

## SAINT TRYPHŌN OF PHRYGIA: HAGIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION, ORIGINS OF HIS CULT AND ICONOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS IN BYZANTINE ART



### PHRYGİALİ AZİZ TRYPHŌN: HAGİGRAFİK GELENEĞİ, KÜLTÜNÜN KÖKENLERİ VE BİZANS SANATINDAKİ İKONOGRAFİK TEMSİLLERİ

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on Saint Tryphōn, an important figure in Anatolia during the early Christian period. Saint Tryphōn, born in the Phrygian countryside, was particularly known as a healer and miracle-worker, and belonged to a group of people known as “*anargyros*” (bestower). His most important miracle was the healing of the daughter of the Emperor Gordian by casting out the demon that had possessed her. This event caused the saint’s fame to spread and the Christian faith to be embraced more and more by the people. However, the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Decius meant that St. Tryphōn was perceived as a threat by the Roman Empire, and the saint was eventually executed and martyred in Nicaea. St. Tryphōn’s association with viniculture made him known as the protector of vineyards and associated with Dionysus, an ancient god of Anatolia. During the reign of Emperor Theodoros II Doukas Laskaris, lilies miraculously bloomed in his sanctuary in the city of Nicaea, of which he was the patron, and coins of the time featured the saint and lily motifs. Not only in Anatolia, but also in the rural areas of the Balkan geography, the inhabitants built many shrines dedicated to Saint Tryphōn with iconographic representations of the saint in order to honour him. The paper examines the role of Saint Tryphōn in the history of Anatolian Christianity, his place in Byzantine depictions and iconography, his influence on people’s religious practices, and his links with rural life.

**Keywords:** *Saint Tryphōn, Hagiography, Iconography, Viniculture, Anatolian saints, Anatolian cults*

#### **ÖZ**

Erken Hristiyanlık Dönemi, Anadolu’nun Hristiyanlaşma sürecinin en dikkat çekici ve dönüştürücü evrelerinden biridir. İsa Mesih’in öğretilerini benimseyen havariler ve müritleri, bu yeni inancı tanıtmak ve yaymak adına büyük bir özveriyle hareket etmişlerdir. Anadolu’nun farklı bölgelerinde yaşayan Paganlar ve Yahudiler, yüzyıllar içinde Hristiyanlığın artan etkileriyle karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Hristiyanlığın toplum içinde yayılmasından rahatsız olan Yahudi toplulukları, zamanla Roma yönetimini İsa Mesih’e inananlara karşı kışkırtarak onların çeşitli cezalar almalarına neden olmuşlardır.

Bu süreçte, İsa Mesih ve havarilerin izinden giden birçok dinî figür Erken Hristiyanlık Dönemi’nde öne çıkarak inançlarını yayma uğruna büyük fedakârlıklar göstermiştir. Bu

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liderlerin yaşam öyküleri ve öğretileri, yalnızca Hristiyanlığı benimseyen figürler olmadıklarını, yaşadıkları coğrafyanın kültürel ve toplumsal izlerini de taşıdıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Özellikle Anadolu'nun kırsal bölgelerindeki Pagan geleneklerin ve yerel inanışların, Hristiyan pratiklerle iç içe geçtiği anlaşılmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, Phrygia kırsalında küçük bir köyde doğan Aziz Tryphōn, III. yüzyıl Anadolu'sunun en önemli Hristiyan figürleri arasında görülür. Hayatı boyunca özellikle şifacılığı ve mucizeleriyle tanınan Tryphōn, "*anargyros*" yani *ihsan eden* sıfatıyla anılan azizlerden biri olmuştur. Erken dönem Hristiyan şeytan kovucularından biri olarak da öne çıkan Aziz'in, Hristiyan inancına göre en büyük mucizelerinden biri, Roma İmparatoru Gordianus'un (İS. 238-244) kızını ele geçiren iblisi kovarak genç kızı iyileştirmesidir. Bu olay, Aziz Tryphōn'un şöhretinin halk arasında hızla yayılmasını sağlamış ve onun Anadolu'daki Hristiyan misyonerlik faaliyetlerinde etkili bir figür olarak anılmasına katkı sağlamıştır. Ancak İmparator Decius'un (İS. 249-251) Hristiyanlara karşı politikaları, Aziz Tryphōn'un da Roma İmparatorluğu tarafından tehdit olarak görülmesiyle sonuçlanmıştır. İncından vazgeçmeyi reddeden Aziz, Nikaia'da (günümüz İznik) çeşitli işkencelere maruz kalmış ve başı kesilerek *martyr* edilmiştir.

Aziz Tryphōn'un kültü yalnızca şifa mucizeleri ile sınırlı kalmamıştır. Phrygia gibi bağıcılığıyla ünlü bir coğrafyada yaşadığı için, halk arasında üzüm ve bağlarla özdeşleşen bir figür haline gelmesini de sağlamıştır. Verimli toprakları ve üzüm bağlarıyla ünlü olan bu bölgede, Aziz Tryphōn'un bağların ve bağıcılığın koruyucusu olarak kabul edilmesi oldukça dikkat çekicidir. İkonografik tasvirlerinde sıklıkla bir asma yaprağı ya da "*kladeutērion*" olarak adlandırılan budama bıçağıyla betimlenmesi, Aziz Tryphōn'un bağıcılıkla olan derin ve sembolik ilişkisini de açıkça ortaya koymaktadır. Bu semboller, kadim Anadolu kültüründe şarap ve üzümle özdeşleşen Pagan tanrısı Dionysos ile Hristiyan azizi Tryphōn arasında belirli paralellikler kurulduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, Hristiyanlık öncesi inançlardan miras kalan bazı motiflerin ve pratiklerin, Aziz Tryphōn'un kültü içinde yaşamaya devam ettiği görülmektedir.

Orta Bizans Dönemi'nde kırsal kimliğiyle öne çıkan Aziz Tryphōn, Nikaia'da zambak çiçeği mucizesi gerçekleştirmiştir. İmparator II. Theodoros Laskaris Devri'nde yaşanan mucize, dönemin sikkelerinde zambak motifi ve Aziz Tryphōn tasviri ile kendini göstermiş, Aziz'e ait kültürün Laskarisler Devri'ndeki kutsallığını vurgulamıştır.

Öte yandan, kırsal bölgelerde tarım ve hayvancılıkla geçinen köy halkı, Aziz Tryphōn'u onurlandırmak amacıyla onun adına çeşitli mabetler inşa etmiştir. Bu yapılar, yalnızca dinî işlevleriyle değil, ikonografik programlarıyla da dikkat çekmektedir. Aziz Tryphōn'un yanı sıra kırsal yaşamla özdeşleşen diğer azizlerin tasvirlerine de yer verilen bu yapılar, halkın dinî ve kültürel yaşamında önemli bir rol üstlenmiştir. Aziz Tryphōn'un tarımsal bereketle ilişkilendirilmesi, onu şifacılığının yanında kırsal yaşamın koruyucusu olarak da öne çıkarmıştır.

Çalışma kapsamında, Aziz Tryphōn'un Hristiyanlık tarihindeki yeri, mucizeleri, ikonografik temsilleri ve inanç pratikleri üzerindeki etkisi ele alınmıştır. Ayrıca, Anadolu ve Balkanlar'daki kırsal hayat ve bağıcılıkla ilişkisi üzerinden, azize atfedilen kültürün kökenleri incelenerek değerlendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aziz Tryphōn, Hagiografi, İkonografi, Bağıcılık, Anadolu azizleri, Anadolu kültüleri

## Introduction

The Early Christian Period was one of the most striking stages in the process of Christianization in Anatolia. The followers of the apostles made intense efforts to introduce and spread the new faith. Pagans and Jews, who continued their lives in Anatolia, were confronted with the effects of this new belief over the centuries. Christianity, which was initially perceived as an extension of Judaism by local authorities, gradually gained its own identity and separated from Judaism. Jews, who were disturbed by Christianity's establishment within society, provoked the Roman authorities against Jesus Christ and his followers, leading to their punishment. The following centuries resulted in the Christianization of Pagan Romans and Jews, causing ideological conflicts between cultures.

Religious leaders who followed the path of Jesus Christ and the apostles began to come into prominence during the Early Christian Period. In many cities of various regions of Anatolia, these religious figures, who carried the "Christian flag", fought with their lives to spread their faith. When considering the environment they grew up in and their life stories, it is evident that they carried many local influences. In particular, the pagan traditions of rural Anatolia are heavily reflected in their religious practices.

Saint Tryphōn, born in a small village in rural Phrygia, is one of the significant Christian figures of 3rd-century Anatolia. Known for his healing abilities throughout his life, he was also referred to by the title "*anargyros*", meaning the bestower. Tryphōn, who performed many miracles among the people, also stood out as one of the first Christian exorcists<sup>1</sup>. His most significant miracle was casting out the devil that had possessed the daughter of Emperor Gordian (r. 238–244 CE) and healing the young girl. This event contributed to the rapid spread of Saint Tryphōn's fame among the people, establishing him as an influential figure in missionary activities. The healing miracles performed by Saint Tryphōn led many people to adopt Christian teachings and follow the path of Jesus Christ. However, the harsh policies against Christians by the Emperor Decius (r. 249–251 CE) led to Saint Tryphōn being seen as a threat by the Roman Empire. The young saint, who refused to renounce his faith, was executed in Nicaea (modern-day İzmit), becoming a martyr.

Saint Tryphōn, born in a fertile region like Phrygia, famous for its vineyards, was also known as the protector of vines and viticulture. He is often depicted with a vine leaf or a pruning knife called a *kladeutērion*. His healing abilities, as well as his symbolic connection to viticulture, place him in a position associated with Dionysus, the ancient Anatolian god of wine and grapes.

Additionally, villagers who earned their livelihoods through agriculture and animal husbandry occasionally built small temples in honor of Saint Tryphōn. These structures not only served religious functions but also attracted attention with their iconographic programs. Depictions of saints, particularly Saint Tryphōn, who were associated with rural life, were included, and these figures held an important place in the religious and cultural life of the people.

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1 Kazhdan, 1991, 771; Young, 2016, 38-39.

This study explores in detail the place of Saint Tryphōn in the history of Christianity in Anatolia, his miracles, iconographic representations, and his influence on the religious practices of the local people. Additionally, in the context of his relationship with rural life and viticulture, the origins of the cult of Saint Tryphōn and the cultural continuity established with pre-Christian belief systems are also examined.

### 1. Origin of the Cult of Saint Tryphōn

St. Tryphōn (Τρύφων), who was born and raised in Anatolia and was one of the followers of Jesus Christ, is one of the prominent religious figures of the 3rd century<sup>2</sup>. St. Tryphōn was martyred in Nicaea during the Christian persecutions of the reign of Emperor Decius (r. 249–251 CE). His body was transported by his followers to his birthplace, where it was buried<sup>3</sup>. After the saint's death, various texts written by Christian communities provide much information about Tryphōn's life and miracles. However, due to Anatolia's ancient and deeply rooted traditions, forming a multi-layered cultural mosaic, and the presence of several settlements with the same name has led to uncertainties and conflicting interpretations regarding the saint's identity, feast day, and place of birth.

Among the various works that trace the origins of saints, including St. Tryphōn, the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (BHG) by Halkin is a notable example. The work under examination here demonstrates Tryphōn's direct connection to Nicaea and states that he was martyred in Nicaea during the reign of Emperor Decius. However, a clear statements in both St. Tryphōn's biography (*vita*) and his martyrdom indicate that he was born and lived in the village of Kampsada near the city of Apameia in Phrygia<sup>4</sup>.

The *Synaxarion* mentions that St. Tryphōn was born in a village named Kampsada/Sampsada in Phrygia, and it is noted that this village was located within the borders of the city of Apameia<sup>5</sup>. It is noteworthy that in Roman geography, it is important that many cities from east to west shared the name Apameia<sup>6</sup>. While it is explicitly stated that St. Tryphōn was from Phrygia at his martyrdom site, it is likely that oral traditions, various inscriptions, or a structure dedicated to the saint or its remains led to confusion about the location of Apameia (**Fig.1**).

The land where St. Tryphōn was born is the Phrygia Apameia, referred to as Kibotos by Ptolemy and Kelainai by Pliny<sup>7</sup>. It is believed that the settlement is located near Dinar, within the Afyonkarahisar province in modern-day Turkey<sup>8</sup>. Outside the Phrygia region, there are other cities named Apameia, including Apameia Myrleia in Bithynia, Euphrates Apameia near the famous city of Zeugma (on the Euphrates River),

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2 De Smedt et al., 1902, 11; Migne, 1903, 1311-1312; Halkin, 1957, 307-309.

3 De Smedt et al., 1902, 11.

4 Migne, 1903, 1312; Delehay, 1902, 437; Halkin, 1957, 309.

5 Long, 1870, 152-153; Delehay, 1902, 437.

6 Westermann, 1839, 46.

7 Long, 1870a, 153; Ramsay, 1897, 397-398.

8 Long, 1870a, 153; Narkiss, 1979, 383; Baş, 2019, 349.



**Fig. 1:** Anatolia at the end of the 4th century AD (URL 1)



**Fig.2:** Dionysopolis (Bekilli) and Apameia Kibotos/Kelainai (Dinar) (URL 2)

and Orontes Apameia in Syria<sup>9</sup> (on the Orontes River). After St. Tryphōn was captured in Phrygia and martyred in Nicaea, the cult of the saint gained significance in the Bithynia region as well. The construction of various churches and chapels dedicated to the saint in Nicaea and its surroundings likely led to the assumption that St. Tryphōn was born in Apameia, Bithynia.

Another prominent city in the region during the Roman period was Dionysopolis, under the administration of Apameia Kibotos<sup>10</sup> (Fig.2). Named after the Pagan god

9 Long, 1870a, 152; James, 1870, 876.

10 Westermann, 1839, 104; Long, 1870b, 777.

Dionysus, the ancient settlement of Dionysopolis both honored him and established a direct connection with the Dionysian cult. It is thought to have been located near modern-day Bekilli, known for its fertile vineyards and winemaking<sup>11</sup>. The cities of Dionysopolis and Apameia Kibotos are united in a shared cultural tradition centered around the ancient vine and wine culture in Anatolia, sustained by Dionysus, the god of wine, and St. Tryphōn, the protector of vine-growers.

## 2. Life of Saint Tryphōn

St. Tryphōn (ὁ Ἅγιος Τρύφων) was born in the early 3rd century in the village of Kampsada in Phrygia (**Fig.3**). Making a living as a *χηννοβοσκός*<sup>12</sup> (*khēnoboskos*), gooseherd, he embraced Christian teachings during his youth. Due to his deep devotion to his faith, he was blessed by God and performed numerous miracles, including exorcisms and acts of healing. As a prominent Christian leader of his time, he influenced large audiences and led many people to follow Jesus Christ<sup>13</sup>.



**Fig. 3:**  
Saint Tryphōn of Kampsada  
holding grape leaf, most likely  
a Serbian-Orthodox wooden  
icon (URL 3)

### 2.1. The Hagiographical Narratives of Saint Tryphōn and His Exorcism Miracle

St. Tryphōn's life story (*vita*), miracles, martyrdom, and other texts written about him are listed with brief descriptions in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (BHG) compiled by F. Halkin<sup>14</sup>. Despite the hagiographic tradition states that St. Tryphōn was a martyr of Nicaea, the saint's own *vita* and the concise biography recorded in the

11 Ramsay, 1895, 126.

12 Liddell & Scott, 1996, 1990.

13 Safran, 2005, 189; Živković, 2016, 359.

14 Halkin, 1957, 307-309.

*Synaxarion* both indicate that he was born in a village named Kampsada in the Phrygian countryside<sup>15</sup>.

There are two main biographical accounts of St. Tryphōn's life<sup>16</sup>. The first (BHG 1856) is an Ancient Greek text compiled by P. F. De Cavalieri. This is the earliest and most comprehensive account of St. Tryphōn's life<sup>17</sup>. The earliest of the manuscripts used in De Cavalieri's version dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In a brief note, De Cavalieri mentions the existence of an 8<sup>th</sup> century copy of the Vatican Codex<sup>18</sup>. However, De Cavalieri adds that this copy has been disregarded due to the unreliable information it contains. Another biographical version (BHG 1857) is that attributed to Symeon Metaphrastes<sup>19</sup>. As far as known, there are about 30 reference manuscripts of the Metaphrastic version that have been preserved. The earliest of these dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>.

The Metaphrastic version follows the same tradition as the BHG 1856<sup>21</sup>. In terms of content, both texts contain similar expressions and narratives. In terms of plot, each begins with St. Tryphōn living as a gooseherd in a village called Kampsada in the Phrygian countryside and drawing attention to the saint's reputation as a healer<sup>22</sup>. His first remarkable miracle is the healing of the daughter of Emperor Gordian III. During the reign of Emperor Decius, St. Tryphōn is captured in Kampsada, brought to Nicaea, and put on trial. This passage contains detailed descriptions of passion scenes<sup>23</sup>. In both texts, after a series of tortures, the governor leaves the city and the saint thrown into a dungeon to consider his options. Upon the governor's return, the soldiers tortured him once more<sup>24</sup>. Unable to change the saint's decision, the governor finally decides to behead St. Tryphōn. After his death, his disciples wrapped the remains of the martyred saints in a shroud and took them to his native Kampsada<sup>25</sup>. In the Metaphrastic version, which largely retains the storyline of BHG 1856, the torture scenes are simplified. In particular, BHG 1856 provides a more detailed description of the torture of St. Tryphōn by soldiers<sup>26</sup>.

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15 Migne, 1903, 1312; Delehay, 1902, 437; Halkin, 1957, 309.

16 De Cavalieri, 1908, 38.

17 De Cavalieri, 1908, 41; Halkin, 1957, 307-308.

18 De Cavalieri, 1908, 44.

19 Migne, 1903, 1311-1328; Halkin, 1957, 308.

20 Ott. Gr. 54. <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/cote/65295/> ; [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Ott.gr.54](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Ott.gr.54) (Access date: 30.08.2025).

21 Antonopoulou, 1997, 130.

22 Migne, 1903, 1312; De Cavalieri, 1908, 47-48.

23 Migne, 1903, 1313-1318; De Cavalieri, 1908, 47-64.

24 Migne, 1903, 1323; De Cavalieri, 1908, 64-69. For detailed information on tortures endured by the martyr saints, see. De Cavalieri, 1908, 23-24.

25 Migne, 1903, 1323-1327; De Cavalieri, 1908, 71-74.

26 Migne, 1903, 1323-1326.

Another significant text about St. Tryphōn is Emperor Leo VI's homily, BHG 1858<sup>27</sup>. Until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this homily was the only sermon written for St. Tryphōn. Like the Metaphrastic version, Emperor Leo probably referenced BHG 1856 in his text, but used it in a considerably more straightforward manner<sup>28</sup>. The homily (27<sup>th</sup> sermon) begins with an encomium lauding St. Tryphōn, emphasizing the saint's spiritual nature, which had been evident since childhood. The text recounts that St. Tryphōn, who had been healing people since his youth, performed significant miracles, but was eventually arrested and subjected to various torment. In the homily, it is stated that St. Tryphōn was called by God before his death and received the wreath of glory from Christ. After the demise of saint, it is indicated that he celebrated his triumph by meeting with angels and continued to healing people. The homily also makes reference to the fact that the martyred saint received a glorious crown, and Emperor Leo VI gained imperial glory<sup>29</sup>. The homily focuses on the miracle of exorcism among the saint's miracles<sup>30</sup>. This account is first detailed in BHG 1856 and is regarded as the most remarkable miracle attributed to St. Tryphōn. Despite the fact that the text known as *Vita et Miracula* (BHG 1856a), includes the saint's miracles of healing, Emperor Leo VI's reason for not mentioning them is likely he was only familiar with the initial text. Therefore, it can also be said that the homily is more of a summary emphasizing fundamental points of BHG 1856<sup>31</sup>.

One of the most renowned miracles attributed to Saint Tryphōn is his exorcism of the demon that had possessed the daughter of Emperor Gordian III<sup>32</sup>. The emperor's daughter was known for her humility and beauty, and many senators and nobles competed for the honor of marrying her. However, one day, her body became possessed by evil spirits. Despite all efforts to restore her health, no remedy proved effective. In the midst of her suffering, the tormented young woman suddenly uttered the words "*Tryphōn, the gooseherd.*" Upon hearing this, the emperor ordered all his governors and generals to locate a man named Tryphōn who worked as a gooseherd. Although many individuals named Tryphōn were arrested and brought before the emperor, none were the healer in question<sup>33</sup>.

Before long, the emperor's decree reached the city of Apamea in the province of Phrygia. Roman soldiers, while searching in the village of Kampsada near a lake, encountered a young man tending geese and learned that his name was Tryphōn. Believing they had found the healer, the soldiers first brought the young shepherd before

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27 Halkin, 1957, 308-309; Antonopoulou, 1997, 129-130.

28 Antonopoulou, 1997, 131.

29 Antonopoulou, 1997, 130.

30 Antonopoulou, 1997, 131.

31 De Cavalieri, 1908, 41; Antonopoulou, 1997, 130-131.

32 De Cavalieri, 1908, 43-74. The Greek text "Martyrium S. Triphonis" by De Cavalieri in his 1908 edition of *Hagiographica* (BHG 1856) is the basis for the information on the life of St. Tryphōn.

33 De Cavalieri, 1908, 45-47.

the regional governor and then escorted him to the emperor. Meanwhile, the demon continued to torment the girl with increasing ferocity. As her desperate father watched over her, he suddenly noticed her exhibiting strange movements. Sensing the approach of Healer Tryphōn to the capital, the evil spirit became frantic, using the girl's body to lash out violently. Through the possessed girl, the demon declared, *"I can no longer remain in this body! In three days, the one whom God has blessed—the executioner of our kind—will arrive in Rome."* With these words, the demon departed from the princess's body. Three days later, Tryphōn arrived in Rome and was received by the emperor. Recognizing that the young man before him was indeed the healer foretold by the demon, Emperor Gordian turned to Tryphōn and said, *"If you have truly healed my daughter, then show me the demon's true form."* Tryphōn fasted and prayed for six days, and on the seventh day, as he felt the divine light, he proclaimed, *"O evil spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ! Show yourself without harming anyone present."* At that moment, a massive dog with jet-black fur and eyes glowing like fire appeared before the gathered assembly<sup>34</sup>. Tryphōn then ordered the demon to reveal its identity, the entity it served, and the misfortunes it had caused. The demon confessed that it seized weak souls, leading them away from Christianity and into the worship of empty idols. Stunned by the demon's words, the emperor began to glorify God and Jesus Christ.

Recognizing the young goseherd as a holy man, the emperor held Tryphōn in great reverence. In the final act of the exorcism, Tryphōn commanded the demon to return to the fires of hell, and it vanished<sup>35</sup>. Witnessing the divine power granted to the young saint, many pagans converted to Christianity. In gratitude for his miraculous deeds, the emperor honored and rewarded Saint Tryphōn before allowing him to return to his homeland<sup>36</sup>.

## **2.2. Martyrdom of the Death-defying Saint Tryphōn**

After performing his miracle in Rome, Saint Tryphōn's fame spread rapidly throughout Anatolia. He became widely respected among Christians for his exorcisms and healing abilities, yet he also drew the ire of both Jews and pagans. Following the death of Emperor Gordian III, Philippus (r. 244–249 CE) ascended to the throne, and he was later succeeded by Emperor. Under Decius, the persecution of Christians, which had occurred in previous years, resumed with renewed intensity. The emperor issued an edict mandating that those who refused to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods and who followed the teachings of Jesus Christ would be punished by being burned alive or thrown to wild animals<sup>37</sup>.

Decius's decree was disseminated by governors throughout the empire, and known Christians were arrested and subjected to punishment. Tryphōn, who held

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34 Delehay, 1902, 437; De Cavalieri, 1908, 47–49.

35 Delehay, 1902, 437; De Cavalieri, 1908, 50–53.

36 De Cavalieri, 1908, 53–54.

37 De Cavalieri, 1908, 56.

significant influence over large communities in Anatolia, was also arrested by order of Governor Aquilinus and taken to Nicaea. Upon arrival in the city, he was imprisoned. The following day, he was brought before the governor for interrogation. Aquilinus first asked for his name and his purpose in life. Tryphōn replied that his name was Tryphōn, that he had no specific worldly purpose, but that he was a follower of Jesus Christ. The governor then warned him that he had all those who refused to sacrifice to the gods burned alive. In response, Tryphōn defiantly declared, *"If I am worthy to burn in the fire for Christ, then I accept my fate!"*<sup>38</sup>.

Although impressed by Tryphōn's confidence, Aquilinus continued to persuade him: *"Offer sacrifices to the gods, young man! Despite your age, I can see that you possess a mature spirit."* Tryphōn responded, *"I owe my maturity to my devotion to God, and I must preserve it."* Enraged by the young man's steadfastness, the governor commanded him, *"Obey the emperor! Otherwise, you will be burned alive!"* Fearless, Tryphōn replied, *"O Governor! The fire with which you threaten me will, in the end, leave only a handful of ashes and a corpse! But God will cast into the eternal flames of hell those who bring evil upon His servants."* Furious at these words, Aquilinus ordered his soldiers to scourge Tryphōn. Without hesitation, the saint removed his garments and stood ready. His hands were bound, and the soldiers began to flog him. Despite hours of brutal torture, Tryphōn remained silent. The governor urged him to abandon his defiance, warning that disobedience to the emperor would lead only to death<sup>39</sup>.

Unmoved by these threats, Tryphōn continued to proclaim his devotion to God and Jesus Christ. Aquilinus persisted in demanding that he offer sacrifices to the gods. Tryphōn replied, *"Worshiping idols and offering sacrifices will only please the devil and bring destruction upon you!"* He added, *"The fire with which you threaten me will burn for a time and then be extinguished, and the rage of wild beasts will be subdued by divine power. But you do not understand, O Governor! For those who ignore His commandments, God will bring eternal hellfire."* Stunned by this declaration, Aquilinus ordered Tryphōn to be tied to the back of horses and dragged through the freezing cold of Nicaea. As the young man was tormented for hours in the midst of a snowstorm, his body was crushed, and his feet were torn apart. Enduring his suffering with great virtue, Tryphōn prayed to Jesus Christ, asking that the sins of his torturers not be held against them. When the horses finally returned, the governor ordered Tryphōn to be brought before him once more and asked, *"Have you come to your senses now?"* The saint, looking directly at the governor, replied, *"I remain unwavering in my path, but have you, who serve the devil, come to yours?"* Infuriated, Aquilinus threw Tryphōn back into prison, shouting, *"Either you will come to your senses there, or I will subject you to even greater torments!"*<sup>40</sup>.

While Tryphōn was in prison, the governor left Nicaea for several days. Upon his return, he summoned the saint once again and asked, *"Did your time in the dungeon*

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38 De Cavalieri, 1908, 57–59.

39 Delehayé, 1902, 437; De Cavalieri, 1908, 60–61.

40 Delehayé, 1902, 437; De Cavalieri, 1908, 62–64.

make you reconsider?" Tryphōn answered, "*The Creator of the universe and the Father of all beings has commanded me to believe only in Him! I pity myself! I pity myself because, despite everything, I must protect my soul so that I do not abandon the Creator of heaven, earth, and all humanity!*"<sup>41</sup>.

Determined to break his spirit, the governor continued his tortures. Tryphōn's feet were pierced with nails, and he was beaten with clubs in the city square. When asked if he felt pain, he responded that he only felt the nails in his feet. Astounded by the young man's extraordinary endurance, Aquilinus escalated the torture, having him beaten with molten lead clubs and his ribs seared with torches<sup>42</sup>.

Despite these relentless torments, Tryphōn remained resolute. Suddenly, he was once again blessed by God, and a radiant light as bright as the sun surrounded his body. A jeweled crown appeared on his head, and those who witnessed it—the soldiers and the gathered crowd—were so overwhelmed by its splendor that they fell to the ground. At that moment, Tryphōn lifted his hands to the heavens and prayed: "*O my God! Do not let the devil triumph over me! Do not deprive me of Your divine beauty, and accept me into the flock of Your chosen ones!*"<sup>43</sup>.

Blinded by rage, Aquilinus intensified the torture, trying to force Tryphōn to submit to the emperor's authority. As the soldiers began to whip him once again, Tryphōn declared, "*O Governor! I shall offer no sacrifice to demons! For I fear only the God who created heaven and earth! The breath of all humanity is in His hands, and I bow only to His commands. I fear neither men nor the suffering you inflict upon me!*"<sup>44</sup>.

The next day, the governor resumed the torment. Tryphōn was beaten with leaden clubs once more. Then, Aquilinus ordered him to offer a sacrifice before the statue of Emperor Decius and swear allegiance to Zeus. Instead, Tryphōn cursed all Roman gods, declaring that they never truly existed and were nothing more than mere stones. Enraged by this defiance, Aquilinus ordered an immediate trial. Before the court, Tryphōn, the gooseherd from the village of Kampsada in Phrygia, was condemned to death for being a Christian, for disobeying the emperor's orders, and for disrespecting the gods of Rome. The young saint was taken to the place of execution, where he lifted his hands to the sky in prayer. As soon as he finished his final words, he was martyred by beheading<sup>45</sup> (**Fig.4**).

Following Saint Tryphōn's execution, the Christian community in Nicaea gathered to collect the saint's bodily remains. They anointed his body with *myron*, wrapped it in burial cloths, and placed it in a coffin, sending it to his hometown of Kampsada<sup>46</sup>.

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41 De Cavalieri, 1908, 64–65.

42 De Cavalieri, 1908, 64–66.

43 De Cavalieri, 1908, 66–69.

44 De Cavalieri, 1908, 68–69.

45 De Cavalieri, 1908, 71–74.

46 De Cavalieri, 1908, 74.

### 3. The Christian Identity of Saint Tryphōn, His Feast, and its Connection to Dionysian Festivals

The *vita* of Saint Tryphōn portrays him as a devoted disciple who fully embraced Christian teachings, demonstrating unwavering faith in God and Jesus Christ. Despite his relatively short life, he played a significant role in preserving the unity of Christian belief and provided great service to Christian communities. Through Saint Tryphōn's intercessions, many people were cured of severe illnesses, and those afflicted by malevolent spirits were healed through his miracles. With regard to this subject, the following lines appear in the section dedicated to St. Tryphōn in Byzantine Menaion: "*For having your strength, he laid low his adversaries, and shattered the powerless boldness of demons.*"<sup>47</sup>

Although primarily known as a healer, Saint Tryphōn was also venerated as the protector of viticulture, an industry of vital economic and cultural importance in his homeland. His miraculous deeds extended beyond healing people, as he was believed to safeguard vineyards, gardens, and fields by neutralizing venomous creatures that threatened agricultural prosperity<sup>48</sup>.

As a healer, Tryphōn is associated with a group of Christian saints known as *anargyroi* (ἀνάργυροι)<sup>49</sup>. The term *anargyroi*, meaning "without silver" or "those who do not accept payment," refers to saints who performed acts of healing and kindness without seeking material compensation. Alongside prominent Christian figures such as Saints Cosmas and Damian and Gregory Thaumaturgus of Neocaesarea, these saints were known for their miraculous interventions, healing the sick, and exorcising demons without expectation of personal gain<sup>50</sup>. Tryphōn, in particular, was renowned for his expertise in exorcism rituals. Tertullian (2nd–3rd century AD) suggests that specialized exorcists may have been present within Christian communities as early as the 3rd century AD. In this context, Tryphōn was recognized not only for delivering individuals from demonic possession but also for conducting purification rites to cleanse land and estates from malevolent spirits<sup>51</sup>.

After his martyrdom, Christians commemorated Saint Tryphōn's feast day annually on February 1/14 with various religious rituals. The feast day of St. Tryphōn is traditionally listed as February 1 in the *Synaxarion*. However, the feast day falls on February 14 according to the Gregorian calendar, and it is probable that over time it has become widely known among people as February 14<sup>52</sup>. The difference between the calendars, the concurrence of mid-February with the grape harvest, and the significance

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47 Byzantine Monthly Menaion, 2005, February 1. [https://mci.archpitt.org/sheetmusic/general/Menaion\\_February.pdf](https://mci.archpitt.org/sheetmusic/general/Menaion_February.pdf) (Access date: 30.08.2025).

48 Kazhdan, 1991, 771; Foss, 1996, 6.

49 Liddell & Scott, 1996, 118; Hronas, 1999, 24.

50 Kruk, 2018, 43-45.

51 De Cavalieri, 1908, 74; Kazhdan, 1991, 771. See also: Tattam, 1848; 130; Pitarakis, 2018, 43-62.

52 Bař, 2019, 346.

of February 14 in the modern world are likely to have been contributing factors in this regard.

His veneration extended beyond major urban centers and cult sites, reaching rural communities where churches and chapels were dedicated in his honor<sup>53</sup>. A prominent feature of these rural structures was the depiction of saints associated with agriculture and animal husbandry in their iconographic programs. Some churches and chapels also included votive niches dedicated to these saints (Fig.7). This reflects the significance of agriculture and livestock farming in both daily life and religious practices of rural communities<sup>54</sup>. Viticulture, in particular, was of vital importance to villagers due to the significant commercial potential of wine production<sup>55</sup>. Believing that these saints protected and blessed their crops, livestock, and lands, Christian villagers built modest sanctuaries in their honor, offering their harvest as votive gifts. In certain regions, farmers who refrained from visiting their fields on Tryphōn's feast day believed that their lands would be blessed that night, resulting in increased fertility<sup>56</sup>. An inscription discovered near ancient Alexandria Troas is also significant evidence of the local inhabitants' devotion of the cult of St. Tryphōn. The inscription, which was translated by F. R. Trombley and slightly modified by P. Nowakowski, contains the following statements: "*On behalf of the vow of the villages and people of Saint Tryphon, and of those who made offerings in it (?), and of all their households whose names God [alone] knows. Holy, holy, holy. God help us! Amen*"<sup>57</sup>.

A striking parallel exists between the timing of Saint Tryphōn's feast and the traditional pruning season of vineyards, which typically begins in mid-February and continues through March. The period from February 14 to March 12, known to the Athenians as *Anthestēriōn*, coincides with the vineyard pruning season. The name *Anthestēriōn* originates from the *Anthestēria* (Festival of Flowers), a festival in honor of Dionysus that began on February 14<sup>58</sup>. In addition to vineyard pruning, the *Anthestēria* festival featured important rites, including the sacred marriage of Dionysus, making it one of the most significant celebrations dedicated to the god<sup>59</sup>.

As seen in numerous Christian martyr narratives, Saint Tryphōn was reportedly adorned with a crown encrusted with precious stones and surrounded by divine radiance

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53 The most important building in Anatolia, which may have been dedicated to Saint Tryphōn, is the remains of a church in Nicaea. The first information about the building was written by Semavi Eyice in 1949. For detailed information see also: Eyice, 1949, 37-41; Papadopoulos, 1952, 110-113; Buchwald, 1979; 262-263; Ermiş, 2009, 102-103, 326-328.

54 Safran, 2005, 190.

55 Laiou-Thomadakis, 1977, 30.

56 Hamilton, 1910, 198; Kazhdan, 1991, 771.

57 Nowakowski, Cult of Saints, E00733 - <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00733> (Access date: 30.08.2025).

58 Liddell & Scott, 1996, 139.

59 Parker, 2005, 312.

at the moment of his martyrdom. Interestingly, Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine, is frequently depicted wearing a wreath made of ivy or vine leaves since antiquity, drawing an intriguing parallel to the imagery surrounding Tryphōn. In addition, in his homily, Emperor Leo recount that Jesus gave St. Tryphōn a "wreath of victory" and that the saint celebrated his victory with the angels. Furthermore, the transference of Tryphōn's feast to February 14 is significant, as the number 14 plays a crucial role in Dionysian mythology<sup>60</sup>. The month of *Anthestēriōn* begins on February 14<sup>61</sup>. In the sacred wedding of Dionysus, 14 priestesses, known as *gerarai* (γεραραί), performed the rites. These women, whose name means "elders," were selected from an esteemed senior group<sup>62</sup>. Additionally, during the *Anthestēria* festival, 14 altars were dedicated to these priestesses, one for each<sup>63</sup>.

In the *Dionysiaca*, the poet Nonnus presents Dionysus as the son of Zeus and Semele, whereas the Orphic tradition identifies him as the offspring of Zeus and Persephone<sup>64</sup>. In the Orphic myth, Dionysus was dismembered into 14 pieces by the Titans<sup>65</sup>. This theme is also reflected in *Dionysiaca*, where Dionysus appears in the form of Zagreus, the son of Zeus and Persephone. Zeus, disguised as a serpent, impregnates Persephone, who had been hidden in a cave by Demeter for protection. Their child, Zagreus, is subsequently hunted down and dismembered by the Titans under Hera's orders. After consuming his flesh, the Titans are struck down by Zeus's thunderbolt. Zagreus is later reborn as Dionysus, continuing the cycle of life, death, and rebirth central to Dionysian tradition<sup>66</sup>.

#### 4. The Representation of Saint Tryphōn in Byzantine Art

The cult of Saint Tryphōn holds a significant place within the local religious and cultural fabric of Anatolia. Venerated across a vast geographical expanse stretching from the interior regions of Anatolia, such as Phrygia, to the Balkans, Saint Tryphōn's sanctity became tangible through the numerous churches built in his honor. Within the Byzantine world, he was regarded as a protective saint, associated with both material and spiritual aspects such as viticulture, production, healing, and fertility. As a result, a distinct cult dedicated to him emerged. In Byzantine art, Saint Tryphōn was depicted as a symbol of abundance for landowners and cultivators, and as a source of healing for the sick. His iconographic representations emphasize his holiness and protective attributes through various attributes, often accompanied by scenes from his hagiography.

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60 Hamilton, 1910, 199-200.

61 Taylor-Perry, 2003, 105.

62 Taylor-Perry, 2003, 64; Parker, 2005, 312.

63 And, 2022, 40.

64 Nonnos, 1962, 1.1-10; Brilliant, 1979, 128; Weitzmann, 1984, 180-181; Taylor-Perry, 2003, 63-64.

65 Nilsson, 1975, 111; And, 2022, 40.

66 Nonnos, 1962, 6.155-168, 6.166-206; Nilsson, 1975, 40-44.



**Fig.4:** Martyr scene of Saint Tryphōn, Menologion of Basil II (11<sup>th</sup> century) (URL 4)

Among illuminated manuscripts, The Menologion Basil II stands out as one of the most important work, and also contains one of the earliest depiction of Saint Tryphōn (Fig.4). In the scene of St. Tryphōn's martyrdom by beheading, the saint is depicted as young and beardless, with his hand tied behind. This scene is considered to be of great importance, as it is also describe in detail in saint's *vita*. The saint is depicted with a halo surroundings his head, and is attired in a long white *χιτών* (*khitōn*) with gilded details on the collar and hem. Behind him stands a Roman soldier with a slight beard and a purple-blue *χλαμύς* (*khlamys*) hanging from his blue *khitōn*. He holds a red scabbard in his left hand, and a sword in his right, which he raises to strike the fatal blow. In the background of the composition, high hills can be seen along with a few trees and other plant details. On the left side of the landscape, a blue building decorated with pink and white eaves can be seen<sup>67</sup>. The text of the Menologion, akin to the *Synaxarion*, provides a concise account of St. Tryphōn's life. According to this account, St. Tryphōn resided in the Phrygian countryside during the reign of Emperor Gordian. It is further stated that St. Tryphōn performed a miracle by casting out the demon that possessed the emperor's daughter, and eventually the saint was brought to Nicaea to face trial during the reign of Emperor Decius, where he was martyred there<sup>68</sup>.

67 Bibliothecae Vaticanae, 1907, 99.

68 Vat.gr.1613 fol. 363r. [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.gr.1613/0386](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1613/0386) (Access date: 30.08.2025).

Saint Tryphōn is frequently depicted either alone or alongside other saints in frescoes; in some instances, he appears in a bust form within a medallion. Renowned for the miracles he performed in his youth and martyred at a young age, Saint Tryphōn is typically portrayed as a beardless young man dressed in Roman attire. His garments generally consist of a long tunic similar to an *ἐπενδύτης* (*ependytēs*), over which he wears a *khlamys*, and he is always depicted with a halo<sup>69</sup>. Despite being highly revered by the people during his lifetime, Saint Tryphōn had no direct affiliation with the institutional Church. Consequently, he is never depicted wearing clerical or episcopal vestments. However, in some frescoes, small cross motifs intricately woven into the fabric of his garments serve as notable details (Fig.5).

In the frescoes, Saint Tryphōn is typically depicted in two distinct forms. The first of these portrays him holding a patriarchal cross<sup>70</sup> in his right hand,



Fig. 5: Saint Tryphōn's tunic detailed with crosses, Sopocani Monastery-Chapel of St. Symeon Nemania (13<sup>th</sup> century) (URL 5)

69 Kazhdan & Ševčenko, 1991, 424; Ševčenko, 1991, 2127.

70 Patriarchal cross is cross with two cross-arms, one above the other and the shorter one at the top. This form of cross, frequently attested on Byzantine coinage, also appears in the iconography of martyr saints. Grierson, 1982, 341; Sear, 1987, 425-427; Becker, 1994, 71. There are also many interpretations of the symbolic and iconographic meaning of the cross. According to one of them, just like Jesus Christ, the cross has a dual nature, and one of the arms of the cross represents the death of Jesus Christ and the other his resurrection. Another view is based on the statement in John 19:21. After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Governor Pilate had a sign hung on the cross with the inscription "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews". The long part with the arms of Jesus Christ nailed to it symbolises his earthly nature, whereas the part corresponding to the short arm of the cross symbolises his divine or religious power. From this point of view, it is possible to say that the depictions of martyr saints holding a two-barred cross symbolise death

while his left hand is positioned with the palm facing outward<sup>71</sup>. The placement of the patriarchal cross in the right hand is rooted in the symbolic association of the right side with God and the divine, as it is traditionally considered the side of sacred authority. In iconography, the right hand is often depicted as a symbol of blessing and divine power. Conversely, the left side is commonly associated with worldly elements and is linked to nature, symbolizing an earthly role in healing and nourishment. Within this context, the left hand, shown open and raised, can be interpreted as a gesture responding to the needs of the physical world, signifying fertility, enrichment, or healing (**Fig.6**).



**Fig.6:** Saint Tryphōn with open palm raising his hand and holding cross, Dečani Monastery (14th century) (URL 6)

The second iconographic type of Saint Tryphōn in Byzantine art developed in response to the socio-political transformations of the Middle Byzantine period. This era witnessed the expansion and growth of rural settlements in Anatolia, alongside an increasing inclination toward talismanic beliefs under the influence of Orthodox Christianity<sup>72</sup>. Following the capture of Constantinople by the Latins during the Fourth Crusade, the distinctive character of Anatolia became more pronounced in the 13th century. During the Nicaean Empire, smaller settlements evolved not only into centers of agricultural production but also into hubs of trade<sup>73</sup>. Consequently, from the Middle to the Late Byzantine periods, Christian saints emerged as prominent cultural patrons and local protectors in Anatolia, a phenomenon that was reflected across various artistic and religious domains, including Byzantine painting.

In these depictions, Saint Tryphōn is frequently portrayed holding a patriarchal cross in his right hand, while his left hand grasps a *κλαδευτήριον* (*kladeutērion*), a viticultural pruning knife, or alternatively, a grapevine leaf or a lily (**Fig.7-8**). The pruning

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and salvation together. See also Lundy, 1876, 22-23; Schiller, 1972, 124-130; Brown, 1988, 93; Karpozilos & Cutler, 1991, 550-551; Becker, 1994, 73-74; White, 2021, 139.

71 As is known, the cross has the important function of exorcising demons and purifying the environment from evil spirits. In this respect, the depiction of the Exorcist Tryphōn with a cross in his right hand also emphasizes purge. Podskalsky, 1991, 550.

72 Kōroğlu, 2024, 54.

73 Nesbitt & Kazhdan, 1991, 40.

knife was a widely used tool in vineyards and gardens throughout the Middle Ages<sup>74</sup>. The grapevine leaf, symbolizing both the region of the saint's birth and the vineyards he was believed to protect, was also one of the most significant attributes of Dionysos. The lily, on the other hand, is associated with the widespread veneration of Saint Tryphōn during the Laskarid period in Nicaea<sup>75</sup> (Fig.8). A notable miracle linked to Saint Tryphōn was reported in a church dedicated to him in Nicaea<sup>76</sup>, where lilies placed beside the lamp illuminating his icon or statue were said to bloom even in the harsh winter months<sup>77</sup>. Witnessing this phenomenon, Emperor Theodoros II Doukas Laskaris composed hymns in praise of Saint Tryphōn<sup>78</sup>. The early blooming of the lilies was regarded as a *τέρας* (teras), meaning "miracle"<sup>79</sup>. Particularly significant is the inclusion of Saint Tryphōn's image and the lily motif on the coins minted in Magnesia under the orders of Emperor Theodoros II Doukas Laskaris, highlighting the saint's cultural influence<sup>80</sup> (Fig. 9).



**Fig. 7:** The fresco of Saint Tryphōn fresco in a small niche, Church of St. Demetrios in Crete (13<sup>th</sup> century) (Gerstel, 2015, 122)

Saint Tryphōn frequently appears in pictorial programs alongside other religious figures associated with agricultural and pastoral protection, such as Saint Mamas and Saint Blasios<sup>81</sup>. In rural settlements and particularly in the religious architecture of the countryside, such iconographic representations often emphasize symbolic elements related to the saints' cults. In the example from the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Kalyvia, the figures of Saint Mamas and Saint Tryphōn are depicted facing each other, positioned on the inner surface of an

74 Nesbitt et al., 1991, 39; Pitarakis, 2005, 248-249.

75 Foss, 1996, 6.

76 Ramsay, 1890, 179, 183; Buchwald, 1979; 262-263; Ermiş, 2009, 103-110.

77 Foss, 1991, 1464; Foss, 1996, 105-106.

78 Foss, 1996, 105-106.

79 Foss, 1996, 201; Liddell & Scott, 1996, 1776.

80 Grierson, 1982, 251-252; Sear, 1987, 17; Foss, 1996, 105; Hendy, 1999, 521; Göktürk, 2021, 169

81 Gerstel, 2015, 122.

**Fig. 8:**  
Saint Tryphōn  
with lily flower  
in medallion,  
Manasija  
Monastery  
(15th century)  
(URL 7)



**Fig. 9:**  
Coins of  
Theodoros  
II Doukas  
Laskaris  
(Hendy, 1999,  
pl. XXXV)  
(Also see.  
Grierson, 1982,  
pl. 72.)



arch (**Fig.10**). Saint Mamas is portrayed holding a *kalauros* (καλαῦρος) or *lagōbolon* (λαγωβόλον), a shepherd's staff, in his right hand, while carrying a small lamb in his left<sup>82</sup>. Saint Tryphōn, on the other hand, is depicted holding a small livestock animal in his left hand. Due to damage to the wall painting, the object in his right hand is not entirely discernible, but it is likely a patriarchal cross<sup>83</sup>.

82 Liddell & Scott, 1996, 866, 1023.

83 Gerstel, 2005, 170.



**Fig. 10:** Saints Mamas and Tryphōn, Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Kalyvia (14<sup>th</sup> century) (Gerstel, 2005, 171)

The cult of Saint Tryphōn spread extensively across the Balkan region, particularly in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The continuation of this phenomenon in Post-Byzantine wall paintings serves as one of the most significant indicators of the enduring relevance of the saint's cult. In a Post-Byzantine painting housed in the Byzantine Museum of Athens, Saint Tryphōn is depicted in accordance with the second iconographic type, holding a patriarchal cross in his right hand and a *kladeutērion* (κλαδευτήριον) in his left (**Fig.11**).

Another notable depiction of Saint Tryphōn appears in a fresco located in the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon in Nerezi (**Fig.12**). In this representation, the saint holds a shepherd's staff (*kalaurops*) in his right hand, while his left hand is depicted with an open palm, consistent with the first iconographic type. The unusual placement of the staff in the right hand evokes the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd<sup>84</sup> (ποιμὴν ὁ καλός/*poimēn ho kalos*). When considering Middle Byzantine depictions, the more conventional iconographic choice for portraying Saint Tryphōn as a gooseherd would be positioning the staff in the left hand. However, in the Nerezi example, the staff appears to transcend its earthly function, assuming a sacred significance associated with the divine.

Although narratives about Saint Tryphōn's life and miracles are well-documented in written sources, his representation in Byzantine art remains relatively rare. One of his most renowned miracles—exorcising an evil spirit from the daughter of the Roman Emperor Gordian III—is frequently emphasized in hagiographic texts yet seldom depicted

84 Kazhdan & Ševčenko, 1991, 860. See also. Lundy, 1876, 187-191.



**Fig. 11:** Saint Tryphōn, Byzantine Museum of Athens (18<sup>th</sup> century) (URL 8)



**Fig. 12:** Saint Tryphōn with shepherd's crook, Monastery of Saint Panteleimon (12<sup>th</sup> century) (URL 9)

in iconographic scenes. Instead, Byzantine art more commonly portrays saints healing the souls of individuals<sup>85</sup>. Within Christian iconography, scenes of martyr saints combating demons are often used to emphasize their divine power and sanctity<sup>86</sup>. One of the few surviving examples of Saint Tryphōn depicted as an exorcist healer can be found in the relief on the ciborium of Saint Tryphōn's Cathedral in Kotor, Montenegro.



**Fig. 13:** Saint Tryphōn with devil in, Kotor (14<sup>th</sup> century) (URL 10)

85 Walter, 1982, 92; Podskalsky & Cutler, 1991, 609.

86 Kōroğlu, 2024, 55-56.

The relief in the cathedral from the Middle Ages primarily depicts the scene of the princess falling ill and collapsing into bed after being possessed by a demon. In the narrative, the demon who haunts the princess abandons her when Tryphōn approaches the city. Later, the Emperor demands that Tryphōn prove that he is the one who healed the princess. In response, Saint Tryphōn prays for six days and, on the seventh day, is consecrated and commands the demon to reveal itself. The demon then shows itself to everyone present, and the continuation of the relief captures this moment (**Fig.13**). The narrative describes the demon as appearing in the form of “*a large, black dog with eyes glowing like fire*”<sup>87</sup>. When examining the lives of other saints, it is also evident that evil spirits often appear in the guise of animals such as dogs, snakes, or scorpions (Podskalsky, 1991, 616; Greenfield, 1992, 74-74). In the story of Saint Demetrios of Thessalonica, a devil is said to appear in the form of a scorpion while he is imprisoned<sup>88</sup>. According to one account, evil spirits, having possessed the bodies of 14 different animals, torment vineyards and gardens. Saint Tryphōn miraculously tames the animals and purifies the gardens and vineyards from the evil spirits<sup>89</sup>. In the relief at the Kotor Cathedral, the demon is depicted standing on two feet with wings spread, next to Saint Tryphōn, as a wild creature with sharp teeth and horns on its head. The representation of the saint in the vitrine and the relief’s depiction serve to make the narrative more understandable to the illiterate segments of the public. Moreover, they play a significant role in emphasizing the main theme of the story and establishing a stronger context in the viewer’s mind.

While the *passion* scenes of Saint Tryphōn are detailed in his vitrine, their representations in Byzantine iconography are quite limited. The narratives particularly emphasize the saint’s torments, his struggle to maintain his faith, and the miracles he performed in this context. The most notable piece containing the *passion* scenes of Saint Tryphōn is the Post-Period metal reliquary preserved in Kotor Cathedral. It depicts, in sequence, scenes of the saint being dragged by horses, scourged, stoned, and ultimately decapitated<sup>90</sup> (**Fig.14**).

In the depiction of Saint Tryphōn being dragged by horses, the saint is shown with his hands and feet bound to separate horses. In the scourging scene, Saint Tryphōn is positioned in the center, tied to a pole, while two soldiers on either side lash him with whips. Similarly, in the stoning scene, the saint is also tied to a pole, with soldiers raising stones in the air on either side of him (**Fig.15**). At the top of the reliquary, Saint Tryphōn is depicted holding a model of the city of Kotor, which he protects in one hand, and a pruning knife in the other. Notably, the tradition concerning the saint places greater emphasis on the moment of his martyrdom, where his head is decapitated, in the Byzantine examples (**Fig.16**).

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87 Delehaye, 1902, 437; De Cavalieri, 1908, 47-49; Mango, 1992, 221.

88 Lemerle, 1979, 235-236; Hostetler, 2016, 173.

89 Hamilton, 1910, 199-200.

90 Živković, 2020, 186, 191.

**Fig. 14:**  
Passions of Saint  
Tryphōn on reliquary  
casket (16<sup>th</sup> century)  
(Živković, 2020, 186)



**Fig. 15:**  
Stoning of Saint  
Tryphōn on reliquary  
casket (16<sup>th</sup> century)  
(Živković, 2020, 190)



**Fig. 16:**  
Decapitation of Saint  
Tryphōn on reliquary  
casket (16<sup>th</sup> century)  
(Živković, 2020, 191)



### Evaluation and Conclusion

The processes of cultural and religious transmission can be observed not only through the traditions between Paganism and Christianity but also through the intersections between all cultures and religions. However, focusing solely on seeking direct similarities in belief transmissions may lead to the overlooking of important details and contextual differences. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the diversity of local cults and rituals, especially in the religious elements and figures of polytheistic traditions. Christianity, a monotheistic faith, was built upon the Hellenistic-Roman and Eastern traditions it inherited from polytheistic beliefs. The influences of significant religious figures such as Zeus, Demeter, and Dionysus from Olympus are clearly felt in the Christian saints of later periods. However, this continuity can be observed as a process where the characteristics or protective roles of an Olympian god were transferred to multiple Christian saints. Saint Tryphōn, the healer saint, emerges as an important carrier of a specific tradition shaped around the healing miracles of the Dionysian cult in Anatolia and Christian belief.

In classical Christian martyrdom narratives, the theme of a religious figure becoming a martyr after undergoing several forms of torture is common. However, in the martyrdom narrative of Saint Tryphōn, despite enduring tortures that exceed the physical limits of the human body, he survives and does not become a martyr. In this context, it is striking that Saint Tryphōn survives by seeking strength and power from God, as though being resurrected. Similarly, in the mythological narrative of Dionysus, based on the Orphic tradition, the theme of death and resurrection is prominent, as it is in other belief systems. In both stories, the motif of death and resurrection can be interpreted as a reflection of divine power.

Another striking example of the similarities between Saint Tryphōn and the Dionysian cult is the celebration of his feast day on February 14, which coincides with the beginning of the *Anthēstēria* festival of Dionysus, lasting for a month. It is also notable that the period for pruning vineyards to avoid the adverse effects of weather falls in February and March. Furthermore, the fact that Apameia, the birthplace of Saint Tryphōn, is located near Dionysopolis, which was famous for its vineyards and considered Dionysus' hometown in the Phrygian tradition, further supports this connection.

The depictions of Saint Tryphōn in Byzantine art also reveal the saint's multifaceted influence on the local population and how his cult spread from Anatolia to the Balkans. As Saint Tryphōn was martyred at a young age, he is always depicted as a young man with wavy-curly hair. As he did not officially adopt a religious identity during his lifetime, the saint is often depicted wearing Roman garments. In church frescoes in the Balkan region in particular, cross motifs on his garments emphasize his religious character. In the churches of Serbia, Kosova, and Macedonia, the saint depicted holding a patriarchal cross, and this tradition continued throughout the Balkans until the Middle Byzantine period.

During the Middle Byzantine period, depictions of the St. Tryphōn with motifs of his pruning knife and vine leaves can be seen, especially in rural village settlements.

These motifs emphasize the saint's connection of the socio-economic structure of rural settlements, not only in Anatolia but also throughout the Balkans, on religious practice. The examples identified by researchers show that some village churches in Greece also feature St. Tryphōn in their painting programs. In particular, the depiction of the saint with rural motifs, such as a pruning knife, is based on his role as a protector of vineyards and viniculture. Significantly, some depictions of saints in these churches are depicted inside votive niches. The local people offer their own produce, such as vegetables, fruits, or other goods as offerings to the saints associated with the products that sustain their livelihoods. One such example is the depiction of Saint Tryphōn in a small niche at the Church of St. Demetrios in Crete. Based on this, it can be said that churches built by villagers with their own resources, sometimes with donations from a pioneer, implemented a painting programme entirely in line with their beliefs and needs. This situation is also an important reflection of how closely the villagers' daily lives were interwind with their religious beliefs.

The reflections of Saint Tryphōn's lily miracle, which took place in Nicaea during the Laskarid period, can also be traced in various examples of Byzantine depictions. St. Tryphōn held a particularly significant position as the patron saint of Nicaea under Emperor Theodoros II Doukas Laskaris. Depictions of St. Tryphōn with lilies were also featured on coins minted by the emperor during this period. This is the most significant example emphasizing the importance of the cult of St. Tryphōn during the Laskarid period. Similarly, frescoes depicting St. Tryphōn with a lily have been noticed in churches across the Balkans since the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

A group of itinerant artists who painted frescoes in churches, in particularly in the Balkans during 14<sup>th</sup> century, are frequently mentioned<sup>91</sup>. It is thought that these itinerant artists were active in many churches in regions such as Dečani, Gračanica, and Thessaloniki<sup>92</sup>. However, the results of this study, based on the depictions of Saint Tryphōn accessed and examined, suggest that is difficult to infer stylistic conclusion regarding the existence of workshops and itinerant artists. Nevertheless, it is possible to assert that the artists based their depictions of the saint on a specific template. As indicated by the hagiographic narrative of the saint, it is noteworthy that the figure is depicted as young and usually beardless. It is also notable that the saint is invariably depicted with wavy-curl hair. Furthermore, it is challenging to identify a unifying stylistic motif in the attributes and garments of the saint, which underwent significant alterations throughout the historical period.

The narratives present in the vitrine of Saint Tryphōn, especially those depicted as reliefs on stone and metal works, illustrate scenes from his life. While miracles such as the healing of Emperor Gordian III's daughter rarely appear in iconography, motifs related to healing and exorcism are found in the reliefs in Kotor Cathedral, specifically in the ciborium. Additionally, while the passion scenes of the saint are more detailed in his

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91 Rice, 1963, 16; Skliris, 2003, 74-75.

92 Rice, 1963, 16-17; Skliris, 2003, 74-76.

vitrine, they are depicted most extensively in the metal reliquary from the Post-Byzantine period in Kotor Cathedral.

Despite his short life, Saint Tryphōn reached a wide audience in various parts of Anatolia, particularly Phrygia, contributing to the growth of the Christian population and bringing healing to many. By blending the elements inherited from the historical and cultural past of his native region with the belief system that developed around him, he drew attention to the significance of Anatolia's deep-rooted traditions on the social structure. The memory and legacy of Saint Tryphōn have been preserved not only in the major cultural centers of Anatolia but also through the construction of numerous churches dedicated to him in the Balkans, playing a significant role in the cultural and spatial spread of Christianity.

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