This paper focuses on female patronage during the eighth and ninth centuries in Constantinople and examines how it is illustrated in the *Patria*. While this tenth-century text is often lacking in historicity, it nevertheless gives us the opportunity to evaluate the way childbirth was perceived in the tenth century. Through the connection of childbirth with patronage in the *Patria* the figure of St Anna (the mother of the Virgin Mary) emerges, as well as her role as protector of childbirth. I will argue that the *Patria* patronage stories are the result of tradition rather than historicity and that associations made in the text with St Anna or women named Anna point to the veneration that the saint enjoyed in the tenth century.

**The Patronage Stories**

In the *Patria* we find four very similar cases of female patronage or patronage taking place by an emperor on behalf of an empress. First, Justinian II (685–695 and 705–711) is said to have built a church of St Anna in the quarter of Deuteronomy after his wife Theodora became pregnant.

I would like to thank Prof. Leslie Brubaker for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This paper stems from my doctoral thesis (Birmingham 2011), which will be published as: The cult of St Anne in Byzantium (Aldershot 2014.).


2 Justinian II is not the only emperor who acted as a donor on behalf of his wife. Leo VI (886–912) built a chapel of St Anna next to his wife's vestiary, see I. Bekker (ed.), Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus (Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae), Bonn 1838, pp. 146 v. 18–19. Leo's interest in Mary's mother is also shown in his composition of sermons on Mary's Nativity and Presentation, see *PG* 107: 1–12C, 12D–21A. Leo VI shared his father's (Basil I, 867–886) interest in St Anna. Basil had a daughter named Anna (PmbZ, no. 461), reconstructed two churches of St Anna, one in Constantinople (*Theophanes Cont.* 1838: 324) and one in Trebizond, see A. Bryer/D. Winfield, The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos, Washington, DC 1985, p. 218. The visual equivalent of female patronage on behalf of their husbands is attested in the dedicatory inscription of the tenth-century portrait of St Anna in Carpignano (see Linda Safran's article in this volume) and in the depictions of St Anna in the churches of Hagioi Anargyroi and St Stephen in Kastoria, where in both cases the name of the wives of the donors (Theodore Limniotes and Constantine respectively) are Anna. See S.M. Pelekanides/M. Chatzidakis, Kastoria, Athens 1985, pp. 11, 22, 25, no. 127. See also J.K. Darling, Architecture of Greece, Westport, CT 2004, pp. 17–19; S. Gerstel, Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 52, 1998, pp. 96–97; J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident, I, Brussels 1992, pp. 39, 44; T. Malmquist, Byzantine 12th Century Frescoes in Kastoria: Agioi Anargyroi and Agios Nikolaos tou Kasnitzer, Uppsala 1979, p. 19, no. 81, p. 23.

3 Preger, Scriptores (cit. n. 1), p. 244.
and had a vision of the saint. Second, the wife of Leo III (717–741), Anna – who was actually his daughter –, is said to have built a monastery called ta Annes (= of St Anna), the location of which we are not told and modern research has failed to locate. Third, in order to explain the name of the monastery of Spoude (= haste) the writer/editor of the Patria tells us that Anna, once again identified as the wife of Leo III, was returning from the Blachernai and, while passing the house of a protospatharios, gave birth in a location where she later bought a house and founded the monastery of haste. Finally, a century later, Theophilos’s (829–842) wife, Theodora, is said to have realized she was pregnant while returning from the Blachernai when her horse flinched, which motivated her to build the church in the Dagestheas area dedicated to St Anna.

In these four stories empresses are responsible (three directly, the wife of Justinian II indirectly) for the construction of churches dedicated to St Anna. The alleged wife of Leo III is mentioned twice, and one of the foundation stories she is involved in resembles closely the one pertaining to the wife of Theophilos. The story of Theophilos’s wife and that of the wife of Justinian II are also very similar, the major difference being the form in which the saint’s divinity was made known to the empresses, namely through a dream or the flinching of a horse.

Some of the evidence incorporated in these four stories cannot be supported either by toponography or written sources. They do, however, have a historical nucleus: According to the sixth-

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4 PmbZ 137: no. 443. She was married to Artabasdos, who was incarcerated by the iconoclast emperor Constantine V and who (741–2) restored the icons during his reign: ὁ δὲ Ἀρτάυασδος κατὰ πάσαν τὴν πόλιν τὰς ἱερὰς εἰκόνας ἀνεστήλωσεν, see C. de Boor (ed.), Theophanis Chronographia, repr. Hildesheim 1963, p. 415.
6 Preger, Scriptores (cit. n. 1), p. 251.
8 There are no Byzantine sources on St Anna performing miracles as there are in the West, see T. Brandenbarg, Saint Anne: A Holy Grandmother and her Children, in: A. B. Mulder-Bakker (ed.), Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages, New York/London 1995, pp. 31–68, here pp. 54–56.
9 On the one hand Dagron argues that “a cult is extended through either an arbitrary place or through a location where a miracle made it pass smoothly to the geography of the sacred”, and refers to Theodora’s church in the Dagestheas area to demonstrate the inconsistencies between texts and toponography, see Dagron, Le christianisme (cit. n. 7), pp. 8, 25. On the other hand, Janin believes that even if the story behind Dagestheas is fictional, it “obliges us to admit the existence of a church that the patriographers must have seen or that they copied from earlier texts”, see R. Janin, Deuteron, Triton et Pempton, in: Échos d’Orient, 35, 1936, p. 150.
10 J. Haury (ed.), Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia, VI, De aedificiis, Leipzig 1964, I 2, 11, p. 21, 17–18. For other
century historian Prokopios, a church had been dedicated to St Anna in the quarter of Deuteronon by Justinian I (527–565) – not, as the Patria claims, by Justinian II. A chapel to St Anna had been dedicated by Leo VI and also by Anna the wife of Leo Patrikios and not by Leo III. The visit of Theodora, wife of Theophilos, to the Blachernai is verified by Theophanes, and we know that Leo VI’s wife (not the wife of Leo III), Theophano, was a frequent visitor to Blachernai.

Thus, the Patria stories developed from a historical nucleus, but, as I will show, ideological associations related to St Anna, childbirth and imperial ideology shaped their final form.

ST ANNA AND CHILDBIRTH

Patronage, empresses, cases of pregnancy or childbirth, St Anna and women named Anna are the features that transcend the four Patria stories. Examples from hagiography demonstrate that women normally prayed to the Virgin for a child. However, Anna’s role in resolving sterility is shown in the life of Theodora of Kaisareia, a nun in the monastery of St Anna in Rigidion. Theodora’s mother was barren and used to pray in a church dedicated to Mary, until she accepted the grace of Anna the mother of the Theotokos and gave birth to Theodora. We do not know whether it was St Anna to whom the empresses were praying when they visited the Blachernai, but in the Patria the dedication of the church to the saint after pregnancy or childbirth may allude to this. Evidence from hagiography points to the significance of the name Anna from the ninth century onwards in resolving issues of sterility. The mothers of Stephen the Younger, of Peter of Atroa and of St Theophano – all ninth century – or, later, the mother of the monk Nicholas (eleventh century), all had mothers named Anna who had difficulties getting pregnant.

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sources that mention the church of St Anna in the Deuteron see Bekker, Theophanes Continuatus (cit. n. 2), pp. 197, 324, 677; I. BEKKER (ed.), Leo Grammaticus, Chronographia. Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1842, p. 168; I. THURN (ed.), Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum. (Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae, 3), Berlin 1973, pp. 107, 163. The last information on the church is found in the typikon of the Kecharitomene monastery (twelfth century), see R. JORDAN (ed.), Typikon of Empress Irene Doukaina Komnene for the Convent of the Mother of God Kecharitomene in Constantinople, in: BMFD, II, p. 710.


12 Bekker, Theophanes Continuatus (cit. n. 2), pp. 88, 93, 174; It was customary for empresses to visit the Blachernai. Located next to the palace and kept apart from empresses, members of the imperial family often visited it, see C. MANGO, Η Κωνσταντινούπολις ως Θεσποικότατος, in: M. VASSILAKI (ed.), Μήτηρ Θεού: Απεικονίσεις της Παναγίας στη Βυζαντινή τέχνη, Athens 2000, p. 21. For the ideological associations between St Anna and the Blachernai see below.


16 B. Pitarakis, Female Piety in Context: Understanding Developments in Private Devotional Practices in: M. Vassi-
a clear connection between St Anna and problems of sterility within Byzantine society and note that the name “Anna” in these cases is not haphazard. The maternal role of St Anna was first demonstrated in art in the standing portraits of her alone or with Mary, which date from the eighth century onward in Italy (Rome) and Egypt (Faras) but also from the tenth century onwards in mainland Greece. Hagiography and the Patria make an association between St Anna and childbirth, and this association has a long visual tradition: thus, this social reality is reflected in the Patria. Ideology plays a significant role in the formation of the patronage stories under discussion, and not only those pertaining to St Anna as a protector of childbirth, but also to imperial ideology. For example, in contrast to the sterility problems of women named Anna in hagiography, in the Patria empresses are not presented as struggling with sterility at all. The writer or editor of the Patria manipulated ideologies differently according to the social group they targeted, and since it was an essential prerequisite for empresses to leave offspring, he formed the stories accordingly.

WOMEN AT CHURCH — THE BLACHERNAI

The integration of the church of Blachernai in the Patria stories and its connection to the name Anna is placed in the wider framework of women named Anna at the church.

On a first level, the name Anna — either as the name of the empress who prays for a child or as the mother of Mary — brings to mind the Old Testament childless woman Hannah, the mother of Samuel (I Samuel 1), who is associated with the apocryphal Anna in the writings of Church Fathers and in hagiography. Gregory of Nyssa, Maximos the Confessor and the hagiographer of the vita of St Stephen the Younger make this association very clear.

On a second level, the visit to the church by females mentioned in the Patria is the result of the motif of biblical and other women visiting a church or spending most of their time there. This is the case in the New Testament of a prophetess named Anna (Luke 2:37) who, according to the...
seventh-century life of St Artemios, used to light a lamp before the icon of John the Baptist; or also of the mother of emperor Basil I, who visited the church similarly to Anna (the prophetess) and would not leave the temple but spent her time there praying and fasting; or also of St Theophano’s mother Anna, who spent her days praying for a child in the church of the Theotokos in the area of Bassois.

Thus, the story of the apocryphal Anna (the mother of Mary), the Biblical Hannah (the mother of Samuel), both infertile, and that of the New Testament Anna (the prophetess) created a model for the presentation of women named Anna inside a church praying for a child. This association was fused in the stories of the empresses who prayed in the church of Blachernai and were rewarded with a child as were their role models. Evidence from hagiography—mentioned earlier—supports this view.

We are not told whether the empresses in the Patria ever visited a church of St Anna to pray for a child, but it could be that the writer or editor wanted to attribute to these empresses the construction of the first churches of St Anna in Constantinople. In that case his wish would have been to show that churches dedicated to St Anna in the Byzantine capital were the result of female patronage.

**Final Remarks**

The building and rebuilding of all monuments dedicated to St Anna that we are certain existed in Constantinople were initiated by male emperors such as Justinian I, Basil I and Leo VI, and only in the Patria do we see a connection to female patrons. The empresses in the Patria, some of whom were married to iconoclast emperors, appear to have worshipped a saint whose role as Christ’s progenitor was promoted after the end of Iconoclasm and to whom each of them dedicated a monument after a successful childbirth. This shift in the promotion of Anna in texts is placed in the framework of developments in Marian theology during Iconoclasm, when Mary became a symbol of Orthodoxy. Interest in the grandparents of Christ was expressed first in the early Christian period, but the texts stressing...
Christ’s humanity during the eighth and ninth centuries outnumber by far the texts in all other periods of Byzantine text production. The story of Anna as a childless woman in the second-century Protoevangelion, the outbreak of Iconoclasm and the need to support the dogma of Incarnation, the growing number of Marian homilies dating from the eighth and ninth centuries on the conception of Anna and the nativity of Mary, and hagiography, facilitated the spread of the veneration of St Anna from the ninth century onwards and her association with problems of sterility and protection of childbirth. These ideological associations are responsible for the crystallisation of the female patronage stories in the Patria and demonstrate the value of the study of the veneration of St Anna for our understanding of Byzantine mentality.

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28 Homilies on Anna’s Conception and Mary’s Nativity written by the tenth century are: (Andrew of Crete) PG 97: 803–882; (John of Damascus) PG 96: 661–698; (John of Euboea) PG 96: 1460–1500; (Kosmas Vestitor) PG 106: 1006–1018; (Patriarch Tarasios) PG 98: 1484–1488; (George of Nikomedea) PG 100: 1385A, 1368D, 1389A; (Patriarch Euthymios) PO 19: 441[323]–455 [337]; (Emperor Leo VI) PG 107: 5–12; (Niketas Paphlagon) PG 106: 20B; (Patriarch Photios) PG 102: 342–562; (Peter of Argos) K. T. Kyriakopoulos (ed. and tr.), Αγίου Πέτρου ἐπισκόπου Ἀργοῦς βίος καὶ λόγοι, Εἰσαγωγή, κείμενο, μετάφρασις, σχόλια, Athens 1976, pp. 22–34.