



# Saints and Holy (Wo)Men in Byzantine Literature and Art

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Session 2: Sanctity through Martyrdom: Male and Female Martyrs

# ■ The Agenda for the Day

- **Summary of the Previous Unit**
- **The Concept of Martyrdom**
- **Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia***
  - **Symeon Metaphrastes and His *Menologion***
  - **The *Menologion* of Emperor Basil II**
- **Literary Analysis of Two *Passions***
  - **The *Passion of Polykarpos* (BHG 1556-1560)**
  - **The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (BHG 1482)**
- **Other Cult Objects**
- **Cult Places Devoted to Martyrs**

# ■ Summary of the Previous Unit

- **‘Byzantine Hagiographical Literature’**  
(Term, Period, Object, Genres, and Context of Use)
- **Literariness**
- **Bibliographical Tools**
  - **Acta Sanctorum**
  - **BHG and BHG Novum**
  - **Synaxarion of Constantinople**
  - **Analecta Bollandiana**
  - **Patrologia Graeca**
  - **Bibliotheca Sanctorum**
  - **The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography by S. Efthymiadis**
  - **The Cult of Saints Project: [http://cultofsaints.history.ox.ac.uk/?page\\_id=2](http://cultofsaints.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=2)**

# ■ The Concept of Martyrdom

Meanings of μαρτύριον / 'Martyrion' (= martyrdom):

1. the event/process of trial, torture, imprisonment and execution of a Christian person
2. the account of a martyr's life (= 'Passion' or 'Martyrdom Account') – literary genre
3. the martyr's shrine, i.e., church or chapel (engl. martyr)

*Acta vs. Passio*

*Individual Passions vs. Group Passions*



Texts with liturgical, didactic and entertaining character

μάρτυς / μάρτυρες (= martyrs): 1st meaning 'witness'

2nd meaning 'martyr', i.e., the saint who suffered martyrdom (late 2nd century)

The martyr's death and its meaning – holiness/sanctity

Historical background of *Passions*: Persecutions of Christians in Roman Empire (41–313 AD),  
under Julian the Apostate (361–363 AD),  
during the iconoclastic era (8th-9th centuries), and  
during the Arab invasions (e.g., the fall of Amorion in 838)

# ■ Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

## Symeon Metaphrastes and His *Menologion*

‘Menologion’ (μηνολόγιον = μήν, ‘month’ + λόγος, ‘catalog’): a collection of *vitae* arranged according to the date of each saint’s celebration in the church calendar.

**Symeon Metaphrastes** (10th century): author of the ‘Metaphrastic Menologion’, a liturgical collection organized according to the church calendar, mainly consisting of stylistically and thematically reworked earlier hagiographical texts (148 in total). Hence, Symeon received the byname ‘Metaphrastes’, which means translator or reviser.

Symeon Metaphrastes probably gathered the most popular stories of martyrs among the Byzantines (82 in total), who obtained even greater popularity through the mass circulation of his *Menologion*.

Significance of his work: the enormous scale of his enterprise and the subsequent success

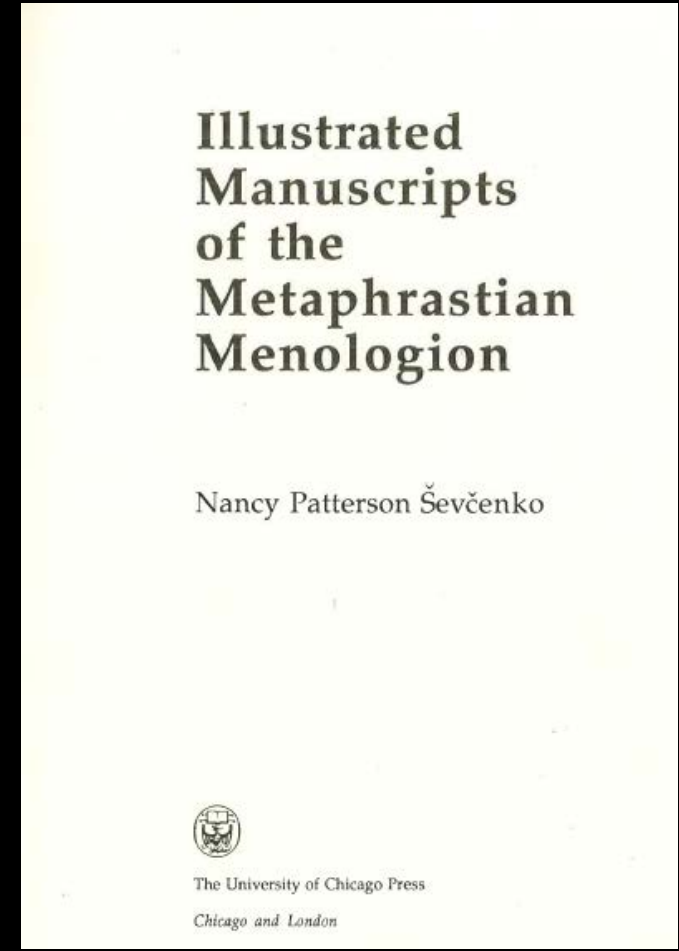


C. HØGEL, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization*, Copenhagen, 2002

# ■ Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

## Symeon Metaphrastes and His *Menologion*

A great number of illustrated manuscripts includes the ‘Metaphrastic Menologion’, for example, the codex Add. 11870 in the British Library, London, which “is the most lavishly illustrated of all the surviving Metaphrastian Menologia” (Patterson Ševčenko 1990: 119).



N. PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion*, Chicago – London, 1990



# Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

## Symeon Metaphrastes and His *Menologion*

Fol. 67r: Four scenes from the life of Eudoxios, Romylos, Zenon, and Makarios (3D7)

The scenes again occupy four roundels. The upper two show (a) three of the saints brought by a guard before the governor of Melitene, who is seated and flanked by a second guard with a large shield,<sup>237</sup> and (b) one saint (Eudoxios?), prone and clad in a loincloth, being beaten by two men with clubs, while the three other saints look on. The lower roundels show the saints (c) in prison, and (d) being beheaded.

(Patterson Ševčenko 1990: 120-121)

Scenes from the Martyrdom of Eudoxios, Romylos, Zenon and Makarios of Melitene, Metaphrastic Menologion, 11th century (cod. Add. 11870, fol. 67r, British Library, London)









# ■ Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

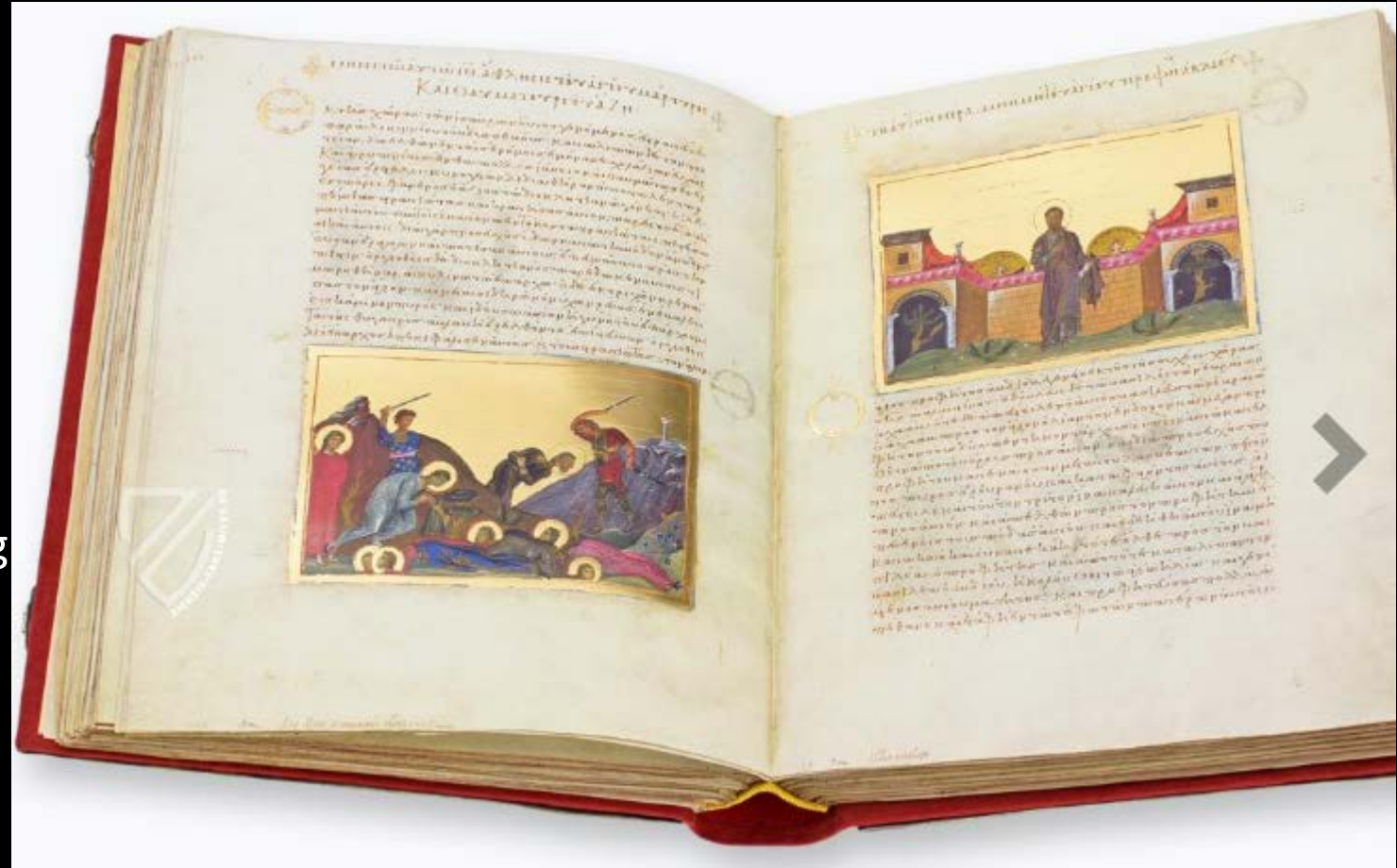
## Emperor Basil II and His “Menologion” (Vat. gr. 1613)

This is the most lavishly illustrated Byzantine liturgical manuscript (ca. 430 illustrations), compiled around 1000 AD for Basil II (r. 976–1025); one miniature on nearly every page.

It currently resides in the Vatican Library (Vat. gr. 1613).

The manuscript is in fact not a ‘menologion’, but a ‘synaxarion’: a liturgical book containing a list of the saints and their feast days with a short description of sixteen lines of text and a painting of a saint or grouping of saints.

[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.gr.1613](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1613)



# ■ Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

## Emperor Basil II and His “Menologion” (Vat. gr. 1613)



A Scene of the Martyrdom of Lucian of Antioch,  
Menologion of Basil II, ca. 1000 AD (cod. Vatic. gr.  
1613, fol. 115)  
(Digitalised ms. by Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)



# Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

## Emperor Basil II and His “Menologion”

torture. A case in point can be found in the Passion of the female martyr Pistic and her sisters Elpida and Agape (*BHG* 1637z). Once the emperor commands to cut off the breasts of the female martyr Pistic, the spectators, both men and women, burst into tears and cast doubts on the correctness of the imperial decision:

ὁ βασιλεὺς [...] ἐκέλευσεν ξίφει ἀποτμηθῆναι αὐτῆς τοὺς μασθοὺς. Οἱ δὲ παρόντες ἐπὶ τὴν θεάν ἄνδρες ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναῖκες, ὁρῶντες τὸ νέον τῆς ἡλικίας αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον κάλλος ποτὲ μὲν πληγαῖς βασανιζόμενον, ποτὲ δὲ σιδήρῳ τῶν ἁγίων μελῶν ἀποκοπτόμενον, ἔκλαιον ὀλολύζοντες καὶ λέγοντες: Τί γὰρ κακὸν ἔπραξαν τὰ νήπια, ἵνα τοιαύταις τιμωρίαις ὑποβάλλωνται; Κακὴ κρίσις, βασιλεῦ, καὶ ἄδικα τὰ προστάγματά σου (*PPisElAg*, ch. 7, emphasis added).

“The emperor [...] commanded to cut off her [= Pistic’s] breasts by sword. Those present at the spectacle, men and women, cried aloud in lamentation seeing her [= Pistic’s] youthfulness and her great beauty, at times tortured by beatings and at times deprived by iron of the holy body parts; and they were saying: ‘What bad thing did the little ones commit to be subjected to such punishments? Oh emperor, [your] judgment [is] bad and your order unjust!’”

However, according to the text, at the violent removal of the breasts, not blood but streams of milk flow out (ἀντὶ αἵματος κρονοὶ γάλακτος ἀπέρρεον, *PPisElAg*, ch. 7). Thereupon, the entire crowd praises God for the great miracles they witnessed (Καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος Ῥώμης ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τοῖς μεγάλοις θαύμασιν οἷς ἔβλεπον, *PPisElAg*, ch. 7). The on-

(Papavarnavas 2016: 73)



Martyrdom of Agatha, *Menologion* of Basil II, ca. 1000 AD (cod. Vatic. gr. 1613, fol. 115)



# ■ Text and Image: Illustrated Byzantine *Menologia*

## Emperor Basil II and His “Menologion”



Martyrdom of Melasippos, Karina, and their Son, Menologion of Basil II, ca. 1000 AD (cod. Vatic. gr. 1613, fol. 115)



# ■ Depiction of Martyrdom in the 19th-Century Art

Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), “The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer”, The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, USA



<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/36782/the-christian-martyrs-last-prayer/>

# ■ Literary Analysis of Two *Passions*

## The *Passion of Polykarpos* (BHG 1556-1560)

- Contextualization of the text: author; place, time and characters of the story
- Christian virtues of the protagonist
- Similarities between the passion of Polykarpos and the passion of Christ
  - *Imitatio Christi*
- “Caesar is lord” (p. 9)
- The depiction of the Jews in the text
- Phases of martyrdom
- Audience: Intra-textual (bystanders) – extra-textual (listeners/readers)

# ■ Literary Analysis of Two *Passions*

*The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (BHG 1482)

(See the PowerPoint Presentation of the next session.)