

Gender and Byzantine Studies from the Viewpoint of Methodology

The following article on problems associated with the methodology of Byzantine studies is written from the perspective of a research project entitled *The Image of the Woman and the Cult of Mary*.¹ It is concerned, in the first place, with the historiography of Byzantine studies on women, because the methodological problems encountered in the project are closely connected to such gender research. The project approaches the subject from a gender framework, but the problems that it deals with relate to the study of social history and of literature and are focused on the question of interpretation. The aim of this article is to assess the state of the theoretical and methodological discussion of gender within Byzantine studies. Therefore, before discussing the project itself, I will survey the study on women in Byzantium to shed light on the present situation of gender research within the field of Byzantine studies.

THE PICTURE OF THE WOMAN IN BYZANTIUM

The keyword "Women" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (1991) provides in five columns a picture of the Byzantine woman, the main points of which are listed here:²

1. Byzantine attitudes towards women were ambivalent. On the one hand, the church fathers assumed female inferiority and essential weakness, and perceived women to be the instrument of the devil: Eve disobeyed God's first commandment and was responsible for the Fall of Man. Accordingly, the position of women in the world had to be inferior to that of men. On the other hand, the church proclaimed women's spiritual equality with man, through her being created in God's image and redeemed in the same way as man. Women were equal to men in martyrdom, a few good wives and mothers attained sanctity, and the cult of the Virgin Mary was extremely popular.
2. The major function of women was marriage and the procreation of children, in contradiction to the extremist idea that virginity is one of the main virtues. Motherhood (divinized in the cult of the Theotokos), one of the few acceptable Christian roles for women, was glorified in panegyrics. In general women led secluded lives at home. In addition to childbearing, the second female obligation was the maintenance of the household. Despite their theoretical subjugation to their husbands, women had important

¹ The project, financed by the Austrian *Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung*, is presented on the online newsletter of the University of Vienna (<http://www.dieuniversitaet-online.at>, 16.8.04): Forschungsprojekt: Frauenbild und Marienkult in Byzanz.

² A. P. KAZHDAN et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium III*. New York–Oxford 1991.

rights and enjoyed respect. The primary economic activities were those of “distaff and loom”, that is spinning, weaving, and making cloth. Women were deeply involved in retail trade, especially selling foodstuffs.

3. A few women from imperial and aristocratic families played a significant role in the social, political, cultural, and religious life of the empire. The role of women increased during periods of crisis: they were active in religious conflicts (e.g., in the resistance to Iconoclasm) and in political rebellions; in certain cases they participated in the defense of besieged cities.
4. Although elementary education was available for girls, female literacy was not very common.
5. The scarcity of evidence makes it difficult to ascertain changes in the position of women, especially since the data refer primarily to the upper stratum of Byzantine society. In the late Roman period, women evidently maintained relative freedom. After the mid-seventh century the empire was preoccupied by the response to military threats in which women necessarily had little or no role. The situation changed by the end of the eleventh century: the bellicose Komnenoi acknowledged the important role of their women.
6. Representation in Art: Byzantine women are generally represented as homogeneous, sexless creatures. From the 7th to 11th centuries, women’s bodies are either masked entirely by their clothing or are parodies of human form. Like males, female nudes are utterly distorted. The reedlike proportions of women in much 14th century painting are also applied to male figures.

This presentation will hardly surprise anyone within the field of Byzantine scholarship; this is the stereotypical, one-sided and petrified image of the Byzantine woman. The features of the collective picture of the Byzantine women are well-known, they are “facts” that are met in the sources. Of course, it is evident that the description generalizes to an extreme, because it seeks common explanatory factors for women and the conditions of their lives during an enormously long time period within a gigantic imperium, whose borderline changed greatly. Be that as it may, this reflects the most important issues that were identified in the Byzantine study on women during the 1980s and this is evident from the reference literature. Thus the discussion of women indirectly mirrors the interests of individual researchers, too.

RESEARCH

The sum of knowledge in “Women” shows that substantial lacunae in our knowledge about women in Byzantium continue to exist. Nearly two decades ago, in her article “Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women”, Angeliki E. Laiou wrote: “Almost every question which may be posed – whether relating to the legal status of women, or their economic activities, or their ideology – cannot yet be answered definitively.”³ And at the same time Catia S. Galatariotou began her article, “Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender”, with the words: “Byzantine women’s history, Byzantine attitudes towards women and men, Byzantine conceptions

³ A. E. LAIOU, Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women. *Byzantinische Forschungen* 9 (1985) 59–102, loc. cit. 59.

of gender: that these are all areas still awaiting their researcher is a fact both obvious and well known.”⁴ These remarks about the state of the Byzantine study on women are still valid in spite of the work that has been undertaken in the meantime.

While the “Women” of *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* represents the status questionis with regard to research, the *Bibliography on Women in Byzantium 2003* represents the interests of researchers, at least as far as the titles would suggest.⁵ In addition to the list of translated primary sources (altogether forty items), the bibliography comprises 26 pages of research literature with several already outdated works (c.f. Charles Diehl’s, *Figures Byzantines*, Paris 1906; English translation 1963). The works included are not annotated (with a few exceptions), while the bibliography tends to merge with a larger bibliography on women and gender roles in early Christianity. For instance, the classic gender study, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, does not deal with Byzantine women, but appears on the list for other reasons. In spite of this, we may hazard several observations about the interests of researchers in Byzantine women’s study.

First, judging from the dates of publication, interest in Byzantine women emerged in the 1980s. Second, the research interest of Byzantinists seems to have been concentrated to the fates of imperial women and to the *vitae* of female saints, a tendency which has been continued. Third, the “woman” appears relatively often as the subject of the study. The “nature” of the woman, her sex and sexuality and body, and her gender are treated in various ideological and social frameworks of different periods, from late Antiquity to the fall of Constantinople. It is plain that the survival and availability of sources correlates with the favouring of female aristocrats and female saints, because no records of other, ordinary women are preserved. Nevertheless, on the basis of the dates of publication it appears that there has been a growing trend towards gender study. A collection of papers from the 1997, *Women, Men and Eunuchs. Gender in Byzantium*, edited by Liz James,⁶ is the first book of its kind and until now the only one in the Byzantine field which investigates different methodological approaches.

In light of the approach of *Gender in Byzantium*, it is especially interesting to take notice of what James says in her introduction. She describes the three stages of feminist scholarship: the rediscovery of “lost women” or biographies of individual women; the placing of women in their socio-economic context; and the movement from “women” to “gender”.⁷ Considering the contents of the volume, she states that “most of the chapters consider the ways in which language is used in marking out gender”.⁸ In reflecting on the aim of the joint enterprise James writes that “an investigation of Byzantine women has to be

⁴ C. S. GALATARIOU, Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1984–85) 55–94, loc. cit. 55.

⁵ A.-M. TALBOT, [http://www.doaks.org/women in byzantium.html](http://www.doaks.org/women%20in%20byzantium.html).

⁶ L. JAMES (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs. Gender in Byzantium*. London–New York 1997.

⁷ *Gender in Byzantium* xi–xvii, referred to in Rebecca KRAWIEC, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford 2002, 8: “Because my study examines women in a little-known community, it must necessarily go through similar stages [described by James] even while incorporating the scholarly developments that have occurred.”

⁸ *Gender in Byzantium* xx.

undertaken in parallel with an investigation of Byzantine construction of gender. We do need to continue to look at what women did in Byzantium. Once we have this empirical evidence, however, we must do something with it.”⁹ And she finishes with the claim: “Women alone are not enough in understanding women’s lives in Byzantium.”¹⁰ She hits the point. The benefits of constant observation of gender we see, e.g., in Judith Herrin’s work, *Women in Purple. Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, a reconstruction of three women’s lives.¹¹

Although the bibliography suggests that there was a growing trend towards the study of gender, this is not confirmed by the accounts of the latest Byzantine congresses. As a matter of fact, in the light of the proceedings of the XIX and XX international congresses of Byzantine studies the interest in women and gender study seems quite modest. According to the abstracts of the congress in Copenhagen (1996) a session on “Women in Byzantium” was held with one communication by Thalia Gouma-Peterson. The title indicates its subject matter: “Byzantine Studies and Feminist Methodologies: Passages to the Material in Anna Kommena’s Alexiad”.¹² Central to this investigation was “a consideration of power relationship between the gendered categories of imperial men and imperial women in Byzantine culture”.¹³ This was the only contribution to studies on women and gender. Two communications on medical history, dealing with gynaecological texts on the topic “Birth, Death, Health and Illness in Byzantium”, did not clarify women’s lives but were rather concerned with manuscript tradition.¹⁴ Among the round tables’ abstracts an interesting female topic appears, “The Bride Shows at the Byzantine Court – History or Fiction?” However, as the title suggests, the phenomenon was examined from the point of view of historical credibility.¹⁵ Thus the focus at that round table was not on the woman.

The pre-acts of the congress in Paris (2001) present the following abstracts of communications that can be considered studies of women:

A. “Women’s Petitions in Late Antiquity” by Roger Bagnall. The author examines the linguistic usage of the petitions written on papyrus.¹⁶

B. “La femme défunte à Byzance. Quelques remarques sur les éloges funèbres de femmes” by Marina Loukaki. The author points out to the necessity of re-examining the genre of funeral eulogies for women.¹⁷

C. “Thecla and Egeria: The Self-Awareness of Women in Late Antiquity” by Hiroaki Adachi. The author presents textual testimonies supporting his

⁹ Ibid. xxi.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Cf. J. HERRIN, *Sources and Notes*, in: EAD., *Women in Purple. Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*. London 2001, 258–262.

¹² TH. GOUMA-PETERSON, *Byzantine Studies and Feminist Methodologies: Passages to the Material in Anna Kommena’s Alexiad*, in: FLEDELIUS, *Byzantium* 2341.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, *Passages gynécologiques du texte grec des Ephodia*, in: FLEDELIUS, *Byzantium* 2331; E. R. GÓMEZ, *Once upon a Text: Metrodoros’s Work on the feminine Diseases: Tradition, Assimilation and Dissemination of the ancient medical Theories in Byzantine Medicine*, in: FLEDELIUS, *Byzantium* 2332.

¹⁵ J. HERRIN – L. RYDEN, (moderators), *The Bride Shows at the Byzantine Court – History or Fiction?*, in: K. FLEDELIUS – P. SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Byzantium. Identity, Image, Influence. Major Papers*. Copenhagen 1996, 506.

¹⁶ R. BAGNALL, *Women’s Petitions in Late Antiquity*, in: G. DAGRON – B. MONDRAIN (eds.), *XXe Congrès international des études byzantines. Pré-actes II*. Paris 2001, 159.

¹⁷ M. LOUKAKI, *La femme défunte à Byzance. Quelques remarques sur les éloges funèbres de femmes*, in: *Pré-actes III* 49.

view that “folklorist theory may offer a key to an understanding of the self-awareness of women”.¹⁸

D. “Women in social space in 6th century Byzantium” by Jeanette Lindblom. The author investigates the difference between ideals and practical reality, evident in historical sources.¹⁹

E. “Women and the right to possess land (κατέχειν καὶ νέμεσθαι γῆν) in the 13th and the 14th centuries” by Triandafyllitsa Maniati-Kokkini. The author provides legal evidence for women possessing land and presents a hypothesis concerning female owners.²⁰

Undoubtedly, these papers focus on women, but whether all of them are really explorations within a gender framework is a matter of definition. A gender approach requires reflection and analysis within a social context, but in this respect, with the exception of Lindblom, the authors do not provide enough information on their theoretical premises. Here I would like to add that the congress programme for 2006 in London does not include the topic “gender” at all.

THE FUTURE OF GENDER STUDY WITHIN BYZANTINE STUDIES

Why, then, do I consider this matter to be so important? Because outside Byzantine scholarship gender is known as “a useful category of historical analysis”.²¹ It is already well established among the methodological apparatus of ancient historians and classical philologists. Discussion on it is absolutely vital and it is one reason why German-speaking scholars representing all main research fields of Antiquity organize seminars on this topic and publish their results.²² What is wrong with the Byzantinists? Are Byzantine scholars familiar with the difficulties involved in gender study? That would explain why Byzantine gender study is still in its infancy.

The aim of this article is to pay attention to the state of theoretical and methodological discussion within Byzantine studies: is it really up-to-date? Let us consider the following claim of Ramsay MacMullen, a historian who seems to share the methodological convictions of many researchers within Byzantine studies: “Nothing said about the mentalities, behaviour, norms, or

¹⁸ H. ADACHI, Thecla and Egeria: The Self-Awareness of Women in Late Antiquity, in: *Pré-actes III* 112. The Adachi refers to Steven Davies, Dennis R. MacDonald and Virginia Burrus, who have considered the story of Thecla as a good example of women’s folk stories that praise their autonomy and independence against the ruling male gender system.

¹⁹ J. LINDBLOM, Women in social space in 6th century Byzantium, in: *Pré-actes III* 175.

²⁰ T. Maniati-kokkini, Women and the right to possess land (κατέχειν καὶ νέμεσθαι γῆν) in the 13th and the 14th centuries, in: *Pré-actes III* 203.

²¹ J. W. SCOTT, Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. *American Historical Review* 91 (1986) 1053–75; EAD., *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York 1988, 28–50.

²² H. HARICH-SCHWARZBAUER – TH. SPÄTH, (organizers), *Räume und Geschlechter in der Antike. Gender Studies in den Altertumswissenschaften*, Castelen/Augst bei Basel, 30. 6.–2. 7. 04. The publications of the previous seminars are: B. FEICHTINGER – G. WÖHRLE (eds.), *Gender Studies in den Altertumswissenschaften: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen (IPHIS. Beiträge zu altertumswissenschaftlichen Genderforschung 1)*. Trier 2002; TH. FUHRER – S. ZINSLI (eds.), *Gender Studies in den Altertumswissenschaften: Rollenkonstrukte in antiken Texten (IPHIS. Beiträge zu altertumswissenschaftlichen Genderforschung 2)*. Trier 2003. The next “Gender Tagung” with a wide-ranging programme will be held in Berlin in February 2005.

proclivities of millions of people can be taken seriously without proofs proportionate to the size of the sample. One individual from the past, one single thing said or done, no matter how striking or evocative, can support no general truth.” Accordingly, the author continues: “So in the notes that follow, I have tried hard to supply enough material to match my broad themes and interpretations.”²³

In my experience the position of MacMullen represents the way of thinking of the majority of Byzantine scholars with regard to interpretation: truth is derived from “proofs proportionate to the size of sample”. This is a major issue because it concerns the method of interpretation which is used in all fields of Byzantine scholarship. It concerns the comparative method, which actually is the only method of interpretation that Byzantinists, as heirs of classical philology, know. Yet for a researcher on women in Byzantium, this method is as bad a premise for examination as are the insufficient and androcentric sources. Fortunately, there are other interpretative methods which are not based on the belief that historical facts drawn from the sources are representative only if they are compared to facts drawn from other sources. Of course, the comparative method implies that the interpreter has a basic knowledge about the social or cultural phenomenon that is under interpretation. But where does this basic knowledge come from? Of course, it derives from Byzantine scholarship. Consequently, the more a Byzantinist is familiar with the sources, the more competent is their interpretation of them. This practice can only lead to a dead end, for familiarity with the sources is no guarantee of a competent interpretation. What Byzantinists need is an acquaintance with at least some modern literary theories. Margaret Mullett suggests this politely and with great sophistication in her article, “New Literary History and the History of Byzantine Literature: A Worthwhile Endeavour?”²⁴

The major problems for the study of ancient/medieval/Byzantine women are repeatedly said to be the scarcity of sources and the androcentric texts. However, we have to see that basically the problem is not one of source scarcity or biased texts. The fundamental problem is related to what the historian considers as evidence. And that is why the issue is intrinsically methodological and theoretical. For example, for scholars whose disposition is empirical or positivistic, to whom evidence means statistical facts and quantitatively measurable things and phenomena, the insufficient source material provides no reasonable starting point for any study. For scholars to whom evidence is not “dictated by survival of sources”,²⁵ studying women is easier. So, the source problem is both absolute and relative at the same time. In every case, studying Byzantine women demands profound theoretical and methodological reflection because the premises are unfavourable.²⁶

The work that has been undertaken recently shows that every attempt is welcome because it removes the conceptual blinkers that restrain us from see-

²³ R. MACMULLEN, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eight Centuries*. New Haven–London 1997, 161 (forward to Notes).

²⁴ M. MULLETT, *New Literary History and the History of Byzantine Literature: A Worthwhile Endeavour?*, in: P. ODORICO – P. A. AGAPITOS (eds.), *Pour une “nouvelle” histoire de la littérature byzantine. Problèmes, méthodes, approches, propositions (Dossiers Byzantins 1)*. Actes du Colloque international philologique, Nicosie–Chypre, 25–28 mai 2000. Paris 2002, 37–60, loc. cit. 38.

²⁵ D. C. SMYTHE, *Women as Outsiders*, in: *Gender in Byzantium 147–167*, loc. cit. 150.

²⁶ A fine example of a thorough reflection: A. CAMERON, *Women in Ancient Culture and Society*. *Der Altsprachliche Unterricht* 32/2 (1989) 6–17.

ing in the sources things other than we expect to find. The series of seven papers focussing on women that are included in *Gender in Byzantium* demonstrate the validity of the point: a new approach or a new methodology brings to view aspects of the lives of Byzantine women that otherwise would have remained undiscovered. In this connection Averil Cameron suggests a programme of research on women's lives which would focus on the linguistic usages related to the Cult of Mary. "It would be important for the study of Byzantine gender if the full range of Byzantine linguistic usages in relation to the Virgin were brought into conjunction with the relevant iconography. Gender messages are not usually consistent, and those sent out by the image of the Mother of God are no exception in having both their positive and their negative sides."²⁷ Cameron's proposal to examine women's life through the linguistic usages related to the Cult of Mary, have given an impetus to the realization of an idea, already in search of its form and content, that hymnography could be exploited as the primary source for a study on women. The abstract of the project, which began in June 2003, is as follows:

THE IMAGE OF THE WOMAN AND THE CULT OF MARY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMAGE OF THE
WOMAN AS MIRRORED IN THE BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY OF THE PRE-ISLAMIC
PERIOD

Considered in the historical context, the influence of the cult of Mary brought about a real change in the social position of the Byzantine woman. The aim of the project is to use the cult of Mary to examine how the image of the woman changed over the course of the centuries during which the value system of Hellenistic society was transformed under the influence of Christianity. The project will thus seek to explain the extent to which hymnography as a propaganda tool with a broad influence on the masses reflected the development of the image of the woman, which can be reconstructed using other sources.

The subject is to be studied in the context of linguistic usage related to the cult of Mary. Hymnography will be compared both with types of sources that depict actual circumstances and those which formed the normative, i.e. dogmatic-ideological and legal, framework of women's position in Byzantine life. Relevant references will be extracted from the sources by using concepts that correlate with the cult of Mary and the images of women. This method will endeavour to develop a manner of reading and interpretation that will act as a guidepost for future Byzantine scholarship. While adhering to the strict standards of classical philology, it is hoped that through critical "cross reading" this new method will lead to the systematic identification of new fields of information. By overcoming – at least in part – the male-dominated confines of Byzantine writers and through systematic and critical questioning, the project aims to depict the development of the mentality and situation of Byzantine women, without regard to specific social groups, in a manner which not only provides more information but is also richer in nuances than heretofore. The result will be to correct the stereotypical, one-sided and petrified image of the Byzantine woman.

²⁷ A. CAMERON, Sacred and Profane Love: Thoughts on Byzantine Gender, in: *Gender in Byzantium* 1–23, loc. cit. 18.

BACKGROUND

In general the cult of Mary is useful for gender studies. In feminist theology and women's studies the mariological concepts that were developed in patristic reflection are particularly popular. The most important are the "Eve-Mary", "Virgin-Mother" and "Queen-Servant". Doubtless these parallels and the teaching on Mary that was transmitted by church fathers and monastic and ascetic authorities reduced the intellectual sphere of women to a minimum. The antithesis "Eve-Mary" implicates that women, as Eve's descendants, are corrupted and the source of every evil, whereas, on account of Mary, they are the giver of the new and uncorrupted life. This antithesis points to an important aspect of women's relation to Mary, but it does not capture the fullness of the life of any woman. These and similar parallels do not reveal, for example, in which way and to what extent if any Mary was internalized as a model by Byzantine women. For the Virgin Mary was only gradually constructed in religious discourse as a model for women to imitate. Over time, this discourse emphasized three distinctive stages: At first Christian had to argue for the virginity of Mary against the unbelieving Jews and pagans. Then the virginity of Mary became the matter of speculation in Christian dogmatic disputes. Finally it was fought over in the controversies about Mary's right to the title of "Theotokos". It was during these phases that the linguistic usage related to Mary was developed both substantially and rhetorically.²⁸ At the same time the veneration of Mary and devotion to her grew into a cult that affected Byzantine society on all levels.

HYPOTHESIS

Judging from the extraordinary role of the Virgin in Byzantine religiosity, which is richly documented in the sources (e.g. in the period of iconoclasm), we may readily assume that the cult of Mary had an influence on women's thoughts and notions about themselves, although we do not know how the cult originated and developed.²⁹ Then, considered in the historical context, in the course of the centuries the influence of the cult of Mary brought about a real change in the social position of the Byzantine woman. There is no theory about this correlation as there is no "full theory of the potential role of women in large in pre-industrial societies".³⁰ However, the hypothesis of the influence of the Marian cult on women's social position conforms to the views of historians such as Laiou: "It would be a grave error to assume that the position of women remained frozen in a society which underwent fundamental changes over the thousand years of its existence. It is, on the contrary, quite clear that the role and function of women evolved over time."³¹ There is every reason to

²⁸ Cf. A. CAMERON, *Virginity as Metaphor*, in: EAD. (ed.), *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*. London 1989, 181–205; EAD., *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–Oxford 1991, 165–180; L. M. PELTOMAA, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (*The Medieval Mediterranean* 35). Leiden–Boston–Cologne 2001, 101–113.

²⁹ L. M. PELTOMAA, *Towards the Origins of the History of the Cult of Mary*. *Studia Patristica*, forthcoming. Cf. HERRIN, *In Search of Byzantine Women* 183.

³⁰ HERRIN, *In Search of Byzantine Women* 167.

³¹ A. E. LAIOU, *The Role of Women in Byzantine Society*. *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31/1 (1981) 233–260, loc. cit. 233.

suppose that the cult of Mary contributed significantly to that change (otherwise all feminist efforts to show the historical significance of the cult of Mary would have been in vain).³² However, we must be aware that there is a closely associated danger of a wrong orientation: we tend to reflect the issue in the framework of our modern system of values along the lines laid down originally by feminist ideology, which wanted to show the negative influence of the cult of Mary on women's lives. Our hypothesis has other implications, related to a change and development.

SOURCES

In this study hymnography is considered as the primary source, whereas all other genres of Byzantine written heritage (historiography, hagiography, homiletics, epistles, inscriptions, epigrams, council acts, canons, law etc.) represent secondary sources. We do not imply that hymnography is the only source that should reflect the image of the woman, even if it represents the veneration of the Mother of God so emphatically. In this section I will concentrate on the issue what kind of source hymnography is.

It would seem that hymnography, being a literary genre, excludes a socio-historical approach. In fact, an argument other than a literary one speaks for hymnography's social role: in its own time, assessed by our modern standards, hymnography was an excellent instrument of propaganda. The voice of imperial and ecclesiastical authorities was embedded in hymnography, which must have had a broad influence on the masses. Such influence is difficult but not impossible to assess, as can be seen in Johannes Koder's article "Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum. Zur Einbeziehung und Beeinflussung der Zuhörer durch das Kontakion".³³ Yet it would be psychologically unbelievable that people who attended church services did not collectively internalize the "message", repeated in the rhythm of the Church's liturgical year over centuries. As to women's participation, there are of course no statistical facts, but the evidence Wendy Mayer presents for consideration on the basis of John Chrysostom's sermons is suggestive in this respect: "Not only did women attend in reasonable numbers on extraordinary occasions but it is more than likely that in both cities (Antioch and Constantinople) women of varying status constituted a significant core element of the preacher's regular audience."³⁴ The evidence of "women's space" during times of worship in the churches of Constantinople leads Robert Taft to conclude that "there is nothing to prove that women *were restricted to the galleries*, nor that this space was *reserved for their exclusive liturgical use*, that is, that during services only the women were in the galleries, that they were nowhere but in the galleries, and that no one else was there with them."³⁵ From this we can infer that the

³² Cf. S. J. Boss, *Empress and Handmaid. On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London–New York 2000, 16: "The question arises as to whether Marian doctrine and devotion has itself the capacity to effect change in social action."

³³ J. KODER, Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum. Zur Einbeziehung und Beeinflussung der Zuhörer durch das Kontakion. *Anzeiger phil.-hist. Kl. Österr. Akad. Wiss.* 134/1 (1999) 63–94, 83.

³⁴ W. MAYER, Female Participation and the Late Fourth-Century Preacher's Audience. *Augustinianum* 39 (1999) 139–147, loc. cit. 147.

³⁵ R. T. TAFT, Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When – and Why? *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998) 27–87, loc. cit. 86. By "Byzantine church" Taft means "Byzan-

external conditions of reception did not hinder women from hearing and absorbing the hymnographic message if they were willing.

The number of hymns, 116 (including fragmentary ones), dated to the pre-Islamic period also provides an important argument for the study, although not all of them deal with Mary and/or other female figures.³⁶ In addition, we are fortunate to have from such an early a period so large a corpus of hymns whose author is known, viz. Romanos the Melodist (d. before 562).³⁷ His authentic works, around 60 pieces, are, with regard to their language, easily accessible in spite of the pertinent rhetoric. Additionally, they abound in dialogues reflecting the language the contemporaries of Romanos used in their social intercourse, making his hymns an ideal object for this kind of study. So, although what I stated above is true – that, being a literary genre, hymnography would seem to exclude a socio-historical approach – we can expect that in Romanos we will find traces of his world. Nevertheless, it is also true that in principle every literary work of whatever genre can be profitably discussed in any context. The “how” is a methodological issue, to which I will later return. Meanwhile let us note that the intentional as well as the unintentional elements of a literary text, such as a hymn, are significant. This can, for example, be seen in Romanos’ hymn “On the Sinful Woman”.³⁸ The author’s obvious intention is to describe the behaviour of the sinful woman in accordance with the New Testament account (Luke 7, 37–50) and patristic tradition. Similarly intentionally, in order to heighten the force of the poetical and artistic effect of the hymn, he purposely includes an imagined dialogue between the sinful woman and a perfume dealer. Unintentionally, however, he reflects contemporary attitudes (and probably patristic tradition) by systematically using the word “prostitute” for the woman. In addition he refers unintentionally to a contemporary mode of punishment when he expresses fear of lashes.

Another sort of example is provided by the Akathistos Hymn. The evident intention of the anonymous author is to praise the Theotokos, through whom the incarnation is realized; this is demonstrated by the acclamations to the Theotokos. However, the author’s ascetic idealism imprints itself on the image of the Virgin. Accordingly the “Ascetical Virgin” of the Akathistos’ image of Mary reflects the ideal of the purity of body and soul, mirrors the set of values of the ascetical life, and, in the refrain, χαίρε, νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε, refers indirectly to the way of thought peculiar to early female asceticism,

tine-rite church”, the church building designed for the celebration of the “liturgy of the Great Church” in use throughout the Patriarchate of Constantinople, cf. loc. cit. 28.

³⁶ P. MAAS, Frühbyzantinische Kirchenpoesie I. Anonyme Hymnen des V–VI Jahrhundert. Berlin 1931; P. MAAS – C. A. TRYPANIS, Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina. Oxford 1963; J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Romanos de Mélode, Hymnes. Paris, I 1964, II 1965, III 1965, IV 1967, V 1981 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 99, 110, 114, 128, 283); R. MAISANO, Romano il Melode, Cantici I–II (*Classici Greci, Autori della tarda antichità e dell’età bizantina*). Turin 2002; C. A. TRYPANIS, Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica (*Wiener Byzantinistische Studien* 5). Vienna 1968; P. MAAS – C. A. TRYPANIS, Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Dubia. Berlin 1970.

³⁷ J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance. Paris 1977. Cf. J. KODER, Mit der Seele Augen sah er deines Lichtes Zeichen, Herr. Hymnen des orthodoxen Kirchenjahres von Romanos dem Meloden. Vienna 1996, 8.

³⁸ No. 10 in Cantica Genuina; in French No. 21 in GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Hymnes III 20–43; in English in M. CARPENTER, Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist I. On the Person of Christ. Columbia 1970, 101–107; E. LASH, Kontakia. On the Life of Christ. St. Romanos the Melodist. San Francisco–London–Pymble, Australia 1995, 75–84; see also my translation in the APPENDIX of this paper; in Italian: MAISANO I, 272–289.

namely that a virgin is Christ's bride. In the "Ascetical Virgin" we see both the imitation of Mary and her role as protector and guide which developed for Mary as a consequence of imitation.³⁹ In this way the ascetical emphasis – probably half intentional, half unintentional – turns the Akathistos into a document of ascetical values and female asceticism.⁴⁰

A further argument for the use of hymnography as a source for a study with a socio-historical dimension is that it has been little investigated. It may sound surprising, but even in (Roman Catholic) mariological studies hymnography has remained outside systematic research.⁴¹ The same holds for Patristic theology and women's studies. From *this* angle we do not actually know the contents of Byzantine hymnographic corpus. This alone should make this source important to review for its potential for the study of Byzantine women.

METHOD

Let us now turn to the question of interpretation. As the project abstract says, we will compare hymnography to types of sources that depict actual circumstances and those which formed the normative, i.e. dogmatic-ideological and legal, framework of women's position in Byzantine life. This is the crucial point which demands a clear stance on the method of interpretation. It has already become evident that I do not regard the comparative method as a valid means of interpretation. Accordingly, the "comparison of hymnography with other types of sources" is not to be taken as the process of interpretation. By comparing hymns with other sources we acquire information that we need for interpretation, but the meaning of a hymn and the significance of its specific expressions we must discover within the hymn's own context. Thus, for instance, a paragraph of a legal text does not reveal the significance of the language in a hymn, although it can illuminate its linguistic usage. A literary work like a hymn is *per se* a whole.⁴² This is the starting point of literary analysis. However, it would be hard to interpret every single expression. For this reason we need the method, but, in the first place, working on a method means that the interpretation is not dependent solely upon the knowledge of the interpreter and the occasional matches of comparative material. On the other hand, we must also be aware of the dangers of standardizing, of bringing all expressions into accord with our hypothesis. In my work on the 228 lines of the Akathistos Hymn I have pointed out the advantages of a structural analysis with concepts.⁴³ For the present project gender provides the necessary theoretical and methodological means for the interpretation.

Obviously the concept "gender" was not yet established when *Images of Women in Antiquity* was published (1983) because the introduction by Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt was addressed to "feminists and historians".⁴⁴

³⁹ Cf. PELTOMAA, *The Image* 213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 205–216.

⁴¹ Cf. R. CARO, *La homiletica mariana griega en el siglo V*, vol. I. *Marian Library Studies*, University of Dayton, Ohio 1971, 24.

⁴² About the method and metaphorical language of the Akathistos Hymn cf. PELTOMAA, *The Image* 115–125.

⁴³ J. DECLERCK (in his review of my book): "Tant la méthode rigoureuse de cette étude que ses résultats nous ont séduit", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 54 (2004) 289–290, loc. cit. 290.

⁴⁴ *Images of Women in Antiquity* xi.

Here we may recall that “gender” as tool for research is the result of the development of feminist research methods.⁴⁵ The introduction of Liz James to *Gender in Byzantium* is illuminating with regard to the development of the concept of gender,⁴⁶ which originally referred to grammatical classes (masculine, feminine and neuter) and to sex.⁴⁷ Today “gender” is, as Kathryn M. Ringrose puts it, “the pattern of behaviour assumed to be appropriate to men and women”.⁴⁸ Ringrose also provides a useful formulation of gender theory: “Modern gender theory distinguishes biological markers from gender markers. Gender markers include such elements as dress, body language, patterns of speech, and roles and types of activities that society allots to men and women.”⁴⁹

The theoretical framework for our project lies within phrases “the pattern of behaviour assumed to be appropriate”, and “patterns of speech, and roles and types of activities that society allots to women”. However, the framework in itself does not lead to an accurate interpretation and we have to try to develop as explicit criteria for interpretation as possible. In our case the famous sociological theory of Erving Goffman, originally published under the title *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,⁵⁰ seems appropriate. This theory, which has already been fruitfully drawn upon,⁵¹ provides a model for interpreting human behaviour in society and in literary works according to the same standards. In brief, life is theatre.⁵² I will clarify this in the following example.

ROMANOS THE MELODIST: “ON THE SINFUL WOMAN”⁵³

The “play” that Romanos dramatizes is based on Luke’s famous account of an event in the house of Simon the Pharisee: “And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair...”⁵⁴ In Romanos’ version, besides the characters, there is a narrator who reflects on

⁴⁵ Cf. *Gender in Byzantium* xvii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* xi–xxiv.

⁴⁷ *Webster*, s.v. gender.

⁴⁸ K. M. RINGROSE, *The Perfect Servant. Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium*. Chicago–London 2003, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 6.

⁵⁰ E. GOFFMAN, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York et al. 1959.

⁵¹ Cf. Therese Fuhrer and Samuel Zinsli in their introduction to *Rollenkonstrukte in antiken Texten (IPHIS 2)*.

⁵² Stavroula CONSTANTINOY, who employed Goffman’s theory, describes this point: “Goffman suggests that different forms of social behaviour are like theatrical roles because they are imitative acts realised before an audience and have to fulfil certain expectations depending on the social performer’s appearance, gestures, and discourse. According to Goffman, a social performance aspires to influence its observers.” EAD., *Performing the ‘Male Woman’*. *Roles of Female Sainthood in Byzantine Lives of Holy Women*, in: D. C. SMYTHE, *Byzantine Masculinities*. Papers from the Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton. May 2002, [Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies], forthcoming.

⁵³ The translation is in the APPENDIX. Cf. note 38 for the Greek text edition and other translations.

⁵⁴ Luke 7, 36 ff; transl., Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. Oxford University Press 1995.

the event in Simon's house from his own perspective. The narrator begs Christ to deliver him from the "slime of his deeds", comparing his own spiritual state with that of the sinful woman. Therefore we can think that the actual stage is the narrator's mind: everything that happens in the hymn has its origins in his psyche. There is no explicit reference to the liturgical calendar of the Church in the text, but it is evident that it provided the starting point for the composition and that most probably the hymn was sung on Wednesday of Holy Week.⁵⁵ Thus the hymnographer's intention and preaching is inherently in harmony with the teaching of the Church (in other words, involved in authoritative propaganda).

According to Luke the woman was a sinner (*hamartolós*), but the narrator calls her systematically *pórne*, i.e. "prostitute".⁵⁶ Such linguistic usage naturally reflects patristic interpretative tradition, but undoubtedly also the moral atmosphere of Constantinople. It is the city where Romanos had lived since the beginning of the sixth century.⁵⁷ We know that Constantinople was the "ideal city" for prostitution. The capital was provided with the best opportunities for this kind of profession. It was the centre of administration, army, trade and business, industry, a big seaport with fluctuating currents of population. It is probable that brothels were found everywhere in the city.⁵⁸ In Justinian's era (527–565), judging from a legal clause, they were something no one could avoid seeing, not even in the vicinity of the most holy sites: "Almost all over this imperial city and its surroundings such shelters of brothel-keepers are the worst neighbour of the holy sites and the most respectable houses."⁵⁹ In another hymn Romanos compares his own city with Nineveh, "which has become a prostitute".⁶⁰ So, by using this word he interprets the sentiments of the inhabitants on the moral state of Constantinople.

Let us now return to the analysis of a literary work, which can be seen as a theatrical adaptation of the "real life". In strophes 12 and 13 Simon reflects on the annoying situation that the prostitute's behaviour caused him. Romanos added the following scene to the original account of Luke:

[Simon] began to blame the Lord, the harlot, and himself;
the former, because he did not recognize her as she drew near;
the woman, because she showed no shame in falling down before him;
and himself for having inconsiderately received such people.⁶¹

Reading this passage for its gendered meanings results in the interpretation that in Romanos' version the appearance of the woman signifies personal offence to the Pharisee, because it brings shame upon him. Simon's

⁵⁵ Cf. GROSIDIER DE MATONS, XXI Hymne de la pécheresse. Hymnes III 13–16.

⁵⁶ Pr. I.1; Pr. II.1; 1.2,9; 3.4; 4.4; 7.5,6; 12.6; 17.9.

⁵⁷ KODER, Mit der Seele Augen 7.

⁵⁸ S. LEONTSINI, Die Prostitution im frühen Byzanz. *Dissertationen der Universität Wien* 194, VWGÖ Wien 1989, 64.

⁵⁹ Just. Nov. 14, Pr. 16–20: ἐν πάσῃ σχεδὸν τῇ βασιλίδι ταύτῃ πόλει καὶ ἐν τοῖς περᾶμασιν αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ δὴ χεῖριστον καὶ πλησίον τῶν ἱερῶν τόπων καὶ τῶν σεβασμωτάτων οἰκῶν τὰς τοιαύτας αὐτοῖς [πορνοβοσχοῖς] εἶναι καταγωγάς.

⁶⁰ Cantica Genuina No. 52, „On Repentance“, cf. Prooimion, str. 6, 6–7: καταλλάγηθι τῇ πορνευσάσῃ, str. 17; GROSIDIER DE MATONS, Hymne de Ninive, Hymnes I 410–427.

⁶¹ 12.5–9: Ὁ δὲ Σίμων θεωρήσας τοῦτο αὐτό, / τὸν δεσπότην καὶ τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἤρξατο ψέγειν, / τὸν μὲν ὡς ἀγνοήσαντα τὴν προσεγγίσασαν, / τὴν δὲ ἀναισχυντήσασαν καὶ προσκυνήσασαν, / καὶ ἑαυτὸν ὡς ἀσκέπτως δεξάμενον τοῦτούτους.

blaming thoughts indicate that the issue is not insignificant to him, because lots of negative emotions are involved in it. In his eyes the behaviour of the woman is shameless, since she breaks – paradoxically – the “norms of good behaviour”. In sociological terminology, the prostitute’s behaviour did not conform to the expectations that were associated with the social role of “that kind of woman” in sixth-century Constantinople.

Methodologically, the framework of gender means, among other things, that it is no longer necessary to pay attention particularly to the expressions that reveal the patriarchal or misogynic attitudes of the author, in this case put into words as Simon’s thoughts. We know already from feminist and women’s studies that this is a component of Byzantine literary texts; it would be excessive to repeat this point. However, it will, of course, be taken into consideration. Yet, because the clarification of the social relationship between men and women is not the main purpose of the analysis, but rather the development of the image of the woman, another approach has to be chosen on the basis of the framework of gender. In fact, “gender” as a category of analysis means that the patriarchal or misogynic aspect is a given. Therefore it is not surprising that we find reflections of this influence in Romanos. Indeed, “On the Sinful Woman” presents the polarity of the antithesis “Eve-Mary” in its extremes: “A prostitute seeks to anoint with *myron* a Virgin born from a Virgin”.⁶² In the Gospel story there is no allusion to the Virgin Mary. This sentence is to be carefully registered because of the linguistic usage, but it is impossible to say what it means with respect to the image of the woman until we have uncovered the entire matrix of expressions about Mary and other female figures that appear in the hymns.

It looks probable that, besides the linguistic elements that women’s studies originally raised as it used gender classification in analysis, gender enables us to concentrate on other aspects of a text as well. The hypothesis that I envisage next requires more elaboration, but to give an idea of what the theoretical possibility for interpretation would be I will explicate the matter a little. The starting-point is my notion that gender provides a solid basis on which, in principle, further interpretative constructions are possible. For instance, it is logical to think that in a hymn, as in “real life”, breaking a norm is a deed which in most cases represents a deliberate act. We can infer that the sinful woman of Romanos’ time “knew” that her appearance was unacceptable, and yet she went to Simon’s house. In addition to it being a deliberate act, her breaking the norm suggests that she had a good reason for that. From this we can infer that it had something to do with the meaning of her life (*Sinn* in German, *logos* in Greek).

Luke states simply that the woman had learned that Jesus was eating in the house of the Pharisee. Her motive we have to guess. Romanos again mentions two reasons why the sinful woman acted as she did. In the refrain of the prooimion II, the woman cries for forgiveness for the shame of the slime of her deeds.⁶³ The first strophe says that “the harlot ... / began to hate the stench of her actions, / and she pondered upon her shame.”⁶⁴ Shame seems to give the impulse to her feelings of hate of her former life, which motivates her repentance – a well known theme from ascetical teaching. Romanos offers another

⁶² 7.6: νῦν παρθένον ἐκ παρθένου πόρνη ζητεῖ ἀλείψαι μύρω.

⁶³ Pr. II, 6–7: δώρησαί μοι ἄφρουν τῆς αἰσχύνης τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.

⁶⁴ 1.2–5: ἡ πόρνη ποτέ... / τῶν πεπραγμένων αὐτῆ τὸ δυσώδες ἐμίσησεν, / ἐννοῦσα τὴν αἰσχύνην τὴν ἑαυτῆς.

motive, too, which may be linked with the words Jesus directs to the Pharisee: “Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.” (Luke 7, 47). Love is the motive that Romanos considers most thoroughly. He repeats the expression of Jesus, τὴν πολὺ ποθοῦσαν με (16.1),⁶⁵ which characterizes the quality of the woman’s love. This expression reveals the moral and emotional level on which the hymn has been placed: the word ποθέω means to ‘desire’ or ‘to long for’. We can now approach the emotional reality of the harlot in our interpretation – not by taking the word ‘love’, but ‘desire’/‘longing for’ as our starting point. This differentiation is important, because the sinful woman’s character or behaviour, besides reflecting a socially constructed role, is equally a literary construct, conditioned by the genre.

I would like to illuminate my point by means of an observation of John H. Barkhuizen. He comments on this kontakion on the basis of Herbert Hunger, who, in his interpretations of Romanos, tends to stress on his vocation. According to Hunger, Romanos should be considered a preacher whose mission was religious and pastoral.⁶⁶ From this vantage point Barkhuizen explores the message, themes, and motifs of the hymn. His philological analysis brings out a “love affair” motif in the text, as he calls it.⁶⁷ In my view this is not an apt expression, since an “affair” is “a romantic or amorous relationship of brief duration, especially an illicit one”.⁶⁸ It is definitely not correct to suggest that there is a “love affair” motif in this hymn, for it would contradict the intention of the woman and foil precisely the message of repentance Romanos is preaching. This unsuccessful choice of (English) words does not, however, change the fact that Romanos’ language implies love and this kind of language permeates his depiction of the woman, as Barkhuizen observed.

In any event, I think that there is the possibility of interpreting the “sinful woman” in a psychological context which would focus on the reactions of the woman. Although we read about her reactions through the double male filter (the narrator on the hymn’s stage and the hymn writer on the Constantinopolitan social stage of the Justinian era), it is not impossible to judge her motives, which must be common to all people. Let me argue this with two observations: a) people do not commit acts which are senseless unless, from a medical and social point of view, they are mentally ill, and b) the faculty to manage in a group or society is essential for their survival (as it was from the beginning of the history of human beings). The meaning of life is related to acting rationally and to group management, although not everyone is aware of it. In her *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery* Rebecca Krawiec successfully uses a method of interpretation which reminds me of what I am pursuing. She approaches her topic in the framework of power, gender and family, and reconstructs the happenings that led to the correspondence of Shenoute, the monk, who was the head of 1800 female ascetics (from about 385 to 464) and whose thirteen letter fragments are the only evidence we have. Krawiec argues that “we can understand some of the quality and experiences of some of the women’s monastic lives under Shenoute’s leadership”.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Reading variant: τὴν ποθοῦσαν με στοργῇ.

⁶⁶ J. BARKHUIZEN, Romanos Melodos, Kontakion 10 (Oxf.) ‘On the Sinful Woman’. *Acta Classica* 33 (1990) 33–52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 37–38.

⁶⁸ *Webster*.

⁶⁹ KRAWIEC, Shenoute 5.

The study fulfils its promise. Therefore I believe that we can take a step forward if modern psycho-sociological study is employed – for, without women who lived in the White Monastery there would have been no “women’s monastic lives” either. This is a difficult issue, but if our aim is to understand the image and social position of the Byzantine woman, psychological factors cannot be disregarded in the analysis. In this connection it is good to remember that Barbara H. Rosenwein has pointed out that the disposition or methods of historians rather than the lack of evidence in sources is the cause for the loss of emotions and feelings in history.⁷⁰

It is far too early to go into the details of the analysis at this stage of the project, because there are still many problems that can be solved only through practical work. However, if we think about the picture of the Byzantine woman which I presented in the beginning on the basis of *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, it seems likely that by means of our theoretical approach the features of the image of the Byzantine woman will not be fixed. Isolating these features represent the basic work that has been done and that must go on. The main challenge is to see how the features changed over time. If this methodological experiment proves successful, then it should show that there was latitude and liberty of action, even for women in Byzantine society. The project is intended to form a foundation for further research on the development of the image of the woman in Byzantium as a reflection of the ideological development of the empire itself. The convincing results achieved by women’s studies demonstrate that it is possible to obtain a more accurate, detailed picture of the medieval woman, who earlier was doomed to disappear in the darkness of history because of the character of the sources. If this was made possible by new theoretical approaches in other fields of humanities, then why should it not be possible also within Byzantine scholarship?

ABBREVIATIONS

- Cantica Genuina = P. MAAS – C. A. TRYPANIS, Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina. Oxford 1963.
- FLEDELIUS, Byzantium = K. FLEDELIUS (ed.), Byzantium. Identity, Image, Influence. XIXth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Abstracts of Communications. Copenhagen 1996.
- Gender in Byzantium = L. JAMES (ed.), Women, Men and Eunuchs. Gender in Byzantium. London–New York 1997.
- GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Hymnes I = J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Romanos de Mélode, Hymnes. Paris 1964 (*Sources Chrésiennes* 99).
- GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Hymnes III = J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, Hymnes. Paris 1965 (*Sources Chrésiennes* 114).
- HERRIN, In Search of Byzantine Women = J. HERRIN, Three Avenues of Approach, Images of Women in Antiquity, in: A. CAMERON – A. KUERT (eds.), Images of Women in Antiquity. London–Cambera 1983, 167–189.
- Images of Women in Antiquity = A. CAMERON – A. KUERT (eds.), Images of Women in Antiquity. London–Cambera 1983.
- IPHIS 2 = TH. FUHRER – S. ZINSLI (eds.), Gender Studies in den Altertumswissenschaften: Rollenkonstrukte in antiken Texten (*IPHIS. Beiträge zu altertumswissenschaftlichen Genderforschung* 2). Trier 2003.

⁷⁰ Cf. B. H. ROSENWEIN, Worrying about Emotions in History. *The American Historical Review* 107/3 (2002) 821–845. I am very grateful to Barbara H. Rosenwein who carefully read through the entire manuscript and greatly improved it.

- KODER, Mit der Seele Augen = J. KODER, Mit der Seele Augen sah er deines Lichtes Zeichen, Herr. Hymnen des orthodoxen Kirchenjahres von Romanos dem Meloden. Vienna 1996.
- KRAWIEC = R. KRAWIEC, Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity. Oxford 2002.
- MAISANO I = R. MAISANO, Romano il Melode, Cantici I (*Classici Greci, Autori della tarda antichità e dell'età bizantina*). Turin 2002.
- PELTOMAA, The Image = L. M. PELTOMAA, The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn (*The Medieval Mediterranean* 35). Leiden–Boston–Cologne 2001.
- Pré-actes III = G. DAGRON – B. MONDRAIN (eds.), XXe Congrès international des études byzantines. Pré-actes III. Paris 2001.
- Webster = *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. New York–Avenel–New Jersey 1989.

APPENDIX

ON THE SINFUL WOMAN⁷¹

PROOIMION I

O Christ, God, who called the harlot “daughter”,
 declare me also “son of repentance”,
 I beg you, deliver me
 from the slime of my deeds.

PROOIMION II

With broken heart the harlot, closely following your footsteps,
 cried out in her repentance to you,
 Christ, God, who knows what is hidden:
 “How shall I, who have beguiled all with my glances, gaze on you?
 How shall I, who have enraged you, my Creator, entreat you,
 the Compassionate?
 Yet accept, O Lord, this *myron* as entreaty,⁷²
 and grant me forgiveness from the shame
 of the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE I

When the harlot once saw the words of Christ
 spreading everywhere like aromatic spice,
 granting the breath of life to all the faithful,
 she began to hate the stench of her actions,
 and she pondered upon her shame and considered the pain

⁷¹ This translation is based on the Greek text edition, No. 10 in *Cantica Genuina*. It follows the published translations by M. CARPENTER, *Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist I. On the Person of Christ*. Columbia 1970, 101–107, and by E. LASH, *Kontakia. On the Life of Christ. St. Romanos the Melodist*. San Francisco–London–Pymble, Australia 1995, 75–84, and is compared with the German translation by J. KODER, *Auf die Dirne, Romanos Melodos, Die Hymnen II*. Forthcoming Stuttgart 2006.

⁷² G. W. H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford 1961/1989: (*myron* =) μύρον, τό, *perfume, unguent, sweet oil*, in general many kinds employed, e.g. used at festal banquets (cf. str. 12 line 4), in Christian rituals as in consecration of baptismal water (cf. str. 6 line 9). In this hymn, in its context of compunction (Pr. II: “with broken heart” = *en katanyxei*), the word *myron* has so many connotations that I preferred not to translate it. *Myron* is the word Luke uses, but it is clear that in Romanos *myron* is associated also to the consecrated anointing oil used in the Orthodox Church.

brought about by them.
For there is much affliction there among the dissolute,
of whom I am one and ready for the lashes
the harlot feared and remained no longer a harlot,
while I, though terrified, persist
in the slime of my deeds.

STROPHE 2

I am never willing to be separated from evil,
nor do I remember the terrible things which I am going to see there [in Hell].
Nor do I consider the compassion of Christ,
how he came looking for me who deliberately wander astray.
For my sake he searched everywhere,
for my sake, too, he, who nourishes all, dines with the Pharisee
and shows the table to be an altar,
on which he is laid, forgiving the debtors
their debt, so that every debtor, taking courage,
would draw near, saying, "Master, relieve me
from the slime of my deeds."

STROPHE 3

The scent of the table of Christ attracted the woman,
who had formerly been dissolute, but now was steadfast,
in the beginning a dog, and in the end a ewe lamb,
slave and daughter, harlot and chaste.
Hence, in greedy haste she reached the table,
leaving the crumbs, and seized the bread on it.
More famished than the Canaanite of old,
she satisfied her empty soul, for her faith was that great.
She was not redeemed by her cry. Rather she was saved by silence,
for weeping she said: "Lord, raise me up
from the slime of my deeds."

STROPHE 4

I would like to search the mind of the wise woman
and to know how Jesus came to shine in her,
he, the most beautiful and the Creator of beauty,
whose form the harlot longed for before she saw him,
as the book of the Gospel proclaims:
As Christ was at table in the house of the Pharisee,
a certain woman heard of it and at once hastened
to fulfill her intent towards repentance.
HARLOT: "Come on, my soul, see the moment you were seeking!
The One who purifies you is at hand. Why do you remain
in the slime of your deeds?"

STROPHE 5

HARLOT: "I am going to him, because it is for me he has come.
I leave those I had, for now I earnestly yearn for him;
as the One, who loves me, I anoint him and caress him,
I weep, I groan and try correctly to win him over to desire me.
I am changed to the longing of the One who is longed for,

and as he wishes to be loved, so I love my beloved.
I grieve and bow myself down, for this he wishes.
I am silent and maintain my silence, for he is delighted with that.
I break with the past that I may please the new.
In short, as I breathe, I renounce
the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 6

HARLOT: “Let me then go to him. Let me be enlightened, as it is written.
Let me now approach God and not be put to shame.
He does not upbraid me. He does not say,
‘Until now you were in darkness and now you have come to see me, the Sun?’
Therefore, I take the *myron* and go forward.
I shall make the house of the Pharisee a place of enlightenment,
for there I shall wash away my sins.
There I shall be purified of my lawlessness.
I shall mix the baptismal font with weeping, oil and *myron*;
I shall bathe and wash myself and escape
from the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 7

HARLOT: “Formerly Rahab received spies,
and since she was faithful she found life as the reward for her reception.
For the one who had sent them was the prefigure of life,
bearing the precious name of my Jesus.
At that time a prostitute gave hospitality to chaste men,
now a prostitute seeks to anoint with *myron* a Virgin born from a Virgin.
The former woman released the men she had hidden,
but I cling to him whom I came to love,
not as a spy of the land but as a guardian of all.
I grasp him and am raised up from the filth and
slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 8

HARLOT: “See, the moment has come that I longed to see,
the day shone forth to me, and the year of the favour of the Lord.
My God is lodged in the house of Simon.
I will hurry to him and like Anna weep over my barrenness.
Simon may consider me drunk
as Eli then considered Anna, but I will remain praying,
crying out in silence, ‘Lord, I did not ask for a child.
I seek the only-begotten soul I have lost!’
Like Samuel, son of the childless, so you, Emmanuel, son of the husbandless,
took away the disgrace of a barren woman. So deliver me, a harlot,
from the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 9

The faithful woman is heartened by these thoughts,
and she hastens to the purchase of the *myron*.
She approaches the perfume dealer, crying out to him:
HARLOT: “Give me, if you have it, *myron* worthy of my friend,
whom I love rightly and purely,

who has set my limbs and my inward parts and my heart aflame.

Do not argue with me over price.

If necessary, I am ready to give even my skin and bones
that I may have something with which to repay
the One who hastens to purify me
from the muddy slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 10

As he saw the fervour and zeal of the holy woman,

PERFUME MERCHANT: he said to her: “Tell me who is the one whom you love so
much

that he has charmed you to buy this love potion?

Does he really have something worthy of the gift of my *myron*?”

At once the pious woman raised her voice

and answered with boldness to the perfume-maker:

HARLOT: “What are you saying to me, man, ‘Has he something worthy?’

There is nothing worthy of his worth;

not Heaven, not earth, not the whole world

can be compared to the One who hastens to save me
from the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 11

HARLOT: “He is the Son of David, and therefore beautiful to behold;
Son of God and God, and therefore wholly lovely.

I have not seen him, but I have heard of him, and I have been nourished
by the vision of him who is by nature invisible.

Michal once having seen David loved him;

I have not seen the Son of David, but I long for him and love him.

She abandoned all the rights of royalty

and ran then to David, the poor beggar.

As for me, I scorn unjust wealth, and I buy *myron*
for the One who cleanses my soul
from the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 12

She cut off his flow of words with silence

and with delight took her fine *myron*.

And she entered the house of the Pharisee,
running as though invited to perfume the meal.

But Simon, when he saw this,

began to blame the Lord, the harlot, and himself:

the former, because he did not recognize her as she drew near;
the woman, because she showed no shame in falling down before him;
and himself for having inconsiderately received such people,
especially her who was crying: “Remove me
from the slime of my deeds.”

STROPHE 13

O Ignorance! What does he say? SIMON: “This I have done well.

I invited Jesus as one of the prophets,

and he did not perceive what each one of us knew of her.

He did not recognize! If he had been a prophet, he would have known.”

The One who searches hearts and inward parts,

observing the troubled thoughts of the Pharisee,
at once became for him a sceptre of uprightness.
CHRIST: "O Simon", he said, "hear the goodness
that has come to you and to this woman whom you see
crying with tears, 'Master, remove me
from the slime of my deeds.'"

STROPHE 14

CHRIST: "I seemed to you blameworthy because I did not reproach her
as she hastened to escape from her iniquity.
But your reproof, Simon, is not good, not just.
Consider what I am going to say to you and judge:
a moneylender had two debtors,
one for five hundred and one for only fifty.
Since they did not know how to repay,
the one who was owed forgave what he was owed.
Which of the two would love him more? Tell me,
which ought to have cried out to him, 'You have saved me
from the slime of my deeds?'"

STROPHE 15

Hearing this, the wise Pharisee said:
SIMON: "Teacher, it is indeed clear to all
that the one who ought to love him more is the one
for whom his creditor waived the larger debt."
At this the Lord answered him:
CHRIST: "You answered rightly, Simon. It is just as you say.
For the One whom you did not anoint with oil, she anointed with *myron*,
the One whom you did not wash with water, she washed with tears,
the One whom you did not greet by kissing, kisses me tenderly as she cries,
'I have grasped your feet, lest I fall
into the slime of my deeds.'"

STROPHE 16

CHRIST: "Now that I have shown you the woman who desires me much,
I shall show you, my friend, who is the creditor,
and I will show to you who are his debtors.
You are one of them as is the woman whom you see weeping,
but I am the creditor of both,
not only of both of you, but all human beings.
For I have lent to all everything they have:
soul, breath and senses, body and movement.
To the creditor of the world, then, Simon, as far as you are able,
pray and cry out: 'Redeem me
from the slime of my deeds.'"

STROPHE 17

CHRIST: "You are not able to give me what you owe me,
but at least keep silent so that your debt may be remitted.
Do not condemn the one who is condemned;
do not scorn the one who is scorned. Be calm.
I wish for nothing of yours or hers."

For as one who releases you both from debt, I have come for you and for all.
Simon, you have lived according to the Law; but you are in debt.
Come then to my grace that you may pay me back.
Look at this harlot: you see her like the Church
crying out: 'I renounce and blow upon
the slime of my deeds.'

STROPHE 18

CHRIST: "Depart, you have been released from the rest of your debts.
Go. You are exempt every obligation.
You are freed, do not be subjected again.
Since the record of debt has been torn up, do not incur another."
This same, then, my Jesus, speak to me also,
for I am not able to repay what I owe,
because I have used up both capital and interest.
Do not demand back from me, what you granted me,
of the capital of my soul and the interest of my flesh!
As you are compassionate, raise me, let me go, and forgive
the slime of my deeds.