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Remarks on the Role of Women in Byzantium through the Epigrams on the Cross by Nicholas Kallikles

Scholarly poetry and epigrams in particular, have been a literary means of expression for the scholars in Byzantium. On the one hand, they helped express ideas and attitudes towards life and on the other hand, conveyed their religious feelings and deep religious beliefs. A plethora of engraved Byzantine epigrams were used on exceptional works of Byzantine micro-art, such as crosses and staurothékes, so as to emphasize the religiosity of the person who ordered the making of such a complicated and grand piece. Among those people were noble women and specifically, the wives of Byzantine emperors held an exceptional position. Some cases include Irene Doukaina and her second daughter Maria Komnene during the 11th-12th century, who assigned the composition of such epigrams to their contemporary scholar of the royal court Nicholas Kallikles. These epigrams are going to be examined in this article emphasizing the most important information they provide, including the motivational factors for these orders.

Keywords: Byzantine epigram, cross, crucifixion, *staurothékes*, noble women, 11th-12th century, Nicholas Kallikles

Prologue

Ancient Athens, the capital city of Attica, was under the protection of the goddess Athena, hence the name of the city. A special myth is associated to this city-naming. One day, a dispute arose between two gods: a woman—Athena—and a man—Poseidon. More precisely, during the

reign of Cecrops, king of the city later called Athens, two wondrous things happened: an olive tree sprouted on the dry earth one day and at the same time, a spring of water gushed forth a little further away. The king then turned to the Oracle of Delphi to ask what it all meant and what he should do. The oracle replied that the olive tree represented Athena and the water represented Poseidon and that the inhabitants themselves had to decide which of the two gods they would choose as their patron. Cecrops then called the people to an assembly, in which the women also took part, because at that time they were still involved in the decision-making process. The men voted for Poseidon, the women for Athena. But because there was one woman more in the assembly, Athena won, which angered Poseidon so much that he covered the land of the Athenians with sea water. In order to appease him, the latter were forced to impose three penalties on their women: they took away their right to vote, the right to name their children after their own names (which from then on were called by their maiden name) and, finally, they took away their right to call themselves Athenian, as had been done up to that time in honor of the goddess Athena. What is the deeper meaning of the myth? Undoubtedly, this myth shows that ancient Athens, during an early phase of its history, before it became a patriarchal society that excluded women from any public space, went through a period of gynecocracy (or political supremacy of women).¹

Although the above incident belongs to the realm of myth, one cannot ignore the question it raises about the place and role of women in human societies throughout the centuries. Can we, then, speak of a continuous degradation of the position of women in the course of human

¹ It is noted that women in ancient Greece played an important role in the religious life of a community as priestesses. We recall the three-day autumn festival of Thesmophoria, a festival that remained untainted by the patriarchal stratification of the Olympian pantheon, in the absence of the male population, and which reaffirmed the fertility of the earth and female fertility in the sowing season. See HARRISON (1996: 167–179); MOSSE (2002).

societies? Is there historically a pivotal moment when we can claim that a change is foreseen? And if so, when is this moment and what is the event that triggers it? Are changes, whatever they are, coming rapidly or are there difficulties in their occurrence? Also, can we talk about changes of universal significance, i.e. applying the same to all women regardless of age and especially economic and social status? These are some of the questions that this article attempts to answer, focusing historically on society in the Byzantine period, after a brief historical overview of the subject has been attempted. The sources that will help us to outline the status of Byzantine women come from the field of Byzantine poetry, and in particular from the Byzantine epigrams of a renowned scholar and physician of the court of Komnenoi, Nicholas Kallikles.²

Introduction

It is without a doubt that the role of women in society is inextricably linked with family as a social institution. In Roman times, marriage was a social relation between a man and a woman validated by law so that the couple could live together and have children according to standard moral codes.³ The husband held authority over the members of the Roman family thus determining their fate and life.⁴ Still, it is worth noting that women of that era enjoyed freedom in matters regarding religion

² It is worth noting that, in general, there are few written testimonies of the simple and everyday life of women in Byzantium, which generally concern members of the middle and upper social classes. Our knowledge of the life of women belonging to lower classes is more limited, as it comes mainly from indirect information, in which, at the same time, it is often difficult to distinguish between elements that correspond to reality and those that could be interpreted as literary sources. Even more striking is the lack of evidence concerning women's domestic tasks (e.g. spinning, preparing food, kneading bread, cleaning and decorating the house), which were apparently taken for granted, with the result that no Byzantine author refers to them in detail. See Μαντάς (2012: 55).

³ KAZDAN (1989:196); JONAITIS – KOSAITĖ-ČYPIENĖ (2009: 295–316).

⁴ SALLER (1986).

given that women from all social classes (even slaves or prostitutes) could participate in religious events and affairs.⁵ Towards the end of the roman period, the power of women had started to grow in the familial environment at first and then in society. As a matter of fact, women coming from rich families could pursue an education and accompany their husbands in social events.

As we move forward, Christianity made its debut and started influencing the established social face of marriage giving it new features. This began to formulate the new religious aspect of marriage thus improving the position of women in society.⁶ These changes can be seen in texts by the Great Fathers and in law documents of the Byzantine period which validate the position of women and allow them certain rights.⁷

The role of women in the Old and New Testament

In the book of Genesis, the woman was made by God by taking a piece from Adam⁸ and, from that moment on, all men would leave their father and mother in order to match with a woman resulting in a marriage.⁹ It

⁵ FRIER – MCGINN – LIDOV (2004: 31–32).

⁶ Κουκουλές (1955c: 163–218); Κουκουλές (1981); ΛΑΙΟΥ (1981); Βακαλούδη (1998); Λάμπρος (1923); Μέντζου (1982); Νικολάου (1986); HUTTER (1984: 163–170). It should also be noted that women could practice medicine in Byzantium mostly in their capacity as a midwife or as a doctor for diseases of the female body. See Μπουρδάρα (1998); KISLINGER (1955); Κουκουλές (1955b: 14); BULLOUGH (1973). Women doctors who tended to the human body also had the arduous task of abortions, which were morally deplorable. For abortions in the Byzantine world and the way this issue was dealt with by the State and the Church see CUPANE – KISLINGER (1985); Τρωιάνος (1987).

⁷ See e.g. Κιουσοπούλου – Μπενβενίστε (1991).

⁸ Gen. 2, 21–22: καὶ ἐπέβαλεν ὁ Θεὸς ἔκστασιν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀδὰμ, καὶ ὑπνώσε· καὶ ἔλαβε μίαν τῶν πλευρῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεπλήρωσε σάρκα ἀντ’ αὐτῆς. / καὶ ὠκοδόμησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν πλευράν, ἣν ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδὰμ, εἰς γυναῖκα καὶ ἤγαγεν αὐτὴν πρὸς τὸν Ἀδὰμ (= And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and he slept, and He took one of his sides, and He closed the flesh in its place. And the Lord God built the side that He had taken from man into a woman, and He brought her to man).

⁹ Gen. 2, 24: ἔνεκεν τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα

should be noted that the woman is characterized as a helper and not as a slave to men,¹⁰ and it is a fact that after the original sin (that is, after the disobedience of Adam and Eve to God's command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil),¹¹ the woman took on the role of a helper with a more soteriological concept.¹² Women were now helpers, supporters and comrades to men in their tough course to uniting with God.¹³ The same was also true for men who ought to be helpers of women towards their salvation.¹⁴

However, in the Old Testament we do not see any indication of the God-given equivalency of men and women,¹⁵ since women were mostly described as unholy and second-grade humans.¹⁶ Certainly, in the patriarchal society of the Old Testament¹⁷ we see a lot of women with powerful positions in the Israeli society, namely Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, and many others, reminding us of what we later read in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians that οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἑλλήν, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ

καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν (= Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh).

¹⁰ Gen. 2, 20: τῷ δὲ Ἀδὰμ οὐχ εὗρέθη βοηθὸς ὅμοιος αὐτῷ (= but for man, he did not find a helpmate opposite him).

¹¹ Gen. 2, 16-17: Καὶ ἐνετείλατο Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Ἀδὰμ λέγων· ἀπὸ παντὸς ξύλου τοῦ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ βρώσει φαγῇ, / ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ γινώσκειν καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν, οὐ φάγεσθε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ· ἢ δ' ἂν ἡμέρα φάγητε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε (= And the Lord God commanded man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat. But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it, for on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die").

¹² Πατρῶνος (1992: 27); Τρεμπέλας (1981: 324).

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Περὶ τοῦ τὰς κανονικὰς μὴ συνοικεῖν ἀνδράσι*, PG 47, 514: Κατὰ πάντα [ἢ γυναῖκα] τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ [τῷ Ἀδάμ] ὅμοιον, δυνάμενον, ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτῷ καὶ τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις τὴν ζωὴν τὰ τῆς βοηθείας εἰσφέρει.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 7, 14: ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί, καὶ ἡγίασται ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀνδρί.

¹⁵ Num. 27, 1-11; Ex. 20, 17.

¹⁶ Deut. 21, 10-17; Lev. 11, 1-5.

¹⁷ GOODMAN – GOODMAN (1975: 22-37); BORNEMAN (1988: 70-74; 160-168).

ὅμοις εἷς ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.¹⁸ A pious and good wife standing by her husband's side was commended and the husband was seen as a happy man¹⁹ with a God-sent wife.²⁰

The great divide comes with the establishment of Christianity as a religion. Christ Himself was the one who praised women with His attitude and teachings and put them in the same social status as men. Therefore, He didn't hesitate to socialize with prostitutes,²¹ discuss with the Samaritan woman²² and forgive the adulteress.²³ Certainly, we should be aware of the fact that within His circle there were not only men but women too and it is to women that He revealed Himself for the first time²⁴ and not to men.²⁵ It is then observable that women are not just standing in the limelight but they are active participants with a primary role in God's plan for the salvation of the human kind.

Such a concept, meaning the role of women in the New Testament, can be seen in the decisive role that Virgin Mary played as God's mother. The Great Fathers call her the new Eve since she was the reason why the second face of the Holy Trinity, Christ -the new Adam-, took on a human face in order to save humanity from the original sin of Adam and Eve.

Finally, it should not be left out that the books of the New Testament mention a lot of female names corresponding to women who played a great role within the Church. Therefore, in Acts of the Apostles we see the names of Priscilla,²⁶ Lydia,²⁷ Saint Thekla and many others,²⁸ while

¹⁸ Gal. 3, 28.

¹⁹ Sir. 16, 1.

²⁰ Prov. 31, 10–31.

²¹ Luke 7, 36–50.

²² John 4, 5–42.

²³ John 8, 1–11.

²⁴ Luke 24, 1–10; Mark 16, 9–11; John 20, 11–18.

²⁵ Αγουρίδης (1999: 286).

²⁶ Act. 18, 2–3; Rom. 16, 3.

²⁷ Act. 16, 14.

²⁸ Act. 1, 14; 9, 36; 41; 12, 12; 16, 14.

in the epistles by Paul²⁹ we see the names of *Apfá*, Eunice, Claudia, Lois, Maria, *Syntýchi*, *Eodía* and Phoebe.

The role of Apostle Paul

In the years of the Apostle Paul, the presence of women is distinct, since during his missionary activity, we see women apostles, such as Junia, who together with Andronikos is referred to as ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις.³⁰ In fact, John Chrysostom,³¹ in his interpretation of the letter to the Romans, refers to Junia with admiration, considering her a worthy apostle. In fact, she is one of Paul's female associates who were able to use their gifts and offer their services to the then newly founded Christian Church, perhaps the only place in the long later Byzantine period, where women could enjoy some form of freedom. It is important to note, however, that, on the one hand, these cases of women do not represent the norm, but rather the exception, and, on the other hand, any activity of some women during this early period of the Christian Church is inextricably linked to the social conditions prevailing. In particular, while the Church belonged to the private sphere, being persecuted and marginalized, various roles were developed by its early members, regardless of gender, as the participation of everyone was essential and useful. But once the Christian Church is officially recognized (in 313 AD), it becomes part of the public sphere and begins to identify with it,

²⁹ 2 Tim. 1, 5; 4, 21; Rom. 16, 3; 6, 12-13, 15; Phil. 4, 2. It is worth mentioning the excerpt of Apostle Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7, 4: ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει, ἀλλ' ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει, ἀλλ' ἡ γυνή), in which there is an attempt to distinguish the roles of each gender within a marriage, showing clearly how one gender succumbs to the other.

³⁰ Rom. 16, 7.

³¹ PG 60, 669: Βαβαί, πόση τῆς γυναικὸς ταύτης ἡ φιλοσοφία, ὡς καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀξιοθῆναι προσηγορίας.

accepting the distinction of social roles of the time and reproducing the prevailing social hierarchy.³²

The example of Saint Helena

The first woman, and in particular the first express, who, according to tradition, acquired a more direct and active role in ecclesiastical matters, building churches,³³ was the mother of Constantine the Great, Saint Helena. She was indeed a model for other empresses and brilliant aristocrats (as we shall see below), as her name is associated with the most powerful symbol of Christianity, the Cross, and its discovery. In summary, the story of the finding of the Cross is as follows.³⁴ In the year 326, the Empress Helena visits the Holy Land and *τὴν τότε Ιερουσαλὴμ ἔρημον ὡς ὁπωροφυλάκιον κατὰ τὸν προφήτην*³⁵ and finds the Cross. With the help of the Bishop of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of the area she manages to locate the position of the Cross and after excavation, she extracts three crosses, as well as the inscription of Pilate (J. N. R. J.).³⁶ The cross of Christ is miraculously recognized, as Macarius of Jerusalem places it on a dying woman, who is healed. Thus, the finding of the Holy Cross by Saint Hel-

³² Παπαγεωργίου (2016: 163); Αδαμτζιλογλου (2003: 32). It is important to note that in many cases women themselves agree with the stereotype of being labelled as the weaker sex. See GARLAND (1988: 386).

³³ These are the basilicas of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives in the Holy Land.

³⁴ On the history and legends of the finding of the Holy Cross see BERJEAU (1863); HALUSA (1926); LECLERCQ (1948); COMBES (1907); MUSSAFIA (1869); PRIME (1877); STRAUBINGER (1913); NESTLE (1895); VELDENNER (1863); MERCURI (2014: 14–24); BORGEHAMMAR (1991); DRIJVERS (1992); NESBITT (2003); WORTLEY (2009); HEID (2001: On the role of Saint Helena in the finding of the Cross and especially on the avoidance of recording the event from early sources); KRETZENBACHER (1995: On the legends of the wood of the Cross in Byzantium and the West).

³⁵ Sokrates Scholasticus, Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία PG 67, 120A; Ps. 78, 1.

³⁶ She also took out of the earth the spear, the sponge, the crown of thorns and the nails, that is, all the relics relating to the Divine Passion of Jesus Christ.

ena, the first trekker and pilgrim to the Holy Sepulcher on Golgotha,³⁷ becomes an important historical event, which is the subject of realization by Orthodox Christian writers,³⁸ and by Latin writers,³⁹ thus indicating the enormous impact of this event in the centuries that followed, both for the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christian world, sealing the worship of the Holy Cross. Through this historical event, therefore, the crucial position that a woman now occupies in the field of religion is underlined, initiating a tradition of church donations and sponsorships.⁴⁰

The role of women during the Byzantine era

During the first years of Christianity, the teachings of the Great Fathers played a determining role in the improvement of women's role as being equal to men in society.⁴¹ This was primarily shown through the face of the Virgin Mary, however, not excluding other women, like Mary Magdalene.⁴² These teachings also criticized the unfairness towards women in the laws (especially true given that lawmakers were men!),⁴³ high-

³⁷ GRUNDT (1878: III); ROBINSON (2011: 14–19).

³⁸ Sokrates Scholasticus, Ἐκκλησιαστική ἱστορία, PG 67, 117–121; Sozomenus, Ἐκκλησιαστική ἱστορία (Περὶ τῆς εὐρέσεως τοῦ ζωηφόρου σταυροῦ καὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἡλῶν), PG 67, 929–933; Theodoret of Kyros, Ἐκκλησιαστική ἱστορία, PG 82, 357–961 and 1064–1217; Alezander the monk, Ἱστορικόν ἐγκώμιον περὶ εὐρέσεως τοῦ τιμίου καὶ ζωοποιοῦ σταυροῦ, PG 87, 4016–4076 and 4080–4088 (summary).

³⁹ Paulinus Nolensis, «Epistolae», PL 61, 326–330; HALM (1866. Vol. I: 108–110); BERNAYS (1885. Vol. II: 84–86). For the Latin texts of the legend of the finding of the Holy Cross see Κορακίδης (1983: 73–74, 76–79), while the existence of a section of Holy Wood in Rome from the 6th century see KLEIN (2004: 69–76).

⁴⁰ Σαράντη (2012); Δημητροπούλου (2012); Αγγελίδη (2012); Παπαμαστοράκης (2012); Καλοπίση-Βέρτη (2012).

⁴¹ For the woman in late antiquity and the first years of Byzantium through the theology of Cyril of Alexandria see Δελλόπουλος (2016).

⁴² John Chrysostom calls Mary Magdalene ἡ τέτραθλος καὶ ἀνδρεία γυνή: John Chrysostom, *Εἰς Ματθαῖον*, 40, PG 58, 823AB.

⁴³ Ἄνδρες ἦσαν οἱ νομοθετοῦντες, διὰ τοῦτο κατὰ γυναικῶν ἡ νομοθεσία: Gregory of Nazianzos, *Λόγος* 37, PG 36, 289AB.

lighting that men and women are equal before God.⁴⁴ The Great Fathers and church writers were admirable proponents of the equality between men and women before the law and within the society, noting that both sexes were punished equally for their disobedience and were given the same objective potential for salvation through the incarnation of God, His Passion, His Crucifixion and His Resurrection. Consequently, men and women are one entity before God. In reality, though, the early years of the Byzantine period witness the withdrawal of women and their isolation in the house, caring solely for that and their family. However, over the centuries things started to change gradually.

Reaching mid-Byzantine years, women held a different position in society, among other things that were changing over time. These changes regarded new borders and other modifications in political, administrative, financial and military structures⁴⁵ that -undoubtedly- influenced the

⁴⁴ See e.g.: Gregory of Nazianzos, *Λόγος* 37, PG 36 281-308; Basil of Caesarea, *Εἰς τὴν μάρτυρα Ἰουλίτταν*, PG 31, col. 241AB; Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου γενέσεως καὶ εἰς τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν*, PG 44, 233C; Clement of Alexandria, *Παιδαγωγός*, PG 8, 260C; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Κατηχήσεις*, 20, PG 33, 480C. It was John Chrysostom who gave speeches about women and their position in society and marriage (praising them and advising both genders). See John Chrysostom, *Εἰς Κολοσσαεῖς*, 12, PG 62, 386B; John Chrysostom, *Εἰς τὸν Γάμον*, PG 51, 213-215, 219A). For more information see ARTEMI (2015).

⁴⁵ During the 12th century for example, the unit of thematic (military) administration is abolished and the defense of the Byzantine Empire is not supported by mercenaries. The state mechanism is based on a new social class of prestigious officers and it is a fact that a new policy of aristocracy is established (much relying on the Komnenos family). As for the economy, we see the stabilization of the gold coin and there is an upward trend with the creation of art manufacturing facilities (such as ceramics and textiles) in urban centers which are experiencing an urban sprawl. Finally, let's not forget that there were ongoing war operations towards the east and west by emperor Alexios I Komnenos, and his plans were interrupted by crusades and in particular by the threat of the 4th crusade in 1204.

For a brief overview of the history in the 12th century see KAZHDAN – FRANKLIN (2007: 59-67; 72-75; 116-119; KAZHDAN – EPSTEIN (2004); Καρπόζηλος (2009: III 30-32). For the economy in the Byzantine state see LAIOU – MORRISON (2011: 135-233); Λαϊῶν (2006: II). For the commerce in Byzantium see e.g. MAGDALINO (2008); MORRISON (2012: 125-218). For the vision of emperor Manuel I Komnenos to restore a new ecumenical empire see MAGDALINO (2008: 685-779).

role of women in the Byzantine society. This is the point where it should be noted that the imperial laws, the texts by historians and chronologists and the hagiological texts of the time were all drafted by men. The scarcity of texts written by women at least up until the 11th century was substantial⁴⁶ and does not allow us to have a clear image of women's role. At the same time, the men writers who came from important families of the Byzantine bourgeoisie, described women who were either part of the same social class or with higher social status such as Theodora -wife of Justinian-, Irene of Athens, Theophano, Zoe Porphyrogenete, Anna Dalassene, Anna Komnene and others.⁴⁷ This necessarily meant that the majority of the female lower-class population (that is of the average Byzantine woman, the woman of the city or the rural society) was left unaccounted for.

After the end of the 11th century, the Byzantine society witnessed important changes compared to the past.⁴⁸ As a result, there was grow-

⁴⁶ In regard to epistolography, there are a number of saved letters written by women during the later period, such as the letters by Irene Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina (1291–approx. 1355) (CONSTANTINIDES-HERRO [1986]), while very few are saved that date back to the middle Byzantine period (see ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ [1993: 169–180]). The letters saved are usually the ones making references to women who used this means of communication to achieve their purpose. So, in the correspondence by Theodore of Stoudios (KAZHDAN – TALBOT [1991/1992: Appendix B, 406]) we often see female names, belonging to women of the aristocracy, nuns, and mother superiors, still of noble descent though. (see GOUILLARD [1982]).

In hymnography, we see just four female names (Theodosia, Thekla, Kassia and Palaiologina), who all came from monastical environments and lived and composed their hymns within a nunnery (CATAFYGIOTOU-TOPPING [1982–3]; CATAFYGIOTOU-TOPPING [1980]; CATAFYGIOTOU-TOPPING [1986–8]; ΠΕΤΡΙΔΕΣ [1902]; ROCHOW [1967]). Such a limited number of women Hymnographers can be explained partially due to rules against women's voices being heard in church (HERRIN [1992: 97]), and partially due to their educational level given how hymnography needs certain educational standards that only few women held.

⁴⁷ DIEHL (1939); HERRIN (2002); GARLAND (1999); GARLAND (1988); HILL (1996a); HILL (1996b); ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ (2009²). Also see JAMES (1997); JAMES (2001); NICOL (2004); HERRIN (1983a).

⁴⁸ For women of the later Byzantine period we find information from legal and historical sources and the rich files of that time. See e.g. LAIOU (1985); LAIOU (1992a); LAIOU (1992b); HILL (1999).

ing interest for the education of women and a change in the societal norms for that issue;⁴⁹ this is observed even further during the time of the Palaiologos family. Still, the education of women concerned almost exclusively women of the aristocracy⁵⁰ rather than women of lower social classes, who often found themselves unable to sign documents regarding themselves.⁵¹ However, some of them may have had the ability to read simple texts given the evidence we have for the different levels of literacy.⁵²

Women, religion, and monasticism

In the previous sections, we saw that the education of Byzantine women and the level of their literacy had been hard to pinpoint since their activities were limited. Still, these activities included all related tasks to the religious and the Church. Such tasks were so closely connected to women that it was considered the norm for women to be involved in church-related activities. Therefore, what we can conclude is that the

⁴⁹ A prime example of an educated woman is that of Anna Komnene who in the preface of her work *Alexiad* (REINCH – KAMBYLIS [2001: Πρόλογος, I, lines 10–17]) does not just take pride in her royal descent and education but explicitly mentions how women should have a high educational level and take pride in it without being considered arrogant.

⁵⁰ It is a fact that in the Byzantine Empire, education and climbing the social ladder worked hand in hand. This was true because education was the only means and prerequisite for having a position in a state that was so rigidly organized and so bureaucratic that it necessarily needed educated clerks. Women, expectedly, were not allowed in such positions (SCHELTEMA - VAN DER WAL [1955-1988: 2.3.2.]: Αἱ γυναῖκες πάντων τῶν πολιτικῶν καὶ τῶν δημοσίων ὀφφικίων κωλύονται, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐ δικάζουσιν, οὐκ ἀρχοῦσιν, οὐ συνηγοροῦσιν, οὐ παρεμβάλλουσιν ὑπὲρ ἄλλων, οὐ γίνονται φροντισταί. Καὶ οἱ ἄνηβοι πάντων τῶν πολιτικῶν ὀφφικίων ἀπέχονται.), so that meant that their educational level was simply a matter of their family. As a result, women of noble descent had more opportunities to be educated. See e.g. Νικολάου (2009²: 185–213); HERRIN (1995) for the education of Byzantine princesses.

⁵¹ LAIOU (1981: 255–257).

⁵² BROWNING (1978).

cosmical education of women is unaccounted for but on the other hand, the clerical world was open to them.⁵³

We also need to make note of the fact that church tasks gave the opportunity to Byzantine women to be out of the house. As a result, whenever there was an event like a litany, the welcoming of a new bishop or the ecclesiastical festivals, women were among the main audience. In all relevant events, their presence was to be expected and it was considered the norm since they were members of the Church too and had an ethical obligation to participate in all church-related events.⁵⁴ It was also expected that women would participate in all charity events regardless of their social and financial status.⁵⁵ All of them (rich or poor, noble or peasant) followed faithfully and avidly the charity command, as expressed and framed in Christianity.⁵⁶

The role of women in religious and ecclesiastical affairs reaches its absolute expression during the iconoclastic era and specifically, the events of *Chalké Gate* in 726.⁵⁷ It was a group of women who attacked bravely and fiercely the officials who took down the icon of Christ from *Chalké Gate* of the palace. The officials were killed and this marked the beginning of the iconoclastic era. These women even came close to the πατριαρχικὸν οἶκον and began stoning Patriarch Anastasios.⁵⁸ In general, we could say that during the iconoclastic era, women showed a ferocity unknown to the public till that time, actively saving the lives

⁵³ It is worth mentioning the action of some women within the affairs of the Church, with the most characteristic example being the possibility of women exercising deaconry. For more information see Παπαδημητρίου (2019).

⁵⁴ Νικολάου (2009²: 215–228).

⁵⁵ Νικολάου (2009²: 236–239).

⁵⁶ Κωνσταντέλος (1986).

⁵⁷ The bibliography for the iconoclastic period is particularly extensive. See e.g.: BRUBAKER (2014); BRUBAKER – HALDON (2001); BRUBAKER – HALDON (2010); BRYER – HERRIN (1977); GERO (1977); GERO (1974); GRABAR (1957 = 1984); HALDON (1977); HENRY (1977); SPECK (1998); STEIN (1980); WORTLEY (1982).

⁵⁸ ΑΥΖΕΨΥ (1997: 100–101 [kap. 10]).

of iconoclastic fighters. This would often bring them against their husbands' will and, more often than not, they too were persecuted and punished with exile and imprisonment by iconoclastic supporters such as Leo III and Constantine V.⁵⁹ These persecutions were sometimes savage and were frowned upon by the general public, who -though- were unable to grasp the deeper theological meaning of iconoclasm.⁶⁰

Following the iconoclastic era, we notice a further elevation of the role of women. Byzantine texts now make references to new types of women's sanctity such as the Mother Superior or the "married martyr".⁶¹ In the cases of Mother Superiors, we are dealing with an innovative change for that time, according to which discipline and organization are no longer exclusive to men.⁶² What follows next are the cases of noble women during the period of Komnenoi, who founded nunneries among other things. We are also going to delve into the construction and donation of valuable sacred objects to these nunneries. A distinctive case is the one of Irene Doukaina. To accomplish this venture, we are going to investigate Byzantine epigrams on the Cross and the Crucifixion drafted by an important doctor and poet of that era.

Nicholas Kallikles: Life and Works

Nicholas Kallikles was a prominent figure of the Komnenian Period. He was an excellent doctor according to statements.⁶³ However, facts

⁵⁹ For the women during iconoclasm and their faith see KAZHDAN - TALBOT (1991/1992); HERRIN (1983b); Ευθυμιάδης (2019: 33–37).

⁶⁰ For the role of women in the clash between church and state see Νικολάου (2009²: 229–236).

⁶¹ For some examples see Ευθυμιάδης (2019: 37–48).

⁶² For the position of women in hagiography of the middle and later Byzantine period see CONSTANTINOU (2005); Νικολάου (2009²); DELIERNEUX (2014); TALBOT (1996); TALBOT (2011); Μεργιάλη-Σάχα (2014: 85–88).

⁶³ It is characteristic that Anna Komnene includes him among the leading doctors (REINCH – KAMBYLIS [2001. 15.11.13.91–94: 499]), Theodore Prodromos characterizes him

about his life are extremely limited and we only have information coming from his correspondence with Theophylaktos of Ohrid.⁶⁴ In these letters, we can observe how Kallikles played a pivotal role in treating the ailments of Theophylaktos and how the latter wished good health for Kallikles and imperial grace.⁶⁵ It was, after all, known that Kallikles was in the emperor's good graces and benefited greatly from that. This is evident in his role as a member of the medical council set to find a cure for Alexios Komnenos, who suffered from a severe case of rheumatism in his legs. Although Kallikles was the only one who predicted that his arthritis would deteriorate over time and suggested suitable treatment,⁶⁶ his prognosis was not taken into consideration resulting in the emperor's bad health and later his death.⁶⁷

What interests us in this article are the poetic works of Kallikles, a total of thirty-six poems-epigrams,⁶⁸ which were mostly written in order to be engraved on artefacts such as icons, *staurothékes*, chalices etc. According to some scholars,⁶⁹ Nicholas Kallikles also composed Τιμαρίων ἢ περὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν παθημάτων on account of his medical expertise.

as an intelligent and scientific soul (PODESTÀ [1945]), while Theophylaktos of Ohrid will not hesitate to describe him as his Asclepios (GAUTIER [1986. Letter no. 111, 7–8: 535]. Even Kallikles himself in the title of an epigram characterizes himself as διδάσκαλος τῶν ἰατρῶν (ROMANO [1980. Poem no. 9: τοῦ σοφωτάτου διδασκάλου τῶν ἰατρῶν κυροῦ Νικολάου τοῦ Καλικλέως]).

⁶⁴ The letters are 93, 94, 111 and 112. See GAUTIER (1986. Letters 477, 479, 535 and 536).

⁶⁵ GAUTIER (1986. Letter no. 93: 477: ὑγιαίνουσιν οὖν, καὶ ἀπολαύουσιν τῆς τε φιλανθρωπίου ἰατρικῆς, καὶ τῶν βασιλείων ...).

⁶⁶ REINCH – KAMBYLIS (2001. 15.11.3.49–52: 494).

⁶⁷ REINCH – KAMBYLIS (2001. 15.11.3.55–15.11.19.95: 495–503).

⁶⁸ Thirty-one poems are attributed to Kallikles and they are saved in manuscripts while the remaining five are again attributed to him on the basis of certain linguistic patterns but with a bit of speculation. This division of his poems is made based on Romano (see ROMANO [1980]), on which this paper was also based.

⁶⁹ See ROMANO (1974: 309–315). A different opinion about the name of the author is given by BALDWIN (1984) and HUNGER (1968: 61–63).

The status of women in the epigrams on the Cross and the Crucifixion by Nicholas Kallikles

The epigrams by Nicholas Kallikles that deal with the Cross and the Crucifixion are six in total. Let's explore the information they can give us.

Epigrams

Epigram n.1

Εἰς τὸ καλὸν ξύλον τὸ κοσμηθὲν ὑπὸ τῆς Δεσποίνης.

Οὐ ταῦτα δρυμός οὐδὲ κρανίου τόπος,

ἐν οἷς ἐπάγη τοῦτο τὸ ξύλον πάλαι,

ἀλλ' ἔστι λιθόστρωτος ἢ χρυσοῦς τόπος,

ἀνθεῖ δὲ λευκὸν ἄνθος ἐκ τῶν μαργάρων.

- 5 Τούτοις φυτεύει σέ, ξύλον ζωηφόρον,
Δουκῶν ὁ λαμπτήρ, ἡ βασιλὶς Εἰρήνη,
καρπὸν γλυκὺν τρυγῶσα τὴν σωτηρίαν.⁷⁰

*Translation*⁷¹

For the beautiful wood decorated by the empress (Irene Doukaina)

It is neither a forest nor Golgotha

where this wood once stood,

but it is a place laid with stones or a golden field,

and white flowers blossom from pearls.

- 5 With these, life-giving wood, you are planted by
the lamp of the clan of Doukai, queen Irene,
harvesting salvation like it's a sweet fruit.

⁷⁰ ROMANO (1980: 81 [no. 6]; 135 [Italian translation]; 168 [comments]); FROLOW (1961: 281 [no. 241]).

⁷¹ All translations have been written by the author of this article. They aim to help the reader and by no means serve as a literary recreation of epigrams.

Remarks

The epigram refers to a *staurothéke* ordered by Irene Doukaina, wife of Alexios I Komnenos.⁷² Going through this epigram, it is pretty evident how the poem is grounded on chain metaphors and puns from the Old and New Testament addressing the reader to trace their meaning, all the while describing the *staurothéke* in an intricate way. Specifically, the poem is constructed with the pattern κατ' ἄρσιν καὶ θέσιν, meaning that the first two lines refer to what the *staurothéke* is not and then, the subsequent lines reveal what it actually is.

Regarding the content of the epigram, it begins by informing us that the *staurothéke* does not depict a forest or Golgotha,⁷³ the Crucifixion Hills (lines 1–2). Instead, it talks about a *staurothéke* embossed with gold, precious stones and pearls (lines 3–4). Using lexical items like λιθόστρωτος⁷⁴ and χρυσοῦς τόπος (line 3), there is an allusion to New Jerusalem,⁷⁵ as this is presented in John's Revelation.⁷⁶ Furthermore, attributing life-giving abilities to the wood (ξύλον ζωηφόρον – line 5),

⁷² See ODB (II: 1009); POLEMIS (1968: 70–74).

⁷³ Matt. 27: 33; Mark 15: 22; Luke 23:33.

⁷⁴ The cobblestoned place near the praetorium was called Gabbathah in Hebrew, as we read in John's Gospel (John 19: 13: ὁ οὖν Πιλάτος ἀκούσας τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἤγαγεν ἔξω τὸν Ἰησοῦν, καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Λιθόστρωτον, Ἑβραϊστὶ δὲ Γαββαθᾶ). Still, quite often there was confusion between his place and Golgotha.

⁷⁵ ROMANO (1980: 168). A prime example is the excerpt in John's Revelation which describes the walls of the celestial Jerusalem as covered with precious stones (Rev. 19–20). In ODB (II: 1035) we read: In art, biblical exegesis, and theology a celestial Jerusalem paralleled and sometimes reflected the terrestrial city. Conforming to biblical prophecies about Jerusalem, this conception became an archetype of the human soul, of the Christian church, and of individual church buildings. It provided an image of paradise, [...], where the heavenly city with golden streets and a place could equally be Constantinople, sometimes called by the Byzantines the New Jerusalem.

⁷⁶ Rev. 21, 18 (καὶ ἦν ἡ ἐνδόμησις τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς ἰασπς, καὶ ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρὸν, ὅμοιον ὑάλῳ καθαρῷ); Rev. 21, 21 (καὶ οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες δώδεκα μαργαρίται· ἀνὰ εἷς ἕκαστος τῶν πυλῶνων ἦν ἐξ ἐνὸς μαργαρίτου. καὶ ἡ πλατεῖα τῆς πόλεως χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὡς ὕαλος διαυγής).

implying its concept as a tree giving life, alludes to the tree growing in the heavenly city of God.⁷⁷ In this heavenly setting, we see the positioning of the Cross in the *staurothéke*⁷⁸ (line 5) by queen Irene, light of the family of Doukai (line 6), aiming at harvesting the sweet fruit⁷⁹ of salvation (line 7).

The content of the lines allows us to observe a unique form in their composition. The first four lines refer to the *staurothéke* while the remaining ones (lines 5–7) clearly indicate the name of the donor and the purpose of the engraving. It is worth mentioning that the use of the third person singular does not allow us to understand in a clear and sustainable manner who is really describing the *staurothéke*. Most likely, this is done by the donor but it is an opaque point given that anyone would be able to do it.

Epigram n. 2

Εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν κρεμáμενον ἐπὶ ξύλου καὶ τεθνηκότα.

Ζητοῦσα τὴν σὴν ὄψιν, ἀγνὲ νυμφίε,
καὶ ψηλαφῶσα, ποῦ νέμεις καὶ ποῦ μένεις
καὶ ποῦ καθυπνοῖς ἐν μέσῃ μεσεμβρία,
ἔγνω·ν ἐφυπνῶττοντα τῇ τριδενδρία·

⁷⁷ Rev. 22, 2 (ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς, ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα, κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδίδου· τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ξύλου εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν). See also HOSTETLER (2016: 113).

⁷⁸ This *staurothéke* depicted the tree of life, which was a common topic for *staurothékes* of that kind (HOSTETLER [2016: 113]).

⁷⁹ Enjoying the sweet fruits from a forest tree evokes the Song of Songs 2, 3: ὡς μῆλον ἐν τοῖς ξύλοις τοῦ δρυμοῦ, οὕτως ἀδελφιδός μου ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν υἱῶν· ἐν τῇ σκιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐπεθύμησα καὶ ἐκάθισα, καὶ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ γλυκὺς ἐν λάρυγγί μου (= As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons; in his shade I delighted and sat, and his fruit was sweet to my palate). According to Gregory of Nyssa the forest symbolizes earthly life, while the fruit tree in the middle of the forest symbolizes Christ (LANGERBECK [1960, VI: 116–117]).

- 5 πεύκη τὰ δένδρα, κυπάρισσος καὶ κέδρος·
 αἶ, αἶ! γλυκὺν τὸν ὕπνον ὑπνοῖς, ἀλλ' ὅμως
 φθάσας πρὸς ἀντίληψιν ἀνάστηθι μοι.⁸⁰

Translation

For the dead Christ, hanged on the Cross

Looking for your form, Oh pure bridegroom,
 and trying to find where you herd (your sheep), where you live
 and where you lay down to sleep at noon,
 I saw that you sleep on three trees.

- 5 Pine, cypress and cedar are those trees.
 Alas, you sleep sweetly, but
 wake up and come help me.

Remarks

Much like the previous one (epigram no.1) this epigram brims with allegories since it explicitly alludes to the Song of Songs, book of the Old Testament with a majorly allegorical content. Specifically, in the first three lines, the donor – through the poet – addresses Christ by calling Him ἀγνὲ νυμφίε (line 1), and employs possessive pronouns of the second person singular (τὴν σὴν ὄψιν – line 1) and verbs of the same person (νέμεις – μένεις: line 2; καθυπνοῖς: line 3). The choice of verbs is intentional alluding to the corresponding excerpt from the Song of Songs and to the dialogue between the nymph and the bridegroom.⁸¹ Evident-

⁸⁰ ROMANO (1980: 82 [no. 7]; 135 [Italian translation]; 168–169 [comments]); FROLOW (1961: 330 [no. 338]).

⁸¹ Song of Songs 1, 7: ἀπάγγελόν μοι ὅν ἡγάπησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου, ποῦ ποιμαίνεις, ποῦ κοιτάζεις ἐν μεσημβρίᾳ (= “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you feed, where do you rest [the flocks] at noon, for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?”). The similarities between the two texts are visible, since the epigram contains phrases from the biblical text in light modification. So

ly though, the poet does not simply quote the excerpt but adjusts it and extends its meaning to the relationship between the donor and Christ.

Looking at the form of Christ (line 1) and ψηλαφῶσα (indicative verb of the act of slight touching) to find where exactly He is (line 2), she finds Him sleeping on three trees -pine, cypress, cedar- (lines 4-5). These trees -according to tradition- are known to have been used to make the holy cross.⁸² This is otherwise called τριδενδρία, which we also meet in epigram no.6 (lines 1 and 5) later on. We should also note that the crucifixion is presented not as death but as a state of sleep (line 3). This means that the death of Christ is an event that shares the same attributes as sleep, i.e. not definitive but reversible and expected to reach a state of wake, thus alluding to His upcoming Resurrection (line 7).⁸³

The last two lines clearly show the donor's request to Christ. After she wishes Him sweet sleep (γλυκὺν τὸν ὕπνον ὑπνοῖς - line 6), she encourages Him to resurrect in order to help her (line 7). It should be noted that the moods used are the optative (ὑπνοῖς - line 6), and the imperative (ἀνάστηθι - line 7), which in combination with the exclamations αἶ, αἶ! in the beginning of the sixth line, assign a theatrical attribute to the poem. This seems to appeal to the audience, who interestingly

ποιμαίνεις becomes νέμεις (line 2), while κοιτάζεις is replaced by καθυπνοῖς (line 3).

⁸² Isa. 60, 13: καὶ ἡ δόξα τοῦ Λιβάνου πρὸς σὲ ἥξει ἐν κυπαρίσσῳ καὶ πεύκῃ καὶ κέδρῳ ἅμα, δοξάσαι τὸν τόπον τὸν ἅγιόν μου καὶ τὸν τόπον τῶν ποδῶν μου δοξάσω (= The glory of the Lebanon shall come to you, box trees, firs, and cypresses together, to glorify the place of My sanctuary, and the place of My feet I will honor).

⁸³ The metaphor of death as sleep is seen in other epigrams about the cross and the crucifixion. See e.g. 11th century, John Mauropous, line 1: Κάνταῦθα Χριστός ἐστὶν ὑπνῶν ἐν ξύλῳ (De LAGARDE – BOLLIG [1882 = 1979: 17–18. no. 32]). See also KANTARAS (2021: 174–175); 12th–13th century, Nicholas of Otranto, line 1: Οὐχ ὕπνον ἔξεις οὐδὲ νυστάξεις πάλιν (LONGO – JACOB [1980-1982: 197. no. 19.7, f. 36^r]). We see that in the holy texts too when we consider how the Old Testament uses the verb κοιμῶμαι in order to show the state in which death is experienced as the eternal sleep. For instance, in Job (Job 21, 13), we read: συνετέλεσαν δὲ ἐν ἀγαθοῖς τὸν βίον αὐτῶν, ἐν δὲ ἀναπαύσει ἄδου ἐκοιμήθησαν (= They end their days in prosperity, and in a moment they descend to the grave).

engages with the poem.⁸⁴ Generally, we need to highlight the imagery of the epigram stemming from the use of extended metaphors and allegories so as to state the donor's request.

As for the donor herself, it is safe to assume that it is the same person as epigram no.1 i.e. Irene Doukaina although this is not explicitly stated anywhere. Still, this epigram was found in writing right after epigram no.1 in a manuscript used for the first publication of Theodore Prodromos in 1536.⁸⁵ Consequently, not explicitly mentioning the donor might be a sensible choice since Irene Doukaina is mentioned in the previous epigram on that same manuscript.

Finally, we can only assume where this epigram was engraved given that the artefact is not saved. The content of the epigram might reveal an object like an icon of crucifixion,⁸⁶ a cross or a *staurotheke*.⁸⁷ The options of either a cross or a *staurothéke* may be a little more grounded compared to the icon since -again- the epigram was found in a manuscript together with another epigram engraved on a *staurothéke*.

Epigram n. 3

Τοῦ Καλλικλέους στίχοι εἰς τὸν καλὸν σταυρὸν

τὸν κοσμηθέντα παρὰ τῆς πορφυρογεννήτου κυρᾶς Εὐδοκίας
Ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τρυγῶ σε τὴν ζωὴν, Λόγε,
καὶν Εὐὰ τρυγᾷ τὴν φθορὰν ἀπὸ ξύλου,
καὶ προσκυνοῦσα σῶν παθῶν τὴν εἰκόνα
εἰς ἀπαθῶν αἰτῶ σε λιμένα φθάσαι,

⁸⁴ For the dramatic character of epigrams about the cross and the crucifixion see KANTARAS (2019: 79–95).

⁸⁵ ROMANO (1980; 44).

⁸⁶ HOSTETLER (2016: 109).

⁸⁷ FROLOW (1961: 330); ROMANO (1980; 21).

- 5 σὺν συζύγῳ τὲ καὶ τέκνοις τηρουμένη.
Ἐξ Εὐδοκίας ταῦτα, πορφύρας κλάδου.⁸⁸

Translation

Lines by Kallikles about the beautiful cross decorated by “purple-born”
Eudokia (Komnene)

From the wood I harvest Thee, that is life, Logos,
even if Eve harvested damage from wood,
I am bowing in front of the icon of your Passions
and I am asking to reach the harbor of those relieved from their
passions

- 5 safe and sound together with my husband and children.
Those words are from Eudokia, the branch of porphýra.

Remarks

This is an epigram engraved on a *staurothéke* decorated with the Crucifixion.⁸⁹ As we are informed by its title, it is an epigram written by Nicholas Kallikles for a cross ordered and decorated by Eudokia Komnene, third daughter of Alexios I Komnenos and wife to Constantine Iasites.⁹⁰

As for its content, in the first line, Eudokia addresses directly Christ as evidenced by the use of the second person singular personal pronoun (σε) and the term of endearment Λόγε. This creates an antithesis between the past and the present because it compares Eve of the past harvesting the damage from the wood of Heaven to herself in the present

⁸⁸ ROMANO (1980: 105 [no. 27]; 147 [Italian translation]; 181 [comments]; FROLOW (1961: 317-318 [no. 312]).

⁸⁹ FROLOW (1961: 317).

⁹⁰ Consequently, the epigram precedes the death of Alexios I Komnenos given that Constantine Iasites died before Alexios. See ODB (II: 969); FROLOW (1961: 317 [no. 312]); ROMANO (1980: 181 [no.27]).

harvesting life from the wood of the crucifixion cross (lines 1–2). In other words, while Eve managed to lose the eternal life by eating from the forbidden fruit,⁹¹ Eudokia earns it by showing her devotion to the cross. After all, the assonance between the two names - Εὐα and Εὐδοκία - is substantial and adds to the analogy between the two women. At the same time, though, it is a comparison between two types of wood;⁹² the wood of heaven that led humans to sin and the wood of the crucifixion cross that leads humans to their salvation.

Moving on, Eudokia, bowing in front of the icon of the Passions (line 3), makes her request to reach the harbor of those relieved from their passions safe and sound (line 4). It is an appeal that does not involve just herself but also her husband and children (line 5), highlighting her love towards her family and the status she enjoys within her family given how she is able to order and decorate a *staurothéke*.

The epigram is completed with a straightforward declaration that all the above words come from Eudokia, the branch of *porphýra* (line 6), leaving no room for doubt about who the donor of the *staurothéke* is. At this point, we should note the use of the term πορφύρα, in order to show the donor's royal descent. It is not uncommon to see that word used in other epigrams by Nicholas Kallikles to indicate royal heritage, as we shall see in epigrams no.4 and no.5.

⁹¹ The presence of Eve is intense in epigrams about the cross and the crucifixion in the 12th century because she is seen as responsible for the original sin and thus, she is attributed negative terms (e.g. 12th century, Theodore Prodromos, tit., line 1: Εἰς τὴν ἀπάτην Ἀδάμ. / Δαίμων, φθόνος, γύναιον, ἡδονῆς ξύλον. See PAPAGIANNIS (1997: 12–13 [no. 9a]). It should be noted that she is compared to the Virgin Mary who as a new Eve bearing the new Adam (i.e. Christ) 'dresses' Him with the new tree, the wood of the cross, opening up the Garden of Eden.

⁹² By offering Himself (1 Tim. 2, 6: ὁ δοὺς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων) and dying for all humans (2 Cor. 5, 15: ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν), Christ changes the meaning and symbolic value of the wood of the cross from a curse to salvation. The wood of the cross that kills Christ is life-giving wood since He died on it and broke its curse. This is how we go from ἡδονῆς ξύλον to ἔντιμον ξύλον.

Epigram n. 4

Τὸ τῆς Ἑδὲμ βλάστημα, τὸ ζωῆς ξύλον,
 τὸ πορφύρας γέννημα σεμνὴ Μαρία
 ἀφιεροῖ σοὶ τῇ πανυμνήτῳ κόρη.⁹³

Translation

The sprout of Eden, the wood of life
 purple-born, humble Maria,
 is devoted to you the Virgin who is praised by all.

Remarks

This epigram written in all stressed caps is comprised of three lines engraved at the back side of a cross. This cross was placed in the central compartment of a gold-plated *staurothéke* decorated with precious stones. It is now being kept at the church of St. Eloi in Eine, Belgium.⁹⁴ The first two lines are engraved on the vertical part of the cross while the third is divided on each side of the horizontal axle of the cross.⁹⁵

Its first reading is very informative: Τὸ τῆς Ἑδὲμ βλάστημα, τὸ ζωῆς ξύλον (line 1), meaning the cross, is gifted by Maria, τὸ πορφύρας γέννημα (line 2), meaning a woman of royal descent, to πανυμνήτῳ κόρη (line 3), meaning the Virgin Mary.

⁹³ Epigram on enamel. A. Frolov marks the date of the epigram in the 11th century (1085). See FROLOW (1961: 283 [no. 249]); RHOBY (2010: 152–154 [no. Me3]); 496 [im. 20]); ROMANO (1980: 119 [no. 33], 155 [Italian translation], 187 [comments]; VOORDECKERS – MILIS (1969: 461, tab. II; Βαρχός (1984: I, 203; note 30); PAUL (2007: 251 [no. 24]); LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE (1982: 152 [no. O.21]; 154 [im.]).

⁹⁴ VOORDECKERS – MILIS (1969: 461; taf. I–II); LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE (1982: 152 [no. O.21]); 154 [im.]).

⁹⁵ The beginning of the epigram is distinct by the engraved cross sign. The end of lines 1 and 2 is seen from the two semi-colons, and the end of the third line is seen from the four semi colons. See e.g. RHOBY (2010: 152).

In more detail, the first line references Eden alluding to ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῷ παραδείσῳ,⁹⁶ so as to refer to the new wood of life (τὸ ζωῆς ξύλον), i.e. the wood of the crucifixion cross. The second line informs us of the person who orders the specific cross and the composition of the epigram. This person is, of course, Maria Komnene, second daughter of Alexios I Komnenos and Irene Doukaina,⁹⁷ who we meet in our next epigram (epigram no.5), and sister of Eudokia, whom we met in the previous epigram (epigram no. 3). Maria Komnene lived from 1085 to 1136 and was married to Nikephoros Euphorbenos Katakalon, son of Constantine Euphorbenos Katakalon,⁹⁸ one of the most important Generals of Alexios I Komnenos.⁹⁹ Her royal descent is stated, as in the case of Eudokia, with the use of the word πορφύρα accompanied by the word γέννημα and not κλάδος as in epigram no.3.¹⁰⁰ The second line gives us some extra information about Maria, since she is characterized as humble. We are thus prompted to consider her possible positioning within a nunnery which may have been the case after her husband died some time between 1118 and 1130.

As for the nunnery she may have joined till the end of her life, we get some information from the third and final line. Maria donates the cross to the παννυμνίτῳ κόρῃ, implying the Virgin Mary. Considering that Maria's mother, Irene Doukaina, is the one who founded the nun-

⁹⁶ Gen. 2, 9.

⁹⁷ The first daughter was Anna, and in total Irene Doukaina had nine children, five girls and four boys (see ODB [II: 1009]).

⁹⁸ Βαρζός (1984: I, 198 [no. 33]).

⁹⁹ The family of Katakalon was a byzantine noble family of the 10th century to the 12th century. The first confirmed member was Leo Katakalon, who was a *doméstikos* of the *scholaié* in 900. In the 11th century, military officials such as Demetrios Katakalon, or the commander and military author Katakalon Kekaumenos were prominent figures of the time. The family was particularly known during the reign of Komnenoi and their descendants held prestigious positions. After the 12th century, the family is not seen as much.

¹⁰⁰ This is an expression used by Anna Komnene in her work *Alexiad*, where we read πορφύρας τινθήμα τε καὶ γέννημα (REINCH – KAMBYLIS [2001: 5,10]).

nery of the Virgin Mary (Theotokos *Kecharitoméne*) in Constantinople,¹⁰¹ and that the nunnery was assigned to Maria after the death of her sister Anna, we can safely assume that this is the same nunnery. Such events only serve to highlight the close relationship between the women of the family and the nunnery.

Epigram n. 5

Καὶ τοῦτο γοῦν σοι προσφέρω πανυστάτως
 ἤδη προσεγγίσασα ταῖς Ἰδου πύλαις,
 τὸ θεῖον ἀνάθημα, τὸ ζωῆς ξύλον,
 ἐν ᾧ τὸ πν(εῦμ)α τῷ τεκόντι παρέθου
 5 καὶ τῶν πόνων ἔληξας, οὓς ἐκαρτέρεις·
 οἷς τοὺς πόνους ἔλυσας, οὓς κατεκρίθην,
 καὶ καρ<ερ>εῖν ἔπεισας ἡμᾶς ἐν πόνοις·
 ταύτην δίδωμι σοὶ τελευταίαν δόσιν
 θνήσκουσα καὶ λήγουσα καὶ γὰρ τῶν πόνων,
 10 ἡ βασιλὶς Δούκαινα, λάτρεις Εἰρήνη,
 Χρυσενδύτις πρὶν, ἀλλὰ νῦν ῥακενδύτις,
 ἐν τρυχίνοις νῦν, ἢ τὸ πρὶν ἐν βυσσίνοις,
 τὰ ῥάκια στέργουσα πορφύρας πλέον
 πορφυρίδ<α> κρίνουσα τὴν ἐπωμίδα {(καί)}
 15 μελεμβαφῇ ἔχουσα, ὥς δέδοκτό σοι·
 σὺ δ' ἀντιδοίης λῆξιν ἐ<ν> μακαρίοις
 καὶ χαρμονὴν ἄληκτον ἐν σεσωσμένοις.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ GAUTHIER (1985); VOORDECKERS – MILIS (1969: 467–470).

¹⁰² RHOBY (2010: 268–272 [no. Me90]; 516 [im. 71–74]); ROMANO (1980: 120–121 [no. 35]; 155–156 [Italian translation]; 187 [comments]; FROLOW (1961: 315–316 [no. 308]); HAHNLOSER (1965: 35f [no. 25]; tab. XXVIII; HAHNLOSER (1971: 35–7 [no. 25]); PASINI (1885–1886: 29 [no. 5]); 28 [sketch]); GUILLOU (1996: 91[f]–93 [no. 90], tab. 94–98 [im. 90a–e]); PAUL (2007: 250f [no. 23]); HÖRANDNER (1998: 311 [no. 90]).

Translation

And this I give you towards the end of my life,
 I am closing in to the gates of Hades,
 the sacred devotion, the wood of life,
 on which you have given your spirit to Father
 5 and stopped the pains you were suffering.
 With these you stopped the pains, to which I am condemned,
 and persuaded us to suffer those pains.
 This last gift I give you
 as I am dying in pains,
 10 queen Doukaina, your slave Irene,
 who once used to wear gold, but now I am dressed with the
 monastical rag,
 with this thread garment, I who was once dressed in por phýra,
 I now prefer the rags more than porphýra
 choosing the rag over the purple garment,
 15 wearing black, since you wanted it that way.
 May you give me an end among the blessed in return
 and endless joy among those who are saved.

Remarks

This titleless long epigram is engraved on a cross comprised by two shards of the crucifixion wood. Its four edges are covered with protective casings made with gold-plated silver. On these casings we find the engraved lines in a partially stressed all caps font.¹⁰³ Its seventeen lines are divided as follows: the first five lines are on the top casing marked

¹⁰³ The artifact is now kept in a kind of box in the shape of a cross, made with crystal and gold-plated silver, which is a later work by a Venetian workshop in the 16th century. The *staurothéke* is kept in the church of Saint Marcus in Venice, Italy. See Rhoby (2010: 268); Romano (1980: 48).

with a cross -pretty standard for such artefacts-, lines 6–9 are on the left casing, lines 10–13 are on the right, and lines 14–17 are on the bottom casing.¹⁰⁴

As for its content, the epigram can be divided into two separate contextual entities. The first and largest part comprises of lines 1–15 and the second is only made by the final two lines (lines 16–17). The first part (lines 1–15) gives enough information about who offers this cross to Christ and why.

In more detail, in the central part of the epigram, we see pretty clearly the name of the donor which is none other than a woman, Irene Doukaina (ἡ βασιλὶς Δούκαινα, λάτρις Εἰρήνη – line 10),¹⁰⁵ wife to Alexios I Komnenos¹⁰⁶ who died in 1118, and mother to successor John II. Therefore, this is a woman of royal descent, high social and financial status -if not the highest since she is the emperor's wife- who orders this valuable artefact to be constructed.

In this epigram, she is the narrator,¹⁰⁷ and addresses directly Christ, to whom she is dedicating the cross (Καὶ τοῦτο γοῦν σοι προσφέρω παννυστάτως – line 1).¹⁰⁸ This happens towards the end of her life (ἤδη προσεγγίσασα ταῖς Ἰδίου πύλαις, / ... / ταύτην δίδωμι σοὶ τελευταίαν δόσιν / θνήσκουσα καὶ λήγουσα κἀγὼ τῶν πόνων – lines 2, 8 and 9), since after the death of her husband Alexios I Komnenos (in 1118) and the ascension of her son John II to power, she decides to become a mem-

¹⁰⁴ Of course, such an order of reading lines is supported by their content and the grammatical and syntactical rules.

¹⁰⁵ ODB (II: 1009); POLEMIS (1968: 70–74); SKOULATOS (1980: 119–124).

¹⁰⁶ ODB (I: 63); CHALANDON (1912); ANGOLD (1984: 102–149).

¹⁰⁷ Let us note that the use of the first-person singular helps in the efficiency of prayer towards God (see TALBOT [1999: 81]).

¹⁰⁸ We should really note the second position of the deictic pronoun τοῦτο in the first line of the epigram since this makes it clear that the epigram wants to present the *staurothéke* to the audience. Finally, this deictic pronoun leaves no doubt that this is an epigram meant to be engraved. See HOSTETLER (2016: 89).

ber of a nunnery.¹⁰⁹ There she dies, as shown to us in lines 10–15 of the epigram. The nunnery must be the one in Constantinople dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Theotokos *Kecharitoméne*), which is the one she founded earlier in her life.¹¹⁰ It is very likely that this is the same nunnery as epigram no.4, in which, τὸ πορφύρεας γέννημα σεμνὴ Μαρία Komnene, daughter of Irene Doukaina, dedicated her cross to the Virgin Mary. What we can see here is a pattern¹¹¹ of women offering crosses to that nunnery, creating something like a tradition on behalf of the women of this particular family (given that the same happened with mother and daughter).¹¹²

It is also worth noting that lines 11–15 give us a comparison between the luxury of purple (πορφύρεα) and the simplicity of the black rags. This comparison serves to highlight one of the advantages of the latter towards the salvation of the soul.¹¹³ The antonymous pairs of that comparison are indicative of it such as χρυσευδύτις – ῥακενδύτις (line

¹⁰⁹ Irene Doukaina retired to the *Kecharitoméne* nunnery, in 1118, a date that can be used as *terminus post quem* if we are to date the epigram.

¹¹⁰ ODB (II: 1118); GAUTHIER (1985); JANIN (1969²: 188–191).

¹¹¹ Let us note that in Byzantium offering artefacts to a monastery or a church in an effort to save the souls of the donors took many forms. Aside from crosses and other holy items, we also see books of fine workmanship, oftentimes decorated, which were gifted to the libraries of monasteries and churches. Mostly we see that in the 11th century and in the reign of Palaiologoi (see CAVALLO [2008: 134]; Ευαγγέλατου-Νοταρά [2000: 171–270]; Ευαγγέλου-Νοταρά [2003]).

¹¹² Women of the family of Komnenoi were involved in several small-scale charities such as the creation of valuable artefacts accompanied by epigrams for the churches of Constantinople. Irene Doukaina is a prime example since she offered to the *Kecharitoméne* nunnery at least twenty icons and six crosses, as seen in the monastic *typikón* (see GAUTHIER [1985: 152–155]). The creation of precious icons to be gifted to God by both men and women of the Byzantine empire served as a token of wealth and power and it was not uncommon for that time (see NORDHAGEN [1987]) particularly during the 12th century (see ΠΑΠΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΗΣ [2002]).

¹¹³ For the production and use of *porphýra* in Byzantium generally see CARILE (1998); for its symbolic value see DAGRON (1994), in particular for the period of the reign of Komnenoi see STANKOVIĆ (2008). For the Byzantine monastical attire see FAURO (2003). For the detailed description of the Byzantine attire (according to social class, construction materials and colors) see ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1955a: II/2; 5–59).

11) and ἐν τρυχίνοις – ἐν βυσσίνοις (line 12), which show the transition from the cosmic, rich and royal life to the simple, humble and monastical life. We should also note the use of the word ἐπωμίδα (line 14), which is another important component of the byzantine monastical attire, i.e. the black vestments (μελεμβαφῇ - line 15) of byzantine monks and nuns.

The second part of the epigram (lines 16-17) clarifies the purpose of creating a particular artefact since the donor Irene asks Christ in exchange (ἀντιδοίης – line 16) that she may be gifted the blissful end to her life thus joining those who are already saved. It is worth noting that the use of the optative mood (ἀντιδοίης – line 16), instead of the more usual imperative (ἀνάστηθι: epigram no.2 – line 7; δέχου, σκέπε: epigram no 6 – line 8) or the indicative (αἰτῶ: epigram no.3 - line 4), renders the statement of the request milder.

Epigram n. 6

Βραχὺν ὑπνώσας ὕπνον ἐν τριδενδ[ρί]α
 ὁ παμβασιλεὺς καὶ θεάν(θρωπ)ος Λόγος
 πολλὴν ἐπεβράβευσε τῷ δένδρῳ χάριν·
 ἐμψύχεται γὰρ πᾶς πυρούμενος νόσοις
 5 ὁ προσπεφευγὼς τοῖς τριδενδρίας κλάδοις·
 ἀλλὰ φλογωθείς ἐν μέσῃ μεσεμβρία
 ἔδραμον, ἦλθον, τοῖς κλάδοις ὑπείσεδυν·
 καὶ σῇ σκιᾷ δέχου με καὶ καλῶς σκέπε,
 ὦ συσκιάζον δένδρον ἅπασαν χθόνα,
 10 καὶ τὴν Ἀερμών ἐνστάλαξόν μοι δρόσον
 ἐκ Δουκικ(ῆς) φυέντι καλλιδενδρίας,
 ἧς ῥιζόπρεμνον ἡ βασιλὶς Εἰρήνη,
 ἡ μητρομάμμη, τῶν ἀνάκτων τὸ κλέος,
 Ἀλεξίου κρατοῦντος Αὐσόνων δάμαρ·

- 15 ναί, ναί, δυσωπῶ τὸν μόν(ον) φύλακά μου
 σὸς δοῦλος Ἀλέξιος ἐ[κ] γένους Δούκας.¹¹⁴

Translation

- After He was asleep for a while on wood made of three trees
 the king of all and the God-man Logos
 He gave great grace to the tree,
 because anyone who is burning with disease, is cooled off
 5 if he seeks refuge to the branches of these three trees;
 but I was burning at noon
 and ran, got into the branches.
 Take me in your shadow and protect me,
 Oh you, tree that casts a shadow all over the earth,
 10 and drop the coolness of Aërmon on me
 coming from the noble tree of Doukai,
 its roots are queen Irene,
 grandmother on the side of her mother, the glory of the palaces,
 wife to Alexios, king of Ausones.
 15 Yes, yes, I beg my sole guardian
 I, your slave Alexios, of Doukas descent.

¹¹⁴ RHOBY (2010: 174–178 [no. Me15]); ROMANO (1980: 121 [no. 36]; 156 [Italian translation]; 187–188 [comments]); FROLOW (1961: 320–322 [no. 319]); KLEIN (2004; 220; note 196); PAUL (2007: 251–252).

Remarks

The second extensive epigram of 16 lines was engraved on a *staurothéke* (lost after the French revolution)¹¹⁵ by Alexios Doukas,¹¹⁶ as we are informed in the last line (σὸς δοῦλος Ἀλέξιος ἐ[κ] γένους Δούκας). Specifically, this is the son of Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios and grandson of Alexios I Komnenos and Irene Doukaina (lines 11–14).

The epigram can be divided into two sections. In the first section, lines 1–5, Alexios refers to παμβασιλεὺ καὶ θεάν(θρωπ)ο Λόγο (line 2), i.e. Christ, who after a brief sleep on the cross made of three woods (Βραχὺν ὑπνώσας ὕπνον ἐν τριδενδ[ρί]α - line 1), gave to it such grace (πολλὴν ἐπεβράβευσε τῷ δένδρῳ χάριν - line 3) that it could cure any sick man seeking refuge in its shadow (lines 4–5). We observe the use of similar patterns as previous epigrams, such as the metaphorization of the death of Christ as sleep (epigram no.2. - line 6: γλυκὺν τὸν ὕπνον ὑπνοῖς) and the three-tree analogy (epigram no.2 - lines 4–5: τριδενδρία), where the wood of the cross¹¹⁷ is metaphorized as a tree¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Although the traces of the *staurothéke* are lost after the French Revolution, possibly because it was destroyed, we still have the descriptions and its design from the time it was placed in the Abbey of Grandmont. According to these designs, the *staurothéke* shows the crucifixion, with Christ being in the center, the Virgin Mary on the left and John on the right while two angels were placed above the cross. The particularity of such a depiction is that there was a picture of the donor Alexios at the base of the cross holding his hands in prayer. The inside of the cross-shape *staurothéke* was decorated with precious stones. See OGIER (1658); HOSTETLER (2017: 180–181).

¹¹⁶ RHOBY (2010: 175); ROMANO (1980: 187–188); HOSTETLER (2017: 182–183); Βαζός (1084: I; 308–317 [no. 65]). It is surely worth noting that Alexios I had five grandsons with the same name so we cannot know who is who exactly.

¹¹⁷ The majority of the epigrams of the middle Byzantine period use the words σταυρὸς and ξύλον in order to refer to *staurothékes* (HOSTETLER [2016: 178–186]).

¹¹⁸ The tree as a symbol is seen in many religious texts (e.g. Ps. 96, 12: τότε ἀγαλλιᾶσονται πάντα τὰ ξύλα τοῦ δρυμοῦ [= The field and all that is therein will jubilate; then all the forest trees will sing praises]; Ezek. 34, 27: καὶ τὰ ξύλα τὰ ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ δώσει τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἡ γῆ δώσει τὴν ἰσχὺν αὐτῆς, καὶ κατοικήσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς αὐτῶν ἐν ἐλπίδι εἰρήνης, καὶ γνώσονται ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι Κύριος ἐν τῷ συντρίψαι με τὸν ζυγὸν αὐτῶν [= And the tree of the field will give forth its fruit and the land will

whose shadow can cool off the sick sinful souls of humans.¹¹⁹ In the second section, lines 6-16, Alexios is requesting that Christ accepts him under the shadow of the cooling branches of the cross-tree and protects him (lines 6-10). Still, the lines which interest us the most and are relevant to our topic, are lines 11-14 in which Alexios Doukas makes a note

give forth its produce, and they will know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from those who enslave them]), oftentimes as a linking chain, as a bridge between God and human, between the divine and earthly world (see Τσιρέλη [2014: 117]), a bridge that collapses after the original sin and is given a new chance with the cross of the crucifixion. Christ, then, as the new Adam, with His victory against death gives humans the chance to return to their former heavenly state; a chance in the form of a promise, as we are informed by John in the Revelation (Rev. 2, 7: Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου.; Rev. 22, 2: ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς, ...; Rev. 22, 19: καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφέλῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, ἀφελεῖ ὁ Θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας, τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ), highlighting the prominent position of the tree since this is the one that ‘opens’ (Genesis) and ‘closes’ (Revelation) the biblical text. As a symbol, finally, the tree makes its appearance in the Proverbs of Solomon, where it offers security (Prov. 3, 18: ξύλον ζωῆς ἐστὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀντεχομένοις αὐτῆς, καὶ τοῖς ἐπερειδομένοις ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ὡς ἐπὶ Κύριον ἀσφαλῆς [= It is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and those who draw near it are fortunate]), justice (Prov. 11, 30: ἐκ καρποῦ δικαιοσύνης φύεται δένδρον ζωῆς [= The fruit of a righteous man is the tree of life, and the wise man acquires souls]) and spiritual healing (Prov. 15, 4: ἴασις γλώσσης δένδρον ζωῆς, ὁ δὲ συντηρῶν αὐτὴν πλησθήσεται πνεύματος [= A healing tongue is a tree of life, but if there is perverseness in it, it causes destruction by wind]).

¹¹⁹ It is a fact that Byzantine poets throughout times (from 8th to 14th century) use the metaphor of the cross of the crucifixion as a plant and actually a tree planted at just the right moment (11th century, anonymous: Οὗτος φυτευθεὶς εἰς κ(αι)ρὸν εὐκ(αι)ρίας. See RHOBY (2014: 752–753 [no. UK3]; 971 [im. CXIV]) in the θεόδροσον Golgotha (13th–14th century, Manuel Philes, line 1: Δένδρον φυτευθὲν εἰς θεόδροσον τόπον. See MILLER (1855–57 = 1967: I; 89 [no. CLXXXIV]) and blossomed in a prayer land (12th century, anonymous, line 1: Τόπου προσευχῆς ἐκφυὲν φέρω ξύλον. See FROLOW (1961: 362 [no. 405]), so as an admirable sprout (8th–9th century, Theodore of Stoudios, line 1: Θαυμαστὸν ἔργον, ὡς Θεῷ πλακέν, σὺ με. See Theod. Stud, *Refutatio poem. Iconoclastici*, PG 99, 440 B-C) to water the world with the coolness of his wonders giving strength (8th–9th century, Theodore of Stoudios, lines 4–6: Δρόσους ὕω γὰρ θαυματουργίας μάλα. / Ὡς κόσμον ἄρδει ταῖς ἀπορροαῖς ἅπαξ. / Πῶσεις παρέχων, καὶ τί τῶν οὐκ εὖ βίω; See Theod. Stud, *Refutatio poem. Iconoclastici*, PG 99, 440 B-C), shadowing the earth (epigram no. 6 – line 9) and dripping τὴν Ἀερῶν δρόσον (epigram no. 6 – line 10) onto the souls of all the faithful people who needs it.

of his descent for which he is very proud, highlighting his origins in his mother's family. He uses significant and complicated terms and phrases so as to make it clear that he is of noble descent. As such, he mentions that he is the offspring of noble generations (φυνέντι καλλιιδενδρίας – line 11), whose root is queen Irene Doukaina (ρίζοπρεμνον ή βασιλῖς Εἰρήνη – line 12), the glory of all the palaces (τῶν ἀνάκτων τὸ κλέος – line 13) and the grandmother of his mother (ή μητρομάμη – line 13), Anna Komnene. The tree metaphor then serves to give sense to the concept of family and it is used to show the close relation between its members, the wood of the holy cross and the *staurothékes*.¹²⁰

Briefly, we should make note of the fact that a male member of the royal family self-identifies through his noble descent on his mother's side and not on his father's. This serves to show the important status of women at the time, his grandmother in particular, not just for him alone but in the conscience of all the members of the family. His clear and straightforward declaration of respect towards her in the epigram is a daring statement.

Summary

In the Byzantine epigrams regarding the cross and the crucifixion composed by Nicholas Kallikles we see prominent female figures. These are women of noble descent, members of the royal Byzantine Empire of Komnenoi, who ordered holy artefacts, such as crosses and *staurothékes*, engraved with epigrams by Nicholas Kallikles. This allows us to claim that Kallikles¹²¹ must have had close relations with the royal Byzantine

¹²⁰ We have to mention the six crosses and five *staurothékes* ordered by Irene Doukaina (GAUTHIER [1985: 152–155]), and also the reliquaries of the holy cross used by Alexios I to negotiate with the Normans (HOSTETLER [2017: 182–183]).

¹²¹ It is reminded that Nicholas Kallikles was the chief doctor of the imperial court during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, and he was his personal physician. This, on

women of the time, possibly through philological meetings that took place in the imperial court,¹²² which reflects their high educational status and their literary concerns¹²³

It is worth noting that some of these works of art, created following the order of royal Byzantine women, were connected in one way or

its own, could explain why these epigrams were assigned to Kallikles on behalf of the two women, the wife and daughter of Alexios.

¹²² It has been stated that in Byzantium the literary texts were narrated in front of an audience of cultured people. There is also use of the word *θέατρον*, wanting to show how a concept known from the antiquities is now blooming again during the reign of Komnenoi and Palaiologoi (see HUNGER [1978; trans. 2008⁴: I; 131; 138]; for Byzantine theatres see MARCINIAK [2007]; PUCHNER [2002]; for on-stage reading see CAVALLO [2008: 85-99]). In the 12th century, there were some scholar circles consisting of women such as Anna Dalassene, Irene Doukaina, Anna Komnene (mother, wife, and daughter of Alexios I Komnenos, respectively), queen Maria (wife to Michael VII Doukas first and Nikephoros Botaneiates later) and Sebastokratorissa Irene (wife to Andronikos Komnenos, second son of John II). For the relationship of Byzantine women with literature, the education they received and some examples see CAVALLO (2008: 63-70); MALTESE (1991); ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ (2009²: 185-213). For Sebastokratorissa Irene (JEFFREYS - JEFFREYS [1994]) and her literary circle comprised by the most notable writers of the time such as Manganeios Prodromos, Constantine Manasses, John Tzetzes and Jacob the Monk, see RHOBY (2009); JEFFREYS (1982); JEFFREYS (2011/12) and CHALANDON (1912: II; 213), where we read: 'Irènea été le centre d'une petite cour littéraire dont les membres l'ont célébrée en vers et en prose'. Finally, let us mention the concept of muscle memory practices (movements and gestures), which helped to memorize lines (since their memorization was easier than that of prose) and present them lively to the audience (see e.g. PAPALEXANDROU [2007: 165], on the easiness of memorizing lines and the characteristics of their formality; CARRUTHERS [1990: 170], for the nature of the easily memorized texts; JEFFREYS - JEFFREYS [1986]; CONNERTON [1989]; GEARY [2002], for the relationship of formality and textuality in the Medieval west; THOMAS [1992], for ancient Greece).

¹²³ For Irene Doukaina, several scholars have said that she indeed had a small literary circle and its members read prose and lines (see MULLETT [1984: 177-179]). In this framework, we may accept an out-loud reading of epigrams engraved or drawn on artefacts (see CAVALLO [2008: 82-83]; SPINGOU [2013: 142-143]; BERNARD [2014: 64]).

In any case, the position of an engraved line was crucial for its audience and the reading. We need to consider the definitive role of the distance between the audience and the line which may have inhibited its reading (JAMES [2007: 188-203]), and also the degree to which it was legible (SPINGOU [2013: 150-159]). Finally, there may have been mediators who had the role of explaining the epigrams to those who couldn't read them.

another with nunneries.¹²⁴ Prime examples of this are the two epigrams no.4 and no.5 by Irene Doukaina and her daughter Maria, respectively, which are dedicated to the nunnery of the Virgin Mary (Theotokos *Kecharitoméne*) in Constantinople.

In conclusion, what we should make note of is the prominent female donorship during the reign of Komnenoi as a token of noble women's powerful position in the Byzantine empire given how they were able to order such precious artefacts. These orders serve to show the craftsmanship in Byzantine micro-art, Byzantine women's deep religious faith and honest feelings towards God, as well as their right to make such expensive and high-profile orders. Undoubtedly, these Byzantine ladies had high social and financial status,¹²⁵ but also a sophisticated level of scholarly knowledge rendering them capable of being remembered by other members of their families (epigram no.6) in their request to join Christ in the Garden of Eden¹²⁶. It is actually a kind of

¹²⁴ For a list of women founders of monasteries in Constantinople see Koubena (1991) and Talbot (2001), while for women as founders of double monasteries (for men and women): Hilpisch (1928: 5–24); Pargoire (1906); Beck (1959: 138) in Byzantium see Mitsiou (2014). For the relation between some families of the Byzantine Empire and monasteries see e.g. Talbot (1990) and Thomas (1987).

¹²⁵ Their social status and financial activities involved founding nunneries like in the case of Irene Doukaina, and sponsoring the renovation of churches in prominent parts of Constantinople, relaying a political message to the citizens and essentially showcasing their wealth and power through richly renovating prominent churches and monasteries around the city (see Dimitropoulou [2007: 102–103] and Dimitropoulou [2010: 165–166]). For the founding of convents by women as an act of ideological power and social recognition see James (2001: 159); Weingrod (1977: 43); Hill (1999: 178); Dimitropoulou (2010: 167). In Cappadocia we see the founding of churches mostly by women in the 13th century. It is worth noting that they were significantly decorated on the inside (see Karamaouna – Peker – Uyar [2014]).

¹²⁶ Let's note those cases in Byzantine history where the empress works together with the emperor – and in some cases, as the emperor or against him – (Theodora, Irene of Athens [see Runciman (1978)], Theophano, Anna Dalassene – mother of Komnenoi – and others). This power, or better yet the influence to power, of the Byzantine empress has been characterized as “the power behind the throne” which in fact, is directly linked with the personal power of each empress over her husband (for the term “power behind the throne” and its importance in early Byzantine years see James

investment of wealth for the eternal life,¹²⁷ hoping that Christ would mediate for a place in Heaven.¹²⁸ And there is no better way to do that than founding or renovating monasteries and churches and also gifting expensive and valuable artefacts to the church.¹²⁹ So, the benefit is on behalf of religious donors -men and women- given that both had the same target,¹³⁰ with a double meaning: saving their souls in celestial life and being socially acknowledged in earthly life.¹³¹ We could thus claim,

[2001: 84-88], while it is interesting to see the articles in the volume GARLICK – DIXON – ALLEN [1992], which focus on particular Byzantine empresses). See also DELBRÜCK (1913); MISSIOU (1982); RUNCIMAN (1972). It is worth noting the case of the daughter of Alexios I Komnenos, Anna Komnene, who aspired in the 12th century to succeed her father together with her husband Nikephoros Bryennios (see HILL [1996a: 45–53]; HILL [1996b]), but didn't manage to do so and became a really good author writing the story of her father in *Alexiad*. It is also powerful proof of the strong presence of women empresses on coins (see GARLAND [1999: 229–231]; GKANTZIOS [2016]; BRUBAKER – TOBLER [2000] and JAMES [2001: 101–132] for the presence of the Byzantine empress on coins of the 4th and 8th century and examples of such coins and their manufacturing dates) and their presence in art (see JAMES [2001: 26–49]). Finally, the Byzantine rituals show us how the empress was treated in Byzantium (see JAMES [2001: 50–58] for the early period, while for the title of empress and its importance see BENSAMMER [1976]).

¹²⁷ See Δημητρουπούλου (2006: 144); WHARTON (1981).

¹²⁸ The monasteries' *typiká* show the expectations of the founders for Christ and the Virgin Mary and other Saints to mediate in order to save their souls and the souls of their families (GAUTHIER [1985: 19–29]). See also GALATARIOTOU (1987: 91–95); DIMITROPOULOU (2010: 162–163; 167) and GALATARIOTOU (1998). After all, it was a popular belief that the worthy good souls could cross the gates of heaven (see EVERY [1976: 142–148]; MORRIS [1995: 128] and DIMITROPOULOU [2010: 162]).

¹²⁹ CUTLER (1994: 302). Let's note that there was a hierarchy in the different forms of female donorship since mostly empresses could found monasteries while the remaining women of the royal family could support them financially and dedicate artefacts, acts which reflected their financial means (see Δημητρουπούλου [2006: 144]; JAMES [2001: 148–163], for the empresses as donors during the early Byzantine period). Let's note that the construction of a church by an empress follows the example of Saint Helena, particularly during the 4th and 5th century (see BRUBAKER [1999]). Finally, we should note the two women of noble descent of the 14th century, Maria Aggelina Doukaina Palaiologina of Ioannina and Helena Uglješa of Serres, who dedicated a considerable number of artefacts to Byzantine monasteries, for example in Meteora and Mount Athos (see VASSILAKI [2012]).

¹³⁰ DIMITROPOULOU (2007: 105).

¹³¹ Δημητρουπούλου (2006: 145).

rounding this paper, that in Byzantium the best way to spend money was to order the construction of holy artefacts, the founding or renovation of monasteries and churches, all in an effort to persuade God for a spot in His eternal kingdom all the while showcasing their social and financial superiority.¹³²

Epilogue

How would the Byzantines themselves have answered the question, what was the place of women in their society? From the 4th century to the end of the Byzantine Empire, the answer would be broadly the same, with some exceptions. Generally speaking, then, a Byzantine would answer that the place of women is exhausted within the family. Her destination is marriage and motherhood, and her place is the home, from which she must not leave except to go to church, and even then, she will not be unaccompanied.¹³³ However, the extent to which a Byzantine woman could move freely outside the home was something that was directly related to the social status of her family. For example, the women of aristocratic and wealthy families were much more engaged in domestic life, where they had the help of servants and slaves for their various activities, unlike the wives of the poorer citizens, who were often obliged to earn their living outside, either as workers in the

¹³² DIMITROPOULOU (2010: 169). During the 10th to 15th centuries these donations-gifts were substantial in churches and monasteries (see GIROS [2012: 97–98]). We should not forget that monasteries such as the ones in Mount Athos were given prominence due to their large donations and gifts even from people of other religions. Naturally, politics played its role in such cases, since there was balance and conflicts were avoided for the people and for the monks (see Μανιάτη-Κοκκίνη [2003: 62–66], particularly for the period between 12th and 14th century).

¹³³ The contribution of Kekaumenos in *Στρατηγικόν*, written in the 11th century, is characteristic: *Τὰς θυγατέρας σου ὡς καταδίκους ἔχε ἐγκεκλεισμένας καὶ ἀπροόπτους*. See Τσουγκαράκης (1993: 173).

harvest, or as vendors in the market.¹³⁴ The latter had absolutely no access to political power, as did their husbands, and were illiterate, as poverty contributed even more to these negative and unpleasant living conditions.

But what happened to the women of the aristocracy? They, on the contrary, had access to education as well as economic power and political power, up to a point. In terms of education, we recall that Anna Komnene was one of the most learned people of her time, while her mother, Irene Doukaina, was also a woman of knowledge, especially theological knowledge. It is worth noting that the position of women of the aristocracy was strengthened in the 11th and 12th centuries due to the strategy pursued by the new aristocracy, mainly through intermarriage. The multiple concordances between the Komnenoi and the Doukai in the late 11th century bound these two families with strong ties and resulted in the accession of two of their representatives, Alexios Komnenos and Irene Doukaina, to the throne. As a result, the aristocracy of the 12th century consisted largely of the Doukas, the Komnenoi and their families with whom they were related through arranged marriages.

The era of Komnenoi has, therefore, several women who played an important role in imperial political life, mainly influencing a man, husband, or son. Thus, we see the women of Alexios Komnenos' immediate entourage founding monasteries from his property and even owning relics of the Holy Cross, which in previous historical periods were inextricably linked to the power of men, a symbol of power, mainly in connection with campaign and battles (for the protection of troops). At this point, it should not escape our attention that the finding of the Holy Cross is due to a woman, namely the empress Saint Helena. Irene Doukaina is the first known empress to possess part of the most important relic of the Byzantines, the Holy Cross, and in this way, she emerges as a

¹³⁴ LAIOU (2001).

new Helena. She even places these parts of the Holy Wood of the Cross in crucifixes made with luxurious raw materials (e.g. gold, pearls, enamel, etc.) and commissions for the creation of metrical inscriptions to notable scholars of her time in order to be engraved on them (epigram no.1, 2 and 5). Her two porphyrogenites daughters, Maria (epigram no.4) and Eudokia (epigram no.3), had similar engraved *staurothekes*, following the example of their mother. Finally, the Komnenoi era, which is the focus of this article with the epigrams of Nicholas Kallikles, men and women determine their genealogy independently of the biological sex of their ennobled ancestors. Thus, the importance of a woman's social origin as a factor in promoting a husband or any other offspring, such as a grandchild (epigram no.6), is clearly emphasized.

Abbreviations

A	Αρχαιολογία
Ae	Aevum. Rassegna di scienze storiche, linguistiche e filologiche
B	Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines
BF	Byzantinische Forschungen. Internationale Zeitschrift für Byzantinistik
BMGS	Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
Bsl	Byzantinoslavica. Revue internationale des études byzantines
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CCha	Continuity and Change
ChH	Church History
DACL	Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
ΔΕΒΜΜ	Δίπτυχα Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών και Μεταβυζαντινών Μελετών
ECR	Eastern Churches Review
EO	Échos d'Orient
GHi	Gender and History
GLB	Graeco-Latina Brunensia
GOTR	Greek Orthodox Theological Review
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History

JMRU	Jurisprudencija/Jurisprudence of Mykolo Romerio universitetas
JÖB	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
M	Μνήμων
MEMIPCH	Medieval and Early Modern Iberian Peninsula Cultural History: Mirabilia
MDAI.RA	Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung
NE	Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων
NRh	Nea Rhōmē/Νέα Ῥώμη
ODB	Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium
OT	Oral Tradition
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca, acc. J. P. Migne, vol. 1–161 (Parisiis, 1857–1866)
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina, acc. J. P. Migne, vol. 1–221 (Parisiis, 1844–1864)
REB	Revue des Études Byzantines
ROC	Revue de l'Orient Chrétien
RSBN	Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici
SUC	Sapiens Ubique Civis
TM	Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de recherches d'histoire et civilisation byzantines
V	Viator: Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies
WJK	Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte
ZRVI	Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta

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