On the *Vita* of St Stephen the Younger

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WHEN GIBBON noted that the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandists had not advanced beyond the seventh day of October, the historian was moved to remark that "the suppression of the Jesuits has most probably checked an undertaking, which though the medium and fable of superstition, communicates much historical and philosophical information."[1] The problem of separating historical fact from pious fiction in hagiography continues to exercise historians, and in no field of study is the need to sift out the truth in saints' lives more necessary, or more difficult, than in Byzantine iconoclasm. Because the sources for imperial Roman history of the eighth and ninth centuries are so few and of such uneven quality, the evidence of hagiography offers hope of additional knowledge; but with hope comes the temptation to demand from any source more than it can offer. In this paper I examine statements in one *Vita* in order to illustrate some of the difficulties in treating Byzantine iconodule saints' *Lives* as historical documents.

The *Vita* of St Stephen the Younger, who suffered martyrdom in the reign of the emperor Constantine V, was written by Stephen the Deacon. The hagiographer states (*PG* 100, 1072c) that he was writing after the forty-second year from the martyrdom had passed, and he claims to have taken the facts he reports from persons who had known the saint as well as from confidants of the emperor: τὰ ἐκλεχθέντα παρὰ τῶν τοῦ ὁσίου ἀγχιστέων, γνωρίμων, cυγγενῶν, cυνοίκων (v. l. cυccίτων), ὁμορόφων, καὶ φοιτητῶν, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ τῶν τοῦ τυράννου cυμμυcτῶν, τῶν ἀκμὴν ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ cυζώντων, ἀληθινὰ διηγήματα (1184B). Some of the informants, he says, had even heard a deathbed confession from a certain Georgios Synkletous, who declared that he had been sent as a spy by the emperor to infiltrate himself into the company of the saint on Mount Auxentios (1132D).

The *Vita* therefore has the semblance of offering "historical and philosophical information" for doctrinal conflicts and political events

[1] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, III (London 1897) ch. 33, 414 n.48.

in the reign of Constantine V, since it purports to draw on the testimony of eyewitnesses. The Deacon also borrowed from literary sources, however; his heaviest debt is to the *Vita* of St Euthymios by Cyril of Skythopolis.[2] The verbal and biographical borrowings are most obvious in the account of Stephen's earlier life before he became prominent as a public opponent of iconoclasm, but the indebtedness continues to the end of the *Vita Stephani*, and it is clear that the Deacon is not drawing solely on contemporary oral tradition.[3]

Fr Gill comments on the borrowings into the *Vita Stephani*, "the fact that the life of Stephen contains so much taken from the life of Euthymius does not, at first sight, create an impression of great historical value. But it should be noticed that these borrowings do not touch any point of historical importance: on the contrary they are modified to fit in with the chronology of Stephen's life which the Deacon notes with exactitude."[4] It is true that the chronology of the saint's life is presented with internal consistency, but the historical difficulties begin when the biography is compared with the public events of the period. A. Lombard recognised the need for caution when, having called the *Vita Stephani* the principal document of eighth-century hagiography, he wrote "Il me semble qu'on a accordé à la Vie d'Étienne plus de confiance qu'elle n'en mérite. Je ne parle pas des récits purement merveilleux qu'elle renferme. Mais elle est sur plusieurs points importants en contradiction avec les textes des chroniqueurs."[5] Let us consider some of the problems.

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[2] *PG* 114, 595–734 (the metaphrastic version); E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig 1939) 5–85 (text of *Vita*).

[3] J. Gill, s.j., "The Life of Stephen the Younger by Stephen the Deacon. Debts and Loans," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 6 (1940) 114–39, following P. Nitikin, *BullAcad Pétersbourg*, ser. 6, 1912, 1099–115. To Gill's list of borrowings from the *Vita Stephani* add the account of the beginnings of iconoclasm and the deposition of the Patriarch Germanos in the long recension of the *passio* of the Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem (see S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Reign of Leo III* [Louvain 1973] 177 n.4). The indebtedness of the *Vita Stephani Junioris* to the *Vita Euthymii* was first noted in the *Analecta Graeca* of the Benedictines of St Maur, I (Paris 1688) 396 (see *PG* 100, 1070). It was also discussed by Ch. M. Loparev in *VizVrem* 17 (1910) 1–224, at 119–20.

[4] *art.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 136.

[5] *Constantin V, Empereur des Romains (740–775)* (Paris 1902) 6–7. There is for example a serious disagreement between Theophanes and the *Vita Stephani* concerning the date of the destruction of the Chalke image by Leo III. Theophanes (1.405.5–11 de Boor) places it in 726 (when Germanos was still Patriarch), but the *Vita Stephani* (*PG* 100, 1085c) says that the icon was taken down and burnt when Anastasios had become Patriarch. The problem is complicated, but it is likely, as Professor Mango points out to me, that the incident was postdated in the *Vita* to save the reputation of the Patriarch Germanos. See also Gero, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 212–17.

First, an anachronism. According to the *Vita Stephani* (1144), Constantine of Nakoleia was amongst the persons sent by Constantine V to the saint on Mount Auxentios to obtain his assent to the ὅρος of the iconoclast Council of 754. But there is no evidence that Constantine of Nakoleia had any part in the Council; he was active much earlier, in the time of the Patriarch Germanos, who criticised him for making innovations against the tradition of the Fathers;[6] and Theophanes (1.402.16–18 de Boor) states that the bishop of Nakoleia was an early supporter of Leo III's policy of iconoclasm. Constantine of Nakoleia may well have been dead already in the 730s or have retired by then, as Gero suggests,[7] and it is most unlikely that he was still alive in the mid-'fifties of the eighth century; Stephen the Deacon, who knew from the *Acta* of the Council of Nicaea of 787 that the bishop of Nakoleia was reputed to be an institutor of iconoclasm, has brought the saint of Mount Auxentios and the heresiarch together in a dramatic interview. He even makes the saint deny, in conformity with the orthodox view of the Council of 787, that the iconoclast Council of 754 was to be numbered seventh (1144A). The confrontation of the iconoclastic heresiarch and the champion of images has no historical basis, but the Deacon could not resist the temptation to bring on to his stage a figure believed to have been significant in the conflict.[8]

Secondly, there are geographical problems. Stephen the Deacon says that monks came to the saint on Mount Auxentios asking for advice about places of refuge from imperial persecution. The answer given was that there were three regions to which they could go;[9] and so, having heard the detailed advice of the saint, some set out for the Euxine, others for Cyprus, and yet others for Rome (1120B). Stephen recommends in particular (1117CD): Τὰ πρὸc τὸ ἄναντεc τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου, ἐπὶ τὴν τῆc Ζηκχίαc ἐπαρχίαν cυγκείμενα, ἀπό τε Βοcπόρου, Χερcῶνοc, Νικόψεωc, καὶ τὰ πρὸc τὴν Γότθιον Κοίλην ἀπαντῶντα· εἶθ᾽ οὕτωc καὶ τὰ πρὸc τὸ Παρθενικὸν cυγκείμενα πέλαγοc, ἐν οἶc τε διαπλέεται ὁ νότιοc κόλποc, ὡc ἐπὶ τῆc πρεcβυτέραc ʽΡώμηc τὸ κάταντεc, ἥ τε Νικοπολιτῶν μητρόπολιc, καὶ ἡ Νεάπολιc καὶ τὰ ἕωc τοῦ ποταμοῦ Τιβερίου ʽΡώμηc cυγκείμενα, ἔcθ᾽ ὅτε καὶ τὰ κατιόντα τῆc Λυκίων ἐπαρχίαc, ἀπό

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[6] *De haeresibus et synodis*, PG 98.77A.

[7] *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 90.

[8] Lombard, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 8.

[9] PG 100, 1117c: τριῶν ὄντων τῶν καθ᾽ ἡμᾶc μερῶν τῶν μὴ κοινωνηcάντων ταυτῇ τῇ μιαρᾷ αἱρέcει, τούτοιc προcτρέχειν ὑμῖν cυμβουλεύω.

τε Cυλέου, Cυκῆc, καὶ τὰ κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν Προποντίδα πλεόμενα, ἥ τε Κυπρίων νῆcοc, καὶ τὰ πρὸc ἀντικρὺ, ἕωc Τριπόλεωc καὶ Τύρου καὶ 'Ιώπηc.

Iconodule emigration to Italy is well attested and presents no problem in the context. In the eighth century Cyprus was permanently held neither by the Saracens nor by the Byzantines, though it was exposed to raiding or taxation by both.[10] A general of the Thrakesian *thema*, Michael Lachanodrakon, threatened to blind disobedient monks and then to exile them to Cyprus,[11] but the story implies neither that the island was in imperial control nor that it was unsuited to be a place of voluntary refuge for iconodules. A Georgian text states that five of the banished monks, having been carried off from Cyprus by Saracens, were brought to Bagdad at the beginning of the reign of Mohammad al Mahdī,[12] that is, shortly after the death of Constantine V in September 775.

The countries beside the Euxine recommended by St Stephen as places of refuge are Gotthia,[13] the eparchy of Zechia, Bosporos, Cherson and Nikopsis. In the time of Constantine V Zechia (or Zichia) would have been barely, if at all, in imperial control, and Cherson, a favourite refuge of iconophiles, was not fully incorporated until it was placed under a *strategos* in the reign of Theophilos. So Zechia and Cherson are plausibly mentioned as places of refuge in the conversation. Crimean Gotthia was favourable to iconophiles at least from the time of the iconoclast council onwards, as we learn from the *Vita* of St John of Gotthia. In 754 the then bishop of Gotthia had been rewarded for his support of imperial policy by appointment as metropolitan of Thracian Herakleia, and the Goths, offended by the defection, had John consecrated bishop by the Iberian Catholicus.[14] Stephen the Deacon's inclusion of Gotthia in the list of places of refuge

[10] R. J. H. Jenkins, "Cyprus between Byzantium and Islam, A.D. 688–965," in *Studies presented to D. M. Robinson* II (St Louis 1953) 1006–14 [= *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries* (London 1970) ch. XXII].

[11] Theophanes 1.445.8–9 de Boor.

[12] P. Peeters, "S. Romain le Néomartyr (†1 May 780) d'après un document géorgien," *AnalBoll* 30 (1911) 393–427, para. 17 of the Latin translation.

[13] τὰ πρὸc τὴν Γοτθίαν Κοίλην ἀπαντῶντα (*PG* 100, 1117c. The printed text has τὴν Γότθιον Κοίλην. A variant is Γοττίαν).

[14] *Acta Sanctorum* June VII (1867) 168, chs. 1.1 and 1.2. See also for the appointment ch. 52 of the *Life* of St George the Hagiorite (transl. by P. Peeters in *AnalBoll* 36/37 [1917/1918] 117). For the diplomatic background of Bishop John's later career see P. Peeters, "Les Khazares dans la Passion de S. Abo de Tiflis," *AnalBoll* 52 (1934) 21–56, at p.37. Note also that an iconodule exile in Cherson is said to have fled to Chazaria and to have become a bishop there, according to an 'Αθληcιc τῶν ἁγίων τῶν cὺν τῷ ἁγίῳ Cτεφάνῳ τῷ Νέῳ, ὑπὲρ

for iconodules fleeing from the emperor Constantine V is, therefore, appropriate. 'Hollow Gotthia' would be the country between the coast of the Crimea and the passes (κλεισοῦραι) to which Goths under the leadership of Bishop John once succeeded in driving a force of Khazars, who had been posted at Doros (or Doras) by their Chagan.[15]

Nikopsis is more problematical. The name belongs to a city and river on the frontier of Zechia and Abasgia.[16] In the *Passio* of S. Abo, who was put to death in 786, Nikopsis, together with Trapezous and Apsar, is said to be subject to the emperor of the Greeks.[17] Iconophile fugitives who wished to be beyond the range of the imperial fleet would not have been safe at Nikopsis, but according to the Georgian Annals the ethnarch Leo revolted from the Greeks towards the end of the eighth century, took the name of king, and held sway over Colchis and Abasgia.[18] Therefore in naming Nikopsis as a safe place of

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τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων μαρτυρησάντων (see the *Menologion* of Basil [= *PG* 117, 181] in V. Vasilievsky's edition of the *Lives* of George of Amastris and Stephen of Surozh [*Analecta Byzantino-russica* 3, St Petersburg 1893] ccxxiii-xxiv): ἄλλος ἔγκλειστος ἐν τῷ Cωσθενίῳ ῥινοκοπηθεὶς, ἐν Χερσῶνι ἐξωρίσθη, καὶ μέλλων φονευθῆναι ἔφυγεν εἰς Χαζαρίαν, ἐν ᾗ καὶ ἐπίσκοπος ἐγένετο καὶ ὕστερον ἐτελειώθη. That there were, or were intended to be, bishoprics in Chazaria proper well beyond the Crimea is clear from the entries under Ἐπαρχία Γοτθίας in the de Boor *Notitia Episcopatuum* (*ZfKirchengeschichte* 12 [1891] 519–34, 14 [1894] 573–99), and the proposed mid-eighth century date of the entries would suit the reference to the bishop in Chazaria in the ἄθλησις; for the date see A. A. Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1936) 97–104, but contrast G. Vernadsky, *Byzantion* 15 [1940/1941] 67–76. The ἄθλησις also states ἄλλος δὲ Cτέφανος ὀνόματι εἰς Cουγδίαν ἐξορισθεὶς καὶ πολλοὺς ὠφελήσας, τέλος ἔσχε τοῦ βίου, and this Stephen can hardly be Bishop Stephen of Surozh, who was not an exile there. Stephen was appointed by the Patriarch Germanos to the bishopric; he was recalled and imprisoned by the Emperor Leo (III), but Constantine (V) is said to have been persuaded by his wife "Theodora, daughter of the king of Kerch" to set him free, and Stephen returned to his see in Surozh (see Vasilievsky, *op.cit. supra*, *Life* [Slavonic version], ch. 14, and especially p.98, para. 28). In the extant Greek version of the *Life* Leo (III) has become Leo V, the Armenian, and the empress is demoted to being "a certain woman Eirene" (chs. 3 and 4, pp.76 and 78 Vasilievsky). In the original story the consort of Constantine would have been Eirene the daughter of the Chazar king. "Theodora" is a confusion of Eirene the Chazar with Theodora the Chazar, second wife of Justinian II.

[15] *Acta Sanctorum* VII (1867) 169, ch. 1.5. See also J. B. Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire* (London 1912) 409, for the campaign.

[16] Const.Porph. *De admin.imp.* 42; 97–98, 109 ed. Moravcsik/Jenkins.

[17] Peeters, *art.cit.* (*supra* n.14) 26 (Latin transl.): *His (sc. Abasgis) quippe conterminum est mare Ponticum, (ad) quod totum incolunt christiani, usque ad fines Chaldiae. Illic sita est Trapezon, et mansio Apsarea, et portus Nicopsis. Pertinent autem istae urbes et loca ad imperium Christum amantis regis Graecorum, qui solium habet in magna urbe Constantinopoli.*

[18] Peeters, *art.cit.* (*supra* n.14) 43–44. J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge* (Leipzig 1903) 421–22.

refuge Stephen the Deacon introduces a reference to his own time rather than to the reign of Constantine V.

Also anachronistic is the mention (1117c) of lower Lycia with Syllaion in Pamphylia and Syke in Isauria; there is no sign that imperial control of Lycia was ever lost in the time of Constantine V, and since the naval *thema* of Kibyrhaiotai was loyal to him in the war with Artavasdos,[19] it would not have been wise of opponents of the emperor to flee to that part of Asia Minor.[20] The Deacon again has circumstances of his own epoch in mind, and though we are not told that Lycia was lost during the Saracen campaigns against Nikephoros I, the attacks on Rhodes and Myra in the sixth year of his reign (807) point to a weakening of the imperial hold on the coastlands.[21] It is noteworthy that Stephen the Deacon claimed to be writing after the forty-second year from the martyrdom of Stephen the Younger (1072c). The year 764 is 43 years before 807, and the date (20 November of Indiction 4) assigned by Theophanes[22] to the martyrdom of the

[19] Theophanes 1.419.15–25 de Boor.

[20] Lombard, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 165 n.3.

[21] Theophanes 1.483.4–15 de Boor. Note however the implied claim in the *Life* of St Andrew Salos (10th century?) that Syllaion had never fallen: Σύλαιον κληθήσεται καὶ οὐ cυλληφθήcεται οὐδὲ παραληφθήcεται εἰc τὸν αἰῶνα (ed. L. Rydén, *DOPapers* 28 [1974] 207, lines 143–44).

[22] 1.436.25–437.9 de Boor. The fourth indiction ran, in the opinion of Ch. Diehl, from 1 September 764 to 1 September 765. The *Vit.Steph.* (1178d) puts the martyrdom in 28 November without giving the year. Diehl assumed that 28 is a mistake for 20 and thought that Stephen the Deacon accepted the date 20 November Ind. 4 given by Theophanes for the martyrdom ("Une Vie de saint de l'époque des empereurs iconoclastes" in *CRAI* 1915, 134–50 at p.148 and n.1). Both suppositions are open to doubt, and even if the war against the Skyths (*PG* 100, 1125c) is, as Diehl supposed, that of the victory over the Bulgarians at Anchialos, his notion that the exile of the saint in Prokonnesos lasted only thirteen months is doubtful; Diehl thought that the words τῷ τῆc κατοικήcεωc αὐτοῦ δευτέρῳ χρόνῳ at 1153d refer to the length of the saint's stay in the island, but in fact they date the death of the saint's mother (see 1156a). Having allowed the saint only thirteen months in Prokonnesos, Diehl added the eleven months spent in the Praetorium (1164b) after the short confinement in the Phiale (1156d). He placed the whole period of 24 months and a few days within the interval between the triumph after the Anchialos campaign and 20 November 764. According to Diehl, the victory was won on 30 June 762, and the triumph was celebrated before the end of Ind. 1, 1 September 762 (*cf.* Theophanes 1.433.5 and 11 de Boor); this is a tight time-table, and we do not know that the saint was in Prokonnesos for as few as thirteen months. Diehl's article is valuable in emphasizing that even according to the *Vita Stephani* Constantine V for long showed patience and restraint in his dealings with St Stephen, but the chronological argument is far from conclusive. Diehl follows Lombard, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 47, in placing the battle of Anchialos on 30 June 762, but Theophanes states that the battle took place on a Thursday, and 30 June was a Thursday in 763. The world year 6254 in Theophanes, on which Lombard relies, is not in accord with the indiction. See G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, transl. J. Hussey (Oxford 1968) 169 n.1.

saint suits the interval quite well. The anachronism in the *Vita* thus shows that lower Lycia, Syllaion and Syke may have been lost from the empire for a time in the reign of Nikephoros I,[23] but it is important to bear in mind that Stephen the Deacon's time of writing cannot be fixed within close limits.

The expression τὰ κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν Προποντίδα πλεόμενα (1117c) refers to Prokonnesos. The saint himself was banished to the island, but Prokonnesos was also, though easily reached from Constantinople, a place of refuge (some of Stephen the Younger's disciples, his mother and his sister joined him there [1148a–c]); there is no implausibility in the mention of the island here in the *Vita*. But that the whole list of places, including Lycia and Nikopsis, can ever have been uttered by Stephen the Younger to intending emigrants in the time of Constantine V is hardly credible.

The obscure words τὰ πρὸc τὸ Παρθενικὸν cυγκείμενα πέλαγοc, ἐν οἷc τε διαπλέεται ὁ νότιοc κόλποc introduce mentions of Rome and Naples. There was a place called Parthenicum on the road leading along the coast of the northwestern bay of Sicily from Panhormos to Drepanon;[24] the name is kept in the modern town Partinico. In the context the Greek words quoted could refer to the sea off the north coast of Sicily, where the Aegates and Aeolian islands lie, and it is worth noting that Lipari was used as a place of exile in the reign of Nikephoros I.[25] It is however most unlikely that Stephen the Younger used the words τὸ Παρθενικὸν πέλαγοc; not only is the destination, wherever it may have been, too imprecisely expressed, but also the very mention of the Parthenic sea is taken from Cyril of Skythopolis by Stephen the Deacon.[26] The position of the 'southern gulf' is also not made clear by the Deacon.

[23] Compare Lombard, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.20): "En 808, en effet, cette partie de l'Asie Mineure était sans doute aux mains de Arabes." (Lombard here assumes that the *Vita* was written in 808.) Note that from 800 to 806 St Ioannikios had sought solitude in Cilicia; earlier he had visited the mountains of Lycia (*Acta Sanctorum* 4 November [1894] 344 and 341).

[24] K. Ziegler, *RE* 18.4 (1949) 1886–87.

[25] Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.15) 37 and n.2, on Theodore of Stoudios, *Epp.* 1.48 (*PG* 99, 1072D).

[26] The words τὸ Παρθενικὸν πέλαγοc recur in the *Vita Euthymii* (p.63.6 ed. E. Schwartz [*supra* n.2] and *PG* 114, 693c). The Deacon Phidos puts to sea in a ship bound for Κούρικοc (Cilician Korykos) from Joppa, but he is wrecked in the Parthenic sea. Amm.Marc. 14.8.10 (1.29 Gardthausen) says that the Syrian Orontes flows *in Parthenium mare*, and a Levantine sea is indicated in the *Vita Euthymii*. It does not follow that Stephen the Deacon had the same neighbourhood in mind—he mentions τὸ Παρθενικὸν πέλαγοc separately from Joppa. The mention of a current flowing into a Parthenian sea at Macrob. *Sat.* 7.12.35 (1.443 Willis) does not assist in the interpretation of the *Vita Stephani*. Loparev, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 128 n.4,

The words ἥ τε Νικοπολιτῶν μητρόπολις refer to the place in Old Epirus. That there was already a metropolis there in the eighth century is clear from the *Acta* of the Council of 787.[27] Nikopolis would have been a resting-place for iconophiles intending to flee further westwards.

Thirdly, the list of martyrdoms in the *Vita*. During his last imprisonment Stephen was confined in the Praetorium in the company of 342 monks, all of whom, says the Deacon, had suffered various kinds of mutilation or ill-treatment. The conversation turned to recent martyrdoms. The first victim of the persecution to be mentioned was the Cretan monk Paul; Antony the Cretan reported to his fellow-prisoners that Paul had been tortured to death by the 'archisatrap' of the island, Theophanes Lardotyros, in the praetorium of Herakleion.[28] Next the aged Theosteriktos of the monastery of Pelekete, whose nose had been cut off and whose beard had been set alight by the 'ikonokausts', said that on the evening of the previous Holy Thursday during divine service in the monastery, Lachanodrakon, ἄρχων τῆς 'Ασιάτιδος γαίης, acting on imperial orders, rushed in with a band of soldiers. Some of the monks were beaten; others were burned or had their noses cut off and their beards tarred and set on fire. Thirty-eight were placed, hands and neck, in wooden fetters. The monastery with its stables and churches was burned down, and

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pronounces τὸ Παρθενικὸν πέλαγος to be the Mediterranean and the 'southern gulf' to be the Adriatic (without giving reasons); but then the saint's purported instructions would be so imprecise as to be almost meaningless. There is no connexion, so far as I can see, between Parthenitai, birthplace of Bishop John of Gotthia, on the southern coast of the Crimea, and the Parthenic sea. For Parthenitai and its neighbourhood see Vasiliev, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.14) 90, 93–94. Note that in the *Peregrinatio Aetheriae*, "mare illut Parthenicum, quod mittit Alexandriam" (*sic*) is visible from Mount Sinai (3.8 p.4, ed. O. Prinz). Contrast the Deacon's vagueness about Mediterranean geography with his precise references to places in Constantinople. Examples are: (1) the Praetorium. Here St Stephen was enclosed, and he is said to have found there 342 monks, many of whom had been tortured (*PG* 100, 1160 BC). He was kept there for eleven months (1164B). For this prison see R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*[2] (Paris 1964) 167. (2) The palace τὰ Κῶνστα, near which the saint's parents lived (1073D). See Janin, *op.cit.* 372. (3) The Phiale prison, probably in the palace, but its exact position is not known (1129D, 1156D). See Janin, *op.cit.* 409.

[27] J. Darrouzès, "Listes épiscopales du Concile de Nicée (787)," *REByz* 33 (1975) 1–76; 19A, 21B, 29DE, 17F, and esp. p.13.

[28] 1164B-D. Lardotyros is also called *strategos* here, but his alleged title does not prove Crete to have been a *thema* at the time; but *cf.* H. Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, *Byzantion* 31 (1961) 217–28, at p.219 (= *Études sur les structures administratives et sociales de Byzance* [London 1971] ch. xi).

the 38 captives were taken to Ephesos, where they were buried alive in the vaulted chamber of an old bath-house.[29]

The next to speak was Stephen himself. He described the martyrdom of Peter of Blachernae, who was flayed, and the martyrdom after Peter's, that of John, *hegoumenos* of Monagria, who was cast into the sea in a weighted sack (1165CD). The Bollandists argued that Peter of Blachernae was the same person as the first monk said by Theophanes to have been martyred under Constantine V, Andrew Kalybites of Blachernae, who in 761 was whipped to death after insulting the emperor.[30] The festival of Peter's punishment was placed by the Bollandists on 16 May, and that of John of Monagria on 4 June of the same year; and, taking the conversation between Antony the Cretan, Theosteriktos of Pelekete and Stephen the Younger to be historical, they attempted to assign dates to the other martyrdoms.[31]

The death of Stephen the Bollandists assigned to 28 November 767, and the attack of Lachanodrakon on Pelekete to the previous Holy Thursday. Theophanes, however, states (1.436.26 and 440.27 de Boor) that Stephen was put to death on 20 November of the fourth indiction, and that Michael Lachanodrakon was appointed general of the Thrakesians in the fifth indiction. Therefore the martyrdom of Stephen may well have preceded the attack of Lachanodrakon on Pelekete; the attack could well have been made by the general on the way to take up his appointment at Ephesos.[32]

Stephen the Deacon knew that Lachanodrakon had been a persecutor of monks, that he had attacked Pelekete, and that he had held office in 'Asia' as 'Archon'—in fact Lachanodrakon had been general of the Thrakesian *thema*. The Deacon therefore included the story of the attack on Pelekete in the conversation of the prisoners in the Praetorium. But the truth is, as Bury stated,[33] that the date of Stephen's martyrdom is not known; if we reject the testimony of

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[29] 1164D–65B (the story of the burial may owe something to the tale of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesos).

[30] *Acta Sanctorum* October VIII 128. But contrast Theophanes 1.432.16–21 de Boor (martyrdom of Andrew Kalybites at Blachernae) with *Vit.Steph.* 1165CD (martyrdom of Peter of Blachernae).

[31] *Acta Sanctorum* October VIII 131.

[32] C. Mango and I. Ševčenko suppose that Lachanodrakon's attack on Pelekete occurred on Holy Thursday in 764 or 763 (*DOPapers* 27 [1973] 243).

[33] J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire* II (London 1889) 464.

Theophanes for the date of martyrdom, then we ought not to use the same chronicler's date for the appointment of Lachanodrakon in combination with the *Vita Stephani* to try to obtain a different date for the saint's death. Besides, the attack on Pelekete could have happened as late as 770 or 771 (the time in which Theophanes[34] places the persecution of monks and nuns by Lachanodrakon in the Thrakesian theme), at least two years later even then the date assigned by the Bollandists to the martyrdom of Stephen the Younger. All these inconsistencies show how unwise it is to treat the dramatic conversation of the incarcerated monks in the *Vita Stephani* as though it were a historical event capable of yielding chronological evidence for the sequence of martyrdoms.

Since the date of Stephen's martyrdom is not known, the date of the Deacon's writing is also not known. If Stephen the Younger died in the persecutions of the 760s, Stephen the Deacon was composing the story of the saint's life over 42 years later in the first decade of the ninth century. In his forty-ninth year (1148C) the saint was in exile in Prokonnesos (again the date is not certain); and if he died, as the *Vita* states (1177D), in the fifty-third year of his life,[35] he was born about the second decade of the eighth century. The *Vita* does not allow any closer datings.

One dramatic conversation in the *Vita* is at least consistent with the chronology of Theophanes. We are told that on the eve of the saint's martyrdom two handsome and noble brothers, whom the jealous emperor later put to death, were sent to shake the resolve of the saint. In the prison they did him no harm but instead urged him to hold fast to orthodoxy. Then, having returned to the emperor, they declared that their blows had been so harsh that the victim would die on the following day (1172D–73B). The brothers are known from

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[34] 1.445.3–14 and 1.445.28–446.15 de Boor. There is the additional problem that if Pelekete lay near the southern shore of the Propontis, it was in the *thema* Opsikion, but Lachanodrakon was general of the Thrakesian *thema*; *cf.* Mango and Ševčenko, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.32) 244. The expression ἄρχων τῆς ᾿Ασιάτιδος γαίης could mean that Lachanodrakon had a roving commission to attack monasteries, even outside his own *thema*. I know of no evidence that a monastery called Pelekete existed in the Thrakesian *thema*. R. Janin doubted that Pelekete was at Trigleia on the Bithynian coast, where it is customarily placed; he also believed a position in the Thrakesian theme not to be excluded (*Les Églises et les Monastères des grands centres byzantines* [Paris 1975] 170–72).

[35] Oddly L. W. Bernard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclast Controversy* (Leiden 1974), says on p.68 that the *Vita* was written in 808, but on p.7 that it was published in 806.

the chronicles of Theophanes (1.438.10 and 443.11–12 de Boor) and
Nikephoros (*Brev.* p.74.18–21 de Boor): they are Constantine Podopa-
gouros and Strategios, who was a *spatharios* and *domestikos*, and their
heads were cut off at the Kynegion not long after the martyrdom of
Stephanos, according to the order of events in Theophanes. The *Vita*
therefore may not be in error in regarding the brothers as iconodule
sympathizers who were predeceased by the saint. But that the
emperor sent them to shake the resolve of the saint is far from certain.
Rather, we have here another instance of the Deacon's desire dramati-
cally to introduce into the life of his hero persons known to have been
historically significant in the reign of Constantine V.[36]

A noteworthy anachronism brings the Patriarch Constantine
prematurely into the story. The *Vita* places his appointment before
the iconoclast Council of 754, and the emperor and his nominee are
presented as preparing the business of the Council together. In fact,
Constantine was not appointed Patriarch until the assembly was
transferred to Blachernae;[37] the president in the first part of the pro-
ceedings had been Theodosios, Bishop of Ephesos, but Stephen the
Deacon either ignores, or is ignorant of, the fact.[38]

In the thirty years or so between the death of the emperor Con-
stantine V and the writing of the *Vita S. Stephani Junioris* memories
had been gravely distorted by the bitterness of controversy. But
distortion is not the only reason for distrusting Stephen the Deacon's
use of eyewitness evidence and oral tradition, quite apart from his
fanciful borrowings out of the *Vita Euthymii*: the hagiographer had a
strong sense of drama, but his respect for historical facts was less firm.
Nikephoros and Theophanes the chroniclers, on the other hand,
despite all their defects of presentation and the difficulties in their
chronologies, drew on documentary evidence, and the worth of
their testimony is not gravely diminished by their iconophile con-
victions. When their testimonies conflict with the *Vita Stephani*, they
are to be preferred; and no statement in the *Vita* should be accepted

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[36] Lombard, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 7, points out that the story of the conversation cannot be
reconciled both with (1) the chroniclers' dating of the deaths of Strategios and his brother
and with (2) the Bollandists' dating of Stephen's martyrdom (28 Nov. 767). For both
Nikephoros and Theophanes put the brothers' deaths earlier than 767, and the conversation
in the *Vita* is supposed to have taken place shortly before the martyrdom. Bury, *op.cit.*
(*supra* n.33) 468, places the conspiracy of Podopagouros and his associates in August 765.

[37] Theophanes 1.428.2–6 de Boor. Nikephoros, *Brev.* p.66.1–4 de Boor.

[38] Lombard, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.36).

without question or be used to support a chronological argument
unless the testimony is consistent with or confirmed by the two
principal chroniclers of the first period of iconoclasm. The merit of
the *Vita* is to show how the reign of Constantine V was viewed by a
convinced iconodule after an interval of a generation; but the Deacon
himself (1184в) called the *Vita* an ἐλάχιϲτον πόνημα,[39] and cautious
scholars too will not overestimate the significance of his work.[40]

THE QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY OF BELFAST
October, 1976