

# Displaying an Icon: The Mosaic Icon of Saint Demetrios at Sassoferato and its Frame

The mosaic icon of St Demetrios in its splendid silver frame, today in the Museo Civico in Sassoferato in the Marches region of central Italy (fig. 1), has been the focus of scholarly disagreement from its first publication in the year 1901<sup>1</sup> to the present day. The dating has varied from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>, the classification from Byzantine object of art to »one of the oldest Byzantine fakes«<sup>3</sup> or »hyper-Byzantine collage«<sup>4</sup>. It had its most prominent appearance in 2004, when it was on view in the »Byzantium. Faith and Power« exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York<sup>5</sup>. The following year, it even made a short visit to Thessaloniki, where it was shown in the Basilica of St Demetrios on the occasion of the 1700-year anniversary of the martyrdom of the saint. The problematic part of the icon has always been the frame; in this article, I want to explain it as a genuine Byzantine object of art and veneration of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The mosaic icon was given together with a collection of western reliquaries to his city of birth by Niccolò Perotti (1430-1480), secretary to Cardinal Bessarion and archbishop of Siponto<sup>6</sup>. His gifts were placed in the Monastery of Santa Chiara di Sassoferato from where they were transferred to the Museo Civico in 1861. We owe this information to local tradition as is made clear by the first written testimony from 1753 that cites a document from 1472<sup>7</sup>. The first description and illustration of the mosaic icon and its frame is given in a document from 1772<sup>8</sup>. There seems to be no reason not to trust the local tradition. How in fact the object ended up

in Perotti's possession is an open question: it may have been given to him by Cardinal Bessarion, who owned several mosaic icons, but there is no prove for this<sup>9</sup>. Perotti may have even acquired it himself in the East; his travels took him as far as Trebizond<sup>10</sup>.

Anthony Cutler has argued that the mosaic icon was made for Perotti himself in the 15<sup>th</sup> century on the basis that the shield of St Demetrios shows what he believes is the coat of arms of the Perotti family<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, the standing white lion against a blue background with golden stylized flowers looks like a coat of arms. The coat of arms of the Perotti family, however, depicts a silver lion climbing a golden ladder against a red background<sup>12</sup>. This clearly proves that the lion cannot be the coat of arms of Perotti. The assumption by Jannic Durand<sup>13</sup>, that the coat of arms is a later restoration is also incorrect, since X-ray images taken during the recent restoration reveal no traces of any secondary interference<sup>14</sup>.

This type of almond-shaped or kite-shaped shield, a type sometimes called a »Norman shield«, does not look Byzantine at first, but it is known from Byzantine images since the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>. An early example is a steatite icon from the monastery of Vatopedi<sup>16</sup>. A very prominent example is in the church of Nerezi (dated 1164), where St Theodore Tiron holds a shield of the same type even with a lion on it<sup>17</sup>. Warrior saints at Sopoćani – painted in the years 1263-1268 – again depict this type of shield but also the rampant lion on a Byzantine round shield<sup>18</sup>. A manuscript from the

1 The first publication outside of local scholarship is Savignoni, *Reliquiario*, already questioning whether the frame is »un'imitazione di una più antica bizantina«.  
 2 The bibliography for the piece is vast, for a recent overview see Moretti, *Roma bizantina* 24-26 with n. 81-94.  
 3 Chatzidakis, *Ikonen aus Griechenland LXXXV* (»Es dürfte sich um eine der ältesten byzantinischen Fälschungen handeln...«).  
 4 Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 457-460 (esp. 460).  
 5 *Cat. New York 2004*, 231-233 no. 139 (J. Durand). – The icon was already on exhibition in Athens 1964 (*Cat. Athens 1964*, 238 no. 171 [D. Mouriki], icon 14<sup>th</sup> c., frame 16<sup>th</sup> c.), due to its state of conservation it was not in the exhibition in Ravenna 1990 (*Cat. Ravenna 1990*, 112 no. 42, 14<sup>th</sup> c. [S. Romano]). – Barucca, *Icona musiva di San Demetrio* 25). – 2011/12 in an exhibition in Cleveland/Baltimore/London: *Cat. Cleveland 2011*, 201 no. 115 (icon 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> c., frame probably Italian mid-15<sup>th</sup> century [K. B. Gerry]); an essay in the catalogue by D. Krueger mentions the frame as »possibly contemporaneous with the mosaic« (p. 15).  
 6 Still fundamental Mercati, *Niccolò Perotti*. – For an overview on recent scholarship Charlet, *Niccolò Perotti*. – D'Alessandro, *Perotti*.  
 7 Barucca, *Reliquiari a Sassoferato* 9-10, on the icon 15-16 fig. 23, on the other reliquaries 13-18 fig. 3-25. – Barucca, *Raccolta di reliquie e reliquiari* 28, on the icon 30-33 fig. 17, on the other reliquaries 34-42 fig. 18-21.

8 Barucca, *Reliquiari a Sassoferato* 10-11 fig. 2. – Barucca, *Icona musiva di San Demetrio* 22-23 fig. 16. – Barucca, *Raccolta di reliquie e reliquiari* 28-29.  
 9 First proposed by Bettini, *Appunti* 19-20, thereafter repeated by many authors. On Bessarion and other mosaic icons Cutler, *Changing Modes* 251-252. – Effenberger, *Images of Personal Devotion* 211. – On Bessarion and Byzantine art objects in general Moretti, *Roma bizantina* 18-29.  
 10 Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion* 266. 409; not mentioned in Mercati, *Niccolò Perotti*.  
 11 Cutler, *Changing Modes* 253-254. The early form of the coat of arms only had the lion on a ladder, the later form was quartered with the lion on a ladder and a black eagle, see Mercati, *Niccolò Perotti* 51 pl. 5.  
 12 Examples in manuscripts Mercati, *Niccolò Perotti* pl. 1. 3. 5; a relief with the coat of arms in Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 458 fig. 6.  
 13 *Cat. New York 2004*, 232 (J. Durand).  
 14 Aldrovandi et al., *Indagini scientifiche* 11-12 fig. 2-3.  
 15 Grotowski, *Warrior Saints* 231-236.  
 16 Grotowski, *Warrior Saints* fig. 33.  
 17 Sincević, *Nerezi* fig. 62. – Grotowski, *Warrior Saints* fig. 45b; the similarity is also stated by Ousterhout, *Mittelalterliche Heraldik* 93. – For the lion on Byzantine shields Grotowski, *Warrior Saints* 246-248.  
 18 Grabar/Velmans, *Sopoćani* pl. 40.





Fig. 1 Sassoferrato, Museo Civico, Mosaic icon of St Demetrius. – (From Aldrovandi et al., Indagini scientifiche 18 fig. 1).



Kievan Rus', the Fjodor Evangelary at Yaroslavl (dated to 1321-1327), shows a related shield again with the white lion rampant<sup>19</sup>, further Late Byzantine examples can be added<sup>20</sup>. Obviously, this type of shield and decoration was widely used in the pictorial language of Middle and Late Byzantium. There is absolutely no need for any direct connection to the West.

The use of the lion rampant is also much too common to connect this heraldic device to a particular person, as has been suggested by Robert Nelson. He connected the icon at Sassoferrato with Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotos, well known from his funeral chapel, the parekklesion of the Pammakaristos Church in Constantinople<sup>21</sup>, where a lion rampant is depicted on the cornice<sup>22</sup>. If we take heraldry seriously, we see there a red lion going to the right, not a white lion going to the left as on our icon. Therefore, there is no plausible connection.

Mosaic icons are probably the most elaborate form of Byzantine painting, closely related to the imperial court and high ranking commissioners<sup>23</sup>. According to stylistic analysis, the mosaic icon at Sassoferrato was executed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a typical work of Palaiologan art<sup>24</sup>. This date is further confirmed by the radiocarbon analysis dating of the wooden support of the icon to 1279 ± 26 years<sup>25</sup>, which gives a *terminus post quem*. This analysis was done during the restoration of the icon in the laboratory of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence in 1995. This careful examination, including X-ray, revealed that there are no indications that the metal revetment of the icon is secondary, there are no traces of earlier phases like holes for nails<sup>26</sup>. All the holes are related to the frame we see today.

In the following, I will argue that the icon and the revetment of its frame have to be understood as two complimentary devices connected to the cult of St Demetrios and Thessaloniki and to a specific commissioner, affiliated with this saint and with this city.

The mosaic icon measures 12.5 cm × 5.5 cm, the frame doubles its size to 24.3 cm × 16 cm (fig. 1). As we see, the frame today is partly damaged. This happened in 1894 when the icon was stolen from the Museo Civico and only recovered in a damaged condition a year later<sup>27</sup>. Fortunately, an old photograph taken before this date exists (fig. 2)<sup>28</sup>.

The wide wooden frame of the icon, made out of poplar wood, is covered with a silver revetment. In the upper corners, there are two crosses, each quarter of which is articulated with the letter B, the so-called *tetrabasilion*. The lower corners depict a double-headed, crowned eagle. The upper frame panel, now partly missing, bears the inscription IC XC NI KA, and contains a silver ampulla in the middle, with the inscription TO AFION MYPON («the holy oil»). This part is now completely lost, giving view to a lead ampulla that had been incorporated into an opening in the wooden frame, its neck towering above it. This ampulla could not be seen before the destruction of the frame, only its outer form and the inscription. Below the ampulla was set a small amethyst intaglio depicting a beardless head, probably an ancient piece, now lost, just as the ten rubies originally placed onto the edges of the frame and the cap of the ampulla made out of sapphire. Furthermore, the central piece of the lower frame panel was stolen during the theft of 1894: a Byzantine cameo depicting the bust of a male saint holding a cross. Most likely, this was a cameo depicting St Demetrios as a martyr, as known from two other examples<sup>29</sup>. Next to this, we find the inscription AFIOΣ twice, evoking the sainthood of the image, and in the corners a double-headed, crowned eagle.

The icon itself becomes a reliquary through the incorporation of the lead ampulla, a highly unusual feature in Byzantium. There are very few examples of icons containing relics<sup>30</sup>, including two more mosaic icons. One is the icon with the crucifixion now in Berlin, with ten round depressions in its frame, some still containing particles of relics<sup>31</sup>. The second, an icon depicting four church fathers in Saint Petersburg, has a frame incorporating relics; however, this frame might be a later Russian alteration<sup>32</sup>. Other prominent examples are two closely related painted icons produced in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century for Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina (fig. see p. 140 fig. 22), the diptych with its splendid metal revetment now in Cuenca and an icon nowadays without its revetment kept at the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Meteora<sup>33</sup>. Below images of saints on the frame are small slots in which relics of saints were placed. These slots were originally covered by the revetment, as is still visible on the Cuenca Diptych. The place of origin of these two icons is un-

19 Popova, *Altrussische Buchmalerei* pl. 18.

20 Androudis, *Emblèmes héraldiques* 31-33. – Spier, *Late Byzantine Rings* 45-46. – Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 457 fig. 7-11 (all with further references).

21 Nelson, *Shield* 11.

22 Belting et al., *Pammakaristos* pl. V. 94-95

23 On mosaic icons in general Demus, *Mosaic Icons (the Sassoferrato icon p. 93)*. – Furlan, *Icone bizantine – Krickelberg-Pütz, Mosaikone des Hl. Nikolaus*. – Demus, *Byzantinische Mosaikonen (the Sassoferrato icon p. 11)*. – Effenberger, *Images of Personal Devotion* 209-212. – Ryder, *Micromosaic Icons (the Sassoferrato icon p. 128-132)*. – Fafalios, *Psēphidotēs eikōnes (the Sassoferrato icon 85-88 no. 26)*.

24 Chatzidakis, *Ikōnes aus Griechenland XXVIII (end of the 14<sup>th</sup> c.)*. – Furlan, *Icone bizantine 31-32. 96-97 no. 41 (last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> c.)*. – Krickelberg-Pütz, *Mosaikone des Hl. Nikolaus 98-99 (late Palaiologan)*. – *Cat. New York 2004, 231 (J. Durand) (beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century)*.

25 Aldrovandi et al., *Indagini scientifiche* 16.

26 Aldrovandi et al., *Indagini scientifiche* 9-16 fig. 2-3.

27 Barucca, *Reliquiari a Sassoferrato* 11. – Barucca, *Icona musiva di San Demetrio* 23. – Barucca, *Raccolta di reliquie e reliquiari* 30.

28 Bettini, *Appunti* 19 fig. 1. – Theocharis, *Eikon* pl. 2. – Aldrovandi et al., *Indagini scientifiche* 17 fig. 8.

29 Wentzel, *Kamee* 105 with n. 21 (Vatican) and n. 22 (Laubach). – On glass cameos, the bust of Demetrios is always shown as military saint with a spear: Wentzel, *Enkolpion* 11-24 fig. 3. – Wentzel, *Medaillon* 66 no. 37-38 fig. 10.

30 On icons as reliquaries in Byzantine Rapti, *Images du Christ* 215-221.

31 *Cat. New York 2004, 221-222 no. 130 (A. Effenberger)*. – Indicated by the relics the piece must have been in Rome, Buschhausen, *Frage des makedonischen Ursprungs* 59; for the provenance from a Roman aristocratic collection Pizzoli, *Roma* 359.

32 *Cat. New York 2004, 225-227 no. 134 (Y. Piatnitsky)*.

33 *Cat. New York 2004, 51-54 no. 24B-C (L. Deriziotis)*. – Martínez Sáez, *Diptycho bizantino*.



Fig. 2 Sassoferrato, Museo Civico, Mosaic icon of St Demetrius prior to 1894. – (From Aldrovandi et al., *Indagini scientifiche* 17 fig. 8).

known. They have been ascribed to Ioannina, the residence of Maria and her husband, Meteora, Thessaloniki, or even Constantinople. In any case, they prove that the custom of incorporating relics was known in northern Greece during the Late Byzantine period. Whether this is a western influence at this late date is, however, an open question<sup>34</sup>.

Large metal revetments are known from many other Byzantine icons, especially of the Palaiologan period<sup>35</sup>, but the revetment of the Sassoferrato icon is not related to any other known example, they all look very different and much more ornamental. The unique Sassoferrato frame focuses on the inscriptions, the heraldic devices and the relic as no other revetment does.

Neither the place of production of the icon, nor the metal frame can be unequivocally determined. Mosaic icons have been generally connected to the court at Constantinople, but some, including the Sassoferrato icon, have been occasionally attributed to Thessaloniki. In addition, the frame has been attributed to Thessaloniki, especially because of the incorporation of the ampulla for the *myron* (oil), which comes from Thessaloniki<sup>36</sup>.

The key to understanding the icon is given by the inscriptions. The inscription to the right reads »This ampulla bears holy oil drawn from the well in which the body of the divine Demetrios reposes, which gushes here and accomplishes miracles for the entire universe and for the faithful«<sup>37</sup>. The text thus explains the reason for the incorporation of the ampulla at the top of the icon. Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the existence of miraculous oil (the *myron*) connected with the cult of St Demetrios is well attested in the sources. We know lead ampullae from the late 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries that contained the holy *myron* for pilgrims to the saint's tomb, called *koutrouvia*<sup>38</sup>. Examples were found at various places in northern Greece and the Balkans. One of these ampullae, a cherished relic in itself, is the one incorporated at the top of the icon frame<sup>39</sup>. On one side, it shows St Demetrios holding a cross and, on the opposite side, St Theodora, the second *myron*-giving saint of Thessaloniki.

Thus, St Demetrios is present on the icon three times: twice in the form of his image, on the mosaic icon and on the

lost cameo; the third time in the form of his venerated relics, the ampulla with the *myron*.

The second inscription on the left, now lost, even alludes to the historical situation that necessitated the appearance of St Demetrios: »O great martyr Demetrios! Intercede with God that he may help me, I, Your faithful servant, the basileus of the Romans, Justinian, to conquer my enemies and subjugate them beneath my feet«<sup>40</sup>.

This enigmatic inscription naming an emperor Justinian has always troubled scholars. For example, Maria Theocharis even set forth the theory that the frame was commissioned by Marc' Antonio Giustiniano, Doge of Venice from 1684 to 1686. He claimed descent from the family of Justinian and was involved in the last great western attempt against the Turks, thus she dates the frame to late 17<sup>th</sup> century Venice<sup>41</sup>. This is an impossible explanation, as icon and frame, which are inseparable, were already in Sassoferrato in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

In my opinion, the inscription was sufficiently explained by Alexander Vasiliev in 1950<sup>42</sup>, as referring to a victory of Justinian II (r. 685-695 and 705-711). In 688, he defeated the Macedonian Slavs, who had threatened Thessaloniki, and was honoured by a triumphal entry into the city. The connection of Justinian II to the church of St Demetrios is known through a long dedicatory inscription<sup>43</sup>; his entry into the church has sometimes been seen in a fresco in the church<sup>44</sup>. The Slavs could – according to contemporary legend – only be repelled thanks to the supernatural intervention of St Demetrios himself. Nevertheless, it took many centuries before this important event was introduced into art, notably at a time of renewed pressure on Thessaloniki during the Late Byzantine period. It was in the 14<sup>th</sup> century that Demetrios protecting the city against the Slavs appeared in a wall painting in Dečani<sup>45</sup>.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century was a difficult time for Thessaloniki<sup>46</sup>. In 1308, the Catalans besieged the city, although unsuccessfully. In the 1320s, the city was a focus of contention between Andronikos II and Andronikos III. In 1334 and 1341, the city was attacked by the Serbs. In the 1340s, the city fell temporarily under the control of the Zealots. The Ottomans attacked Thessaloniki in 1383 and the city fell to them for the

34 On frames with relics in the west and their relation to Byzantium Preising, *Bild und Reliquie* esp. 21-22. 39-41. – Zchomelidse, *Liminal Phenomena*. – On frames in Byzantine art in general Peers, *Sacred Shock*.

35 See Grabar, *Revêtements*, his catalogue is not complete at all. – Durand, *Icon Revêtements*. – Moss, *Revetments on Late Byzantine Icons*. – On the revetments of mosaic icons Furlan, *Icone bizantine* 26-32.

36 Furlan, *Icone bizantine* 96. – Demus, *Byzantinische Mosaikikonen* 11. – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Thessalonique* 247-248. The revetments attributed to workshops in Thessaloniki by Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Thessalonique* 248-252 are not comparable with the Sassoferrato frame. – Antonaras, *Thessaloniki* 71-72.

37 After Cat. New York 2004, 231 (J. Durand); slightly different Vasiliev, *Historical Significance* 32 with Greek text.

38 Bakirtzis, *Byzantine Ampullae from Thessaloniki*. – Totev, *Thessalonican Eulogia* 53-79. 125-149. – Foskoulou, *Blessing for Sale* 69-77 fig. 16-18. – Antonaras, *Thessaloniki* 51-52.

39 I see no visible evidence that this ampulla was added to the wooden frame later as Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 454 fig. 2, 460 claims.

40 After Cat. New York 2004, 231 (J. Durand); slightly different Vasiliev, *Historical Significance* 32 with Greek text.

41 Theocharis, *Eikon*. – Approvingly Buschhausen, *Frage des makedonischen Ursprungs* 61. – Effenberger, *Images of Personal Devotion* 212.

42 Vasiliev, *Historical Significance*.

43 Vasiliev, *Edict*. – Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 247-249.

44 Vasiliev, *Historical Significance* 37; sceptical Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 242-247 fig. 10. – Now with another more convincing interpretation and dating Bonnekoh, *Malereien in Thessaloniki* 277-499 colourpl. 24.

45 Walter, *Myroblytos of Thessalonika* 170-171 fig. 3. – Walter, *Warrior Saints* 85-89 pl. 49 with further examples.

46 Tafrafi, *Thessalonique*. – Vasiliev, *Historical Significance* 37-38. – Barker, *Late Byzantine Thessalonike*.



first time in 1387. In this Late Byzantine period, St Demetrios was particularly venerated as a warrior saint in Thessaloniki<sup>47</sup>.

Combining this historic background with the text of the inscription, the inscription alludes to the former rescue of the city through the emperor with the help of St Demetrios, the protector of the city. St Demetrios experienced his last peak of cult veneration in the Late Byzantine period and the recollection of the inscription is perfectly fitting for Late Byzantine society. The icon of the saint appeals to the protection of the city by the emperor through the inscription on its frame and evokes the power of the saint through his image and his relics.

A palaeographic element adds another layer to the message of the frame: the shape of the letter sigma. It is not in the common form of the lunar sigma C, the usual shape since the Late Roman period and in Byzantium. Instead, used here is the classical form of the letter: Σ. This is an explicitly archaizing use of the letter, as Cyril Mango has pointed out, which is very rare, but not unknown, in the Middle Byzantine period, as for example in a 9<sup>th</sup>-century inscription from Ankara<sup>48</sup> and a painted inscription from Lagoudera (1192)<sup>49</sup>. Following these examples, the use of this letterform as intentionally archaizing makes even more sense in connection with the content of the inscription, the allusion to a much older incident. That the archaizing form of the letter was also in use in Greek humanistic circles in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as indicated by the use of this form in the inscription on the grave of Cardinal Bessarion in Rome<sup>50</sup>, made the frame even more interesting in this period. For Perotti, the icon must have counted as an »antiquity«<sup>51</sup>.

The frame does not only refer to an historic event but also to a possible commissioner. My starting point are the two emblems or heraldic devices<sup>52</sup> on the upper and lower frame panels: the cross with the letter B in each quarter, the *tetrabasileion*<sup>53</sup>; and the double-headed, crowned eagle<sup>54</sup>. It has been noted that both are connected to the imperial family of the Palaiologoi, the double-headed eagle has even been called the »coat of arms« of the family. In many examples, the double-headed eagle is connected with the monogram of the Palaiologan family on works of art, clearly commissioned



**Fig. 3** Seal of Theodore II Palaiologos of Montferrat (1381-1418). – (From Genzile, *Sigilli* 14 fig. V).

by members of the family. But is there a member of the family in Sassoferrato who may have ordered the icon?

A highly possible candidate is Demetrios Palaiologos (c. 1296-1344; full name Demetrios Angelos Doukas Palaiologos), a son of Andronikos II and Despot of Thessaloniki from about 1322 to 1328<sup>55</sup>. He was named after the saint of Thessaloniki, as he tells us himself in the dedicatory epigram of the Oxford Menologion commissioned by him, which includes a cycle of images of the life of the saint<sup>56</sup>. His veneration of St Demetrios must have been deep: an epigram composed by Manuel Philes on a now lost encolpion, which once belonged to Demetrios, directly connects the despot to Thessaloniki, the saint and the holy *myron*: »The Despot's bosom is the city of Thessaloniki, because Demetrios reposes there in a golden tomb. The tomb exudes *myron*, for Demetrios the illustrious

47 Russell, *Demetrius* esp. 16-21.

48 Mango, *Byzantine Epigraphy* 243-244. – Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme* 77-78.

49 Nicolaidès, *Lagoudera* fig. 33. – Problematic is the case of two earrings with the letter form Σ, either 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. or modern, see Bosselmann-Ruickbie, *Byzantinischer Schmuck* 64-65 fig. 60-61 and Albani, *Middle Byzantine Earrings* 193 with n. 8 fig. 3. – Boyd/Vikan, *Questions of Authenticity* 21 mention »rare coin types of the later twelfth century« with this letter form without any further reference.

50 Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme* 458-460 no. IT19; 950 fig. LXVII; also on a now lost inscription from Naupaktos: Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme* 308-309 no. GR92 (c. 1497).

51 On Byzantine icons as »antiquities« in the Renaissance see Nagel/Wood, *Antiquity* 58-61, on the Sassoferrato icon 59 (»The inscriptions ... must have reinforced Perotti's conviction that he was in possession of a relic of ancient

Christianity«) with n. 20 (»The revetment was most probably a Palaiologan antiquarian venture«).

52 On heraldic devices in Byzantium in the Palaiologan period see Androudis, *Emblèmes héraldiques*. – Székely/Gorovei, *Insimnele imperiale*. – Ousterhout, *Mittelalterliche Heraldik*. – Ousterhout, *Origins of Heraldry* (all with numerous examples and further bibliography).

53 DOC V 87-88. – Androudis, *Emblèmes héraldiques* 27-30. – Ousterhout, *Mittelalterliche Heraldik* 95-96. – Ousterhout, *Origins of Heraldry* 159. – Babuin, *Standards and Insignia* 38-40.

54 DOC V 85-86. – Androudis, *Emblèmes héraldiques* 16-27. – Ousterhout, *Mittelalterliche Heraldik* 96-97. – Ousterhout, *Origins of Heraldry* 159-161. – Androudis, *Chapiteau* 133-134 with further bibliography n. 9.

55 PLP no. 21456. – Hutter, *Despotes Demetrios Palaiologos* 184-195.

56 Oxford, Bodleian Library cod. Gr. th. f. 1. Hutter, *Corpus* 1-33 no. 1, the epigram fol. 55<sup>v</sup>-56<sup>r</sup> fig. 104-105. – Hutter, *Despotes Demetrios Palaiologos* 201-214.



**Fig. 4** Testone of Guglielmo IX Palaiologos of Montferrat (1494-1518). – (From Éditions Gadoury, no. 1143).



**Fig. 5** Box for the icon of St Demetrios. Sassoferato, Museo Civico. – (From Bauer, Stadt und Patron 455 fig. 3).

martyr is within<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, Demetrios was the owner of a golden container for the *myron*, according to Philes<sup>58</sup>. We even know the tomb of Demetrios in the inner narthex of the Chora Church in Constantinople, the city where he presumably died. Here again the despot shows his devotion to St Demetrios, depicting him as the only inscribed warrior saint on one of the capitals of the tomb<sup>59</sup>.

That the Palaiologan family was interested in the church of St Demetrios at Thessaloniki may be further attested by a small column capital, now kept in the crypt of St Demetrios, with the Palaiologan monogram and the double-headed eagle on two sides, unfortunately, the fourth side shows a different monogram, not that of Demetrios<sup>60</sup>. Also from Thessaloniki comes a lintel with the Palaiologan monogram<sup>61</sup>. These pieces may be connected to a tomb, erected by Demetrios for one of his two sons, who died young and was buried in Thessaloniki<sup>62</sup>.

The confirmation that Demetrios Palaiologos was the commissioner of the icon and its frame is given by the heraldic devices of the frame: the combination of the Palaiologan

double-headed eagle and the sign of the fourfold »B«. Both heraldic devices are common in the Palaiologan period, but the combination is rare. The double-headed eagle is extremely seldom seen on coins, but it occurs on coins struck for Demetrios' father Andronikos II in Thessaloniki<sup>63</sup>. In addition, the *tetrabasileion* first occurs on coins of Andronikos III<sup>64</sup>.

As Philipp Grierson has pointed out, the *tetrabasileion* is associated with the family branch of the Palaiologoi of Montferrat<sup>65</sup>. The Marquisate of Montferrat was in the possession of the Palaiologoi since 1305. Here, the two devices in combination are part of their coat of arms, which occurs frequently on seals (fig. 3)<sup>66</sup> and coins (fig. 4)<sup>67</sup>. The only other known example of the combination of these two devices are reliefs of the Genoese family of the Gattilusio from the northern Aegean who were closely related to the Palaiologan family<sup>68</sup>, but there is no known relation of the family either to Thessaloniki or to St Demetrios. The fourfold »B« is also depicted on the small wooden box in which the icon is kept in Sassoferato (fig. 5), another indication for the connection with the Palaiologoi of Montferrat. The box has never been subjected to closer examination and has only recently been published<sup>69</sup>.

57 Manuel Philes, *Carmina I* 133-134 no. 269-271. – Walter, *Myroblytos of Thessalonika* 164. – Walter, *Warrior Saints* 82 with n. 59. – Hutter, *Despotes Demetrios Palaiologos* 200-201. – Russell, *Demetrios* 20.

58 Manuel Philes, *Carmina II* 74 no. 32. – Hutter, *Despotes Demetrios Palaiologos* 200.

59 Hjort, *Sculpture* 255-263. – Brooks, *Tomb Decoration* 308-311 pl. 4.28-34. – *Cat. New York* 2004, 102-103 fig. 4.11-12 (S. Brooks).

60 Tzitzibassi, *Monogramma tōn Palaiologon* 81-87. – Ousterhout, *Origins of Heraldry* 153-156 fig. 1-4. – Androudis, *Chapiteau* 131-135 fig. 1-6.

61 Tzitzibassi, *Monogramma tōn Palaiologon* fig. 11. – Ousterhout, *Origins of Heraldry* 153-156 fig. 5. – Androudis, *Chapiteau* 136 fig. 7.

62 Androudis, *Chapiteau* 137-139.

63 Bendall, *Coinage Later Palaeologan* 206-207 no. 4. – DOC V 85-86.

64 Bendall, *Coinage Later Palaeologan* 96-99 no. 48-49. – DOC V no. 699-700 (joint reign with Michael IX 1294-1320 or later).

65 DOC V 88. The sign does not appear on the coinage of Theodore I (1305-1338), as Grierson states.

66 Beginning with Theodore II (1381-1418), Gentile, *Sigilli* 14 no. 7 fig. V; later examples 18 no. 19 (Guglielmo VIII); 19-20 no. 20-21 (Bonifacio III); 20 no. 22 (Maria of Serbia); 20-22 no. 23. 25-26. 28 (Guglielmo IX); 24 no. 32 (Gian Giorgio). – Gentile, *Riti ed emblemi* 153-156 pl. 55.

67 Beginning with Guglielmo VIII (1464-1483), *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* 103 no. 7-11 pl. VIII 17-18; 105 no. 26 pl. IX 1; later examples pl. X-XII. – On the coinage of Montferrat see now Maetzke, *Montferrat 162-190* pl. 8-10; examples with the full coat of arms pl. 9 no. 138-140.

68 Ousterhout, *Mittelalterliche Heraldik* 97-98 fig. 2. – Ousterhout, *Origins of Heraldry* 160-161 fig. 7. – Babuin, *Standards and Insignia* 37 fig. 81-82. – Wright, *Gattilusio Lordships* 116-122. The *tetrabasileion* frequently appears on the coins of the Gattilusio from Mytilene and Ainos from 1355 to 1462, Lunardi, *Monete* 243-276. – DOC V 88.

69 Mentioned Buschhausen, *Frage des makedonischen Ursprungs* 60. – Bauer, *Stadt und Patron* 455 fig. 3, claiming it to be made in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. in the West.

Demetrios' mother was Yolanda of Montferrat, who married Andronikos II in 1284 and took the name of Irene<sup>70</sup>. She was very much engaged in Thessaloniki through her father Guiglielmo VII of Montferrat, the titular Latin King of Thessaloniki, and lived in the city from 1303 to her death in 1317. Originally, Demetrios was destined by his father to become the first Marquis of Montferrat, but this was not realised<sup>71</sup>. Theodore, brother of Demetrios and the one preferred by his mother, instead became the first Palaiologan Marquis of Montferrat in 1305<sup>72</sup>.

Thus, the icon is connected, through its heraldic devices, to the Palaiologi of Montferrat and Demetrios from this

branch of the family, with his affection for St Demetrios, is the obvious candidate for the commissioner of this icon and its frame.

The icon of St Demetrios (including its frame) in Sassoferrato is clearly an extraordinary object of Late Byzantine art. It can be connected to the veneration of St Demetrios, the city of Thessaloniki and with Demetrios Palaiologos. The »display« of the icon, the metal frame, serves a special function, turning the icon into a reliquary that demonstrates the miracle-working power of the saint *and* the outstanding devotion of its imperial patron to St Demetrios of Thessaloniki.

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## Summary / Zusammenfassung

### Displaying an Icon: The Mosaic Icon of Saint Demetrios at Sassoferrato and its Frame

This chapter is devoted to a Late Byzantine mosaic icon and its silver frame, both known since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and now kept in the Museo Civico in Sassoferrato. The icon, a precious object in terms of material and technique, and its frame, complement each other and present a complex and outstanding programme of veneration of St Demetrios of Thessaloniki. Elements are the representations of the saint himself, as well as an ampulla containing the holy *myron* and inscriptions referring to him. This unusual programme asks for a specific commission and, indeed, the emblems in the corners of the frame point to a member of the imperial family of the Palaiologoi, probably Demetrios Palaiologos (c. 1296-1344), despot of Thessaloniki, with a deep veneration of St Demetrios.

### »Displaying an Icon«. Die Mosaikikone des hl. Demetrios in Sassoferrato und ihr Rahmen

Dieser Beitrag widmet sich einer spätbyzantinischen Mosaikikone und ihrem Silberrahmen, die beide seit dem 15. Jahrhundert bekannt sind und heute im Museo Civico in Sassoferrato aufbewahrt werden. Die Ikone, ein hinsichtlich Material und Technik auffallendes Objekt, und ihr Rahmen ergänzen sich und präsentieren ein komplexes und herausragendes Programm der Verehrung des hl. Demetrios von Thessaloniki. Elemente sind die Darstellungen des Heiligen selbst sowie eine Ampulle mit dem heiligen Myron und Inschriften, die sich auf ihn beziehen. Dieses ungewöhnliche Programm deutet auf eine konkrete Bestellung hin, und die Embleme in den Ecken des Rahmens weisen auf ein Mitglied der kaiserlichen Familie der Palaiologoi, wahrscheinlich Demetrios Palaiologos (ca. 1296-1344), Despot von Thessaloniki, mit einer tiefen Verehrung für den hl. Demetrios, als Auftraggeber.