

THE MOTHER OF GOD
OF THE KANIKLEION

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AMONG THE LEAD BYZANTINE SEALS of the Th. Whittemore Collection in the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University is this unpublished seal (Plate 9). Its dimensions are: 0.02 cm. diam. and 0.004 cm. thick. The obverse carries a standing figure of the Mother of God holding the Christ Child before her. In addition to the letters MP ΘV, which stand for Mother of God, there is the following inscription running in two columns:

| | |
|----|-----|
| Η | ΚΑΙ |
| ΚΑ | ΟΤΙ |
| ΝΙ | CΑ |

Μήτηρ Θεοῦ, ἡ Κανικλιότισσα
 — The Mother of God, the Kanikliotisa

On the reverse is this metric inscription in four lines:

| | |
|------------|-----------------|
| · ΚΕΠΟ · · | [Σ]κέπο[ις], |
| ΠΑΝΑΓΝ · | Πανάγν[ε] |
| Δ ∸ ΚΑΙΩΑΝ | Δούκα Ἰωάν(νην) |
| ΘΕΟΔ · · · | Θεοδ · · · |

It reads in translation: “O most pure, protect John Ducas . . .” The third name on the seal, probably the name of another family with which the owner of the seal was related, has not been preserved complete.¹ This invocation to the Virgin is well known from other metric Byzantine seals,² while the Ducas family is known from texts and monuments of sigillography.³ But any identification of our Ducas with a specific member of the family of Ducas remains uncertain. We can

¹ For other examples of Byzantine persons with three names see H. Moritz, *Die Zunamen bei den byzantinischen Historikern und Chronisten*, 1 (Landshut, 1896/98), 39-41.

² V. Laurent, “Les bulles métriques dans la sigillographie byzantine,” *Ἑλληνικά*, 4-8 (1931/35), *passim*; idem, *La collection C. Orghidan* (Paris, 1952), 337-339. In both works also bibliography on Byzantine seals.

³ Du Cange, *Historia byzantina*, I (*Familiae byzantinae*), (Paris, 1680), 160-167; F. Chalandon, *Jean II Comnène et Manuel I Comnène* (Paris, 1912), see index; V. Laurent, “Un sceau inédit du protonotaire Basil Kamateros,” *Byzantion*, 6 (1931), 266-268; idem, *Ἑλληνικά*, 8 (1935), 327, index; idem, *Collection Orghidan*, 218, no. 428. Cf. B. Pantchenko, “Catalogue des plombs

only suggest an eleventh or a twelfth century date for the seal on the basis of the lettering of the inscriptions which finds parallels on other seals of this period.⁴

The representation of the Virgin on the obverse reproduces an iconographic type known as Virgin Kyriotissa,⁵ an epithet which often accompanies the type on Byzantine seals.⁶ On our specimen, however, the type is accompanied by the epithet *Kanikliotisa* and it is on this epithet that we shall concentrate.

Schlumberger had recognized the importance of the epithets which often accompany the figures of the Virgin on Byzantine seals.⁷ He had pointed out that some of these epithets are not of a mystic or poetic nature, but indicate special icons of the Virgin which were worshipped in famous religious establishments. The brief list of such epithets collected by Schlumberger was corrected and enlarged by Kondakov and Lichacev in their works on the iconography of the Virgin in which the evidence of the seals plays a major role. The relationship of seals to icons which these scholars have demonstrated⁸ is of significance for the art historian, who is enabled to recreate the history of works of art now lost. It is also important for the student of Byzantine civilization in

de la collection de l'Institut archéologique russe à Constantinople," *Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique russe*, 9 (1904), 396; C. Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντικὰ μολυβδόβουλλα τῶ ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἐθν. Νομισματικῷ Μουσείῳ* (Athens, 1917), 161.

⁴ Cf. Pantchenko, *Bulletin*, 8 (1903), 239, pl. xxxii, 8; Laurent *Collection Orghidan*, 172 pl. xlii, 335.

⁵ For the type of the Virgin Kyriotissa, i.e. of the icon which was worshipped in the church of Kyrrou, see N. P. Kondakov, *Иконография Богоматери*, 2 (St. Petersburg, 1914/15), 141ff.; M. Vloberg, "Les types iconographiques de la mère de Dieu dans l'art byzantin," *Maria, études sur la Sainte Vierge*, ed. H. du Manoir, 2 (Paris, 1952), 410. Cf. A. Xyngopoulos, *Κατάλογος τῶν εἰκόνων, Μουσείον Μπενάκη* (Athens, 1936), 8.

⁶ G. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1884), 39; N. Lichacev, *Историческое значение италографической иконописи, изображения Богоматери* (St. Petersburg, 1911), fig. 140, pl. iv, 19.

⁷ Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 37ff.; idem, "La Vierge, le Christ, les Saintes sur les sceaux byzantins des Xe, XIe, XIIe siècles," *Mémoires des Antiquaires de France*, (1888), 2ff.

⁸ See also the forthcoming paper "The Mother of God Stabbed with a Knife," in the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.

general, who enriches his knowledge concerning the religious life of the Byzantines.

The epithet which accompanies the Virgin on our seal is indeed neither of a mystic nor of a poetic nature. One can find it neither in the liturgy nor in the hymnology of the Byzantine church.⁹ The obvious assumption will be that here we have another case of a seal which copies an icon, the name of which derives either from a miracle, or from the name of the religious institution in which the icon was. For example the name Ἐσφαγμένη, "the slaughtered one," of an icon in the monastery of Vatopedi in Mt. Athos, has been obtained from a miracle;¹⁰ while names of some icons in Constantinople, such as Blachernitissa, Agiosoritissa and others, are derived from the names of the churches in which the icons were worshipped. The first possibility has to be excluded because the epithet Kanikliotisa does not suggest a miracle. In fact it is related to Κανίκλειον which was the inkpot of the Byzantine emperor and to Κανίκλειος who was the man in charge of the imperial inkpot, i.e., the secretary of the emperor.¹¹ Much later as Bees has shown the word Κανίκλειος appears as a family name in the Peloponnesus.¹² But there is no reason to suggest any relation of the image of our seal with an icon of the Virgin related to the royal kanikleion, or to connect it with the family of the Kanikleios.

The Byzantine texts, however, mention a palace under the name Kanikleion (τὸν βασιλικὸν οἶκον τὸν λεγόμενον Κανικλείου).¹³ It is known that this palace was transformed into a

⁹ For epithets of the Virgin in hymnography see S. Eustratiades, Ἡ Θεοτόκος ἐν τῇ Ὑμνογραφίᾳ (Paris, 1930); cf. G. Soteriou, "Χριστιανικὴ καὶ Βυζαντινὴ εἰκονογραφία," Θεολογία, 27 (1956), 13.

¹⁰ G. Soteriou, Ἁγίον Ὄρος (Athens), 144; R. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos* (London, 1936), 361.

¹¹ Pseudo-Codinus, *De officialibus* (Bonn, 1839), 206; for the function of this office see F. Dölger, "Der Kodikellos des Christodulos in Palermo," *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, 11 (1929/30), 44-57.

¹² N. Bees, "Ὁ οἶκος Κανικλείου ἢ Κανίκλη . . .," Ἀκρίτας, 2 (1904), 405-407.

¹³ Du Cange, *Historia byzantina*, II (*Constantinopolis christiana*), 2, 169. Dr C. Mango of Dumbarton Oaks called to my attention the fact that the Council of 842, which restored the images took place in this palace. The relevant text reads: ". . . καὶ σύνοδον θεῖαν καὶ ἱερὰν τοπικὴν ἐν τοῖς Κανικλείου

monastery probably by the middle of the tenth century.¹⁴ It was certainly so in the eleventh century, because when the Comnenoi took over power and entered the capital in April 1, 1081, they looked for their mother and wives in the monastery of Kanikleion, where they had been confined by the emperor Nikephoros Botaniates.¹⁵

Although the texts keep silence as to the images which were worshipped in that monastery, there is no doubt that the image of our seal must be connected with this monastery. There must have been an icon of the Virgin known as Kanikliotisa after the name of the monastery to which a member of the family of Ducas must have had a special devotion in order to copy it on his seals.

The study, then, of the seal of the Fogg Art Museum has added one more epithet of the Virgin hitherto unknown and brought evidence for the existence of another icon of Mary venerated in Constantinople. Furthermore another fact known to the iconographers of the Virgin in Byzantine art, can be re-stated: a name which accompanies the Virgin does not necessarily indicate the iconographic type.

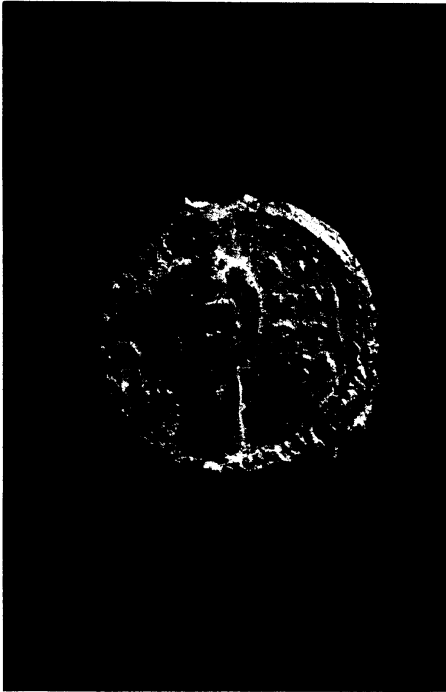
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ποιήσαντες . . .” See J. A. Fabricius, *Bibliotheca graeca*, 12 (Hamburg, 1809), 416; J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. nov., 14 (Paris-Leipzig, 1902), 788.

¹⁴ R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, III (*Les églises et les monastères*), (Paris, 1953), 286-287.

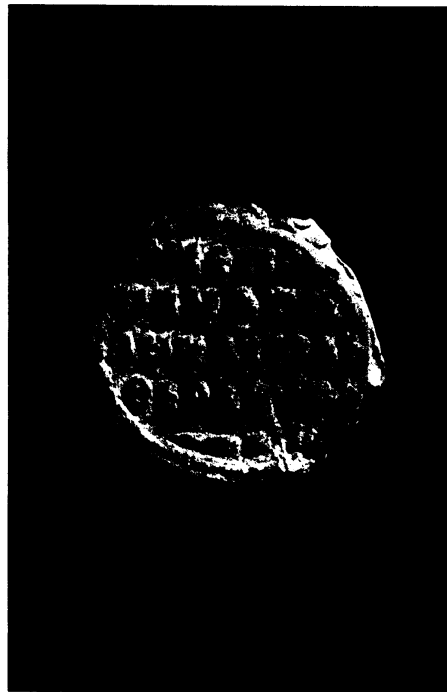
¹⁵ Janin, *ibid.*, *loc.cit.*

GALAVARIS PLATE 9



COURTESY OF FOGG ART MUSEUM

OBVERSE



COURTESY OF FOGG ART MUSEUM

REVERSE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS. FOGG ART MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY. THOMAS WHITTEMORE COLLECTION. LEAD SEAL (Twice its Actual Size). BYZANTINE. 11TH-12TH CENTURY