Notes on female piety
in the hermitages of Ohrid and Prespa

My Doctoral Dissertation deals with the hermitages on the shores of the Lakes of Ohrid and Prespa, dating from 13th to 16th century. All epititomial inscriptions still readable and all donor portraits still preserved on these monuments mention or depict monks, except for the hermitage of Mali Grad in, what is today Albania. In this church we find proof of female patronage, which is the subject of our presentation.

The inscription found in the sanctuary, under the apse conch, is written in a standard supplication form: « Prayer of the servant of God Bojko and the most noble Evdokia and her children. The sanctuary was decorated by them in (6853) 1344/45 ». The name of the man is listed first, and if we follow the Byzantine tradition of digressively listing the names from most important to less important donations, Bojko seems to be the main donor. Nonetheless, the existence of the epithet that qualifies the woman as “most noble”, which is not the case for the man suggests her better social status. Other information on their relationship is the fact that children are not cited as theirs, but as hers. Two hypotheses are possible: Bojko and Evdokia had no familial relations, and they only cumulated their donations to Church, or that they had a blood relation which is difficult to determine. In the majority of dedicatory inscriptions mentioning only a woman and her children, we suppose that the husband was already deceased; divorce being rarer then widowhood. We suppose that Evdokia was in this particular situation, which permitted her to make this donation personally. Byzantine legal documents, mainly in 14th century mention that women, after the death of their husband, as long as they did not remarry, had close control of the family property, especially in the managing of their dowry, which remained almost inalienable from them.

In the apse of the church of Mali Grad, the noble Evdokia is one of these women who materially contributed to the decoration of a church, stepping out in her own name and at her own expenditure, manifesting her independence and initiative in the largely male-dominated medieval society. She is significant in our study because she belonged to the small provincial nobility of which little is known from the sources. Texts often speak only about exceptional women as empresses, and wives of the high aristocrats. The presence of Evdokia together with that of Bojko also suggests the popularity that the hermitage enjoyed among the local population.

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This paper will investigate the role of women in founding tomb monuments during the empire’s final centuries, and especially the role of groups of women in accomplishing these projects. Whereas past authors have tended to focus on isolated examples of female patronage, or individual monuments representing women, my proposed paper will take up the question of how did Byzantine women collaborate in forming a community in death, and how did the sum total of their acts of donation reinforce their connections to one another through family, marriage or other social ties. Through an examination of specific groups of tomb monuments, including those preserved in the Church of Christ in Chora (Kariye Camii) in Constantinople (tombs dating circa 1316-1453), and the Taxiarches Church in Kastoria, Greece (tombs dating circa 1255-1429), it is possible to trace a rich history for specific groups of women patrons.

In the case of the Chora, Theodore Metochites’ restoration and enlargement of the complex has long overshadowed the patronage of many, later tomb donors who added their family monuments to Theodore’s restored church. The nun Eugenia, widow of Michael Tornikes (d. c. 1328), is such a woman; she appears with her husband in the mosaic program for Tomb D in the south chapel. I propose that Eugenia is the likely patron of her husband’s tomb, as is suggested by the tomb’s visual program and its surviving epigram. Eugenia was joined by later patrons, a number of them women, in selecting the Chora to establish family tombs. These likely also included the widow of Despot Demetrios Palaiologos (d. post-1340), who is featured in the couple’s tomb in the church’s inner narthex. Connections to the imperial court of Andronikos II Palaiologos and the Chora’s ktetor, Theodore Metochites, certainly earned these women and their husbands the right of burial in the Chora. But it was also the connections among these women and their elite families, including the Palaiologoi, Asanes, Raouls and Tornikes, that likely motivated the choice to be buried here.

In Kastoria, tombs on the southern exterior of the Taxiarches Church commemorate three laywomen. They are portrayed side-by-side in frescoes set within pseudo-niches; surviving inscriptions record two of the women’s identities: Anna, who made a tomb for her deceased daughter; and Euphrosyne, who died on November 11th, 1436; the inscription for the third adult woman is now lost. While nothing is known of the women’s families, the church’s modest scale and decoration confirm that the subjects are not from noble lineages. The cycle of portraits that this group represents suggests a parallel to elite tomb groups as found in the Chora Monastery in Constantinople. In both instances, women are featured prominently in visual and epigraphic form, and women also played a role as tomb patrons. For the audiences viewing these monuments, such tombs would have been read individually and as part of a larger whole; in this context the prominence of female subjects, and the impact of women patrons, would have made a profound impression on the tomb visitor in his/her viewing experience.
Male constructions of female authorities: identity and spiritual power in the Lives of monastic foundresses

About ten years ago, Elisabeth Clark published a provocative article entitled “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn’,” in which she argued that the male authored Lives of monastic women do not provide us with real women of the past, but with their male hagiographers’ fantasies about them. Clark’s argument implies that these texts would have been closer to reality if their authors were women. This however comes into contradiction with another statement of hers that holy women’s Lives, and hagiography in general are literary texts, and as such they cannot be treated as historical documents.

It is true that hagiography is literature despite the fact that hagiographical texts were treated as historical accounts by their authors and contemporaries. However, they should not be dismissed as mere fictions, especially the texts venerating historical women written shortly after their protagonists’ deaths. In fact, they do tell us certain things about ancient women’s situation, the roles they undertook, their activities, and how their contemporaries saw them. Additionally, these texts give us some information about what was considered exemplary, acceptable and unacceptable female behaviour in male-dominated Christian societies in general, and in women’s monastic communities in particular.

In an attempt to detect some realities about the identities, and religious power of late antique and Byzantine women treated as holy, I shall focus on the Lives of women undertaking the religious role of the monastic foundress-abbess not only because they are related to the theme of this interesting conference, but also because these women are in their large majority historical persons, and some of them are also reported in other texts which I do not have the time to examine here. In addition, most hagiographers were contemporaries with the women they venerate, and some of them knew them first-hand. In the framework of the present paper, I will examine how the identity of the foundress-abbess was formed and the spiritual power and authority she exercised during her lifetime.

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Female imperial donations and donors during the Arsenite schism (1261-1310)

The Arsenite schism had its origins in the conflict that prevailed within the Empire of Nicaea (1204-1261). It was a conflict between the society of Asia Minor and the Constantinopolitan aristocracy, which had fled to Nicaea after the Capture of Constantinople. The support of Patriarch Arsenius by the population of Asia Minor sparked the formation of the movement. The movement was transformed into a rallying flag for all those who were opposed to the Union of the Churches in 1274. It was a movement that confronted the central power and official Church, and the antiunionist party of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy alike. Even after the reinstatement of Orthodoxy by the emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282), popular support established this movement as formal opposition to the political and ecclesiastical authority. During that period, a great number of women of imperial origin, supported directly or indirectly the Arsenite movement. Many of those women chose the monastic life. Some others were involved with charities and donations to monasteries and members of the Arsenite movement alike. Their contribution to the restoration and foundation of monasteries, especially in the region of Constantinople, was very important, too. Maria-Martha the sister of Michael VIII and her daughter Theodora-Theodosia took side with the patriarch Arsenius and offered food and protection to the monk Yakinthos. In the case of the union of the churches, Irene-Eulogia sister of Michael VIII was in opposition to her brother’s policy. She was exiled with her daughter Theodora Raoulaina at the castle of Saint Gregory. Theodora would take care of Gregorius after his resignation from the Patriarchal throne. She created a great library and donated it to the monastery of Aristinon, where Patriarch Gregorius had withdrawn. According to Pachymeris, the Aristinon monastery was located next to the St. Andrew in Krisei (Judgement) monastery, which was owned and renovated by Theodora and where later the corpse of Patriarch Arsenius was placed. Theodora Paleologina, widow of the emperor Michael VIII, restored two monasteries in Constantinople (Lips and St. Anargyroii) during the last decade of her life (1294 - 1301). The main motive behind Theodora’s donations was her wish to see her sins forgiven, as those were caused by the adoption of the Church Union for her husband’s sake. Most of these women were born and grew up in the court of Nicaea and the provinces of Asia Minor. Quite understandably, they kept fond memories of their birth place. Arsenites held such values as the faith in orthodoxy and the delivery. These values made a strong impact in the pious women of imperial origin. The same women were opposing the union of the churches. For the same reason they cling to their faith in Orthodoxy. In a choice that concerned the weight of salvation of soul, the choice between the two parties bent decisively in favour of the Arsenites.

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A female donor amidst the Apostles: not heaven on earth but earth in heaven

The received image of women and icons is of private devotion or of family memorial. There is one icon which does not fit either paradigm, but shows a woman confidently invading a gospel scene in full imperial dress. This is the Doubting Thomas at the monastery of the Metamorphosis at Meteora. The woman is Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina, daughter of Symeon Uros, emperor of the Greeks and the Serbs, sister of John Uros-Joasaph, second founder of the Metamorphosis and successively (and very quickly) wife of Thomas Preljubovic, murdered in 1384, and Esau de Buondelmonti who outlived Maria.

The icon has attracted much interest since Xyngopoulos first published it, and interpretations have focused on political events and personal piety. This reading looks rather at the patronage pattern of Maria with her family, and focuses on the mystery of the twelfth apostle.

The icon shows as well as Maria and the eleven apostles a figure who looks straight out of the picture and presents the scene to the viewer. This paper considers the identification of this figure in the light of other examples of patronage by Maria with her first husband Thomas. On this basis it can be seen that the image must postdate his murder, when Maria was most in need of support and legitimation. But the ‘twelfth apostle’ must have been a puzzle in the middle ages as well, since in the Epirote and Thessalian reception of the icon he is regularly omitted.

Our icon served as a model for frescoes in four different monasteries: in the monastery of Nikolaos ton Philanthropinon (on the island in the lake of Ioannina) dating to 1542, in the katholikon of the Varlaam monastery in Meteora (1548), in the monastery of Zavorda northeast of Meteora (last decade of the sixteenth century) and in the monastery of Hagia Triada in Meteora (1692). All include Maria but not the twelfth apostle. These frescoes attest to the standing of Maria in Epiros and Thessaly in the late Byzantine and metaByzantine period and her almost mythical status, to which she herself contributed. In the icon of the Metamorphosis she shows herself among and equal to the apostles. The icon shows not heaven on earth, but earth in heaven.

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The Lincoln College Typikon and its siblings: books and writing in late Byzantine convents

The ‘golden chain’ of magnificent family portraits prefacing the manuscript nowadays known as the Lincoln College Typikon leads the observer right back into that bustling Constantinople under the first Palaiologan emperors, that Constantinople of the three Theodoras as it were – Theodora Palaiologina, Theodora Rhaoulaina, and Theodora Synadene, one empress and two imperial nieces –, who among themselves shared responsibilities for founding or restoring no fewer than four convents and the commissioning of rich artwork and rhetoric, not least from the court poet Manuel Philes; who proudly displayed their family connections and played a leading role in the politics of the day.

Theodora Synadene’s most splendid foundation, the convent of the Virgin of Sure Hope (τοῦ Θεοτόκου τῆς βεβαίας ἐλπίδος) in Constantinople, would virtually be unknown if not for the survival of one copy – of what must once have been several copies – of its typikon, now in the possession of Lincoln College, Oxford (MS gr. 35): the Lincoln College Typikon (LTC). Although one of the best-known manuscripts surviving from the Byzantine period it has only recently begun to yield its many secrets: following Irmgard Hutter’s masterly 1995 codicological analysis my paper will turn to the manuscript’s palaeographical aspects and re-scrutinize Hutter’s convincing reconstruction of it early history (written around 1300, updated and ‘upgraded’ around 1330). Indeed the message which the hand of the LTC’s main scribe (A) sends is mixed: a commonly perceived clumsiness of its ductus is matched by an astonishing amount of scribal errors – almost all of them painstakingly corrected –, but seemingly contradicted by the scribe’s eager and regular use of tachygraphic abbreviations as well as observance of basic calligraphic rules.

Accepting Hutter’s hypothesis of the LTC being copied by a female scribe, presumably a nun of the convent of sure hope (or rather, over the years, a group of nuns, scribes B and C later being responsible for the manuscript’s updating), on the one hand inferences about the process of scribal training available in Palaiologan nunneries can be drawn. On the other hand, another, contemporary typikon will be suggested to have been copied (not composed, as we know) by a female scribe as well: Theodora Palaiologina’s roughly contemporary typikon for the convents of Lips and the Anargyroi (British Library, MS Add. 22,748), previously assigned to the ‘group of the Palaiologina’ on art historical grounds. Yet its script presents an oddity; it does not either fit the archaizing standards of the other manuscripts produced for the Palaiologina – presumably to be identified with one of Theodora Synadene’s relatives, Theodora Palaiologina or Theodora Rhaoulaina –, nor is the suggested analogy to the imperial chancery (Michael Klostomalles etc.) wholly convincing. Looking at the two manuscripts in comparison will allow some tentative final conclusions; however, it needs to be kept in mind that these will be built on the double hypothesis outlined above.

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Double lives and hidden patrons: a Byzantine set of relics, Siena, and the role of imperial women in late Byzantium

In 1359, the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena acquired a set of Byzantine relics and reliquaries of the Passion, of the Virgin Mary and of various Saints and Apostles. The arrival of the relics in Siena was highly celebrated, and, once in the city, they were made the focus of a long-lived public religious cult.

My paper, however, focuses on the “first life” of these objects in Byzantium, before they were imported to Siena and integrated into the religious and civic fabric of the Italian city. Setting off from a close-up analysis of the physical appearance of the reliquaries, I will reconstruct the ownership of the corpus, proposing to approach it as a female collection of devotional jewels. In order to support my hypothesis, I will also resort to a legal document attached to the relics and drafted in Constantinople immediately before the corpus was taken to Italy. The text is an ecclesiastical bull of authentication, drafted by an official emissary of the pope in Constantinople; its aim is to provide the corpus with a “passport” that would make their sacred value legally valid abroad. After a number of other tests, briefly described in the text, a mysterious imperial woman was sent for and interviewed to dissolve the last doubts cast on the authenticity of the relics.

Who was this woman? What relationship did she have with the corpus of Byzantine relics? And, most importantly, why was she interviewed in place of the emperor himself to authenticate the relics? Matching the information given by the text with the material evidence provided by the objects, I will suggest that the corpus originally functioned as a collection of objects of private female devotion, and that their original owner is very likely to have been this female member of the Byzantine imperial family, whose identity has tentatively been reconstructed by scholarship.

In my final remarks, I will set some more general questions about the social role of women as legal or religious guarantors in relations between Byzantium and the West in the later Middle Ages.

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Some female founders in the village: the Widow’s Tale

The widow in Byzantium has not been the subject of a comprehensive study to date. And yet, demographic studies of the empire reveal that widows formed a large part of the population. Some of the best-known foundations of the Palaeologan period — the south church of Constantine Lips and the funerary chapel of the Pammakaristos monastery — can be attributed to the sponsorship of widows. The seemingly independent financial position of these female founders is at odds with the cliché of the impoverished widow, best exemplified by the gospel tale of the widow’s mite (Mark 12:42-44; Luke 21:2-4), a tale that was picked up by Byzantine authors. The analysis of Byzantine law codes shows that widows were in the enviable legal position to control their own wealth and to dispose of it in ways that are of interest to us today, i.e., when the disposition of that wealth concerned church foundations.

The ability of widows to participate in the foundation of churches or the commissioning of works to adorn them appears, from the evidence, to permeate all levels of Byzantine society. In this paper we will analyze written, archaeological and painted sources to demonstrate that widows, in both urban and rural settings, were actively engaged in church foundation. We will suggest that this cultural phenomenon reflects the strong juridical position of widows in Byzantium, who legally controlled their γονικόν, πατρικόν, or τα θεώρητα, i.e., their dowries or inherited wealth. The foundation of churches, or the commissioning of family portraits for the church walls, witnesses the powerful spiritual desire of widows to render eternal the memories of themselves, their husbands, their parents, and their children.

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Die Erforschung der Rolle der Frau in Kunst und Kultur, besonders als Gründerin und Stifterin, wurde über lange Zeit vernachlässigt.

Das 'Prosopographische Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit' (PLP) bietet sich aufgrund der Fülle seiner etwa 25.000 Einträge für eine Auswertung bezüglich verschiedener Aspekte des Stiftungswesens an.

Als Suchparameter für diese Forschungsarbeit dienten Begriffe wie beispielsweise:
Stiftung, Gründung, Schenkung etc.
Mosaik, Fresko, Restaurierung, Ausstattung etc.
Wein, Brot, Licht, Lampen, Textilien, Testament etc.


For a long time research into the role women played in art and culture, especially as donors and founders, was neglected.

Thanks to its 25,000 entries, the ‘Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit’ (PLP) lends itself to interpretation regarding different aspects of founding.

For this research work, the following terms served as search parameters:
donation, foundation, renovation, gift etc.
mosaic, fresco, furnishing & decoration etc.
wine, bread, light, lamps, textiles, testament etc.

Altogether, 1,618 acts of donation were found and collected in a database. Several new perceptions could be derived: this includes the ratio between male and female founding, the chronological dispersion and the location of donations, the sources and the categories of founding in regard of their appropriation.

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Still in search of Byzantine women, twenty-five years on

This paper will examine the progress made in finding Byzantine women since 1983, drawing attention particularly to new methods of approach and new types of sources. Prescriptive texts such as monastic typika, wills, civil and canon law collections, form a fascinating contrast with literary texts, saints’ lives and romances, and documents of case law from Byzantine courts, Patriarchal, episcopal and civilian. In addition, collections of inscriptions, fresco and mosaic decoration, icons, manuscripts and archaeological finds provide unexpectedly rich evidence for female activity. The growth of gender studies and expanding interest in Byzantine eunuchs has encouraged a more rigorous analysis of women in many different medieval situations: imaginary, ideal and practical. Reading male-authored texts has become a more sophisticated exercise related to questions of genre, rhetorical tradition and intertextuality, and references to women in such texts are now subjected to far closer scrutiny. This is all very positive, but most Byzantine women remain elusive, and the interpretation of their actions, as reported by others, is never straightforward. The most seriously studied individuals, empresses like Theodora and authors like Anna Komnene, continue to provoke significant disagreements, which suggest that there is still much work to be done before the entire female half of Byzantine society can be better appreciated. ‘Female Founders’ marks another stage in this ongoing research project.

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The 'Ariadne' ivories: Leonian empresses revisited

This paper takes the so-called 'Ariadne ivories' as its starting point in a consideration of imperial female founders in the fifth century. It will discuss motives for foundation, and consider how, where, when and why could also be significant factors in building a church in this period. It will also look at how churches could change founders over time and consider some of the reasons why this might have been so.

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Elizabeth JEFFREYS

The sevastokratorissa Eirene as patron

In the mid-twelfth century the sevastokratorissa Eirene commissioned a number of written texts, illustrated books and liturgical items. This paper will discuss at what stages of her life she did this, and will try to assess whether these actions were typical of aristocratic women of that period.

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Tania KAMBOUROVA

Le don de l'église - une affaire de couple ?

J'analyserai l'image du don du modèle de l'église dans les panneaux de ktitores qui s'inscrivent dans la tradition byzantine des représentations picturales, à travers les relations familiales affichées et le rôle attribué au couple dans l'offrande. Comment s'inscrit la femme dans la relation conjugale et quels liens familiaux donne à voir l'image du don de l'église dans les panneaux votifs ? A travers ces questionnements, je dégagerai l'importance des liens familiaux et maritiaux dans l'acte d'offrir transcrits en image tout en m'interrogeant sur la place de la femme dans la société médiévale.

Pour aborder le sujet qui nous intéresse je vais tout d'abord essayer de cerner la notion de ktitor pour ensuite relever les occurrences figuratives de don d'église présentés par des couples notamment des couples de souverains – princes, rois, nobles. Le terme de ktitor se rapporte ainsi en même temps à la fondation d'une église mais aussi à sa possession. Une femme, au même titre que l'homme, pouvait être ktitorissa. Le prendrai comme exemple le cas d’églises bulgares et serbes, construites aux XIIIe – XIVe siècles par de puissantes familles présentes dans les panneaux votifs (avec ou sans référence au pouvoir temporel).

L'église de Bojana présente l'image un couple de ktitores avec une référence au pouvoir temporel (c.-à-d. le panneau du couple royal), dans le narthex, et l'inscription identifiant les personnages mentionne bien les deux comme ktitores. Seulement, l'inscription dédicatoire ne mentionne que l'homme en tant que ktitor.

L'église de Dolna Kamenitza présente trois groupes de ktitores, dont le panneau d'une famille, situé dans les petites chapelles au-dessous des tours. L'homme et la femme tiennent le modèle de l'église. Devant le modèle du côté de la mère est représentée la fille. Un peu en
retrait, derrière le père est placé le jeune garçon de la famille. L'inscription permettant de les identifier n’est pas conservée.

Dans le naos de l'église de Staničane un large panneau de ktitores comporte dix personnages, et l'inscription dédicatoire identifie les chefs de famille qui ont contribué à la construction et à la décoration de l'église comme la maison d’Arsenije, de Jefemie et de Constantin.

A l'église de Ljuboten, le don de l'église n'est pas représenté, mais l'inscription votive mentionne les noms des membres de la famille de ktitores comme étant la noble Danica et ses fils Bojko et Zvečan.

A Kucevište encore, deux panneaux donnent à voir le couple royal et celui de despotes (dans l'exonarthex) et celui de ces mêmes despotes (dans le naos) qui sont les ktitores. L'inscription dédicatoire, même si elle est abîmée, mentionne que l'église est créée et décorée par « la peine et le travail » de la ktitorissa Marena et Radoslav et Vladislava.

Enfin à Psača, le panneau votif de la famille du ktitor se trouve sur le mur sud et fait pendant à celui du pouvoir temporel personnifié par le tsar Uroš et le roi Vukašin, sur le mur nord du narthex.

Ainsi, pour accomplir son don, le ktitor, et sa famille, se situe souvent par rapport à une double hiérarchie à la fois terrestre et céleste. Les premières conclusions m’amèneraient à penser que la construction d’églises est plus qu’une affaire d’homme ou de femme, une affaire de couple, voire une affaire de famille, avec cependant une prépondérance de la présence masculine, significative de la place sociale de la femme dans la société médiévale, et cela bien que du point de vue du droit de ktitor – hommes et femmes aient les mêmes droits. La ktitoria témoigne cependant plus que d’un statut social et d’une puissance économique de la famille. Elle atteste d’une générosité adressée à Dieu par l’offrande d’un don. C’est la perspective sotériologique qui éclaire la raison du geste de construire une église autrement qu’en terme de prestige social.

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Helena als Metapher

Female donors in thirteenth-century wall-paintings in Cappadocia

In this brief paper we shall address the topic of female donors in connection with four well-known churches in Cappadocia. The first donor is a certain Irene in the Karı kilise (1212) near Zoropassos. The second donor bears the title of protopapadias and is known from a dedicatory inscription in the Tatlarin kilise (1215). The third subject is an unidentified donor bearing the title of Screbonisa, whose portrait, poorly preserved, is found in the Yüksekli kilise (second half of the 13th century?) near Zoropassos. Finally, the fourth donor is an historical figure, a local princess called Thamar, whose widely-known portrait is preserved in the Kırkdamaltı kilise (1283) in the Peristrema valley.

As per our observations in situ, we have observed several iconographic aspects linked, in particular, to the garments worn by female donors, which have (until now) gone unnoticed. We will focus on these elements as well as on the dedicatory inscriptions and we will attempt to determine the identity and social status of the female art patrons. Secondly, we will attempt to expose the iconographic style of this region which would be incorporated into a broader provincial tradition attested in the eastern Mediterranean: from Greece and the Balkans to Syro-Palestine, including the Aegean Islands and Cyprus. Furthermore, the location of these dedicatory portraits within the sacred space, as well as their association with the pictorial background and the liturgy, will be examined to gain a better understanding of the female patrons’ involvement in artistic productions.
Research regarding patronage in Cappadocia allows us to fortify the image of a region which, in the first half of the 13th century, benefitted from a flourishing economic situation, the reasons for which can be found in the complex political and social history of the area. Such economic and politic milieus seem to have contributed to the wealth of the female patrons and to their social, cultural and religious identity along with the vitality of the Christian communities in the Seljoukid territory. The female donor’s faith in the power of images of the past has remained steady but it is now expressed in a social context in which the female patron seems to become more significant. The pictorial programs and the epigraphic evidence suggest that the role of the female donor was more complex and that art was used to affirm her double political/cultural identity. The female patron is a part of the Greek communities of the sultanate of Rum but also a living testimony of the absence of political and religious frontiers. Even after the fall of the Seljuk State in the second half of the 13th century, in a specific political background, she appears to continue to affirm her particular identity in a region in which the borders between the Byzantium and the « after Byzantium » are not yet defined; at least in the context of Christian art.

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Konstantin M KLEIN

‘Do good to Sion in thy good pleasure’
a Byzantine empress and Jerusalem

In 452 A.D., a group of miaphysite monks from Jerusalem incensed by the dyophysite victory of the Council of Chalcedon murdered their enemies. They even raised one of their number, the archimandrite Theodosius, to the see of the Holy City. For twenty months, from early 452 until 453, Theodosius held the throne of the patriarch of Jerusalem until he was ousted by imperial troops who reinstalled the former bishop Juvenal. However, miaphysitism had a mighty supporter in this city: Exiled to Jerusalem, the Byzantine empress Eudokia herself emerged, for a period, in deliberate opposition to the persons and policies of the court in Constantinople. The Holy City became the stage for a certain number of power struggles – between Eudokia and the imperial court, and between different religious ideas.
Eudokia came to the Holy Land in around 438 and for a second and final time from 443/444 until her death in 460. She is often listed when modern scholarship investigates in famous pilgrims to Palestine or the history of Theodosius II, her husband. However, until now there has not been a study of Eudocia’s political and theological influence. In my paper, I plan to show that Eudocia as a female founder required a new space for her building activity, since Constantinople was the place of the court. After looking at Eudocia’s small but thoughtful building activity in Constantinople, her ‘grand tour’ as a benefactress to the Greek East and Palestine with Jerusalem as its goal will be discussed.

It will be shown that Eudocia tried to imitate Helena, the mother of Constantine, in her attitude towards the sacred topography and as an influential female founder in the Holy City: Once at Jerusalem, the exiled empress wanted her new home to rival Constantinople in the grandeur of its monuments, and her prestige to grow in spite of her political misfortunes. Jerusalem for many reasons turned out to be the best place for her ambitious foundations as acts of defiance.

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Florin LEONTE

A late Byzantine patroness and counsellor: Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina

The present paper attempts to investigate the extent of Helena Palaiologina Kantakouzene’s patronage in the second half of the fourteenth century. I will compare and analyze the texts of three writers who evoke in different ways the contacts they had with her: Philotheos Kokkinos, Nicephorus Gregoras, and Demetrius Kydones. The latter one seems to have been her protégé with whom she maintained closer ties, most probably because of his family’s connections with the Kantakouzenoi. The six letters which he addressed her provide data for reconstructing a multifaceted relationship lasting for more than four decades. While she was actively involved in the late Byzantine politics and religious debates, she also seems to have supported an entire group of individuals who were also part of the Constantinopolitan court. As these individuals had religious contrasting views, I will try to demonstrate that Helena assumed in this context a role of mediator between the different factions active at that time in Byzantium.

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Eric LIMOUSIN

A la recherche de la femme politique : le patronage des impératrices chez Michel Psellos

En se basant sur l’étude des discours de Psellos, la communication cherche à mieux saisir les rapports entre le savant byzantin et les impératrices du XIe siècle, il s’agit d’étudier dans leur contexte, 2 discours adressés à Théodora (Littlewood 1 ; Dennis n°11), un à Eudocie Makrembolitissa (Dennis n°12). Ce contexte est souvent précisée par des documents annexes comme les lettres

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<td>G 35 KD 271, 272 MB 53 et 132</td>
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La question de la réalité du pouvoir des Porphyrogénètes est permanente dans l'historiographie byzantine. En confrontant les différentes sources entre elles, les historiens arrivent souvent à des contradictions. En effet, la Chronographie présente des difficultés d’analyse et certains historiens sont partisans d’un réel pouvoir de Zoé (Hill, Lauritzen), cependant, l’analyse serrée de l’œuvre majeure de Michel Psellos montre que souvent, Zoé sert de paravent à un groupe de conseillers proches et traditionnels de la famille macédonienne qualifiés de basilikoi dans la Chronographie. L’absence de véritable œuvre rhétorique dédiée à Zoé apporte des éléments favorables à cette thèse.

Pour parvenir à mieux saisir le rôle des impératrices dans la vie politique de la cour impériale, il est nécessaire d’abord de mieux préciser les vertus impériales de Théodora. De plus, l’analyse des deux discours de Michel Psellos permet de mieux cerner les évolutions de la position de l’auteur et des relations de patronage à l’intérieur de la cour impériale. Il semble
bien qu’il existe une concurrence entre plusieurs clans de « conseillers ». Les moines ou un groupe de moines se posent en concurrent de Michel Psellos.

Face aux fondations qualifiées d’impériales, Michel Psellos représente donc la vision traditionnelle de la bureaucratie civile byzantine.

- le monastère est économiquement une extension de la fortune aristocratique
- les moines ne doivent pas détournés la manne de la philanthropie de manière directe. La fondation est logique si elle est faite par les aristocrates qui détiennent les terres par l’intermédiaire d’une donation impériale, mais les empereurs ne doivent pas agir directement comme le montre la présence de cette critique récurrente dans la Chronographie.

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Petra MELICHAR

**The sins of female founders in late Byzantium**

Despite their donations, foundations and with one exception monastic vows, several founders of late Byzantium and Trebizond compromised their pious images by what their opponents and critics considered “inappropriate” political or moral choices. In order to illustrate the different challenges these women had to face, I will briefly depict the stories of Martha Palaiologina, Theodora Raoulaina, Eulogia Choumnaina, Anna Anachoutlou and Theodora Comnene and their trespasses committed against the emperor, church or spouse. Based on the information provided by the primary sources, I will put these offences in context with their motivation and foundation activities and reflect briefly on the issues of power and punishment.

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Visibility of female founders. The case of ancient Greece

The earliest foundations of cults known to have been made by women in ancient Greece date to the classical period (5th and 4th centuries B.C.). Whereas Plato claims that especially women were inclined to sacrifice and build altars and cult places for any given reason the archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence for female founding activity in this period is rather scanty (this changes in the Hellenistic period).

I will present three cases:
- the foundation of one of the earliest sanctuaries of Asklepios, by Nikagora, in Sikyon (literary evidence)
- the foundation of a hieron for the river god Kephisos in Athens, by Xenokrateia (epigraphic evidence plus a fine relief of ca. 400 B.C., depicting the foundress with her son)
- the foundation of a cult place for Demeter and Kore in Cnidus, by Chrysina (epigraphic evidence)

The paper discusses the problems of evidence and of visibility, focuses on the similarities of these foundations and draws conclusions about the intentions of the founders.

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Ekaterini Mitsiou

Die Gründung der Doppelklöster in Byzanz


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Leonora NEVILLE

The adventures of a provincial female founder: Glykeria and the rhetoric of female weakness

Glykeria of Skyros is one of Byzantium’s the less-well known female monastic founders. While she had no imperial connections and apparently never went to Constantinople, she was a significant force in her local community. Her attempt to build a monastery on her lands, known from two documents preserved in the archives of the Great Lavra of Mt. Athos, provides us with invaluable insight into women’s dealings with provincial systems of authority. This paper will examine in particular the legal rhetoric of feminine weakness found in Byzantine archival documents and explore the impact of this rhetorical tradition on the range of actions available to female founders, focusing on Glykeria’s example.

In the early eleventh century Glykeria and her husband John founded a monastery on their estates on the island of Skyros in which they planned to take monastic vows. They tried to keep their monastery independent of the authority of the bishop of Skyros, who in response forbade any priest from celebrating the Eucharist in their monastery. At some point in the course of the dispute their church was burned down. John went to Constantinople to ask for the intervention of the Patriarch and died while in the city. Glykeria then acceded to her bishop’s request to donate the monastery to him. Subsequently however she called on the help of the Great Lavra, declaring her desire to donate the monastery to a monk of Lavra. When several representatives of Lavra arrived on Skyros, Glykeria claimed that her donation to the bishop was invalid and then made a new donation to Lavra. The documents in the archives of Lavra do not tell us whether the fight in Skyros continued after the representatives of Lavra went home, but the great monastery provided Glykeria with a strong and interested protector. It is likely that Glykeria enjoyed monastic retirement precisely the way she had planned.

How was Glykeria able to annul the sworn act of donation to her bishop? One answer is that the powerful Athonite monastery could simply resist the bishop’s authority. In addition, it is possible that the tradition of legal rhetoric about female incompetence was manipulated to allow Glykeria the freedom to change her mind. Acts of donation and sales made by women commonly contain elaborate rhetorical denials that the women have been acting under coercion or out of ‘feminine simplicity.’ These clauses denying the effects of coercion are recalled in Glykeria’s second donation in which she claimed that her first donation to the bishop was invalid and then made a new donation to Lavra. The documents in the archives of Lavra do not tell us whether the fight in Skyros continued after the representatives of Lavra went home, but the great monastery provided Glykeria with a strong and interested protector. It is likely that Glykeria enjoyed monastic retirement precisely the way she had planned.

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In this case the trope of female weakness appears to have helped a woman achieve her goal.

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Early Byzantine medallions: piety and patronage

This paper explores the use of religious imagery on privately commissioned gold medallions dated to around the year 600 AD. I will discuss the marriage medallion in the Christian Schmidt collection in Munich and also the Adana medallions, two identical encolpia in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Whereas other studies of these objects have discussed the magical elements of their iconography, my focus is on the strategic ambiguity with which these objects deploy Christian imagery as both apotropaic elements and devotional figures.

The Schmidt medallion depicts Christ blessing a marriage on the reverse and scenes of the Infancy of Christ on the obverse, where the Annunciation fills the top two-thirds of the medallion, and the Visitation and Nativity occupy the lower third. The three scenes underscore the miraculous nature of Mary’s motherhood. Christ’s blessing of the marriage may be seen as a protective charm of sorts, ensuring a felicitous union. But Gabriel’s greeting of Mary at the Annunciation, “Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you!,” which is inscribed around the perimeter of the medallion, invites prayerful interaction with Mary and serves as the viewer’s prayer in her adoration of the Virgin. This verse was included in the fourth-century liturgy of Saint James, indicating that two to three centuries before this medallion was crafted, the angel’s salutation was already a familiar prayer that Christians used in Marian devotion.

How should this juxtaposition of a marriage scene with imagery of Mary’s pregnancy be interpreted? The adaptation of New Testament iconography to this private, marital context demonstrates the imagery’s astounding—and sometimes problematic—flexibility. It seems that both the iconography and inscriptions of the medallion seem to address the needs of a bride or expectant mother, invoking Mary as both an intercessory figure and an auspicious prototype who benefits the marriage.

A similar blending of prophylactic with devotional imagery can be seen on the Adana encolpia in Istanbul, two identical medallions of embossed gold. As on the Schmidt medallion, Gabriel’s angelic salutation is offered to the viewer as a prayer, facilitating adoration of the Virgin. The devotional significance of the Adana encolpia is further illustrated by the veiled figure kneeling at the Virgin’s feet in the upper register of the medallion. This suppliant underscores the praiseworthy nature of the Virgin birth and offers to the female owner an unambiguous model for Marian worship. Although both men and women worshipped Mary and looked to her as an intercessor, the representation of this female suppliant appeals specifically to women and concerns related to childbirth.

The Schmidt medallion and the Adana encolpia probably originate in different contexts in terms of patronage, the former being a special commission and the latter resulting from serial production. The inscribed greeting of Gabriel on both medallions, “Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you!,” represents the incorporation of a biblical and liturgical prayer to the Virgin. The marriage scene on the Schmidt medallion and the veiled suppliant on the Adana encolpia strongly suggest that they belonged to women, for whom the iconography and
inscriptions carry both devotional and protective force. Close analysis of their iconography shows that the Schmidt and Adana medallions deploy standard imagery of the church in an equivocal manner that minimizes its historical and theological meaning, so that the private, feminine concerns of the owners are visibly interwoven with the biblical story.

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Eirene PANOU

Patronage in the Patria, matronage and maternity

The paper focuses on examples of female patronage particularly during the eighth and tenth centuries in Constantinople and examines how these are illustrated in written sources and specifically in the Patria. This tenth-century text gives us the opportunity to make a few interesting remarks on how the Byzantines viewed the figure of St. Anne. There seems to be a repetitive pattern in the Patria concerning stories of female patronage, the figure of St. Anne (the mother of Virgin Mary) and childbirth. What we will attempt to do is discuss the motives under which the alleged foundations of female empresses took place, we will see how these stories were created and what do they tell us about the Byzantine ideology concerning the saint.

The paper offers an insight into the not-much-studied figure of St. Anne in Byzantium and focuses on the role she had during the Byzantine period, that of a protector of childbirth. The examples of texts used in this paper make this connection clear, and the results from the study of texts is in accordance with the artistic representations of the saint, which also emphasize on her role as a mother. On the whole and as far as patronage is concerned Anne’s connection to feminine patronage had more to do with her role as a mother than the actual patronage of imperial women.

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Die Stifterinnentätigkeit der Kaiserin Sophia -
Impuls für die Gleichberechtigung mit dem Kaiser?

Kaiserin Sophia nahm während der Regierungszeit Justin II. die Rolle der Mitregentin ein, indem sie sich in politischen, finanziellen, als auch religiösen Angelegenheiten ein Mitspracherecht eingeräumt hatte. Wurde Sophias herausragende Stellung in der bisherigen Fachliteratur vor allem auf ihre Persönlichkeit zurückgeführt, liegt mein Fokus auf der Analyse der Wechselwirkung zwischen gesellschaftlicher Positionierung und Stiftungen. Stiftungen legen nicht nur Zeugnis über die Stellung des Stifters / der Stifterin ab, sondern können auch Impuls für diese sein.


Inwiefern sich Sophias Gleichstellung in den genannten Stiftungen widerspiegelt und vor allem ob diese als Impuls für Sophias gesellschaftliches Ansehen fungierten, gilt es abschließend zu analysieren.

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Keran, queen of Armenians, and female patronage in the kingdom of Cilicia

Keran has been the second queen in the history of the Armenian kingdom, which arose in 1198 in the time of Crusades in Cilicia, in the Eastern Mediterranean and lasted until 1375. The marriage of Keran to the crown prince Lewon, in 1262, aimed to the reconciliation of the two major aristocratic families of Cilicia, after the execution of Keran's father accused of betrayal. Keran shared the life and the power of her consort until her death in 1285. Beyond the birth she gave to a dozen of children, there is very few evidence about her life as a queen and as a woman. This lack of information contrasts with the glowing terms in which texts praise her virtues, especially her piety and her beauty "to the body and to the mind". Moreover, Keran's death is commemorated in a synaxary copied in 1348, which also records the death of the prince T’oros, the father of the first king of Cilicia; this selective commemoration in a liturgical manuscript seems particularly significant.

Keran's predecessor on the throne, the queen Zabel, has been the only queen to be depicted in coinage, as the heiress of her father Lewon I. Zabel is also credited with the foundation of a hospital and a church dedicated to saint Marina, for which the evidence is rather obscure. The most important way of patronage in Armenian Cilicia seems to be the production of illuminated manuscripts, which until the middle of the XIIIth century concerns mostly clergymen.

Evidence from colophons of manuscripts indicates that Keran grew up in an educated family: her mother, T'efano, known as the commissioner of a collection of treatises may have initiated her the love of books and letters. Her sister is also attested to have ordered a prayer book in 1285. Moreover, a relative of her and her unique namesake, Keran, widow of Geoffrey of Servandikar commissioned a lavishly illuminated Gospel-book, which probably marked her important donation to the church. Queen Keran is involved in the production of three manuscripts, all Gospel-books, preserved today. The earliest one, Jerusalem, St-James ms 2660, was produced in 1262, probably at the occasion of her marriage to Lewon, who ordered the manuscript. Keran is not mentioned in the scribal colophon but the dedicatory poem, carefully written in face of the portrait of the couple states her as the donor together with her husband. The Christ blesses the couple according to a pattern current in Byzantine imperial iconography, while Lewon raises the book while Keran is particularly emphasized by her enamelled nimbus and the candle she holds. The second manuscript, Jerusalem, St-James ms 2653, is known after the name of the queen who has commissioned it soon after the coronation of her husband. The dedicatory portrait magnifies the royal family kneeling under an impressive image of the Deisis. The king and the queen, wearing the loros under deluxe mantles, are symmetrically displayed and adopt identical attitudes presenting their children and addressing the intercessors.
The third manuscript (Erevan, Matenadaran ms 6764), the decoration of which has probably never been accomplished, was copied in 1283, only two years before her death in the monastery of Skevra, which belonged to the queen's familial fief and should perpetuate the memory of Keran and her parents.

These few, though extremely lavish manuscripts, could be hardly compare with the monastic foundations sponsored by a series of aristocratic women in Greater Armenia. Yet, her accession to the court coincides with the production of manuscripts by women of her family. Although Keran's personal involvement in programs and iconography can difficultly be proved, her patronage seems to inform efficiently the Cilician manuscript illumination, beyond the production of a couple of deluxe Gospel-books. The Keran's Gospel's of 1272, produced in the queen's own initiative marks an important shift in miniature painting: Hromkla, the scriptorium sheltered by the Armenian Patriarchate, gives up its place to a workshop based in Sis, the capital; the anonymous masters of the latter elaborate an expressive and dynamic style which provides aristocratic piety with its most vernacular and individual expression.

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Alexander RI E H L E

Theodora Raulaina als Stifterin und Patronin

Deconstructing Donors

Despite considerable variety in pose, gesture, and proximity to sacred figures, “donor” has become the ubiquitous label for the human beings painted on medieval church walls. This paper looks at wall paintings in Byzantine and post-Byzantine southern Italy to uncover other potential meanings and functions for these painted people, especially the women. I argue against using “donor” as a default unless the figure is actually shown in the act of donating, that is, literally giving something. If the painted person is empty-handed or holds something other than a miniature church, alternative explanations for her presence should be considered; this is also the case if a person is represented by means of a painted text that includes a name. For example, some of the inscribed or painted individuals may be deceased and are thus being commended to God by others rather than commemorating themselves. Specific beliefs and practices important in medieval Italy probably lie behind the configuration of the human images. While the pictorial or textual human presence can be understood in general as drawing the attention of worshippers and activating their piety, clues to specific, contextualized meanings should be sought in each particular case.

Cornelia RÖMER

Female Donors in 8th Century Egypt

In a monastery in Upper Egypt near today Luxor a number of Coptic documents have come to light which attest donations of children to the monastery by their parents. The paper focusses on the social and economic implications of such donations, in particular when the donors were single women, and raises the question whether the status of such children was similar to that of temple slaves.
Dennis Stathakopoulos

I seek not my own:
Is there a female mode of charity?

This paper critically examines the notion that women and men follow different patterns of giving to charity. Although contemporary perceptions seem to point to such a difference, the source material, both contemporary and medieval, does not corroborate it. I will look at women’s institutional philanthropy, patterns of property transfer through donations and testaments and supplement the material with information from narrative sources to establish the veracity of the opening statement. Finally, I will address possible ways of explaining any differences in charitable behaviour that do emerge from the Byzantine sources.

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Christine Stephan-Kaissis

An anonymous Byzantine Lady and the Face of Christ at H. David (Latomou Monastery) in Thessalonike

The case study I want to discuss in my paper concerns the small church of Hosios David also called Latomou Monastery in Thessalonike, Northern Greece. Literary sources record that in Byzantine times the church was dedicated to Christ the Lord Saviour. The structure was erected at an unknown date sometime during the course of the 5th century. According to a dedicatory inscription on site, the sanctuary was founded by a Byzantine lady whose name and identity is now lost.

In my paper I will focus on the evidence the early Byzantine mosaic depicting Christ in glory covering the semi-dome on the apse can yield about the person who ordered it. The costly material, the extremely high quality of the work and its subtle theological implications indicate that the founder must have been a woman of wealth, education and strong religious beliefs. In order to gain insights about this lady I shall first build a frame of reference around the particular foundation by examining its architecture and local urban setting. Combined with the art historical analysis of the mosaic, the results gained, will be used to find out more about the theological message the lady in question wanted to communicate by visual means.

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Female patronage of the arts in the Palaiologan era: Icons, minor arts and manuscripts

This paper will provide a quick overview of some of the deluxe objects commissioned by female members of the aristocracy and imperial family during the Palaiologan era. I will use as evidence both surviving objects with inscriptions linking them with female patrons, and epigrams originally inscribed on works of art which have become disassociated from the objects and have been preserved only in collections of poems. Among the issues to be discussed will be the motivation for the commissioning of these objects and their donation to churches and monasteries.

Anastasios TANTSIAS

Galleries in monastic churches founded by women and their social implications

Founding of religious establishments was a practice bringing social recognition often capitalized into political power. Piety expressed in patronage permitted noble women to partake in the appropriation of the power that the holy community acquired over society, an area usually dominated by male sponsors of religious institutions.

In formal and theoretical aspects, as well as ideology, female practices in the sphere of religion borrowed models of contact established for men. The question of “the place of women inside the church” was in fact then, and still remains in historiography, a double metaphor both for their role inside the establishment in contrast to men and the political power it brought them, as well as for the actuality of the place women occupied inside the church-building. Female founders of churches could manipulate arrangements in the buildings they financed to emulate the known practices of male nobility and especially the emperor. Social class segregation had different rules from the practice of segregation of sexes, especially in church buildings of private character, like monastic Catholica.

The changes in the rules that governed patronage of religious foundations mark the shift in the interest to finance private rather than public ones. This was also a way of shifting the cultural and ideological power from monasteries towards the higher strata of society.
The cross-in-square church was the architectural prototype that became a hallmark of the independent monastic community following the iconoclastic controversy. Female involvement in the dispute guaranteed a prominent role for women in the equilibrium that resulted in the post iconoclastic society and the powers within it. The space occupied by women founders inside the monastic church building is an expression of their distinct place inside the community. The private setting allowed for arrangements that in public churches were disapproved by the clergy.

Galleries in monastic churches founded by women were an addition into the established type of the monastic church, the cross-in-square. Galleries in this type of church were an anomaly disturbing the inherent advantages of its architectural composition. Yet they were regarded as essential, bridging the gap between the functional arrangement of the middle and late Byzantine churches with that of earlier times.

Monastic Catholica founded by women of higher social standing very often have galleries serving as places of distinction for them inside the church building. Examples cited help outline a model repeated frequently. This provides a methodological question to be applied in cases of churches not easy to identify. The case studied is the church known as “Prophetes Elias” in Thessalonike. Taking into account similar cases of churches founded by women, new clues can be proposed for identifying the church. Still it is not an easy task to search for the female founder behind any given monastic Catholicon.

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Eka TCHKOIDZE

Royal female donors to the Iveron Monastery

The Holy Monastery of Iveron was officially founded in 1083. From the very start of Iveron’s existence the Georgian monks were intensively involved in translating of Greek ecclesiastical books into Georgian and in rare cases the opposite. Due to their effort Georgian literature was enriched by translations of works from all literary genres.

The so called Synodikon Biblion (in Georgian aRapebis wigni – Aghapebis tsigni) composed in the Iveron Monastery is one of the most important historical texts has ever been written in Georgian. It is evidence of every kind of grant (economic, juridical, etc.) offered by several people of the period (Byzantine emperors, Georgian kings and renowned representatives of Byzantine and Georgian aristocracy) to the Monastery.

Two of fifteen female donors to the Iveron Monastery are imperial women: the Byzantine empress Maria (so-called “Alani” by mistake); empress Maria, spouse of Alexios I Comnenos (1081-118); There is a reference to two Georgian queens as well: Mariam, spouse of
the Georgian king George I (1014-1027), and grandmother of the above-mentioned Byzantine empress Maria; and Queen Thamar (1184-1213).

The lemma dedicated to Maria, the Georgian princess and Byzantine empress, is a kind of thanking reference for her and her son, Constantine’s “huge and manifold donations”. The first thing they did was to make the monastery immune from taxation.

Although, Constantine Porphyrogenitus is mentioned, it is obvious that the protagonist is Maria. Her donation is characterized as “huge and manifold”. Her effort took many years to gain all these privileges for the Georgian monastery on Mount Athos. Her help was double: juridical and financial. In this lemma Maria is presented as an influential imperial woman, who acted carefully with a certain purpose.

According to the lemma referred to Maria, spouse of Alexios I Komnenos, Paul, the Iveron’s abbot at the end of the 11th c. starts a friendship with Aleksios Komnenos and his wife Mariam who made donations to the monastery without defining it namely. Mentioning them as friends means that the Georgian abbot’s connections with the imperial house (emperor Aleksios and Empress Maria) were quite close. What kind of donation Empress Maria made to the monastery, unfortunately, is not defined in this lemma.

Maria, the grandmother of Empress Maria is mentioned in the lemma 100. During her visit to Constantinople (ca 1052-1055) she met with the Iveron’s tenth abbot and great Georgian scholar George. Together they thought up a plan for the monastery’s economic revival. Despite the difficulties in the relationships between Georgia and Byzantium, the Georgian queen Maria had a rare capability to find a solution even for the most difficult situations. She contributed to the embodiment of Iveron’s economic revival being a mediator between the monastery and Emperor Constantine Monomachos.

The last royal female donor of the Iveron Monastery is queen Thamar. She is mentioned in lemma 153. According to it, Thamar twice sent donations from Georgia to Iveron. So Thamar’s contribution was purely financial.

From these four female donors the most important was Byzantine Empress Maria’s and her grandmother’s contribution. They offered significant juridical and financial support to the monastery after a difficult situation when the monastery’s reputation was greatly damaged and its economic situation was more than critical.

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The voice of Theodora

Much scholarly effort has been spent on manipulating literary sources to allow ‘the real Theodora to stand up’. Her image usually comes to mind through the words of Procopius, who for a long time was seen as the main point of access to the age of Justinian. Despite recent scholarly dismantling of the status of Procopius, the Procopian heritage is evident in the questions we still ask: holy woman or whore? Brave companion of the emperor or sixth-century feminist undermining his agenda? Most of these projections were created posthumously, all by men, exploiting for many different purposes the figure of the empress.

Yet there are traces of self-representation, one way in which Theodora herself can speak: through her foundations. Between 527, the year of her accession to the throne as wife of the co-emperor and 548, the year of her untimely death, she created her own public image.

To delineate it is again not simple: there are problems of various kinds in interpretation. It is important to assemble and evaluate what evidence we have before it can be interpreted. This paper will make use of epigrams and monograms as well as the literary texts to establish what of Theodora can be known through her foundations: the image of a great female founder.

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Alexandra VUKOVITCH

The epistles of princess Jelena Balsic: an example of the role of noblewomen as patrons in late medieval Zeta

Acts of female cultural and religious patronage were not rare in the Kingdom of Serbia in the 14th and 15th centuries. Female patrons were consistently noblewomen; we have examples of historical figures such as Jelena of Serres and Princess Milica who wrote liturgical poetry, commissioned works of art and built churches and convents. Princess Jelena Balsic: daughter of Prince Lazar, martyred at the Battle of Kosovo and of Princess Milica, a Serbian lady of Nemanjid lineage, is an example of the role of noblewomen in the production of literary works and religious patronage in Medieval Serbia. After the death of her second husband, Djordje II Stacimiricov Balsic in 1435, Jelena Balsic consecrated herself to a life of piety and to the construction of a church dedicated to the Holy Mother on Lake Skadar in Zeta. During her reclusion at a convent on the Isle of Gorica, she began a correspondence with the well-travelled and erudite monk, Nikon of Jerusalem who would later become
hieromonk of the monastery of Saint Nicholas on Lake Skadar. From this correspondence, only the *Three Epistles of Jelena Balsic* remain. The three epistles follow the traditional Byzantine epistolary form and are representative of the literary and cultural environment of Zeta in the 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The level of literary expression and the content of the epistles demonstrate princess Jelena’s capacity to engage in theological conversation and her interest and queries regarding monasticism. There is much to be learned from the three epistles of Jelena Balsic, integrated in the un-edited corpus entitled *Goricki Zbornik* (The Corpus of Gorica) and put together by princess Jelena’s “spiritual father”, Nikon of Jerusalem in 1441/2. This paper discusses, notably: the role of kinship in acts of patronage and the role of lineage in the creation of a dynastic precedent permitting noblewomen to become religious patrons and the role of the female patron in contributing to, commissioning and directing a literary work.

It is of great academic interest to examine the *Epistles of Jelena Balsic* from the perspective of social anthropology to gain a better understanding of the cultural and literary pursuits of noblewomen, their education, their power and authority as married women or as noble widows and as patrons or *ktitores* in the Medieval Balkans. Patronage studies demand a composite approach that incorporates ideas related to social anthropology. This discipline can be of great use in identifying an inherited tradition of aristocratic female patronage and can yield an outline for understanding patronage systems. An historical approach is necessary in determining and observing the prominence of female patronage at a specific time or the absence of female patronage during a specific period. In the case of the Medieval Kingdom of Serbia, it can be noted that female patronage was prominent in the Balkans in the later medieval period, during the Ottoman conquest.

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Elite women in the Holy Land in late antiquity

Studying how and where hospitality was provided to the pilgrims who flocked to Jerusalem in the early days of Christian Holy Land pilgrimage illuminates the extent of the role of the Byzantine elites – particularly women – in accommodating visitors to the holy city. The practice amongst noble women of embracing Christian asceticism and transforming their homes into monasteries is well attested, especially Rome and Constantinople. In some cases these women, caught up in the new enthusiasm for pilgrimage, relocated to the Holy Land to live a life of piety and charity.

Two particularly well-documented cases date to the late fourth century, when the Roman noblewomen Melania the Elder and Paula set up monasteries on the Mount of Olives and in Bethlehem respectively. Both these women left Rome, where they had already been practicing domestic asceticism, out of a specific desire to go to the holy places. Although they had both visited the great Egyptian monastic districts, they elected instead to settle in Palestine and found their monasteries there. The hospitality that they offered in part continued a tradition of elite guest friendship that stretched back thousands of years – they offered accommodation to friends from aristocratic circles in Rome and Constantinople, but primarily to those who shared their ascetic vocation and theological viewpoints. A generation later, in the mid-fifth century, Melania’s granddaughter and namesake was continuing this tradition, even extending hospitality to members of the imperial court and the Empress Eudokia herself.

While there is a danger that placing too much emphasis on the few but well documented aristocratic ascetics may lead to a distorted picture of the overall nature of travelers in the Holy Land, the study of these women provides a rare opportunity to observe what becomes of elite interactions in the age of Christian travel. Social networks played an important role in the movement of people – mainly the elite – in the Roman world. By making use of one’s social connections, one could hope to reach one’s destination either by visiting one’s friends en route and being housed with them or on their estates, or by imposing on their position and privileges for ease of passage. The prominence of women, however, as patrons of pilgrimage and providers of hospitality in the Late Antique Holy Land marks a distinct departure from the practices of the previous era. The aim of this paper is to examine how these three women, their establishments and their beliefs fit into the overall scheme of pilgrim hospitality in the early Christian Holy Land.

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