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Thessalonica's Patron: Saint Demetrius or Emeterius?

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The publication of a revised version of James Skedros's doctoral dissertation on the origin and development of the cult of St. Demetrius at Thessalonica, the alleged site of his martyrdom, during the early and middle Byzantine periods is most welcome in itself, but it also invites renewed attention to an old problem.[1] What was the origin of the cult of St. Demetrius at Thessalonica? It is the purpose of this article to offer a fresh solution to this problem.

The Problem

The problem, briefly put, is the lack of early evidence for the cult of St. Demetrius at Thessalonica. The earliest surviving martyrology, the so-called *Syriac Breviary*, dates to 411 and is based on a Greek original which seems to have been

[1]James C. Skedros, *Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki: Civic Patron and Divine Protector 4th–7th Centuries CE* (HTS 47; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999). A summary of the dissertation may be found in *HTR* 89 (1996) 410–11. The book provides a thorough and long-overdue review of the growing, mainly foreign-language literature on this subject. Skedros is to be commended for the speed with which he has revised his dissertation and the readability of the final result. The appendices containing translations of two of the key sources will prove particularly useful for students. One minor criticism is that it does not contain a map of late antique Thessalonica such as may be found, for example, in H. Torp, "Thessalonique paléochrétienne. Une esquisse," in Lennart Rydén and Jan Olof Rosenqvist, eds., *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions 4, 1993), 113–32. It is inconvenient also that Skedros never refers to his primary sources by their listings in the standard catalogues for such texts, either in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* (Subsidia Hagiographica 6; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–99) or in François Halkin, ed., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (Subsidia Hagiographica 8; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes; 3rd ed., 1957).

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composed at Nicomedia ca. 362.[2] This contains many entries for martyrs or groups of martyrs who died in the wider Balkan region, but fails to mention a Demetrius martyred at Thessalonica.[3] Furthermore, he receives no mention either in the so-called *Hieronymian Martyrology,* which seems to have been composed in northern Italy sometime during the period ca. 431–50. This is not particularly surprising, however, since this martyrology seems also to have depended on a version of the Greek original of the *Syriac Breviary* for most of its knowledge of the eastern martyrs. Nevertheless, this absence implies not only that St. Demetrius did not die in Thessalonica, but that whatever it was that was responsible for his cult there probably occurred after ca. 362. Skedros circumvents these conclusions on the basis that the *Syriac Breviary*, or its Greek original rather, did not constitute a full and comprehensive list of the martyrs. He concludes, therefore, that there was a historical Demetrius who was martyred at and buried within the very walls of Thessalonica, at a site on or near where the Church of St. Demetrius was erected during the early fifth-century.[4] For whatever reason, the editor of the *Syriac Breviary* had simply neglected to include his name. To illustrate his point, Skedros draws our attention to the fact that the Rotunda at Thessalonica contains an inscription, dating to the second half of the fifth-century, which preserves the name, profession, and month of celebration of fifteen martyrs and that three of these—Leo, Onesiphoros, and Therinos—remain unknown either to the *Syriac Breviary* or the *Hieronymian Martyrology*, or so he claims.[5] In fact, the Therinos of the inscription, whose feast fell in July, is probably identifiable with the Tirinus whose feast the *Syriac Breviary* records on 7 June.[6] As for Onesiphoros, whose feast the inscription dates to August, his association with Porphyrius proves that he is identifiable with the martyr whom the later Greek synaxaries celebrate on 16 July and who has his ultimate origin in the Onesiphoros named by St. Paul at

[2] G.B. de Rossi and L. Duchesne, eds., *Acta SS* 65: *Novembris* 2.1 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1894) L–LXIX.

[3] For example, it includes two entries for Thessalonica (Fronto and three others on 14 March; Chionia and Agape on 2 April), two entries for Salona (Domnio on 11 April; Septimius and Hermogenes on 18 April), one entry for Bononia (Hermas on 30 December), and four entries for Sirmium (Irenaeus on 6 April; Demetrius on 9 April; Secundus on 20 June; Basilius on 29 August).

[4] Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 14–17.

[5] Ibid., 13–14. The inscription, from the Rotunda in Thessaloniki, is most conveniently found in Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs* (Subsidia Hagiographica 20; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1933), 231–32. Skedros appears to slip when he claims that it contains 14 rather than 15 names.

[6] There is a serious problem in the text of the *Syriac Breviary* at this point. It attributes a large number of martyrs to June (from 6 June onward), which the *Hieronymian Martyrology* and other sources prove to have belonged to July instead (from 6 July onward). The result is that it omits the names of the martyrs whose feasts really fell after 5 June.

2 Tim 1:16–18.[7] Hence he is a fictitious martyr. This leaves only the soldier Leo, whose feast the inscription appears to place in the month of March. But what evidence is there that he was a genuine martyr either? In the absence of such evidence, the existence of his cult at Thessalonica ca. 450 proves not so much that the *Syriac Breviary* and the *Hieronymian Martyrology* do not preserve a full list of martyrs, but that the creation of fictitious martyrs was a growing occurrence by the middle of the fifth-century.

This having been said, one can still sympathize with Skedros's basic argument, that these earliest martyrologies do not necessarily preserve a full list of martyrs. He has merely chosen the wrong examples in order to illustrate his point. Unfortunately, however, he has to prove not so much that these martyrologies do not preserve a full list of martyrs, a point which most scholars would probably readily concede, but that they do not preserve a full list of martyrs even by their limited standards. It is noteworthy, for example, that the *Syriac Breviary* restricts its notices to martyrs who, for the most part, died in major urban centers, even provincial or diocesan capitals, so that one suspects that much of its information was derived from local metropolitan sources. One must still, however, question whether these sources recorded all the martyrs who died at their centers or merely those whose cult continued to be celebrated at these centers because they had been buried there also. Simply proving the *Breviary*'s omission of the name of some martyr who had died at some more obscure location would not, therefore, confirm Skedros's argument, unless, of course, it noted the existence of other martyrs from the same location. Even then it would be preferable to prove not merely that the martyr had died there, but that he had been buried there as well.[8] In brief, Skedros must prove that the *Syriac Breviary* omits the name of a martyr whose feast was celebrated at a similarly early date, if not at Thessalonica itself, then at a comparable metropolitan center, preferably one for which it lists other martyrs. This he has failed to do.

As Skedros reveals in his frank discussion of the problem, the majority of modern scholars do not accept the existence of a historical St. Demetrius who was martyred for his faith at Thessalonica.[9] Instead they follow the hypoth-

[7]As noted by Delehaye, *Les origines*, 232.

[8]For example, the *encomium* that Gregory of Nyssa delivered in honour of the military martyr St. Theodore of Euchaita on 17 February 380 suggests that he was a genuine martyr and that the *Syriac Breviary* ought to have included his name. In general, see Constantine Zuckerman, "Cappadocian Fathers and the Goths," *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 473–86, esp. 479–86. This omission might seem all the more noteworthy in that he was actually executed at the provincial capital at Amasea and the *Breviary* does include one entry for martyrs at Amasea (Philanthes and three companions on 18 August). But Theodore was buried at Euchaita, and there is no evidence that his cult was celebrated at Amasea by the time of the composition of the Greek original of the *Breviary* ca. 362.

[9]Add the article by Alexander Kazhdan and Nancy Patterson Ševčenko ("Demetrios of Thessalonike," *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* [3 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991] 1. 605) to the other modern sources cited by Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 12–13.

esis best advanced by the Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye, who, in response to the absence of a Demetrius of Thessalonica from the earliest martyrologies, sought to identify him instead with the Demetrius whose martyrdom at Sirmium the *Syriac Breviary* records on 9 April. More specifically, he claimed that the cult of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica had developed as a result of the translation to Thessalonica of some relics of St. Demetrius of Sirmium.[10] This hypothesis had two great advantages. First, it explained the unusual location of the central cult-site for St. Demetrius at a prominent location within the walls of Thessalonica. Since the Romans did not allow burials within the walls of their cities, Christians had always buried their dead, including their martyrs, in cemeteries outside the cities, so that it was there—outside the walls—that the martyrial churches had normally developed. Unless one assumes that something very unusual has occurred in the case of St. Demetrius's church at Thessalonica, the natural assumption, based on its location, would be that it had not in fact developed over the original burial site of St. Demetrius.[11] The second advantage to the hypothesis posited by Delehaye is that it explains why successive bishops of Thessalonica were never able to produce any of St. Demetrius's corporeal remains.[12] They could not because they had never possessed any to begin with. Their church was not in fact built over the burial-site of St. Demetrius, even though this was what they came to believe in time, and, one assumes, the original relics about which the cult had developed must have consisted of contact-relics, items which had allegedly come into contact with the martyr's corporeal remains rather than a portion of these remains themselves. Finally, one must add that the so-called *Passio altera*[13] identifies one of the relics about which the cult was centered as an *orarium*, a neckscarf. In so far as this had formed a part of the deacon's vestments since at least the late fourth century,[14] and the *Hieronymian Martyrology* specifically identifies St. Demetrius of Sirmium as a deacon, this does lend some further credence to Delehaye's hypothesis. This is not to claim that the original St. Demetrius of Sirmium must have owned such an item, or that such an item could have survived even if he had owned one. Nevertheless, by

[10]Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris: Picard, 1909) 106–08.

[11]Skedros *(Saint Demetrios*, 14) appears to accept the explanation offered by *BHG* 496 for the burial of St.Demetrius within the city, that it simply did not occur to anyone to remove his body for a proper burial outside the city.

[12]Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 85–88.

[13]*BHG* 497 in Halkin, ed., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca,* 153.

[14]Its use is attested by canons 22 and 23 of the Council of Laodicea (exact date disputed). See, for example, Karl Joseph von Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux* (trans. Henri Leclercq; 16 vols.; Paris: Adrien Le Cerf, 1870) 2.151–52.

the end of the fourth century, had someone made what seemed a sufficiently authoritative claim, many Christians would readily have accepted the identification of such an item as a genuine contact-relic; such was the nature of the age.

Unfortunately, although Delehaye's hypothesis suffers disadvantages as well, this has not prevented its widespread adoption. The first of these disadvantages is that it does not explain how the cult of a deacon was transformed into the cult of a military martyr. As Skedros notes, there is not the slightest hint in the existing evidence relating to St. Demetrius of Thessalonica, whether literary or iconographical, that he was ever identified as a deacon.[15] The second problem is that this interpretation directly contradicts the literary evidence. According to the *Passio altera*, when a prefect of Illyricum by the name of Leontius reinvigorated the cult of St. Demetrius at Thessalonica by building a new house for his relics, he then took some of these relics to Sirmium.[16] Hence the literary tradition proves the transfer of the cult from Thessalonica to Sirmium, not vice-versa. One could, of course, imagine a scenario by which some relics of the deacon St. Demetrius of Sirmium were translated to Thessalonica only to develop a new identity and be re-translated, in part at least, back to Sirmium in their new guise as relics of the military martyr St. Demetrius of Thessalonica. Yet the more complicated one's hypothesis, and the poorer one assumes the existing evidence to be, the less credible it becomes also. Instead, the modern consensus is that a simple error has occurred, that the names of Sirmium and Thessalonica were accidentally switched at an early stage in the literary tradition, so that the present tale of the translation of the relics from Thessalonica to Sirmium preserves the memory of a genuine translation of relics but in reverse form.[17] Skedros's approach to this tale is even more drastic. He concludes that "the story of the transfer of the cult of St. Demetrios to Sirmium through the efforts of the prefect Leontius is simply the creation of the anonymous author of the *Passio altera*" and seeks to explain its creation by reference to the long-standing civic rivalry between Sirmium and Thessalonica already in place at the beginning of the eighth century.[18] Yet he also admits that the cult of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica did eventually subsume that of the deacon St. Demetrius even in Sirmium itself, and accepts that the translation of some relics of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica to Sirmium must have played a large part in this process.[19] Hence he finds himself in the position of denying the translation of

[15]Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 17.

[16]*Passio altera (BHG* 497) chs. 15–16.

[17]Michael Vickers, "Sirmium or Thessaloniki? A Critical Examination of the St. Demetrius Legend," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 67 (1974) 337–50.

[18]Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 26.

[19]Ibid., 28.

relics from Thessalonica to Sirmium as attested by the literary tradition, while assuming a similar such translation at some undetermined later date that has left no trace in the tradition whatsoever.

A Fresh Solution

It is important at this point to provide a brief summary of the relative merits of the surviving accounts of the martyrdom of St. Demetrius. There survive three short accounts of Demetrius's martyrdom, which are said to represent the "shorter version" of his martyrdom. These include two Greek passions—an anonymous text and a text compiled by Photius of Constantinople (in his *Bibliotheca* dating ca. 855)—and one Latin text, also known as the *Passio prima*, which Anastasius Bibliothecarius sent to Charles the Bald in 876. There also survives a "longer version" of his martyrdom represented by a sole, anonymous Greek text, also known as the *Passio altera*. As its name suggests, the latter text contains many details absent from the three texts representative of the so-called "shorter version," but both versions report the same sequence of events and agree in all essentials. Therefore, what is the relationship between the two versions? It had traditionally been assumed that the "longer version" is an embellishment of the "shorter version," but it has recently been argued that they are merely differently abridged versions of a more extensive narrative.[20] If this is the case, one cannot simply dismiss the additional details appearing in the "longer version" as late, fictitious additions to an original tradition. There is no obvious way of deciding which is the correct interpretation, so it is important to highlight that in what follows next I assume the latter interpretation to be true.

To begin, therefore, I want to draw attention to the identity of the relics of St. Demetrius as reported by the *Passio altera*. It reports the existence of two contact-relics immediately after the execution of Demetrius, his *orarium*, or neckscarf, and his ring:

> In this way was the all-glorious martyr put to death having fulfilled the witness of a good confession. Loupos, a servant of St. Demetrios, after taking proper care of the body, took the saint's neckscarf (τὸ ὀράριον) having collected his blood in it. [13] Taking also the royal ring (τὸ βασιλικὸν δακτύλιον), which the saint was wearing on his hand, and dipping it in his holy blood, Loupos was able to accomplish many miracles of healing through it.[21]

[20]See Skedros, *Saint Demetrius*, 60–70, on Aristotle Mentzos, Τὸ προσκύνημα τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης στὰ βυζαντινὰ χρόνια (Athens: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1994).

[21]*BHG* 497, chs. 12–13. I follow the translation of Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 153, except that he transliterates ὀράριον as *orarion*.

Unfortunately, the *Passio* does not record what happened to these relics later, after the execution of Loupos in turn, the burial of Demetrius, and the ending of the persecution of Christians; but the *orarium* does make a second appearance when the *Passio* records the identity of the relics which the prefect Leontius took to Illyricum after his miraculous cure at the shrine of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica:

> Deciding to depart for Illyricum, Leontios wanted to take with him some of the relics of the martyr in order to place them in a church which he built there in the saint's name. However, the all-glorious, victorious one of Christ appeared to Leontios at night and prevented him from taking his relics. Leontios, therefore, took the martyr's *chlamys*, which was drenched in the saint's blood, as well as part of his neckscarf. He made a silver reliquary and placed these prized possessions in it. . . . Arriving at Sirmium, he placed the holy vessel with the treasures inside in the all-holy church that he had built there in honor of the holy martyr Demetrios.[22]

Even if the story concerning the initial survival of Demetrius's *orarium* and ring after his death is complete fiction, as I believe it to be, it was clearly designed to provide a provenance for two such alleged relics. It proves that at some point in the cult of St. Demetrius, the church at Thessalonica possessed an *orarium* and a gold ring which it believed to have belonged to Demetrius himself.[23]

Next, I want to emphasize the unusual nature of these relics. No other martyr is said to have left such a combination of relics.[24] It is not a hagiographical commonplace. The only time one comes across something similar is when one reads the poet Prudentius's account of the miracle that preceded the deaths of the Spanish military martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius.[25] He bemoans the loss of the records of the trial of these martyrs, but then resumes:

[22]*BHG* 497, chs. 16–17. Translation from Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 154.

[23]Skedros's position on these contact-relics remains unclear. He accepts (*Saint Demetrios*, 66–67) that the story of their use as preserved by the *Passio altera* was probably in circulation by the early seventh century, when bishop John of Thessalonica composed his *Miracula S. Demetrii*, but he does not make it clear whether he accepts that the relics themselves had ever really existed. On the whole, it does not strike me as very convincing that any Christian community should have preserved some former possessions of a martyr while losing track of where exactly they had buried the martyr himself. Knowledge of the exact location of the martyr's burial ought to have been passed down through the same channels as the possessions themselves.

[24]Of the military martyrs, the African martyr St. Typasius left a shield (*scutum*), which was used to mark his grave, and the faithful used to tear pieces off it for use as relics (*Passio Typasii* 7). A fictitious martyr, his cult only developed ca. 397. See David Woods, "An Unnoticed Official: The *Praepositus Saltus*," *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994) 245–51. Nothing similar can be found in the acts of any of the other military martyrs; for example, Christopher, Fabius, Florian, George, Marcellus, Maximilian, Menas, Theagenes, or Theodore, fictitious or not.

[25]John Petruccione, "Prudentius Use of Martyrological Topoi in Peristephanon," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1985), 58–59, compares the appearance of an *orarium* in Prudentius's

> One honour at least is not hidden from us nor wanes through lapse of time, how the offerings they sent up flew off through the air to show, as they went shining on before, that the path to heaven was open. A ring (*anulus*), representing the faith of the one, was carried up in a cloud, while the other, as they tell, gave a neckscarf (*orarium*) as the pledge of his lips, and they were caught up by the wind of heaven and passed into the depths of light. The glint of the gold was lost to sight in the vault of the clear sky, and the white fabric escaped from the eyes that sought long to follow it; both were carried up to the stars and seen no more. This sight the gathered bystanders saw, and the executioner himself, and he checked his hand and stood motionless, blanching in amazement: but in spite of all he carried the stroke through, so that their glory should not be lost.[26]

Prudentius is our earliest source for this pair of martyrs,[27] and it is highly likely that they never existed.[28] For whatever reason, a shrine to two martyrs, Emeterius and Chelidonius, developed at Calagurris in Hispania Tarraconensis, and, writing sometime before 405, Prudentius seems to have to do his best in order to flesh out

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account of Emeterius and Chelidonius to the description of the use of "handkerchiefs" to bind the eyes of those about to be executed in other martyrial accounts. To refer to his examples, however, bishop Cyprian of Carthage's eyes were bound with *laciniae manuales*, not an *orarium* (*Acta Cypriani* 5.5), as were the eyes of his fellow Carthaginian Montanus (*Martyrium Montani et Luci* 15.2). While it is true that Julius's eyes were bound with an *orarium* (*Passio Juli* 4.4), he was a military veteran and may well have continued to dress in military style, with an *orarium*, after his retirement, unless his military executioner gave him his own out of sympathy for a fellow soldier. The important points here, however, are, first, that neither Emeterius nor Chelidonius use the *orarium* to bind their eyes and, second, that none of these sources associates the "handkerchief" with a ring. There is no real comparison with the texts mentioned, and the presence of the *orarium* is not a martyrological topos. The above texts may all be found in Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

[26]Prudentius *Perist.* 1. 82–93. Translation from H. J. Thomson, ed., *Prudentius* (LCL 2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953) 2. 105–7, with the exception that he translates *orarium* as "handkerchief." The description of the dress of a typical late fourth-century imperial guard in the poem *The Vision of Dorotheus* (l. 332) reveals that the *orarium* was worn about the neck. See Jan Bremmer, "An Imperial Palace Guard in Heaven: The Date of the Vision of Dorotheus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 75 (1988) 82–88.

[27]In general on Prudentius's sources for his *Peristephanon*, see Ann-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 227–77, esp. 237–79.

[28]He has based his description of their dress and status on the dress and status of imperial guardsmen in his day. See, for example, Michael Speidel, "The Master of the Dragon Standards and the Imperial Torc: An Inscription from Prusias and Prudentius's *Peristephanon*," *TAPA* 115 (1985) 283–87. On the donation of gold rings by late antique emperors to higher ranking soldiers at least, see Ida Malte Johansen, "Rings, Fibulae, and Buckles with Imperial Portraits and Inscriptions," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994) 223–42. Although it does not directly affect my argument in this note, I believe that Prudentius was inspired to describe Emeterius and Chelidonius as imperial guardsmen by his reading of, if not the passion of

some very thin material on this subject, despite his own Spanish origin.[29] Several things immediately strike one about the above incident. First, it receives a disproportionate amount of attention within its poem. Although Prudentius spares only sixty-three lines (ll. 31–93) for his main subject, his narrative account of the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius, he then spends twelve of these (ll. 82–93) on the miraculous ascension into heaven of the *orarium* and ring. Would not a lengthy account of their endurance under torture, for example, have proved much more inspiring for any audience had Prudentius merely wished to stretch out his material in some way? Second, it is the only miracle in his account of their martyrdom and stands in stark contrast to Prudentius's sober, although somewhat vague, account of their lives and final trial together beforehand. Next, the fact that Prudentius interrupts his narrative to bewail the loss of the records of their trial immediately before he returns to his description of the ascension of the *orarium* and ring and the final execution of the martyrs serves to emphasize his critical approach and to reassure his audience that they can accept his claim in this matter at least. He then attempts to reinforce his credibility further by specifically noting that there were bystanders who saw this miracle, as well, of course, as the executioner himself (l. 90). Finally, the whole episode runs counter to what one might expect to find at this juncture in a martyr account. The narrator usually describes how or why certain relics managed to survive, not how they disappeared for good. In brief, this passage reads as if Prudentius is trying to disprove the continued survival of the *orarium* and ring of Emeterius and Chelidonius, as if he is arguing in direct reply to a claim to this very effect.[30]

It is important at this point to highlight the differences between Prudentius's account of the ascension of Emeterius's and Chelidonius's *orarium* and ring and the *Passio altera's* account of the survival of Demetrius's *orarium* and ring. There are no similarities beyond the identities of these objects themselves. There is no sign that the author of the *Passio altera* has been influenced in any way by some knowledge of the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius. Indeed, given the

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Sergius and Bacchus itself, another pair of military martyrs, then of a common source which described the trial of two military confessors under the emperor Julian (360–63). See my paper "The Emperor Julian and the Passion of Sergius and Bacchus," *JECS* 5 (1997) 335–67.

[29]His poem on Emeterius and Chelidonius is the first of a collection of fourteen poems dedicated to various individual martyrs or groups of martyrs, known collectively as the *Peristephanon*. Palmer (*Prudentius*, 88) argues that Prudentius wrote the poems at different stages in his career, and only brought them together as a collection at a later date. Insofar as Prudentius refers to poetry dedicated to the martyrs in his *Praefatio*, which he wrote in the 57th year after his birth in 348, it is usually assumed that he composed the *Peristephanon* before 405.

[30]The strength of its impact upon the reader is illustrated by the fact that it is this passage that Gregory of Tours quotes when he describes these martyrs (*Liber in gloria martyrum* 92).

geographical separation of the two cult centers at Calagurris and Thessalonica, that the author of the *Passio altera* wrote in Greek while there is no evidence that any documents relating to the cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius were ever translated from Latin into Greek, and that the cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius enjoyed relatively little success even in the Latin West, one would be surprised to discover otherwise.

To summarize, the *Passio altera* proves the existence of an *orarium* and a ring at the center of the cult of a military martyr, Demetrius, at Thessalonica, while Prudentius seems determined to deny the authenticity of an *orarium* and ring as the relics of the military martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius. Could these be the same items? Noting the similarity between the names Emeterius and Demetrius, the possibility suggests itself that one has resulted from a misreading of the other. So the identical natures of the two pairs of relics, the similarities of the names of Emeterius and Demetrius, and the fact that both were military martyrs, all combine to raise the question of whether the cult of St. Demetrius has its origin in some misunderstanding concerning the presence of some alleged relics of St. Emeterius at Thessalonica.

When, or why, would anyone ever have bothered to translate the relics of a pair of relatively obscure martyrs halfway across the Roman empire, from Calagurris, or thereabouts, to Thessalonica? The answer, perhaps, lies in the rise of the Spanish general Theodosius I (379–95) to the throne of the eastern Roman empire and the rush of clients, relatives, and former acquaintances who inevitably flocked to his court.[31] One notes that Theodosius made prolonged stays at Thessalonica on two occasions. It served as his headquarters and main residence immediately after the western emperor Gratian crowned him as his eastern colleague at Sirmium on 19 January 379, from shortly before 17 June 379 to shortly after 16 November 380.[32] It also served the same purpose again during the winter of 387/88. Given the length of his stay at Thessalonica during his first visit there, and its significance at the start of his reign, one is inclined to identify it as the most likely occasion for a Spanish hanger-on to have arranged for the translation of the alleged relics of some Spanish martyrs there.[33] More importantly, the fact that the relics were deposited at Thessalonica rather than sent on ahead to Constantinople suggests that the person ultimately responsible for their translation had been under the impression that Thessalonica was going to remain the emperor's main residence, the de

[31]In general, see Robert Malcolm Errington,"The Accession of Theodosius I," *Klio* 78 (1996) 438–53.

[32]See Otto Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr.* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1919) 251–55.

[33]For a detailed study of Theodosius's activities and intentions at this period, see Robert Malcolm Errington, "Church and State in the First Years of Theodosius I," *Chiron* 27 (1997) 21–72.

facto capital, and this could only have been the case during Theodosius's earliest stay there. By the time he or she discovered otherwise, it was too late. The local church now had possession of the relics and was not prepared to part with them. But why identify an imperial hanger-on as the author of this translation, and not the new emperor himself? Given the fact that Prudentius was one of the beneficiaries of the new régime, it is difficult to believe that he would have attacked the authenticity of the *orarium* and ring as martyrial relics, had it been Theodosius himself, or a member of his immediate family even, who had arranged for their translation.[34]

Therefore, it is my argument that a person or persons unknown arranged for the translation of some alleged relics of Emeterius and Chelidonius, an *orarium* and gold ring, to Thessalonica during Theodosius's earliest residence in the city in 379–80.[35] Indeed, if the traditional date for the celebration of the feast of St. Demetrius, 26 October, marks the deposition of these relics in their new shrine, then one should probably date this event to 379 rather than 380, since it should have been obvious by 26 October 380 that Theodosius intended to transfer his residence to Constantinople instead.[36] The translation of the relics proved possible, despite the disturbed political conditions—the fact that various barbarian groupings controlled most of the Balkans—because Thessalonica was a thriving seaport. However, there was some controversy over the authenticity of the relics; and

[34]See Palmer, *Prudentius*, 24–31. Prudentius was provincial governor twice before being promoted to a post at the imperial court. Unfortunately, he does not reveal of which provinces he was governor. Nor does he reveal the nature of his appointment at the court. Jill Harries ("Prudentius and Theodosius," *Latomus* 43 [1984] 69–84), argues that the lack of references to the East in Prudentius' poetry suggests that he attended the court only when Theodosius was in the West (388–91). It does not seem likely that he himself had ever actually visted Thessalonica.

[35]In general, see E.D. Hunt, "The Traffic in Relics: Some Late Roman Evidence," in Sergei Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint: University of Birmingham 14th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981) 171–80. It is worth noting that the praetorian prefect Fl. Rufinus, who created a shrine at Chalcedon for the relics of Peter and Paul, which he had acquired during his visit to Rome in 389, was from Elusa in the province of Novempopulana in south-western Gaul, a short journey across the Pyrenees from Calagurris. Unfortunately, we know nothing concerning his career before his appointment as *magister officiorum* in 388, but he must emerge as a strong candidate in any attempt to identify the author of the translation of these relics from Spain to Thessalonica. His assassination on 27 November 395, and subsequent disgrace, might well explain why Prudentius dared to attack the authenticity of these relics in the way he did. On the pious activities of many at Theodosius's court, see John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court AD 364–425* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) 127–45.

[36]The earliest evidence that 26 October was celebrated as the feastday of St. Demetrius occurs in the *Miracula S. Demetrii* by bishop John of Thessaloniki (ca. 610–49). See Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 10–11, who seems inclined to accept it as the genuine date of his martyrdom, while Vickers ("Sirmium or Thessaloniki?," 349) identifies it as the date of the translation of the relics of St. Demetrius from Thessalonica to Sirmium.

Prudentius's account of the ascension of Emeterius's and Chelidonius's *orarium* and ring into the heavens reveals that he came to belong to the faction that denied their authenticity. This controversy may itself have served to stunt the growth of devotion toward these relics among the local population at Thessalonica; but the decision of Theodosius to relocate his court to Constantinople so soon after the initial arrival of the relics in Thessalonica surely proved fatal to the success of their cult since it removed the Spanish courtiers and their families upon whom they would initially have depended to spread the news of their powers. In this way, the cult of Saints Emeterius and Chelidonius at Thessalonica was almost destroyed at birth. The shrine that held their relics never prospered as it ought to have done. To make matters worse, relatively little had been known for sure about the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius, except that they were soldiers who had died for their faith, even at the start of this attempt to transplant their cult to Thessalonica. Hence, as the years slowly passed, there was a vacuum that allowed the local populace to imagine what they would about the origin of these relics.

We now return to the accounts of the reinvigoration of the cult of St. Demetrius, as he came to be called, in both the "shorter" and "longer" versions of his passion. Both versions agree that it was a prefect of Illyricum by the name of Leontius who was responsible for the growth of the cult of St. Demetrius. According to the "shorter" version:

> Leontius, the god-beloved man, while occupying the seat of the prefecture of Illyricum, cleaned out and cleared up the very small structure enclosing the all-holy relics, since it had become covered with debris. He then widened the area between the public bath and the *stadium* where the structure was located and erected a church, bringing to the city of the Thessalonians a domestic martyr and a citizen, as well as a gloriously adorned church where one's prayers could be heard.[37]

It is only the "longer version" which explains why exactly he did this. He had received an unexpected cure at this site:

> [A] certain man named Leontius, in charge of the prefecture of Illyricum, while passing through the country of the Dacians, acquired an incurable illness. He was brought by his kinsmen to the city of the Thessalonians on a litter, where he was placed in the sacred area where the relics of the saint lie underground (ἀνεκλίθη ἐν τῷ σεβασμιῷ σηκῷ, ἔνθα ἦν ὑπὸ γῆν κείμενον τοῦ ἁγίου τὸ λείψανον). Immediately after he was laid upon the healing tomb (τοῦ ἰαματοφόρου μνήματος) he regained his health. Both he and those round him marveled at the rapid visitation of the martyr. Leontios confessed his gratitude both to God and to the all-glorious martyr Demetrios. Therefore, he immediately

[37] *BHG* 496, ch. 8. Translation from Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 157.

> took down and cleaned around the arched area of the kilns and the *caldarium,* along with the public porticoes and taverns which were located there. Here he erected a holy house (πάνσεπτον οἶκον) dedicated to the martyr between the public bath and the *stadium* and adorned it abundantly.[38]

The most important point, and one upon which both versions agree, is that Leontius found the shrine of "Demetrius" in a state of neglect and disrepair. If Leontius is indeed identifiable with the prefect of Illyricum of the same name who held office ca. 412/13, as Skedros and others have argued,[39] then a period of about thirty years had elapsed since the first construction of the shrine, according to the above reconstruction at least. Hence it is entirely credible that Leontius did find the shrine in a state of disrepair. I suggest, therefore, that he did not actually know the names of the relevant martyr or martyrs when he initially visited their shrine for his cure.[40] At that point, their names were irrelevant. What mattered was that there were relics present at the site (whatever the exact nature of the site itself), and that these had the power to effect a cure, as all relics were supposed to have. It was only after his cure that he became curious as to the exact identity of the martyr to whose intervention he owed his renewed health. He thus set about restoring the site in the hope of discovering this martyr's name and found some inscription which he interpreted to preserve the name Demetrius. The relics present, which, upon opening their container, turned out to be an *orarium* and a ring, he then attributed to this Demetrius. I suggest, therefore, that, deceived by its poor state of repair, its partial preservation even, Leontius misread a longer inscription that had originally been dedicated not to a single martyr by the name of Demetrius but to a pair of martyrs by the names of Emeterius and Chelidonius. If this inscription did not itself preserve some evidence that "Demetrius" had been a military martyr, then local folk memory soon supplied this detail, which was correct, along with much more.[41] Hence the origin of St. Demetrius.

Therefore, to summarize, an unknown person arranged for the translation of some alleged relics of Saints Emeterius and Chelidonius, an *orarium* and gold ring, to Thessalonica, probably in 379. These relics rested undisturbed in their shrine, which gradually fell into disrepair, until a prefect of Illyricum by the name

[38]*BHG* 497, ch. 15. Translation from Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 153–54.

[39]Skedros, *Saint Demetrios*, 29–37.

[40]Compare Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 11.

[41]The fact that the *Passio altera* (*BHG* 497, ch. 16) records that Leontius took as relics for the church at Sirmium a *chlamys* as well as part of the *orarium* raises a question as to the origin of this *chlamys*. Dare one suggest that, alarmed at the prospect of losing relics that had only just demonstrated their power once more, some enterprising locals, cleric or otherwise, "remembered" that they also possessed Demetrius's *chlamys,* which they then fobbed off on a grateful Leontius in an effort to retain more of the real things?

of Leontius received an unexpected cure there ca. 412/13. He then cleaned up the surrounding area and built a whole new church for the relics. During the course of this operation he found an ill-preserved inscription which he took to identify the martyr whose relics had cured him as Demetrius rather than Emeterius (and Chelidonius). He also imposed upon the bishop to open the reliquary and give him a portion of the *orarium*, as well as a *chlamys*, which he deposited in a church at Sirmium upon his return there. Despite what the *Passio altera* says, Leontius did not actually build a new church at Sirmium but merely deposited the relics in an existing church, very likely that of St. Demetrius the Deacon. This set in train the confusion of the two Ss. Demetrii and the eventual extinction of the cult of St. Demetrius the Deacon, which is itself the reason that the author of the *Passio altera*, or of its original source rather, assumed that Leontius had built the Church of St. Demetrius at Sirmium as well as that at Thessalonica.

This reconstruction is speculative, of course, but no more so than the hypothesis that currently holds sway, that St. Demetrius of Thessalonica is identifiable with the St. Demetrius the Deacon of Sirmium. It has the same advantages in that it also explains the unusual location of the central cult-site for St. Demetrius at a prominent location within the walls of Thessalonica, as well as why no one was ever able to find his bones at this site. It also explains the nature of the contact-relics about which his early cult seems to have centered, an *orarium* and a gold ring. Furthermore, it has none of the disadvantages of the current hypothesis. It does not require the transformation of the cult of a deacon into the cult of a soldier. Nor does it contradict the literary evidence that reports the spread of the cult from Thessalonica to Sirmium, not vice-versa. Therefore, there is a strong case for detecting the origin of the cult of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica not in the translation of the relics of the deacon Demetrius of Sirmium, but in the translation, probably in 379, of the relics of the military martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius of Calagurris in Spain.