

FEMALE MONASTIC NETWORKS OF ART AND KNOWLEDGE

IN LATE BYZANTIUM, both rural and urban nuns contributed gifts of piety and commissioned portraits accompanied by inscriptions or epigrams. These intertwined texts and images often imitated stereotypical motifs and adhered to existing patterns of representation. On a different level, female monastics supported literate circles by patronizing intellectuals and commissioning manuscripts. These activities enabled them to become part of more complex networks of artistic and scholarly production. Additionally, late Byzantine nuns used images and texts to depict themselves, express their desires, and record their thoughts.

Female Monastics and Art

Artistic objects frequently represent the donations of patrons or founders. Anna Komnene Raoulaina Strategopoulina, for example, donated manuscripts, liturgical vessels, and other treasures to the Krataios nunnery in Constantinople in the late thirteenth century.¹ Empress Theodora Palaiologina similarly donated liturgical books and vessels to the Lips and Anargyroi nunneries. Additionally, she commissioned textile furnishings for her tomb at Lips.²

Art objects could also serve as material expressions of thanksgiving for healing miracles or assistance in difficult situations. These specific individual donations were votive in nature, praising God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints for their help. For instance, Empress Helen/Hypomone Palaiologina commissioned a silver cross, which is now housed in the Monastery of Dionysiou.³ An inscription at the base of the obverse vertical arm identifies this cross as a votive offering: "Votive offering from the Lady Helena

1 For the Krataios nunnery, see Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 510–11.

2 Talbot, "Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII," 299 and 301; Melichar, *Empresses of Late Byzantium*, 92–93.

3 Loverdou-Tsigarida, "Cross of the Empress Helena Palaiologina," no. 9.23, pp. 346–47; Talbot, "Female Patronage in the Palaiologan Era," 269; Evans,

Palaiologina, Mistress of the Romans, wife of Emperor Manuel Palaiologos, daughter of Constantine Dragaš, Prince of Serbia.”⁴ On the front of the cross is depicted the Crucifixion of Christ, while the reverse features the Baptism of Christ. Katia Loberdou-Tsigarida identifies similarities with the so-called “Cross of Constantine the Great,” which is associated with a member of the Palaiologoi. However, this cross is dated prior to Palaiologina’s entry into the monastery in 1448. This explains why the identity markers on the cross refer to her as empress, wife, and daughter rather than as a nun.

In Vatopedi, there is an icon of the Virgin Dexiokratousa (holding the Christ Child in her right arm), dated to the first half of the fourteenth century. This icon, along with a corresponding icon of Christ, originally formed a diptych.⁵ The original inscription has been obscured by later additions. It was commissioned by Anna Philanthropene, as attested by an epigram written on the now much-damaged silver gilt frame. Fortunately, the text can be adequately reconstructed, as it was also recorded in Hagion Oros, Vatopeidiou, MS 1037, fol. 25v (thirteenth century).⁶ The donor has recently been identified as Anna Philanthropene Kantakouzene Komnene Palaiologina Bryennissa, granddaughter of Theodora Synadene, the foundress of Bebaia Elpis. Her portrait, along with that of her husband, Michael Philanthropenos, is preserved in the Lincoln College *typikon* (Lincoln College, MS gr. 35, fol. 4).⁷ The silver frame, the epigram, and possibly the icon itself were gifts to the convent. The epigram may have been composed by Manuel Philes, the most prominent poet of his time.⁸

Byzantium, 122–23. For the text of the inscription, see Millet et al., *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de l’Athos*, p. 159, no. 461.

4 Effenberger, “Ein byzantinisches Emailkreuz mit Besitzerinschrift,” 116 (Lips Monastery).

5 Loberdou-Tsigarida, “Βυζαντινή μικροτεχνία,” pp. 492–93, fig. 437; Tsigaridas and Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου*, pp. 357–60, figs. 313–14.

6 *Diktyon*: 19181; Eugenios, *Περιγραφή ἔμμετρος τῆς ἐν Ἀθῶν ἱερᾶς καὶ σεβασμίας Μεγίστης Λαύρας τοῦ Βατοπεδίου*, 21. English translation from Talbot, “Female Patronage in the Palaiologan Era,” 260–61. See also Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst*, pp. 91–94, no. 1k 26.

7 See Kiilerich, “Attire and Personal Appearance in Byzantium,” 439–51, 479–511 (illustrations).

8 Carr, “Donors in the Frames of Icons,” pp. 193–94, fig. 2, and pp. 196–97n45; cf. on frames and revetments, Peers, *Sacred Shock*, 101–31.

Similarly, Eulogia Komnene Palaiologina requested from Philes a long epigram with a votive character.⁹ Modern scholars have focused on the miracle-working presence of the Virgin and on several elements of a standard miracle account. Eulogia Palaiologina was cured of numerous maladies through the assistance of the Virgin, not by her doctors. The poem refers specifically to a *sostron*: a silver gilt frame or revetment.¹⁰ However, the verses are precious due to the personal information they provide about the life of an unfortunate aristocratic woman. The poem describes the painful journey that led her to take monastic vows. Eulogia, daughter of a *megas stratopedarches* and niece of Andronikos II, had poor health since her childhood. She admits that she was easily susceptible to disease, sometimes being on the verge of dying. No mention of a specific illness is made. Constant health problems formed an obstacle to any marriage plans, leaving her with monastic life as her only option. Her decision was therefore a thanksgiving action, which also saved her from a social dead-end.

Some nuns and donors were “monumentalized” through portraits and inscriptions or by the combination of both in a sacred space. Sharon Gerstel suggested that in Byzantium “the use of monumental decoration as a primary source for the space women occupied in the church was common.”¹¹ Monumental painting offers interesting material on the external appearance of nuns and the way they chose to be depicted. On the other hand, the inscriptions reveal the names of female monastics who left their mark on monuments in the countryside and the cities.

Modern scholars have turned their attention to the study of nuns in the periphery of Byzantium; more accurately, they have focused on their involvement in the donation and patronage of village churches. Sophia Kalopissi-Verti has collected dedicatory inscriptions and donor portraits in churches of thirteenth-century Greece. From her data, we can infer that of seventy-nine inscriptions and portraits, only five (6%) mention exclusively women, while thirty-four (43%) were commissioned by both men and women. Additional material from other regions informed later studies by Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, Sharon Gerstel, and Alice-Mary Talbot. Geographically, we can

⁹ Manuel Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, chap. 1, poem 168, pp. 77–78.

¹⁰ On *sostron*, see Talbot, “Epigrams of Manuel Philes on the Theotokos tes Peges,” 152–53.

¹¹ Brooks, “Women’s Authority in Death,” 317–32; Papamastorakes, “Ἐπιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατά τη μέση και ύστερη βυζαντινή περίοδο,” 285–304.

detect clusters in the representation of nuns in monuments in the Peloponnese, Crete, and Rhodes.¹²

Kalopissi-Verti acknowledged that “the woman who participates in a donation is not mentioned only as wife but also as sister or mother.” This attitude is exemplified in the inscription of St. George in Longanikon in Lakonia (1374/75); one of the founders (priest and notary Basil Kourteses) is mentioned with two female relatives, i.e., his mother (nun Maria/Martha) and his sister (nun Magdalena).¹³

Sole female donors in villages are usually nuns or widows.¹⁴ It is no surprise that these identities often coincide. The wall paintings of the cave church of Ai-Giannakes in Zoupena (Lakonia) reveal two phases (eleventh and thirteenth centuries). In the last phase of the hermitage, an inscription dated to this period is located to the right of St. Basil and reads: “Remember, Lord, the soul of your servant, the nun Euphrosyne Glyka. Forgive her on the Day of Judgment.”¹⁵ Adjacent to the figure of St. Catherine is the inscription of the name of a laywoman, Kale Alype.

By setting their names and images among the saints, the nun-donors hoped for closeness to the sacred and acceptance of their supplications. As mentioned earlier, it is a general tendency to depict nuns together with family members. A dedicatory inscription on the south part of the western wall names the nun Kataphyge Alexena and her children as responsible for the foundation and decoration of the church of Hagia Triada near Psinthos on the island of Rhodes (1407/8).¹⁶ The widow and nun Kataphyge, dressed in monastic garments and depicted in a three-quarters pose, presents a model

12 A search on similar material from Asia Minor and Epiros has not added any further names of nuns. For Middle-Byzantine Macedonia and Thrace see Zarras, *Ideology and Patronage in Byzantium*.

13 Feissel and Philippidis-Braat, “Inventaires en vue d’un recueil des inscriptions historiques,” no. 78, pp. 339–40; Chassoura, *Les peintures murales byzantines des églises*, pp. 18–24, fig. 12; Gerstel and Kalopissi-Verti, “Female Church Founders,” 209.

14 Gerstel and Talbot, “Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside,” 486; Gerstel and Kalopissi-Verti, “Female Church Founders,” 195–212.

15 Drandakes, “Ο σπηλαιώδης ναός του Άι-Γιαννάκη στη Ζούπενα,” 81–82; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 148.

16 Christophorake, “Χορηγικές μαρτυρίες στους ναούς της μεσαιωνικής Ρόδου,” pp. 460–61, plate 181a; Bitha, “Ενδυματολογικές μαρτυρίες στις τοιχογραφίες της μεσαιωνικής Ρόδου,” pp. 435, 445, fig. 2: ια, plate 171γ; Gerstel and Talbot, “Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside,” 486; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 70, 101.

of her church to Christ. It appears that after her husband's death, Kataphyge built the church to serve as the final resting place for both herself and her husband.¹⁷

An intriguing female monastic portrait has survived in Crete: the nun Martha, depicted in the Koimesis Church at Alikambos (1315), is shown in a kneeling position, gazing towards the enthroned Virgin on her right. Her supplication, positioned to the left of Martha, reads: "Remember the servant of God, Martha the nun." Martha is dressed in a brown *himation* (robe) and a black cloak, with her head covered by a turban of brown or a light colour.¹⁸

The names of some nuns and donors of village churches are preserved only in inscribed texts. The nun Kallinike is one of the donors mentioned in the Church of Archangel Michael in Polemitas (Mesa Mane, Peloponnese) (1278).¹⁹ A painted inscription on the north wall above the entrance door records the names of about twenty-nine donors and their donations. However, Kallinike's exact contribution is not specified. Additionally, her name appears after the date in the first part of the inscription, without any mention of her affiliation with a nunnery. This suggests she may have resided in the village or maintained close ties with her family and the local community. Gerstel argues that she was related to other families in Polemitas and asserts a possible connection to the Chapel of St. Nicholas, located near the Church of Archangel Michael.²⁰

St. Theodore Church in Ano Poula Kepoulas (Mesa Mane) (thirteenth century) bears testimony to the nun Kyriake, daughter of Leon Ropounges. The poorly written inscription indicates that the monk Euthymios Lekousas was the primary builder of the church. The same monk appears in a portrait as an older man and in two additional inscriptions on the south wall of the church.²¹ Kyriake's figure stands in a supplicating gesture next to St. Theodore Teron. She is wearing brown clothes and a white head covering. In her hands, she holds a scroll with a red cord.²² The monument is connected with

17 Bolanakes, "Ναός Αγίας Τριάδας Ψίνθου," 825–26; Archontopoulos and Papabasileiou, "Πόδος," no. 53, p. 209.

18 Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 68, 149.

19 Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits*, 71 (text of the inscription), 73 (a list of all the donors); Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 102, 147 (fig. 76).

20 Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 147.

21 Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 140.

22 Drandakes, "Ο Ταξίαρχης τῆς Χαροῦδας καὶ ἡ κτητορικὴ ἐπιγραφή του," 287–88; Drandakes, "Ἐρευναι εἰς τὴν Μάνην," 127. Kalopissi-Verti (*Dedicatory Inscriptions*

the village of Kounos and its church, St. Kyriake, located below Ano Poula. We can presume that the nun Kyriake Ropounge had family ties to the monk Euthymios and to the village of Kounos.²³

An inscription in St. Basil Pediadas in Crete (1291) lists a nun among the donors of the St. John Church.²⁴ Her name has not survived, but she may have been a relative of Nicholas Tzyanontopoulos, who is also mentioned in the same inscription. Among the donors of the single-aisled Church of St. Marina (1300) in the village of Mournes (in Rethymnon, Crete) is the nun Eugenia, mother of the three brothers Koudoumniakos.²⁵ In Crete, there are many examples of nuns donating together with other village members for the restoration of small churches.²⁶ Other inscriptions on the same island are funerary, such as the one for the nun Euphrosyne Drakontopoula (uncertain reading) in the Church of St. John at Stilos (1271 or 1280).²⁷

On the island of Chalke, northwest of Rhodes, stands the small Church of Theotokos Enniameritissa. A dedicatory inscription mentions the financial support of two nuns, Agnese and Magdalena, for the completion of the wall paintings. This occurred on August 11, 1367, just a few days before the feast of the church on August 23. Other donors included a deacon and two laymen. Maria Sigala, who has studied the monument, argued that the nuns either belonged to a nunnery, came from Rhodes, or were anchorites.²⁸ The area is well known for its hermitages and the special form of anchoritism. If these nuns were anchorites, then we need to reevaluate our perception of female monasticism as solely an urban coenobitical phenomenon. Hermitages for women may have existed in other areas as well, such as on Mount Skollis in Achaia (Peloponnese). According to Myrto Georgopoulou-Verra,

and *Donor Portraits*, 106) has offered an incomplete reading of the text. In her study, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium* (141–42), Gerstel included the better reading of the inscription by Katsafados, “Νέα στοιχεία για τις αφιερωτικές επιγραφές,” 275–88.

23 Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 140.

24 Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits*, 93.

25 Gerola, *Monumenti veneti nell’isola di Creta*, vol. 4, pp. 490–91; Albani, “Οι τοιχογραφίες του ναού της Αγίας Μαρίας στον Μουρνέ της Κρήτης,” 211–22.

26 On the nuns Kataphyge and Eugenia in the Saviour’s church at Blithias (1358–1359), see Gerola, *Monumenti veneti nell’isola di Creta*, vol. 4, p. 438; Spatharakis, *Dated Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, 106–7.

27 Gerola, *Monumenti veneti nell’isola di Creta*, vol. 4, p. 428.

28 Sigala, “Η Παναγία η Οδηγήτρια η Εννιαμερίτισσα στη Χάλκη της Δωδεκανήσου,” 329–81.

the small churches of St. George and Theotokos (in the cave of Portes) include iconographic elements that suggest the existence of a female monastic community.²⁹

Contrary to those in villages, female donor portraits in Constantinople were more elaborate. The most outstanding example is the portrait of Maria/Melania of the Mongols in the esonarthex (inner narthex) of the Chora Monastery (Kariye Camii).³⁰ In this mosaic, the image takes precedence over the text. Scholars have speculated about the reasons for Melania's prominent position, concluding that her lavish donations of golden textiles and an eleventh-century gospel manuscript with a new binding played a significant role.

This information is recorded in a forty-eight-line epigram by Manuel Philes, copied in two columns on two pages inserted at the end of the donated manuscript.³¹ Maria asserts that these gifts were offered to the Virgin in gratitude for her salvation from myriad dangers. Another theory is it may connect to a personal ailment of Maria/Melania, as her depiction lies beneath the image of the woman with the issue of blood.³² However, her donations may have been even more lavish and precious than the epigram suggests, especially considering that her portrait was placed near that of the twelfth-century restorer of Chora. Her figure stands next to the entrance to the *naos*, to the left of the figures of Christ and the Virgin. Isaakios Komnenos stands on the right side of the Virgin. Maria of the Mongols, wearing a tall headdress and a dark mantle, is depicted in a kneeling position with her hands extended in supplication to Christ.³³

29 Georgopoulou-Verra, "Βυζαντινά μονύδρια και ασκηταριά στην περιοχή του όρους Σκόλλης," 120, 122.

30 Connor, *Women of Byzantium*, 309–16.

31 Sherry, "The Poem of Maria Komnene Palaiologina to the Virgin," 181–82; Asdracha, "A Brief Commentary to the Verses of Supplication to the Virgin," 183–84; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 385. This scene can be found also in amulets made of hematite. See the piece mentioned by Gansell, "Amulet Portraying the Woman with the Issue of Blood," no. 165, pp. 283–84, and dated to the tenth–twelve centuries.

32 Cf. Studer-Karlen, "Walking Through the Narthex," 50n80, 63n131; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 385.

33 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 33, 45–48, 65–70, 96–100 (also for the architectural features of this part of the inner narthex); Teteriatnikov, "The Place of the Nun Melania," 163–80; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 384, with mistakes on her biography.

Another Constantinopolitan monument, the Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) bears witness of a dedicatory epigram by an aristocratic nun.³⁴ The *protostrator* Michael Tarchaneiotēs Doukas Glabas (who died between 1305 and 1308) and his wife Maria Doukaina Komnene Branaina Palaiologina Tarchaneiotissa constructed the *parekklesion* (chapel) at the beginning of the fourteenth century.³⁵ After his death, Maria/Martha Tarchaneiotissa added the epigrams and its mosaics.³⁶ On the apse of the chapel survives a verse inscription running along the arch. It consists of three verses with the motivation for the donation: “Martha the nun set up this thank-offering to God in memory of Michael Glabas her husband who was a renowned warrior and bore the title of Protostrator.”³⁷

Tombs of nuns—as was also the case with male monastics—were located in the main church of a monastery. This was a prestigious position reserved for the founder and members of their family. *Parekklesia*, a common feature in Palaiologan architecture, often featured large-scale painted programs, typically including a portrait. However, these portraits did not depict the deceased but rather the individual as a living person. Tomb portraits also represented the patron(s), and in larger group portraits additional family members were included.

Even in a rural context, funerary portraits visualized the agency of women. A funerary portrait of the nun Martha Archontokephalene is found in the Church of the Saviour in Kakodiki (Crete).³⁸ The figure wears brown clothes and is depicted in the position of a deceased person, with hands

34 Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst*, 307. For Pammakaristos, see Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 80–86; Belting et al., *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos*, 3–42; Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 208–13; Effenberger, “Zu den Gräbern in der Pammakaristoskirche,” 170–96; Asutay-Effenberger, “Zum Datum der Umwandlung der Pammakaristoskirche in die Fethiye Camii,” 32–41.

35 Effenberger, “Zur Restaurierungstätigkeit des Michael Dukas Glabas Tarchaneiotēs,” 79–93; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 356–66. Tarchaneiotēs commissioned by Philes also an epigram on an icon of John the Baptist. See Pietsch-Braounou, *Beseelte Bilder*, 182–84.

36 Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 362.

37 A slightly revised version of the English translation by Underwood, “Notes on the Work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul,” 298n17. For the Greek text and further bibliography, see Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst*, 402–3; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 364.

38 Gerstel and Talbot, “Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside,” 486, fig. 6; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 148–49.

crossed over the body. Vines are depicted on the white background. Her monastic garments bear a resemblance to those in the portrait of Kataphyge Alexena in Rhodes.³⁹ In the small Church of Ai-Giannakes in Mystras (ca. 1375), the *ktetorissa* (foundress) Kale/Kallinike Kabasalea is painted with her children, depicted both as a laywoman and as a nun. This is a double portrait of a funerary character.⁴⁰

The most prominent examples, however, come from Constantinople. Theodora Palaiologina and members of her family were buried in the Prodromos Church, in the nunnery of Lips. The empress gave written instructions about her own burial place and those of her family members:

The body of my daughter is buried to the right of the entrance to the church of [St. John] the Forerunner. My tomb and that of my honored mother (for I cannot bear to be separated from her even after my death) should be built after the intervening door. In the future any of my children or sons-in-law, who request during their lifetime to be laid to rest here, shall be suitably buried. The same shall apply to my grandsons and granddaughters, daughters-in-law, and the husbands of granddaughters, for all of whom there are to be annual commemorations. The opposite side, on your left as you leave for the old church of the Virgin, will be totally reserved for whatever purpose desired by my son the emperor.⁴¹

Theodora commissioned *περιταφίους στέγας* (an arch or canopy) to surmount her tomb, which may resemble the archivolt from the Lips nunnery (now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, Inv. Nos. 4570, 4355).⁴² In the south church of the nunnery, twelve masonry tombs and two ossuaries were discovered.⁴³ Cyril Mango and Ernest J. W. Hawkins identified the tombs of Theodora Palaiologina and her daughter in the arcosolia of the south church, with Theodora's tomb in the eastern arcosolium and her daughter's tomb in the western one. Mango and Hawkins observed remains of mosaic

39 Bitha, "Ενδυματολογικές μαρτυρίες στις τοιχογραφίες της μεσαιωνικής Ρόδου," 445.

40 Drandakes, "Ο Αι-Γιαννάκης τοῦ Μυστρά," 78 and fig. 27; Papamastorakes, "Επιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατά τη μέση και ὕστερη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο," 298; Kalopissi-Verti, "Δωρεές γυναικῶν στην υστεροβυζαντινὴ περίοδο," 253, fig. 9; Parani, "Negotiating Gender Identity Through the Visual Arts," 432–35.

41 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 42, p. 130; Talbot, "Lips," 1278.

42 Talbot, "Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII," 298–99; Shawcross, "In the Name of the True Emperor," 221; Melvani, *Late Byzantine Sculpture*, 14.

43 Macridy, "The Monastery of Lips and the Burials of the Palaeologi," 269–71; Marinis, "The Monastery tou Libos," 179; Marinis, "Tombs and Burials in the Monastery tou Libos," 147–66.

decoration on the back walls of these spaces. In the middle of the eastern arcosolium was a standing figure of Theodora with her hands folded over her breast. An illegible inscription accompanied the composition.⁴⁴

A nun in the convent of Lips, Maria Palaiologina, established a tomb for herself in the monastery. William H. Buckler, who firstly published the relief, spoke of a nun Maria Palaiologina, while Hans Belting and André Grabar identified the figure with Virgin Mary.⁴⁵ According to Titos Papamastorakes, we should accept the original opinion of Buckler. Palaiologina commissioned also an epigram for her own tomb; it was inscribed on a sculpted relief panel. The tomb slab was probably inserted on the back wall of an arcosolium niche; this was the position normally reserved for the execution of painted portraits.⁴⁶ The poem is written at the centre of the panel in the first person, while at left her figure turns in a three-quarter pose towards the inscribed text.⁴⁷ Maria Palaiologina wears a mantle, a tunic, and shoes. An epigram explains that she took her monastic vows probably in Lips nunnery after her husband (a *sebastos*) died. Maria Palaiologina has still not been identified. Buckler proposed five possible candidates.⁴⁸ Andreas Rhoby has rejected all proposed names on various grounds; he proposed that Maria was an unknown member of the Palaiologoi family who lived in the first half of the fourteenth century.⁴⁹ While the epigram can be attributed to Manuel Philes, the style of the inscribed funerary panel, according to Nicholas Melvani, indicates a date in the last quarter of the thirteenth century.⁵⁰

Images of nuns survive as part of the decoration of three tombs in the *parekklesion* and in the outer narthex of the Chora Monastery (Kariye

44 Mango and Hawkins, "Additional Notes," 301–3; Marinis, "The Monastery tou Libos," 182–83.

45 Buckler, "The Monument of a Palaiologina," pp. 521–26, table 10. According to Firatli, the stele was an antiquarian purchase "but in 1917 was to be found in Atmeydan (Forum of Arkadios)". Firatli, *La sculpture byzantine figurée au Musée Archéologique d'Istanbul*, no. 115, p. 67. See also Belting, *Das illuminierte Buch in der späthbyzantinischen Gesellschaft*, no. 267, p. 79; Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Âge*, nos. 128 and 129, table 110a.

46 Melvani, *Late Byzantine Sculpture*, 65; Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, p. 241, and no. 176.

47 Papamastorakes, "Επιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατά τη μέση και ύστερη βυζαντινή περίοδο," 285–304; Talbot, "Epigrams in Context," 80–81, fig. 9 and translation.

48 Buckler, "The Monument of a Palaiologina," 524.

49 Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, 631.

50 Melvani, *Late Byzantine Sculpture*, 233.

Mosque). One significant testimony is Tomb D in the southwest wall of the *parekklesion*. The double funerary portrait on the back wall of the niche includes the great *konostavlos* Michael Tornikes and his wife, depicted both as laypeople and, on the soffits of the niche, as monastics (monk Makarios and nun Eugenia).⁵¹ Eugenia wears a black mantle, a dark tunic, and a flat-topped hat (*analabos*). Unfortunately, Tornikes' wife is only attested in this inscription and only by her monastic name.⁵² The *terminus ante quem* for the tomb is the year 1328 (the death of Tornikes). A twenty-four-line epigram glorifies the deceased constable (*konostavlos*) only, although nun Eugenia was also buried there.⁵³

The funerary portraits of Tornikes and his wife in both lay and monastic garments depict in colours and lines the transition from one state to another. For members of aristocratic families, adopting monastic dress marked an enormous change, and both written and pictorial sources refer to this drastic transformation. A document related to John/Joasaph Maliasenos described the passage from an aristocratic appearance to the monastic (angelic) habit as follows: "he...replaced those soft tunics, the various and diverse formations (of cloths) with the rough worn garment (of the life according to God)" (my translation).⁵⁴

On the north wall of the *parekklesion*, Tomb C includes portraits of three women and a man. The woman on the far right has been identified by Paul Underwood as a nun. She wears a tunic or dress of light yellowish-brown with dark brown folds and over it a long mantle of dark brown. Prominent is a "light yellowish-brown headdress that fits tightly around her face and covers her shoulders. Her face, on plaster that rises in relief, seems to be a restoration, but her hands appear to be unrestored."⁵⁵ The depicted persons cannot be identified; however, the monograms on the mantle of the central

51 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 276–80; Weißbrod, "Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes," 96–97 (on *parekklesion* D), 130–34 (on the double portraits); Brooks, "Sculpture and the Late Byzantine Tomb," 96; Brooks, "Commemoration of the Dead," 297–300.

52 Schmalzbauer, "Die Tornikioi in der Palaiologenzeit," 131–32.

53 Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, 643–50, no. TR68; Melvani, *Late Byzantine Sculpture*, 17–18, 91; Melvani, "The Last Century of the Chora Monastery," 1219–39; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 408.

54 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 4, p. 337, no. 3 (after 1274).

55 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 272–76, esp. 275; Brooks, "Commemoration of the Dead," 296; Brooks, "The History and Significance of Tomb Monuments," 26–27.

female figure indicate that they belonged to a branch of the Palaiologos-Asanes family. This tomb should be dated to around 1330.

Finally, a female monastic figure is represented in Tomb E in the outer narthex of the Chora (around 1340).⁵⁶ She is part of a group portrait with a male descendant of the Palaiologos and Asanes families, identified through the monograms decorating the dresses. Six figures are depicted on the niche's black wall, while the jambs feature portraits of a monk on the left and the nun Athanasia on the right. Athanasia wears a long brown tunic, a brown mantle, and a black headdress. An inscription provides information about her death and suggests that she was related to the *ktetor*, Theodore Metochites. Underwood has convincingly identified the nun Athanasia as Irene Raoulaina Palaiologina, related to Metochites through her marriage to Constantine Palaiologos Porphyrogennetos.⁵⁷ The Chora nun portraits elucidate the roles under which a nun could be included in the art program of a monument: either as a donor or as a member of a family—usually an aristocratic one—buried there. In none of these cases is a nunnery named, which highlights the significance of being buried with their husbands and children in a family grave. The focus of such portraits is on the laywomen rather than the monastic figures.

Devotion, donation, and death (the three Ds) facilitated the presence of female monastic portraits, and sculpture is no exception. Sculpture and nuns were primarily connected through death, as demonstrated by the sarcophagus of St. Theodora in Arta (located in the narthex).⁵⁸ The latest interpretation links this funerary monument to Anna Kantakouzene, wife of Nikephoros, son of the saint. According to Branislav Čvetković, Anna commissioned the sarcophagus around 1296 to promote the cult of her mother-in-law.⁵⁹ Čvetković identified the figures depicted on the sarcophagus as Anna and her son Thomas. However, other scholars argue that the figures are St. Theodora and her son Nikephoros, or even Theodora and her husband Michael

56 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 280–88; Brooks, “Commemoration of the Dead,” 301–4.

57 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 284–86; Brooks, “Commemoration of the Dead,” 303.

58 Orlandos, “Ο τάφος της Αγίας Θεοδώρας,” 105–15; Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Âge*, 144–45; Pazaras, *Ανάγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι και επιτάφιας πλάκες της μέσης*, 42, 50, 79–80, 170–72, 174–75; Studer-Karlen, “Mise en scene multiple et lecture simultanée,” 79–94. On Theodora as an emissary, see Melichar, “Imperial Women as Emissaries, Intermediaries, and Conciliators,” 107–11.

59 Čvetković, “The Investiture Relief of Arta, Epiros,” 103–12; cf. Melvani, *Late Byzantine Sculpture*, 65, 105.

II, deliberately presented on a smaller scale. The identification with Anna and her son Thomas is not entirely convincing, and many scholars continue to associate the figures with the *despotissa* Theodora (d. 1270) and her son Nikephoros.⁶⁰

My reluctance to accept the idea promoted by Čvetković is based on two main points. First, the female figure is depicted in imperial attire with symbols of power. According to Čvetković, “the *basilissa* is wearing an open crown with a long-decorated veil, falling down on her shoulders.” However, the veil is actually a *kalyptra* (head cover) used instead of the *prependoulia*, which is the usual depiction for imperial persons who have taken monastic vows.⁶¹ Second, a sarcophagus typically features a depiction of the saint. The assumption that the sarcophagus of Theodora depicts individuals other than the saint herself contradicts the essence of a saint’s cult.

If this figure is indeed the saint *despotissa*, then it shows that art and nuns remained connected through sanctity. In contrast to several cases from Late Antiquity and middle Byzantine periods, Theodora of Arta is the only canonized female saint from Late Byzantium.⁶² After her death, icons featuring her portrait would likely have been commissioned. In her icons, St. Theodora is depicted in imperial attire and as a nun with a *skepe* (head cover).⁶³

Her cult, however, remained confined to the boundaries of the Despotate of Epiros. In contrast, icons of the Iconoclast St. Theodosia became extremely popular, with her relics housed in a monastery in Constantinople.⁶⁴ Notable are five icons from Sinai and her portrait in the Triumph of Orthodoxy icon (now in the British Museum), dated to the late fourteenth century. During the Palaiologan period, St. Theodosia is depicted frontally; she holds a cross and wears a tall or flat-topped hat.⁶⁵

60 Papadopoulou, *Η Βυζαντινή Άρτα και τα μνημεία της*, 53–54; Brooks, “Sculpture and the Late Byzantine Tomb,” 100.

61 Moutsopoulos, *Οι βυζαντινές εκκλησίες της Άρτας*, 182–89, esp. 186.

62 On St. Theodora, see Talbot, “Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike,” 159–63; cf. Melicharová, “Crown, Veil and Halo,” 315–44. Another holy woman (*hosia*) was the godmother of Sphrantzes; however, she was never canonized.

63 Talbot, “Literati and the Revival of Hagiography in the Early Palaiologan Period,” 435–46.

64 On the Monastery of Theodosia (Gül Camii and Ayakapı Mescidi) in Constantinople, see Effenberger, “Theodosia von Konstantinopel,” 121–34; Schaeffer, *Die Gül Camii in Istanbul*; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 97, 140–43.

65 Mouriki, “Portraits of St. Theodosia in Five Sinai Icons,” 213–19; Galavaris, “Two Icons of St. Theodosia at Sinai,” 313–16; Cormack, “Icon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy,” 129–30. See also Baltogianne, “Εικόνα της Αγίας Θεοδοσίας της

A special category of art products is the so-called *koutroubia* of St. Demetrios. Many of these lead ampullae feature a depiction of St. Demetrios on one side and St. Theodora of Thessaloniki on the reverse. St. Theodora is shown as a nun with a cloak covering most of her face. The coexistence of both saints is certainly intriguing. These moulded lead ampullae were widely distributed, having been found in various regions of the Balkan Peninsula, particularly in Bulgaria. An interesting example is a *koutroubion* included in a mosaic icon of St. Demetrios, dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century and now housed in the Museo Civico in Sassoferrato near Ancona. This icon was incorporated into a wooden frame and covered with a metal frame by its owner, the Italian humanist Niccolò Perotti (1429/30–1480), who was also the secretary of Bessarion.⁶⁶

Few images of nuns appear in illuminated manuscripts. The Codex Sinai, St. Catherine Monastery, MS gr. 61 (ca. 1274),⁶⁷ contains a portrait of the nun Theotime on fol. 256v. Theotime, wearing a brown cape, a *himation* (robe), and a *skepe* (head covering), prostrates herself before the Virgin. Due to its small size, the Psalter was probably a private devotional book rather than an aristocratic votive donation.⁶⁸

The last testimony of nuns in an illuminated manuscript comes from the monastery *ton Hodegon* in 1449/50. A certain Methodios produced a luxurious manuscript (Sankt-Petersburg, Rossijskaja Nacional'naja biblioteka, MS Φ. No. 906 (Gr.), gr. 243) containing the works of monk Isaiah.⁶⁹ The forty-eight illuminations depict female saints—primarily the Desert Mothers—and the everyday life in a nunnery.⁷⁰ On fol. 25, a female figure in monastic

Κωνσταντινουπολίτισσας στη Νάξο,” 219–21, for two additional representations of St. Theodosia in icons.

66 Bakirtzis, “Κουτρούβια μύρου από τη Θεσσαλονίκη,” 523–29; Foskolou, “Blessing for Sale?” 60–62; cf. Mitsiou, “Ευλογίες,” 195–229; Evans, *Byzantium*, no. 139, pp. 209–12.

67 *Diktyon*: 58436; Ball, “Greek Psalter,” no. 34, 176–77. On the Psalters in Byzantium, see Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium*, no. 52, pp. 99–103; Parpulov, “Ornament and Status,” 101–16.

68 Kalopissi-Verti, “Δωρεές γυναικών στην υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο,” 253; Evans, *Byzantium*, no. 202, pp. 343–44. On illuminated manuscripts of the thirteenth century, see Toumpouri, “Changes and Innovation,” 171–206.

69 *Diktyon*: 57315; Granstrem, “Каталог греческих рукописей ленинградских хранилищ,” 143–44; Ganchou, “Hélène Notara Gatelioussaina d’Ainos,” 148–49; Politis, “Eine Schreiberschule im Kloster τῶν Ὁδηγῶν,” 270n88.

70 Likhačeva, “Роль бытовых реалий и пейзажа в миниатюрах рукописи,” 229–42; Likhačeva, *Византийская миниатюра*, tables 50–55.

garment is shown with a spinning wheel. Vera Likhačeva emphasized the illuminator's imagination and the limited palette of colours used (black, brown, and a few others such as green).

The depiction of female monastic bodies and the attached inscriptions provided a voice to Byzantine women; they became the visual and written manifestations of their identity. However, by including themselves in a church pictorial program or an illuminated manuscript, they became part of a complex network of these artifacts.

In a previous chapter, we applied network analytical methods to understand textual testimonies of foundation as a network of patronage. The base of these examples was the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis.⁷¹ At this point, we will focus on the network of illuminations included in the first folios of the codex. Hutter argued that the surviving copy was intended for special occasions, while an unillustrated copy (made of paper) served the everyday needs of the convent. The illuminations were added around 1330–1335 by Theodora's daughter.⁷²

Euphrosyne Synadene "constructed" a family *album* of direct kinship, including her grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, and their offspring.⁷³ Additionally, on fol. 12r it contains a unique representation of the entire monastic community,⁷⁴ reminiscent of a similar depiction at the *Hortus Deliciarum*: an encyclopedia for nuns composed by the abbess Herrad of Hohenburg in

71 Cutler and Magdalino, "Some Precisions on the Lincoln College *Typikon*," 179–98; Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 190–206; Hutter, "Die Geschichte des Lincoln College *Typikons*," 79–144; Patlagean, *Ο ελληνικός Μεσαίωνας*, 196–207; Yota, "L'image du donateur dans les manuscrits illustrés byzantins," 286.

72 Hutter, "Die Geschichte des Lincoln College *Typikons*," 105–11. See also Connor, *Women of Byzantium*, 268–308.

73 Cutler and Magdalino, "Some Precisions on the Lincoln College *Typikon*," 179–98; Hutter, "Die Geschichte des Lincoln College *Typikons*," 79–114; Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*, pp. 56–62, figs. 201–21 and tables 6–18; Brooks, "Poetry and Female Patronage in Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration," 237–48. Marsengill argues that the portrait of Constantine and Irene may resemble the original panel portrait of Synadene's parents at their tomb. Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, 237–40. On the clothes of the male family members and officials, see Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 154–58.

74 Hennessey argues that the miniatures with the persons in monastic garments were painted at the time of the opening of the convent. Hennessey, "The Lincoln College *Typikon*," 107–8. For recent approaches to the manuscript, see Gastgeber, "Das *Typikon* Lincoln College gr. 35," 95–110; Gaul, "Writing 'with Joyful and Leaping Soul,'" 243–71.

Sainte-Odile in Alsace (twelfth century).⁷⁵ In the Lincoln *typikon*, the various subgroups are depicted with subtle tones of colour in their garments, while the abbess holds the symbol of her power: a staff. Five small girls (novices) are shown in the foreground, two with white headscarves and three in brown. The depiction conveys severity and austere gestures, yet there is an effort to highlight the uniqueness of each person through small facial details.

The first twelve folios of the codex depict the foundress and family members, including her parents, Constantine Palaiologos and Irene, as well as three of her children and their spouses. The first portrait of Theodora Synadene shows her with her husband, John, in luxurious garments. However, on fol. 7r, Synadene, her husband, and their young daughter, Euphrosyne, are shown in monastic attire. John is identified as the monk Ioakeim and Theodora as the nun Theodoule. Synadene wears a typical black mantle and a tall, flat-topped headdress while holding her daughter's hand, evidently offering her to Theotokos. Euphrosyne, who is known to have been tonsured at a very young age, is depicted as a novice in a brown gown.

Unlike Western practice,⁷⁶ it is uncommon in Byzantium to identify nuns working as illuminators. Nonetheless, in the case of the Lincoln *typikon* a female artist may have created the portraits based on sketches or family portraits kept in the family archives of the Synadenoi. The depicted luxurious garments, though, were not a monastic product despite the existence of female weavers and embroiderers.⁷⁷ The monastic craftsmanship consisted mostly of low-cost and profitable everyday products which they could sell in local markets. The nuns of Baionaia were not allowed, for example, to manufacture garments for their family members but could sell them to external monks and laymen. In this double monastery, both monks and nuns created clothes for each other.⁷⁸

75 Grabar, *L'art byzantin*, p. 234, plates 41a-b and 42a-b. The original has been destroyed and only a later copy has survived.

76 Cf. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*; Hamburger and Suckale, "Between This World and the Next," 76–108.

77 Johnstone, *The Byzantine Tradition in Church Embroidery*, 57–64.

78 Pétridès, "Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas," chap. 8, p. 101–3; Talbot, "Neilos Damilas," 1471–73. On the monastery, see Psilakes, *Μοναστήρια και ερημητήρια της Κρήτης*, 521–24.

Networks of Female Literacy and Knowledge

The text of the Lincoln *typikon* was probably copied by nuns and commissioned by a woman. It represents the symbolic or social capital of the aristocratic patroness, which then became part of her foundation. According to Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital is related to knowledge. These two terms can be connected to specific social markers, such as literacy and education, the production of literary works, and manuscripts (acquisition, donation, commission, copying).⁷⁹

Since women in Byzantium could not hold public office, education was not considered essential for their upbringing. They mostly had access to primary education (*hiera grammata*), which focused on gaining reading and writing skills. After the eleventh century, and especially during the Palaiologan period, examples of highly educated women, such as Anna Komnena and Theodora Raoulaina, became more common.⁸⁰ However, even in the upper society, these women remained exceptions to the rule.⁸¹

The literacy of Byzantine women has been assessed based on their ability to sign their names.⁸² 1.8% of women signing documents in the thirteenth century was literate, while 16% were literate in the fourteenth century. However, signatures such as that of Anna Doukopoulina Mesopotamitissa in September 1306 contain orthographic errors;⁸³ similarly, the signatures of Xene Indanina Sarantene and Sophrosyne Sarantene in 1330 are not flawless, indicating inexperienced hands.⁸⁴ Insecurity is also evident in imperial signatures, such as that of Irene Doukaina in the Kecharitomene

79 Bourdieu, “Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital,” 183–98; Erler, “Das Buch als soziales Symbol.” On social markers, see Reuter, “Nobles and Others,” 85–98. On the Byzantine example, see Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” 254–57; Grünbart, “Paideia Connects,” 19–21.

80 On Raoulaina, see below in this chapter. Anna Komnena’s handwriting is being now identified at the manuscript San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, MS gr. Ω-II-13 (*Diktyon*: 15079), which contains the homilies of John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria. See Pérez Martín, “L’Escorial Ω-II-13 (gr. 530) et sa copiste Anna” (to be published). Until recently, the manuscript was erroneously dated in the thirteenth century. See De Andrés, *Catálogo de los códices griegos de la Real Biblioteca*, 168; Schreiner, “Kopistinnen in Byzanz,” 37.

81 Nikolaou, *Η γυναίκα στη μέση βυζαντινή εποχή*, 185–213.

82 Saradi-Mendelovici, “A Contribution to the Study of the Byzantine Notarial Formulas,” 72–79.

83 *Actes de Xénophon*, ed. Papachryssanthou, p. 100, no. 7 (1306); Maniate-Kokkine, “Γυναίκα και “άνδρικά” οίκονομικά προνόμια,” 440–44.

84 Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” 254–57.

typikon (twelfth century). However, a lack of perfect writing skills does not equate to illiteracy. These aristocratic women could function as administrators of their properties, dealing with specific types of texts, such as financial records. Their ability to operate financial transactions and maintain accounting documents is beyond doubt.⁸⁵ Such qualifications would have been useful in a nunnery, which operated under principles similar to those of an (aristocratic) household (*oikos*).⁸⁶

Nunneries in Late Byzantium could function as educational institutions. The focus was on ensuring an adequate number of literate nuns to handle basic administrative and liturgical duties. Some nuns were educated before entering the nunnery, while others acquired these skills either from a young age within the nunnery or at a later stage. For instance, the Philanthropos Soter convent accepted young girls for both educational purposes and security reasons.⁸⁷

In Bebaia Elpis, young girls intending to become nuns were instructed by the *ekklesiarchissa* in reading and chanting.⁸⁸ At the same time, abbesses needed to be educated to fulfill their duties effectively.⁸⁹ Learning activities included not only reading but also listening to specific types of texts. The *typikon* had to be read aloud once a month or three times a year, while during meals, one nun was responsible for reading aloud edificial texts.⁹⁰

The possession or lack of education led to an internal division of nuns into two groups, as we have already explored above: those responsible for the liturgy (*ekklesiastikai*) and those engaged in manual work (*domestikai*). Generally, 60% (three-fifths) of the personnel in convents were assigned to hymnody, while 40% (two-fifths) performed other services. The *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis mandated that literate nuns participate in chanting, while

85 Waring, "Byzantine Monastic Libraries in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," 122.

86 Late antique monasteries already resembled households, and their architecture can be considered a form of domestic architecture. See Brooks Hedstrom, "The Archaeology of Monastic Households," 185–203.

87 Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 60.362–67, no. 2.

88 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 53, p. 47; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1538.

89 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 25, p. 33; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1530.

90 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 85, p. 67; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1548.

illiterate nuns were limited to saying small prayers.⁹¹ In their monastic cells, educated nuns were expected to read, while illiterate monastics relied on their ability to pray and recite psalms by heart after hearing them repeatedly in the church. Teaching was foreseen for some nuns of the convent. Neilos Damilas also encouraged literate nuns to teach their less educated sisters.

The reading habits of nuns and their monastic communities cannot be precisely elucidated. Damilas advised the nuns of Baionaia to read works by Maximos the Confessor and an oration by St. Zosimas, suggesting that manuscripts of these texts were likely part of the convent's library.⁹² Some *typika* also reference books available in convents. In addition to the Pentateuch, Psalter, and New Testament, significant texts included the *typikon* of St. Sabas, works by John Klimax, ascetic treatises by St. Basil, and writings by Gregory of Nazianzos.⁹³

Annemarie Weyl Carr argued that female "learning did not go beyond the narrow limits of devotional and sacred literature to embrace the secular realm of grammar and classical thought."⁹⁴ This view is supported by evidence of private ownership of manuscripts containing sacred texts. For instance, the nun Euphrosyne Pegene owned the illuminated Tetraevangelion (Hagion Oros, Stauroniketa, MS 56) from the thirteenth century.⁹⁵ Similarly, the literary output of nuns primarily consisted of hymnographic⁹⁶ and hagiographic works.

91 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaia Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 62, p. 53; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1540–41.

92 Pétridès, "Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas," chap. 2, pp. 96–97; Talbot, "Neilos Damilas," 1468; Talbot, "Bluestocking Nuns," 614.

93 Talbot, "Bluestocking Nuns," 613n51.

94 Carr, "Women and Monasticism in Byzantium," 8 and 10.

95 *Diktyon*: 30117; Vogel and Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, 123; Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, p. 79: "Εὐφροσύνη μοναχὴ τοῦ νομα ἢ Πηγηνή". See also Demus, "Studien zur byzantinischen Buchmalerei des 13. Jahrhunderts," pp. 78–79, plate 3. Pegene may have been a nun in a Zoodochos Pege nunnery, although this is only an assumption.

96 Only one female hymnographer is known in Late Byzantium, i.e., Palaiologina from the St. Theodora convent in Thessaloniki. In the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century, she composed canons on St. Demetrios and St. Theodora. See Sphrantzes, *Memorii*, ed. Grecu, bk. 18, chap. 2, §32, lines 20–24; Talbot, "Bluestocking Nuns," 607; Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, 797; Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity," 328. For Byzantine female hymnographers, see Catafygiotou-Topping, "Women Hymnographers in Byzantium," 98–111; Riehle, "Authorship and Gender (and) Identity," 245–62; Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople," 173–201; Nikolaou, *Η γυναίκα στη μέση*

In this context, we should also consider the significant number of catechetical and edifying works addressed to nuns and written by male authors. These texts aimed to strengthen the faith of female monastics to help them avoid sin and suppress their passions. They often presented varied and sometimes contradictory ideas about the appropriate knowledge nuns should seek and receive. Frequently, the authors acted as spiritual fathers to their recipients, whether individual nuns or entire nunneries. The tradition of spiritual guidance from male figures to nuns and abbesses has deep roots in Byzantine monasticism. For instance, Theodore of Stoudios corresponded with numerous nuns and nunneries, offering advice on monastic life.⁹⁷ In Late Byzantium, this tradition continued, occasionally incorporating contemporary issues.

The monk Mark (ca. 1260) was the spiritual father of Eulogia, sister of Michael VIII, to whom Mark addresses part of his work.⁹⁸ The thirteenth-century manuscript Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Chig. R.V. 033 (gr. 27) contains 239 titles, which can be divided into five different texts.⁹⁹ Significant in this manuscript are not only the anthologies with citations from various authors but also a dedicatory letter to Eulogia.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, a sermon (*Λόγος πρὸς εὐγενεστάτην ψυχήν*) was addressed to Eulogia prior to her tonsure (after 1257). This sermon serves as a kind of short monastic rule.¹⁰¹ For his compilation, Mark used various authors, most of whom were later associated with hesychastic theology, while no secular authors are mentioned. Feminine inflections are rarely found, as his spiritual advice derives from general principles about the monastic life.

The role of spiritual fathers is uniquely illuminated in the correspondence of Irene Choumnaina with Theoleptos of Philadelphia and her second

βυζαντινή εποχή, 206–9. In modern times, nun Theotekne (Hagiostephanitissa) in Meteora has composed hymns that have been approved by the Church and can be used in the Liturgy.

97 Cf. Theodore of Stoudios, *Epistulae*, ed. Fatouros, pp. 505–6, no. 375; Rigo, “La direction spirituelle des moniales à Byzance,” 283–300. On Western female spirituality, see Spearing, *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality*, vii–xii.

98 Rigo, “Principes et canons pour le choix des livres,” 175–76; Roelli, *Marci monachi opera ascetica*, 11*–14* (introduction).

99 Diktyon: 65214; De'Cavalieri, *Codices graeci Chisiani et Borgiani*, 44–65; Roelli, *Marci monachi opera ascetica*, 33* (introduction).

100 Roelli, *Marci monachi opera ascetica*, 3–105.

101 Roelli, *Marci monachi opera ascetica*, 107–35, 157–79; Cunningham, “Messages in Context,” 83–98.

spiritual father. The metropolitan of Philadelphia, although residing in his see in Western Asia Minor, maintained contact with Irene and her monastic community in Constantinople, acting as a caregiving spiritual father by sending letters and homilies (*katecheseis*).¹⁰² He requested that Irene and the nuns frequently read his letters. At least three individuals served as bearers of these epistles: Kydonates, Karbones, and the monk Niphon.¹⁰³

The surviving letters reveal challenges for the leadership qualities of Irene Choumnaina. On some occasions, she did not know how to handle situations, displaying impatience, insecurity, unhappiness, and great doubts about her abilities as abbess. Theoleptos attempted to teach his spiritual daughter how to remain calm, how to behave in the church and during meals, and to avoid speaking too much. Additionally, he advised her to learn and recite by heart the Gospel, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, and their Lives.¹⁰⁴

Irene/Eulogia struggled to leave behind the life she once knew: the palace, honours, wealth, and the love of her parents and relatives.¹⁰⁵ Her worldly concerns often drained her energy for monastic life. While she was sufficiently ascetic, she was also authoritarian and intolerant of disobedient nuns. For instance, she once wanted to readmit a repentant nun who had left the monastery of her own accord, despite her spiritual father's skepticism.¹⁰⁶ Inside the nunnery, aggression manifested in fights between the nuns. On one occasion, Choumnaina refrained from reporting a problem she faced with a nun to avoid distressing Theoleptos. However, the nun sought forgiveness and guidance from him. Shortly before his death in 1322, Theoleptos sent his spiritual testament,¹⁰⁷ a compilation of his discussions with Irene and the nun Agathonike.

After Theoleptos's death, Choumnaina sought new spiritual advisors, hoping to find someone who could replace him.¹⁰⁸ By around 1335, it appeared she had finally succeeded. A collection of twenty-two letters has survived, including eight of hers and fourteen from her new spiritual father.

102 On a much more restricted model for the spiritual father, see Pétridès, "Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas," chaps. 9 and 15, pp. 103, 107; Talbot, "Neilos Damilas," 1473, 1476.

103 Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 70, no. 3.

104 Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Discourses*, ed. Sinkewicz, p. 104, no. 1.

105 Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 78, no. 3.

106 Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 58, no. 2.

107 Sinkewicz, *Theoleptos of Philadelphia*, pp. 352–82, no. 23.

108 Previale, "Due Monodie inedite di Matteo di Efeso," 26–31.

However, the identity of this person is a matter of dispute. He may have been Ignatios the Philosopher¹⁰⁹ or Gregory Akindynos. The new spiritual father was reluctant in his interactions with Irene, often accepting her suggestions with great difficulty. One particular issue was her desire for him to visit the monastery regularly—a request he initially rejected. He argued that many female saints in the past rarely met their spiritual fathers, with some seeing them only once a year or even just once in their entire lives.¹¹⁰ Irene, in turn, argued that she could not leave the monastery and remained enclosed, not even attending royal weddings and funerals due to a lack of means for such expensive and grand occasions.¹¹¹ Under the pressure of her pleas, the spiritual father eventually agreed to visit her in the monastery six times a year.

Regarding her literacy, the letters reveal spelling mistakes, poor handwriting, and difficulties in expressing her thoughts clearly. Her spiritual father tried to comfort her by stating:

As for what you wrote to me about your inability to express your thoughts clearly in writing...this does not happen to you alone—who surpass all contemporary women in education by a royal cubit, as they say—but it seems also to happen occasionally even to men who have reached the peak of Hellenic learning and rhetorical skill, and probably no one can escape this [difficulty] all the time.¹¹²

Works by Nikephoros Choumnos and Theoleptos of Philadelphia were in her possession. Book exchanges occurred between Irene and her second spiritual father; she desired copies of his various writings, while he requested works by Theoleptos and Nikephoros Choumnos. It is further known that after the death of Theoleptos, Irene commissioned a manuscript of his works.¹¹³ Moreover, the letters to and from her second spiritual father (1332–1338)

109 cf. Rigo, “La direction spirituelle des moniales à Byzance,” 283–300. Neophytos Prodromenos, a known anti-Palamite, is the main scribe, whereas Matthew Blastares may have copied the fols. 83r–156v. Martínez Manzano, “Prontuario para una abadesa,” 311–322.

110 Irene Eulogia Choumnaina, *Correspondence*, ed. Constantinides Hero, pp. 78–82, no. 16.

111 Irene Eulogia Choumnaina, *Correspondence*, ed. Constantinides Hero, pp. 72–78, no. 15.

112 Irene Eulogia Choumnaina, *Correspondence*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 56, no. 10.

113 The Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ottob. gr. 405 (fourteenth century, first half) (*Diktyon*: 65648) belonged to Irene and was copied from her own file. See Feron and Battaglini, *Codices manuscripti graeci Ottoboniani Bibliothecae Vaticanae*, 216.

are preserved in a single manuscript, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RB, MS gr. Φ. III. 11 (230) (fols. 235r–254v). This codex also contains medical, astronomical, philosophical, and theological texts as well as the letters of Gregory Akindynos and a letter to Matthew Kantakouzenos by an anonymous friend of John Kyparissiotēs.¹¹⁴ The same anonymous author sent to Choumnaina his works, an “insignificant gift, appropriate for philosophers, though not for emperors.”¹¹⁵

Gregory Palamas, an opponent of Choumnaina, sent a treatise to a certain nun, Xene, in 1346–1347 to instruct young nuns.¹¹⁶ Xene, who had spent many years in the convent, was a supporter of Palamas. The first part of the treatise discusses topics such as life, soul, virginity, and poverty. In the second part, Palamas addresses major passions, mourning, and the divine light. It is only in the first part that Gregory Palamas refers to Xene and the young nuns who needed his advice. Palamas’s interest in female monastics is also evident in the case of his sisters. While residing in the Skete of Berroia, he arranged for them to be transferred from Constantinople to Berroia to oversee their ascetic practices.¹¹⁷

The fourteenth-century manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 1372 (fols. 155r–170v) contains the letters of Jacob, Metropolitan of Chalcedon (1351–1370), who participated in the Hesychastic synod of 1351. He is depicted on fol. 5v of Paris, BnF, MS gr. 1242 (fourteenth century) alongside other metropolitans, the Patriarch, and Emperor John Kantakouzenos.¹¹⁸ The forty letters (dated 1350–1360) were collected by his spiritual daughter, Eulogia. The metropolitan exhorted her to regard his letters as a rule and canon, recommending a life of solitude, obedience, sacramental practices, repetition of the Jesus Prayer, reading, and repentance.¹¹⁹

Around 1390, a nun named Eugenia sought the spiritual guidance of Nathaniel, the metropolitan of Pentapolis, who was then in Constantinople. Nathaniel responded with a letter composed of a prologue and fifteen

114 Congourdeau, “Nicolas Cabasilas et Matthieu Cantacuzène,” 85–98.

115 *Diktyon*: 15184; Constantinides Hero, “An Unknown Letter,” 280n1.

116 Gregory Palamas, *Letter to nun Xene*, ed. Chrestou, 193–230; Rigo, *Mistici bizantini*, 555–91.

117 Philotheos Kokkinos, *Logos on Gregory Palamas*, ed. Tsames, p. 456, chap. 20.

118 *Diktyon*: 50984; cf. Rigo, “Le lettere di Giacomo metropolita di Calcedonia alla monaca Eulogia,” 195–201; Rigo, *Mistici bizantini*, 595–604; Laurent, “La direction spirituelle à Byzance,” 64–84; Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz*, 74–75.

119 Rigo, *Mistici bizantini*, 595.

short chapters that addressed issues of everyday monastic conduct, such as prayer, silence, and handiwork. He urged Eugenia to consider his letter a rule (στάθμη, ὑποτύπωσις) and a canon (κανών). By following his instructions, Eugenia would become part of ταῖς τῶν ὁσίων γυναικῶν χορείαις (the group of holy women). This spiritual advice from the Hesychast metropolitan evidently found a degree of dissemination, as it was copied into at least eight manuscripts.¹²⁰

The second book of monk Isaiah should also be dated to the end of the fourteenth century.¹²¹ This work is known through the Russian translation by Theophanes the Recluse, based on the manuscript in the Sankt-Petersburg, RNB, MS Φ. No. 906 (Gr.), gr. 243. The first part of Isaiah's work includes 140 *Apophthegmata* of Holy Fathers, presented as Sayings of the Desert Mothers, featuring figures such as Sara, Synkletike, Melania, Theodora, and Matrona. This section is referred to as the *Meterikon*.¹²² Following this initial part, the work includes seven letters of Isaiah on various issues. The manuscript tradition of the second book of Isaiah is divided into two groups. The first group, containing the original redaction of the text, begins with the phrase Βίβλος καλλίστη μοναχῆς Ἀγγελίνας ("The most beautiful book of the nun Angelina") and is transmitted only in the Hagion Oros, Panteleeimonos, MS 578 (6085) (seventeenth century) manuscript.¹²³ The second group of manuscripts is dedicated to Helen Notara Gateliousaina,¹²⁴ to which the Sankt-Petersburg, RNB, MS Φ. No. 906 (Gr.), gr. 243 belongs. This luxurious codex was written in 1449/50 by Methodios in the Hodegon Monastery and includes, as already mentioned, depictions of the Desert Mothers.¹²⁵

Porfiri Uspenskij dated the work to the tenth century,¹²⁶ while other scholars placed it at the beginning of the thirteenth century, identifying

120 Rigo, "Il metropolita di Pentapolis Natanaele a Costantinopoli," 697–707.

121 Rigo, *Mistici bizantini*, 607–15; Rigo, "Principes et canons pour le choix des livres," 176–78.

122 Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity," 326–27.

123 *Diktyon*: 22717; Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, p. 400.

124 Ganchou, "Hélène Notara Gateliousaina d'Ainos," 141–68.

125 Granstrem, "Каталог греческих рукописей ленинградских хранилищ," 143–44; Ganchou, "Hélène Notara Gateliousaina d'Ainos," 148–49. On Methodios, see Politis, "Eine Schreiberschule im Kloster τῶν Ὁδηγῶν," 270n88. Likhačeva, "Роль бытовых реалий и пейзажа в миниатюрах рукописи," 229–42; Likhačeva, *Византийская миниатюра*, tables 50–55.

126 Uspenskij, *Vostok christianskij*, vol. 2, p. 134.

Theodora Angelina with the daughter of Isaakios II Angelos.¹²⁷ However, Antonio Rigo has recently questioned this identification, dating the work to the second half of the fourteenth century, and his argumentation is convincing. Angelina is referred to as “nun Angelina” or “nun Theodora Angelina the Phokaitissa.” Isaakios II’s daughter was named Euphrosyne,¹²⁸ making it improbable that she would be called “Phokaitissa.” Rigo suggests that the attribute Phokaitissa likely refers to her hometown (Phokaia) or a monastery where she resided.¹²⁹ This hypothetical convent (Phokas convent?) might have been an unknown foundation established by a member of the Phokas family.¹³⁰ By reassessing these historical and textual connections, Rigo provides a more plausible context for Theodora Angelina’s identification and the origins of her monastic affiliation. This new perspective allows for a clearer understanding of her role and identity within the Byzantine monastic landscape.

The last testimonies come from George/Gennadios Scholarios, who corresponded with Simonis/Sophrosyne Asanina Palaiologina. The letters were written after 1457/58,¹³¹ indicating that Sophrosyne entered the monastery at a very young age without having been previously married.¹³² Sophrosyne was educated, which allowed her to correspond with Gennadios.¹³³ In her letters, she requested to meet Scholarios and sought his advice on reading materials. Gennadios recommended two books to her: his own treatise “On the First Service of God” (Περὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ Θεοῦ λατρείας) and the

127 Hausherr, “Note sur l’inventeur de la méthode hésychaste,” 180n1; Hausherr, “Le Métèrikon de l’abbé Isaïe,” 286–301; Gouillard, “Une compilation spirituelle du XIII^e siècle,” 81–82; Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, 645–46; Thiermeyer, “Das Meterikon,” 303–5.

128 Hiestand, “Die erste Ehe Isaaks II. Angelos,” 204.

129 Rigo, “La direction spirituelle des moniales à Byzance,” 295–97.

130 In 1397–1398, a certain Psepharas Georgios donated a manuscript to a certain Phokas Monastery. See Kitchin, *Catalogus codicum mss. qui in Bibliotheca Aedis Christi*, 16. On the other hand, the family name Phokas is attested in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

131 Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, ed. Petit et al., 234–35; Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*, ed. Petit et al., 502–3. On Scholarios, see now Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*. The dating derives from a mention of Gennadios Scholarios, *On the First Service of God*, ed. Petit et al., 236–64; Zeses, *Γεννάδιος Β’ Σχολάριος*, 308–9.

132 Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, ed. Petit et al., p. 234, lines 9–12.

133 Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, ed. Petit et al., p. 234, line 6; Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*, ed. Petit et al., p. 502, lines 11–12.

“Asketikon” of St. Basil.¹³⁴ He sent his treatise, which was originally written for monks, with the suggestion that Sophrosyne focus on the points relevant to women.¹³⁵ However, he did not explicitly mention which points these were. From the correspondence, it is evident that Simonis/Sophrosyne Asanina Palaiologina maintained an intellectual and spiritual relationship with Scholarios. This relationship highlights her level of education and her active engagement in theological and monastic discourse—an exceptional case that underscores the presence of educated women in the Byzantine monastic tradition.

Apart from spiritual guidance, Palaiologan nunneries needed various texts to support their religious and administrative functions. One such manuscript is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Cromwell 22, dating to around 1314/15.¹³⁶ This manuscript is a homiliary (a collection of homilies), and it was specifically intended for a nunnery. The colophon of the manuscript is signed by a priestmonk named Mark. Barbara Crostini Lappin has analyzed its contents, concluding that Bodleian, MS Cromwell 22 was meant to be used by the abbess of the nunnery. Unlike other writers of his time, Mark did not deem certain topics unsuitable for a female audience, showing a progressive approach to the education and spiritual needs of nuns.

Crostini Lappin also connected the manuscript to the nunnery of Trichinarea on Mount Auxentios and the Evergetis Monastery. If this connection is accurate, it suggests that the well-known middle Byzantine nunnery of Trichinarea was still active at the beginning of the fourteenth century. This connection underlines the enduring influence of earlier monastic traditions and the continued relevance of such manuscripts in the spiritual life of later Byzantine nunneries.¹³⁷

The codex Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabecchi Conv. B.1.1214 (Olivieri 50) (fourteenth century)¹³⁸ includes the Lives, or *vitae*, of only female saints. Certain *vitae* were the works of well-known Palaiologan authors such as Nikephoros Kallistou Xanthopoulos, John Staurakios,¹³⁹

134 Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, ed. Petit et al., p. 234, line 24.

135 Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, ed. Petit et al., p. 234, line 18.

136 *Diktyon*: 47812.

137 Crostini Lappin, “A Fourteenth-Century Homiliary for Nuns,” 35–68. For Trichinarea, see Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont*, 1051–52.

138 *Diktyon*: 16927. For the manuscript’s description, see Delehay, “Vita sanctae Olympiadis et Narratio Sergiae de eiusdem Translatione,” 406–8.

139 Kountoura-Galake, “Ιωάννης Σταυράκιος,” 379–94.

Constantine Akropolites, and the monk Makarios. Due to the benediction formula “mother, bless” (εὐλόγησον μητέρα) (fol. 12v), we can deduce that the manuscript was used in a nunnery.¹⁴⁰

A similar case is represented by Hagion Oros, Koutloumousiou, MS 208 (fifteenth century).¹⁴¹ The codex contains the funerary *akolouthia* (τῶν κεκοιμημένων) with a (non-authentic) work of John Chrysostom, works of St. Basil, followed by sixteen Lives of female saints and one male (Stephen the Younger), which are organized as a *menologion*. The original number of saints’ Lives would have been higher, judging from some lacunae in the codex. A text entitled “Instruction about the salvation of the soul and the patience to be read aloud in the gatherings of monks and to nuns” (fols. 39r–46v)¹⁴² indicates that the codex could have been used in a convent.

The production and accumulation of books by Byzantine monasteries is not well-documented in detail,¹⁴³ but some insights can be gathered from specific instances. Founders often played a crucial role in establishing monastic libraries by donating collections of books. For example, Neilos Damilas included a detailed list of forty-one books in the *typikon* of his foundation, which likely were intended for the nunnery. His inventory (dated to 1417) consisted of gospels, liturgical books, ascetical treatises, and theological works.¹⁴⁴

Damilas, a bibliophile, emphasized the importance of preserving the convent’s collection by forbidding external lendings, stating: “if they are damaged, you have no one to restore them.”¹⁴⁵ This protective measure highlights the value and scarcity of books during that period. Additionally, he mandated that the personal books of the nuns should remain within the

140 Rapp, “Figures of Female Sanctity,” 319–20.

141 *Diktyon*: 26237; Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, p. 297; Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur*, vol. 3, pp. 907–8.

142 Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur*, 907; Rapp, “Figures of Female Sanctity,” 320n44.

143 Carr, “Women and Monasticism in Byzantium,” 13; Volk, “Die byzantinischen Klosterbibliotheken von Konstantinopel, Thessalonike und Kleinasien,” 10–13; Wilson, “The Libraries of the Byzantine World,” 53–80; Waring, “Byzantine Monastic Libraries in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries”; Cavallo, *Η ανάγνωση στο Βυζάντιο*, 153–98. See also the articles in Shawcross et al., *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*. On Western women and their relations to manuscripts, see, for example, Hand, *Women, Manuscripts and Identity in Northern Europe*.

144 Lampros, “Das Testament des Neilos Damilas,” 585–87; Talbot, “Neilos Damilas,” 1478–79; Caseau, “Objects in Churches,” 549–79.

145 Pétridès, “Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas,” chap. 20, p. 109; Talbot, “Neilos Damilas,” 1477.

convent, further ensuring that the library's resources were safeguarded and available for the community's use.

This practice of keeping personal books within the monastery underscores the communal approach to knowledge and education in Byzantine nunneries. It also reflects the broader monastic values of resource conservation and shared intellectual and spiritual enrichment.

Anna/Antonia Komnene Raoulaina Strategopoulina made a significant donation to the nunnery of Krataios, presenting a parchment manuscript of 319 folios (Hagion Oros, Pantokratoros, MS 6), which dates back to the fourteenth century.¹⁴⁶ This manuscript, as noted extensively on fol. 3v, contained essential panegyric readings for feast days and Lent, as well as saints' Lives, though only two *vitae* were dedicated to female saints: Gregory of Cyprus' *Logos on St. Marina* and the *Vita* of St. Irene of Chrysobalanton. This selection made the manuscript particularly valuable for the liturgical needs of the nunnery.

In addition to this manuscript, the *ktetorissa* (founder) Anna Raoulaina contributed other important items to the convent, including additional books, sacred vessels, and holy heirlooms. Such contributions would have greatly enriched the spiritual and liturgical life of the nunnery, providing the necessary resources for worship and devotion. This act of donation reflects the tradition of monastic patronage, where founders and benefactors played a crucial role in equipping monastic communities with the tools required for their religious practices and daily lives.

The scribes (*οἱ γεγραφοτές*) invested significant time and effort in compiling the diverse material found within the manuscript donated by Anna/Antonia Komnene Raoulaina Strategopoulina to the nunnery of Krataios. This extensive collection included works from various notable sources, such as John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus, Nikephoros Blemmydes, Gregory of Cyprus, and Nikephoros Choumnos.¹⁴⁷

Given the laborious process of gathering and transcribing these texts, the scribes emphasized the importance of treating the holy and wondrous book with the utmost caution and care. They especially directed this admonition towards the future users of the manuscript, particularly the nuns,

146 *Diktyon*: 29025; Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, p. 94; Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur*, vol. 1, p. 436, and vol. 3, p. 216.

147 Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, p. 94; Taxidis, "L'éloge de saint Eudocime par Constantin Acropolite," 5–44.

underscoring the sacred nature of the content and the effort involved in its creation.¹⁴⁸

This careful preservation was crucial for maintaining the integrity and longevity of the manuscript, ensuring that it could continue to serve as a vital resource for liturgical and devotional practices within the nunnery.

The Krataios library holds significant historical interest, particularly highlighted by a revealing note found in fol. 78r-v of the fifteenth-century manuscript Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 677. The scribe recounts the challenges encountered in locating the Athanasian Creed (ἑκθεσις πίστεως) due to the deliberate destruction of its records by opponents of the Union. According to the scribe, the Creed had been nearly eradicated, with only two known testimonies remaining: one in a Psalter from the Krataios convent and another in a codex at the Mangana Monastery. In an effort to preserve the Creed, an anonymous individual transcribed it based on the Krataios Psalter. However, by the time the scribe penned his note, these testimonies, too, had been destroyed, indicating the systematic effort to eliminate this particular theological text.¹⁴⁹

The Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 604 manuscript (fourteenth-fifteenth century)¹⁵⁰ provides valuable insights into the intellectual and religious currents of its time, being a private asset of Demetrios Kydones. The manuscript is notable for including both anti-Palamite and Unionist works, reflecting the contentious theological debates of the period. The involvement of prominent scholars, such as Prochoros Kydones, Manuel Kalekas, and Isidore of Kiev, whose hands have been identified in the manuscript, further underscores its significance.

One of the scribes (probably Manuel Kalekas) utilized two “old manuscripts” from the convent *tes megales Doukaines* in Constantinople.¹⁵¹ These manuscripts contained Proklos’s sermon on the Transfiguration (fol. 37v) and a marginal note on John Chrysostom’s sermon on the same issue (fol. 39v).¹⁵² This indicates that at the end of the fourteenth century, the convent’s library was accessible to both Unionist and anti-Palamite scholars.

148 Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, p. 94.

149 *Diktyon*: 67308; Devreesse, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, 132; Stefec, “Zur Schnittdekoration kretischer Handschriften,” 501–33.

150 *Diktyon*: 67235.

151 Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cidone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota*, 261n4; Talbot, “Bluestocking Nuns,” 610. On this nunnery, see Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire byzantine*, 330.

152 Devreesse, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, 5.

The luxurious eleventh-century Stoudite Psalter, Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 752 (fol. 2r), includes a note indicating its association with a Pantanassa (Queen of All) monastery.¹⁵³ Robert Devreesse proposed that this might refer to the male Monastery of Pantanassa in Mistras, which dates to the fifteenth century.¹⁵⁴ However, further options cannot be dismissed. Two potential monastic connections for the Psalter include the Pantanassa in Baionaia or of *tes Pantanasses* nunnery in Constantinople. The latter was founded in the twelfth century as an imperial establishment; it became a significant pilgrimage site, especially for Russian travelers during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Its imperial foundation and historical significance lend credence to the possibility that the Psalter could have belonged to this nunnery. The exact provenance of the Psalter remains uncertain, but these possibilities highlight the rich tapestry of monastic and religious life in the Byzantine world and the diverse paths through which such a manuscript might have travelled.

The Lips nunnery likely owned an eleventh-century parchment codex containing works of Dionysios Areopagites (Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 1787). According to a note on fol. 4v, an anonymous male donor stated that he drafted the *typikon* for the nunnery at the behest of Empress Theodora Palaiologina.¹⁵⁵ To further support the spiritual development of the nuns, this anonymous ghostwriter gifted the codex, which was likely from his private collection. This nunnery is linked to the so-called Palaiologina group: a collection of manuscripts named after the monogram of a female member of the Palaiologos dynasty that appears in a thirteenth century Gospel Book (Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 1158). Initially, Hugo Buchthal and Hans Belting attributed a group of fifteen deluxe codices to Theodora Raoulaina.¹⁵⁶ This initial group comprised seven Gospel Books, three Lectionaries, three Psalters, a New Testament, and a Praxapostolos. However,

153 *Diktyon*: 67383; Devreesse, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, 268: “Βιβλίω τῆς Παντανάσσου”; Parpulov, *Toward a History of Byzantine Psalters*, 122–26, 130–33; Crostini and Peers, *A Book of Psalms from Eleventh-Century Constantinople*.

154 Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 215–16; Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 377–79.

155 *Diktyon*: 68416; Canart, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, 135; Talbot, “Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII,” 299n40.

156 *Diktyon*: 67789; Buchthal and Belting, *Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople*, 100–21. See also Pérez Martín, “Irene Cumno y el ‘taller de la Paleologuina,’” 223–34.

subsequent scholars identified Theodora Palaiologina, wife of Michael VIII, as the patroness of these codices.¹⁵⁷

Robert S. Nelson and John Lowden expanded the group by adding the fourteenth-century Lips *typikon* (London, British Library, MS Addit. 22748)¹⁵⁸ and several other manuscripts to the known collection. They also questioned the attribution of all manuscripts to a single patron due to the increasing number of new attributions, the significant proportion of Lectionaries, and the production of these manuscripts extending into the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, it remains that at least three manuscripts of the Palaiologina group were commissioned by women: the original Palaiologina Gospel book (Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 1158), the Lips *typikon*, and the Gospel Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. VI.28 (1285).¹⁵⁹

Nuns in Byzantine society often had connections to manuscripts through male ownership or male actions, reflecting the intertwined nature of religious and familial relationships in manuscript preservation and transmission. An illustrative example is found in the Tetraevangelion Hagion Oros, Ivron, MS 5 (mid-thirteenth century).¹⁶⁰ A notice on an unnumbered folio records the death of Maria/Martha Spanopoulou on March 8, 1387.¹⁶¹ Maria was the mother of the manuscript's owner, highlighting the familial linkage in the manuscript's history. This example underscores the broader

157 Nelson and Lowden, "The Palaeologina Group," 59–68; Talbot, "Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII," 302; Kalopissi-Verti, "Δωρεές γυναικών στην υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο," 245; Nicol, *The Byzantine Lady*, 33–47; Maxwell, "Another Lectionary of the 'Atelier' of the Palaiologina," 47–54.

158 *Diktyon*: 39019. According to Talbot, "Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII," 301 it is "a deluxe codex, probably the original version of the *typikon*"; see also Nelson and Lowden, "The Palaeologina Group," 65–67, with plates 9, 11, and 13.

159 *Diktyon*: 16015; Talbot, "Female Patronage in the Palaiologan Era," 269–70. For further manuscripts of the Scriptures owned by and/or produced for convents, see Carr, "Women and Monasticism in Byzantium," 11–12.

160 *Diktyon*: 23602; Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, pp. 1–2; Yota, "L'image du donateur dans les manuscrits illustrés byzantins," 282–83; Belting, *Das illuminierte Buch in der spätbyzantinischen Gesellschaft*, 35–37; Belting, "Die Auftraggeber," 165–66.

161 Lambros, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, p. 2: "Τῇ κ' Μαρτίου ἰνδ. ζ' ζωξέ' (1387) ἐκυμῖθι ὑ μητέρα μου ὀνομαν τῆς Μαρίας μετανομαζόμενη το καλογερικόν τῆς Μαρθᾶ μοναχῆ." See Yota, "L'image du donateur dans les manuscrits illustrés byzantins," 283; Belting, "Die Auftraggeber der spätbyzantinischen Bildhandschrift," 149–76. Martha must have belonged to the Spanopoulos family, since a further notice reports the birth of a certain John Spanopoulos.

phenomenon where women's connections to significant religious texts were often mediated through male relatives or associates.

The commission of manuscripts in Byzantine society indeed fostered a rich network of knowledge and relationships among patrons, copyists, and recipients. A poignant example of this is found in a panegyric volume (Istanbul, Patriarchike Bibliothēke, MS Panagias 11) commissioned in 1360 by the nun Eirenarchia “for the repose of her son, the monk Theodoulos.” This codex, copied by the monk Jacob, reflects the collaborative efforts and the devotion involved in such projects.¹⁶²

A scribal note within the manuscript provides further insights into its journey and the connections between the individuals involved. Initially, Eirenarchia and Jacob donated the codex to the imperial monastery of St. Basil.¹⁶³ This gesture signifies their intention to honour the memory of Theodoulos within a respected religious institution. However, the historical upheavals of the time—specifically the Ottoman capture of Herakleia Pontike—led to the manuscript's relocation. Jacob's note indicates that it was subsequently donated to the Prodomos monastery in Sozopolis (Thrace).¹⁶⁴

The establishment of knowledge networks in Byzantine society was significantly influenced by the patronage of literati and the scholarly relations they cultivated. Empress Helen/Hypomone Kantakouzene Palaiologina stands out as a notable example of female patronage in this intellectual and cultural milieu. Helen, the well-educated daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos, demonstrated her literary talent early on by composing *epinikioi logoi* celebrating her father's victory.¹⁶⁵ Her education and literary output facilitated the creation of a network of patronage encompassing prominent scholars and intellectuals of her era. Two of the most notable figures within

162 *Diktyon*: 33646; Vogel and Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, 156.

163 The St. Basil Monastery may have also been the known nunnery in Constantinople refounded by Gregory Antiochos in the middle of the twelfth century. See Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 59–60.

164 Athenagoras (Metropolitan), *Κατάλογος τῶν χειρογράφων τῆς ἐν Χάλκῃ Μονῆς τῆς Παναγίας*, 243; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Ἡ ἐν τῷ νησίῳ Σωζοπόλεως βασιλικὴ μονὴ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Προδρόμου,” 670; Kouroupiou and Géhin, *Catalogue des manuscrits conservés dans la Bibliothèque du Patriarcat Oecuménique*, 63–67; Euangelatou-Notara, *Χορηγοί-κτήτορες-δωρητές*, pp. 88 and 240, no. 260; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 454–56.

165 Demetrios Kydones, *Epistulae*, ed. Loenertz, pp. 340–41, no. 389. On Kydones' letters to the empress, see Kianka, “The Letters of Demetrios Kydones to Empress Helena,” 155–64; Tinnefeld, *Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones*, 63–64.

her network were her teacher Demetrios Kydones and the historian and philosopher Nikephoros Gregoras.¹⁶⁶

Helen's patronage extended beyond mere intellectual engagement; it also included material support. Before entering the *kyra* Martha nunnery, Helen distributed her wealth generously. Among the recipients of her beneficence was Demetrios Kydones, who expressed his gratitude in a letter. This correspondence not only thanked Helen for her gifts but also provided a poignant account of the empress's trials and tribulations. Kydones depicted the bitter life of the empress and the numerous difficulties she had faced, highlighting her resilience and fortitude.

An intriguing aspect of this correspondence is the involvement of Manuel II Palaiologos, Helen's son. Manuel confirmed that he had read Kydones' epistle to his mother,¹⁶⁷ indicating that the scholarly and personal exchanges facilitated by Helen's patronage were known and valued at the highest levels of Byzantine society. This interaction between the empress, her scholarly correspondents, and her son underscores the intricate web of relationships and knowledge exchange fostered through female patronage in the Byzantine Empire.

The most impressive example, however, is the nun Theodora Raoulaina, a female scholar, patron, author, bibliophile, and copyist.¹⁶⁸ The *protoves-tiaria* Raoulaina renovated the Monastery of St. Andrew in *Krisei*, where she brought her personal library. Raoulaina's only known work is the *Life of the Graptoi* (*Vita Theophanis et Theodori Grapti*, BHG 1793).¹⁶⁹ This *Vita* bears testimony to the books she had at her disposal, referencing works from Homer's *Iliad*, Hesiod, Aeschylus and Euripides, Herodotus, Plato, and

166 Guiland, *Correspondance de Nicephore Gregoras*, pp. 144–47, no. 42. See also Manolova, "Discourses of Science and Philosophy in the Letters," 220.

167 Demetrios Kydones, *Epistulae*, ed. Loenertz, pp. 103–10, no. 222; Manuel II Palaeologos, *Letters*, ed. Dennis, p. 65, no. 23; Leonte, "A Late Byzantine Patroness," 345–53.

168 On Raoulaina, see Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, 43–44; Fryde, *The Early Palaeologan Renaissance*, 180–81. For the title *protovestiaria*, see Margarou, *Τίτλοι και επαγγελματικά ονόματα γυναικών στο Βυζάντιο*, 102–4. Interestingly, she may have been portrayed in the Blachernai Church in Arta. See Parani, "The Joy of the Most Holy Mother of God the Hodegetria," 113–45.

169 The work exists in Athens, Ethnike Bibliotheke tes Ellados, MS Metochion Pan. Taphou 244, fols. 129–53 (fourteenth century) (*Diktyon*: 6641); Theodora Raoulaina, "Vita Theophanis et Theodori Grapti," ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 185–223; Sode, *Jerusalem—Konstantinopel—Rom*, 199–201.

Dionysios of Halicarnassus. She also quotes the Proverbs and the Scriptures, though patristic works are not included.¹⁷⁰

Raoulaina is a well-known copyist. Around 1280, she copied the Orations of Aelius Aristides (Città del Vaticano, MS Vat. gr. 1899)¹⁷¹ and the Simplicius commentaries on Aristotle's Physics (Moscow, Gosudarstvennyj Istoričeskij Muzej, MS Mus. Sobr. 3649).¹⁷² In this role, she belongs to a small group of female scribes. Other known female copyists from the Palaiologan period include the nun Maria¹⁷³ and the calligrapher Irene, daughter of Theodore Hagiopetrites.¹⁷⁴

The *protovestiaria* was an avid collector of books, with a personal library that included manuscripts of classical and ecclesiastical significance. Her collection featured the works of Demosthenes and other rhetoricians, writings by Gregory of Cyprus, the *Ethics* of St. Basil, a treatise on harmonics, and a variety of other texts.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, the famous, tenth-century Thucydides

170 Talbot, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 20–21; Nervo, "Teodora Raoulaina," 152–61; Matschke and Tinnefeld, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz*, 319.

171 *Diktyon*: 68528; Turyn, *Codices graeci Vaticani saeculis XIII et XIV*, 63–65; Canart and Peri, *Sussidi bibliografici per I manoscritti greci della Biblioteca Vaticana*, 656; Gamillscheg, *Repertorium der griechischen Kopisten*, vol. 3, p. 85, no. 206. See also Kugeas, "Zur Geschichte der Münchener Thukydideshandschrift," 594; Pérez Martín, *El patriarca Gregorio de Chipre*, 35–36; Zorzi, "Una copista, due copisti, nessuna copista?" 259–82; Nousia, "Theodora Raoulaina's Autograph Codex Vat. gr. 1899," 339–59.

172 Harlfinger, "Einige Aspekte der handschriftlichen Überlieferung," 267. On the eight twelve-syllable verses in Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. gr. 1899 (*Diktyon*: 68528) and in Moscow, GIM, MS Mus. Sobr. 3649 (*Diktyon*: 43621), where Raoulaina is mentioned as the scribe, see Fonkič, "Zametki o grečeskich rukopisjach Sovetskich chranilišč," 134.

173 She copied the Moscow, GIM, MS Sinod. gr. 343 (Vlad. 268) (thirteenth century) (*Diktyon*: 43968). The parchment manuscript contains liturgical formulas (*Akolouthiai*) to Baptism and to the monastic tonsure. See Vladimir (Archimandrit), *Sistematičeskoe opisanie rukopisei Moskovskoj Sinodalnoj biblioteki*, 386–87; Lampros, "Ελληνίδες βιβλιογράφοι καὶ κυρίαὶ κωδίκων," 243–44; Vogel and Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, 288; Schreiner, "Kopistinnen in Byzanz," 36–37; Carr, "Women and Monasticism in Byzantium," 5–6.

174 Carr, "A Note on Theodore Hagiopetrites," 287–90; Nelson, *Theodore Hagiopetrites*, 25; Schreiner, "Kopistinnen in Byzanz," 38.

175 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, ed. Kotzabassi, p. 154, no. 12, and p. 157, lines 1–4, 10–11, no. 17, and p. 158, lines 18–20, 22–24, no. 17, and p. 159, no. 18; Leone, *Maximi Monachi Planudis Epistulae*, p. 103, lines 11–12, and p. 104, lines 8–10, no. 68; Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, 140. On the letters of Gregory of Cyprus, see Chrysostomides, "To

manuscript (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS gr. 430) was part of her collection.¹⁷⁶ In 1300/1, Raoulaina donated to Lavra a twelfth-century manuscript containing Theophylaktos of Ohrid's commentaries on the Four Gospels (Paris, BnF, MS Coisl. gr. 128).¹⁷⁷ A note in the manuscript records that the monks were requested to offer prayers on behalf of the donor.

Raoulaina participated energetically in a book exchange with other scholars and, like the *sebastokratorissa* Irene in the twelfth century,¹⁷⁸ had a circle of protégés. She sent a mathematic treatise to Constantine Akropolites, who was not impressed by its quality.¹⁷⁹ Nikephoros Choumnos sent her Aristotle's *Meteorologika* with the comments of Alexander of Aphrodisias.¹⁸⁰ Her correspondence is reflected in the letter collections of many Palaiologan scholars, including Gregory of Cyprus, Maximos Planoudes (ca. 1255–1305), Manuel Holobolos (ca. 1245–1310/14), Nikephoros Choumnos and probably also Constantine Akropolites.¹⁸¹

corpus των επιστολών του Γεωργίου-Γρηγορίου Κυπρίου”; Riehle, “Epistolography, Social Exchange and Intellectual Discourse,” 225. Raoulaina was his spiritual child. Pachymeres criticized her attachment to the Patriarch. Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 3, bk. 3, chap. 10, p. 151, line 9.

176 *Diktyon*: 44878; Kugeas, “Zur Geschichte der Münchener Thukydideshandschrift,” 594, 608. This codex includes a notice on the death of Theodora on December 6, 1300. See Kugeas, “Zur Geschichte der Münchener Thukydideshandschrift,” 590: “+έκοιμήθη ἡ ἁγία κυρία μου ἡ μοναχὴ κυρὰ Θεοδώρα Ραούλαινα Καντακουζηνὴ Κομνηνὴ ἡ Παλαιολογίνα ἡ ἐξαδέλφη τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου βασιλέως κυροῦ Ἀνδρονίκου ἐν ἔτει ζωθ' ἰνδ. ιδ' κατὰ τὴν ζ' τοῦ Δεκεμβρίου μηνὸς ᾠρα ζ' τῆς αὐτῆς νυκτός.” Pérez Martín, *El patriarca Gregorio de Chipre*, 270.

177 *Diktyon*: 49272; Devreesse, *Catalogue des manuscrits grecs*, 122; Euangelatou-Notara, *Χορηγοί—κτήτορες—δωρητές*, 99–100; see also the dedicatory notices in De Montfaucon, *Bibliotheca Coisliniana olim Segueriana sive Manuscriptorum omnium Graecorum*, 201. On her library, see now Taxidis, “Public and Private Libraries in Byzantium,” 470.

178 Jeffreys, “The *Sebastokratorissa* Irene as Patron,” 177–94.

179 Constantine Akropolites, *Epistole*, ed. Romano, pp. 155–56, no. 60; Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, 78, 109, 140, and appendix no. 60.164.

180 Riehle, *Die Briefsammlungen des Nikephoros Chumnos*, p. 332, no. B76; Leone, “Le epistole di Niceforo Chumno,” p. 77, no. 76; Riehle, “Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie,” 108, 159; Riehle, “Καὶ σε προστάτιν ἐν αὐτοῖς τῆς αὐτῶν ἐπιγράφομεν σωτηρίας,” 299–315.

181 On Raoulaina and Planoudes, see Leone, *Maximi Monachi Planudis Epistulae*, pp. 79–80, no. 65; Kugeas, “Zur Geschichte der Münchener Thukydideshandschrift,” 602–3; Lampros, “Ἑλληνίδες βιβλιογράφοι καὶ κυρίαὶ κωδίκων,” pp. 415–18; Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, 74–77; Pérez Martín, *El patriarca Gregorio de Chipre*,

Theodora Raoulaina had a very close relation to Gregory of Cyprus (ca. 1241–1290), who may have already been supported by Raoulaina's mother and son, Theodore Mouzalon.¹⁸² Their friendship is attested in historical sources as well as in the twenty-nine letters of the Patriarch addressed to her, most of them dated during Gregory's patriarchate. Despite her literacy, Gregory occasionally used a simplified style in his letters, which caused a reaction from Raoulaina, who felt insulted by this "priestly" (πρεσβυτερικά)—as she called it—style. Unfortunately, the existing data do not support such an accusation. Nevertheless, it is notable that their correspondence refers to gifts and manuscripts but does not delve into scientific topics.

In conclusion, educated nuns were capable of reading edifying texts, but there were limitations on the works recommended to them by spiritual fathers or by the *typika*. Spiritual fathers advised the nuns to read texts of ecclesiastical content or monastic tradition, such as the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the works of St. Basil. Profane literature was not considered appropriate for the edification of female monastics. Only few women could escape illiteracy and even been acknowledged as scholars on their own merit.

270n48; Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede im byzantinischen Brief*, 183, 185, 187, 290; Talbot, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 20–21; Rizzo Nervo, "Teodora Raoulaina," 147–62. On Raoulaina, Holobolos, and Choumnos, see Treu, *Manuelis Holoboli Orationes*, 552; Treu, "Manuel Holobolos," 538–59; Riehle, "Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie," 108, 159.

182 After the death of Theodora's mother, Gregory of Cyprus sent both to her and her sister, Anna, a condolence letter. See Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, ed. Kotzabassi, p. 145, no. 1. On the kinship relation of Raoulaina to Theodore Mouzalon, see Samara, *Θεόδωρος Μουζάλων*, 22–24.