1 (2010): 7–32. In the same period, the mural programs of Moldavian churches incorporated numerous elements of the iconographic repertoire of Russian painting; see Emil Dragnev, “Ohrida, Moldova și Rusia Moscovită, noile contexte ale legăturilor artistice după căderea Constantinopolului” [Ohrid, Moldavia, and the Muscovite Rus’, new context of artistic connections after the Fall of Constantinople], in *Românii și creștinătatea răsăriteană (secolele XIV–XX)* [Romanians and Eastern Christendom (fifteenth–twentieth centuries)], ed. Petronel Zahariuc (Iași: Doxologia, 2021), 117–128. Analogous connections can be traced in the circulation of Slavonic literature, in which Moldavia often acted as a transmission channel between the Balkans and the Rus’; see Aleksandra Sulikowska, “‘New Constantinople’: Byzantine Traditions in Muscovite Rus’ in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century,” *SB* 1 (2003): 89.

<sup>205</sup> *Patria* IV, 8: Τὸ δὲ σχῆμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἔδειξε κατ’ὄναρ τῷ βασιλεῖ.

<sup>206</sup> *Narrative* IV: Ⲁⲓⲅⲉⲗ ⲛⲉ Ⲓⲛⲉ ⲱⲧ ⲛⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲟⲕⲁⲫⲁ ⲛⲣⲉⲛⲓ ⲓⲁⲕⲟⲱⲁ ⲱⲗⲁⲉⲧ ⲛⲣⲟⲕⲟⲱⲧ. The translation is my own.

On a Saturday morning, when the northern arches and southern galleries of the basilica had been erected and vaulted, the builders went out for breakfast, leaving the child to guard their tools. Immediately after they had left, an “angel of the Lord,” disguised as a eunuch “clad in a shining robe and with a beautiful face,” appeared to the boy and urged him to summon back the builders. When the architect’s son refused to leave his job fearing that the tools would be stolen, the celestial eunuch volunteered to replace him as long as he would be away. Justinian thereupon ordered that the boy should never return to the construction site in order to prevent the angel from ever leaving the basilica and make him act as its warden until the end of times.<sup>207</sup> Besides the angel’s bright clothing, the composition at Rădăuți incorporates several other elements from this story. The bearded dignitary painted alongside the emperor was likely meant to represent the architect Ignatios, while the youth standing behind them would make a perfect candidate for his teenage son. The angel’s role as guardian of Justinian’s foundation is suggested by the fact that the image of Hagia Sophia is situated behind him, framing his shining figure.

A cognate iconographic schema is attested in the marginal miniatures that illustrate Psalm 45/46 in the *Kyiv Psalter* (ca. 1397), a Slavonic manuscript connected with the Muscovite milieu (Fig. 37).<sup>208</sup> An angel wearing a purple tunic and an imperial *loros* supports the three domes of a magnificent church identified as St. Sophia (СѦТІА СѦФІА). The scene is surmounted by the representation of “the river’s strong currents” flowing into the Holy City, which alludes to Psalm 45/46: 5/4. The depiction of the atlas-like angel functions as a pictorial exegesis of the next verse: “God is in its midst; it [i.e., the city] shall not be shaken” (Psalm 45/46: 6/5).<sup>209</sup> The *Diegesis* on Hagia Sophia must have constituted an important reference

<sup>207</sup> *Patria* IV, 10.

<sup>208</sup> The National Library of Russia, Saint-Petersburg, *OLDP F 6*, f. 63r.

<sup>209</sup> Ágnes Kriza interprets this miniature as an allegorical visualization of God’s Wisdom, connecting it with the fifteenth-century image of the enthroned Sophia dressed in imperial costume; see *Depicting Orthodoxy in the Russian Middle Ages: The Novgorod Icon of Sophia, God’s Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 67, 110, 206. However, this reading poses major problems since late Byzantine representations of the Divine Wisdom, based on Proverbs 9, do not contain imperial attributes; see Jean Meyendorff, “L’iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition byzantine,” *CA* 10 (1954): 259–277.

point in the design of this image. According to the legend, the same verse of Psalm 45/46 was stamped on every brick used in the construction of the dome in order to ensure its durability.<sup>210</sup> The theme of the divine presence sustaining the building was likely connected with the story of the angel trapped by Justinian within the precinct of the Hagia Sophia. The tale of the boy's vision was a constant element in fourteenth-century accounts of Russian pilgrims to Constantinople, which interpreted it as a manifestation of St. Michael himself.<sup>211</sup> Since the imperial costume was a frequent attribute of Archangels in the visual culture of the Byzantine world, one should not exclude the possibility that the Kyiv miniature was meant to evoke this particular reading of the tale. In that case, the Archangel Michael—“He who is like God”—would have acted as God's *locum tenens* in the midst of the Great Church by physically supporting its dome.

A similar interpretation of the story might have motivated the integration of the composition at Rădăuți into the series of miracles attributed to the “Great Angel.” Although the exact identity of the celestial envoy clad in white garments cannot be determined with certainty, his status as the guardian of the Great Church is explicitly connected with St. Michael's protective role in relation to his shrine in Chonae (Fig. 26). The Miracle of the *Archistrategos* is depicted on the western half of the vault, facing Justinian's Revelation of Hagia Sophia.<sup>212</sup> In accordance with a widespread iconographic model, the image is centered on the figure of the Archangel who uses his staff to stop the flood provoked by some malevolent pagans. Thus, St. Michael saves both the church and the monk Archippos, its faithful caretaker, who bows before him (Fig. 31).<sup>213</sup> Situated at the northern end of the vault, the Great Church in Constantinople and the *Michaelion* in Chonae mirror each other, both being represented as centrally-planned

<sup>210</sup> *Patria* IV, 14.

<sup>211</sup> Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 200–206.

<sup>212</sup> Sinigalia, “L'Archange,” 19.

<sup>213</sup> On the Byzantine legend of the Archangel's Miracle in Chonae, see Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 157–193.

buildings with massive domes. This formal analogy invited medieval viewers to draw parallels between the narrative settings of the two scenes, emphasizing the angels' function as wardens of churches. This idea was further enhanced by the images' position in the close vicinity of the entrance to the narthex.

Within the broader iconographic context of the southwestern bay, the theme of angelic protection actualized by the stories of the two churches is connected with St. Michael's role as bearer of victory and purveyor of divine legitimacy, displayed in the depictions of Jacob and Constantine. As I have mentioned above, the association of these scenes within a unified thematic cluster was likely meant to suggest a symbolic transfer of legitimacy from the leaders of Israel to the Christian emperors. In the scene of the Revelation of Hagia Sophia, the appropriation of the sacred aura of biblical rulers by the pious emperors of the *Rhomaioi* is indicated by the fact that Justinian's physiognomic traits resemble those typically assigned to King David (i.e., round grey beard and curly hair). The Old Testament monarch is also featured on the vault of the northeastern bay of the narthex at Rădăuți, in the scene of his Castigation by the Prophet Nathan (2 Kingdoms 12: 1–13) (Fig. 38).<sup>214</sup>

Interpreted through the lens of the *Diegesis* on Hagia Sophia, this pictorial analogy does not only imply an assimilation of Israelite kingship into the profile of the ideal Christian ruler, but also entails a competitive relationship between the two stages of the sacred history.<sup>215</sup> Because he was blamed for adultery and murder, after orchestrating the death of Uriah and marrying his widow, David was only allowed to gather materials for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem and contemplate its celestial model. The Temple itself was erected by David's son, Solomon, after the death of his father (3 Kingdoms 5–7). In contrast to David, Justinian not only received the divine plan (*schema*) of the "New Temple," but also managed

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<sup>214</sup> Sinigalia, "L'Archange," 30.

<sup>215</sup> The implicit comparison between the construction of Hagia Sophia and Old Testament history is discussed by Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 293–298.



to complete its construction in a form that surpassed the grandeur of its Jewish prototype.<sup>216</sup> According to the *Diegesis*, when the Great Church was consecrated, the emperor rushed into the nave before Patriarch Eutychios, “stretched out his hands,” and exclaimed: “Glory be to God who deemed me worthy to accomplish such work. I have beaten you, Solomon!”<sup>217</sup>

In the wall paintings at Rădăuți, Justinian’s upper hand in relation to the biblical kings of Israel is highlighted by David’s status as a penitent in the composition of his Castigation by the Prophet Nathan.<sup>218</sup> Showing utmost contrition, the monarch falls in prostration before God’s prophet. This dramatic gesture evokes the acme of the biblical story, namely, the moment when David exclaimed: “I have sinned against the Lord!” (2 Kingdoms 12: 13).<sup>219</sup> Behind the repentant king, the grim angel of God’s vengeance, identified as St. Michael by means of the repeated costume, raises his sword in a threatening pose. However, just a few panels away, another celestial being reveals to Justinian the divine image of the Great Church. The spatial configuration of the narthex at Rădăuți emphasizes the typological comparison between the two rulers since their representations can be viewed at the same time by a beholder located in the southwestern bay.

The complex system of symbolic associations developed in the narthex at Rădăuți shows that, similar to Constantine, Justinian was assimilated into a series of archetypes of the ideal monarch, who connected Old Testament and Christian rulership. At the current stage of research, there is no evidence for Justinian’s cult in fifteenth-century Moldavia, although late

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<sup>216</sup> Dagon, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 276–279, 293–300.

<sup>217</sup> *Patria* IV, 27.

<sup>218</sup> For an overview of this theme in late and post-Byzantine art, see Margarita, Kuyumdzhieva, “*David Rex Penitent*. Some Notes on the Interpretation of King David in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art,” in *The Biblical Models of Power and Law: Papers of the International Conference*, Bucharest, New Europe College 2005, ed. Ivan Biliarsky and Radu G. Păun (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 133–152.

<sup>219</sup> Given its position in the narthex, David’s Repentance might have been particularly relevant in relation to the sacrament of confession. In Byzantine liturgical tradition, the image of the prophet witnessing the monarch’s contrition was evoked in the incipit of the prayer for penitents: Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν, ὁ διὰ τοῦ προφήτου σου Νάθαν μετανοήσαντι τῷ Δαβὶδ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις πλημμελήμασιν ἄφεσιν δωρησάμενος (...) [“O Lord, our Savior, who have given remission of sins to the repentant David through your prophet Nathan (...)”]; see *Prayer for the penitents*, ed. Goar, *Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ μετανοοῦντων*, in *Εὐχολόγιον* XV, 61. The translation is my own.

Byzantine sources, such as Xanthopoulos' *Church History*, testify to precedents in Constantinople.<sup>220</sup> Nevertheless, during the same period when the bishopric in Rădăuți was decorated with frescoes, Voivode Stephen III supported the reconstruction of the *katholikon* of Neamț Monastery, one of the main religious centers of the realm. The new church of the Ascension, which fostered a Constantinopolitan icon of the Mother of God possibly donated by Emperor John VIII Palaiologos himself (r. 1425–48), was dedicated on November 14, 1497.<sup>221</sup> In the Synaxarion of the Great Church, which should have been at least known—if not also used—in late medieval Moldavia, this date corresponded to the commemoration of the Pious Emperors Justinian and Theodora.<sup>222</sup> Of course, in the absence of a comprehensive examination of Moldavian *typika* and their relationship with the Byzantine liturgical calendar, this correlation remains in the realm of conjecture. However, the mural of the Revelation of Hagia Sophia in the narthex at Rădăuți might reflect a broader intention of actualizing Justinian's figure as a symbolic counterpart to the exemplary image of Constantine the Great. The representation of Justinian as a recipient of angelic miracles embodied the sacral dimension of the foundation act and contributed to the symbolic legitimation of royal power.

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<sup>220</sup> Xanthopoulos, *Church History* XVII, 31, who mentions that Justinian had a cult in the time of Alexios I Komnenos. This issue is extensively addressed by Kateryna Kovalchuk, "The Founder as a Saint: The Image of Justinian I in the Great Church of St. Sophia," *B 77* (2007): 205–238.

<sup>221</sup> The date is recorded in the dedicatory inscription; see Berza, ed., *Repertoriul monumentelor*, cat. no. 16. On the icon of the Virgin, see Constanța Costea, "A Palaeologan Icon in Moldavia," *RRHA* 26 (1989): 3–10 and Luca Diaconu, *Icoana bizantină a Maicii Domnului–Neamț* [The Byzantine icon of the Mother of God–Neamț] (Iași: Doxologia, 2010).

<sup>222</sup> Mateos, ed., *Typicon*, vol. 1, 100–103.

## Conclusions

The passage from *De Administrando Imperio* quoted at the beginning of the present thesis introduces the encounter between Constantine the Great and the angel sent by God to offer him the imperial *insignia* as the subject of an esoteric tale.<sup>223</sup> However, in late fifteenth-century Moldavia, the “secret stories of old history” transmitted by Constantine VII to his son Romanos, became common knowledge, being revealed to anyone who stepped into the churches at Rădăuți and Bălinești. The narrative association between St. Constantine, “the father of all [Christian] emperors,” and the Archangel Michael was a pivotal element within the ideal representation of Christian rulership elaborated by local elites.<sup>224</sup>

In the wall paintings at Rădăuți and Bălinești, St. Michael’s involvement in the story of the holy emperor was depicted in two individual episodes: 1) the Baptism by Pope Silvester of Rome and 2) the Apparition of the Holy Cross. Although they were assigned different positions within the architectural settings of the two churches, these images are interpretations of the same iconographic schemata. The unprecedented depiction of the Archangel’s participation in the scenes of Constantine’s life seems to represent a local development based on the reinterpretation of multiple narrative traditions. In both scenes, the figure of the “Great Angel” functions as a catalyst of motifs inspired by a broad reservoir of tales that circulated not only in written form, but also through storytelling and pictorial representations.

The integration of St. Michael into the scene of Constantine’s Baptism was motivated by an angelic reading of the rather ambiguous manifestation of “God’s Hand” mentioned in the *Life of Silvester*. The assimilation of this tale into the cycles of angelic miracles at Rădăuți and Bălinești attests to an intense veneration of the saintly pope, whose relationship with

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<sup>223</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* XIII, 66–67.

<sup>224</sup> “Πάντων βασιλέων . . . πατήρ” This epithet appears in the *sticherion* of the vigil for May 21; see *Μηναία τοῦ ὄλου ἐνιαυτοῦ*, vol. 5, 137.

Constantine was regarded an ideal model of the synergy between spiritual and secular power. This theme received special emphasis in the iconographic program at Rădăuți, in accordance with the twofold function of the church, which served both as a princely necropolis and as a cathedral. Its wall paintings commissioned by Stephen III, during the tenure of Bishop Ioanichie, display an ample selection of pictorial themes actualizing the mutually validating interaction between exemplary rulers, such as Constantine, and holy hierarchs.

Similar to the Baptism, in the Apparition of the Holy Cross, the involvement of the Archangel facilitated a conflation of multiple episodes from Constantine's life, as they were presented in the Slavonic encomium by Euthymios of Tarnovo. This new visual configuration used the narrative content of the scene as a means to represent Constantine's role as a visionary emperor. This meaning is further enhanced through the symbolic analogy to the figures of Jacob and Justinian, whose encounters with angels or with St. Michael himself are depicted alongside the Apparition of the Cross. The complex system of pictorial correlations developed in the narthex at Rădăuți contributed to the symbolic legitimation of rulership by constructing a spiritual lineage of power that went back to the biblical figures of the leaders of God's elect nation.

Although the present study has focused on a limited selection of Moldavian wall paintings, future studies may shed further light on the complex character of their iconographic schemata, as well as their multi-layered meaning developed in conjunction with broader representations of Christian rulership. In many respects, my research has only set the scene for further investigations on the questions raised by the visual interpretations of Constantine's Baptism and Vision in late fifteenth-century Moldavia. For example, the discussion on the exchanges of symbolic gestures between Constantine or other pious emperors and the bishops gathered at Ecumenical Councils can be expanded through an analysis of additional hagiographic material that circulated in the Moldavian milieu. Several Slavonic *sborniki* copied

in local scriptoria contain an *Encomium of the Nicene Fathers* composed by Gregory of Caesarea in the tenth century (*BHG* 1431).<sup>225</sup> A closer examination of this text in parallel to a more detailed investigation on the role of the depictions of Synods might shed new light on the context in which the relationship between Constantine and Silvester was shaped. In addition, the image of Justinian's Revelation of Hagia Sophia at Rădăuți, which has been examined here only briefly, can become the subject of a separate study. Such an investigation, which should contain a broader analysis of the cultural links between Moldavia and the Rus', could broaden our current understanding of the reception of Byzantine legends on Constantinople in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest.

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<sup>225</sup> Mircea, *Répertoire*, cat. no. 276. On the dating and content of the Greek text, see Kazhdan, "Constantin imaginaire," 206.

# Illustrations



Fig. 1. The Fall of Lucifer and the Archangel Preventing the Devil to Steal the Body of Moses, Rădăuți, narthex, northwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 2. Moses Receiving the Law from the Angel of the Lord, Rădăuți, narthex, northeastern bay, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 3. The Vision of Constantine, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 4. Constantine's Baptism by Pope Silvester, Rădăuți, narthex, central bay, upper zone of the northern wall, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 5. The Baptism of Constantine by Pope Silvester and Vision, Bălinești, narthex, northwestern wall, middle register, before 1499 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 6. The Vision of Constantine, Bălinești, narthex, northwestern wall, middle register, before 1499 (Andrei Dumitrescu).





Fig. 7. The Baptism of Constantine by Pope Silvester, Bălinești, narthex, northwestern wall, middle register, before 1499 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 8. St. Silvester Presenting the Icons of SS Peter and Paul to Constantine, the Miracle in Chonae, and the Archangel's Apparition to Joshua, Silver Cross, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, eleventh century (<http://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/27345>).



Fig. 9. St. Sylvester Presenting the Icons of SS Peter and Paul to Constantine, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, eleventh century (<http://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/27345>).



Fig. 10. The Vision of Constantine, Arborea, narthex, western wall, middle register, ca. 1502–24 (Petru Palamar).



Fig. 11. SS Athanasius of Alexandria, Silvester, and John Chrysostom, Pătrăuți, chancel, after 1487 (Vlad Bedros).



Fig. 12. SS Basil the Great and Silvester, Botoșani, chancel, ca. 1496 (Vlad Bedros).

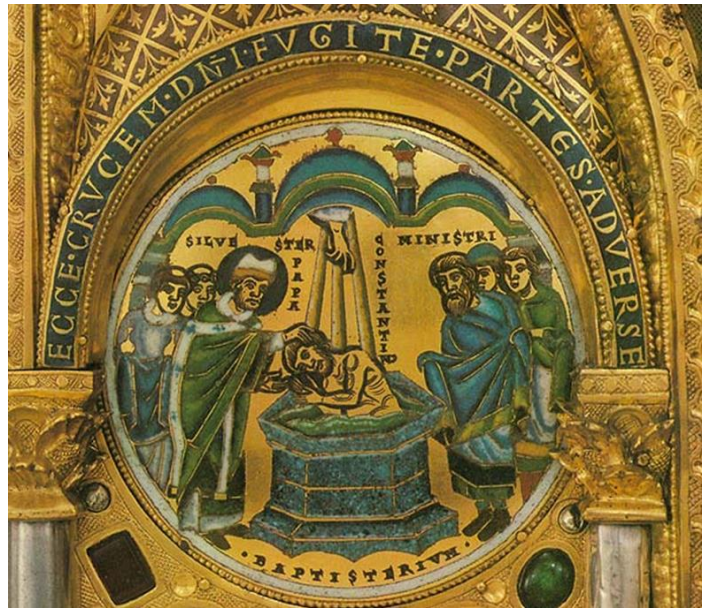


Fig. 13. The Baptism of Constantine by Pope Silvester, the Stavelot Triptych, enamel, Morgan Library, New York, ca. 1156-1158 (<https://theindex.princeton.edu/>).



Fig. 14. The Baptism of Constantine by Pope Silvester, M. 76F5, f. 36v, Royal Library, the Hague, ca. 1200–1220 (<https://theindex.princeton.edu/>).



Fig. 15. Christ the Child in the Paten Flanked by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Rădăuți, chancel, eastern window, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 16. Christ the Child in the Paten Flanked by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, St. Elijah, Suceava, chancel, eastern window, after 1488 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 17. Christ the Child in the Paten Flanked by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and by Two Deacons, Bălinești, chancel, eastern window, before 1499 (Vlad Bedros).



Fig. 18. St. Michael's Apparition outside the Walls of Byzantium, Humor Monastery, chamber of tombs, western wall, ca. 1535 (Petru Palamar).



Fig. 19. St. Michael's Apparition outside the Walls of Byzantium, Moldovița Monastery, porch, ca. 1537 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 20. SS Silvester, Gregory the Dialogist, and Martin of Rome, Dobrovăț Monastery, chancel, ca. 1529 (Vlad Bedros).



Fig. 21. St. Gregory the Dialogist, Voroneț Monastery, western façade, 1547 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 22. The Baptism of Constantine by Pope Silvester, Rome, SS Quattro Coronati, St. Silvester Chapel, ca. 1248 (Andrei Dumitrescu).





Fig. 23. The Third Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), Rădăuți, naos, wester wall, upper register, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 24. The Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (680–1), Rădăuți, northwestern bay, tympanum, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 25. The Vision of Constantine (Detail: The Archangel Pointing to the Cross Inscribed in Stars), Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 26. Jacob's Dream of the Ladder, the Fight with the Angel, the Vision of Constantine, the Revelation of Hagia Sophia to Justinian, and the Miracle in Chonae, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault and tympanum, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 27. Jacob's Dream of the Ladder, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 28. Jacob's Fight with the Angel, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, tympanum, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 29. The Revelation of Hagia Sophia to Justinian, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 30. The Vision of Constantine and the Revelation of Hagia Sophia to Justinian, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 31. The Miracle in Chonae, Rădăuți, narthex, southwestern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 32. The Revelation of Hagia Sophia to Justinian, Sucevița Monastery, exonarthex, ca. 1601 (Vlad Bedros).



Fig. 33. Jacob's Fight with the Angel, Bălinești, narthex, northern wall, middle register, before 1499 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 34. Jacob's Dream of the Ladder, Bălinești, narthex, northern wall, middle register, before 1499 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 35. The Miracle in Chonae, Bălinești, narthex, northern wall, middle register, before 1499 (Andrei Dumitrescu).



Fig. 36. St. Peter and the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena Flanking the True Cross, St. Elijah, Suceava, naos, western wall, lower register, after 1488 (Andrei Dumitrescu).

ДАТІАТІВЪ ВЪ ВЪ КЪ И ВЪ ВЪ ВЪ КЪ  
ПІЦА . У . ДЪДЪ . ІЕ .

**В**Ъ ИМІА ПРНВЪ ТИЩЕНІА,  
ПОМОЩНИКЪ ВЪ СКОРБЕ СЪВРЪ  
ТШНХЪ НЫЗЪЛО . СЕГО РАДНІЕ  
ОЦЪ И ДСМЪ ЕДІАМОЩІА Е  
ТРАДЕША . И ПРЕЛАГАЕ ТРАГО  
РЫ ВЪ СІЦА МОРЕСКИА . ВЪ ШИИЪ  
ША ИМОЩІА ША ВЪ ДЫНХЪ . СЮ  
ТИША АГОРЫ КЪ ПОСТІЕГО .  
ВЪ ПІАМОЦТРЕМЛЕНІА ВЕСЕЛА  
ТЪ ГІАБТНН . СТІА ДЕСТЬ ЗА  
СЕЛО СВІЕ ВЪ ШНН . БЪ ПОСРЕДЕ  
ЕГО , И НЕ ПІДВІТНІТІА . ПОМО  
ТЕТЬ ЕМОЦЪ ВОЦТРОДОЦТІА .



CEU eTD Collection

Fig. 37. The Kyiv Psalter, OLDP F 6, f. 63r, The National Library of Russia, Saint-Petersburg, ca. 1397.





Fig. 38. The Castigation of King David by the Prophet Nathan, Rădăuți, narthex, northeastern bay, vault, ca. 1480–95 (Andrei Dumitrescu).

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