

## ICONOGRAPHY OF FEMALE REGENCY: AN ISSUE OF METHODOLOGY

During medieval times there was a number of instances of regency, the political arrangement the aim of which was to ensure succession by blood of an heir; the regency body could be made up by members from immediate entourage of a minor ruler, be it his mother, the eldest sister, or guardians from the court - clerics or dignitaries alike.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I pursue whether iconography of regency, as represented in Byzantine art, can be identified in an undisputed way, or are there difficulties establishing a regent's portrait.<sup>2</sup> I raise anew the issue of identification of reliefs on "sarcophagus" of St Theodora of Arta as unique example in Byzantine funerary art with a royal portrait on a tomb slab (fig. 1). It is mostly believed that the portraits represent the funeral likeness of basilissa Theodora Petraliphina, accompanied by her son, Despot Nikephoros, since the slab belongs to her very burial site.<sup>3</sup>

This old identification was challenged on a number of issues, and I had long ago proposed that the relief instead more probably represented Theodora's daughter-in-law, the basilissa Anna Cantacuzene Palaiologina as regent, and of her minor son, the future Despot Thomas, as actual Epirote rulers and main promoters of the newly established cult of St Theodora of Arta.<sup>4</sup> The proposal has been differently received in scholarship, with not one attempt to broaden or deepen research of the problem. The reception was quick in the survey of Serbian

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<sup>1</sup> M. McCormick, *Regency*, in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3, New York-Oxford 1991, 1778-1779.

<sup>2</sup> For basic information of regency instances in Byzantium, cf. G. Ostrogorski, *Byzantinische Geschichte 324-1453*, C. H. Beck 1996, 70, 141, 175, 179, 214-215, 237, 317, 336-337, 371-375, 385, 440, 446, 448, 450. Also, see J. Herrin, *Byzantium. The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, London 2007, passim.

<sup>3</sup> For the identification see A. Ορλάνδος, *Ο τάφος της Αγ. Θεοδώρας*, ABME B', Αθηναι 1936, 105-115; A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen âge (XI<sup>e</sup> – XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle) II*, Paris 1976, pp. 144-145, figs. CXXI, a, b; Θ. Παζαράς, *Ανάγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι και επιτάφιας πλάκες της μέσης και ηστέρης βυζαντινής περιόδου στην Ελλάδα*, Αθηναι 1988, 42, 79-80, 90-91, 170-172, 174-175, figs. 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> For discussion see B. Cvetković, *The Investiture Relief in Arta, Epiros*, ZRVI XXXIII (1994) 103-114.



Fig. 1 Royal Portraits, Church of St Theodora, Arta

Сл. 1 Владарски портрети, црква Св. Теодоре у Арти

despotic portraits by D. Vojvodić,<sup>5</sup> briefly noted in the commentary of the *Life of St Theodora of Arta* by A.-M. Talbot,<sup>6</sup> and then quoted in the monograph on Lesnovo by S. Gabelić who interpreted the figures as posthumous on the basis of the stars appearing in the sky segment with God's Hand above the royal portraits.<sup>7</sup> The proposal is overlooked in both of the surveys by M. Parani<sup>8</sup> and S. Brooks,<sup>9</sup> but is accepted in recent publications by V. Papadopoulou,<sup>10</sup> P. Vocotopoulos,<sup>11</sup> and R. Macrides.<sup>12</sup> Some time ago I was told directly in Athens that the main reason for ignoring the possibility of the new identification is religious in nature, because it denies the faithful to see the icon of St Theodora in this relief. Since I cannot dwell on matters of faith here, I may try reconsider instead both the old identification by A. Orlandos and my own, in order to reach perhaps a new breakthrough.

The most typical form of a sovereign image was hieratic portrait as embodiment of the very idea it was conceived after the image of God.<sup>13</sup> Over time various platforms appeared since Byzantium had never developed one consis-

<sup>5</sup> Д. Војводић, *Владарски портрети српских деспота*, in *Манастир Ресава. Историја и уметност*, ур. В. Ј. Ђурић, Деспотовац 1995, 87, нап. 89.

<sup>6</sup> A.-M. Talbot, *Life of St. Theodora of Arta*, in *Holy Women of Byzantium. Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. A.-M. Talbot, Washington D.C. 1996, 333, n. 53.

<sup>7</sup> С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, Београд 1998, 170-171, нап. 1237.

<sup>8</sup> M. G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, Brill 2003, 324.

<sup>9</sup> S. Brooks, *Sculpture and the Late Byzantine Tomb*, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power 1261-1557*, ed. H. C. Evans, New York 2004, 94-95, 98-100, figs. 4.1, 4.7.

<sup>10</sup> V. N. Papadopoulou, *Byzantine Arta and its Monuments*, Athens 2007, 51, 163.

<sup>11</sup> P. Vocotopoulos, *Art in Epiros in the Thirteenth Century*, in *Byzantine Art in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade*, ed. P. Vocotopoulos, Athens 2007, 54, 61, n. 40.

<sup>12</sup> George Akropolites, *The History*, ed. trans. R. Macrides, Oxford 2007, 252, n. 2.

<sup>13</sup> For the seminal studies on this issue, see A. Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936 and E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's two bodies: a study in mediaeval political theology*, Princeton 1957.

tent ideology and allowed both God election - mostly supported by usurpers or army - or blood lineage, which took root much later by the Court and the aristocracy circles.<sup>14</sup> Other ways included those rooted in special circumstances, showing rulers in triumphal, penitential, ktetorial or genealogical contexts.<sup>15</sup>

During this long process female element would acquire significant role.<sup>16</sup> Imperial women had gained in prominence, stressing their importance as mothers, progenitors and partners in rule, and in volatile moments even becoming regents, as in case of Maria of Antioch.<sup>17</sup> An imperial woman could be seen by her subjects in form almost brighter than that of an Emperor, as in Ravenna,<sup>18</sup> and those from aristocratic circles were not reluctant to use propaganda imagery in the most sophisticated way, as done with Anicia Juliana.<sup>19</sup> The so-called "Ariadne ivories" from the early 6<sup>th</sup> C. have recently been analyzed anew and put into context of the rising power of women and their real role in ruling the Empire with full advance of Christianity.<sup>20</sup> As demonstrated by the famous ivory piece from Trier showing a procession of the reliquary, the central position was given here to an Empress, on the luxury relief originally part of a casket.<sup>21</sup>

Coinage has always been reliable source. The visual parity of costume and shared throne of Justin II and Sofia on their coins,<sup>22</sup> does follow Corippus' account that the rulers were greeted by the crowd with acclamations: "*Regnate pares in saecula!* (Reign together for all ages)".<sup>23</sup> Family portraits were not too rare as of Manuel II Palaiologos who, when traveling to Paris and London in his desperate search for help, presented St Denis Abbey in Paris with the lavish codex of works of Dionysios the Areopagite; his son John VIII is there identically dressed as the Emperor, being designated heir.<sup>24</sup> Similarly structured are family portraits of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander in the famous London Gospels, and here too the heir is dressed like his father, while the sisters and the

<sup>14</sup> G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge 2003, passim.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. I. K(alavrezou), *Portraits and Portraiture*, in Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium 3, 1702-1706; Д. Војводић, „Обавијен земаљском сликом“. О представама византијских и српских средњовековних владара у проскинези, Црквене студије 4 (2007) 379-400.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Herrin, *Women in Purple. Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, London 2001.

<sup>17</sup> В. Станковић, *Комнини у Цариграду (1057-1185). Еволуција једне владарске породице*, Београд 2006, 140-147. For her likeness, see I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Leiden 1976, 208-210, figs. 155-157.

<sup>18</sup> D. M. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2009, 240-241, Pl VIIIb.

<sup>19</sup> K. J. Wetter, *Anicia Juliana and the patronage of the Vienna Dioscorides*, Chapel Hill 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. D. Angelova, *The Ivories of Ariadne and Ideas about Female Imperial Authority in Rome and Early Byzantium*, Gesta 43, 1 (2004) 1-15.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. I. Kalavrezou, *Helping Hands for the Empire: Imperial Ceremonies and the Cult of the Relics at the Byzantine Court*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire, Washington D.C. 1997, 57-61, fig. 2.

<sup>22</sup> W. W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum. Volume 1*, London 2005, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, ed. trans. A. Cameron, London 1976, 52, 97.

<sup>24</sup> R. Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, London 2000, 192-193, fig. 112.

son-in-law are moved to another leaf.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that the Empress Theodora is labeled here as the “*newly enlightened*”, being the freshly converted Jew. The very issue of lineage is given here more significant space, but such ideal pictures were of no value with loss of children which happened too often.

All of the imperial portraits in St Sophia in Constantinople had votive character, connected to various donations. The panel with the Comnenian imperial family shows Emperor John II holding a bag with money and Empress Irene presenting a charter, but there is also unlucky Prince Alexios, the heir apparent who never succeeded to the throne dying prematurely despite this highly prayed prayer.<sup>26</sup> Lack of an heir might have caused unusual iconography, by addressing the doctor saints, as in case of the barren marriage of the Serbian King Milutin and his Byzantine bride, Queen Simonis.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, not all of regent imperial women are documented in paintings, but coinage never missed to record it and send forth the message, as in the case of regency coins of Anne of Savoy,<sup>28</sup> unlike with some other members of this temporary body.<sup>29</sup> Art as propaganda must not be underestimated because it was able to maintain the full sense of a reign and transfer the nuances of a political agenda, as sustained by several portraits of Constantine IX Monomachos. His marriage to the Empress Zoe was swiftly echoed in their remodelled mosaic portraits in St Sophia in Constantinople, as well as was the co-rulership of the purple-born sisters expressed in their joint coinage.<sup>30</sup> Though they ruled together only for short three months Constantine IX, his wife Zoe and her sister Theodora were shown as co-rulers on a miniature in the *Chrysostom homilies* (Sinait. gr. 364), the portrait painted in March 1042, as well as on the so-called “Monomachos crown”.<sup>31</sup> The verses in the manuscript portrait do explain both iconography and essence of this unusual rule comparing their triple reign to the Holy Trinity, and elucidating the Emperor’s divine protection along with the purple-born state of the two sisters.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, there are instances of total absence of the female royals, as in the genealogy trees or in monastic contexts. It was the audience of the royal images that played significant part. Therefore in Peć, the seat of the Serbian church and the authentic monastic stronghold, not only that female members are absent from the royal imagery but what was needed as ideological support for the King, his heir and the actual Archbishop was the figure of St

<sup>25</sup> E. Dimitrova, *The Gospels of Tsar Ivan Alexander*, London 1994, 16, fig. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Cormack, *op. cit.*, 129-130, figs. 72.

<sup>27</sup> On this, see B. Cvetković, *König Milutin und die Parakklesiai des Hl. Joachim und der Hl. Anna im Kloster Studenica*, *Balkanica* XXVI (1995) 251-276.

<sup>28</sup> S. Bendall, D. Nicol, *Anna of Savoy at Thessalonica: the numismatic evidence*, *Revue Numismatique* 19 (1977) 87-102.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Љ. Максимовић, *Регентство Алексија Апокавка и друштвена кретања у Цариграду*, *ЗРВИ* 18 (1978) 165-188.

<sup>30</sup> Cormack, *op. cit.*, 126-128, figs. 71; Wroth, *op. cit.*, 499.

<sup>31</sup> H. Maguire, *Davidic Virtue: The Crown of Constantine Monomachos and Its Images*, *Jewish Art*, 23/24 (1997/98) 117-123.

<sup>32</sup> Spatharakis, *op. cit.*, 99-102, fig. 66.

Sabas alone, national saint and founder of the Autocephalous Serbian church.<sup>33</sup> In other instances as is in Boyana, what one encounters is the opposite situation: the Bulgarian Tsar Konstantin Tich is indeed followed by his Byzantine wife Irene, who was in fact the true body of legitimacy for his personal rule because he was usurper of the Assenid throne.<sup>34</sup>

The church of St Theodora in Arta, built by Theodora Petraliphina as the nunnery, originally dedicated to St George,<sup>35</sup> still poses important questions as site regarding its narthex with St Theodora's tomb most probably postdating erection of the nave.<sup>36</sup> Today, the relics of the holy basilissa are kept in a special reliquary, while construction of the tomb with double aspect closely resembles shrines of popular saints, as in Hosios Loukas in Phocis.<sup>37</sup> Lack of inscriptions on the tomb slab identifying portraits is not unique with Byzantine examples, as is prostrated Emperor from the well known mosaic in St Sophia, Constantinople, which induced lasting discussion on his identity and whether figure had any.<sup>38</sup> Similar discussion exists regarding reliefs of an emperor compared to sun.<sup>39</sup>

The main reasons to doubt the original proposition for personages on St Theodora of Arta's tomb are to be found both in the personal history of Theodora Petraliphina and in their analogy to regency imagery from the coinage as the most plausible comparative material.<sup>40</sup> The portraits on the tomb slab are identical to structure of any regency official portrait, which does not comply with fact that Theodora Petraliphina was never regent to her son Nikephoros, and would not be shown as one.<sup>41</sup> Methodological issue at this point comes to the fore connecting structural purity of the relief with the historical reliability both of the comparative material and facts from the life of Theodora Petraliphina.

<sup>33</sup> Б. Тодић, *Српске теме на фрескама XIV века у цркви Светог Димитрија у Пељу*, Зорграф 30 (2004-2005) 123-140.

<sup>34</sup> B. Cvetković, *Robes of Light and the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Frescoes in Boyana*, in *The Boyana Church Between the East and the West in the Art of the Christian Europe*, ed. B. Penkova, Sofia 2011, 198-214.

<sup>35</sup> Α. Ορλάνδος, *Η Αγία Θεοδώρα της Αρτης*, ABME Β', Αθήναι 1936, 80-104; G. Velenis, *Thirteenth-Century Architecture in the Despotate of Epirus: the Origins of the School*, in *Студеница и византијска уметност око 1200. године*, ур. В. Кораћ, Београд 1988, 279; S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, Princeton 2010, 563-565, 569, fig. 644.

<sup>36</sup> The issue raised in Cvetković, *The Investiture Relief in Arta, Epiros*, 111-112, fig. 4.

<sup>37</sup> N. Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas*, Athens 1997, fig. 95; H. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies. Saints and their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 93-96, figs. 78-80.

<sup>38</sup> Cormack, op. cit., 121-126, fig. 68.

<sup>39</sup> G. Vikan, *Catalogue of the Sculpture in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection from the Ptolemaic Period to the Renaissance*, Washington D. C. 1995, 104-108; S. T. Brooks, *Relief Tondo with a Byzantine Emperor*, in *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A. D. 843-1261*, eds. H. C. Evans – W. D. Wixom, New York 1997, 200-201, No. 137; Parani, op. cit., 14, n. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Cvetković, *The Investiture Relief in Arta, Epiros*, 106-107, fig. 2.

<sup>41</sup> For full discussion, see Cvetković, *The Investiture Relief in Arta, Epiros*, 108-109.





Fig. 2 Coin of Theodora, Thecla and Michael III,  
Сл. 2 Новац Теодоре, Текле и Михаила III

Is it, therefore, possible to identify female figure as the portrait of Theodora Petraliphina and yet not raise the issue of absence of her consort on this lavish royal portrait?

It is crucial to pay attention again to the regency images of another Theodora, the Byzantine Empress, wife of Theophilos and mother of Michael III, as already established analogies (fig. 2).<sup>42</sup> In centuries to come, this regency was never forgotten in the way it was represented in art since it had marked the most important event of the age, restoration of icon worship itself, being reiterated on a number of icons of the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* (fig. 3).<sup>43</sup> There is hitherto neglected coincidence that the first celebration of the new liturgy took place on March 11<sup>th</sup>, which is exactly the date of the feast of St Theodora of Arta.<sup>44</sup> It is, though quite an interesting circumstance, not necessary to press it. In a way such coincidences may have induced possibility that the homonymous personages of the empress Theodora and of basilissa Theodora of Arta were reason to make use of such a structure for the holy basilissa's tomb reaffirming the old identification of the portraits as those of Theodora of Arta and of her son Nikephoros, but it is impossible to prove. Even more since icons of *Triumph of Orthodoxy* are not known prior the end of 14<sup>th</sup> Century. But, does such a coincidence may point to possible inspiration for the relief structure since the heirs of late basilissa did make use of her faith and of Orthodoxy to fight pretenders from

<sup>42</sup> Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection: Leo III to Nicephorus III, 717-1081*, Washington D.C. 1973, 457 et passim.

<sup>43</sup> D. Kotoula, *The British Museum Triumph of Orthodoxy Icon*, in *Byzantine orthodoxies: papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, University of Durham, 23-25 March 2002, eds. A. Louth, A. Casidey, Ashgate 2006, 121-130. Amongst later copies of this scene, for one rare example from the monumental art, see A. Серафимова, *Воспоставување на иконите и издигнување на чесниот крст во наосот на кучевишките Свети Архангели*, Ниш и Византија 1 (2003) 236-248.

<sup>44</sup> S. Eustratiades, *Αγιολόγιον της Ορθόδοξου Εκκλησίας*, Athens 1935, 180.

the West, namely Philip of Taranto and Charles II of Naples?<sup>45</sup>

If seen in light of this allusion, and if there is any to the restorers of icon worship, it may have been in line with those who promoted the newly established cult of Theodora of Arta, her immediate successors on the throne of Epiros.<sup>46</sup> These were the same ones threatened by their relatives, the Western pretenders, which is why the very placement of the portraits on the tomb slab of St Theodora of Arta may reveal deliberate usage of such a Western model, intended both for domestic and Western audiences, which, therefore, does enlighten the exact historical context.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 3 *Triumph of Orthodoxy*, icon, British Museum London

Сл. 3 Тријумф православља, икона, Британски музеј у Лондону

This is context that sees the relief representing instead basilissa Anna Cantacuzene Palaiologina, because it was she who did all she could to defend rights of her son Thomas to succeed the Epirote throne and interests of Constantinople, and used for that cause the newly established cult of her mother-in-law, Theodora Petraliphina. The portraits on the slab may have intended to be part of the tomb construction from the start, although some other places

<sup>45</sup> A.-M. Talbot, *Philip I of Taranto*, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3, 1652.

<sup>46</sup> For cults established and promoted by family members, see A.-M. Talbot, *Family Cults in Byzantium: the Case of St Theodora of Thessalonike*, in *ΛΕΙΜΩΝ*. Studies Presented to Lennart Ryden on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, ed. J. O. Rosenqvist, Uppsala 1996, 50-69 (= *Women and religious life in Byzantium*, Ashgate 2001, 49-69).

<sup>47</sup> T. Michalsky, *Memoria und Representation: Die Grabdenkmäler des Königshaus Anjou in Italien*, Göttingen 2000; D. Norman, *Politics and Piety: Locating Simone Martini's Saint Louis of Toulouse Altarpiece*, *Art History* 33, 4 (2010) 597-619. In that sense, commenting the similar position of Joanna and iconography on sargophagi in Naples C. A. Fleck states that Joanna's rule was "politically unfavorable and dynastically unstable", cf. C. A. Fleck, *Patronage, Art, and the Anjou Bible in Angevin Naples (1266-1352)*, in *The Anjou Bible. A Royal Manuscript Revealed. Naples 1340*, eds. L. Watteuw, J. Van der Stock, Peeters 2010, 40-41, fg. III.4.



Fig. 4 Slab with Royal Portraits, Church of St Theodora, Arta

Сл. 4 Плоча с владарским портретима, црква Св. Теодоре у Арти

cannot be excluded.<sup>48</sup> Western connection does provide suitable explanation, as well as developed political theory the Epirote state had.<sup>49</sup> Basilissa Anna Cantacuzene Palaiologina took part in such building activities as were erection of the Paregoretissa church in Arta,<sup>50</sup> and probably had her part in addition of the narthex in the Vlacherna church, in Arta too.<sup>51</sup> She may also have added the narthex of the church of St Theodora in Arta, while constructing the shrine for the saintly basilissa Theodora Petraliphina.

What has hitherto also escaped scholarly attention are the busts of angels sculpted on both sides of the canopy with the figures of royalty (fig. 4). These may help in better understanding the unusual iconography of the relief. The angels from the tomb relief are possible to connect to iconography of the seal of Despot Thomas which stands out as the one more source which had not been used hitherto (fig. 5). The seal is dated by W. Seibt to the period after 1313, marked by Thomas' unexpected belicose resistance to the Byzantine Emperor, unlike

<sup>48</sup> I am grateful for discussion on this matter to dr Yannis Varalis and to dr Paschalis Androudis.

<sup>49</sup> A. Stavridou-Zafraka, *The Political Ideology of the State of Epiros*, in *Urbs capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences*, ed. A. E. Laiou, Paris 2005, 311-323.

<sup>50</sup> L. Theiss, *Die Architektur der Kirche der Panagia Paregoretissa in Arta / Epirus*, Amsterdam 1991; M. Greenhalgh, *Marble past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Mediaeval Mediterranean*, Brill 2009, 245-246.

<sup>51</sup> M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *The Basilissa Anna Palaiologina of Arta and the Monastery of Vlacherna*, in *Women and Byzantine Monasticism: proceedings of the Athens symposium, 28-29 March 1988*, ed. J. Y. Perreault, Athens 1991, 43-49; eadem, *The Byzantine Wall Paintings of Vlacherna Monastery (Area of Arta)*, in *Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'études byzantines II. Art et archéologie. Communications A*, Athènes 1981, 1-14.



his mother's efforts to bring the Epirote Despotate back to Constantinople.<sup>52</sup> Its obverse shows Despot in all imperial insignia which is why scholars interpret it as his usurping the highest power, and the reverse of the seal shows Archangel Michael, also dressed in imperial regalia; it is important to note that the accompanying caption emphasizes Thomas' descent from the Byzantine imperial dynasty of Angels.<sup>53</sup> This is the point which may establish connection between the iconography and political praxis, since it is well known that the angels have been used in imperial propaganda,<sup>54</sup> especially if imperial dynasty of Angels was that tangible link.<sup>55</sup> It is also of interest to note that Despot Thomas is referred to in one source as the Lord of *Archangelos* castle he built himself.<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 5 Seal of Despot Thomas, British Museum London

Сл. 5 Печат деспота Томе, Британски музеј у Лондону

In the like manner, and only if correctly identified on the tomb slab in Arta, Anna Cantacuzene Palaiologina and her son Thomas shown as a small boy, may also have used similar means to stress their own legitimacy against the Westerners. Being surrounded by the two angels in much larger proportions than the royalty figures, the Epirote rulers had sent the message much clearer to their audience than to modern onlookers. If the angels stand for this reason on the slab, their appearance is purposeful because of eminence of the Angel dynasty's very name, but also because of the fact the narrative sources stress that Thomas' grandfather, the Epirote Despot Michael II Komnenos Doukas, as well as his father the Despot Nikephoros, were known as Michael *Angelos*

<sup>52</sup> D. Buckton, *Gold seal of Thomas, Despot of Epirus*, in *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, ed. D. Buckton, London 1994, 198-199.

<sup>53</sup> J. Nesbitt, *Gold Seal of Thomas, Despot of Epiros*, in *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, 35-36.

<sup>54</sup> H. Maguire, *Heavenly Court*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, 247-258.

<sup>55</sup> Maguire, *Heavenly Court*, 252, figs. 12-13; G. Peers, *Subtle bodies: representing angels in Byzantium*, University of California Press 2001, 24.

<sup>56</sup> D. M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros 1267-1479: A Contribution to the History of Greece in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2010, 80, n. 59.

and Nikephoros *Angelos*.<sup>57</sup> In this light, the very dating of the relief and its true link to exact time Thomas was given despotic title by the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II,<sup>58</sup> more precisely illuminate all the circumstances of volatile rule of the regent basilissa Anna and therefore may better put the hapax relief and its unusual iconography into probable historic context bound to dynastic threats from the West.

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ИКОНОГРАФИЈА ЖЕНА РЕГЕНАТА: МЕТОДОЛОШКО ПИТАЊЕ

У средњем веку регенство је било неретка појава с обзиром на то да је циљ овог управног тела у монархијама био да осигура наследство малолетном владару. Регентска тела су могла чинити чланови из непосредног окружења владара, било да су старатељи са двора, свештенство или аристократе или пак најближи рођаци, мајка, сестра и слично. У тексту се расправља питање да ли је могуће у уметности установити иконографију регентства као такву и у том се смислу актуелизује питање идентитета владарских портрета на саркофагу св. Теодоре у Арти који су јединствен пример у византијској надгробној граци.

Пошто је првобитна идентификација ликова као портрета св. Теодоре Петралифине и њеног сина Нићифора оспорена претпоставком да ови ликови пре представљају њену снаху деспотицу Ану Кантакузину Палеологину и њеног сина Тому, који су организовали и подстицали овај нови породични култ у време напада западњачких претенданата на епирски трон, у овом раду се изнова указује на структуру регентских слика и чињеницу да Теодора Петралифина никада није била регент. Такође се подсећа и на аналогне представе регентског пара са икона Тријумфа Православља из позновизантијског периода које понављају структуру из доба победе поштовалаца икона, са царицом Теодором и њеним сином Михаилом. Износе се нови детаљи који у наглашеном приказу анђела на рељефу виде алузију на порекло епирских владара од византијске царске династије Анђела, с обзиром на то да се у изворима отац и деда деспота Томе називају Анђелима, те да се на златном печату деспота Томе налази представа арханђела Михаила.

<sup>57</sup> Nicol, *op. cit.*, passim.

<sup>58</sup> Љ. Максимовић, *Двор епирских деспота у XIV и XV веку*, ЗРВИ XXXIII (1994) 129, нап. 12.