

*The pre-history of the military saints*

Among the military saints who were venerated in the middle and late Byzantine court, three were particularly prominent, forming a recognisable corps. George, Demetrios and Theodore appeared, both individually and together, in countless works of art, far outnumbering depictions of their fellow holy warriors and confirming their special status in the eyes of emperors and soldiers alike. But despite the similarity of their attributes and roles under the Macedonian dynasty and thereafter, these saints had not been mutually associated, nor even necessarily closely connected with warfare, from the inception of their cults. Their earthly lives differed in many important details: although all were victims of the pre-Constantinian persecutions of Christians, they hailed from different regions of the Roman Empire and had dissimilar careers. Demetrios was not even described as a soldier in his earliest *passio*, while Theodore was originally known as a recruit and George was said to have attained a high rank thanks to his bravery. The cults of these saints were also unrelated, and until the tenth century the future comrades-in-arms seem to have existed more or less independently of one another. Demetrios, primarily a local saint, was associated almost exclusively with Thessalonika. Theodore also had strong connections with the city of Euchaita in Asia Minor, although he was popular in other centres as well. George, on the other hand, although usually described as having been born in Cappadocia and martyred in Lydda, was the object of enthusiastic devotion throughout the empire. It seems, indeed, that in the early centuries of their veneration the saints' most important shared feature was martyrdom.

Martyrdom was, of course, an attribute of countless other saints as well, many of whom had served in the Roman army. It would probably be impossible to determine precisely why the Macedonian emperors singled out George, Demetrios and Theodore for particular veneration as military patrons. Their cults, although different from each other, had features in common with the less celebrated members of Delehaye's *état-major* and

other saints, and there is no obvious reason why these saints did not enjoy the fame of the favoured three. Like Demetrios, for example, Prokopios was described as a member of the clergy rather than as a soldier in his earliest hagiography. Both saints later acquired military associations: Demetrios became the defender of Thessalonika during the Avar-Slav invasions of the seventh century, while Prokopios was transformed by the eighth century into a soldier who won a stunning victory against the Arabs after having a vision of a cross flanked by icons of Christ and the archangels Michael and Gabriel.<sup>1</sup> But despite his heroism, veneration of Prokopios never equalled that of Demetrios.

Similarly, the stories of Eustathios and Merkourios have elements in common with those of Theodore and George. The former were both officers who converted to Christianity and gained recognition for their victories from a pagan emperor, but were put to death when they refused to offer sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Merkourios was also known in later centuries for his posthumous killing of Julian the Apostate (discussed further in Chapter 5), while George and Theodore acquired dragon-slaying miracles. Even so, Merkourios did not enjoy the fame of George and Theodore in middle Byzantine culture, and Eustathios' inclusion in group portraits of the military saints was sporadic, despite his fame in both the eastern and western Churches. The same is true of Nestor, who is said to have defeated a ferocious gladiator in single combat while Demetrios was imprisoned in the baths of Thessalonika.<sup>3</sup> Although Nestor's victory would seem to have made him a more obvious candidate for a military patron, his cult was always overshadowed by that of his companion.

George, Demetrios and Theodore thus had no unique characteristics which caused them to become particularly popular. This chapter will not attempt to explain what might have been an entirely arbitrary phenomenon: the fact of their later fame is enough reason to devote special attention to their early cults. Analysis will focus instead on the features of their veneration prior to Iconoclasm in order to clarify the religious and cultural

<sup>1</sup> Hippolyte Delahaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques* (Brussels: Bureaux de la Société des Bollandistes, 1906), pp. 142–56.

<sup>2</sup> Hippolyte Delahaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et fils, 1909), pp. 91–101, and 'La légende de Saint Eustache', in *Mélanges d'hagiographie grecque et latine*, SH 42 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1966), pp. 212–39; Stéphane Binon, 'Documents grecs inédits relatifs à S. Mercure de Césarée', *Université de Louvain Recueil de travaux publiés par les membres des Conférences d'Histoire et de Philologie*, series 2, 41 (1937), 7–174, and 'Essai sur le cycle de Saint Mercure: martyr de Dèce et meurtrier de l'empereur Julien', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Etudes: Sciences Religieuses*, 52–4 (1936–9), v–144 (pp. 11–42).

<sup>3</sup> Delahaye, *Les légendes grecques*, pp. 104–5.

background of their transformation into a corps of imperial patrons in the tenth century. Particular attention will be paid to the emergence of military features in their cults, and to the interplay of the attributes of martyr and warrior in early literary and artistic works dedicated to them. Such an analysis is vital to understanding the middle Byzantine cults of the military saints, which placed new emphasis on the close relationship of these attributes. These developments in the saints' veneration were not, however, simply a continuation of their ancient cults, but had roots in Byzantine military thought and strategy as it developed from the seventh century onward. Although not at first directly connected with saints, the growth of religious concerns in the upper echelons of the late antique and Byzantine army was influential in shaping the joint cult of the holy warriors. In particular, the fascination of prominent Byzantine strategists with the relationship between soldiers and martyrs is essential to understanding the emergence of military sainthood, and this phenomenon will be explored in further detail in Chapter 2. These parallel developments in religious and military life contributed to the eventual emergence of the holy warriors as a defined corps under the Macedonian emperors, which will be studied in Chapter 3.

Demetrios, as mentioned above, was not well known outside of Thessalonika in late antiquity, nor does his earliest hagiography describe him as a soldier. Yet he became one of the favoured patrons in war of the Macedonian and later emperors, who transplanted his cult to Constantinople and placed new emphasis on his military career. The rich corpus of early writings and works of art related to Demetrios' cult allows this transformation to be followed relatively closely. The oldest work recounting his martyrdom, known as the *Passio prima* (BHG 496), says nothing about its hero's career or social standing, other than that he preached the Gospel to the Christians of Thessalonika during Maximian's persecution. The saint was executed, according to the narrative, because his prayers gave Nestor, a fellow Christian, the power to defeat Lyaeus, Maximian's favourite gladiator. Following Demetrios' martyrdom, unspecified miracles occurred at the place of his execution, inspiring a certain Leontios, eparch of Illyricum, to build a church to him there.<sup>4</sup> The *Passio prima* thus provides no clues regarding the saint's later military associations. The date of its composition is, furthermore, unclear. Although the earliest manuscript dates from the ninth century,

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259–63.

the text seems to have been used by John, a seventh-century archbishop of Thessalonika, as a source for his own compositions about Demetrios.<sup>5</sup>

At some point between the composition of the *Passio prima* and that of Archbishop John's work, in any case, a recognition of the saint's protective abilities emerged. John's collection of fifteen miracle stories about his city's patron (*BHG* 499–516) makes a number of references to the saint participating in the defence of Thessalonika during the attacks it endured in the late sixth and seventh centuries. In Miracle XII, for example, Demetrios' role is indirect but vital: he inspired a man to disperse a crowd in the saint's cathedral by warning of a barbarian attack, which then proved actually to be happening.<sup>6</sup> During another attack described in Miracle XIII, the saint was involved in the fighting: 'For he was seen not just in the imagination but before our very eyes, on the wall dressed as a hoplite, the first going up the ladder, already throwing his right foot down upon the wall, striking with his spear-head down the middle of the two battlements, and he shoved a corpse to the outside.'<sup>7</sup> In Miracle XIV, Demetrios caused an apparition of a large army to appear and scare off the city's besiegers. One of the barbarians later described the leader of this army as 'a ruddy and radiant man seated on a white horse and wearing a white cape', and the citizens realised that Demetrios had saved them once again.<sup>8</sup> The saint was also known to intercede on behalf of his city and provide moral support to the citizens. Miracle xv tells the story of a man who took refuge in the saint's cathedral during a siege. He had a vision in which two angels appeared to call Demetrios back to heaven, since the city would soon be destroyed. Demetrios refused to abandon his people and the man, overjoyed, ran along the walls shouting, 'Take courage, brothers, the victorious one is with us.'<sup>9</sup> Thanks to the renewed encouragement which his words gave the defenders, the city was saved.

Although all of Demetrios' miracles benefited the city of Thessalonika or individual citizens, there is some evidence that his military powers were recognised and coveted by outsiders as well. Miracle v describes the efforts of two emperors to obtain the saint's relics. Maurice, it relates, wrote to Archbishop Eusebios with his request because he wanted the martyr as an ally in war. The archbishop refused, declaring that the Thessalonians preferred to keep the martyr in their hearts rather than display his relics. He went on to relate that Justinian had also been unsuccessful in the

<sup>5</sup> Paul Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius*, 2 vols. (Paris: CNRS, 1979), II, pp. 198–9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 124–9.   <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.   <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

same endeavour. The emperor had sponsored an excavation beneath the cathedral to find the relics, but flames had blocked his progress and he had to be content with 'dust' from under the altar.<sup>10</sup> These stories may, to be sure, have been fabricated by Archbishop John or a contemporary to demonstrate the prestige, loyalty and military prowess of Demetrios: they show that even the request of an emperor for aid on the battlefield was not enough to dislodge the saint, and he remained devoted exclusively to the welfare of the Thessalonians.

Unlike his predecessors, it seems that Justinian II did manage to secure the saint's military aid. In 688 he issued an edict claiming that Demetrios had been his ally in various battles against a common enemy – doubtless the same Slavs whom the saint had helped defeat a few decades earlier – and granting a saltpan to the cathedral in Thessalonika in thanks.<sup>11</sup> The saint's intercession on behalf of a non-Thessalonian was unusual, and there is no further evidence for emperors benefiting from his patronage until the late ninth century. It is noteworthy, however, that even Justinian did not attempt to relocate Demetrios' cult. His victories had taken place in the vicinity of Thessalonika, and it is perhaps not surprising that he believed he had been aided by the most celebrated saint of the area, who had recently defended his city from invaders. The emperor's gift was, furthermore, intended to benefit the local cathedral rather than establish veneration of Demetrios in Constantinople. Despite the exceptional nature of the saint's intercession on behalf of an emperor, there was no doubt that he remained, at this stage, firmly rooted in Thessalonika.

These sources indicate that, by the early seventh century, intercession in war did not fall outside Demetrios' normal range of activities.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, the significance of his military role should not be exaggerated, as John mentions it in only a few of his miracle stories. Still, his detailed

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90. The whereabouts of Demetrios' relics is a mystery which continues to be the subject of discussion. For a summary of the evidence related to this issue see Christopher Walter, 'St Demetrios: The Myroblytos of Thessalonika', in *Studies in Byzantine Iconography* (London: Ashgate Variorum, 1977), pp. 157–78 (pp. 159–65).

<sup>11</sup> Justinian II, 'Un édit de l'empereur Justinien II daté de Septembre 688', ed. H. Grégoire, *Byzantion*, 17 (1944–5), 119–24.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Speck has argued that Demetrios' cult first arose only in the early seventh century. According to this theory, which has not gained widespread acceptance, early versions of only a few of the miracle stories date from the reign of Herakleios, another group appeared in the late seventh century and the collection took final form in the ninth century. For the purposes of the present study, this dating would mean that Demetrios' military cult did not exist at all until the Macedonian emperors adopted him as a patron. Paul Speck, 'De miraculis Sancti Demetrii, qui Thessalonicam profugus venit', *Poikila Byzantina*, 12 (1993), 255–542, and 'Nochmals zu den miracula Sancti Demetrii', *Poikila Byzantina*, 13 (1994), 317–429.

description of these incidents hints that the citizens of Thessalonika had already begun to believe in the saint as their defender. Paul Lemerle plausibly speculates that it was the Avar-Slav invasions themselves which encouraged the initial growth of Demetrios' military cult.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the original reason for its appearance, another collection of miracle stories (*BHG* 5162–523), written by an unknown author some seventy years after John's work, confirms Demetrios' continued popularity as a patron in war. Indeed, four out of the five contemporary miracles of the anonymous collection concern the saint's intervention in battles in one capacity or another, an indication that his military role had become even more important since Archbishop John's time.<sup>14</sup>

In two of the miracles Demetrios' participation is indirect, although still important. In Miracle II he causes a projectile inscribed with 'In the name of God and Saint Demetrios' to collide with an enemy's projectile, sending both into the besiegers' camp to deadly effect, and in Miracle V he provides a favourable wind during a battle.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere he actually appears as a soldier: Miracle IV describes him coming to the relief of the besieged city 'on foot, his *chlamys* thrown up, and carrying a rod in his hand', and in Miracle I he is seen, once again in his white *chlamys*, marching along the walls and on the sea.<sup>16</sup> Demetrios thus not only intercedes on behalf of the Thessalonians, but is also dressed and behaves like a soldier. There can be little doubt that he was revered for many other qualities at the time of the composition of the anonymous collection, but Walter's assertion that his military status is explicit only in the later Miracle VI is overstated.<sup>17</sup> Demetrios the soldier emerges as a well-known and widely revered figure in both collections of miracle stories, even if he continued to have other roles and was reluctant to expand his protective powers beyond the walls of Thessalonika.

Neither John nor his continuator elaborated or enhanced Demetrios' earthly career or social standing. Indeed, in his *enkômion* to Demetrios (*BHG* 547h) John declines to discuss the saint's origins or homeland, focusing instead on his preaching and refutation of heresies.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the *Passio altera* (*BHG* 497), a work which expands and develops

<sup>13</sup> Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils*, I, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Lemerle argues that the sixth miracle, in which Demetrios appears in military dress but is not involved in any fighting, is a later addition to the collection. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 163–9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 187, 231–2.   <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 177.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> John of Thessalonika, 'L'enkômion de Saint Démétrius par Jean de Thessalonique', ed. Anna Philippidis-Braat, *TM*, 8 (1981), 397–414 (p. 407).

the material of the *Passio prima*, shows that later authors began to take an interest in these questions. It claims that Demetrios was from a senatorial family and served in the army as *exceptor* before becoming *pro-consul (anthypatos)* of Greece and *consul (hypatos)*.<sup>19</sup> The author of this work, possibly inspired by the active image of the saint conveyed in the seventh-century miracle stories, was clearly concerned to give him a more prestigious career than that described in the *Passio prima*. The titles indicate that Demetrios held both civilian and military positions: an *exceptor* was the head of a legal bureau, *anthypatos* was a title given to generals and *hypatos* was another functionary with judicial powers.<sup>20</sup> Aside from the inclusion of such details, the *Passio altera* generally follows the plot of its source and does not mention whether the saint performed any posthumous miracles connected with military operations. Lemerle places its composition between that of the *Passio prima* and its reworking by Symeon Metaphrastes in the mid tenth century.<sup>21</sup> The text's use of titles provides further clues: according to Oikonomidès, *anthypatos* appeared during the reign of Theophilos, while *hypatos* disappeared in the tenth century.<sup>22</sup>

The early writings about Demetrios thus show an increasing tendency to attribute military titles, exploits and the defence of Thessalonika to him. From an anonymous Christian preacher he was transformed, by the seventh century, into a courageous and patriotic warrior. But in contrast to the literary works about the saint, his contemporary iconography makes no reference to his military career. Although it must be assumed that most depictions of Demetrios from this period have been lost, it is perhaps not a coincidence that none of the surviving early Byzantine artistic sources featuring him celebrates his role as a warrior. The mosaics decorating Demetrios' cathedral, which seem to have been executed in two phases between the late fifth and late seventh centuries, included a number of portraits of the saint. He is shown in the company of lay people and other saints, praying, blessing and interceding on behalf of the faithful, but in none of them does he take part in combat.<sup>23</sup> Walter

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Bye, ed., *Passio altera*, in *AASS*, ed. Constantine Suysken *et al.*, October, IV (Brussels: Typis Regis, 1780), pp. 90–5 (p. 90).

<sup>20</sup> Nicolas Oikonomidès, trans. and ed., *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris: CNRS, 1972), pp. 287, 294, 296, 322, 325.

<sup>21</sup> Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils*, II, p. 202.

<sup>22</sup> Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance*, pp. 294, 325.

<sup>23</sup> Many of these mosaics were destroyed by fire in 1917, but not before being copied in watercolours. For an analysis and reconstruction of the entire decorative programme see Robin Cormack, 'The Mosaic Decoration of S. Demetrios, Thessaloniki: A Re-examination in the Light of the Drawings of W. S. George', in *The Byzantine Eye: Studies in Art and Patronage* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1989), pp. 17–52.

mentions three other early portraits of Demetrios wearing martyr's robes: a seal of Bishop Peter of Thessalonika, a fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome and a mosaic in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.<sup>24</sup>

These items indicate that Demetrios was portrayed primarily, perhaps exclusively, as a civilian in the early Byzantine period. This convention is not surprising: despite the saint's importance as a warrior in the miracle stories, the *Passio prima* describes him only as a martyr. In all likelihood, the earliest depictions of Demetrios were based on this or a similar text, and the generally conservative nature of iconography meant that this portrait type continued to circulate following his debut as a warrior. The miracle stories themselves provide few hints about the saint's iconography. Although they do describe Demetrios as a soldier on several occasions, these personal appearances do not necessarily reflect contemporary depictions. Indeed, the passages in Archbishop John's collection which mention the saint appearing in military garb do not mention related images, and the references to the saint's icons are found only in stories in which he does not engage in combat. These references are elusive: they concern visions of the saint, in two of which he looked 'like his icons' and in one of which he looked 'like his ancient icons'.<sup>25</sup> The author, obviously assuming his audience was familiar with the iconographic styles to which he was referring, gives no further details. Yet it is possible that John's silence on this matter, as opposed to his more detailed descriptions of Demetrios as a soldier elsewhere, means that non-military depictions of the saint were the norm: everyone could be assumed to know his portrait as a martyr, whereas his appearance in armour – a new phenomenon – warranted more detailed description.

This is, to be sure, only one possible interpretation of the texts. Lemerle argues that the saint's appearance as a soldier in the stories must mean that icons of the same type existed.<sup>26</sup> Yet it seems entirely possible, given the devotion of the Thessalonians, that they could have recognised their patron in a new costume. Given the evidence from the surviving works and iconographic conventions, it is more likely that non-military portraits were the norm in the early centuries of Demetrios' veneration. It is remarkable, in any case, that depictions of the saint as a soldier appeared, and steadily became more numerous, from the tenth century onward. This change was related to the cultivation of Demetrios as a patron in

<sup>24</sup> Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils*, 1, pp. 102, 115, 162.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Lemerle, 'Note sur les plus anciennes représentations de saint Démétrius', *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaialogikes Hetaireias*, 10 (1981), 1–10 (pp. 6–7).



war by the Macedonian emperors. Along with promoting the saint's cult outside of its traditional centre, they seem to have encouraged the change in his iconography from martyr to warrior. The former style, well suited to his veneration in Thessalonika, the place of his martyrdom, was less appropriate for his new role as an imperial patron in war.

The early cult of George is even more obscure than that of Demetrios, despite his greater fame throughout medieval Christendom. Like his future companion, however, he was originally venerated for his martyrdom rather than any prowess in battle. Although he was certainly known as a soldier in late antiquity, early versions of his *passio* make only brief note of this fact before describing the spectacular torments he suffered at much greater length. The five Greek narratives published by Krumbacher (*BHG* 670a, b, f, g; 679), which he argues reflect the structure and content of a *passio* which existed by the sixth century, include no more than a few sentences about the saint's service in the army.<sup>27</sup> The Athens version, for example, remarks simply: 'He was enlisted in a *numerus* and deservedly attained the rank of *komes*.'<sup>28</sup> This and the other texts relate that George's talents made him eligible for promotion to a higher rank. He duly appeared before the emperor to have the rank conferred, but was martyred after refusing to offer sacrifices to the gods. The various redactions of the *passio* contain only slight variations in their references to George's military career. The Berroia and Paris versions add that George's father Gerontios, a pagan, had also served in the army, and that his wife and son managed to convert him to Christianity shortly before his death.<sup>29</sup> Even this addition, however, adds little to our knowledge of George's activities prior to his martyrdom. They are, in any case, entirely overshadowed by his subsequent torments, which are the obvious focus of the stories.

The literary traditions surrounding George's actual martyrdom are diverse. The earliest accounts of his *passio*, such as the Vienna and Athens versions, claim that he was subjected to a bewildering variety of torments for seven years by the otherwise unknown Persian Emperor Dadianos, during which time he was killed and brought back to life three times. Inspired by George, thousands of sympathisers converted to Christianity and were martyred in turn, including the Empress Alexandra.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, less fabulous reworkings appeared in which Dadianos was transformed

<sup>27</sup> Karl Krumbacher, *Der heilige Georg in der griechischen Überlieferung*, Abhandlungen der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-philologisch und historische Klasse 25, 3 (Munich, 1911), pp. 121–3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.   <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19, 137.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3, 3–16.

into Diocletian, the miracles performed by the saint during his martyrdom were considerably abridged and he died only once. Even in these versions, however, the detail in which George's torments are described leaves no doubt about the primary focus of the narratives. No further attention is given to George's previous military career once he willingly gives himself over to his tormenters. It is not entirely implausible that the *passiones* are implying a contrast between the saint's service in the army, as a purely secular undertaking, and the more impressive achievement of his martyrdom.

In addition to the miracles which George performed during the course of his martyrdom, he was credited with many posthumous miracles as well. Unlike Demetrios' miracles, these do not appear in collections, but are scattered among many manuscripts, making them difficult to date. Festugière has noted, however, that a number of the miracles take place in Palestine and argued that they originally formed a collection. Some of the stories reflect a time when the area was still under imperial control, while others discuss conflicts with Arabs, suggesting that the collection was formed over several centuries.<sup>31</sup> In none of these miracles, in any case, does the saint engage in combat or intercede on behalf of a favoured army. His military career is, to be sure, acknowledged: in one miracle (*BHG* 691a) he appears in person in the guise of a soldier on horseback, and another miracle (*BHG* 690i) describes a mosaic of the saint dressed in armour and carrying a lance.<sup>32</sup> This image repels a band of Arabs when they try to destroy it, demonstrating the saint's ability to defend himself and his sanctuary. The punishment of would-be desecrators of a church is, however, a miracle performed by many saints, and is not necessarily related to combat in war. Like the stories of George's martyrdom, these miracles do no more than note his identity as a soldier and do not describe any exploits on the battlefield.

If these sources emphasise George's endurance of torments and concern for fellow Christians rather than his military prowess, the inspiration behind other monuments to his cult is less obvious. It is clear from the number of churches dedicated to him that his cult spread rapidly around the empire: by the sixth century churches in his name had been built in major cities such as Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople, as well as in Lydda in Palestine and Ezra in Syria, among others.<sup>33</sup> Although these

<sup>31</sup> A.-J. Festugière, trans. and ed., *Sainte Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean (Extraits), Saint Georges* (Paris: Editions A. & J. Picard, 1971), pp. 264–5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 273–6.

<sup>33</sup> Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, pp. 112–14.

structures testify to the widespread appeal of George's cult, they reveal nothing about the reasons for this appeal: it would probably be impossible to determine whether the people who sponsored their construction were particularly devoted to George for his martyrdom, his military valour, his conversion of pagans to Christianity – or other qualities, or a combination thereof. The relatively numerous early inscriptions which invoke George are likewise informative about the rapid spread of his cult, but not about the reasons for which he was venerated. The specimens published by François Halkin, although fragmentary, seem to be general appeals for protection and intercession and do not refer to any specific attribute of the saint.<sup>34</sup> Only the location of two of the inscriptions – on lintels from an army barracks constructed during the reign of Justin I – hints that George held a special appeal for soldiers.

Most literary, architectural and epigraphic evidence from the pre-Iconoclastic period thus places little if any emphasis on George's military associations, indicating that other aspects of his cult probably played a more prominent role in his veneration at that time. Scattered references show, however, that his status as a soldier was of interest to some authors. Arkadios, an archbishop of Cyprus in the early seventh century, mentions George's role in both the earthly and heavenly armies in a homily (*BHG* 684). In a long list of the saint's praiseworthy qualities, the work calls him 'George, unconquerable shield of the soldiers of Christ; George, the ally of the emperor', and elsewhere, 'fortification of fighting men'.<sup>35</sup> There are also references in late antique sources to George providing aid in battle, although these are found in the hagiography of other saints. According to the seventh-century *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon (*BHG* 1748), Domniziolos, a nephew of the Emperor Phokas, sought Theodore's blessing and advice prior to an especially difficult battle with the Persians. Theodore told him that he would have to endure a great hardship, 'but I commend you to God and to his holy martyr George to guard you from danger'. Thereafter, Domniziolos was assured of triumph. The predicted events came to pass, and the grateful Domniziolos became a generous donor to Theodore's Church of St George.<sup>36</sup> In one of the approximately

<sup>34</sup> François Halkin, 'Faux martyrs et inscriptions pseudo-hagiographiques. Les deux Phénicies et les deux Syries. La province d'Arabie', pp. 87–108 (pp. 88, 95, 98, 100–1, 105, 108); 'La Palestine', pp. 67–76 (pp. 68, 72, 74); 'L'Asie Mineure (suite). Supplément. Conclusion', pp. 326–54 (p. 336), in *Etudes d'épigraphie grecque et d'hagiographie byzantine* (London: Variorum, 1973).

<sup>35</sup> Arkadios, 'Die Homilie des Arkadios von Cypern', in Krumbacher, *Der heilige Georg*, pp. 78–81 (p. 79).

<sup>36</sup> A.-J. Festugière, trans. and ed., *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, SH 48 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1970), p. 97.

contemporary miracles of Anastasios the Persian (*BHG* 89g–90), an officer who had a deformity told some colleagues that he had been advised to rub the affected area with chrism from the saint. They laughed at him, and ‘one said “there is no martyr stronger than Saint Theodore,” and another “[there is none stronger than] Saint George,” and another “[there is none stronger than] Saint Merkourios,” and each of them according to his belief’.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear from these passages that George was beginning to be venerated as an intercessor in war by the seventh century, but the texts also indicate that this was not the most prominent aspect of his cult. Arkadios does not give special emphasis to George’s military qualities and lists them together with many others, including his protection of sailors, his healing of the sick, his aid of those facing persecution and his celebration within the Church. The homily does not refer to a specific incident such as Demetrios’ appearances, but rather to a general awareness of the saint having associations with warfare. It is also noteworthy that George’s intercession on behalf of Domniziolos and his praise by the officer are related in the hagiography of other saints. Although Theodore of Sykeon was under the special protection of George, the miracle is meant to demonstrate Theodore’s powers as much as those of his patron. Similarly, the officer with the deformity was eventually healed by Anastasios, showing that he was the strongest of the saints. None of the miracle stories about George published by Festugière or Aufhauser includes these or similar incidents.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the stories do not show George to be actively involved in battle. Rather than fighting alongside the army, the saint was invoked by Theodore of Sykeon, who ‘commended’ Domniziolos to God and George. Although Domniziolos clearly believed that George had aided him, his subsequent munificence was meant to benefit both George and Theodore, indicating the importance of the latter as a go-between. The other miracle story portrays George as a general military intercessor, and, unusually for this period, names him in conjunction with other military saints. Although this may be evidence for their early joint veneration outside imperial circles, the text implies more strongly that each of them had an individual following among soldiers, which the author brought together in order to demonstrate the superior healing powers of Anastasios.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard Flusin, trans. and ed., *Saint Anastase le Perse et l’histoire de la Palestine au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1992), 1, pp. 143, 145.

<sup>38</sup> J. Aufhauser, ed., *Miracula S. Georgii* (Leipzig: Typis B. G. Teubneri, 1913).

Even taking into account these sources, it seems that George's status as a soldier was only one of many qualities for which he was venerated in late antiquity. By contrast, almost all of the saint's early iconography portrays him as a soldier. Walter lists eight portraits of George which can with reasonable certainty be dated to the beginning of the eighth century or earlier.<sup>39</sup> In six of these, George wears armour and/or carries a military attribute such as a shield. One bust portrait shows the saint with no attributes, and in only one fresco does he wear courtly dress and hold a martyr's cross but no item of weaponry.<sup>40</sup> The military portraits survive in a variety of media – wall paintings, a processional cross and a terracotta tile – which have been found in the far-flung locales of Egypt, Cappadocia and the Balkans. This diversity is probably a good indication of the popularity of such depictions, although much more evidence has certainly been lost. Even so, the preponderance of military portraits of George hints that they were more popular than those of the saint in his martyr's robes.

The differing emphases of the various media is not as incongruous as it may appear. Indeed, the evidence corresponds to that related to Demetrios. Originally described only as a martyr, Demetrios continued to be depicted as such even after his military cult began to develop. Likewise George, whose early hagiography describes him, if only briefly, as a soldier, was usually portrayed in this manner even though that aspect of his cult was not prominent in the early centuries of his veneration. A saint's iconography is meant to help identify him, and in the cases of both George and Demetrios the characteristics mentioned in their early hagiography were used to make recognisable portraits of them. In any case, the differences between the literary and artistic sources provide further evidence for the argument set out above: that the military roles of both saints, despite existing to a greater or lesser degree in their early cults, were not their defining attributes. Demetrios, known primarily as the guardian of Thessalonika, came to the defence of his native city as part of his more general protective duties. George was probably portrayed as a soldier because he was described as such, but neither his early

<sup>39</sup> Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, pp. 123–6.

<sup>40</sup> The identities of the two saints flanking the Mother of God in a sixth-century icon from Mount Sinai have been an ongoing subject of debate. Although they are not labelled, their features match those generally associated with Theodore and George, meaning that the icon may be another example of an early non-military depiction of him. See Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, 3 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1976), II, p. 36, pl. B.13.

*passiones* nor his miracle stories describe his military career in any detail. This model of limited military associations in combination with other attributes seems to have remained current until the tenth century, when the saints took on a more overtly military role as patrons in war of the Macedonian emperors.

The development of the cults of Demetrios and George differed somewhat from that of Theodore, the third chief member of the phalanx of military saints which took shape during the middle Byzantine period. His early military associations had elements in common with those of the other saints, but were more prominent. Like those of Demetrios, a number of Theodore's miracle stories concern intercession in battle and the defence of his native city. And like George, he was commonly depicted in military dress and was venerated throughout the empire, although his attachment to his homeland remained strong. Accordingly, martial characteristics were prominent in both literary and iconographic sources related to Theodore, and seem to have been more central to his veneration than they were to the cults of Demetrios or George. Moreover, Theodore's military characteristics developed more rapidly than those of the other saints, and were already being described in detail in the late fourth century. There is no evidence that Theodore's military cult influenced that of Demetrios or George prior to the tenth century, but it may well have provided a model for the emerging military cults of his comrades-in-arms once the idea of a corps of heavenly protectors began to attract the attention of the Macedonian emperors.

Although the cults of the three saints probably originated at roughly the same time, only that of Theodore had well developed military attributes in its earliest attested form. The oldest surviving text about him (*BHG* 1760) is an *enkomyion* which Gregory of Nyssa delivered in about 380 at one of the saint's churches, probably the one in Euchaita. Theodore's defence of the area from a recent incursion by 'Scythians' is one of the first praiseworthy deeds which Gregory mentions, declaring: 'For he, as we believe, in the past year calmed the barbarian storm and stopped the horrible war of the wild Scythians.'<sup>41</sup> The bulk of the narrative concerns Theodore's exemplary service in the army (the fact that he was a

<sup>41</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, 'De Sancto Theodoro', in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. Werner Jaeger *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 1960–), x.i. *Sermones*, ed. Gunter Heil *et al.* (1990), pp. 61–71 (pp. 61–2). On the circumstances surrounding the delivery of the sermon and its historical context see Constantine Zuckerman, 'Cappadocian Fathers and the Goths', *TM*, 11 (1991), 473–86. Zuckerman argues that the Scythians in question were the Goths who staged an uprising in Asia Minor following the battle of Adrianople.

recruit later gave rise to his epithet ‘Teron’), his refusal to sacrifice to the gods and his subsequent imprisonment and martyrdom. At the end of the work, Gregory once again mentions the Scythians, who seem to have continued to threaten the area, and pleads that Theodore keep interceding on behalf of his fellow countrymen: ‘We suspect [there will be] afflictions, we expect danger, [for] the offending Scythians are not far and are plaguing us with war. As a soldier, fight for us.’<sup>42</sup>

Gregory’s *enkomiastion* seems to have served as a model for the first part of Theodore’s earliest surviving *passio* (BHG 1761–2d), although the later work changes the order of certain events and adds a number of details. Several versions survive, in manuscripts from as early as the late ninth century, but Delehaye has argued that it was in circulation well before the eighth century based on its similarities with the Latin *passio* of Theagenes.<sup>43</sup> The work is chiefly concerned with Theodore’s life and martyrdom and does not include any of the posthumous miracles, military or otherwise, mentioned by Gregory. It does, however, embellish the details about the saint’s military career, giving the names of his legion and its leaders and noting that it was stationed in Amasea, not far from Euchaita.<sup>44</sup> The version of the *passio* published by Delehaye also includes the story of Theodore’s victory over the dragon, a miracle with strong martial overtones. Although Delehaye argues that this episode is a later interpolation, it may be at least as old as the other parts of the text: two seals of Bishop Peter of Euchaita and one other, dated to between the mid sixth and early eighth century, feature a bearded dragon-slaying figure who is probably Theodore.<sup>45</sup>

A short text known as the *Life and Education of Theodore Teron* (BHG 1765), likewise notes the saint’s service in the army but none of his posthumous miracles.<sup>46</sup> Although the date of its composition is unclear, parts of it were copied into a collection of miracle stories from the mid eighth century, which will be discussed below.<sup>47</sup> Several other early works about Theodore show that he was revered for a variety of qualities besides his military prowess. One of his most celebrated miracles, commemorated

<sup>42</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, ‘De Sancto Theodoro’, p. 70.

<sup>43</sup> Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques*, pp. 19–25.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23; G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 2 vols. (Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1972), I.ii, pp. 792–3.

<sup>46</sup> *Life and Education of Theodore Teron*, in *AASS*, ed. Constantine Suysken *et al.*, November, 1v (Brussels: Apud Socios Bollandianos, 1925), pp. 45–6.

<sup>47</sup> Constantine Zuckerman, ‘The Reign of Constantine V in the Miracles of St. Theodore the Recruit (BHG 1764)’, *REB*, 46 (1988), 191–205, p. 200.

on the first Saturday of Lent, was his provision of *kollyba* (boiled wheat cakes) to the citizens of Euchaita after the Emperor Julian the Apostate demanded that all food for sale in the market be offered to idols or sprinkled with the blood of sacrificial victims. This story is recounted in a homily (*BHG* 1768) attributed to Nektarios, archbishop of Constantinople in the late fourth century, and by several later authors.<sup>48</sup>

A collection of miracle stories attributed to the fifth-century priest Chrysippos of Jerusalem (*BHG* 1765c) likewise shows that Theodore could be counted on to perform many types of miracles, such as enriching the poor, bringing thieves to justice and protecting travellers. Indeed, Chrysippos' collection contains no reference to its hero engaging in battle. Nevertheless, the author was aware of Theodore's military identity, since the saint appears in military costume in the first miracle to rescue a boy sold into slavery.<sup>49</sup> The rescue of prisoners does not necessarily have military connotations, and this miracle is unrelated to warfare: the boy was sold to the Muslims by a dishonest neighbour while on a journey. Of interest is the description of Theodore, whose appearance as a soldier even when not engaged in combat shows that he was commonly identified as such. Two other miracles in the collection relate how Theodore returned horses to soldiers who had lost them, possibly reflecting a particular veneration of the saint in military circles.<sup>50</sup>

If Theodore's identity as a soldier is apparent even in narratives which do not involve fighting, it becomes even more prominent in a collection of miracle stories from the mid eighth century, written during a period of Arab invasions. This work, known as *The Life, Education and Miracles of St Theodore Teron* (*BHG* 1764), seems to have been composed by an anonymous native of Euchaita sometime after 754. Along with retelling the story of Theodore's martyrdom, it discusses several of the saint's posthumous military exploits and describes his appearance in military dress. The date is obtained from the text, which states that a raid on the city began 'in the fourteenth year of the ... Emperor Constantine ... at the beginning of the seventh indiction'.<sup>51</sup> Although the most sensible interpretation of this formula would be 754, a number of scholars have refused to accept this date because it falls during the first period of Iconoclasm.

<sup>48</sup> Nektarios, 'De Festo S. Theodori', in *PG*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Lutetiae Parisiorum, 1857–1912), xxxix, cols. 1821–40. On the debate surrounding the author of this work and the *kollyba* generally see L. Petit, 'La grande controverse des colybes', *EO*, 2 (1898–9), 321–31.

<sup>49</sup> Chrysippos of Jerusalem, 'Des Chrysippos von Jerusalem Enkomion auf den hl. Theodoros Teron', ed. Antonios Sigalas, *Byzantinisches Archiv*, 7 (1921), i–102 (pp. 59–62).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–4, 72.

<sup>51</sup> Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques*, p. 196.



According to the traditional view, Iconoclasm officially proscribed icons and belief in the intercessory power of saints, both of which are discussed at length in the work. Zuckerman, however, has argued convincingly in favour of the date, noting that the policies of Iconoclasm were not uniformly enforced, especially outside of Constantinople, and that the cult of saints was never officially banned.<sup>52</sup>

In any case, it is noteworthy that the text devotes more attention to Theodore's military intercessions than the works composed in preceding centuries. All eight miracles take place during wars or raids and most involve Theodore intervening in combat or dealing with the consequences of war. In the first miracle, as if to set the tone for the rest of the collection, Theodore appears to an icon painter 'like a soldier coming from a long journey' so that his likeness can be painted.<sup>53</sup> The subsequent stories confirm the appropriateness of this military image. Two are concerned with earlier Persian attacks on the city, and the remaining five relate to Arab raids which the author seems to have witnessed. Theodore does not engage in battle in every miracle, although his valour is confirmed in Miracle III, which notes that the Roman forces built a church in Theodore's name on the site of their victory over the Persians, 'since he was responsible for their victory, as they swore, having found him fighting in the vanguard and joining in zealously'.<sup>54</sup> Even the miracles in which the saint does not fight are related to the invasions. In Miracle VII, for example, Theodore sends rain to cleanse the city of animal corpses and filth following its occupation by the Arabs, and in Miracle IX he gives a priest kidnapped by the Arabs the strength to fight off his captors and escape.<sup>55</sup> Theodore, it seems, was capable not only of repelling invaders, but of dealing with other consequences of war as well. The themes treated in the collection imply that his associations with warfare, already evident in his early cult, had become even more prominent by the mid eighth century.

In addition to the posthumous miracles, the collection includes the story of Theodore's slaying of the dragon prior to his martyrdom. It seems that the episode is not, in this case, a later interpolation and may well be the oldest surviving literary account of the miracle. As a miracle which involves combat, the dragon-slaying episode fits the pattern developed in the posthumous miracles. On the other hand, it differs from Theodore's military exploits in that it took place during the saint's lifetime and was not connected with a battle. The miracle thus represents a different

<sup>52</sup> Zuckerman, 'The Reign of Constantine V'.

<sup>53</sup> Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques*, p. 194.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.   <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198–9, 199–201.

tradition in the veneration of Theodore (and, in later centuries, George): one which celebrated the saint's personal victory in single combat over the forces of darkness, rather than his aid of the faithful at the head of an army. Analysis of this phenomenon falls outside the scope of the present study; suffice it to say that the overtones of the dragon-slaying miracle imply that it is closely related to other aspects of the saints' military cults, even if it differed somewhat in emphasis.<sup>56</sup>

All of the surviving early Byzantine sources about Theodore mention his military associations, and two describe his interventions in battle. Unlike George, whose career in the army was noted but not discussed in the early literary sources, the references to Theodore defending his native city show that active participation in warfare was an important aspect of his cult from its earliest days. Unlike that of Demetrios, however, his veneration was not confined to the original centre of his cult. The fact that neither Gregory of Nyssa nor Chrysippos of Jerusalem lived near or had any other connection with Euchaita gives some indication of how widely revered Theodore was. The churches which bear his name and the inscriptions invoking him tell a similar story. By the seventh century, in addition to the sanctuary at Euchaita, churches to Theodore had been built in many major cities, including Venice (of which he was the patron saint until the arrival of the relics of Mark in 828), Rome, Jerusalem and Constantinople.<sup>57</sup> Inscriptions naming him were also scattered throughout the empire. Halkin mentions some seven of these, found in Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Greece. Interestingly, one of them invokes both Theodore and Longinos, another martyr connected with warfare.<sup>58</sup> Once again, it is difficult to determine which of the saint's qualities inspired these invocations. His early iconography, however, reflects an integration of his attributes within his cult: Walter lists three items which depict him as a soldier and five in which he appears as a martyr.<sup>59</sup> These portrait styles

<sup>56</sup> On the phenomenon of dragon-slaying in the cults of Theodore and other saints see W. Hengstenberg, 'Der Drachenkampf des heiligen Theodor', *OC*, n.s. 2 (1912), 78–106, 241–80; Christopher Walter, 'Saint Theodore and the Dragon', in *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton*, ed. C. Entwistle (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), pp. 95–106; Monica White, 'The Rise of the Dragon in Middle Byzantine Hagiography', *BMGSt*, 32 (2008), 149–67.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Walter, 'Theodore, Archetype of the Warrior Saint', *REB*, 57 (1999), 163–210 (pp. 171–2).

<sup>58</sup> Halkin, 'Faux martyrs', pp. 99, 101–2; 'La Palestine', p. 72; 'L'Égypte, Chypre, la Crète et les autres îles grecques. La Grèce continentale et les pays balkaniques. L'Italie et la Sicile', pp. 116–37 (p. 122); 'L'Asie Mineure', pp. 338, 340, in *Études d'épigraphie*.

<sup>59</sup> Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, pp. 50–6, 125. Walter also notes the existence of a number of frescoes in Cappadocia which feature Theodore, some of which may be pre-Iconoclastic, although most are difficult to date.

are distributed across a wide range of media, including seals, a terracotta tile, mosaic, fresco, textile and icons. It seems that Theodore's identities as soldier and martyr were celebrated together in both written and artistic form, seemingly from the very inception of his cult.

The evidence surveyed above is in many senses unsatisfactory: the literary sources have been rewritten over the course of centuries and are often difficult to date, as are the sparse and fragmentary artistic works. As indicators of the broad outlines of the early cults of three saints they are, however, sufficient. Despite gaps in the record, the picture that emerges is one of three martyrs who were connected with warfare in different ways and to varying degrees. Demetrios, the protector of Thessalonika, engaged in battle to defend his native city but was not, it seems, portrayed in the act of fighting. George, whose status as a soldier was only briefly noted, nevertheless was consistently depicted as such, while Theodore's attributes of martyr and warrior received approximately equal attention. But despite their shared valour, the saints did not have strong ties to the court or to one another: George's rescue of Domnizioles and Demetrios' assistance of Justinian II did not set a precedent for patronage of the imperial family, and there is no other evidence from late antiquity for emperors invoking the saints in war. Although they were occasionally depicted or mentioned together, these pairings do not seem to have been any more consistent than those of other popular saints, and are not indicative of joint veneration of all three as a distinct corps of comrades-in-arms. Their cults seem, indeed, to have been largely independent of one another until the tenth century, when an increasing interest within the court in the sacred nature of warfare itself inspired a series of emperors to seek out appropriate heavenly patrons. The development within the Byzantine army of an interest in the role of religion in warfare, and in the relationship of soldiers to martyrs in particular, is essential to understanding the further development of military sainthood, and is the subject of the next chapter.