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Edited by
Denis Sullivan
Elizabeth Fisher
Stratis Papaioannou

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LEARNED WOMEN OF BYZANTIUM AND THE SURVIVING RECORD

Maria Mavroudi

The narrative sources that inform us about learned women in Greek-speaking antiquity and the medieval period are in their overwhelming majority the result of late antique and subsequently also Byzantine selection and preservation. Since we recognize that the attitude of a society regarding aspects of its past reveals its views about the present, the following fact calls for some reflection: Greek narrative sources created or preserved during the Byzantine period seem to convey a significantly greater amount of information about learned women of the ancient than of the Byzantine period. Indeed, already in the early modern period, it was possible to collect a mine of information on learned women (for example, philosophers, poets, doctors, alchemists) who were active in Graeco-Roman antiquity[1] and use them in order to argue in favor of female participation in public intellectual life in the seventeenth century, a period for which female authors are relatively well recorded and studied by modern researchers.[2] Likewise—and closer to our own frame of reference—the study of women in earlier historic periods was intensified since the late 1970s and early 1980s, the time when "women's studies" took shape as an academic discipline and employed various tools, including the exploration of historic precedent, in order to argue in favor of a new place for contemporary women in academia and society at large. By the same token, could we interpret the Byzantine collection and preservation of information

[1] A well-known such work is by Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), *The nobility and excellence of women, and the defects and vices of men*, ed. and trans. Dunhill (1999); it was based on earlier works on famous women, the earliest of which was Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (1374), the collected biographies of 106 women. Boccaccio seems to have intended this as an imitation of known works from Roman antiquity on illustrious men [Kolsky (2003)] and was unaware of Plutarch's *Noble Deeds of Women* (= *Moralia* 17) [Franklin (2006) 1]. Later authors reference Boccaccio's work, such as Christine de Pisan in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) [Lawson (1985) 21]. For other works on famous women, see Dunhill (1999) xvi ff. and the not always adequate McLeod (1991).

[2] Findlen (2002).

about learned women in antiquity as a contemplation by the Byzantines (whether men or women) on equivalent roles potentially played by Byzantine women in their contemporary societies? A brief answer to this large question is possible by looking at the associations three Byzantine writers evoke when mentioning Aspasia, one of the most famous female figures of Greek antiquity. The ancient sources read by the Byzantines offer a range of positive as well as negative evaluations for Aspasia ranging between a prostitute and a respectable woman;[3] this is also reflected in Aspasia's mention by Byzantine authors, who chose depending on whether they wanted to convey a positive or negative example of womanhood as it applied to the point they wished to make regarding their own society. In the tenth century, Euthymios Protasecretis wrote an *encomium* on St. Mary the Egyptian praising her asceticism in which he compared her with a number of virtuous men and women from antiquity. The female examples include not only Aspasia, but also Antigone, Pheretima, Phemonoe, Pantheia, Thargelia, and Theano the Pythagorean. The modern editor of the text, F. Halkin, registered surprise at this seemingly incongruous catalogue,[4] but Euthymios' choices become perfectly intelligible when we realize that he identified these figures as philosophers following a definition of philosophy current in a number of ninth to eleventh century texts such as the *Suda* and the Lexicon of Zonaras as "moral perfection based on the true gnosis of Being."[5] In a world that had known Christian revelation, such a definition can only lead to the identification of philosophy with Christianity and of a monk or nun with a philosopher;[6] accordingly, Euthymios compared the ascetic Mary with non-Christian models of virtue, since all of them are philosophers; of course, Mary far surpasses the others because of being a Christian.[7] A positive

[3] Henry (1995); Taylor (2003) 182–86. Both Henry and Taylor discuss the seventeenth-century drawing of a gemstone thought to depict Aspasia because of its inscription ΑΣΠΑΣΟΥ, seemingly a Byzantine version of her name. Since this would have been a unique such instance, a correction is in order: this is a first-century BC gem depicting the gold and ivory statue of Athena by Pheidias. The inscription (ΑΣΠΑΣΙΟΥ) gives the name of the engraver. See Zwierlein-Diehl (2007) 111–12, 408–9, plate 96, fig. 436. I am grateful to Professor Nikos Papazarkadas for the correction and reference.

[4] Ed. Halkin (1981), 34, note 17.

[5] On the appearance of the term in other texts, see Ševčenko (1956) 449.

[6] See Ševčenko (1956) 449 and Dölger (1953). On the identification of male and female ascetics with philosophers in Late Antiquity, see Clark (1998).

[7] Ed. Halkin (1981) 7. 12–15: Τί πρὸς ταῦτα ἡμῖν Ἐσσαῖοι καὶ γυμνοσοφισταί; Τί δὲ Βραχμάνες οἱ τρωγλοδύται, Ἀντισθένεις τε καὶ Διογένεις καὶ Κράτητες τὰ τῆς κενῆς

attitude towards Aspasia is also registered at the beginning of the fifteenth century, though in a different way: in an address to emperor Manuel II, Manuel Chrysoloras called the emperor's mother, Helena Kantakouzene, a new Aspasia, in an attempt to pay her the ultimate compliment on account of her erudition.[8]

An elaborate negative portrayal of Aspasia is given in the twelfth century:[9] John Tzetzes (*Chiliades* 360.943–61) presents her as the cause of the Peloponnesian war, an allegation traceable to Aristophanes[10] and repeated in a number of ancient and Byzantine sources[11] though absent from Thucydides, whose text Tzetzes had read and commented on:[12] Pericles excluded the Megarians from all markets and ports controlled by Athens by claiming they had destroyed a sacred meadow (ὀργάς), whereas the real reason was that they had insulted his wedded wife, Aspasia, whom they had formerly known as a prostitute in their city. Tzetzes' punch line is that, while lying, Pericles was also telling the truth, because both the real and the fabricated cause of the Megarian exclusion was an ὀργάς, a word which Tzetzes stretches to convey a double entendre: Pericles' ὀργὰς was not a sacred meadow but Aspasia, a crazed devotee (rendered by Tzetzes irregularly also as ὀργάς)[13] not of Athena (therefore no learned woman) but of Aphrodite (that is, a mere prostitute). In this word play Tzetzes exploits a well-known

δόξης πάρεργα; Ἢ γυναικῶν ὅσαι περίδοξοι δι' ἀρετὴν ἀνεγράφησαν, Ἀντιγόνη φημὶ καὶ Φερετίμα καὶ Φημονόη καὶ Πάνθεια, Θαργηλία τε καὶ Ἀσπασία καὶ ἡ πυθαγορικὴ Θεανώ; Ἀλλὰ τί δεῖ μιγνύειν τὰ ἄμικτα; Τίς γὰρ κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος; ἢ τίς μερὶς πιστῷ μετὰ ἀπίστου; Τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῷ θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων; Ἐξὸν ἐκ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς τὴν ὑπεροχὴν ἐπιδείξασθαι.

[8] Ἔσχομεν γὰρ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις τούτοις, Ἀσπασίαν νέαν, τὴν σὴν μητέραν καὶ βασιλίδα λέγω, δυναμένην καὶ αὐτὴν ἄριστα λέγειν. For references to this inaccessible text, see Mergiali (1996) 122.

[9] Byzantine literature contains both negative and positive portrayals of pagan female intellectuals, sometimes by the same author. For example, Psellos mentions Sappho, Diotima, Aspasia and Theano negatively when he compares them with the prophetess Dosithea in his *Accusation of the Patriarch* (*Orationes forenses et acta* 1.1114); Sappho and Theano, together with the Sibyls and "the Egyptian wise woman" (i.e. Hypatia) are positive models in Psellos' *Encomium for His Mother* (1873). Theano's reputation was so firmly established in Greek by the late antique period that her gnomic sentences also exist in Syriac translation; see Possedel (1998) and Brock (2003) 15.

[10] Henry (1995) 25–28; Taylor (2003) 184.

[11] E.g. Plutarch, *Life of Pericles*, 30; Scholia in Aelium Aristidem, *Hyper ton tettaron*, ed. Jebb, 137.6; George Synkellos (304.12 and 309.10); etc.

[12] Luzzatto (1999).

[13] ὀργάς = "crazed devotee" is not an attested meaning of the word in modern or Byzantine dictionaries; a more correct choice would have been ὀργιὰς or ὀργεών, words that appear right after ὀργάς in some Byzantine dictionaries.

metaphor of ancient and medieval literature, the woman as a garden,[14] with connotations of both sexual purity and lewdness, also analyzed by Eustathios of Thessaloniki at around the same time.[15] Tzetzes is repeatedly sarcastic towards women renowned for their erudition. In the introduction to his commentary on the *Odyssey*, he also attacked Demo, an author of unknown date that modern scholars tend to place around the fifth or sixth century; the surviving fragments of her work indicate that she drew from astronomy and astrology in order to offer rationalized allegorical interpretations of myths and deities following a traditional method of Homeric interpretation.[16] She is quoted a number of times in the Byzantine scholia to Homer, also by Eustathios of Thessaloniki. Tzetzes mocked her name with a pun (Demo = Mimo = monkey) and dismissed her as too high-minded, which in the immediately preceding line he contrasts (not without self-satisfaction) with his own simplicity and clarity. The literary pursuits of women, not only those of the remote past, but also of the living present, seem to have bothered him: in a brief verse invective against an unnamed woman who wrote schedographies (a kind of grammatical exercise),[17] he admonished her that spinning and weaving is a more appropriate female occupation.[18] Could this be a woman trying to support herself as a paid professional of letters (especially since she turned to a literary product included in school textbooks of the twelfth century, therefore potentially lucrative through its use in beginning education),[19] like the

[14] On this metaphor, see Dolezal and Mavroudi (2002) 139.

[15] Stallbaum (1825/1970) 1: 265.39: γυναῖκα γάρ τις μανιόκηπον εἶπε, τὴν μεμηνυῖαν περὶ μίξεις. κῆπον ἐκεῖνος ὑποθέμενος εἶναι, τὸ παρὰ Λυκόφρονι ἐπείσιον. [Someone called a woman who is mad [with desire] to have intercourse "a mad garden." He suggested that a garden is what Lycophron calls *epeision* (pudenda muliebria)]. Cf. also *Suda*, Μυσάχνη: ἡ πόρνη παρὰ Ἀρχιλόχῳ [...]. Ἀνακρέων δὲ καὶ πανδοσίαν καὶ λεωφόρον [ταύτην φησὶν] καὶ μανιόκηπον. κῆπος γὰρ τὸ μόριον.

[16] The most detailed discussion on Demo remains Ludwich (1895) that also collects a number of her fragments. Hunger (1978), = Greek trans. (1992) 2: 445, places her in the sixth century. Wilson (1983) 228 considers her date uncertain. Montanari (2010) gives the fifth century. One must consider whether she could be identified with the second century AD poetess Demo (Damo), who wrote a poem inscribed on the Colossus of Memnon and was knowledgeable in Homeric poetry; see Plant (2004) 156–58; Brennan (1998) further identified Demo of Memnon's graffiti with a wealthy Athenian woman of the second century AD attested in an inscription from Attica.

[17] On *schedographia*, see Hunger (1978), = Greek trans. (1992) 2: 396–402.

[18] Mercati (1951) 416–18; Mercati believes that Tzetzes wrote these verses out of hostility to the genre of schedography, not the woman who wrote in it.

[19] On the status of schedography in the twelfth century, see Hunger (1978) = Greek trans. (1992) 2: 397.

Venetian born Christine de Pisan (1365–c. 1431) managed to do at the courts of France?[20] Christine is the only female from the Middle Ages, East or West, known to have supported herself and her children through her activities as a professional woman of letters. She turned to writing after being widowed at a young age and, in doing so, followed the profession she had watched her father and husband exercise while she was under their care;[21] it may have been the only thing she knew how to do to earn a living. The key to her success during her lifetime — and the preservation of her work and reputation in posterity—is that she catered to aristocratic patrons (including women) with important political agendas; she presented them with luxurious manuscripts of her work, some of which survive. Tzetzes' woman schedographer may have been pushed to writing under similar circumstances but seems to have followed a diametrically opposed business model, which may be the reason why we do not hear about her again. Such a hypothesis is, of course, impossible to substantiate; yet the invective is an exhibition of Tzetzes' own grammatical prowess and control of stylistic techniques that may respond to a perceived threat to his own status as a perennially poor professional man of letters. One wonders whether it was also triggered by his testy relations with at least two female patrons of his literary activity, empress Eirene (born Bertha von Sulzbach), first wife of Manuel I and *sebastokratorissa* Eirene, wife of Andronikos, older brother of Manuel I.[22] Professional men of letters like him were catering to a remarkably numerous group of female patrons known to be active during the Komnenian period. The extent of this social phenomenon is possible to gauge through the following statistic: among sixty-four poems from three twelfth-century collections of verse naming magnates, thirty-one (almost half) mention women, either by themselves or together with their male kin.[23] In such an atmosphere, some

[20] Biographical information on Christine de Pisan in Briesemeister (1977).

[21] Christine's father, Tommaso da Pisano, had been a professor at the University of Bologna before being invited to Paris as court astrologer by Charles V. Her husband, the Picard nobleman Etienne du Castel, was a notary and royal secretary.

[22] Jeffreys (1974) 151.

[23] Count based on the combined evidence of the lists 1–3 drawn up by Magdalino (1993) Appendix 3. These magnates could be actual or potential literary patrons, even if the poets who mention them do not explicitly say so. The overall number of male and female patrons is somewhat greater, since emperors, empresses and magnates whom the authors explicitly identify as actual or potential patrons were excluded from Magdalino's list. On one of the manuscripts from which Magdalino's data is drawn, see Odorico and Messis (2003).

aristocratic women must have developed definite literary tastes and may have even tried their own hand at composition. Tzetzes' female schedographer may have been not an aspiring professional like him, but a dilettante, which can be even worse: a rich lady playing literary games with her other rich lady friends addresses (at least partially) their need for this kind of intellectual fare and curtails the niche that a professional like Tzetzes is trying to carve for himself as she over-saturates the market by making even more products available for free. Tzetzes has a positive opinion about a single literary woman: empress Eudocia, of whose work he admits he knows little. What he emphasizes instead is her long apprentice under the grammarians Hyperechios, Orion, and other rhetoricians and philosophers—male professionals like himself to whom she paid due respect, we are to understand; he sharply, vehemently, and at length, contrasts this with his own, unnamed contemporaries, who know nothing about literary composition but pour excrement on the one who tries to help them out of their ignorance.[24] It is impossible to miss that he is using an example from the remote past in order to criticize his own wretched times.

If we grant, as the above examples suggest that we do, that Byzantine discussions and comments on learned women in antiquity reflect Byzantine attitudes towards Byzantine learned women, and therefore the record on ancient women's intellectual pursuits preserved in Byzantine manuscripts can also be counted as reflecting implicit Byzantine attitudes towards learned women, this goes only part of the way in bridging the gap in the amount of information on learned women in the ancient vs. the Byzantine period. Two related questions remain open: why do Byzantine women with an education seem to have authored little, or at any rate considerably less than their ancient counterparts?[25] In addition, a cumulative comparison of known female intellectual activity in antiquity with its counterpart in the Byzantine period seems to reveal not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference: The surviving written record allows us to detect women in Greek-speaking antiquity engaging in a number of different yet interrelated disciplines: poetry, philosophy (broadly conceived), alchemy,

[24] *Chiliades* 10 ed. Leone (1968) 306. 52–94; I read μακρὸν instead of μικρὸν ἀκροωμένη in verse 59.

[25] Laiou (1985) 60: "The extant writings of <Byzantine> women are surprisingly few in a society which, especially after the eleventh century, could boast of a certain degree of female literacy and even, at times, of highly learned aristocratic women."

and medicine—all of which we recognize as "secular" pursuits.[26] By comparison, learned women of the middle and late Byzantine period seem to have expended their intellectual energies in "religious" pursuits: hymnography, hagiography, copying of religious manuscripts, epistolography (mostly, though not exclusively, exchanged with men of the church on religious topics). How justified is this impression?

The Byzantine archeological record lacks a particular kind of source that modern scholars have used productively in order to retrieve information on women in the ancient world, including professionals and women of letters: inscriptions, the habit and taste for which drastically diminished and all but disappeared after the end of antiquity.[27] Yet Byzantinists can make up for it with existing manuscripts known through notes on their pages to have been copied or owned by women.[28]

The earliest modern publication on female scribes in the Greek language is a 1903 study by Spyridon Lampros, evidently borne out of a life-long occupation with Greek manuscripts.[29] He enumerated thirty-one women scribes and manuscript owners active between the fourth and the seventeenth centuries, in their majority undistinguished and otherwise unknown to the historic record, mostly on the basis of notes on existing manuscripts, but also consulting narrative sources. Understandably, as the manuscripts become more recent, therefore more abundant, so do the names of the women who copied or owned them: six can be dated between the fourth and the twelfth centuries

[26] Ancient women poets and philosophers are discussed below; on ancient women physicians, see Fleming (2007); women alchemists, Letrouit (1995), no. 26.7; no. 2.1.1; no. 26.9; no. 3; no. 9.

[27] Inscriptions are used by Haines-Eintzen (1998) on female scribes in the early Christian period; Parker (1997) and Fleming (2007) for female physicians up to the sixth century; Dronke (1984) and Plant (2004) use them to retrieve poems by women inscribed formally or as graffiti on stone, though in such cases one needs to carefully distinguish between poems composed or commissioned by women, which is not always easy.

[28] Seals, an important source for Byzantine prosopography, are not helpful in discerning women scribes or in other activities indicating literacy: they generally belonged to aristocratic women whom they identify with their noble titles or the names of the administrative offices held by their husbands; for examples, see Margarou (2000), 26, 44, 46, 52, 54, 64, 66–68, 73, etc.

[29] Lampros (1903); perhaps the inspiration for this publication can also be placed within the context of the feminist activities spearheaded in Greece by Kalirroe Parren (1861–1940) during the last decades of the nineteenth century; Spyridon Lampros, briefly a prime-minister (1916–17), was also the father of the first female minister on a Greek government, Lina Tsaldari (minister of social welfare, 1956–58).

(among whom three are recorded only in narrative sources),[30] twelve between the thirteenth and the fifteenth, while the remaining thirteen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[31]

Recently, K. Haines-Eitzen proposed that some of our earliest Christian manuscripts may have been copied by women.[32] As for later Byzantine scribal activity and manuscript ownership by women, the best available treatment is by Alice-Mary Talbot, discussing the Paleologan period, when the overall greater availability of manuscripts yields more data.[33] We remain without a systematic investigation of

[30] No. 1, Saint Melania the Younger; no. 3, Kassia; no. 6, Constantina, whose very existence Lampros doubted. The education of no. 5, Eirene Doukaina, is more evident from the information recorded about her in the *Alexiad* than her autograph signature on the *Typikon* of her nunnery (MS *Paris. gr.* 383). No. 2, "Empress Maria," considered at least since the eighteenth century as the scribe of a manuscript with scholia on the Acts of the Apostles and identified as Maria of Amnia, the granddaughter of St. Philaretos the Merciful and first wife of emperor Constantine VI, writing around the year 800, must be Maria of Alania (ca. 1050–1103) who was not the copyist but the recipient of the manuscript. See Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1905) and Rydèn (2002) 23. Clearly, Lampros was unable to identify manuscript notes giving evidence of female scribal activity before the thirteenth century, though such information could be gleaned from earlier narrative sources. Consistently with this pattern, Laiou (1981) 255 finds that the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are the earliest time for which enough archival documents survive to allow even an attempt to statistically measure female literacy. The basis for such statistics are almost exclusively Athonite documents (which involve aristocratic and peasant women but largely exclude the urban, non-aristocratic females and do not reveal anything about belletristic activity); the criterion applied for defining literacy is the ability of the women to sign their names; the rate of female literacy is 1.8% for the thirteenth century and 16.0% for the fourteenth. The studies of both Lampros and Laiou suggest that it is very difficult to find evidence independent of the narrative sources that could be used to measure how many women could read and write, and if so what kind of texts, earlier than the thirteenth century.

[31] This count is still generous, because among the thirty-one women that Lampros discussed, he sometimes doubted the female authorship alleged by the sources. On no. 12, Smaragda, see Tselikas (2000) 355 (with photographic reproduction of the manuscript).

[32] Haines-Eitzen (1998). To the Greek sources known to Lampros (the testimony of Eusebius on Origen's virgin scribes and the hagiographic account of a fifth-century saint, Melania the Younger) Haines-Eitzen added two Greek inscriptions from Asia Minor and Latin epigraphic and literary evidence pertaining to female calligraphers who could write Greek, as well as a later legend, the earliest surviving record of which dates to the fourteenth century, indicating that the codex Alexandrinus, one of the earliest biblical codices in existence, was copied by St. Thecla. On St. Thecla and three more legendary female scribes (empress Theodora the restorer of the icons, Kassia and St. Matrona), see Casetti Brach (1975).

[33] Talbot (1983) 609–14, providing a catalogue of Paleologan manuscripts that can be associated with convents. To the women scribes of the Paleologan period known to Lampros, two more were added by later research: the nun Anna in the thirteenth century and her close contemporary Eirene, the daughter of Theodore Hagiopetrites,

female scribal activity in the middle Byzantine and the Comnenian period other than Lampros', though scholarly remarks on female education during these centuries are pertinent.[34] Katerina Nikolaou recently outlined that from the eighth until the beginning of the eleventh century the presence of women in the context of Byzantine educational institutions is hard to discern, or completely missing. This changes towards the end of the eleventh century, from which time onwards we know of a number of well-educated women, a phenomenon that lasts throughout the Comnenian period. Aristocratic women of any period had better chances to receive an education, while royal women of different centuries were often (but not always) given one because of the exalted duties they were expected to perform and the possibility that they may be called upon to assist with governance.[35]

This brief overview suggests a pattern in the availability of information on educated women in Byzantium that is entirely consistent with the distribution of the preserved record on any aspect of Byzantine social and cultural life. True, the evidence collected by modern scholars on Byzantine female bibliophiles suggests that women produced and owned mostly biblical, liturgical, and hagiographical—therefore "religious" rather than "secular"—manuscripts. Yet notable exceptions include the famous sixth-century manuscript of Dioscorides now in Vienna that was produced for Juliana Anicia;[36] the collection of classical

active in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; see Schreiner (1999) 37–38 and Weyl Carr (1985) 5–6.

[34] References from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries to women in occupations that suggest female literacy and access to education are collected in Margarou (2002) 163–65 and 217–18 (teacher = *didaskalos*), 215 (calligrapher), 223–26 and 235–36 (physician and midwife), 257–58 (preparer of potions and amulets). However, almost all mentions of "teachers" occur in a monastic context and could simply indicate guidance in matters of spirituality and conduct; as for medicine, midwifery, and knowledge of herbs, drugs and magic, they could be imparted through practice instead of academic training. Margarou (2002) 265–71 differentiates the levels of education attained by nuns depending on the social class to which they had been born and generally agrees with the conclusions outlined in Nikolaou (2005).

[35] Nikolaou (2005) 185–213. See also the remarks on female literacy in Laiou (1981) 253–57. A well-known instance of advertising the education given to the daughters of emperor Basil I (born an illiterate peasant) is their depiction holding books in a painting decorating the imperial palace [Anderson (2000) 127]; educated imperial princesses also include the daughters of emperor Theophilos and Constantine VII's daughter Agathe. Psellos, on the other hand, accused Constantine VIII and Basil II of neglecting the education of Constantine VIII's daughters; for references to primary sources and further instances, see Herrin (1995) 77–78.

[36] On Juliana Anicia and the Dioscorides manuscript, see Brubaker (2002) and Talbot (1997) 135–37; for a recent suggestion that parts of the manuscript preexisted

authors associated with Theodora Raoulaina in the second half of the thirteenth century;[37] a further example could be the fifteenth-century female owner of a manuscript with two comedies by Aristophanes who is mentioned together with her husband, though it is impossible to ascertain whether co-owning the manuscript also meant that she read it;[38] beyond manuscript copying, in the realm of literary composition, "secularly minded" is the translation into Greek of an Arabic or Persian work on geomancy commissioned to the monk Arsenios by the lady Theodora Doukaina, future wife of emperor Michael VIII Paleologos;[39] it almost becomes possible to argue that the primacy of religious content is not a peculiarity of manuscripts connected with women but consistent with the overall distribution of texts in the surviving Byzantine manuscripts, where the "religious" outnumbers the "secular."[40]

and were only bound together and prefaced with the dedicatory page for the occasion of Juliana Anicia's wedding, see Gamillscheg (2007) 192.

[37] Talbot (1983) 611; Katsiampoura (2002); Reghelin (2006). Theodora Raoulaina owned the famous 10th-century Thucydides (MS *Monac. Gr.* 430) and copied with her own hand the *Orations* of Aelios Aristeides (MS *Vat. Gr.* 1899) and Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (MS *Mosq. Hist. Mus.* 3649); see Fonkić (1974) 134 and Evangelatou-Notara (1982/83) 204. Her scholarly interests are also clear in the letters of men such as Maximos Planoudes and Nikephoros Choumnos addressed to her; for example, a letter by Choumnos indicates that she had asked to borrow from him a manuscript of Aristotle's *Meteorologika* and its commentaries by Alexandros of Aphrodisias. On her many correspondents and references to primary sources, see Nicol (1996) 41–44.

[38] Lampros (1903) no. 11; the same reservation applies to the sixteenth-century widow who owned a manuscript with patristic texts and world chronicles and gifted it to a monk [Lampros (1903) no. 18]. Two further manuscripts with secular content are purportedly autographs by women authors but Lampros dismisses the claim by arguing that they could not possibly have mastered the classicizing language of these texts (nos. 28 and 29).

[39] Mavroudi (2002) 408–9. An outline of the intellectual interests documented in connection with women throughout the Byzantine centuries can be found in Talbot (1997) 135–37; specifically for the Paleologan period, Talbot (1983) 609–14.

[40] The reasons for this are multiple and cannot be attributed simply to the "theocratic" character of Byzantium; patterns of preservation must also be taken into consideration, such as the utilitarian purpose of books with religious content in the only institutions of the Byzantine world that retained their continuity after the political end of Byzantium, i.e. monasteries and patriarchal sees. These remained the most important depositories of manuscripts after the fifteenth century and their holdings enriched modern European collections of Greek manuscripts. Let it also be remembered that the text of the Bible remains, even in our secular era, the most frequently printed single work. Interestingly, the group of mostly religious manuscripts attributed to the "atelier of the Palaiologina" (identified as Theodora Raoulaina) are no longer viewed as exclusively commissioned and owned by her; see Lowden and Nelson (1991) and the earlier comments in Talbot (1983) 612. This affects our understanding of the balance between her "religious" vs. "secular" interests.

So much about what women read; how about what they wrote? If we compare Greek antiquity with Byzantium or even Latin antiquity, it seems that not only the names of female authors but also texts written by or attributed to them survive in considerably greater numbers from the ancient Greek world.[41] For example, it is possible to compile an anthology quoting from the work of forty-six women authors writing in Greek between the seventh century BC and the early third century AD.[42] In the current state of research, Byzantinists would be hard pressed to create as extensive an anthology covering an equivalent amount of time, between the fourth and the fifteenth century AD.[43] The only published attempt known to me, Kadel (1995), includes only seven women authors. This disparity can, at least partly, be explained by the eagerness with which modern scholars in different fields have scrutinized the historic record. Such an effort was undertaken more intensively for Graeco-Roman antiquity, early Christianity and the Latin Middle Ages because not only are these fields more populated in Western academia than Byzantine studies, but their conclusions can more readily provide arguments in the context of contemporary political debates, since all three are broadly considered as ancestors to the modern "Western" world in a way that Byzantium, rightly or wrongly,

[41] Ludwich (1895) 296 contrasted the abundance of material attributed to female authors in Greek with the paucity in Latin.

[42] Plant (2004), anthologizing a total of fifty-five female authors, seven of whom wrote in Latin and the rest in Greek; the last five in Plant's catalogue (three of whom wrote in Latin) lived between the fourth and the sixth centuries and have been excluded from our count of fifty because they could be reckoned as falling within the "Byzantine" period. The authors anthologized by Plant are many of those discussed in the earlier monograph by McIntosh Snyder (1989). Dronke (1984) does the same for late antique and medieval literature in Latin. These pioneering efforts do not always address limitations inherent in the source material. For example, Plant includes the reports of men on works by women that do not survive; Dronke (1984) 21–26 collects from inscriptions poems with a female narrative voice without discussing the possibility that these may have been commissioned to professional poets; on female poetry in epigraphic evidence, see also Kadel (1995) 44.

[43] Kadel's goal is to include Christian writers from the first to the fifteenth century regardless of language; the work builds on the earlier research by Dronke (1984) and mostly includes women writing in Latin and Western European vernaculars, though it does make an effort to include Christian women from the churches of the East writing not only in Greek, but also Armenian (two examples). Kadel is so eager to extend the record as far and wide as possible that he includes four lives of female saints written in Syriac that he acknowledges as most probably written by men.

is not.[44] A closer look at the channels through which information on learned women in antiquity reached us reveals that they are considerably limited and fragile but have been greatly amplified by systematic scholarly efforts over centuries. The domain in which ancient female literary production survives most extensively is poetry, and modern efforts to create a systematic corpus of female poetic production are in evidence at least as early as the sixteenth century.[45] The work of Sappho, the superstar of ancient poetesses, has been (and continues to be) painstakingly recovered from fragments quoted in later philological works, anthologies and papyri. By comparison, the body of secular and religious poetry attributed to Kassia, Sappho's Byzantine counterpart as far as fame is concerned, has not yet received a systematic edition nor an extensive discussion of the problems it presents in spite of some initial steps in this direction.[46] Some further comparisons are illuminating: the electronic collection of Greek texts *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* in its present state includes the names of 411 ancient poets (eighth century BC–fourth century AD), nine among whom are female (approximately 2%). Conversely, Hunger's *History of the High-Style Secular Literature of the Byzantines* (1978) reviews approximately 120 Byzantine poets for an equivalent period (fourth- fifteenth century AD) including two women, empress Eudocia (early fifth century) and Kassia (ninth century).[47] Since this excludes religious poetry, a corrective can be supplied by adding the authors listed in Wellesz' *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (1961), which yields seventy

[44] For a wide-ranging examination of why Byzantium does not have the same cachet as Graeco-Roman antiquity in the context of modern political debates, see Cameron (2008). Especially regarding women in the early Christian church, research on them has grown almost commensurately with the intensity of the contemporary debate within a number of Christian denominations regarding whether women can become ordained members of the clergy or not, a debate in which the modern doctrinal and institutional heirs to Byzantine Christianity did not become particularly involved. On the necessity to not only "recover" the female figures of the past but also critically reflect on the context in which the evidence about them survives, see Clark (1998).

[45] The earliest printed edition of ancient women poets I have been able to trace is Ursinus (1598) followed by Wolfius and Olearius (1734–35); a history of early editions of ancient poetry by women can be found in the introduction to Schneider (1802); such efforts must be viewed within the context of the philological study of ancient poetry as a whole.

[46] The most systematic discussion of Kassia's manuscript tradition and the *testimonia* on her person that could form the basis for a future edition is Rochow (1967); for a recent discussion on the problem of authorship regarding the poems attributed to Kassia, see Lauxtermann (2003) 248–52.

[47] Hunger (1978), = Greek trans. (1992) 2: 479–598.

more names of poets including one woman, Thecla (ninth century).[48] More recent research into Byzantine hymnography brought to light two additional female hymnographers, Theodosia (ninth century) and Palaiologina (fourteenth century).[49] This means that among 190 Byzantine poets five are women (2.6%). Though these calculations are based on non exhaustive data—especially since a sizeable chunk of Byzantine poetic production remains unexplored—[50] they still indicate that the statistical discrepancy in the number of recorded women authors in antiquity as compared with the Byzantine period is minimal; and that, within this small margin, a more systematic effort to "recover" women authors from unpublished (and even published) source material may yield statistically significant results even if it does not spectacularly increase the number of women authors that we know of.

The best recorded Byzantine woman poet is Eudocia, who—Tzetzes' comments notwithstanding—owed her education primarily to her pagan philosopher father, Leontios of Athens, though she became a Christian (and an empress) by marrying Theodosios II in 421.[51] Her close contemporary, Hypatia, who excelled not in poetry but Neoplatonic philosophy, was also taught by her father, the famous pagan philosopher Theon of Alexandria.[52] Since both men were professional teachers, they may have educated their daughters not simply out of paternal love but also as a way to advertise their own ability to teach, especially in an era when their pagan professional credentials

[48] We have subtracted the names of hymnographers that also appear as "secular" poets in Hunger (1978).

[49] Catafygiotou-Topping (1982–83), recovering the names of women hymnographers from the catalogue in Follieri (1966) 251–306.

[50] Hunger (1978) ends the chapter on poetry by stating that he will now stop enumerating Byzantine poets though there are many more to name: most Byzantine authors also wrote poetry.

[51] Tzetzes mentions Leontios as Eudocia's father but does not assign him a role in educating her, which is not surprising given that he wanted to emphasize her debt to paid professionals like himself. His information on her studies with Hyperechios and Orion is not repeated anywhere else in the sources; see Martindale (1980) 408–9.

[52] On Eudocia, see Holum (1982) 112–46; on Hypatia, see Saffrey (2005). Father-daughter teams are also known among professional scribes, such as Theodore Hagiopetrites and his daughter Eirene (who also appears to have had her own independent clientele) in the late thirteenth century and in the sixteenth century Angelus Vergicius whose daughter worked on the illustrations of the manuscripts copied by her father; see Weyl Carr (1985) 6–7. The daughter of Ioannes Honorios from sixteenth-century Otranto helped him with copying; see Vogel and Gardthausen (1909) 181–82, note 8.

may have been undermined by the aggressive triumph of Christianity. An educated daughter could also serve as a trusted research assistant: Hypatia is known to have worked on at least some of her father's projects.[53] The historic record preserved information on Eudocia because she became empress and Hypatia on account of her martyrdom to the pagan cause; yet there must have been other women educated by their male kin and participating in their intellectual endeavors about whom we know little or nothing because their life circumstances were far less dramatic. Such an instance must be the thirteenth-century Athenian maiden Constantina, whose reported ability to predict earthquakes and other natural phenomena sounds perfectly analogous to that of the fourth-century Neoplatonist Sosipatra.[54] She is known only through the thirteenth-century Latin chronicle of Matthew Paris, where she is said to have taught Master John of Bassingstoke, archdeacon of Leicester, a man of great erudition and translator of several treatises from Greek into Latin who visited Athens during the first half of the thirteenth century.[55] Matthew Paris knew John of Basingstoke personally and is explicit that his report is based on his friend's oral communications. Yet modern scholars are inclined to dismiss his account of Constantina as literary fiction.[56] True, his description of her predictive abilities can make modern scholars incredulous. Since he died before finishing his manuscript, the existing autograph is unrevised and its overall narrative of the history of England during his time contains repetitions, contradictions, and a heartfelt defence of English politics vis-à-vis the Italian papacy. Yet in spite of such flaws Matthew is not known to fabricate lies and the passage on John of Bassingstoke's Athenian sojourn accurately describes at least one independently verifiable fact, Robert

[53] Cameron (1990).

[54] Our only source for Sosipatra is Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, 6.6; for fabulous elements in her story, see Pack (1952).

[55] In the words of Matthew Paris [Ed. Giles (1853) 2: 485], "There was a young woman, the daughter of the archbishop of Athens, Constantina by name, who was not twenty years old, endowed with every virtue, and had learned all the difficulties of the trivium and the quadrivium; from which circumstance, on account of her remarkable learning and knowledge, the said Master John used jestingly to call her another Catherine, or simply Catherine. She was the mistress of Master John, and whatever good he acquired in the way of science, as he often asserted, he had begged from her, although he had studied and read for a long time at Paris. This young woman foretold pestilence, thunders, eclipses, and, what was more remarkable, earthquakes; and thus gave an infallible forewarning to all her auditors."

[56] Lampros (1903) 13–14.

Grosseteste's interest in biblical apocrypha.[57] Whether Constantina was actually clairvoyant or not, there seems to be no good reason to dismiss her very existence other than our own reluctance to accept that, though extraordinary, it was indeed possible for a young woman in thirteenth-century Athens to have been more knowledgeable than a Paris educated man, at least in some domains.[58]

Philosophy (broadly defined in its literal sense as "love of wisdom") is, after poetry, the field of intellectual endeavour in which ancient women are reported to have been most frequently active. Ancient women philosophers have attracted the attention of modern scholars since the seventeenth century.[59] Though Aristotle did not accord women a share in philosophy, Plato and his followers did and even included philosopher-queens among the rulers of the ideal state.[60] As a result, women are more likely to be visible in circles friendly to Platonic philosophy. Even the information we have on Pythagorean women, i.e. female followers of a philosophy earlier than Plato, is available because the Neoplatonists after the first century BC and in particular Iamblichos (ca. 240–325 AD) collected, reinterpreted and disseminated much Pythagorean material.[61] In his *Life of Pythagoras*,

[57] According to Matthew Paris [Ed. Giles (1853) 2: 484] Grosseteste became aware of the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* through John of Bassingstoke; as a result, he procured a manuscript from Greece (today MS Ff. 1.24 of the Cambridge University library) and translated the text into Latin. The account of Matthew Paris (minus the explicit mention of John of Basingstoke's name) is consistent with Robert Grosseteste's preface to his translation in Grosseteste (1716).

[58] This is not to suggest that Constantina was a "regular" phenomenon for early thirteenth-century Athens; she may have been the product of the (unattested) Athenian equivalent of the (well-attested) Constantinopolitan philosophical and literary salons (θέατρα) associated with the desire of literary patrons to assert themselves socially during the Comnenian period [Magdalino (1993) 335–56]; she may have met with reactions analogous to those towards the better recorded learned women of the modern period, such as the eighteenth-century Milanese Maria Gaetana Agnesi who appeared at her father's salon almost as a public attraction. Her multilingualism, philosophical and mathematical training, and mastery of typically masculine techniques of academic disputation became an instrument for her family's social advancement. See Mazzotti (2007) 17–21.

[59] McIntosh Snyder (1989) 99–121 and Dorandi (1991); the earliest is Menagius (1690), listing sixty-five ancient women philosophers and dedicated to the published classicist Madame Dacier, the wife and daughter of classical scholars.

[60] On women in Platonic and Neo-platonic philosophy, see O'Meara (2003) 83–86.

[61] Riedwig (2005) x and 124–28; Athanassiadi (2006) 166–69; the present paper adopts the term "Neoplatonist," invented by nineteenth-century scholars to designate the followers and interpreters of Platonic philosophy from Plotinus onwards, for reasons of simplicity, without wishing to enter the more recent scholarly discussions on

Iamblichos gives a list of male and female Pythagoreans that comprises two hundred and eighteen men and seventeen women, eight among whom are identified as wives, daughters, or sisters of the men mentioned in the same catalogue.[62]

Neoplatonists paid attention to women for practical reasons, too: the schools of Athens and Alexandria depended on dynastic succession, which was often made possible through marriage.[63] We also know of women followers of Cynicism, like Hipparchia of Maroneia, and Epicurianism, such as Leontion, who may have been attracted to these philosophical schools due to their lack of emphasis on the traditional division of labor between men and women.[64] In general, we are much better informed about philosophically inclined women in the ancient than the Byzantine world, partly because information on them is conveyed in collections of biographies conceived as intellectual history, a genre that, after the sixth century AD was no longer cultivated as such.[65] Female figures seem to have played a role in the intellectual endeavors of writers who include women in their biographical collections: the Neoplatonist Plutarch of Chaironeia (46–122 AD) was married to Timoxena, an author in her own right;[66] Philostratos was a protegé of "the most philosophical" empress Julia Domna

the appropriate terms to describe the various manifestations of this intellectual tradition at different times and places.

[62] Data collected from Iamblichos' *Life of Pythagoras* in Diels and Kranz (1951) 446 ff. (a1); same text in Klein (1937) 36. 267; discussion of women Pythagoreans in Taylor (2003) 178 ff.

[63] O'Meara (2003) 83. The view that Platonic philosophy was friendly to women somewhat differs from McIntosh Snyder (1989) 121, where Neoplatonism is said not to have attracted many female followers due to its conservative values regarding the role of women and the family, the example of Hypatia notwithstanding.

[64] McIntosh Snyder (1989) 121.

[65] The latest collection of biographies I am aware of is the sixth-century *Onomatologos* by Hesychios of Miletos, a work no longer extant, which was used as a source for the biographical entries in the tenth-century *Suda*. Of course, biographies were still written after the sixth century, such as lives of saints and emperors, but are understood by us as hagiography and historiography. It seems to me that the genre was revived in Greek only in the eighteenth century with the works of Demetrios Prokopiou, Ἐπιτετμημένη ἀπαρίθμησις τῶν κατὰ τὸν παρελθόντα αἰῶνα λογίων γραικῶν καὶ περί τινων ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι ἀνθούντων (1722); Kaisarios Dapontes, Ἱστορικὸς κατάλογος ἀνδρῶν ἐπισήμων; and parts of the *Ὑπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας* by Sergios Makraios (or Makres). It can be argued that in the medieval period intellectual biography was transformed into hagiography, especially if we take into consideration the definition of philosophy as following a Christian way of life mentioned above.

[66] Pelling (2010); Plutarch's many works include *On the Virtues of Women* and *Sayings of Spartan Women*.

(ca. 172–250 AD);[67] Diogenes Laertius (third century AD) dedicated his *Lives of the Philosophers* to an unnamed woman interested in Platonic philosophy;[68] and Eunapios of Sardis (b. 347 AD) was married to a kinswoman of his mentor Chrysanthios, a student of Iamblichos. These authors frequently provide biographical information about their own teachers and colleagues, an intellectual circle connected also through marriage, friendship, and social intercourse. Since women cannot but play a role in establishing and sustaining such a network (in their capacity as marriageable material, hostesses of philosophical salons, or companions of great men) their names and accomplishments are mentioned because the authors of the biographical works had a direct or indirect personal connection with them. However, almost nothing of what they may have written survives; we know of their teaching mostly through gnomic sentences and riddles that read more like a condensed written record of oral communications.[69] This, perhaps already in antiquity or in later centuries, may have been regarded as a genre of literature expected of female authors, since examples of it are attributed to Kassia in manuscripts dating from the thirteenth century onwards, whether she really cultivated it or not.[70]

The lack of biographical collections from the sixth century onwards means that, for the middle and late Byzantine period, information on female philosophical interests must be painstakingly sought in a wide variety of sources. The enterprise is complicated by at least two factors: most Byzantine philosophical writings remain unpublished; and we know significantly more about Byzantine philosophy after the second half of the eleventh century than before.[71] In the current state of research, the examples are few and far in between. Predictably, most can be found from the late eleventh century onwards, a period also thought by modern scholars to have dramatically improved the access of women, especially aristocrats, to education.[72] From the end of the

[67] Bowie (2010).

[68] *Lives of the Philosophers* 3.47; on Diogenes Laertius, see Runia (2010).

[69] On the aptitude of ancient women philosophers for riddles, see Taylor (2003) 177.

[70] On its manuscript tradition, see Lauxtermann (2003) 248 ff. The genre is also akin to the Christian *Apophthegmata Patrum*, appropriate for Kassia as a nun.

[71] The problem is outlined in Ierodiakonou (2002) 5.

[72] Outline in Reinsch (2000) 85–87 and more briefly Laiou (1981) 253, who rightly emphasizes the importance of social class in the improved access to education over three generations of women in Michael Psellos' family.

eleventh and into the twelfth century, we can discern the outlines of literary-philosophical salons maintained by a number of women with close ties to the imperial house: Maria of Alania, Eirene Doukaina, Anna Komnena,[73] and the aforementioned *sebastokratorissa* Eirene, sister-in-law of the emperor.[74] Information can be gleaned from conventional historiography, epistolography, and the dedication of works by men to women, either as flattery by ambitious literati to politically and socially influential women, or as the result of direct female patronage. In the twelfth century, Eustratios of Nicaea, a member of Anna Comnena's circle, dedicated his commentary to Book Six of the *Ethica Nicomacheia* to an unnamed woman whom he addressed as princess (βασιλίς), most probably Anna herself; he also dedicated a short essay on meteorology to Maria of Alania.[75] In the thirteenth century, the narrative of George Akropolites (*Annales* 39) informs us that Eirene, empress of Nicaea and wife of John III Doukas Vatatzes, though far from proficient in philosophy, had an avowed interest in and respect for it. In the fourteenth century, Theodora Raoulaina's autograph copy of Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* and the letters of her male correspondents such as Maximos Planoudes leave no doubt regarding her advanced philosophical readings.[76] Several decades later, Nikephoros Gregoras dedicated his commentary on Synesius' treatise on dreams to Eudocia Paleologina, a figure whom he describes in his *Roman History* 8.3.B as famous for her beauty and intellect, a voracious reader and auditor of teaching by others, likened by her contemporaries to Hypatia and Theano the Pythagorean.[77] Towards the end of that century, Matthew Kantakouzenos addressed two essays to his daughter, Theodora Kantakouzene, titled *On the Love of Learning*

[73] Brief discussion and earlier bibliography in Reinsch (2000) 87; Nardi (2002) 56–58; see also Papaioannou in this volume.

[74] On her position as literary patroness relative to other such patronage in the twelfth century, see Magdalino (1993) 344; for a cumulative portrait with references to earlier literature, see Jeffreys and Jeffreys (2009) xxiv–xxix.

[75] Cacouros (1989) 382–83. Cacouros' identification of Anna is uncertain because the term βασιλὶς is occasionally used for a Roman imperial princess but more frequently applies to an empress; see Liddell and Scott (1996) and Sophocles (1888) s.v. βασιλίς.

[76] See above, note 33.

[77] On the re-dedication to Eudocia of Gregoras' commentary on Synesios, see Pietrosanti (1999) xxvi–xvii.

and *On the Qualities of the Soul*.[78] At around the same time, emperor Manuel II wrote his *Dialogue on Marriage*, where, in good Platonic fashion, he cast himself and his mother Helena Kantakouzene (Chrysoloras' "new Aspasia") as interlocutors; the work may reflect discussions that had actually taken place between them decades before it was written; it is only formally on matrimony and in fact offers a series of reflections on politics, the moral duties of a ruler, and the relation of an emperor to his subjects; it is also a portrayal of and a homage to Helena for her political acumen and advice, her virtue and education.[79] Intellectually, Helena was clearly able to appreciate the dialogue's literary and philosophical merits, as evidenced by the letters addressed to her by the likes of Nikephoros Gregoras[80] and Demetrios Kydones, which also reveal that she was an author in her own right.[81]

Although increased access of women to education is better attested from the end of the eleventh century onwards, the most evidence we have about a similar phenomenon in Byzantium at an earlier period is concentrated around the middle decades of the ninth century (admittedly better documented than the earlier iconoclastic century, the eighth, in our overall source material), when three of our four attested female hymnographers lived.[82] In spite of the numerous and profound differences in the economic and social conditions of the ninth, the twelfth, and the fourteenth centuries, there is at least one analogy: all

[78] Περὶ φιλομαθίας and περὶ ψυχῆς δυνάμεων, edited in Sakkelion (1888); on Theodora, see Trapp (1976–94) no. 10939. The two essays were written towards the end of Matthew's life because he mentions that, at the time of his writing, he is a bit over seventy-one years old [Sakkelion (1888) 275]. Trapp (1976–94) no. 10983 gives his birth ca. 1325 and his death in 1391 (therefore at age 58). The internal evidence of the essay Περὶ φιλομαθίας suggests that these dates must be revised.

[79] Angelou (1991) 55–57. Given that the dialogue skirts explosive contemporary political problems like the dynastic ambitions of imperial relatives that undermined Manuel's political power, it may be fruitful for future research to investigate whether the appearance of the empress mother is not only an exaltation of her rationality but also a cover for what otherwise would be unspeakable; for the application of such an analysis to celebrated ancient philosophical dialogues between men and women (of which Manuel is likely to have been aware), such as Socrates and Diotima in the *Symposium* and Gregory of Nyssa and his sister Makrina in *On the Soul and Resurrection*, see Clark (1998). (2007) argues that the dialogue was written to show the importance of inheritance for the imperial family and revised in order to encourage Manuel's son, John, to marry and have successors.

[80] Leone (1983), Letters 42 and 158.

[81] She wrote victory orations for her father, John VI Kantakouzenos, that do not survive; on her correspondence with Kydones, see Angelou (1991) 40.

[82] This was also noticed by Kazhdan and Talbot (1991/92) 400–401.

three centuries were, each for different reasons, periods of important social and ideological change. The fourteenth century brought, in addition to a series of civil wars, deep ideological divisions on account of the Arsenite schism, Hesychasm, and the imperial policies regarding union with the church of Rome, in which women played a pronounced role.[83] Their intervention was encouraged by the proponents and despised by the enemies of the causes they championed.[84] Earlier, the twelfth century was also a period of transition because the ruling class of the empire was being restructured; political divisions were created in each generation of imperial relatives as they antagonized each other for power. Within this context, aristocratic women could exercise remarkable authority in the name of their clan and broadcast its claims to power through becoming patrons of an extensive literary production by male authors, though the most famous case of such broadcasting is Anna Comnena, a woman writing with her own pen.[85] This social transition gave aristocratic women—perhaps even the female kin of lesser magnates—[86] a new public role and offered opportunities to access education and literary culture that would have been unavailable under different circumstances.[87] The ninth century can also be viewed as a period of transition due to the iconoclastic controversy. In addition, socially prominent women during this time seem to have enjoyed considerable financial independence, as was also

[83] Talbot (1983) 614–17 chronicles the active involvement of women, including literary patronesses like Theodora Raoulaina and Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina, to these disputes.

[84] It would be interesting for a future study to examine in which terms the negative criticism is cast. An example is Philotheos Kokkinos who describes a series of Gregory Palamas' healing miracles involving women. As a result, one of them became a Palamite after having belonged to the opposition, described in the following words (*PG* 151, col. 642): "Those superficial and empty-headed women, whom Constantinople breeds in large numbers, who add to their supposed nobility vacuousness and a schismatic predilection, and who... have the ambition of building around them a following, and acquiring fame and an unbecoming name." Translation by Laiou (1985) 97. Kokkinos must have been referring to anti-Palamites like the literary minded Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina and Eirene, wife of John Kantakouzenos; see Laiou (1981) 251 and note 92.

[85] Magdalino (2000).

[86] Magdalino (1993) 345; see also above, note 31.

[87] Indeed, Kazhdan and Wharton (1985) 99–102 suggested that the increased appearance of imperial women in Byzantine historiography of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is due to the "aristocratization" of Komnenian society and politics. More recently, Neville (2010) 72 attributed this phenomenon to an "increased use of Classical Roman models by Byzantine historians." Such an explanation does account for the well-attested female literary patronage and implies that literary tastes were either disconnected from or generated social trends, instead of reflecting them.

the case in the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries.[88] We hear of a noble woman of the senatorial class who "had been left a widow with two daughters along with much wealth and a conspicuous lifestyle" and in the 820s was inducted with her entire household into monastic life by the iconophile St. Symeon of Lesbos.[89] Her older daughter, Hypatia, had showed an earlier predilection for monastic life by her determination to devote herself "to divine studies and also to poetry and grammar and the metrical works of the divine fathers."[90] She was of the same age and social class as the poet Kassia, which leads to the hypothesis that the study of poetry and hymnography may have been a standard feature of female aristocratic education around the beginning of the ninth century—this would help explain the concentration of women hymnographers in that generation. There is further evidence of female financial independence around the same time, though it is impossible to know to which degree it may have been combined with access to education and a predilection for intellectual endeavors. The well known story of the ship owned by Theodora, wife of emperor Theophilos (829–42), which he burnt, claiming outrage that his wife had turned him from emperor into a trading ship owner (ναύκληρος), suggests substantial financial activity by the wife unbeknownst to the husband and considerable independence of mind and action.[91] The destruction of his wife's ship notwithstanding, Theophilos restored justice to a widowed woman who had lost her own ship and its cargo to

[88] Laiou (1981) 242–43 and Laiou (1985) document the financial resources available to women in the Comnenian and Paleologan period.

[89] The entire story is related in Abrahamse and Domingo-Forasté (1998) 193–96; see also Alexakis in this volume.

[90] "...ταῖς θείαις μελέταις, ἔτι δὲ ποιητικῇ καὶ γραμματικῇ καὶ τοῖς τῶν θείων πατέρων ἐμμέτροις πονήμασιν ἔγνω αὐτὴν ἐπιδιδόναι," translation by Abrahamse and Domingo-Forasté (1998) 193. Discussion of her education ibid., 193–94.

[91] The story can be found in three Byzantine sources (the Continuator of Theophanes, Genesios, and Zonaras); for references and a discussion, see Laiou (2002) 729 and Dagron (2002) 416. Its version by the Continuator of Theophanes suggests that the sight of the magnificent ship must have caused Theophilos to fear that its owner's wealth may pose a threat to imperial authority [on a preemptive move by Theophilos to avoid conspiracies, see Treadgold (1988) 272]: Theophilos is said to have been relieved upon hearing that the ship belonged to his own wife (τότε μὲν ἐφησυχάσαι λέγεται). The complaint that Theodora's commercial activities were an insult to his own imperial dignity must have served him more as an excuse to punish the empress for her independence than an opportunity to apply his ideas regarding the commercial activities of aristocrats.

the rapacity of the imperial Praepositus Nikephoros (*Patria* 3. 28).[92] In the 850s Danielis, a fabulously wealthy widow from the Peloponnese, played an important role in the career of Basil I.[93] The social leverage of wealthy women could be particularly consequential if they embraced causes under dispute. It is not surprising that Theodore of Stoudios (in the manner of the early Church Fathers) discouraged his female correspondents from marrying: this would have jeopardized their independence and possibly ended their support for the icons, since men connected with the imperial administration would have been obliged to pay at least lip service to iconoclast orthodoxy.[94] Alice-Mary Talbot and Alexander Kazhdan have remarked on the extraordinary number of women addressees of letters by Theodore of Stoudios (759–826) that can be paralleled only in the epistolography of the early Christian period, a time when women became soldiers to the causes of Christianity and its doctrinal development.[95] Yet forty-one women correspondents do not make him a feminist, only a pragmatist. Jean Gouillard argued that Theodore was most interested, among the many women to whom he wrote, in those that could further the cause of iconophile orthodoxy and its elite corps, the Stoudites.[96] We know from other moments in history such as the European Reformation or—within the "feminist" twentieth century—the Cuban revolution and the first Palestinian Intifada, that whenever there is a political and social struggle women are invited to join the army of partisans because every soldier is needed and every soul counts. As a result, their social importance and independence increase—for a brief moment. They are then pushed back to the social niche they occupied before the struggle begun, sometimes even before its final triumph.[97] The greater social consequence of women as partisans of a cause gives them an

[92] Preger (1907) 223–24. The *praepositus* Nikephoros was punished with burning at the stake; the widow regained the value of her lost property and a portion of his confiscated estate.

[93] Anagnostakes (1989) suggested that Danielis is a literary fiction created for propagandist purposes by the author of the *Life of Basil*, a hypothesis rejected by Ševčenko (1992) 193; even if she did not exist, creating her must have been based on the real existence of wealthy independent women in ninth- and tenth-century society. On Danielis, see Winkelmann and Lilie (1999) 392, no. 1215.

[94] Kazhdan and Talbot (1991/92) 399.

[95] Kazhdan and Talbot (1991/92) 399.

[96] Gouillard (1982).

[97] On the efforts to limit the greater freedom of women generated by the Intifada while it was taking place, see Hammami (1990) and Abdo (1991).

opportunity to become more vocal in public, therefore potentially increases their participation in intellectual life and literary production. For many women, Protestantism meant such an invitation to participate, which included the right to publicly preach and interpret the scripture; Calvin, Pierre Viret, and others, responded by formally forbidding women to do so.[98] Byzantine iconophile women fared much the same: Theodore of Stoudios' letters portray women who had shown considerable independence and endurance by risking their lives or being subjected to flogging, imprisonment, and banishment, yet his ideal feminine qualities are conservative.[99] Their struggle on behalf of the icons briefly gave women a public voice as hymnographers included in formal church rites. Yet after the end of iconoclasm they returned to a more restricted social condition, which included the removal of their compositions from the liturgy, as already observed by Alice-Mary Talbot and Alexander Kazhdan.[100]

An additional factor may have contributed to the concentration of women hymnographers in the ninth century: as a result of iconoclasm, this is a period of changing poetic and musical tastes, therefore open to imports from the cultural periphery of Byzantium, such as Palestine[101] and —why not?—the compositions of women. The novelty of iconophile ninth-century chant by Theodore of Stoudios was such that it elicited ridicule in Byzantine Sicily.[102] Women hymnographers seem to be embracing novelty, too: Diane Touliatos has pointed out that Kassia's most famous composition, her Troparion on *The Fallen Woman*, has some exceptional musical features when compared with other examples of Mode IV Plagal, in which it is written.[103] In composing a canon on Hosios Ioannikios the Great (754–846) soon after his death, Theodosia was definitely tackling a theme outside established tradition.[104] The Virgin, the topic of Thecla's only surviving hymn, is much more conventional, but her treatment of it is unusual in voicing an openly and exclusively female perspective throughout.[105]

[98] See, for example, Timmermans (1993) 28 ff.

[99] Gouillard (1982).

[100] Kazhdan and Talbot (1991/92) 404 and 401.

[101] Lauxtermann (2003) 137–38; Cicolella (2000) xxvi ff.

[102] Taft (1999) 534.

[103] Touliatos (1984) 77, accepting this troparion as genuine.

[104] Catafygiotou-Topping (1982/83) 102–04.

[105] Catafygiotou-Topping (1982/83) 105.

There is promise that a more systematic investigation of the Byzantine sources, both published and unpublished, will help modern scholarship take stock of more literary products by women than we are currently aware of. For example, to the meager corpus of female poetry from Byzantium one must add the two dodecasyllabic poems by Theodora Raoulaina found in her autograph copies of Simplikios and Aelios Aristeides celebrating her scribal work and the nobility of her blood.[106] This also nuances her profile as author, since her only generally known literary composition is her lengthy hagiographic account of the ninth-century saints Theodore and Theophanes;[107] it also extends to women what Herbert Hunger observed regarding men: most Byzantines who ever wrote anything also tried their hand at poetry.[108] There is firm evidence that Byzantine women wrote more and in more genres than what we now possess. For example, we no longer have empress Eudocia's entire poetic production,[109] nor the panegyrics for emperor John Kantakouzenos written by his daughter Helena, nor Palaiologina's hymns that Georgios Sphrantzes stated he had read.[110] Further, it is clear that a number of letters written to women by Theodore of Stoudios are responses.[111] More such instances can certainly be uncovered after a systematic search for letters addressed to female correspondents among the voluminous epistolographic corpora of Byzantine men.

Two things stand out in our examination of the literature produced by women, both ancient and Byzantine. First, already in antiquity, female literary output is better recorded for genres in which performance (poetry) or oral transmission of learning (philosophy, alchemy, medicine) is paramount, although the only reason we are aware of it is because it was eventually committed to writing. Second, both in the ancient and the Byzantine period, the preservation of texts, whether by men or women, frequently depends not only on their intrinsic quality and usefulness for subsequent generations of readers, but also on steps

[106] Quoted in full by Evangelatou-Notara (1982/83) 204.
[107] On this *Vita*, see Talbot (1983) 606 and 611.
[108] Hunger (1978) = Greek translation (1992) 2: 598.
[109] A biblical cento and the *Martyrdom of St Cyprian* survive; her verses on the Roman victories of 421 and 422 over Persia and *encomium* of Antioch do not; her entire literary production seems to have been cast in Homeric hexameters; see Hunger (1978) = Greek translation (1992) 2: 514.
[110] Catafygiotou-Topping (1982/83) 110–11.
[111] Kazhdan and Talbot (1991/92) 399.

taken by an author during his or her lifetime. Such steps include the publication or at least organization of their own body of work and the cultivation of disciples who would continue to study and disseminate it beyond the lifetime of its author. For example, the numerous texts written by or attributed to Psellos would not have been as many without his career in education, which created a circle of students (and later their students) who kept copying and citing his work throughout the twelfth century. The prolific literary output of Tzetzes (condemned by modern scholars as not of very high caliber) survives because he took pains to organize, edit, publish it, and clearly mark it with his name, as is natural for a professional seeking to advertise himself and make a living out of his literary craft. In contrast, the literary games of a dilettante, perhaps like Tzetzes' woman schedographer, made for amusement and not out of professional ambition, would generally be regarded by herself and her circle as ephemera, likely to disappear for lack of motivation to preserve them (and her name) for the sake of immediate or long-term posterity.[112] Yet we have vestiges of female literary production due to the chance survival of such ephemera the subsequent care for which can clearly be linked with members of the author's close personal circle: the only letters by a Byzantine woman known to survive, those by Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina, are part of a sequence of letters copied on the last thirty folia of a miscellany with medical, astrological, philosophical and patristic texts written by a number of different fourteenth- and fifteenth-century hands.[113] The sequence begins with four letters by a known protégé of hers, Gregory Akindynos, followed by one addressed to John Kyparissiotes[114] and a chronologically arranged exchange between herself (a total of eight letters) and an unnamed male figure,[115] to whom she turned for spiritual guidance (fourteen letters). His literary style, grammar and spelling

[112] Compare the accidental survival of the poems by one of the most famous women poets in English, Emily Dickinson: they were meant as private musings and were written on forty notebooks and loose leaves of paper. They were found locked in a chest after her death in 1886 by her sister Lavinia and were published only because of Lavinia's determination. Even so, a systematic and complete edition did not materialize until 1955, after Emily's literary reputation was firmly established.
[113] Detailed description of the contents in Zuretti (1932) 113–20.
[114] Hero (1986) 22. Like Akindynos, John Kyparissiotes and Choumnaina were anti-palamist.
[115] Possibly Ignations, a hesychast and correspondent of Barlaam; he disagreed with Palamas after 1341, which places him and Choumnaina on the same side of the Palamite controversy; see Meyendorff's introduction in Hero (1986) 18.

meet the expectations of Byzantine epistolography as a rhetorical genre, while hers do not. This means that they were collected not for their belletristic but their personal value. Though she most likely did not copy these folia, they must have belonged to her or a member of her immediate circle.[116] A similar situation led to our knowledge of Palaiologina's fourteenth-century canons that two generations later Sphrantzes reports to have read (ἀνέγνωσα), not heard; though he does not explain where he accessed her writings, he does mention that Palaiologina bequeathed all her possessions (evidently including her personal papers) to his godmother, who later ended up at a nunnery in Constantinople joined by his mother's sisters. According to Sphrantzes, Palaiologina, a nun at the nunnery of St. Theodora of Thessaloniki, composed canons honoring "St. Demetrios and St. Theodora and other saints"; her choice of subjects, focusing on figures revered in her nunnery and its surrounding city, suggests that her compositions were expressions of private devotion without aspiration or intention to reach an audience wider than her own spiritual community, as befits a nun's humility. As a result, her writings would likely not have survived for Sphrantzes to read and tell us about without his godmother's attachment to the spiritual legacy of the Palaiologina, which must have been the reason for her to preserve them when fleeing Thessaloniki after the Ottoman occupation of 1387 to become a refugee in Lesbos first and Constantinople later.[117] Palaiologina may be an exceptional but not unique case; given how many nunneries there were throughout the Byzantine centuries, there must have existed a whole body of hymnography by women that even then few would have known much about—we will never know much, either.

The little evidence we have on the social condition of females in Byzantium, including literacy and access to education, is geographically and chronologically so scattered that it yields no continuous narrative. Yet scholarship in the last twenty years has cautiously outlined how political and ideological transformations (the introduction of Christian ideology to state legislation in the late antique period,[118]

[116] Hero (1986) 22.

[117] The life stories of Palaiologina and Sphrantzes' godmother Thomaïs (both aristocrats and therefore implicitly with easier access to education) are narrated in Grecu (1966) *Chronicle* 18.1 ff. corresponding to Bekker (1838) *Chronicle* 2.5, 139–44; see also Catafygiotou-Topping (1982–83) 110–11.

[118] Beaucamp (1990–92).

legal changes regarding the institution of marriage in the late ninth and tenth centuries,[119] or the "aristocratization" of society in the Comnenian period mentioned above) impacted women's lives in a number of distinct historical moments. This effort cannot continue without reflecting on the causes and patterns of preservation in our primary source material.

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WOMEN IN BYZANTINE HISTORY IN THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES: SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Stamatina McGrath

Understanding the role of gender in Byzantine society is a task that has drawn the attention of scholars systematically since the 1980's. A number of different methodological approaches have been employed in the interpretation of women in literary, historical, hagiographical and theological texts, as well as, in art and music.[1] These most valuable contributions have advanced our concept of women and most importantly gender in Byzantium. Teasing out what authors intended when they included women in their stories helps us reveal not only the writer's philosophical and political agenda but also more deep rooted concepts of social structure, authority and patriarchy.[2] Elizabeth Clark's notion that literary, philosophical, and theoretical critique of premodern texts is a fruitful avenue of study and that 'the social logic of the text' is one of the tools that aids researchers in examining the literary production of the past offer the ideological framework for this paper.[3] I propose the examination of Skylitzes' history with a focus on revealing the social concerns of the Byzantine society in the eleventh century specifically in the realm of women's involvement in public life. This type of examination of texts is most revealing at times of societal change when the strain of the conflict between one ideology and another reveals the weak points in a society's ideology.

In Byzantium, one such time of change was the eleventh century.[4] Among the historians of this time John Skylitzes has received particular attention for his connection with the ruling dynasty, his legal expertise, moralizing tendencies and negative attitudes toward women.[5]

[1] Herrin (1983) 167–89; Garland (1988); Talbot (2001); Laiou (1981/1992a); Garland (2006); James (1997); James (2009) and Peltomaa (2005) for the most recent overviews of gender studies in Byzantium.
[2] Clark (2004) 156–85.
[3] Clark (2004) 166–67; James (1997) ix–xxi.
[4] Kazhdan and Epstein (1990); Harvey (1989); Kazhdan and Franklin (1984); Laiou and Simon (1994).
[5] Laiou (1992b); Holmes (2005) 66ff.; Strugnell (2006); Sklavos (2006).