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Book Review: S. GERMANIDOU (ed.), Secular Byzantine Women. Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography of Female Material Culture from Late Roman to Post - Byzantine Times, London and New York, Routledge, 2022

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S. GERMANIDOU (ed.), *Secular Byzantine Women. Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography of Female Material Culture from Late Roman to Post-Byzantine Times*, London and New York, Routledge, 2022, pp. xxv + 218. ISBN: 978-0-367-85637-3

The Byzantinist community welcomes the present attractive volume that brings together scholars from various fields, including anthropology, archaeology, ethnography, history, and philosophy, and aims to approach the lives of the non-elite women from the late Roman to post Byzantine era through their precious possessions, working routines, and clothing. The study of ordinary women has been gaining ground, especially in the context of gender studies, to which this collective volume is a welcome addition. Its eleven chapters speak to the life and experience of non-elite women with modern academic tools and, as the subtitle makes clear (p. i), it is through material culture that they attempt to piece together the lives of ordinary women, mainly from the Byzantine period. The dedication (p. v) “Giving voice to those who remain unheard” is inventive, imaginative and stimulates the readers’ thought. The lists of figures, plans and tables (p. ix) convey the extent of the material which contributes to the visualization and the documentation of the papers. The list of contributors (p. xvi) indicates the scientific field of the respective authors, showing the interdisciplinary character of the present volume.

There are four sections, covering the daily life, work, female interests and general ethnographic approach: Part 1 (“Modest Vanity, Social Identity”, pp. 11-79), where archaeological evidence and material objects of ordinary women relating to their personal care are examined. Part 2 (“Working girls”, pp. 81-148), focuses on female daily labour routine, through art representations, historical sources and bioarcheology. Part 3 (“Earthly delights, holy concerns, pp. 151-183), worldly female interests, such as dance, meet with the theological perceptions about lay women. Part 4 (“An ethnographic glimpse”, pp. 185-213), studies ordinary women

that labour at tasks both at home and in the fields from an ethnographic point of view. The first section consists of three papers, the second of four, each of the third and fourth parts, of two.

In her well-structured Preface (pp. xix-xxii), the editor of the volume, Byzantine archaeologist, Sofia Germanidou, author, among others, of *Byzantine Honey culture* (2016), gives the background and the rationale of the volume, which is addressed both to scholars and students and the wider public, presents the main goals and the interdisciplinary approach of the secular ordinary women. She indicates concisely the previous scientific research by referring to Angeliki Laiou, one of the pioneers of the study of women in Byzantine society, and the Canadian philosopher of archaeology Alyson Wilie, who in her ground-breaking volume “Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory”, examines the theoretical underpinnings of archaeology in relation to gender. Germanidou refers to the growing research interest in ordinary women both in urban and rural settings, in a public or private context. This anonymous group of everyday, multi-tasking women is characterized by lack of homogeneity, but the editorial policy is that they be considered collectively. The structure of the volume is outlined and the papers are ranged with regard to their geographic and chronological reference, though most of them concern Byzantine territory, the Aimos peninsula and Asia Minor with the occasional excursions into the wider Mediterranean and Western Europe. As far as the temporal range is concerned, the Byzantine era is studied mainly, yet some contributions extend earlier or later, covering thus a wide spectrum that allows readers to perceive roles and life of the ordinary women in the intended frame of chronological reference. The photographs that accompany the Preface convey a sense of immutability even in connection with the Modern Greek society. The editor refers to the problems of methodology and interpretation of the research field of ordinary women: most of the written sources were authored by educated men and addressed mainly to a male public, while women have not traditionally been treated as an object of detailed inquiry, the chronological, cultural, and geographical contexts are fluctuating (although they offer interesting comparisons and open up horizons), finally, even though female work opportunities are being explored and woman’s focus on her appearance as an expression of femininity is already an established field of research, the femininity of ordinary women remains on the margins of academic studies. Sofia Germanidou is deservedly passionate about the volume and shares that passion with her female readership and colleagues, referring to it as “thematically dedicated to women, ... written by working women”. However, the male presence and influence is

sensible on the personal and working lives of those women.

The Introduction (pp. 1-8), contributed by Ecaterina Lung, ushers the reader to the issue of ordinary women. She sums up the state of the art in gender studies, pointing out that this collective volume responds to a perceived lack of scholarly work based on wider categories of sources pertaining to different areas of representation, circulation, and reception in society. Although elite women have been researched, less privileged groups only now are coming within the scope of investigation. She presents the emerging problems: the nature of available sources, as the written ones, focused on empresses or women of the aristocracy or on religious figures, were overwhelmingly created by men and, even when the author is a woman, like Anna Komnene, the underlying ideology remains masculine¹. It is noted that the overall impression of the written sources about the women is pejorative; women were thought to be inferior, irrational, highly emotive, and unable to control their impulses. Byzantine lay women were seldom given an identity of their own, although they may have held more social and political power in Byzantium than in the Medieval West. The Byzantine prevailing practice was of segregated feminine and masculine living spheres. It is observed, however, that the articles of the volume bring to light the porousness of these spheres, indeed that Byzantine women's lives and experiences can still be nuanced. The overall image, derived from the papers, is sometimes very different from the one created through the more traditional analysis of texts and iconography pertaining to elite women. It is suggested that the 'silent' women of the written sources are shown by the contributors to be speaking through the objects and their meaning, demonstrating the connection of ordinary women with the renewed interest in Material Culture, which leads to the investigation of new gendered perspectives, bringing up the example of Ioli Kalavrezou's work in this context. Histories of beauty, physical appearance, and adornment, placed in the social setting of those less privileged women, are the novelties of current approaches that are condensed in the paradoxical but suggestive concept of "modest vanity". It is pointed out that the placing of women in a Braudelian *longue durée* proves that women's existence throughout history was often defined by different rhythms than that of men. Despite the fact that the transition from the Roman World to the

1. Cf. A. SIMPSON, The imperial feminine in Niketas Choniates' History, in: *Byzantine Authors and their times*, ed. V. VLYSSIDOU [Section of Byzantine Research. Institute of Historical Research. National Hellenic Research Foundation. Research Library 9], Athens 2021, 267-284, esp. 268.

Medieval one remained gender-blind, the present volume reveals the changes in women's lives and activity and the varying degrees of tension between the tradition and modernity. The contributors bring to light the way the women's identity was constructed through images, objects and texts, showing an incredible force of continuity from the Late Antiquity to Post Byzantine period. Lung concludes that the multiplicity of the contributors' viewpoints and approaches can vastly benefit any scholar interested in Gender Studies, women's history, and material culture of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine period.

The first section ("Modest Vanity, Social Identity", pp. 11-80), consists of three articles that answer to the section title, as they study feminine adornment through material objects. Marina Vogkli and Stavroula Papanikolopoulou's paper ["Women's accessories from a bath house on Santorini (Thira), Cyclades (2th-4th centuries)", pp. 13-30], presents women's accessories that were discovered at the bath complex of a Roman country house in the Kamari region of Santorini, and shines a light on the female personal care. Lacking numismatic evidence, the site was dated on the basis of pottery to have been in use between the second and the fourth centuries AD. After a standard and detailed description of the archaeological site, of the bath complex, that occupied a surface area of 230m² and included eight rooms, and agricultural installations (wine press and vat), with abundant supporting photographic material, the site finds are presented: a complete small cylindrical bone *pyxis*, a cochlear and stirring rod, solid indications of female presence, through their function and use: the face care, the hair style, the clothes, and shoe fashion. The *pyxis* is dated by comparison with similar Roman finds, dated between the 1st and the 4th century AD and discovered in various areas of the Roman World, which were used as containers of make-up powders. The cochlear, a tiny circular spoon with a long stem, was probably used in the preparation of cosmetics. As for the stirring rod, it was used in the process of stirring and extracting perfume oils and maybe was useful as a tool to apply perfumes, although certain researchers argue that it is a spindle or appropriate to ritual practices. The bathers used to bring with them the necessary equipment, as shown by parallel archaeological finds, since the baths were meeting points between groups that shared the same attitude to life. The makeup and other cosmetics were made at home, ground in small marble mortaria. Cosmetics and jewels were kept in special boxes made of various materials and the perfumes were stirred in clay, glass, or alabaster bottles (*unguentaria*). Stirring rods and cochlear were used to measure the portion, stir and apply the desired substance.

Although some men did use makeup and perfumes as social indicators, the presence of women in the bath is confirmed by finds like the nine loom weights and fourteen spindle whorls, objects that are related to textile production, but mainly by the inscriptions of the site heroon, where two female names appear. It is noted that the operation of the baths from the Roman to Byzantine times is also confirmed by the textual evidence, historical accounts, inscriptions, Church Fathers' texts and hagiographical sources, where they offer evidence that baths play a significant role in private and public life. The authors provide information about the opening hours of the baths from the first century BC to the fifth AD, which are different for men and women.

Evidently, during the 2nd century AD, the local aristocracy played an important role in the public life of Thira. Even though it is impossible to identify whether the particular complex is public or private, it could be linked with Titus Flavius Kleitosthenis Claudianus, a man from the local elite, who took care of the baths on the ports of Thira, as it is confirmed by inscription. Apparently, the bath complex in Kamari was a significant one for the local community and remains one of the best-preserved Roman structures in the Cyclades. The bone objects allow various interpretations about their function, their habits, needs, as well as their use in daily care, and role in the community. The authors approach to the continuity between Roman and Byzantine periods is well argued for and in line with other inter-disciplinary studies, such as the collective volume of A. BINSFELD – S. HOSS – H. PÖSCHE (eds), *Thermae in Context, the Roman Bath in Town and in Life, Actes du colloque de Dalheim*, Archeologia Mosellana 10, Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art du Luxembourg, Luxembourg 2018.

Susanne Metaxa's paper ("Unheard voices of Early Byzantine girls. On the custom of adorning secular girls with earrings, as seen through the evidence of burials", pp. 32-43) complements the study of female vanity and identity. At the outset the author notes that knowledge about earrings is restricted to their use by aristocratic women, whose earrings are made of gold and silver and their study is concerned with typology, chronology and artistic quality. About ordinary women, the gap is filled by funerary archaeology, which examines graves as closed assemblages that provide evidence for the investigation of social class, cultural identity, age and sex. The present paper is a stage in this direction, as it aids to understand the Early Byzantine adornment from the very first years of life. The author continues with Early Church Fathers negative attitudes (Tertullian, Clemens of Alexandria, John Chrysostom) towards female jewellery. The custom of adorning

girls with earrings through the burials that come from five infant graves of the 6th-7th century at three sites in the Peloponnese (Southern Greece) Argos, Pallantion and Olympia is investigated. In these graves, pairs of earrings were found beside the skulls. In particular, in Argos earrings constituted the most frequent of all personal objects occurring in all types of graves (cist graves, tile graves), and represented many types of earrings of cheaper materials hitherto unremarked. As the sexual identity based on skeletal remains is not possible, these infants can be identified as girls due to the pairs of earrings. At the settlement of Pallantion, a grave of length of 110cm contains skeletal remains of five individuals aged between one to five years old. It is noted that two of the five individuals could be identified by the personal objects lying in situ. One of them is a pair of silver earrings in the shape of a hoop. In Olympia, approximately 400 graves, from one (grave 313), comes a pair of silver earrings, analogous to the above-mentioned finds. The earrings found in previous settlements, worn by girls, are all essentially of the same type.

Earrings in the shape of simple hoops found in early Byzantine infant graves, flesh out our knowledge of the Early Byzantine jewellery of cheaper materials belonging to ordinary females, as it is confirmed, and the provided photographs show their simple make. The evidence is interpreted in the light of the textual sources and a comprehensive body of references to gender studies concerning girlhood. The author insightfully connects the research on women with the material culture and girlhood, capitalizing on the results of D. ARIANTZIS' book (*Kindheit in Byzanz. Emotionale, geistige und materielle Entwicklung im familiären Umfeld vom 6. bis zum 11. Jahrhundert*, Berlin-Boston 2012).

Metaxa concludes on the strength of the written sources that there are no indications of the earrings being related to some funerary custom and they must have been worn during lifetime and not removed at burial. The piercing and adorning of the ears of female infants with simple hoop earrings appears to have been customary from very early on in life. She claims that pairs of earrings related to female infants break new ground in social history and gender studies, as it is possible to further highlight a so far unexplored aspect of Early Byzantine female adornment. Earrings could be related to an amuletic function due to high infant mortality, and it is not known whether the piercing of the lobes to put on rings was related to some specific event or rite of Early Byzantine girlhood. It is observed

that a pair of earrings probably also functioned as female gender markers, as the archaeological evidence confirms that boys were wearing a single earring². Metaxa ends with a perspective on the very promising future of funerary archaeology that can document the adorning of female infants, as both the depictions in art and written sources remain silent.

The paper imaginatively entitled “Not even a band on my finger? Rings of non-elite women” (pp. 45-61), quoting from the Ptochoprodromic Poems, is signed by Florentia Evangelatou-Notara and Kalliope Mavrommati, shines a light on female vanity through the finger-rings in relation with the marital status and family setting and stands out for its pertinent description and astute interpretation. The article draws on the previous one, as it also refers to an accessory and complements the study of female adornment in the middle and late Byzantine period. The authors deal with rings of non-elite women and solidly support their results with quotations from a varied body of primary sources and abundant bibliographical references. The approach of this interdisciplinary study (texts, iconography, and archaeology) of the use of finger-rings by non-elite women is multi-faceted and based on the first publication of the catalogue of private finger-ring collection of Evangelatou-Notara, the gemstone of the volume.

Through texts mainly from the Middle to the Late Byzantine period, the authors investigate the topic beginning with an attractive mention of the fictional narrative first encountered in John Malalas’ *Chronographia*, set in Constantinople (6th cent.). The story revolves around a strolling street performer accompanied by a blind dog, which has the knack to light on rings and coins lost in the street that belong to people from all social strata. The authors observe that the decoration of finger rings was subject to certain social models linked to the self-image of their middle-and lower-middle class female users. Legal documents and narratives, even dream-books that interpret the symbolism of fingers rings, provide evidence for the lifestyle and adornment of ordinary women. The authors note that the offering of rings and jewellery as gifts by the husband to his wife was usual in the 12th century and thereafter. Increasingly, archaeological reports appear with details about the

2. A practice originating from the Eastern aesthetics which Byzantium follows. A quotation V. Kokkori’s book would be useful and maybe a correlation between earrings as objects and their interpretation in dreams, as symbol of power and birth of daughter, as it reflects the standard view of Byzantine society. V. Kokkori, *Woman in Byzantine Dreambooks*, Athens 2015, 90, 183.

size, the shape and type of metal of low-cost finger-rings, as well as whether they belonged to men or women, as is deduced from other grave goods or the osteological material. Finger-rings served to promote the female public image; possibly the marital status of women, the economic standing of households of limited means, the spiritual needs, as well as personal and social conceptions (rings engraved with religious representations or amuletic inscriptions), as well as women's external beauty and appearance. Moreover, according to testaments, some rings pass from one generation to the next as family heirlooms, but only from male donors. It is stressed that usually ordinary women, when depicted with jewellery, are represented with earrings but not finger-rings, which were made of non-precious metal and sold in the workshops of larger towns or at local festival markets (*πανηγύρεις*). As far as the gender identification of finger-rings is concerned, the archaeological and anthropological research indicates that the diameter is a sophisticated issue and does not determine sex, as apparently often finger-rings were exchanged between men and women, to be worn on a different finger. Byzantine romances confirm that some finger-rings were worn both by men and women.

As historical support (archives, legal texts, narratives, letters, poems, and archaeological sources) is consistent, significant conclusions are drawn that illustrate a broad and varied use of finger-rings of humbler materials. It often remains unclear from the co-finds whether the rings belonged to a man or a woman, and only occasionally do we find inscriptions or other evidence that gives hints or proof about the sex of the owner. Finger-rings cross the gender barrier, and it is possible that in some circumstances women wore rings designed for males.

The authors note that Byzantine women would be proud of rings that symbolized parental love, betrothal, virtue, or delight. They tackle the use of the finger-ring as imprinted in Byzantine sources, which extended to all strata of the Byzantine society, and consider its semiotics, since the finger-ring is perhaps the only piece of jewellery that emits clear messages about the social standing of men and women, particularly due to its use in ritual vows and the marriage ceremony. The scholars demonstrate that the finger-ring projects the inner connection of the self both with the outside and the unseen world. In the case of the lower social classes, it was most likely worn on special occasions in public (the wedding or on feast-days). Certain trends were followed as to when and where rings and other jewellery should be worn, which depended on local and contemporary modes of social self-representation. The image of wives waiting for their husbands to offer rings and other pieces of jewellery is clearly imprinted in Byzantine texts and perhaps reflects a requirement

for married women of the middle social groups, but possibly perceived as a form of social refinement. Women had the ability to buy jewellery for themselves to satisfy their vanity. For widows of the middle strata, use of finger-rings, and even more so their purchase, was not considered appropriate. Consequently, following the gender approach, the authors provide a well-documented and convincing interpretation of the usage and significance of finger rings.

The article is also accompanied by the partial but crucial first-published “Catalogue of finger-rings from the collection of Florentia Evangelatou-Notara” (pp. 63-81) and annotated insightfully by the authors. The collection started in 1975 and today it includes about 600 finger-rings from the Roman, Byzantine, Post-Byzantine, and modern periods to the mid-20th century, which are being studied systematically to publish a *catalogue raisonné*, as the two authors deservedly highlight in their introduction. Most of the rings were purchased in Athens, in antique shops. The authors consistently note that the finger-rings of the catalogue are made of copper or copper alloys and were worn by women and/or men of the middle and lower classes, mainly for adornment. The presented rings dates, from the early Byzantine to post-Byzantine period, are established on the strength of the typology of each item, the stratigraphy and the co-finds of the excavation, based on public and private collections and of the international bibliography. They also observe that a considerable number of the rings published here are amuletic-apotropaic and point out the close contact between body and finger-rings for averting envy and the recovery from illness. Thanks to this first-published catalogue with high-quality photographs, we readily appreciate the evolution of their design in time as well as the aesthetic and the modest vanity of ordinary women.

The second section (“Working girls”, pp. 81-149), includes four contributions that study the ordinary women in the workplace. The contribution “Women and beekeeping - a forbidden liaison (?). Scattered evidence with emphasis on Christian era (Byzantine - Medieval culture)” (pp. 83-97) illuminates the female contribution to the rural activities, but mainly focuses on the interdiction of beekeeping to women. It is written by the editor of the volume who, as her *Byzantine Honey Culture* (2016) attests, has expertise in the field. She connects rural life, female biology, and social stereotypes with female labour. The paper adopts an anthropological-historical approach and is not geographically restrained to Byzantium, bringing information from the Middle East, W. Europe and N. Africa in support of its general statements and to help the reader get the required perspective. In particular, the

scholar skillfully employs a source-pluralist methodology and an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the emerging field of cultural entomology, which examines the impact of insects on the history of civilization. The author approaches the slowly evolving character of apiculture from prehistoric to modern times.

Beginning from Minoan and Mycenaean miniature art works, Germanidou examines artefacts and texts down to the pre-industrial societies of the Aimos Peninsula through an appropriate photographic material of illustrated manuscripts of Byzantium and of the West and through depictions of beehives of Modern rural Greece. She relates the interdiction of beekeeping to women to the biology and the secretions of the female body³ and its odours that irritate bees. In domestic beekeeping women could be present in a subordinate role, as it was a man's job. However, although the female beekeeping occupation was avoided, the polar pair bee – (chaste) woman received remarkable theological dimensions and a particular dogmatic background in early Christian patriarchal literature, influenced by a further fallacy concerning the breeding of bees, which were thought to remain virginal after reproduction.

Scarce Byzantine evidence seems to point to an interdiction of beekeeping by women that persisted longer in Eastern Christianity than in the West. Two manuscript illustrations represent women in Byzantine beekeeping: one in the scroll of the Latin hymn *Exultet* Pisa 2 (1070–1100) and the other in the Byzantine codex of the story of *Job* Parisinus graecus 135, f. 145v (1362), which confirm that women could be present as assistants, but not directly engaged in honey harvest. In Western art, the depiction of a single woman responsible for honey harvesting is found in 15th century; two manuscript images, one in a French *Dioscorides* (*Tractatus de Herbis*) from 1400, and the other in the Flemish manuscript *The Pontifical of Saint Mary* Ms. 400, of 1438–1460 or circa 1450. The illuminations support the argumentation. The author observes that from the 16th century, through early publications in the West, the image of the female ruler of the hive started being recognised, although in a conventional context. Due to the evolution of scientific data on beekeeping and socio-ideological changes of the following centuries, the exclusion of women from the beekeeping was abolished, as texts and representations from western and central Europe confirm. Germanidou stresses that even nowadays

3. Cf. EL. PΑPAGIANNI – SP. TROIANOS, Τα «γυναικεία πάθη» και οι νομοκανονικές πηγές, in: *Proceedings of the IX Panhellenic Historical Congress*, ed. AL. STAVRIDOU-ZAFRAKA – Z. TSIRPANLIS – G. PENTOGALOS, Thessalonike 1988, 29-46.

in the underdeveloped, rural sub-Saharan African communities honey harvesting is considered a male occupation.

The author concludes that only in the 20th century, ethnographical documentation shows that the ancient practices began to fade and practically disappear, mainly due to the smoking of bees. Paradoxically, the bee identified with the chaste woman and, in a wider sense, with Virgin Mary, to the exclusion of the sexually active women from honey harvesting, that reveals an oppressed female sexuality. She considers that in future a psychological approach of the topic may be in position to flesh out our knowledge.

Passing from a rural to an urban context, Konstantina Gerolymou's paper ("Eve at the forge. Byzantine women and manual labour. Comments on a rare iconographical theme and its connection", pp. 98-112), insightfully pieces together the evidence for female labour, in metalworking, a preponderantly male occupation. The author considers the depiction of Adam and Eve as a working couple in the light of gender studies and relates it to social reality. The scholar's goal is to present one aspect of the working reality of ordinary women, who assumed an ancillary role in forging. Gerolymou uses written sources of different periods that refer to the female involvement in metalworking and investigates the working life of Byzantine women from the lower classes, beginning with two pieces of evidence: the representations of the scenes from the Old and New Testaments that show either Adam and Eve (archetypical figure of the ordinary woman) or a pair of working artisans on boxes (offered most likely as wedding gifts intended for the safekeeping of precious objects). The first piece of visual evidence, Adam and Eve at the forge, coming from the Old Testament, a panel from an ivory box, dated to early in the 11th century, and the second relates to the New Testament and comes from a monumental painting of the monastery of Zemen in Bulgaria, dated to the second half of the 14th century. The author observes that during the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine periods, women are known not to have been prohibited from assisting their husbands in their professions but in general each woman's manual labour in practice conformed to her socio-economic situation, a conclusion reasonably supported by the evidence the author cites. Byzantine sources confirm instances of cooperation between spouses, known through some trade, e.g. *χάλκισσα*, female coppersmith.

She notes that the precise role of women and their degree of involvement in shared labour at the family workshop cannot be determined; it was purely ancillary as viewed from the standpoint of stereotypes about women, or completely active, if

not equivalent to that of their male partners. However, a woman's employment in a workshop did not necessarily signify her continual exposure to the community. Working class women appear more likely to have been recruited by the middle and especially the upper classes as staff for domestic or rural jobs, and less often for employment in a metalworking shop. Metalworkers normally belonged to a lower income class and would have difficulty maintaining additional workers. In Byzantine and post-Byzantine textual sources, women hired as staff for certain tasks are associated with wealthier employers or the state itself.

These considerations lead Gerolymou to conclude that women who did not have the economic means were not subject to the requisites for their class, and could have been led to undertake even more demanding manual work to contribute to their family's viability. She claims that women's participation occurred in the context of family businesses and although their role in the production process was restricted, their participation in this activity added to their multiple duties. Finally, it is suggested that since women's heavy work reflects reality, the existing stereotypes about their role and actual status should perhaps be treated with greater skepticism by researchers.

The next contribution ("Family status during the Late Byzantine period; evidence from MS Parisinus graecus", pp. 114-131), authored by the archaeologist Eleni Barmparitsa, focuses on the female labour in the household, the primary female sphere. She meticulously describes and analyses two-family dining scenes from the well-known *Book of Job* from the NLF: Parisinus graecus 135, ff. 9v, 18v, dated in 1361-1362, probably produced in Mistras, providing evidence of the appearance, status, and role of female family members during the Late Middle Ages. The influence of the Western European artistic tradition is obvious and comes as a result from the relationship with the Lusignan house in Cyprus and the Angevin dynasty that had extended its influence on the Peloponnese after 1267. The two scenes are characterized by the variety of iconographic types of men and women and numerous roles that emerge, which go beyond the standardized type found in the representation of dining scenes in Byzantine art.

The author outlines gender roles and family relationships on the basis of iconographic diversity, which indicates separate age groups and a sort of ranking in the relationships among both the female and male family members. The differences in appearance between the women suggest divisions based on age and status. Three distinctive female groups are depicted in the two miniatures: women with covered heads participating in the meal, women with uncovered heads serving dinner, and

women with covered and uncovered heads sitting together opposite the men. The uncovered heads may also indicate a private family meal and the youth of women. The two miniatures portray women with the status of the sister, and possibly of the wife, and of the servant and they reveal the importance of the various female members within the family (mother, sisters, wives), based on the firmly embedded priority –also reflected in legal terms– given by the Byzantine society to blood relations, as opposed to relations by marriage. For instance, the two women who are serving in f. 9v, whom we assume to be the spouses of the brothers, are portrayed on the same scale with the sisters and are dressed almost alike, suggesting a similar social status. The author combines the information from the family representation with the results of scholarship about family relationships and marriage⁴, as well as motherhood, which occupies a prominent role, both in the personal sphere and on the social stage. She points out that at family meals, both in the Byzantium and Western Europe, it was considered more appropriate for the men to sit apart from the women. This is attested on the miniature of the *Book of Job* revealing the inferior position of female over the male members of household.

Barmparitsa concludes that two scenes provide a rare visual testimony of an ordinary activity, which is difficult to reproduce in texts. These depictions capture aspects of Byzantine expectations of gender among the social elite and demonstrate traditional gender-based limitations within the hierarchical family structure, which is determined by the Christian Orthodox faith. The scenes suggest that, while women were experiencing patriarchal control of family life, enjoy diverse degrees of appreciation and self-will according to their age and role within the family. Motherhood seemed to be a passport to social recognition, while the servants were at the bottom of the social pyramid, and even then, the female ones were most probably placed in a position inferior to their male counterparts. The perceptive description of the family scenes makes the contribution also of interest in relation to performativity.

The last paper (“Ordinary Women in Byzantine funerary contexts from Greece; a view from the bones”, pp. 133-148) of the second section, standing out for its innovative approach, as the study to funeral archaeological data involves biology and is authored by the bioarchaeologist Paraskevi Tritsaroli. It uses the evidence of skeletons to illuminate everyday activities of women and their life conditions and

4. A. LAIOU, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XI-XIII siècles*, Paris 1992. Perhaps a reference to this study would be useful.

comes as a capstone to the section. In the frame of her investigation concerning the skeletons of the past populations as a reservoir of information about the conduct of people during their lives, the author focuses on female skeletal remains to interpret the women's health and status from the bioarcheological data from Byzantine sites in Greece and a case study from central Greece. The paper is accompanied by four tables of funerary finds from the early Christian to early Ottoman period, which help the reader to form a picture about the numbers of women, men and subadults from archaeological sites, visualise the research evidence and highlight the innovative methodology, stimulating the readers' interest. The first table presents the list of eighteen sites from Greece analyzed in the text; numbers of women, men and subadults; average of individuals per grave; stature of men and women. The second table presents the teeth affected with disease and prevailing disease rates. The third visualises the factors affecting the expression of dental diseases and cranial porosities on the basis of sex and rural or urban settings. The fourth table/graphic presents the number and the percentages of women, men and subadults in Early Christian, Byzantine, Late Byzantine, and Early Ottoman samples from the burials of 18 cities.

Her important conclusions merit mention: variations in the frequencies of skeletal health indicators between sexes and across settlements suggest more pronounced gender differences in the urban lifestyles than in the countryside. The hardships of the rural life led women to experience more frequent periods of stress early in life, but at the same time, they were able to enjoy the same diet as men, suggesting a certain degree of social equality. Women in the cities had probably better living conditions but a more unhealthy, inadequate diet and poor oral health than men or the average countryside inhabitants. She also concludes that gender differences in keeping with women's experiences are observed in burial practices. Mortuary treatment for women living in the countryside was more homogenous and followed similar customs with the rest of the population. The development of family bonds is highly noticeable through the practice of burying infants and adults together, thus underlining "the centrality of the family," not only to the village, but to the urban society as well.

The third section ("Earthly delights, holy concerns", pp. 151-183), as its title inventively suggests, includes two articles, one on the position of women in Early Patristic literature and another on the depiction of dance performances of the Ainoi. The first entitled "The 'transcendental' role of woman in Early Patristics (theological and philosophical insights" (pp. 153-161), is signed by Neneva Dimitrova, expert

on Byzantine philosophy, and examines the attitude of the early Church Fathers and of Maximus the Confessor towards women. Beginning with the observation that ‘bridging’ is the term that best describes how the Church Fathers consider women’s role as one of balancing the extremes of life, she analyses it in a well-structured, comprehensible, and well-documented paper. The place of women as models of behavior in the Church Father’s writings is justified by their perception of woman as ‘passive’ participant in the family circle, for which reason they eulogised their mothers, sisters, and the women who inspired them. Initially Church authorities grounded their views on Pauline statements, but gradually the injunction for female submission becomes bolder.

Concerning the consistency and justification of the Christian attitude, Dimitrova refers to the Alexandrian school, which promoted gender equality, while the Antiochian School held that only man was created in the image of Christ. She calls attention to the contradictory Church views of the genders. Despite this inconsistency and the doctrinal centrality and spiritual magnitude of the Holy Virgin, they all look up to the Mother of God, through whom Christian women gain a higher status, still the woman is feared and discouraged from male occupations. They have male approval as heroines but not as authors, mentioning in this respect the exceptional treatise of Eupraxia Komnene on medicine, on which would be interesting to have more information, as it is not widely known⁵. She notes that

5. K. VARZOS, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, Thessaloniki 1984, v. 1. 343-344, Dobroděja Mstislavna was the first wife of the co-emperor Alexios Komnenos (1106-1142), son of John II Komnenos. She married Alexios Komnenos in 1122. She was a daughter of the prince of Kiev Mstislav (1125-1132). According to Varzos, after her coronation, she took the name Eirene, but the right one is Eudokia, see also *ibid* 491 n. 12., N. PUSHKAREVA, *Women in Russian history from the tenth to the twentieth century* (English transl. E. Levin), New-York - London 1997, 16, 27, it is noted that she has studied Galen’s works that she translated into Old East Slavic. Her treatise bears the title “Ointments” (Alimna) and is the first of its genre written by a woman author. It survives in fragments in the Medici Library in Florence. On Eudokia see *Prosopography of the Byzantine World, 1025-1204 ‘Eudokia’* 112 <http://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/Eudokia/112/>. Cf. P. GAUTIER, *Le Typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator*, *REB* 32 (1974), 1-145, esp. 43, 221-222, 42 n. 5. J. THOMAS – A. CONSTANTINIDES-HERO, *Byzantine Monastic Foundations Documents*, *Pantocrator Typikon*, v. 2, number 28, 743, n. 8. Other women authors selectively *PmbZ* 3637 (Kasia/Ikasia/Eikasia/Kassiane), *PLP*, 10943 (Theodora Kantakuzene Raulaina Palaiologina Komnene). *PLP*, 30396 (Eirene Choumnaina Palaiologina Laskarina). On Eirene Choumnaina cf. D. NICOL, *The Byzantine Lady: Ten Portraits 1250-1500*, Cambridge 1994, 59-70.

women were excluded from instructing on religious matters, despite their voluntary assistance in Church. The author continues with underlining the Church Fathers' attitude to women in everyday life focusing on the '*patristic*' versus '*matristics*' arguments and positions from Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50AD) and Clement of Alexandria (150-215) down to Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) and Basil the Great. Established positions in ascetic and monastic contexts of the fourth and fifth centuries are integrated in the discussion. Under this influence, treatises on virginity of that period employ the concept of asceticism to address the issue of appropriate behaviours and personal moral qualities. Maximus Confessors' theological view of woman as a transcending bond is explained by stressing that, except for a Trinitarian context, the mediatory role of woman between the immanent and the transcendent forges her unique position of transforming "extremes" into "means". The extract cited is helpful, though only cited in English.

Despite this support for the pivotal balancing role of women, the Christian Church has lived with a Trinitarian view of reality for most of its theological life, which fits well into a masculine mentality. The inevitable consequence is the exclusion of the feminine element. Nevertheless, Dimitrova offsets this position with a quotation from J. Herrin on the relative social prominence of Byzantine women when compared to their Western counterparts and another from S. Runciman that ponders if it was female strength that lay at the root of the empire's longevity.

The next contribution of the third section, authored by the archaeologist Magdalini Parcharidou under the title "Interpreting the female dances of Αἴβοι (Laudes) in Post-Byzantine painting" (pp. 163-183), investigates the depiction of the dances of Αἴβοι by a female group in post-byzantine society in the light of gender studies and falls under the heading of "Earthy delights," even though the religious element is present. Initially, it is explained that Αἴβοι is the Greek for the three *Laudate* Psalms (148-150). Their content is a doxology of God by all creatures and especially by humans for the immortality and the harmony that unites human beings, and they are depicted as verses from the Early Christian period. The dance performance of the Αἴβοι is rare in Byzantine iconography. There exist only four exemplars, three of which in illustrated MSS: Utrecht (Rijksuniversiteit MS. 32, c. 820-830), Stuttgart Württemberg Landesbibliothek (f. 23, c. 830) and St Petersburg Leningrad, Public Library (MS. 1252 FVI, c.1397) and one from an ivory relief from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (BZ. 1936.24, c. 1403-1404).

Parcharidou establishes a typology of individual and communal dance that will sustain a reading of the images at the level of expressive detail, on the strength

of a connection between imagery and contemporary practice. In particular, in the Utrecht Psalter (f. 83v) scene three young women musicians, with long loose hair, play lyres and drums, while moving rhythmically towards a church, interpreted as the Sion of the Psalms verses ‘149.1.3’. The Stuttgart Psalter depicts the hieratic movement of a young woman with long loose hair and maracas (*σειστορα*) in front of a church, while in the lower register dances a young boy with a scarf (*Psalm* 150, f. 163r). On the ivory *pyxis*, the two emperors and their families are depicted together with seven musicians and two female dancers who enliven the festivities. The photographs depicting the dance of Αἴβοι support the argumentation. It is observed that in Byzantine monumental painting female dancers are not employed in the depiction of the Αἴβοι, but in the Late Post-Byzantine period, dance appears mixed. The typology is studiously worked backwards from reliable ethnographic accounts of later centuries. Through a well-evidenced description and analysis of the earliest portrayals of the all-female dances of Αἴβοι from the mid-16th century in monasteries in Greece and Serbia, it is convincingly argued that these reflect the social conditions and the real dances of the era, thus a connection between depicted dance and contemporary life is established.

Two types of dances are apparent: group dances and individual ones. The first one expresses the community and its concerns. The second originates from the dancing women depicted at banquets, festivals, or celebrations, such as the wedding ceremonies on Byzantine illuminated manuscripts and minor art objects. The group female dance is usually done in a straight line or circle, as a natural extension of the flow of the Psalm verses. The author notes that, based on the way the dancers are linked together, the dances, such as knit (*δετός*), double (*διπλός*) and *ζωναράδικος*, are identified. She combines them with analogous representations of the 18th and 19th centuries. Starting from the 17th cent., based on the way dancers move, the most common dance is *the syrtos* and its variants. It is observed that clothing, jewellery and accessories of the female dancers, most importantly the scarf, an accessory with many levels of significance, and the headscarf, supplement the symbolism of the dance and relate to the meaning of the Αἴβοι. The luxurious clothes reflect the social status and wealth of the participants. Especially the headscarf was mandatory, as it answered to the Church Fathers’ precept for female modesty, but with the passage of time, it becomes an object of elegance and token of prosperity. The jewellery for its part stresses the economic and social power of its owner.

It is remarked that the emotion of natural and spiritual joy is often restrained

and inner and expressed by the elegant female figures and their outfit. However, occasionally, joy is expressed by intense movements, copious emotion and purity, and hair hung loose by the excitement of the dance. Sometimes this excitement is ingeniously intensified by the notional sound of objects, such as small bells. Outfit and movement do not reveal the body of the dancers, which with the exception of the bare arms, head, and neck of the women, is always covered from head to toe, and barely discernible under the clothes. This attitude is interpreted from the point of view of patristic sources that negatively refer to Salome's dance as an example of immoral act.

It is noted that the spectacle of the dance is accompanied by musicians. Female musicians, even though rarely attested, reflect the celebratory mood in a family or community setting (e.g. a female drummer in the monastery of Koutloumousiou on Mount Athos) and indicate the female participation in the patriarchal society in the Post-Byzantine times.

Parcharidou concludes that the dance of the *Aĩvoi*, despite its distinct relationship with historical reality, maintains its strong symbolic character, the collective joy of the feasts of the Community as well as that of humankind and of all creatures. It aims at the solemn, yet joyous, glorification of God and at this absolute need for union with the Divine, subjugates the beauty of clothing, sanctity, or vivacity of movements, and certainly, space and time of its realisation and its representation usually found in the narthex or in the 'liti' of monasteries. She indicates that older perceptions and habits about this dance continue from the Roman period through Byzantium down to our day, in Greece and even on the Black Sea. She concludes that these *Ainoi* are the dance analogue of the psalm verses, where movement, costume, jewellery, and iconography of the female dancers reflect perceptions and habits at the time of the production of the artefact. She points out that the '*Aĩvoi*' dances associate with the Resurrection and its symbolism with the joy of life. Her well-argued, insightfully interpreted and interdisciplinary contribution of female participation in '*Aĩvoi*' dance indicates the ability of nature for rebirth and evolutionary continuity and would also interest scholars studying performance, performativity, emotions and soundscapes.

The fourth section ("An ethnographic glimpse", pp. 185-213) includes two studies from an ethnographic viewpoint and insightfully connects the Byzantine attitude towards secular women with the Post-Byzantine one. Sofia Menenakou's paper ("Illustrating the everyday life of women in Mani during the Post-Byzantine period. A small contribution to the subject", pp. 187-199), starting from existent

descriptions of women's life in Mani, attempts to work back to aspects of their lives that within reason were preserved from an earlier age, the 18th and 19th century. The choice of Mani comes as a result of its historical and geographical peculiarities that led to distinctive ethics, and it is pointed out that the way Maniot women are represented as protagonists in common domestic activities, religious scenes, patronage and sponsorship, extends the Byzantine past or traces its ethnographic impact.

Her sources are varied; church murals and architectural characteristics, dedicatory inscriptions, prayers and travellers' accounts dating mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries. According to Menenakou, spinning was very popular and widely practiced by women in Mani up to the third quarter of the 20th century, as was tailoring. She clarifies the phenomenon with reference to the sewing machine, which was an indispensable part of the household of a woman about to be married and many young women would go to seamstresses to pick up tailoring to be able to make or repair clothes for the family. Another important source of information for the life of women in Mani are the laments (*μοιρολόγια*). Through these, the author traces the care of the dead, a female contribution from Byzantine times. The archaeologist draws important conclusions such as that the upbringing of children, spinning, weaving, and tailoring were among their common cares for their beloved ones, tracking their routes back to at least Byzantine times. Women and men were separated in all their activities but simultaneously they were co-operating; war is an excellent example of this co-acting. This fact reveals that when circumstances called for it, women rejected their passivity and they assumed leadership or engaged in fighting as the equal counterparts of men. Social control was exerted over their lives and this control was reinforced by the social organization in 'clans'. Finally, Menenakou concludes that dedicatory inscriptions or prayers reveal that women could be patrons in their own right only when they were nuns or the heads of their households, possibly if they were widows. The connection of the evidence dated in 18th and 19th century with the Byzantine culture is one of the virtues of the paper, among others.

The last contribution, signed by Andromachi Economou, specialist in Folklore studies, bearing the title "Women's work in pre-industrial rural Greece. An ethnographic point of view" (pp. 201-213), is the culmination not only to this section but to the whole volume, as it reveals the continuity of the role of secular women. The focus is on the presentation of female labour in agriculture, resin collection, livestock and silkworm farming, but also in activities such as silk production textile

weaving, cheese making. The required fieldwork lasted from 1980 to 2020 and was carried out in various regions of Greece and on different ethnic- cultural groups in the Greek territory; Arvanites, Vlachs, Sarakatsans. Economou introduces her study with reference to the “long term” societies of Braudel’s theory of defining historical phenomena in time, to highlight the close connection of different social and cultural structures that manifest ‘continuity’ between Byzantine and Post-Byzantine times. She deduces that the labour of women and children (boys and girls) remained complementary, unpaid, and unrecognized as such in the pre-industrial agricultural Greek society, although it supported the livelihood and the social reproduction of the rural household. Especially, during the late Post-War period (from the mid-20th century), what with the mechanization of the farming sector, the rural exodus and urbanization, female labour became part of the family capital, maintaining largely its “informal” and underrated character. Another conclusion is that in the period following the military junta of 1967-1974 until now, female labour in the agricultural sector was mainly focused on business activities (agrotourism, agri-food businesses, handicrafts) while it is totally absent from the farming sector where it is replaced by economic migrants. This is a contribution of remarkable breadth and essential for an appreciation of the continuity of Post-Byzantine society and family relations and their transformation in the mid-twentieth century. The abundant photographic material supports the argumentation and offers insight into the agricultural female activities of Byzantine era and their continuity.

Finally, the volume is accompanied by an index (pp. 215-218); It has been produced with intelligence, but it would be more useful if it referenced the conceptual development of articles consistently.

To conclude, given the growing scientific interest in gender studies, the present volume undoubtedly constitutes an essential contribution to the field of the ordinary Byzantine women, which is still under investigation. The interdisciplinary and modern approach of the papers, that interact with each other, helps bring to light and focus on various aspects of everyday life of secular women from the late antiquity to the post-Byzantine era. Thus, the dedication “Giving voice to those who remain unheard” (p. v), is completely borne out, thanks to the well-documented, convincing, and remarkable contributions that give voice to the “silent” secular women in various aspects of everyday life from a modern scholarly perspective. The papers convincingly show how ideology, objects’ agency, social roles, and status inform social and cultural definitions of femininity in Byzantium and beyond, highlighting aspects of the material culture. A variety of sources and

approaches motivate this collective female work that broadens our horizons in this fascinating area of Byzantine culture. Simultaneously, it provides the motivation for further investigation in several fields: Early Byzantine girlhood through burial archaeology and material culture, psychoanalytic approaches to interpret bee-keeping, the treatment of existing stereotypes about the role of women and while in many instances their actual status emerges varied and nuanced, inter-family relationships, typified in the usage of finger-rings, the expression of emotions and the performative aspect in the depiction of dance, the realisation that female options followed changes in social status, artistic and ethnographical research for women in post-Byzantine era and modern Greece until the middle of the 20th century. Sofia Germanidou responded felicitously to the editorial task, achieving consistent scholarship, uniform well-documented and convincing papers, amply supported both from primary sources and secondary modern bibliography. As a result individually and collectively the essays of the volume offer insight and make a meaningful contribution to the field.

The fluid, appealing language, and the pleasant style of the papers constitute additional advantages and aid the study of the volume by experts and the wider public. The considered visual documentation and careful selection of supplementary photographic material from manuscripts, wall-paintings, minor-arts objects, photographic archives (including maps, tables, and plans) assist the reader to visualize the “silent women”; they flesh out the modern scientific approach and achieve elegance in a scholarly publication. Junior scholars and the general public will find in it a useful introduction to gender studies and cultural archaeology in Byzantium. As an ordinary woman and a Byzantinist, I am strongly persuaded that this journey is worth the while, and I would highly recommend to the public to enjoy this fascinating scholarly achievement.

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