PRAISING MARY’S GIRDLE

THE ENCOMIUM BHG 1146M ATTRIBUTED TO
MICHAEL THE MONK AND SYNKELOS

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.123

Date Accepted: 20 December 2020

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PRAISING MARY’S GIRDLE: THE ENCOMIUM BHG 1146M
ATTRIBUTED TO MICHAEL THE MONK AND SYNKELLOS

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Abstract
The girdle of the Virgin, which was kept in the Chalkoprateia church, was one of the most prominent relics in Constantinople. It was praised in *encomia* by Patriarch Germanus and the *synkellos* and later patriarch Euthymius. This article focuses on a third text, which dates to the early tenth century and is attributed to the *synkellos* Michael. It offers an analysis of the content, the Greek text and an English translation.

As the self-appointed centre of Christianity and New Jerusalem, Constantinople boasted of many relics. Among the most prized items was Mary’s girdle, which was kept in the church of the Theotokos in the Chalkoprateia (the ‘Copper Market’) near St Sophia.2 The church is old. Trustworthy sources report that it was built in the fifth century and refurbished in the third quarter of the sixth.3 By contrast, the historicity of accounts of the invention and translation of the girdle is more difficult to assess. In a notice in the *Synaxarium* S and in a short encomium edited by Latyshev, which both date to the tenth century, it is claimed that it was brought to Constantinople from the Anatolian city of Zela during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565).4 Unfortunately, we have no

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1 The present study was undertaken within the framework of the project ‘Moving Byzantium: Mobility, Microstructures and Personal Agency’ (PI: Prof. Claudia Rapp; [https://rapp.univie.ac.at/](https://rapp.univie.ac.at/)), funded by the FWF Austrian Science Fund (Project Z 288 Wittgenstein-Preis).
2 For the remains of the church see W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul* (Tübingen 1977), 76-78.
4 See H. Delehaye, *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Propylæum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris; Brussels, 1902), 935-936; and B. Latyshev, *Menologii anonymi Byzantini saeculi X quae supersunt*, II (St-Petersburg, 1912), 342-344.

contemporary evidence that would allow us to verify this information. The earliest secure evidence for the presence of the girdle in the Chalkoprateia is a speech in its honour, which was delivered by Patriarch Germanus (715-730). It is possible that it first surfaced in the seventh century, as a response to the growing cult of Mary’s robe, which was kept in the church of the Theotokos in the Blachernai.

In the last quarter of the ninth century a second sermon was produced, this time by Euthymius, a patriarchal synkellos who later became patriarch of Constantinople (907-912). At that point the fame of the Chalkoprateia and the girdle appears to have reached its zenith. The church had just been extensively refurbished by Basil I (867-886); and Zoe, the wife of Basil’s son Leo VI (886-912) had the girdle placed on her and was cured from an illness. Interestingly, Euthymius and the author of the miracle account state that the girdle was brought to Constantinople during the reign of Arcadius (395-408). It seems likely that this was a case of one-upmanship. The robe was believed to have been brought to the Blachernae during the reign of Leo I (457-474). The clergy of the Chalkoprateia was evidently not satisfied with the original legend that dated to the invention of the girdle to the mid-sixth century. Therefore, they chose an emperor whose reign preceded that of Leo.

Besides the speeches of Germanus and Euthymius, we have a third encomium whose date and attribution are uncertain. The two oldest manuscripts were copied in the eleventh century but go back to an archetype from the middle of the tenth century: the most recent text is a eulogy of the martyr Agathonicus by Anastasius Traoulos (late 9th-early 10th century). There the text appears without an author’s name. Later it is attributed to various authors: once to Patriarch Germanus, once to Theophanes of Nicaea, once to Nicetas Paphlagon and six times to the monk and synkellos Michael. This Michael was a contemporary of Euthymius (and of Anastasius Traulos). A Stoudite monk, he became abbot of the monastery of Dalmatos and synkellos of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (901-

6 The girdle is mentioned in a Life of Mary, which is attributed to Maximus the Confessor. This would mean that in the middle of the seventh century it was already in the Chalkoprateia. Yet the text has been redated to the tenth century by Ph. Booth, ‘On the Life of the Virgin Attributed to Maximus Confessor’, Journal of Theological Studies 66 (2015), 149-203 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flv003); and Ch. Simelides, ‘Two Lives of the Virgin: John Geometres, Euthymius the Athonite, and Maximus the Confessor’, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 74 (2020), 125-160 (DOI: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26979081).
8 See Janin, La géographie ecclésiastique, 237; and M. Jugie, ‘L’église de Chalchoprateia et le culte de la ceinture de la sainte vierge à Constantinople’, Échos d’Orient 16 (1913), 308-312.
9 See Euthymius, Zona, ed. Jugie, 511; and Delehaye, Synaxarium, 935.19-34.
11 See text and translation below.
12 See the Pinakes of the IRHT: https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/4115/.
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907, 912-925).¹³ He was a prolific author of encomia of saints.¹⁴ Unfortunately, it is impossible to say with certainty whether he penned the speech in honour of the girdle. It contains the very rare compound θεοπάροχος, which appears in almost all of his other works, but the absence of further idiosyncratic features leaves room for doubt.¹⁵ Other evidence is equally weak. The text speaks of enemies threatening Constantinople, which may be a reference to the Bulgarian attacks of the 910s and 920s.¹⁶ Moreover, it presupposes that there was just one emperor. This may mean that it was written during the early reign of Constantine VII (912-959), after the death of his uncle Alexander (912-913) and before the appointment of Romanus Lekapenos (920-944) as co-emperor.

The author mentions that he has already delivered encomia on six other occasions: Mary’s Conception, her Birth, her Presentation, her Dormition, the Annunciation, and Christmas.¹⁷ This is an almost complete list of high Marian feasts: only Candlemas is missing. Since the first four feasts were celebrated in the Chalkoprateia, we can assume that the author spoke there. A more difficult case is the Dormition. Since the major festivity was held in the Blachernai one might think that the author was also active for this church.¹⁸ Yet there was also a more low-key celebration in the Chalkoprateia. Since the author states that he has in each case addressed the same audience it seems more likely that he delivered his encomium in this setting. If this interpretation is correct one can posit a closer link between him and the Chalkoprateia.

In his encomium the author makes mention of the ‘container’ (σορός) that held not only Mary’s girdle but also Christ’s swaddling clothes. Both objects had already been mentioned in the speeches of Germanus and Euthymius.¹⁹ Yet unlike his predecessors, he also praises Mary’s robe, lavishing on her almost as much attention as on the girdle. In one case he even states that the faithful gaze at two ‘containers’ (σοροί). This does not necessarily mean that the robe had been brought from the Blachernai to the Chalkoprateia for this occasion. It may just be the case that in the mind of the faithful the two items were

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¹³ See D. Krausmüller, ‘Reconstructing the hagiographical oeuvre of Michael, monk of Stoudios, archimandrite of Dalmatos and patriarchal synkellos (9th/10th Centuries)’, Parkebolai 10 (2020), 1-42. DOI: https://doi.org/10.26262/par.v10i0.7633


¹⁷ None of these sermons appears to have survived.

¹⁸ For the feasts and the locations see D. Krausmüller, ‘Making the most of Mary: The cult of the Virgin in the Chalkoprateia from Late Antiquity to the tenth century’, in M. Cunningham and L. Brubaker (ed.), The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images (Aldershot, 2011), 219-246.


closely linked to one another. Yet there exists another possibility. A notice in the *Synaxarium* Mc makes mention of two robes:

When our most glorious Lady Virgin and God-bearer was about to depart to the Lord who had been born by her, she commanded that her two robes be given to two poor widows. After her transitus, then, these took the robes, and each of them kept hers with herself, holding it in high esteem, secretly passing it down through the generations to other virgins. One of them also took the girdle of the Godmother, holding it in high esteem. But through the providence of God, the robe was brought from Kapernaum by Galbius and Candidus in the reign of Leo the Great, and was deposited in the Blachernae. The girdle, on the other hand, was brought from the bishopric Zela, as it had been found there, in the reign of the pious Justinian and was deposited in the Chalkoprateia.\(^{20}\)

We can assume that the author of this text was associated with the Chalkoprateia although it needs to be stressed that he dates the translation of the girdle to the reign of Justinian and not that of Arcadius, which had become the official version by the late ninth century. He combines the traditional story with the famous account of the invention of the robe that was taken to the Blachernae. As it is preserved the story lacks coherence. It is claimed that both a robe and a girdle were kept in Zela then only the translation of the girdle is mentioned. Yet this may merely be an oversight because we have evidence that there was indeed a second garment kept in the Chalkoprateia. In the *Patria* we read that the robe and the girdle were kept in the Chalkoprateia whereas the *omophorion* (or rather *maphorion*, i.e. veil) of the Virgin was kept in the Blachernae.\(^{21}\) This suggests that the clergy of the Chalkoprateia stepped up the rivalry by inventing a second robe.

### Text

The Greek text is taken from the Cod. Marc. gr. Z 360, fol. 530r-540v (Diktyon #69831), a *Zweimonats-Menologium* for July and August.\(^{22}\) Its version is virtually identical with that of the Cod. Paris. gr. 1177, fol. 287-292v (Diktyon #50779), which was edited by François Combefis.\(^{23}\) Unlike its twin, however, has preserved the final section and a slightly fuller text.

Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὴν κατάθεσιν τῆς τιμίας ζώνης τῆς ὑπεραγίας δεσποίνης ἡμῶν θεοτόκου.

Τίς ὁ φαιδρὸς σύλλογος οὗτος, τίς ὁ παναρμόνιος τῆς μελῳδίας φθόγγος, τίς ἡ τῆς παγκοσμίου ταύτης χοροστασίας καὶ δοξολογίας ἀφορμή; Πῶς ὥσπερ ἐν σάλπιγγι


\(^{22}\) See Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand*, 432.

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νεομηνίας ἄλλος ἄλλαρχόθεν ἀωρὶ τῶν νυκτῶν ἐξαναστάντες πρὸς τὸν ἱερὸν τουτοῦ, καὶ ἠκοήν πρὸς ἵνα ὑμησίν αὖθις τῆς ἱερομοναχίας τῆς ἀξιαγάστου συγκαλεῖ ζώνης. Αὐτὸ καὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον λόγον πᾶλαι καὶ μεταφάσατο τὰ τῆς ἁγίου κατανοοῦσα καὶ τὴν ὑπερευλογημένην ἐγκυμοσύνην καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καταθέσεις μηδὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατιμήσειν τὴν ἀλήθειαν φυλακῇ. Καὶ γὰρ ἄλλως οὐδὲν ὑμησίν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμέτερου λόγου πᾶλαι καὶ μεταφάσαν τὸν ἱερὸν κατανοοῦσα καὶ τὴν ὑπερευλογημένην ἐγκυμοσύνην καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καταθέσεις μηδὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατιμήσειν τὴν ἀλήθειαν φυλακῇ. Καὶ γὰρ ἄλλως οὐδὲν ὑμησίν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμέτερου λόγου πᾶλαι καὶ μεταφάσαν τὸν ἱερὸν κατανοοῦσα καὶ τὴν ὑπερευλογημένην ἐγκυμοσύνην καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καταθέσεις μηδὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατιμήσειν τὴν ἀλήθειαν φυλακῇ. Καὶ γὰρ ἄλλως οὐδὲν ὑμησίν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμέτερου λόγου πάλαι καὶ μεταφάσαν τὸν ἱερὸν κατανοοῦσα καὶ τὴν ὑπερευλογημένην ἐγκυμοσύνην καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καταθέσεις μηδὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατιμήσειν τὴν ἀλήθειαν φυλακῇ. Καὶ γὰρ ἄλλως οὐδὲν ὑμησίν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμέτερου λόγου πάλαι καὶ μεταφάσαν τὸν ἱερὸν κατανοοῦσα καὶ τὴν ὑπερευλογημένην ἐγκυμοσύνην καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καταθέσεις μηδὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατιμήσειν τὴν ἀλήθειαν φυλακῇ.
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metabibázein proís zoính kai psiqhíh òma sómati próz to noerón kai oufránion ánalaambránómenon thsiaásthríon, épeidh leiwánion ieródhn òmourovn xelidei tìn thn litínei, ìna tì meiòn theamatiourgísth pròs énergíseían tin tímian autíthès ãsthíta kai tìn ònìnthn ftheta kýatà fúsín ípokleímwn fthetaíz ãpotelései diánoeitai kriqítovo kai sómèwos ènôcha tougxánonta panakúphtata diatraiein. Kai taítà ouí áforfínhn mónon eußebéia te kai pístteos, allá kai áthanátoù dòèhs éçghgha tìs autí thè dèdórfhetai perítrhémewn. Êlei yâr ouíoutó ò skia, skia yâr taítà légeth òn eîkóthos tòu òwoudóchorowntímatos èkainión theoseprhísh th kai megalodúnavmos, òs èreisima mèn pístteos tâz èkklysíasia proebblèshsa, ëllpíðos de stírhima kai theías ènócharag àgáspis kathéstánaí, ðópoain tìnà ùrìh nòeín tin en èapokrísous èstáswsan tìs ðlìthéia dòxh. Kai ei tà perî to ðheíon tìs theotókou sómâa ouíw mèn ìgìa òs pân to pistaðhs êgízîn plírhoû àgísmou, òuto dè pansténni kai megalouragía òs pássan ánthròpowen lóbhí kai páthì psíqhí kai sómâmatos ìásthâ, ùtrè lóghon òn èì pântos ò ðnageía kai àggastiká tòutwn àgísths kai megaloprépsiâ. O gar toí òndómíswan ouíoutó èpérphfìsséh ðráin kai éukleíasan kataxchámenos, pósíoun autíth nh proséinei tì èndusaménnh tìs èpérphresoih dòxhs tìn èpérbohì nh tònì ðxoupektí vér纳斯íos dîdòsí tekmárethei. Òm ùn ðûn èpérphmníthw kai panagý kôrh tìn prèpónsan ùmíngon ðhì pròteron àpòdédókamén kai kâdòs ðoí ò ìmèn tìn megaloprépsiâ tîs dòxhs tìs ðgiosúnhs autíthès èkdoqhmíwmenon tîs autíthès ìagabón òs ènîh ìásterfhsmen. Màta Ònnìs ãgállíasamètha kai màta ìoákeí epì tì par' èllpíða ãenhnísh thès ðeospaídhos èuphránhtímen, mètà tînÒ neaûdòn eîn tà tón ìagíon ìgìa taútw ñnnpstàshèshmen, kai màtà tòu Òbhrhîl èuggeîlíasamètha, màtà ðlîðhosûn stràptas ðwraûn ðûn tònì ìagíon ìgìa ðgiosúnhs autíthès èkdoqhmíwmenon tîs autíthès ìagabón òs ènîh ìásterfhsmen. Kai ðràís thò òdoiûlòs ðìmas èuphergoûntí trópòs kai pròs ðaûtôn dìa thès íðias autíthòu mihtorû ðwouínti kai katauðhnínti. Nûnì dé panîgnrhìs ðllh kai ðllh thès ðeospaîntoros èorhtì. Òu stègò thò lóghon tìn ìdûna, òu féroû diânnwûn ðûnì ègkoîmoudàsûn ùpèrórhà, áll' ò pròs autíth ènûkrius nòn tìn panîgnûnî ãpotéinon tìn ìgnh, toí thmíías dè taûtès ñkeûñw, ùzôhì légo kai ãsthíthi, tòn nûnì èpèrphsûmênu, èughmìas dé kai ãgállíaawos rîzhas fòwvûn òtò prôsékhonta tòutwos pròsaugoreúvon ènaráthghomai. Ó ùzôhì tímì thò ònì kai pàuexklêhì ò thè thèian ósphôn periosórfhshsa tìn thò Òmmanovjìl kouförísasan. Ó èsthìs, òs yâr èmpsthìsûn ìgìa dìa thòn òzôhìn ðráin diàleîéma, ò thè theoseidéstaton skènòs tòu ðeospaîdòs èpérphlaûsa kai katakàlwpsa kai tîs èz autóu pìghaûsìs ìgíthtòs ãpotôrìntos èmataçhôshsa. Ó ùzôhì thòn kàta thòn Ònekeîhîl kkelekisénîn pûlûn kataðèouwsa, oûdhèn dè diò autíthès dièleâen ò thò kürîj ìmôwûn suçhurðhà, âlûà kàtaparafálìshsûn autíthès èz ìaûna ñntípouâsûn. Ó èsthìs mústëriwos àpòrhítovn frouró, katapàètsa tîs pròtw tîs ìagíon ðkíhnìs, ðlìstèrîwos tîs kîjìtovn kûrîjìs, èz òû ò diò ðhì ðhììmàttizwûn ánoûthos ò nòmòthètès tò thè ðhàritos tëleûtàtâ mústaghûtì. Ó 6

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ζώνη τῆς κατὰ τὴν περιζωσαμένην παρθένον δυνάμεως καὶ ἀληθείας, σωφροσύνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης ἐναργέστατον τεκμήριον. Ὅ έσθης τῆς τῷ Πέτρῳ δείγματος ἀντίτυπος ὡς προαίρεσις τῶν πρακτέων αἱρετίζουσα τὸ βέλτιο τοῖς ἐπαίνοις ὑποβάλει τὰς ἀφορμάς, μόνῃ δὲ τῇ ἐπισκιαζούσῃ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος τετίμηται, τούτως δηλαδὴ καὶ ὁ αἶνος ἄνωθεν μόνον κατ’ ἀξίαν ἐπιβάλλεται. Ἡ τιμία μὲν οὖν ζώνη πάλαι τὸν παρθενικὸν κεχυμένον ἑκάτον, καὶ τῆς διανοίας τούτων ὅσφυς ἀναζωννύουσα, εὐσταλεῖς καὶ κούφους πρὸς τὴν ἄνω παρασκευάζει τρίβον.

Ἡ ἐσθής δὲ τότε μὲν ἐν σώμα τῆς θεοπρεπεστάτης περιελάμβανε νεανίδος, νυνὶ δὲ κόσμον ὅλον καὶ πόλεις περιελάμβανε τῶν νοητῶν ἀνέμων καὶ ὀμβρῶν καὶ καυμάτων τὴν κάκωσιν ἀποσοβεῖ. Καὶ διὰ τῆς ζώνης μὲν ὁ τῆς τελειότητος σύνδεσμος, οὐκ θεοῦ μὲν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους, ἀνθρώπων δὲ πρὸς θεοῦ συνάφεια αἰνίγματος ὑποσημαίνεται, διὰ τῆς ἐσθῆτος δὲ ἡ παρὰ θεοῦ δείκνυται σκέπη τῆς ἡμετέρας ἀσθενείας τῆς ἡμετέρας ἀσχημοσύνης ἡ συγκάλυψις. Κἀκείνην μὲν ἀπόστολοι πρῶτον θεῖοι, εἶτα γενναῖοι μάρτυρες καὶ πάντες ἱεροὶ πατέρων χοροὶ διὰ πίστεως περιζωσαμένου καὶ καυματίζουσα τὴν ἄνω παρασκευάζει τρίβον. Οὐ μόνον γὰρ ἔστι σωμάτων φρουρητικὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ψυχῶν συνεκτικὴ καὶ διανοιῶν σκεπαστικὴ καὶ καρδιῶν φυλακτικὴ. Ἄμφω γὰρ τότε τὸν θεαρχικῶτατον Ἰησοῦν νηπιάζοντα κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς περικαλύπτει καὶ τοῦ ζωοδώρου ῥανίσι γάλακτος ᾧ ἐγαλακτοτροφεῖτο πολλάκις καταδιανθέντα καὶ τοσαυτάκις καθαγιασθέντα, νῦν δὲ τῆς ἀνειμένης τοῦ βίου κατάτιμον καὶ ἄσχετον διακατέχουσι καὶ τῆς ἡδυπαθείας τοῦ σώματος τὸν ῥοῦν ἀναχαιτίζουσι, καὶ σωφρονικῶς καὶ σεμνῶς ἀναπείθουσι βιοῦν. Ὡ σορὸς ἀφράστων ἀγαθῶν, σορὸς οὐρανίων λειψάνων καὶ σπαργάνων περιληπτικὴ τιμίων, σπαργάνων οἷς ὁ ὑπερούσιος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν βρεφωθεὶς τοῦ νηπιάζοντος κεχυμένον σωμάτιον, σπαργάνων οἷς ἐκεῖνος σπαργανωθεὶς τὰς τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος διερρήξατο σειρὰς. Ὡ κιβωτὸς ἁγία, κιβωτὸς τρισολβίων καὶ πανακηράτων μυστηρίων, κιβωτὸς θειότερου περιπυκτικῆς συμβόλου ἡ κατὰ Μωσέα περιεῖχε κιβωτός. Σὺ στέφανος δόξης βασιλεῦσι, σὺ καλλώπισμα στολισμοῦ τοῖς ἱερεῦσι. Σὺ τῆς κατὰ τὸν Ἀαρὼν ἐπωμίδος καὶ τοῦ ποδήρου καὶ τῆς ζώνης κατὰ τοσοῦτον ἱεροπρεπεστέρα κεχρημάτικας, καθ᾽ ὅσον καὶ τῶν ἐν νόμῳ λειτουργῶν ἢ τῶν ἀρχιερέων τῶν μέγαν τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διεληλυθότα γεννήσασα Χριστὸν ὑπεροχαῖς ἀνεπινοήτοις.
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ὑπεραναβέβηκας. Σὺ ἰμάτιον σωτηρίου καὶ χιτῶν εὐφροσύνης τῷ πανευερήθη τέφρης λαῷ. Σὺ κόσμος πανευσπηρίη τῆς βασιλείας ἀλουργόδος λαμπρότερος, μαργαριτῶν τιμιάρεστερος, τιμίων λίθων ἀπάντων τιμιώτερος. Σὺ δόξα καὶ μέγα τῆς πολιτείας κλέος, τοῦ βασιλικοῦ διαδήματος μεγαλοπρεπεστέρα, τῶν ἐκ σηρῶν υψαμμῶν πολυτελεστέρα. Σὺ τῆς κατὰ τὸν ἄλληθ Μελχισεδέκ ιεροσύνης ἱερατικότητα στολῆ καὶ τῆς ἱερωτάτης ἐκκλησίας ἱερώτατον ἁγλάϊσμα καὶ περιφανέστατον ἐγκαλλώπισμα. Σὺ πάντων ὁμοί τῶν πιστῶν θησαυρὸς ἀνελλιπὴς, θησαυρὸς οὐ φθαρτὸν ἄργυρον οὐ χρυσίον ἐντὸς περικρύβων ἀπολλύμενον, άλλα πλοῦτον οὐχ ἀληθῶς ἀκήρατον, πλοῦτον οὐρανίων καὶ πνευματικῶν δωρεῶν, πάσιν ἐπίσης εἰς ἀπόλαυσιν ἄφθονα προσφέροντον, εἰ καὶ κατ᾽ ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως ἡ μέθεξις γίνεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. Χρυσὸς μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἄργυρος καὶ ἡ λοιπὴ τῆς γῆς περιουσία γῆς τυγχάνοντα καρπός, εἰκότως οὐκ ἐν ἰσομοιρίᾳ τοῖς ἐπιχορηγεῖται, τὰ παναχράντα δὲ ταῦτα τῆς θεοτόκου σκεύη, ζώνη λέγω καὶ ἐσθής, ὥσπερ οὐκ ἐκ τῆς ἀδίκου γῆς, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπεράγνου τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβόντα, καθὼς ἡ ταῦτα ποτε περιθεμένη κοινὴν πάσιν ἐπίσης ἐπιδαψιλεύεται. Ὢ σκέυη τίμια καὶ σεβάσμια, παρὰ τῆς ὑπεράγνου μὲν πρότερον παρθένους ως λόγος παρατεθεμένα πισταῖς, παρθένοις ἰουδαίαις μὲν τὸ γένος, χριστιαναῖς δὲ τὴν πίστιν, καὶ ἐξ ἄλλης εἰς κατὰ διαδοχὴν μυστικὸς παραπεμπόμενα, μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ διὰ περιφανῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ πόλεων ἀπλοῦν ἀναληφθέντα κατατάσσεται, καὶ τῇ βασιλίδι τῶν πόλεων ἀνελλιπής, καὶ υπὸ ἀρχόντων καὶ ἱερέων καὶ λαῶν ἀνάκλησις καταδιπλασιώνται καὶ προσκυνούμενα, καὶ ναοῖς οὐρανίοις ως θείοις ἀποθησαυριζόμενα. Ὢ σκέυη ἀγγέλοις μὲν σεπτὰ, δαίμονι δὲ φρικτὰ, καὶ πιστοῖς σωτήρια, τοῖς δὲ ἀπίστοις ἀποτρόπαια. Ὢ σκέυη τῆς ἀγαθαρχῆς ἀνάμεστα χρηστότητος, τῶν ποικίλων πάθεσιν ἐταζομένων ἀλεξητήρια, νοσούντων ἱατήρια, βαρβάρων ὀλετήρια, ἃ δὲ πλεονάς ἱεραίς ὅλον πέριξ τὸ τεῖχος ἐκπεριὶ κατηκομέναις αὐτήν ἔθνεσιν ἐπέσεισαν τῆς ὑπερμάχου δηλαδὴ στρατηγοῦ νοητῶς αὐτοῖς μετὰ νοητῆς ἐμπεσούσης στρατιάς καταγωγισμένης τε καὶ τρεψαμένης ἀδόκητον τε σωτηρίαν τῷ οἰκείῳ λαῷ περιποιησαμένης. ὥστε ὁ πολίτης καὶ ἄλλοι τῶν πρόσκοπῶν τεταξόμενοι καὶ τῷ θεῷ κατὰ τὸν ἀπόστολον πρὸς καθάρεσιν ὁχυρωμάτων, ὡς ἀπαθείας πύργος ἔρυμα καὶ καταστρόφωσαν τὰς ὑπεραναβέβηκις. Σὺ πολίτης καὶ ἀρχοντες καὶ λαὸς ἐνατενίζων σοροί ὅτι εἰς ἐννοιαν ήκει σαφῆ τῆς ἐν αὐτὰς

Ὑπερτιμωμένης θεομήτορος; Τίς δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν μόνον τείνας τὴν διάνοιαν οὐκ αὐτῇ σαφῶς παρετάνα καὶ ἐναργῶς πληροφορεῖται; Τίς δαὶ τρόπῳ τουίτω προσευχόμενος οὐ παρατικὰ τυχήναι τῶν αἰτήσεων. Ὡσπερ γὰρ οἰκείως μέλεσιν τοῖς ιεροῖς τοῦτοι σκεύεσιν ἡ θεοτόκους κεχρημένη πᾶσιν ψυχὴν ἀδιακρίτω πίστει πελάζουσαν ἀγάζει, καὶ παντοδαπῶς ἐν αὐτοῖς εὐεργετεῖ καὶ ἀγαθύνει. Ἀλλ᾽ ὦ δέσποινα θεογενήτρια, πρὸς σε γὰρ αὐθέντως διὰ τὸν ἀξιουράτους σου περιβλημάτων ἀνατείνομαι καὶ σοὶ κατατραχαίως τὸν λόγον, ὡς ἄρρητος καὶ τέλει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ καὶ λόγου καὶ πράγματος ἡμῖν χρηματιζοῦση. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἀξιονόμω ὑπερώνυμο ὑπερτιμωμένη τινὰς τῆς ἁγιαρχίας ἐπεκείνα, ἥπερ ἐναργῶς πληροφορεῖται, ἡ πολλοῖς μὲν τοῖς κατά τὴν παλαιὰν ὑπερώνυμην ἁγιαρχίαν καὶ παντοδαπῶς ἐν αὐτοῖς εὐεργετεῖ καὶ ἀγαθύνει. Ἀλλ᾽ ὦ δέσποινα θεογενήτρια, πρὸς σε γὰρ αὐθέντως διὰ τὸν ἀξιουράτους σου περιβλημάτων ἀνατείνομαι καὶ σοὶ κατατραχαίως τὸν λόγον, ὡς ἄρρητος καὶ τέλει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ καὶ λόγου καὶ πράγματος ἡμῖν χρηματιζοῦση. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἀξιονόμω ὑπερώνυμο ὑπερτιμωμένη τινὰς τῆς ἁγιαρχίας ἐπεκείνα, ἥπερ ἐναργῶς πληροφορεῖται, ἡ πολλοῖς μὲν τοῖς κατά τὴν παλαιὰν ὑπερώνυμην ἁγιαρχίαν καὶ παντοδαπῶς ἐν αὐτοῖς εὐεργετεῖ καὶ ἀγαθύνει. Ἀλλ᾽ ὦ δέσποινα θεογενήτρια, πρὸς σε γὰρ αὐθέντως διὰ τὸν ἀξιουράτους σου περιβλημάτων ἀνατείνομαι καὶ σοὶ κατατραχαίως τὸν λόγον, ὡς ἄρρητος καὶ τέλει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ καὶ λόγου καὶ πράγματος ἡμῖν χρηματιζοῦση. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἀξιονόμω ὑπερώνυμο ὑπερτιμωμένη τινὰς τῆς ἁγιαρχίας ἐπεκείνα, ἥπερ ἐναργῶς πληροφορεῖται, ἡ πολλοῖς μὲν τοῖς κατά τὴν παλαιὰν ὑπερώνυμην ἁγιαρχίαν καὶ παντοδαπῶς ἐν αὐτοῖς εὐεργετεῖ καὶ ἀγαθύνει.

Translation

Encomium on the deposition of the venerable girdle
of our exceedingly holy Lady God-bearer

What is this splendid gathering? What is the perfectly harmonious sound of the chant?
What is the reason for this universal choir-singing and glorification? Why have you risen at dead of night, as if roused by a trumpet that announces the new moon, and today have
been led from all directions to this sacred and august temple of the God-bearer? Surely it is obvious that the holy Spirit has blown a divinely sounding and mystical trumpet, rousing every piety-loving mind and hearing, and has called us together to the inspired praise of the admirable girdle. He it is also who has given wings to our speech, which had long flagged through the multitude of temptations, and has filled me with such great eagerness that I have undertaken to praise not only the girdle but also the venerable robe.

For it would not be pious to separate them from one another in memory, but as the completely undefiled one is believed to have used both together in her bodily life, so it is necessary that we, too, weave a joint praise that is fitting to them. For they are not to be contemned because their nature is without soul, but they are evidently to be praised because they, too, are the belongings of the exceedingly praiseworthy one. They are not to be overlooked because they lack sense perception, but are to be blessed and hymned because the power of the divine Spirit overshadows them, too, and does good to every soul that approaches in faith, since the blessing and praise offered to them is passed on directly to her who has been clothed and girded. For it is not the case that she who has now put them down has put them down altogether, but as the fragrance of precious ointment does not disappear straight after the emptying of the ointment from the vessel, but remains in the vessel and makes fragrant whoever comes close to it, thus the grace and power of the life-giving body is left in the sacred clothes and proclaims the power of her who wore them. Therefore, let us honour today the venerable garments of the exceedingly venerable one. Let us embrace not only with lips but even before with the mind, what used to surround decorously the exceedingly decorous body of the one who is beyond worldly decorousness. Let us honour the robe of the one who has covered the heavens through her supernatural virtue and has obscured the earth through her ineffable majesty! Let us honour the girdle of her who has girded our nature with righteousness, courage and truth, and let us celebrate wholeheartedly their deposition, not despising what is apparent but elevating what is imagined, not overlooking what is visible but giving exceedingly great honour to what is hidden. By focusing not on the humbleness of the garments but on the greatness and divineness of their grace and the frightfulness of the power that overshadows them, let us be led to a consideration of the prototypes through what is visible as if through clear images. Let us reach out for the contemplation of the

truth that is venerated in them by giving the fitting veneration and the honour from speeches to them as sacred and mystical relics. For the exceedingly holy one has gathered all the souls of the other saints and transferred them to him from the earth whereas he has left to the earth the venerable dust of the bodies and the harder nature of the bones, like a precious and lovely treasure, so that they remind the faithful of their sojourn with the body and cure manifold illnesses and scourge most evil spirits. Yet in the case of the wholly undefiled virgin and mother the incomprehensible one is not comprehended as doing the same, but he transferred her as one who is entirely above sin and filth, from death to life and gathered the soul together with the body to the intellectual and celestial altar. Since she was about to leave the earth deprived of sacred relics, he performed a greater miracle for our benefit. He decided to make greater her venerable robe and girdle, which by nature were subjected to corruption, and to preserve them undefiled, which were liable to putrefaction. And he gifted them not only as cause of piety and faith but also as securities of the one was clothed in them. For since the shadow is thus – for they might be fittingly called a divine and powerful shadow of the life-giving body – that it has been built as a bulwark of faith for the churches, and serves as a prop of hope and pledge of divine love, how must one imagine the glory of truth, which stands in a hidden place? And if that which surrounds the divine body of the God-bearer is so holy that it fills with sanctification all that approaches in faith, so powerful and efficient that it heals all illnesses of human beings and sufferings of the soul and the body, their source-like and sanctifying sanctity and grandeur would indeed be above all thought. For he who has poured out over the garments such supernatural grace and glory lets those with sharp eyesight conjecture how great is the excess of glory of the one who wore them. We, then, have already before given the fitting praise to the girl who is beyond praise and all-holy, and as much as we could have narrated the grandeur of the glory of her sanctity, and have delighted in her goodness as far as it is possible. We have rejoiced together with Anna and felt joy together with Joachim at the unexpected birth of the divine child, we have been led with her to the holy of holies together with the young women, we have brought good tidings together with Gabriel, we have glorified the birth of the God Word from her together with the multitude of the heavenly host, and we have celebrated her transferral to the one who was born from her together with the same ones. And thanks be to the one

who has done us good in manifold ways and has elevated us and led us to himself through his own mother. But now there is another celebration and another feast of the God-bearer. I cannot bear the pangs of childbirth over my speech, I cannot bear to overlook a mind that is pregnant with praise. But now I do not extend the praise directly to the all-praiseworthy one but base my mind on her venerable vessels, I mean, the girdle and the robe, and I raise a voice of praise and joy when I utter and say what it fitting to them. O truly venerable and famous girdle that cinched the divine loins when they were pregnant with the Emmanuel. O robe – for I will address you as if yor were ensouled because of the living grace – that clad and covered the most divine dwelling of the divine principle, and sufficiently partook of the sanctity that welled forth from it. O girdle that binds together Hezekiel’s closed gate, and does not permit anyone but the Lord alone to pass through it, but keeps it closed forever. O robe, guardian of ineffable mysteries, curtain of the first tent of the holies, mercy-seat of the ark of the Lord, from which and through which the lawgiver from above initiates into the most perfect things of grace. O girdle, most clear sign of the power and truth, chastity and righteousness of the virgin who was girded with it. O robe, type of the cloth that had been shown to Peter, of that cloth, which was suspended from heaven and symbolically showed the fullness of the unclean nations that were cleansed in Christ. But what might one proclaim that is worthy of your divineness, from where might one gain the material for praises? For where neither the preceding mind, nor the following word nor a moral decision, which chooses the better, gives the starting-points for praises, and there is only the honour of the overshadowing power of the Spirit, there the worthy praise evidently comes only from above. The venerable girdle, then, once tucked up the virginal dress, holding together and making decorous what was flowing haphazardly in the dress, but now cinching what is lax and flowing in the human passions, and girding the loins of their minds, making them ready and swift for the upward road. The robe once clothed the one body of the most divine girl, but now embraces the whole world and cities, and drives away the ill-treatment of wind and rain and heat. And through the girdle as through a riddle is indicated the bond of perfection, that is, the union and interweaving and mixture of God with human beings and of human beings with God, whereas through the robe is shown the sheltering by God of our weakness and the covering of our unseemliness. With the former first the divine

apostles, then the valiant martyrs and all sacred choirs of fathers girded themselves
through faith and were ready when they engaged with the devil, completely overthrowing
and destroying him, whereas dressed in the latter the entire choir of the faithful remained
unhurt by the missiles coming from the enemy. For it does not only guard bodies but also
holds together souls and shelters thoughts and preserves hearts. For both once covered as
it is proper Jesus, the most divine principle, when he was a babe, and were often moistened with the drops of the life-giving milk with which he was breastfed, and were
as many times hallowed, and now they hold together what is poured out and uncontrolled
in the laxity and carelessness of life and stop the flow of the pleasures of the body, and
persuade us to live chastely and honourably. O container of ineffable good things,
container of heavenly and mystical relics, container enclosing not only the sacred and
virginal girdle but also the venerable swaddling clothes, those swaddling clothes with
which the infant body of the supersubstantial one was covered when he became a babe,
swaddling clothes, swaddled with which he broke the bonds of humanity. O holy ark, ark
of thrice-blessed and entirely undefiled mysteries, ark enclosing more divine symbols
than the ark of Moses. You are a crown of glory for emperors, you are an ornament of
clothing for the priests. You are so much more sacred than the shoulder-strap and the long
robe and the girdle of Aaron of old insofar as she who bore the great archpriest who had
passed through the heavens was unimaginably greater than the liturgists in the law. You
have been shown to be a garment of salvation and a dress of joy for the most pious people.
You are a most decorous adornment, more splendid than an emperor’s purple dress, more
precious than pearls, more valuable than all valuable stones. You are the glory and great
fame of the state, more grand than an emperor’s crown, more valuable than silken weaves.
You are the most priestly garb of the priesthood of the true Melchisedec and the most
sacred adornment and most famous gem of the most sacred church. You are the
inexhaustible treasure of all the faithful together, the treasure that will not be emptied, a
treasure that hides inside not silver that can be corrupted and gold that can be lost, but has
a wealth that cannot be soiled, that cannot be diminished, that cannot be defiled, a wealth
of spiritual gifts, that is set before all for ungrudging enjoyment, even if the partaking of
the good happens according to the measure of faith. For gold and silver and the other
riches of the earth, which are the fruits of the earth, are evidently not given to all in same

Dirk Krausmüller, “Praising Mary’s Girdle: The Encomium BHG 1146M Attributed to Michael
the Monk and Synkellos,” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 15 (2021) 1-18; DOI:
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measure, whereas these utterly undefiled vessels of the God-bearer, I mean, the girdle and the robe, which took their beginning not from the unjust earth but from heaven, are, just as the one who wore them, ungrudgingly given as a benefit that is the common to and the same for all. O precious and sacred and venerable vessels, which were, as it is said, first given by the most holy virgin to faithful virgins, virgins that were Jewish by race but Christians by faith, and were secretly passed on from one to the other in succession, and were afterwards secretly taken by famous men who were passing through, and deigned to come into the open, and were given to the queen of the cities as a bulwark and a crown, and here were richly venerated by emperors and were worthily honoured and worshipped by officials and priests and all the worthy people, and were stored in celestial temples as in divine sanctuaries. O vessels that are venerable to angels but frightful to demons, and salvific for the faithful but ill-omened for the unbelievers. O vessels full of the kindness that is derived from the principle of goodness, antidotes for those who are tortured by manifold sufferings, cures of the sick, destroyers of barbarians, which often have gone out around the entire wall in the hands of archpriests and have surrounded the queen of cities, threatening unforeseen destruction to the peoples that besieged it, obviously because the invincible general intelligibly fought against them with the intelligible attacking army and put them to flight and provided an unexpected rescue for her own people. O weapons that are not of the flesh but powerful through God according to the Apostle so that they can pull down fastnesses, invincible weapons of the faithful, power of strength and stongest bulwark. O divineness, o grace, o power of the dress, o white mantle that sends out the intelligible rays like divine arrows, like the figure of the God-man that shone forth on the mountain, mercy for the sinners, protection for those in good cheer, respite for those in despair, a prop for those in danger, a support for those who are broken down, a strong soccou for those who seek refuge, sufficient consolation of the poor. For when somebody gazes at these most pure containers does he not immediately formulate a clear thought of the God-mother who has been exceedingly honoured in them. When somebody turns his mind towards her alone is he not reassured that he clearly and evidently stands beside her? When somebody prays in such a way does he not immediately see his wishes granted? For the God-bearer uses these sacred vessels as if they were her own limbs and sanctifies every soul that approaches with unwavering faith,
and in manifold ways gives through them benefits and good things. O Lady God-bearer, for I again address you through your lovely coverings and end the speech with you, since you are for us the beginning and the end of all good word and deed. O you who through the excess of your graces are alone beyond all precise appellation after the principle of goodness that is beyond names, so that you almost cannot be addressed by anyone with a name that is worthy of you, who have been dimly indicated through many examples in the Old Testament in the form of riddles, and who have been manifested through splendid characteristics in the New Testament, but have not been grasped clearly in any way. O mirror of prophets, glory of apostles, crown of martyrs, grace of priests, light of ascetics and strength and culmination of all saints. Browbeat the boastful enemies, persuaded by the faith that your people have in you and by its unceasing entreaties, crush the arrogance of barbarian adversaries through the hand of a pious emperor, break the invincible armies in her, scatter the nations that want war, and kill them in return as far as the limits of the earth. Break bows, burn weapons and shields through the fire of your power, give to the earth a multitude of peace, threaten them, all-praiseworthy one, with your undefiled girdle and robe, and hinder all those who rise up against your city, through the defensive strength and operation that leaps out from them, make them turn back with your remnants, prepare their face for destruction, make disappear and wither away all evil of the adversary against us, grant us a quiet and peaceful and calm life through your inheritance, guide us to the undefiled lands through an undefiled life and deem us worthy of the eternal goods, in Christ Jesus our Lord to whom be glory and honour and worship now and forever and in eternity. Amen.

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