

**Angeliki E. Laiou**

**Gender, Society  
and Economic  
Life in Byzantium**





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## PREFACE

The studies included in this volume represent a long-standing interest in history as it was lived: not only in social and economic structures, but in the men and women, collectively and individually, who made them function. Two major themes are explored here. One concerns the role of women in Byzantine society, an interest which was first kindled by a study of the Palaeologan aristocracy (VI), since aristocratic women are the ones most in evidence, given the nature of the sources. Study I broaches a number of issues, from the presence of women in the legal sources to their economic function, to the question of female literacy. The intervention of women in economic activity, specifically the manufacturing of cloth, is further discussed in Study III, while Study II is concerned with women as administrators of monasteries and also tries to elicit from the sources women's own view of themselves and of their role. Necessarily, this focuses on members of the aristocracy, whereas Study III deals with members of the artisan class.

The study of women has led me, as it has other scholars, to the history of the family. Such a history intersects at various points with legal matters and sources, and here the historian must acknowledge a great debt to legal historians, whose rules of evidence are stricter and more precise than those to which our profession is accustomed. My debt to colleagues at the Max-Plank-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte, especially Dieter Simon and Marie-Theres Fögen, is evident in Studies IV and V, which discuss the evolution of laws and customs affecting marriage, and various aspects of the family in Epirus, respectively.

The second focus of the volume is on the economy of exchange and the role of the Byzantine and Greek merchant, especially in the period after the Fourth Crusade. Ten years ago, when the first of these studies appeared, scholarly interest in such matters was limited, although there are some notable exceptions, mentioned in the notes of the articles. Study VII discusses the Byzantine economy within the larger complex of Mediterranean trade, a complex dominated by the presence of Italian merchants and catering to the needs of the Western European economy. Similar topics are elaborated for different regions in Studies IX and X, while Study VIII attempts to draw a collective portrait of the merchant of Byzantine lands or lands which had been Byzantine but came under western domination. The view that the Byzantine economy of the

Palaeologan period, especially trade and manufacturing, must be seen as part of a Mediterranean trade system evolved from insights I gained from a course on the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages. I first started teaching this course at Harvard a good twenty-five years ago, and have taught different versions of it ever since. My students have played a not inconsiderable part in the development of my thought and my research interest. It should be noted here that Eliyahu Ashtor had already, in 1976, discussed the impact of Italian merchants on the economies of the Muslim Near East (*A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages*), a theme which was explored in much greater depth in his *Levant Trade in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983). The interest of scholars in the fate of the dependent economies of the Mediterranean, including Byzantium, in the late Middle Ages remains strong. The final study in this volume, XI, is an examination of trade and merchant activities in the late tenth to early eleventh century.

The earliest of the articles which are reprinted here was published in 1973, while the others were all published within the last decade. Scholarship does not, of course, stand still, especially in topics such as the history of women, the family and the economy of exchange, which are still relatively new. I have noted some of the most pertinent recent work in Addenda, after Studies I and VII. As might be expected, the subject which has occasioned some controversy is the history of women, where interpretation, nuance and predisposition play a particularly significant role. I cannot say, however, that the controversy has caused my general conclusions to change, although refinements are always possible.

*Washington, D.C., 1991*

ANGELIKI E. LAIOU

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The index to this volume was prepared by Victoria Erhart.

## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original pagination has been maintained wherever possible.

Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and quoted in the index entries.

# I

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN BYZANTINE SOCIETY

The role of women in Byzantine society is a subject on which limitations must be placed, in order to correct its somewhat amorphous nature. First of all, chronological limitations are essential. 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. I will therefore discuss the period from the eleventh century to the end of the existence of the Byzantine state, because it is a period clearly distinguishable from the earlier centuries, and with its own internal evolution<sup>1</sup>.

The subject under discussion is complicated by the fact that the Byzantines, normally reluctant to recognise and accept change, were even more conservative than usual in what concerned women. The narrative sources are replete with *topoi* when they treat the subject of women, thereby obscuring or distorting reality.

The legislation, too, was exceptionally conservative in the provisions concerning women<sup>2</sup>, and it is only through a study of the resolution of particular legal disputes that one may discern the degree of divergence of applied, as opposed to stated, law. It is, therefore, the first task of historians to establish the relationship between social practice and the legal and ideological models.

### 1. WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

Beginning with the promulgation of the *Ecloga*, the primary function of women in Byzantine society was considered to be the reproduction of its

<sup>1</sup> I should like to express my thanks to Professor A. P. Kazdan, for his generous help. The bibliography on women in Byzantine society is very limited. After the studies included in Charles DIEHL's *Figures byzantines* (Paris 1906—1908), the major contributions have been those of Ph. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτισμός*, vol. II B. Athens 1955; Sp. LAMPROS, 'Η γυνή παρὰ τοῖς Βυζαντιοῖς. *NE* 17 (1923) 258ff.; J. GROSIDIER DE MATONS, *La femme dans l'empire byzantin*, in: *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, III. Paris 1967, 11—43.

<sup>2</sup> On this, see the excellent study by J. BEAUCAMP, *La situation juridique de la femme à Byzance. Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 20 (1977) 145—176.

human resources. Marriage and the procreation of children were intimately connected in the legislation; indeed, marriage was affirmed to be *for* the procreation of children<sup>3</sup>, and as an institution it was protected by the state, as also by the church<sup>4</sup>. The legislation affecting women consisted primarily of family law: marriage, divorce, and the financial arrangements attending both. Significantly, the legislation, which was very conservative in matters such as the legal disabilities of women, became less so when it dealt with a woman's role in the family. Here, it is possible to discern an evolution which, in the eighth century and after, tended to increase her rights<sup>5</sup>. More significantly, not only the legislation — which may, after all, not reflect reality at any given moment — but also applied law, that is, the decisions of lay and ecclesiastical courts, dealt primarily with matters which affected the family in the cases involving women. This is illustrated by Table I.

Table I  
Legal Cases Involving Women<sup>6</sup>

	a) no. of specific cases	b) no. of cases involving women	c) dowry	d) other property	e) marriage, divorce, etc.
1. Peira	309	111 (36%)	44 (40%)	39 (35%)	21 (19%)
2. Chomatianos	143	101 (71%)	14 (14%)	40 (40%)	45 (44%)
3. MM I	211	75 (35%)	23 (31%)	16 (21%)	23 (31%)
4. MM II	286	119 (42%)	39 (33%)	45 (38%)	21 (18%)

Table I, despite the problems created by the fact that the three sources used are not entirely comparable, establishes several important points. The first is, that a consistently high percentage of the cases which reached lay or ecclesiastical courts involved women. This is true throughout the period covered by these sources, reaching a high point in thirteenth-century

<sup>3</sup> P. NOAILLES—A. DAIN, *Les nouvelles de Léon VI le Sage*. Paris 1944, no. 26; cf. A. GULLOU, *Il matrimonio nell'Italia bizantina nei secoli X e XI. Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 24 (1976). Spoleto 1977, 869—886.

<sup>4</sup> H. HUNGER, *Christliches und Nichtchristliches im byzantinischen Eherecht. Österr. Arch. f. Kirchenrecht* 18 (1967) 305—325; cf. D. SIMON, *Zur Ehegesetzgebung der Isaurier*, in: D. SIMON, *Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte*. Frankfurt 1976, 16—43; N. KUHN, *Die Ehetrennung im Kirchenrecht der orthodoxen Kirchen des byzantinischen Ritus. Ostkirchl. Stud.* 26 (1977) 3—27.

<sup>5</sup> BEAUCAMP, *op. cit.* 164—174.

<sup>6</sup> The sources for Table I are: Peira, in: I. and P. ZEPOS, *Jus Graecoromanum*, IV. Athens 1931; I. B. PITRA, *Analecta sacra et classica spicilegio Solesmensi parata*, VI. Paris and Rome 1891; *MM I—II*. From all three sources I have selected only those cases which referred to a specific situation and were not concerned with entirely ecclesiastical matters. In columns c, d, and e, the percentages are taken upon the cases involving women.

Epirus. Secondly, it is to be noted that issues concerning marriage and its dissolution, that is, prohibited marriage alliances, second or third marriages, age at marriage, grounds for divorce, adultery, concubinage, etc. form a very high proportion of court cases in the thirteenth century, and are less important in the eleventh and late fourteenth centuries. For the eleventh century, the explanation lies outside the statistics: the *Peira* concerned itself with matters of civil law, while matters affecting the legality of matrimonial alliances were judged in ecclesiastical courts. Indeed, the vast majority of cases involving women in the patriarchal acts of the 11th through the 13th centuries are connected with the religious and moral aspects of marriage and of other sexual unions<sup>7</sup>. This percentage declines sharply in the 14th century, not only because of technical reasons (that is, the fact that patriarchal decisions now dealt with many civil law cases as well), but also because of an apparent shift of concern. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the church, as also the state, was particularly interested in establishing and enforcing the legislation concerning consanguinity and affinity as impediments to marriage. In the 13th century in Epirus, the same concern existed, along with another problem, which may have been particularly acute in the region: the engagement or marriage of extremely young girls, often to much older men. In one case, a girl was reportedly married twice before reaching the legal age of twelve years<sup>8</sup>. By the 14th century, such cases appear less frequently; of paramount importance then were property questions, most of them connected either with the woman's property rights within the marriage, or with her disputes with other close relatives.

The study of some of the court cases indicates a certain amount of divergence between reality and the law. Particularly significant are the cases involving second and third marriages. The law discouraged second marriages, especially for women<sup>9</sup>. But they were extremely common. Demetrios Chomatianos dealt with many such cases (including even that of a woman who had married four times), and tried to impose identical conditions on the men and the women who entered a second marriage. The

<sup>7</sup> Cf. V. GRUMEL, *Les registres des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. I, *Actes des Patriarches*, fasc. III (1043—1206). Paris 1947, and V. LAURENT, *Les registres . . .* fasc. IV. Paris 1971.

<sup>8</sup> Pitra, no. 9; cf. nos. 13. 19. 122. 124. 126. 139, and N. A. BEES, *Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropoliten von Naupaktos in Aetolien*. *BNJ* 21 (1976), nos. 28. 9. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Balsamon, in: G. RALLES—M. POTLES, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, IV. Athens 1854, 481. It is significant that Chomatianos insisted on the equal treatment of men and women who entered a second marriage: PITRA, *op. cit.*, no. 43.

documents of the patriarchate of Constantinople are also indicative. Of the forty-one couples married in a few months in 1399—1400, thirteen men and twelve women were contracting a second union<sup>10</sup>. As for third marriages, they were allowed by law if the person entering into a third alliance was both young and childless<sup>11</sup>. But in one case at least, in 1393, a man was allowed to marry for the third time because he was young, although he already had children<sup>12</sup>.

The concern of the Byzantine legislator with marriage and the procreation of children, and the development of an ideology which made motherhood the greatest and most glorious function of a woman<sup>13</sup> express to some extent the demographic exigencies of the society. It has been suggested that among the peasantry of the fourteenth century, with a life expectancy at birth of about twenty-five years, with a birth rate of about 44 per thousand per year, and a survival rate of 50% in the first five years of life, a woman would have had to bear six daughters to ensure that one of them would survive to the age of thirty<sup>14</sup>. If that was the case at a time of demographic crisis, high infant mortality seems to have been a more general phenomenon, and it affected classes other than the peasantry. The *vita* of St. Theodora of Thessalonica, who lived in the ninth century, is particularly grim. Her mother, who died in childbirth, had three children, of whom two died in early adulthood; she herself had three children, of whom two died very young and one was dedicated to God. One of Psellos' siblings died in early adulthood, and he lost a daughter when she was nine years old<sup>15</sup>. These circumstances underlie the high value placed by society on the rearing of children, and explain the early marriage age of girls<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> *MM* II 297—299. 303—304; cf. H. HUNGER, *Byzantinisches Eherecht im 14. Jahrhundert: Theorie und Praxis. ZRVI* 14—15 (1974) 67.

<sup>11</sup> Balsamon. *loc. cit.*; cf. PITRA. *op. cit.*, nos. 28. 30.

<sup>12</sup> *MM* II 176; cf. HUNGER, *Eherecht* 71.

<sup>13</sup> A few examples of this perception of woman as mother: Theophylact of Ochrid, *PG* 126, 265; cf. the lament of Kale Pakouriane on the shame of her childlessness (I. IVERITES, *Βυζαντινὰ Διαθήκαι. Ὁρθοδοξία* 6 [1931] 364) and the pride of Theodora Cantacuzena on her offspring: P. LEMERLE. *Actes de Kutlumus*. Paris 1945, no. 18.

<sup>14</sup> A. E. LAIOU—THOMADAKIS, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire; A Social and Demographic Study*. Princeton 1977, 276. 294. 296.

<sup>15</sup> ARSENIJ, *Žitie i podrigi sv. Feodory Solunskoi*. St. Petersburg 1899, 4—5; M. Psellos, in: K. SATHAS. *Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, V. Athens 1876. 28. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Girls were married at an early age in upper class families too. For example, Irene Choumnaina was married at twelve and widowed at sixteen, while Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina married Thomas Preljubovitch at sixteen: V. LAURENT, *Une princesse byzantine au cloître. EO* 29 (1930) 40—42; P. LEMERLE, A. GUILLOU, N. SVORONOS, D. PAPA-CHRYSSANTHOU. *Actes de Lavra, III*. Paris 1979, 101.

The role of women within the family had important economic implications as well, for with her marriage a woman became the owner of a certain amount of property. The newly-formed family had as its economic nucleus the woman's dowry and the man's marriage gift<sup>17</sup>.

The essential family property, however, was the dowry, for its purpose was specifically and inalienably designated to be the preservation of the family and particularly of the children<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, when dowry and inheritance disputes came to court, the case was usually resolved in favor of the children. For example, a decision of Demetrios Chomatianos makes it clear that the first rights on the dowry of a woman after her death belong to the next generation; in the second instance they belong to the parents of the woman. Then the property can be redistributed among her siblings. Furthermore, a widower was entitled only to the use of dowry goods, while ownership belonged to the children of the marriage<sup>19</sup>. Finally, it was a characteristic of the dowry that it could not be easily alienated; it was protected against the husband's debtors, and could be sold for very few purposes, one of which was the survival of the family, primarily of the children<sup>20</sup>.

Dowry property thus functioned under legal constraints which gave it a particular economic character. While ownership remained vested in the woman, the usufruct belonged to the husband who, however, was obligated to retain the principal undiminished<sup>21</sup>. The woman could bring her husband to court for maladministering her dowry goods, and he was then forced to restore them in their entirety: but he was only responsible up to a sum such that would not condemn him to absolute indigence<sup>22</sup>. When a court had restored the dowry to a woman, she then acquired, along with absolute ownership, the right to administer her property. The eleventh-century *Peira* considered this to be an extreme situation, a reversal of the correct order of authority (ἐνῆλλακται ἡ τάξις τῆς ἐξουσίας), for the woman acquired the rights and obligations of a husband, and the man those of a wife<sup>23</sup>. In the fourteenth century, there are some examples of women taking over the administration of their dowry property; but the matter then seems to have

<sup>17</sup> Chomatianos in Pitra, no. 55, calculates the marriage gift as 1/2 of the dowry; in the fourteenth century it was 1/3 of the dowry: N. P. MATSES, *Τὸ οἰκογενειακὸν δίκαιον κατὰ τὴν νομολογίαν τοῦ Πατριαρχείου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τῶν ἐτῶν 1315—1401*. Athens 1962, 141—142.

<sup>18</sup> BEES, *Unedierte*, no. 3.

<sup>19</sup> PITRA, *op. cit.*, nos. 4, 34, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Harmenopoulos, *Hexabiblos*, IV 11, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Chomatianos in PITRA, *op. cit.*, no. 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Peira*, XXVI 13; XXV 63.

<sup>23</sup> *Peira*, VII 19.

been more frequent or more accepted than in the eleventh century, and there are no statements as to its propriety or impropriety<sup>24</sup>.

The protected nature and stated purpose of dowries posed limitations upon its economic use. Dowry property consisted of various kinds of goods: houses, land, shops, cash, jewelry<sup>25</sup>. But it functioned as a protection against indigence, not as a liquid asset. It could not normally be invested in risky ventures — at least not by men — and therefore was subject to very conservative economic exploitation. However, here too the law and reality diverge. Although dowry retained its protected character until the end of the Empire, in practice its use and functions changed. In the eleventh and twelfth century, the legislation concerning dowries seems to have been followed quite strictly; cases of risky treatment or misuse of dowry goods are rare<sup>26</sup>. The *Peira* affirmed that dowry property had priority over all debts contracted by the husband, and even over the demands of the fisc<sup>27</sup>. Alienation of dowry goods was difficult, as can be seen in a case which occurred in 1112. At that time, Eudocia, wife of Stephen Rasopolos, wanted to sell some land to the monastery of Docheiariou, but was hindered by the monks' reluctance to acquire dowry goods. She appealed to Andronicus Ducas, the *praetor* and *dux* of Thessalonica, for permission to make this sale, pleading the abject poverty of her husband and the possibility that she and her children would starve. Her plea was accepted, for the law provided for such an eventuality, and a *dekretion* was issued, permitting the sale<sup>28</sup>. However, later the situation was different. The early 13th century in Epirus was a time of troubles and social upset. As a result, there was both family and social dislocation. Dowry goods were frequently seized, and although the law was affirmed, the result of the frequent changes of ownership was to make of the dowry a more flexible kind of property<sup>29</sup>.

In the Palaeologan period, although the law concerning dowry remained unchanged, the special and protected character of the dowry tended to diminish. Dowry goods often changed hands, without complicated legal

<sup>24</sup> *MM* I 56—57; II 267; MATSES, *op. cit.*, 110.

<sup>25</sup> P. LEMERLE, A. GUILLOU, N. SVORONOS, D. PAPACHRYSSANTHOU, *Actes de Lavra*, I. Paris 1970, no. 2; J. LEFORT, *Actes d'Esphigménou*. Paris 1973, no. 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Peira* VII 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Peira* VI 2; XXII 4.

<sup>28</sup> N. OIKONOMIDES, 'Ἐρὰ μὴν Δοχειαρίου. Κατάλογος τοῦ Ἀρχείου. *Σύμμεικτα* III (1979), no. 93. I am grateful to Professor Oikonomides for having placed at my disposal his transcription of this document.

<sup>29</sup> PITRA, *op. cit.*, no. 52.

arrangements<sup>30</sup>. In fact, the distinction between patrimonial and dowry property tended to become blurred. This may be seen in the case of a certain Constantine Perdikaes, who found himself owing 500 *hyperpyra* to Thomas Kalokyres. In the arrangement made between the two men, Perdikaes's wife participated with her dowry goods, she gave up the protection afforded her dowry by the law, and used it to pay off her husband's debt<sup>31</sup>. In the same period, we find dowry goods used as liquid assets, and even invested in trade, with no permission being visibly sought or granted<sup>32</sup>.

The freeing of dowry property from its constraints is also evident in the large number of sales or donations of land made to monasteries by women, acting either as principal donors, or as interested parties. Table II summarizes the pertinent information gleaned from monastic records. The acts in which women appear in a significant role are an important proportion of the total number of acts. The proportion would have been much higher if the first figure had consisted only of private acts of sale or donation, instead of including all the acts of the monastic archives.

Table II<sup>33</sup>  
Women and Property

Total Cases	Cases Involving Women	Dowry Property	Class	
			Imperial Family	Aristocracy
	<i>11th century</i>			
88	18 (20%)	1 ( 5%)	6 (33%)	1 ( 5%)
	<i>12th century</i>			
66	7 (11%)	1 (14%)	2 (28%)	1 (14%)
	<i>13th century</i>			
319	103 (32%)	5 ( 5%)	7 ( 7%)	32 (31%)
	<i>14th century</i>			
502	82 (16%)	13 (16%)	1 ( 1%)	19 (23%)
	<i>15th century</i>			
53	9 (17%)	4 (44%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)

<sup>30</sup> L. PETIT, Actes de Chilandar, Actes grecs. VV 17 (1911), Appendix I, nos. 21, 121; Esphigménou, no. 9; OIKONOMIDES, Δοχειαρίου, no. 105; W. REGEL, E. KURTZ, B. KORABLEV, Actes de Philothée. VV 20 (1913), App. I, no. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *MM* II 372—374.

<sup>32</sup> *MM* II 329—333; I 151—154, 279—283.

<sup>33</sup> The cases counted in the first column of Table II do not include *praktika*; acts of sale grouped in a single document have been counted individually. The proportions in the last three columns are taken on the cases involving women. The documentary base for Table II consists of: Lavra, I, II, III; Esphigménou; OIKONOMIDES, Docheiariou; Chilan-

It is, at first glance, surprising that only a small proportion of the acts which involve women concern dowry property. Yet we know that women usually received their share of the family property in the form not of inheritance but of dowry<sup>34</sup>. It is also clear from Table I that a high proportion of the cases disputed in court affected dowries. There are two possible — and not mutually exclusive — interpretations of the discrepancy. One is that dowry property was not specifically designated as such in order to avoid the legal difficulties attendant upon the alienation of dowry land. This interpretation is given weight by the existence of cases where it is evident that dowry goods are involved, but they are not specifically designated as such; for example, a case involving the same dowry property appears twice in the documentation, but only once is the property so designated<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, there is a patriarchal decision of 1317 which states that in Asia Minor men refused to accept dowries, demanding instead that their wives receive patrimonial property in full and unrestricted ownership<sup>36</sup>. This would explain the thirteenth-century statistics on Table II, since these are drawn primarily from the archives of the Lemviotissa. The other possible explanation is that a significant amount of the property donated by women of the aristocracy was, in fact, land they held in full ownership, not dowry land.

It is then necessary to pose the question, whether the developments outlined here increased the possibility of women to take economic initiatives. The answer is complex. When the primary factor affecting the behavior of dowry property was hardship, the result on the economic activities of women was null.

On the other hand, there are cases in which the women were given the usufruct as well as the ownership of their dowry property<sup>37</sup>. This is an

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dar, Actes grecs; Philothée; N. OIKONOMIDÈS, Actes de Dionysiou. Paris 1968; W. REGEL, E. KURTZ, B. KORABLEV, Actes de Zographou. *VV* 13 (1907), App. I; Kutlumus; J. BOMPAIRE, Actes de Xéropotamou. Paris 1964; V. MOŠIN, A SOVRE, Supplementa ad acta graeca Chilandarii. Ljubljana 1948; L. PETIT, Actes de Pantocrator. *VV* 10 (1903), App. II; L. PETIT, Actes de Xénophon. *VV* 10 (1903), App. I; N. OIKONOMIDÈS, Actes de Kastamonitou; acts of St. John Theologos of Patmos, in *MM* VI; acts of Lemviotissa, *ibid.*, IV; M. GOUDAS, Βυζαντινά ἐγγράφα τῆς ἐν Ἀθῶν ἱερᾶς μονῆς τοῦ Βατοπεδίου. *ΕΕΒΣ* 3 (1926) 113—119; 4 (1927) 211—248. Some archives (e. g. of the Protaton and of St. John Prodromos near Serres) have not been included, because they present particular problems.

<sup>34</sup> *MM* I 30—31 (cf. J. DARROUZÈS, Les registes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople, I 5, Les registes de 1310 à 1376. Paris 1977, no. 2048); MATSEI, Οἰκογενειακὸν δίκαιον 134 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Chilandar, Actes grecs, nos. 151, 154.

<sup>36</sup> *MM* I 76—79.

<sup>37</sup> *MM* I 56 ff.; II 267 ff.

event of some significance, for it removes at least some of the limitations placed on women's economic activities. As a result, we find dowry property invested in trade, or in the operation of small artisanal enterprises; and occasionally this was done at the initiative of women<sup>38</sup>. In such cases, dowry property functioned as liquid capital, and women had the possibility of exploiting it. The fact that this phenomenon is visible primarily in the Palaeologan period is only partly an accident of the sources; it is also the result of a general involvement of the urban Byzantine population with trade<sup>39</sup>. It is also probably due to the fact that in a period of crisis, certain segments of the female population assumed a greater than normal economic initiative.

The alienation of non-dowry property followed certain patterns. Women had the right to alienate inherited property. However, while sales and donations of property were sometimes made by women alone<sup>40</sup>, they were most frequently executed by family groups. Members of the nuclear family, or other relatives who might have inheritance rights on the property, cosigned the act<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, women's property, whether dowry or inherited lands, tended to be interspersed with the goods of the rest of the family. Therefore, when women alienated it, it frequently went back to relatives, making possible a reconcentration of family property. This was, for example, the case with the property of Michael Attaleiates, much of which he bought from his wife's female relatives<sup>42</sup>. As late as the thirteenth century, legal practice protected the integrity of family property, by giving priority to the recovery of patrimonial goods<sup>43</sup>. This was a limitation on the free disposal of goods, but it often also acted as a form of protection.

## 2. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

In discussing the role of women in the Byzantine economy, it is essential to differentiate between women of various classes, for the social divisions of Byzantine society were also those of the female population.

<sup>38</sup> *MM* II 358—359. 399—400. 511—512.

<sup>39</sup> N. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Hommes d'affaires grecs et latins à Constantinople (XIII<sup>e</sup>—XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Montréal 1979; A. E. LAIOU, *The Byzantine Economy in the Mediterranean Trade System, 13th—15th Centuries*. *DOP* 34 (1980).

<sup>40</sup> See for example Lavra, I, nos. 16. 20; Zographou, no. 5, by Maria Komnene Tzousmene (the act as it is published is probably a fake); DÖLGER, *Schatzkammern*, no. 33.

<sup>41</sup> For example, see Lavra I, nos. 24. 53; Chilandar, nos. 25. 89. 98. 107—109. 142—144; Kutlumus, no. 7; Esphigménou, no. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *MM* V 297—298; cf. P. LEMERLE, *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin*. Paris 1977, 77—78. 101—102.

<sup>43</sup> PITRA, no. 81.

Therefore, the economic function of an aristocratic woman was fundamentally different from that of a peasant or of the woman involved in retail trade. A striking illustration of this point is afforded by the organization of women's convents, where there is an evident reproduction of the social divisions prevalent in the society. Here, perhaps more than in the male monasteries, the aristocracy retained the social hierarchies, allowing, for example, the use of servants, and making special provisions for imperial or other high-born ladies who might enter the nunnery, and different provisions for poorer nuns<sup>44</sup>.

The aristocratic women had very important economic functions, at least since the late 11th and the 12th centuries. Anna Dalassena's authority, granted by Alexius I early in his reign, included full powers in fiscal and economic matters; and both Alexius I and his daughter Anna extolled Anna Dalassena's experience with „worldly matters, even though she profoundly despises them“<sup>45</sup>. Anna thought her grandmother a woman of great experience, fully capable of running the Byzantine state<sup>46</sup>. Anna Dalassena's competence was a social phenomenon, not an individual aberration. Her daughter-in-law, Irene Doukaina, gives ample evidence of the same virtues in her *typikon* for the convent of Kecharitomene. Its detailed, numerous provisions for the financial administration of the convent indicate her first-hand experience with managing a large economic concern, including landed estates. In her convent, as in all the convents whose *typika* survive (and they were all founded by members of the aristocracy, who envisaged them primarily as retreats for members of their class), the economic administration and decisions were in the hands of the women. The *oikonomos*, when he was a man, for in one case it was a woman, played primarily an executive role. It was the abbess who decided on economic policy, who took decisions and controlled the actions of all her subordinates<sup>47</sup>.

The same situation occurs in the fourteenth century, when aristocratic women had close control of the family property. It was, for example, Cantacuzenus' mother who was in charge of their warehouses in Constantinople, and it was her decision to use the family fortune to finance

<sup>44</sup> Irene Augustae Typicum sive regula, *PG* 127, chs. 4. 79; H. DELEHAYE, *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues*. Brussels 1921, 71. 128—129. Cf. A. P. KAZDAN, *Vizantijskij monastyr' XI—XII vv. kak social'naja gruppa*. *VV* 13 (1971) 48—70.

<sup>45</sup> Alexias III 6. Cf. a similar statement on Theodora Cantacuzena, in *Cantacuzenus I* 125.

<sup>46</sup> Alexias III 7.

<sup>47</sup> Irene Augustae Typicum, chs. 14. 31; DELEHAYE, *Deux typica* 48. 119ff.

Andronicus III's bid for power<sup>48</sup>. In the same period, Nicephorus Choumnos asserted in his testament that his wife had had all the responsibilities of the household; but the context indicates that he used the words τῶν κατ' οἶκον in a general sense, to describe the family fortune, which thrived under his wife's management<sup>49</sup>. His daughter, Irene Choumnaina Palaeologina, was as competent as her mother. Widowed at sixteen, and thereafter in full ownership and usufruct of her great dowry, she was able to deal with economic matters almost immediately after her husband's death. She retained control of her property, and remarkable economic independence, even after becoming a nun. She, like other women of the aristocracy, was able to sell or donate her property as she wished, without male authorisation<sup>50</sup>.

The upper class woman, then, had her own property, acquired full ownership and use of it upon widowhood, and in any case was closely involved in managing it.

The variance between ideology and reality in Byzantium was particularly evident with regard to the participation of women in economic activities such as agriculture, manufacturing and trade. For the most part, the sources present model views of female behavior, and it is only indirectly that the face of reality may be uncovered. Byzantine ideology, consistent with its exaltation of the woman in the family, allowed her one primary occupation, that of running the household. Even Kekaumenos, with his strict views about keeping women secluded, admitted their right to be in charge of the household<sup>51</sup>. Within the household, the model occupation for a woman was spinning, weaving, and making cloth. This was seen as the primary and only totally accepted economic function of women. Indeed, it is probably the most common *topos* applied to females, in contexts other than moral ones. It would, therefore, be an idle exercise to list the texts in which women appear in the act of cloth-making<sup>52</sup>. It is more interesting to

<sup>48</sup> Cantacuzenus I 138; II 137—138. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Nicephorus Choumnos, *Διαθήκη*, in J. Fr. BOISSONADE, *Anecdota Graeca e codicibus regijs*, V. Paris 1833, 330.

<sup>50</sup> A.-M. M. TALBOT, *The Correspondence of Athanasius I, Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters to the Emperor Andronicus II, Members of the Imperial Family, and Officials*. Washington, D. C., 1975, no. 96; V. LAURENT, *Une princesse byzantine au cloître*. *EO* 29 (1930) 57; A. GUILLOU, *Les archives de Saint-Jean-Prodrôme sur le mont Ménécée*. Paris 1955, no. 46.

<sup>51</sup> *Cecaumeni Strategicon*, edd. B. VASSILIEVSKY, V. JERNSTEDT. St. Petersburg 1896, 42—43.

<sup>52</sup> On the subject, see Ph. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ πολιτισμός*, vol. II B, 202—204. Tzetzes, with his negative attitude toward female learning, praised the martyr Loukia for spending her days at her distaff along with her mother and servant girls, after having

note that the commonplace was so powerful that it occasionally appears in peculiar forms. Thus, when the historian Doukas discusses the origins of the second civil war, he makes John VI's friends say to him that the Empire in the hands of Anne of Savoy was like a weaver's shuttle that worked improperly and spoiled the cloth<sup>53</sup>. A political judgment was given greater force by being tied to the stereotype which expected the woman to be at her loom. Even in Byzantine art, which very rarely portrays women in any kind of productive capacity, women at the loom are a frequent subject<sup>54</sup>.

The *topos*, however, while distorting reality, does not entirely falsify it. Women did participate actively in the production of cloth in the Byzantine Empire as in western Europe<sup>55</sup>. The fact is firmly established by the only documents we have which regulated the communal life of women, that is, the *typika* of convents. In Irene Doukaina's convent, the *ἐργόχειρον*, the main secular occupation of the nuns, was making cloth and clothes, while in the *typikon* established by Neilos Damilas for a Cretan nunnery the word *ἐργόχειρα* was also associated with the making of monastic habits by the nuns<sup>56</sup>. In some nunneries, the production of cloth may have been relatively large-scale, with the possibility of selling the product in the market. Irene Choumnaina Palaeologina, in her foundation charter, forbade the nuns to work on their own account, or to behave like retail merchants (*πραγματεύτριαι*); I assume that she meant they were not to sell their cloth in the market<sup>57</sup>. There is, too, the short and intriguing treatise on "Agathe" by Michael Psellos, which seems to be discussing wage-earning cloth makers. He shows women at a number of jobs (making linen, carding

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acquired an elementary education: τὰ πρῶτα δὲ καὶ στοιχειώδη ἐκμελετήσασα γράμματα, κοσμίῳ τῇ οἰκουρίᾳ σὺν ἅμα θεραπαίνισι καὶ τῇ μητρὶ ταλασιουργιῶν ἐμεμέλητο: A. PAPADOPOULOS—KERAMEUS, *Varia Graeca sacra*. St. Peterburg 1909, 84.

<sup>53</sup> Doukas, *Istoria Turco-Bizantina (1341—1462)*, ed. V. GRECU. Bucharest 1958, VI 1.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, T. VELMANS, *Le Parisinus Graecus 135 et quelques autres peintures de style gothique dans les MSS grecs à l'époque des Paléologues. Cahiers Archéologiques* 17 (1967) 209—235; I am indebted to Mr. M. Chatzidakis for his help with the iconographic material. It should be added that the theme of women weaving or spinning is common in western iconography as well, and has been considered as one of the portrayals of women in a passive condition: Chiara FRUGONI, *L'iconographie de la femme au cours des XI<sup>e</sup>—XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in: *La femme dans les civilisations (1977)*, 87—97.

<sup>55</sup> See A. HIGOUNET, *La femme du moyen âge en France dans la vie économique et sociale*, in: *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, vol. II. Paris 1966, 154ff. In this case, the sources allow a closer examination of the various types of activity women engaged in, and even permit the identification of purely female occupations.

<sup>56</sup> *Irenae Augustae Typicum*, ch. 27; S. PETRIDES, *Le typicon de Nil Damilas pour le monastère des femmes de Baeonia en Crète (1400)*. *IRAIK* 15 (1911) 102—103.

<sup>57</sup> Ph. MEYER, *Bruchstücke zweier typikā κτητορικά*. *BZ* 4 (1895) 45—49.

wool, spinning and weaving), while he presents wool dyeing as a male occupation<sup>58</sup>.

It seems very probable that women did in fact control much of the household production of cloth; and part at least of the cloth sold in the marketplace was produced by women, as even the poem of Ptochoprodromos suggests<sup>59</sup>. The divergence between the ideology and reality lies, for one thing, in the fact that cloth-making was considered proper only insofar as it covered the household needs and not those of the larger economy. Indeed, in the thirteenth century, a woman was granted a divorce because, among other things, her husband had abandoned her, thus forcing her to spin and make woollen and linen cloth in other people's service. Apokaukos, who issued the divorce, objected not to the occupation but to the fact that it was undertaken for the account of others<sup>60</sup>. The social value projected here is, precisely, the virtue of the economic self-sufficiency of the household, and woman's role in keeping it self-sufficient. But that, as previous discussion has made clear, was a model situation, with little connection with reality.

The second distortion stems from the pervasiveness of the commonplace regarding women and cloth-making. This activity was, in fact, neither peculiarly feminine<sup>61</sup>, nor the only one in which women engaged. On the contrary, women may be found in a number of occupations, including that of doctor and midwife<sup>62</sup>. Of particular importance was the participation of women in retail trade. Mention of such activities is frequent, from the 4th

<sup>58</sup> SATHAS, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, V (1876) 530.

<sup>59</sup> D. C. HESSELING, H. PERNOT, edd., *Poèmes prodromiques en grec vulgaire*. Amsterdam 1910, IV 259.

<sup>60</sup> S. PETRIDES, Jean Apokaukos, *Lettres et autres documents inédits*. *IRAIK* 14 (1909) 29: ἔρια καὶ λίνον εὐρίσκειν αὐτὴν τὰς τε χεῖρας ἐρείδειν εἰς ἄτρακτον καὶ ἄλλοτρίων εἶναι χερνῆτιν . . .

<sup>61</sup> S. EUSTRATIADES, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ μῦθοι*. Alexandria 1910, no. 87. Cf. the frequent occurrence of the surnames Raptēs and Yphantēs (e. g., LAIOU—THOMADAKIS, *Peasant Society* 120. 122—123). For a pictorial representation of male weavers, see the 11th-century Octateuch, Vat. gr. 747, Exodus XXXVI.

<sup>62</sup> In the *typikon* for the monastery of Pantocrator provision was made for a female doctor and nurses to take care of the female patients. The doctor received only half the salary of her male counterpart, and she was to function as assistant to the male doctors: P. GAUTIER, *Le typicon du Christ sauveur Pantocrator*. *REB* 32 (1974) 13. 85. 101. Women doctors, as well as midwives, are mentioned in inscriptions of the early Byzantine period: K. P. MENTZOU, *Συμβολαὶ εἰς τὴν μελέτην τοῦ οἰκονομικοῦ καὶ κοινωνικοῦ βίου τῆς πρώιμου Βυζαντινῆς περιόδου*. Athens 1975. Midwives are also mentioned in the Palaeologan period (e. g., *MM* I 132ff.), and are commonly depicted in miniatures: D.-C. HESSELING, *Miniatures de l'octateuque grec de Smyrne*. Leyden 1909, figures 25. 70. 90. 115. 123; cf. Dionysiou, *cod. 587*, in: *Οἱ Θῆσχαυροὶ τοῦ Ἀγίου Ὁρους*, vol. I. Athens 1974, fig. 268.

century through the fourteenth, and Ibn Battuta, in his description of Constantinople, writes: "Each bazaar has gates which are closed upon it at night, and the majority of the artisans and sellers in them are women"<sup>63</sup>. The documentary sources allow a somewhat greater precision. Although women certainly did not monopolize retail trade, they were owners and sometimes also operators of small shops in Byzantine cities. They frequently received such shops as dowries<sup>64</sup>. And in some cases they participated with their dowry money in the small family retail business<sup>65</sup>. In the countryside, too, some women formed partnerships for the exploitation of mines and presumably for the sale of the product. Such was the case of the nun Nymphodora who, in 1445, was involved in two partnerships for the exploitation of mines in Siderokausia<sup>66</sup>. It may also be noted that, although women could not, by law, be money changers, we find in 1342 a woman of the highest aristocracy, an aunt of John V, selling some money-changers' benches<sup>67</sup>.

Women were particularly active as producers and sellers of foodstuffs. In the twelfth century as in the fourteenth women operated bakeries; one put up capital for the operation of a dairy shop in Constantinople<sup>68</sup>. Vegetable and apple sellers are attested in Constantinople<sup>69</sup>, while retail traders of vegetables, and of some kind of beverage, are shown in a fresco of the Blacherniotissa in Arta<sup>70</sup>.

The marked presence of women in the retail trades is a phenomenon which was certainly not unique to the Byzantine Empire. It undoubtedly received an impetus from the quickening of urban life after the eleventh

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325—1354*, transl. H. A. R. GIBBS. London 1929, 160.

<sup>64</sup> Esphigménou, no. 9; *MM* II 416.

<sup>65</sup> *MM* I 452—454; II 326—328.

<sup>66</sup> Xéropotamou, no. 30. One of the rare artistic representations of women at work is that of Eve with bellows helping Adam at the forge. There are several examples, from ivory caskets of the 10th through the 12th centuries: A. GOLDSCHMIDT, K. WEITZMANN, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.—XIII. Jahrhunderts*, I. Berlin 1930, 67. 68. 69. 76. 93. This was pointed out to me by A. P. Každan.

<sup>67</sup> Lavra III, no. 123.

<sup>68</sup> HESSELING—PERNOT, *Poèmes prodromiques* IV 99ff.; *MM* II 391—397. On women's participation in the production and sale of foodstuffs in medieval France, cf. HIGOUNET, *op. cit.*, 154. 165.

<sup>69</sup> OIKONOMIDÈS, *Hommes d'affaires* 99; Ioannis Tzetzēs *Epistulae*, ed. P. A. M. LEONE. Leipzig 1972, no. 57.

<sup>70</sup> I am grateful to Mrs. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou for allowing me to see her unpublished photographs of this fresco; for a preliminary description of the scene, see her Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες στη Μονή Βλαχέρνας της Άρτας. *Αρχαιολογικά Ανάλεκτα ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν* 8 (1975) 208—216.

century; and it was made possible to some extent by the relative liberation of dowry property from the strict constraints regarding its use. The same elements account for the existence of women who lent money to others, or who invested money in relatively long-distance trade. Such is the case of Theodora Palaeologina, who gave her daughter's dowry (along with 300 *hyperpyra* she had borrowed) to her relative Ioannes Goudelis, to invest in a trading enterprise to Chios. Apparently this was not an exceptional type of investment for her; when, a year earlier, she was arranging her daughter's marriage, she could not deliver the 400 *hyperpyra* which formed part of the dowry, for she had it not in cash, but εἰς πραγµατεῖαν καὶ χρέα<sup>71</sup>. Similar activities continued until the very end of the existence of the Byzantine state. In the late winter of 1453, Maria, daughter of Manuel Sevastos, is seen to have had several dealings with Genoese merchants, including debts for unknown purposes, and a debt for the purchase of some caviar. And just after the fall of Constantinople, Mariola, the widow of a certain "Micali Apaschi", who left the captured city on a Genoese ship, appointed a plenipotentiary to guard her interests<sup>72</sup>.

Among the women who participated in the urban economy, by lending money, or by engaging in retail or long-distance trade, or in other similar ways, several belonged to the aristocracy. In the fourteenth century, 75% of the reported cases were aristocratic women<sup>73</sup>. The proportion is certainly exaggerated because the sources are to some degree biased. Nevertheless, it may serve as a reminder of the role of aristocratic women in the economy of exchange.

The greatest possibility of operating in economic life without special disabilities belonged to widows who, as long as they did not remarry, retained the right of ownership and administration of family property.

<sup>71</sup> *MM* II 399. 511—512. 550—551. A study has been made of Genoese women who invested in trade; unfortunately, our data are insufficient for similar analysis: G. JEHEL, Le rôle des femmes et du milieu familial à Gênes dans les activités commerciales. *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* 53 (1975) 193—215; cf. M. BALARD, *La Romanie génoise*. Rome 1978, 517, n. 12.

<sup>72</sup> A. ROCCATAGLIATA, Con un notaio genovese tra Pera e Chio nel 1453—1454. *RESEE* 17 (1979) 220.

<sup>73</sup> I have taken into account the following cases, designating members of the aristocracy by the letter A: *MM* I 52—53. 106—107 (A). 276—279 (A). 391—397; II 326—328. 348—350 (A). 358 (A). 367—368. 368—369 (A). 372 (A). 386 (A). 399 (A). 424—426 (A). 437—438 (A). 439—441. 447—448 (A). 484 (A). 550—551 (A); DARROUZÈS, *Regestes*, nos. 2500. 2674; G. FERRARI DELLE SPADE, *Registro Vaticano di atti bizantini di diritto privato*. *SBN* 4 (1935), no. 7; and the two cases mentioned in notes 76. 77 below.

Two of these cases (*MM* I 52—53; II 513—515) refer to a semi-economic activity, whereby women have the right to exploit important icons. Cf. also J. NESBITT, J. WILTA, A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era. *BZ* 68 (1975) 360ff.

They were rather numerous, probably making up about 20% of the population at any given time<sup>74</sup>. They had fiscal responsibilities, and we know that peasant widows headed households with property similar to the average property of the peasant population as a whole. The economic and financial activities of widows in the cities have not yet been studied. It is clear, however, that these were the women most involved in the economic transactions which reached the courts and therefore the sources. They were involved in trade or in artisanal activities<sup>75</sup>. Some had dealings with the Venetians or the Genoese. Thus, a woman named Irene, widow of Manuel Sagitopoulos, sold a Tatar slave to a Venetian in 1350<sup>76</sup>. And Jhera (Kyra) Palaeologina, daughter of a certain Livadarios and widow of Luchino de Draperiis, member of one of the important Genoese families of Pera, came into full control of her dowry of 2500 *hyperpyra* on her husband's death. She was subsequently quite active, recovering debts and acting in the name of her sons<sup>77</sup>.

If the economic activities of urban women are to some extent visible and capable of analysis, women's participation in agricultural labor is virtually invisible in the sources. Indeed, although historians may assume that peasant women worked in the fields as well as in the house, the specifics of these activities are not known, and the evidence is ambivalent. For example, although apparently it was quite common in 13th-century Epirus for women to gather grapes, Apokaukos, in what may be a metaphorical passage, finds the participation of women in grain harvesting a strange and almost unnatural activity<sup>78</sup>. Apparently, women also took part in threshing, but not in every part of the Empire<sup>79</sup>. There is also the interesting case of the disbanding of a double monastery in the late fourteenth century; part of the rationale for the decision was that the monks were unhappy because women would not work in the fields<sup>80</sup>. At this

<sup>74</sup> LAIOU—THOMADAKIS, Peasant Society 89ff. The taxes paid by peasant households headed by women (0.6 *hyperpyra* in 1300—1301; 1.1 in 1320—21, and 0.5 in 1341) were comparable to those paid by the peasant population as a whole (1 *hyperpyron* in 1300—01, 1.2 in 1320—21, 0.7 in 1341). On the contrary, in the early fifteenth century peasant households headed by widows paid a much lower tax than the others: F. DÖLGER, *Aus den Schatzkammern des Heiligen Berges*. Munich 1948, no. 63.

<sup>75</sup> *MM* II 399—400. 511—512.

<sup>76</sup> A. S. V., Notai di Candia, b. 11, fo. 5ro.

<sup>77</sup> A. S. G., Notary Donato di Chiavari, 1389, nos. 10. 17. 21. 24. 81 (1387—1390). A study of the position of Greek women in Venetian- or Genoese-held territories would yield very significant results.

<sup>78</sup> A. PAPAPOULOS—KERAMEUS, *Noctes Petropolitanae*. St. Petersburg 1913, 260; PETRIDES, Jean Apokaukos 18.

<sup>79</sup> Ph. KOUKOULES, *Θεσσαλονίκης Εὔσταθίου τὰ Λαογραφικά* I. Athens 1950, 25.

<sup>80</sup> *MM* II 80ff. (1383).

point, all that may be said with certainty is that women in the countryside were normally inscribed in the *praktika*, often functioning as heads of household. They probably, as in western Europe, engaged in the minor agricultural activities: tending small animals, cultivating gardens, perhaps vineyards. Occasionally we find women shepherdesses (like the Vlach shepherdesses introduced in Mt. Athos in the eleventh century)<sup>81</sup>. But the participation of women in the major agricultural activities remains an open question<sup>82</sup>.

### 3. SOCIETY AND POLITICS

The active economic role of women presupposes a general involvement in the society, and a much greater interaction with men than scholars have believed<sup>83</sup>. The modern concept of the seclusion and isolation of Byzantine women from the rest of society is largely a misconception which extends earlier realities to periods when they no longer applied. The confinement of women to women's quarters was not a functional reality after the eleventh century. It has been made famous by the eloquence of Psellos and the picturesque language of Kekaumenos; but in fact, these two authors, along with Attaleiates, are the last to show the *gynaeceum* as part of social reality<sup>84</sup>. When it appears in the sources subsequently, it is presented merely as an ideal, not as part of people's lives. Eustathius of Thessalonica, for example, talks of a κόρη, θαλαμειομένη ἐκείνη ὥσπερ καὶ αὕτη ἐντὸς τῶν βλεφάρων, but the passage is part of an exegesis, and does not really describe the contemporary situation<sup>85</sup>.

Reality was quite different. The aristocratic women of the twelfth century and through the late fourteenth were far from secluded. Irene Doukaina went on campaign with her husband, and her daughter was at some pains to reconcile this fact with the social norm, which would still prefer women to shun the company of men<sup>86</sup>. Cantacuzenus' wife, Irene,

<sup>81</sup> GRUMEL, *Regestes*, no. 81; L. OECONOMOS, *La vie religieuse dans l'empire byzantin au temps des Comnènes et des Anges*. Paris 1918, ch. VII.

<sup>82</sup> Iconography is of little help in this case. Unlike western European miniatures, Byzantine ones very rarely show women in agricultural activities. Women do not appear in the bucolic scenes illustrating the Homilies of St. Gregory Nazianzenus, although these show, among other things, pruning, tilling, shearing, beekeeping, and milking. G. GALAVARIS, *The Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus*. Princeton 1969. Only rarely do women appear in scenes like the 12th-century representation of Eve helping Adam to reap: GOLDSCHMIDT—WEITZMANN, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 92.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, *La femme* 27—28.

<sup>84</sup> Michaelis *Attalioetae historia*, ed. Em. BEKKER. Bonn 1853, 88.

<sup>85</sup> *PG* 136, 732.

<sup>86</sup> Alexias XII 3.

essentially governed Didymoteichon while he was on campaign in Macedonia during the second civil war; some years later, his daughter Helen was left in charge of the garrison of Ainos by her husband, the despot Nicephorus II of Epirus<sup>87</sup>. At a somewhat different level, the life of Eudocia, daughter of the protasekretis Neokaisarites, is instructive. She lived in Thessalonica, and was the object of the ardent affections of the despot Constantine, son of Andronicus II. He tried to woo her, but she refused, fearing, says Gregoras, either the act of adultery itself, or her husband's reaction to it. Constantine was finally able to marry her after her first husband's death. Gregoras, who relates the story, describes her beauty, great enough to inspire desire in all who met her or who heard of her. These seem to have been rather numerous. For she was an educated woman, and she apparently had a relatively large group of acquaintances with whom she discussed books and intellectual questions<sup>88</sup>. Even if one were to relieve this story of a certain romantic element, it would still serve as proof of the free interaction of Palaeologan aristocratic women with men.

The aristocratic woman emerged as an important element in the society and politics of the Empire in the late 11th century. This was not the personal involvement of remarkable women who were important because of historical accident or extraordinary ability — like Pulcheria, Theodora, wife of Justinian I, or Irene the Athenian. It was, rather, the increased interference of a whole class of women in public life. Some functioned as Empresses, running their own administration (as did Irene of Montferrat in Thessalonica), and managing their own properties. Starting with Anna Dalassena, they issued acts many of which, although not all, had to do with economic arrangements involving their property<sup>89</sup>. Occasionally they ruled the Empire, or parts of it, as did Anne of Savoy. Most frequently they ran the state along with their male relatives, as did a number of the women of the Cantacuzenus family. Some of them clearly enjoyed power; the most striking example is, perhaps, Anna Comnena, who plotted as much as her paternal grandmother had done, although less successfully. The difference is, that whereas Anna Dalassena had, like a model Byzantine mother, plotted for her sons, her granddaughter's interest was concentrated on her own self. Anna Comnena was also quite conscious of the new role women were playing in politics. For she divorced the actions of the Comnenian

<sup>87</sup> Cantacuzenus III 315—316; II 195, 281—287.

<sup>88</sup> Gregoras I 293—294.

<sup>89</sup> F. BARIŠIĆ, *Povelje vizantijskih carica*. *ZRVI* 13 (1971) 145—202. For Anna Dalassena's acts, see *MM VI* 32ff. 35ff. 65ff. The eleventh-century empress Theodora had also issued acts: F. DÖLGER, *Aus den Schatzkammern des Heiligen Berges*. Munich 1948. no. 36. Cf. the disapproving statement by Psellos, *Chronographie* II 73.

ladies from those of the Macedonian empresses and the other eleventh-century women who ran the state from the *gynaecium*<sup>90</sup>.

Women also took a very active part in the religious controversies of the Palaeologan period, to the extent of taking action that was independent of and hostile to those of their male relatives. The ardent opposition to Michael VIII's unionist policies by his sister Eulogia and his two nieces, Theodora Comnena Raoulaina and Anne of Epirus, is well known. Maria, wife of Michael IX, apparently also had pro-Arsenite tendencies, as did two other close relatives of Andronicus II<sup>91</sup>; which places a good number of Palaeologan ladies in opposition to the official policies of their male relatives. Later in the century, Irene Choumnaina ran an anti-Palamist campaign from her convent and, more surprisingly, her religious predilections were shared for a time by Irene, wife of John Cantacuzenus<sup>92</sup>.

The rather intense involvement of the women of the aristocracy in religious matters is an aspect of their involvement in politics; but the pattern of opposition to the official state positions is a subject worthy of further examination.

The emergence of the aristocratic woman as an important element in the economy and the politics of the Byzantine Empire is, of course, a result of the fact that the aristocracy as a whole had become more solid, and dominant. Within that class, women played a particular role, partly because they owned and controlled some of the landed property which was the economic power base of that class, and partly because they could ensure the proper ancestry to their offspring. The existence of strong family links between the members of the Byzantine dominant families in the Comnenian period and later, and the fact that much of politics was run by these closely related families is too well known a phenomenon to bear discussion<sup>93</sup>; it began, in fact, with the alliance of the Ducae and the

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Psellos, p. 117: Περίσταται οὖν ἡ βασιλεία ταῖς δυσὶν ἀδελφαῖς, καὶ τότε πρῶτον ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνος τεθῆσθαι γυναικωῖτιν μετασχηματισθεῖσαν εἰς βασιλικὸν βουλευτήριον . . . and Anna Comnena, Alexias III 7: Καὶ ἴσως μὲν ἂν τις ἐνταῦθα γενόμενος καταμέμφοιτο τὴν οἰκονομίαν ὡς γυναικωνίτιδι καταπιστεύσαντος τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς τὴν τῆς βασιλείας διοίκησιν. Ἄλλ' εἰ τὸ φρόνημα τῆς γυναικὸς ἤπίστατο . . . ἀφέμενος μέμψως πρὸς θαῦμα τὴν μέμψιν μετέβαλλε.

<sup>91</sup> TALBOT, Correspondence, no. 69, no. 34; cf. LAURENT, Regestes. no. 1689, and D. M. NICOL, The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus). Washington, D. C., 1968, no. 14.

<sup>92</sup> LAURENT, Princesse. *passim*; R. GUILLAND, La correspondance de Nicéphore Grégoras. Paris 1927, no. 151. It is, presumably, such women that Philotheos Kokkinos deplures in his *enkōmion* of Gregory Palamas: *PG* 151, 642.

<sup>93</sup> A. P. KAŽDAN, Social'nyj sostav gospodstvjuščego klassa Vizantii XI—XII vv. Moscow 1974, 196ff.; A. E. LAIOU, The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Palaeologan Period: A Story of Arrested Development. *Viator* 4 (1973) 131—151; LEMERLE, Cinq études, 297.

Comneni through the marriage of Alexius I and Irene. As a result, the women of the aristocracy had a clear self-awareness as members of the dominant class, and an immense pride of family. This is evident in their own statements and appears also in the poems of those who were trying to court their favor. For Theodore Prodromos, and presumably for his audience, descent along the female line was as important as along the male. Of the daughter of Theodora Comnena, he writes: ἡ πορφυρανθόπαιδος ἐκ Θεοδώρας | μητρὸς Κομνηνῆς Κομνηνῆ παῖς Μαρία | Κωνσταντίνου δὲ σύζυγος Καμυτζίου<sup>94</sup>.

In the early Palaeologan period, Maximos Planoudes composed what may be the epitome of this genre, an epigram addressed to Theodora Comnena Raoulaina which consists simply of her genealogy, tracing her paternal ancestry to the early Comneni, her maternal to the Angeli, and her husband's to John Ducas Vatatzes<sup>95</sup>. It is also significant that among the aristocracy it was a common occurrence for children to adopt both their mother's and their father's name or even to use only the name of their female parent. The phenomenon usually appeared when the female ancestry was more exalted than the male one, but it also suggests a particular kind of pride. It is that which must have made the daughter of Nicephorus Bryennios and granddaughter of Alexius I Comnenus adopt the name of her maternal grandmother, Irene Ducaena.

The non-aristocratic urban women, too, seem to have had a complex role in society, far removed from the simple model which Byzantine ideology had created. Their presence in economic life has already been discussed. Almost all access to political life being denied them, they, unlike aristocratic women, had very limited influence on the politics of the Empire. They did, however, participate in riots, sometimes with great violence. Women were among the most vocal participants in the riots in Constantinople in 1042, when Michael Calaphates tried to remove Zoe from power. Psellos was impressed by the numbers and the violence of the women who threatened to burn the palace, and who called for Zoe with the strange cry "ποῦ ποτε ἡ μόνη τῶν πασῶν ἐλευθέρα"<sup>96</sup>; At the end of the next century, women were among the crowd in the riot which ended the reign and the life of Andronicus I; but Choniates, in describing their actions, is

<sup>94</sup> W. HÖRANDNER, Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte. Vienna 1974, LXIV; cf. LXVI.

<sup>95</sup> Sp. LAMPROS, Ἐπιγράμματα Μαξίμου Πλανούδη. *NE* 13 (1916) 414—421.

<sup>96</sup> E. RENAUD, Michel Psellos Chronographie, I. Paris 1926, 102. Neither Skylitzes nor Attaleiates mention women in this riot.

not surprised at their presence in the streets of the city and outside their home, as Psellos and Attaleiates had been in the eleventh century<sup>97</sup>.

#### 4. LITERACY

The multifaceted activities of women in Byzantine society in the eleventh century and after are connected, to some extent, with changes in female literacy, and in the societal attitude toward educated women. Already in the late eleventh century there is a certain positive perception of women who had achieved greater education than that required for reading the simplest religious texts<sup>98</sup>. Theophylact of Ochrid praised the great learning of the empress Maria of Alania<sup>99</sup>, while Michael Psellos inadvertently describes intriguing development within his own family. For while his mother had only the most rudimentary learning, his daughter was on her way to acquiring a good education before she died at the age of nine<sup>100</sup>. His pride at her accomplishment probably reflects a change in the society's attitude toward education for upper class women; Psellos' daughter would have differed from his mother not only because times had changed, but because she would have belonged to a higher class.

The existence of a number of highly educated women in 12th-century Constantinople is as well known as it is interesting a phenomenon. They were primarily relatives of the Comnenoi: Anna Comnena, or the sebastocratorissa Irene who had her own literary circle and whom Theodore Prodromos addressed as φιλάγαθε βασίλισσα καὶ φιλολογωτάτη<sup>101</sup>. Learning had become an acceptable virtue for the upper class female.

There was, however, an ambivalence in that attitude. George Tornikios' funeral oration of Anna Comnena, a commissioned work, gives a measure of the ambivalence<sup>102</sup>. He praised her extraordinary education, her erudition, her influence on contemporary learned men<sup>103</sup>. Nevertheless, he

<sup>97</sup> Nicetae Choniatae historia, ed. Em. BEKKER. Bonn 1835, 456 ff.

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Zhitie ... sv. Feodory, p. 3; PAPAPOPOULOS—KERAMEUS, *Varia* 84.

<sup>99</sup> *PG* 126, 265.

<sup>100</sup> SATHAS, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, V, 7. 12. 64—66.

<sup>101</sup> HÖRANDNER, Theodoros Prodromos, no. XLVI; cf. Tzetzes *Epistulae*, ep. 56, in which he asks her to return a book he had sent her. On the *sebastokratorissa*, cf. F. CHALANDON, *Jean II Comnène (1118—1143) et Manuel I Comnène (1143—1180)*. Paris 1912, 212—213.

<sup>102</sup> J. DARROUZÈS, *Georges et Démétrius Tornikès, Lettres et discours*. Paris 1970, 229—230; cf. R. BROWNING, *An Unpublished Funeral Oration of Anna Comnena. Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, no. 188 (new ser. no. 8) (1962) 1—12.

<sup>103</sup> DARROUZÈS, *Tornikès* 244 ff. 255. 283. 287 ff. 301. 311.

was not presenting these traits as those of a model woman, to be emulated by others. He found Anna comparable only to a few women of remote Antiquity. It was a fairly common cliché, but normally employed not for learning but for wisdom or piety. Tornikios' use of it seems to remove Anna from her social milieu. He also insisted that she acquired her knowledge secretly, and against her parents' desires: very questionable praise, in a society where obedience to parents was a prime virtue. And he used the *topos* for a woman's proper occupation (spinning and weaving), saying that Anna had exchanged the distaff and spindle for learning<sup>104</sup>. The truly negative implications of that statement are made clear in a poem by Tzetzes, κατὰ γυναικὸς σχεδογραφούσης, in which he urges the woman scholar to return to her spindle, "for learning is proper to men"<sup>105</sup>. Tzetzes took a dim view of women's literary activities, which he lamented in another verse. That poem seems to indicate that there were a relatively large number of women of learning in twelfth-century Constantinople<sup>106</sup>.

To these vague and to some degree impressionistic types of information may be added the potentially more valuable data provided by the *typika* of women's convents. Especially important is the oldest extant one, the *typikon* of Irene Doukaina for the convent of Kecharitomeni. In it she described in great detail the duties of the many officials of the convent, virtually all of whom had to know reading, writing and some form of accounting in order to discharge their duties adequately<sup>107</sup>; never once did she mention the possibility that some of the nuns (who were, to be sure, aristocratic ladies) might be illiterate. On the contrary, the eleventh-century *typikon* for the monastery of Evergetis did confront that possibility; and it was echoed by the *typikon* issued in 1152 by Isaac Comnenus for the monastery of Kosmosoteira<sup>108</sup>. The other *typika* governing female convents all date from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries;

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 231. 243—245. 315. 229.

<sup>105</sup> S. G. MERCATI, Giambi di Giovanni Tzetze contro una donna schedografa. *BZ* 44 (1951) 419. Anna Comnena herself was very much opposed to the particular kind of scholarship Tzetzes criticized: Alexias, book XV, 7.

<sup>106</sup> Th. KIESSLING, Ioannis Tzetzae Historiarum variarum Chiliades. Leipzig 1826. p. 517; I owe this reference to Professor A. P. Kazdan.

<sup>107</sup> *Irenae Augustae Typicum*, chs. 14. 19. 20. 21. 22. 24.

<sup>108</sup> A. DMITRIEVSKIY, Opisanie liturgiĉeskikh rukopisej, chranjaščichsja v bibliotekach pravoslavnago vostoka, I. Typica. St. Petersburg 1895, 645—646; cf. J. PARGOIRE, Constantinople: Le couvent de l'Evergétés. *EO* 9 (1906) 228—232. 366—373; 10 (1907) 155—167. 259—263; L. PETIT, Typicon du monastère de la Kosmosotira près d'Aenos (1142). *IRAİK* 13 (1908), ch. 39.

and in only one of them is there mention of nuns who might be illiterate<sup>109</sup>. The same convent had a school for girls as well as boys; but this was later suppressed<sup>110</sup>.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but unfortunately in no other period, there is sufficient information to make possible a closer examination of female literacy. The existence of a relatively large number of documents, issued by or involving women, allow us to use a somewhat rudimentary but nevertheless indicative criterion, namely the ability of women to sign their name. Table III summarises female literacy in the sense defined above. The statistics include women of the aristocracy and of the peasantry; the urban, non-aristocratic woman, is largely absent from this documentation<sup>111</sup>.

Table III  
Female Literacy

	No. of Cases	Literate	Illiterate	Rate of Literacy
13th c.	113	2	111	1.8%
14th c.	83	13	70	16.0%

The difference in the percentages of "literate" women is to be ascribed not to changes over time, but to the social composition of the female population which underlies these figures. The thirteenth-century documentation involves a considerable number of women who belonged to the local Asia Minor aristocracy<sup>112</sup>; it is their illiteracy that Table III establishes, as well as that of the peasant woman. That this was a sex-specific illiteracy is proven by the fact that in a number of cases the husband or father of the woman was literate, at least to the degree established by the criterion we have used. The fourteenth century documentation, which comes mostly from Macedonia, tells the same story. Not only peasant women, but many

<sup>109</sup> That is the *typikon* for the monastery of Vevaaia Elpis, founded by Theodora Synadene: DELEHAYE, *Deux typica* 53. The introduction to this edition gives a list of *typika*; cf. also K. A. MANAPHES, *Μοναστηριακά Τυπικά-Διαθήκαι*. Athens 1970, 178ff.

<sup>110</sup> DELEHAYE, *op. cit.*, 47. 97. 98.

<sup>111</sup> Sources for Table III: Esphigménou; Lavra, I. II. III: Chilandar (Actes grecs); MOŠIN, SOVRE, *Supplementa ad acta graeca Chilandarii; Zographou; Kutlumu; Dionysiou; Pantocrator; Xénophon; Xéropotamou; MM IV. VI; GUILLOU, Saint Jean Prodrome; Philothée; OIKONOMIDÈS, Docheiariou; H. HUNGER, Zwei byzantinische Urkunden der späten Palaiologenzeit aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. BZ 48 (1955) 304ff.*

<sup>112</sup> For example. Martha Thrakesina and her daughter Anna, Anna Planitissa. members of the Gordatos family, etc.: *MM IV 86-88. 94-96. 99. 127*; cf. M. ANGOLD, *A Byzantine Government in Exile*. Oxford 1974, *passim*.