

GREEK EPITAPHIOI AND OTHER EVIDENCE FOR THE SHROUD IN CONSTANTINOPLE UP TO 1204

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Today the premiere difficulty relating to the history of the Turin Shroud (TS) is tying Bishop d'Arcis's 1355 Lirey Shroud—the very first undoubted reference in history to the Shroud in Turin today—to that Mandyllion which was documented in Edessa since at least the 4th c. and in Constantinople between 944 and 1204. Two major documents have greatly helped in establishing the needed link: the Gregory Sermon of August 16, 944, which suggests strongly a full-length image on the Mandyllion just arrived from Edessa, and the Pray Codex of 1192-5 (fig. 1). This codex shows the Shroudlike folded hands without thumbs and the four-burn-hole pattern, still seen on the TS.

Ilona Berkovits, the premiere interpreter of the Pray Codex wrote: "It is not impossible that the miniaturist followed the illumination of an earlier, more elaborate manuscript, from the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century, which has since been lost, and copied its compositions." This burn-pattern (fig. 2) was already present on the TS before the Lierre copy (dated 1516) was made (fig. 3). The Pray Codex is evidence that this pattern was seen on the TS even earlier—when the Shroud would have been in Constantinople, where a shroud of Christ was, in fact, amply documented.

Mario Latendresse, a computer scientist from the University of Montréal, has reminded us (personal letter) that if the Pray Codex, in fact, proves the Shroud in Eastern Europe (and more precisely in Constantinople) in 1192, where a shroud was documented by Robert of Clari and numerous others from 944 to 1204), then the artist of Bishop d'Arcis's Memorandum (1389) could not have created the original shroud thirty-four years earlier, in 1355, no matter what he told Bishop Henri de Poitiers. The word "depinxit" in the Memorandum then must mean "the artist copied," and not "the artist painted" the Lirey Shroud.

In the crucial illustration from the Pray Codex, the tomb slab is strangely decorated. What is one to make of the very "noisy," unusually flamboyant Greek key motif? As in so many cases, to cut to the point, obscurities such as this often become brightly lit when one inserts the Shroud into the context. Arguably, then, it is possible that this naive artist was naively representing the herring-bone twill of the TS. The early date of this Codex and the presence of these several Shroud elements strongly suggest that the artist of the Codex saw the Shroud during its Constantinople period.

Is that herringbone twill, then, all that remarkable? It does seem that it is. We may recall the certainty of members of the C14 labs that tested the TS in 1988 that they could easily tell the Shroud from the control samples because of its particular weave. It is of extreme importance to recall that even the jeweller or engraver who created the die for the 14th-15th c. medallion found in the Seine River—which does definitely represent the Lirey-Chambery-Turin Shroud's twin image—noticed and incised that special and apparently very rare weave. And the medallion is only about 2.4 inches across (fig. 4).

If the link to Constantinople can be firmed up, it would contribute greatly to the scientific work that is gradually building its own case for refutation of the C14 dating and that is contributing to the intellectual and scholarly rehabilitation of the TS. In this paper I set out to see if a study of the liturgy, art, and texts coming from the Greek East might give historical underpinning to the evidence of the Pray Codex and the Gregory Sermon. To a large extent, my research focused on the Shroud's twill.

Last summer (1998) in Torino, Fr. Kim Dreisbach showed me some illustrations of Byzantine epitaphioi that bore the lamentation scene known by the Greek word threnos. He pointed to the weave-pattern on the shroud upon which Jesus lay in death. In several cases it was the exact 3-to-1 twill we see on the Shroud. Could this be the hoped-for reinforcement of the evidence of the Pray Codex and the Gregory sermon?

My conclusion is that it was—and it wasn't. The twill on these embroidered cloths, it seems, may have been random, just one of the several possible types of weave used by Byzantine weavers. It appears here and there in halos of angels and in garments as a variation to set them off from their neighboring weave-types. In some, the cloth on which Jesus was placed in these embroideries has the twill, but Jesus' hands are not folded Shroudlike but by his side. The variations found in the epitaphioi are many. But the positive hints are exciting and provide potential new evidence that the Shroud was once in Constantinople.

Small Eucharistic chalice or paten coverlets (called an aër or amnos, Greek for "lamb") had been used for centuries in the Byzantine or Greek Orthodox Mass. The amnos aër cloths, seen already at the start of the Christian era, originally (and sometimes) had an illustration of a lamb. This prevailed until 692, year of the so-called Quinisext Council in Trullo. The 82nd canon of the Trullo Council did not say Christ should be represented as infant or adult, but just that his human figure should be substituted for the lamb. Thus artists were often inexact in differentiating these two themes, adult Jesus in threnos attitude in church murals and on epitaphioi and infant Jesus as a cloth-borne symbol of the sacrificial lamb during the melismos Eucharistic office. Melismos means the "breaking" of the bread for communion.

At some indefinite time in the 11-12th c., large epitaphioi threnoi ("funeral lamentation" cloths) began to be used during Holy Week in the Greek liturgy. These bore representations of the dead Christ, sometimes life-sized, upon His shroud. A fresco of the 16th c. is the most telling representation of the carrying of the epitaphios in the Byzantine procession of the Great Entry during Holy Week (fig. 4a). The fresco is in the monastery church of Kaisariani in Athens. On it one can see an image of the life-sized Christ.

For purposes of this paper, let me say that I am grouping together the woven and embroidered epitaphioi and the mural threnos scenes. All the scholars I have consulted agree that there was an evolution by which the more pathetic threnos Jesus overtook the placid epitaphios Jesus and appeared as well on the woven examples. In further evolution of this art, the attendants at the cross mentioned in the NT, i.e., the Virgin, John the beloved, the other Marys, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, are all depicted. And, of course, the ubiquitous angels. So many of these cloths and murals bear

Shroudlike Christs that the question must be asked whether they came about in some way because of the presence of the TS in the Byzantine East—again, i.e., Constantinople?

There must have been weavers who made these liturgical cloths but had never seen the original Shroud or a copy. Only this explains those epitaphioi that do not resemble the TS. It is interesting in the extreme that most of the examples of mural and cloth threnoi derive from Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo, and a bit later, from Romania. Those artists will not likely have seen the original, though the Romanian scholar Émile Turdeanu noted that along with the predominant Byzantine Christian influences in this region, there was also a less pervasive Latin-Catholic influence. However, this influence would have come only from Hungary and Poland and not, I think, from Lirey.

(And let us hope these Serbian examples still exist as we speak.)

More to the point, could some weavers have been working from the original TS or a copy of it? From my study of this liturgical art, this is a distinct possibility. The plot thickens when we introduce the "Man of Pity" or "Man of Sorrows" art into the context of the period when the Shroud would have been in Constantinople (fig. 5). One of the earliest extant is today in Rome in the Church of S. Croce in Gerusalemme and dates from c. 1300. Scholars agree that it was made in a Constantinopolitan atelier.

Hans Belting, a giant among Byzantine scholars, has noted what for him is the true meaning of the "Man of Sorrows" icon, the icon-type which seems to represent Jesus in the process of rising up from the tomb. "In my opinion," he wrote, "it is the visual expression of its ritual function." Those who have made a study of the Shroud will know that this icon-type seems accurately to illustrate the Edessa Easter rituals (before 944). In the chief description of this ritual we read that the image of Jesus' entire body was never shown to the faithful close up. In Edessa, it was kept in a gold chest (scrinium) and on Easter it used to change its appearance according to different ages: it showed itself in infancy at the first hour of the day (7 a.m.), childhood at the third hour, adolescence at the sixth hour, and the fullness of age at the ninth hour, when the Son of God came to His Passion and cross.

The "Man of Sorrows" also resonates Nicholas Mesarites' and Robert de Clari's texts, both who referred to the shroud in Constantinople in 1200 as gradually rising or standing up. In personal correspondence Dreisbach has noted numerous texts—his now famous "spy clues" (he considers these to be deliberately veiled references to the TS during the early centuries of the Christian movement)—that may further support the notions introduced by Clari and Mesarites.

Elsewhere I have identified other apocryphal texts that describe this "changing" or "polymorphic" Jesus. These show that the moment in the Byzantine Mass known as the melismos seems to have been related to or intertwined with all these considerations. In this Eucharistic ritual, the cloth with the image of the infant's body was placed over the loaf of bread, and the celebrant cut through the cloth, piercing the figure of the infant in the side as he cut the bread into the communion morsels with a scalpel called a *lónche* or "lance." The infant Jesus thus symbolically changes into the adult Jesus who is the actual sacrificial victim of Good Friday and who distributed his body to the disciples at the Last Supper. This latter is a mural subject in virtually every Byzantine church (fig. 6).⁵ The

theme is also figured on a large number of aëres and later on some epitaphioi, notably on that at Salonika, discussed below.

Both the mural representations of melismos and the threnos and the epitaphios scenes on textiles make visible the sacrificial host, whether in the guise of the Christ-child or in that of the dead Christ. In other words, the veil which had been in use long before, now received an image which was to make more visible and poignant its Passion (Last Supper and burial) symbolism. According to Belting, the coincidence in time of the introduction of the threnos veil image and that of the melismos still remains unexplained. The literature of Edessa's shroud, as seen in the above ritual, places some light on the mystery.

The earliest preserved melismos mural is at Kurbinovo in present-day Macedonia, dating to 1192. In poor state, it shows the adult Jesus lying on a Mass paten. In most cases after this, the infant replaces the adult Jesus in melismos illustrations. The central motif of the fresco at Kafiona (So. Peloponnese, late 13th c.) is, perhaps, the most explicit example of realism (fig. 7). The actual mural is barely visible today. It pictures the infant Jesus pierced in the right side with the blood gushing out. Often the infant is shown in the presence of the chalice, such as in the church of Donja Kamenica and in Milutin's church, both at Studenica (c. 1200) (fig. 8), at Chilandari (near Mt. Athos, 1300) (fig. 9), and at Ljuboten (Romania, 1337) (fig. 10). Note that "chalice" derives from Greek kylix, a somewhat shallow and stemmed drinking cup. The word kylix applied to that bowl- or paten-like cup may have led to a great confusion in the Western stories of the Holy Grail, which are uncomfortably flexible as to whether the Grail was a chalice or a dish.

Getting to the new material I wish to introduce, I have now read several interpretations, including that of Kurt Weitzmann, of the origins of the new threnos ("lamentation") and epitaphios ("burial scene") motifs that do not consider the Shroud in their explanations. And yet, as we know and as I hope to show, much in this area that is not otherwise understood, even by solid scholars, begins to make sense as soon as the Shroud is invoked.

Hans Belting is one of the few who have perceived the Shroud as at least one factor among many in the rise of the larger cloth epitaphioi and the new mural art, but sadly he did not follow it up as we might have wished. Belting noticed what he called a new empathetic realism in liturgical representation during the 11th-12th c.

He noted that the threnos art, from its inception in the 11th c., reflects a liturgical change(!) as well as the new mood of empathetic involvement of the congregation in the suffering of Jesus. It became a favorite theme of "a new language of Church art" and was even accompanied by a threnos office.

He adds: The epitaphios woven cloth is of a type that makes "no sense when studied on the basis of the biblical text alone." Whence then did it arise? Belting agrees with other scholars that the developed use of the threnos motif on epitaphioi evolved in steps out of those smaller veils which covered the Holy Gifts (bread and chalice). In this new art, he says, "Eucharistic symbolism is combined with Passion realism." What then was the origin of this shift?

Belting continues: "There was what was believed to be the authentic relic of the Holy Shroud preserved in the chapel of the Palace before it ended up in Turin. The existence of the true likeness of the buried Christ justified the creation of our icon; with time, the icon came to reflect a shift of emphasis to the burial proper, which explains the burial position of the crossed hands." Evidence for the Shroud in Constantinople half a century prior to the earliest C14 date ("with 95% certainty") is here forthcoming from the pen of a scholar who is properly reluctant to issue his complete imprimatur on the Shroud's authenticity. Instead, he did little else than cite Vignon, J. Wilson (sic), Mesarites, and Clari.

Belting is not alone in his intimations of a linkage between the new art and the Shroud. Dora Iliopoulou-Rogan (p.116) suggests it and cites D. I Pallas (pp. 256-7 and 800) and Vignon. She notes that the origin of the adult Christ found on liturgical cloths (aërs) may be the shroud of Constantinople described by Clari. Johnstone shows that the artistic trends that appeared in the various parts of the Byzantine East, and featured in this essay, must have originated in the capital.

The examples with which I will conclude are either actual liturgical epitaphioi used on Good Friday and Holy Saturday or they are mural illustrations depicting the Eucharistic moments of the Byzantine Mass when these cloths were in use.

These examples show up the movement toward empathetic realism so enjoyed by the Byzantine Greeks of the late Middle Ages, movement that Belting and others think was inspired by the presence of the Turin Shroud. Since some of these examples are late, 14th-15th c., the question to be asked—and answered—is whether the twill, where it appears, is a remembrance of a cloth looking backward in time to Constantinople or whether it was woven by a Greek artist with a knowledge of the twill of the Shroud in Lirey/Chambery.

Though created after the burial wrapping of Jesus had, according to Clari, disappeared from Constantinople (his sydoines is singular), it is still true that these late threnoi were produced before any notoriety surrounding the Lirey Shroud. Thus they look backward, not forward. And they represent the weaver's or muralist's art inspired by and based upon something already known from Constantinople and not by a reputed Shroud in the West. On this point, it should be remembered that information backed up by written documents was not exactly passing in torrents between East and West—or anywhere—in the 14th c. Most documents were one-of-a-kind. The information age resulting from Gutenberg's printing press had not yet begun.

[Barrie, Insert here "Map of Yugoslavia (fig. 11)"]

As early as 1164 a threnos mural was painted and a liturgical epitaphios was woven in Nerezi, Serbia (fig. 12), both which showed the body of Jesus lying upon a symbolic burial sheet. I could not obtain a picture of the epitaphios with enough detail to enable me to comment on it. The mural, however, is important as it shows a shroud designed with a series of Xs very much like the Xs that decorate several artists' copies of the Mandyllion that begin to appear in the tenth century with the gorgeous Mandyllion from Cappadocia first brought to our attention by Lennox Manton (fig. 13; see also fig. 14).

It is not precisely a herring-bone weave, but does hint at it. Another interpretation of the Xs, of course, is that they represent Chi, the first Greek character in the name Xpistos. It seems that this X design was common in the Kosovo (Eastern European) region since the Edessa cloth was depicted in a mural at Studenica in 1235 with precisely the same design (fig. 15).

Among the many epitaphioi, Belting singled out that of Voevod Uros Milutin, Belgrade, ca. 1300 (fig. 16). Kim Dreisbach notes that the color of the hair in this epitaphios, and in others as well, is orangish red—a possible derivative of the sepia on the Shroud. Moreover, he notes, this Christ is standing, as one sees from the position of the angels in the upper corners, a resonance with the examples of the Man of Pity and with the accounts of Clari and Mesarites already discussed. What it manifests is the best art of epitaphios decoration as it was prior to the empathetic trend by which the threnos emotionalism came to dominate the genre.

Another great masterpiece of epitaphios/threnos art is the example from Salonika in Northern Greece, from the 14th c. It, too, has the twill, but we find that same weave pattern in various other places on the cloth as well (fig. 17). It is significant that this specimen has the threnos theme (one of the angels is clearly weeping) centered between two Eucharistic scenes of Christ giving communion to his disciples. The Eucharistic melismos-threnos connection is hereby reinforced. This cloth stands in stark contrast to that of Uros Milutin, as it begins to portray the dead Christ of the threnos rather than the Christ in glory.

A great aer-epitaphios from the monastery at Stavronikita (14th-15th c.) was created in the atelier of Mt. Athos. Thus it is Greek. It also has the twill weave and reddish coloration, both resonating the Shroud. It is not a NT scene complete with all the familiar characters, but goes a step beyond the placid, glorious Jesus of the Uros Milutin example (fig. 18).

The epitaphios from Cozia (Wallachia, Romania) dates from 1396. Jesus' hands are Shroudlike, and his shroud has the twill weave (fig. 19). It is significant that this example is among the first to intrude in its threnos scene two mourning figures (the Virgin and John), thus uniting fully the new poignant representation of lamentation with the liturgical cloth. A key example, it contributes to the evidence offered in this essay that the shroud documented in Constantinople was always the same as in Torino today.

The epitaphios from Putna, Romania, is the handwork of a Romanian princess Euthymia (or Euphemia) and her daughter Eupraxia and is dated 1405. These women took the habit of a nun after the fall from power of Euthymia's husband. Its special feature is that it recalls the folded arms and hands as is seen in the Man of Pity art (fig. 20). The same attitude of the hands can be seen on another epitaphios, that of a noble family of the Morea (Peloponnesus) now in the Victoria and Albert Museum and dating to 1407. Here, even the angels seem to be mourning, and there is no text of praise but only the Good Friday verses about Joseph of Arimathea and the spice-bearing, mourning women. On the border of the shroud on which Jesus lies can also be seen the twill weave reminiscent of the Turin Shroud's (fig. 21). There are several other examples with the Man of Pity's folded arms.

A prince of Moldavia, Basil Lupus, donated a great epitaphios to Vatopedi monastery in 1651. The reddish coloration of Jesus' hair and the herringbone weave were too striking

to allow this example to be omitted, though it is very late. It does manifest, though, the lasting persistence of these Shroudlike features in the art that follows the Byzantine tradition (fig. 22).

Considering now the convincing evidence of flower-imprints on the Shroud developed by the Whangers and their Israeli colleagues, Avinoam Danin and Uri Baruch, it is significant that many epitaphioi also bear numerous flower illustrations, though sometimes stylized as stars or simple rosettes, seemingly scattered at random around the body of Jesus. They, too, we must note, contribute to support the hypothesis that traces the Turin Shroud to a 260-year sojourn in Constantinople before it began its still-mysterious westward journey. The floral motif on numerous epitaphioi deserves a careful study in its own right¹⁴.

Most of the surviving embroideries belong to the Palaeologan era (14th c.); there are a few older articles but, as seen above, none from before the twelfth century. Perhaps we did not need to find an example of the herringbone twill in Byzantine embroidery prior to 1355. Given the split between the Greek Orthodox Church and Rome, it is highly unlikely that the Greek East would have any knowledge of the particulars of a shroud in tiny Lirey. While the French went to the East prior to 1204, the Greeks did not reciprocate following the Fourth Crusade. What is quite amazing is the very fact that this pattern is retained four centuries after any Greek or East European might have seen the original. Logic would seem to indicate that if the pattern is retained in a liturgical embroidery even in the 17th c., it is because it has a firmly established precedent whose origins may well have been forgotten, but which became part of the artist's/weaver's "manual" when the original Mandylion/Shroud was in Byzantium and available to the chosen few for up-close inspection.

ENDNOTES

1. Daniel Scavone, "The Shroud in Constantinople: The Documentary Evidence," in Robert F. Sutton, Jr., ed., *Daidalikon: Studies in Memory of Raymond V. Schoder, S.J.* (Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Pub., 1989) 311-329.

2. Hans Belting, "An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 34-35 (1980-81) 1-16; Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages* (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide Caratzas, 1981).

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Vénétiá Cottas, "Contribution à l'étude de quelques tissus liturgiques," *Studi bizantini e neoellenici*, 6, 1949, 87-102.

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Christopher Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London: Variorum, 1982).
Kurt Weitzmann, "The Origins of the Threnos," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL*,

Essays in Honor of Irwin Panofsky (New York: New York Univ. Pr., 1961) 476-490.

3. Gino Zaninotto, "L'Immagine Edessena: Impronta dell'Intera Persone de Cristo. Nuova Conferma del Codex Vossianus Latinus Q69," Proceedings of the Rome Conference on the Turin Shroud (June 1993). Zaninotto considers this 10th c. Latin Abgar text to be a copy of an 8th-9th c. Syriac text; it is virtually identical with the tractatus called the "Oldest Latin Abgar Legend" by Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder* (Leipzig: Pries, 1899) 134**, who saw it in 14th c. Codex Parisiensis B.N. Lat. 6041:

Asserunt autem religiosi plerique viri, qui eum cernere meruerunt, quod in sancto die pasce per diversas se mutare consueverat [a]etatum species, id est ut prima hora diei infantiam, tertia vero puericiam, sexta quoque adulescentiam, nona autem [a]etatis se premonstrat habere plenitudinem, in qua ad passionem dei filius veniens pro nostrorum pondere criminum dirum crucis pertulit supplicium.

4. Daniel Scavone, "Joseph of Arimathea, the Holy Grail, and the Edessa Icon," *Arthuriana*, forthcoming. See Dobschütz, 147** for an Armenian account. See also the 2nd c. apocryphal text *Acta Johannis* in Edgar Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed; R. McL. Wilson, tr., 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963). Both involve a polymorphic (child/man) or ephemeral Jesus.

5. Gabriel Millet, *Recherches sur L'Iconographie de l'Évangile* (Paris, 1916). See also Ștefănescu.

6. Belting, "An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy (above, n. 2).

7. For the Kurbinovo mural, see the discussion in Walter, above, n. 2, and in Hamann-Mac Lean.

8. A good discussion of the Kafiona mural may be read in Dora Iliopoulou-Rogan, "Sur une Fresque de la Période des Paléologues," *Byzantion*, vol. 41, 1971, 109-121.

9. These illustrations of the melismos may be seen in several sources in the Bibliography and Endnotes, especially Cottas, Hamann-Mac Lean, Millet, Ștefănescu, and Turdeanu.

10. See n. 4 above.

11. Weitzmann, see n. 2 above.

12. Ian Wilson, *The Turin Shroud* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978).

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romaine inédites ou peu connues: Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople* (Berlin: Weidemann, 1873); and Peter Dembrowski, "Sindon in the Old French Chronicle of Robert of Clari," *Shroud Spectrum*, 2 (March 1982) 13-18 (on sydoines as singular).

13. Iliopoulou-Rogan, op. cit. and D. I. Pallas, *Passion und Bestattung Christi* (Munich: *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia*, Heft 2, 1965).

14. Mary and Alan Whanger, *The Shroud of Turin: An Adventure of Discovery* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Pubs., 1998).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 Pray Codex of 1192-5.

Fig. 2 Burn-pattern on the Turin Shroud.

Fig. 3 Lierre copy of the Shroud, dated 1516.

Fig. 4 Seine River medallion, 14th-15th c.

Fig. 4a) Fresco: Carrying of the epitaphios in a Byzantine procession.
Monastery church of Kaisariani in Athens, 16th c.

Fig. 5 "Man of Pity": Church of S. Croce in Gerusalemme (Rome, c. 1300).

Fig. 6 Christ distributes his body to the disciples at the Last Supper (Typical).

Fig. 7 Melismos illustration: Fresco at Kafiona (So. Peloponnese, late 13th c.)

Fig. 8 Melismos: Church of Donja Kamenica and Milutin's church, both at Studenica, Kosovo (c. 1200).

Fig. 9 Melismos: Chilandari (near Mt. Athos, 1300).

Fig. 10 Melismos: Ljuboten (Romania, 1337).

Fig. 11 Map of Yugoslavia.

Fig. 12 Nerezi, Serbia: Threnos mural, 1164. Note the pattern of repeated Xs.

Fig. 13 10th c. Mandylion from Cappadocia; see also fig. 14).

Fig. 14 Other Mandylion examples.

Fig. 15 Kosovo (Eastern Europe): mural at Studenica in 1235 with X-design.

Fig. 16 Epitaphios of the Voevod Uros Milutin, Belgrade, ca. 1300.

Fig. 17 Epitaphios at Salonika (Northern Greece), 14th c.

Fig. 18 Aer-epitaphios from the monastery at Stavronikita (14th-15th c.) was created in the atelier of Mt. Athos.

Fig. 19 Epitaphios from Cozia (Wallachia, Romania) 1396.

Fig. 20 Epitaphios from Putna, Romania, 1405.

Fig. 21 Epitaphios, the Morea (Peloponnesus) now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1407.

Fig. 22 Epitaphios of Basil Lupus, Vatopedi monastery (near Mt. Athos), 1651.