It is by now well established that elite women played a prominent role in the renewal of the cityscape of Constantinople following its recovery from the Latins in 1261, especially during the long reign of Andronikos II. They focused their attention on the restoration and revival of monasteries, both male and female, that had fallen into decline during the Latin occupation of 1204–61, as well as on the foundation of new convents. Nine of the twenty-two monastic institutions restored between 1282 and 1328 had female patrons, and four of the ten newly constructed monasteries were founded by women.1 After this significant burst of building activity in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, the restoration of older complexes and the construction of new monasteries in the capital declined dramatically in the later fourteenth and fifteenth century, in large part due to the rapidly worsening financial condition of the empire. Emblematic of the reduced circumstances of the Constantinopolitan elite and their ability to support restoration activities are two notices at the end of the typikon of the convent of Bebaia Elpis, which had been founded in the early fourteenth century. By the end of that century the buildings were evidently suffering from deferred maintenance, and we are told that in 1392 the nun Xene Philanthropene, desirous of achieving her future salvation, restored at her own expense our venerable convent, which was threatening to collapse in several places. Some eight years later her daughter, Eugenia Kantakouzene, sold a house in order to assemble the 200 hyperpera necessary to pay for the restoration and repair of the holy church and bell tower, which were in danger of collapsing. These hyperpera were spent on tiles, nails, plaster, skilled labor and other appropriate expenses.2 Conditions in the capital had obviously deteriorated since a century earlier, when Maria-Martha Glabaina co-sponsored with her husband the addition to the church of the Pammakaristos of a parekklesion decorated with mosaics, which was to serve as his funerary monument,3 and the dowager empress Theodora Palaiologina added the south church to the church at the Lips convent as a mausoleum for deceased members of the Palaiologan family.

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3 For the latest discussion of the dating of this construction see A. Effenberger, Zur Restaurierungstätigkeit des Michael Dukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes im Pammakaristikoskloster und zur Erbauungszeit des Parekklesion, in: Zograf, 31, 2006–7, pp. 79–94. I thank Andreas Rhoby for this reference. Effenberger argues that the parekklesion was built between 1302 and 1304, when Michael Tarchaniotes was still alive, and that his wife was not the sole founder, as has been previously argued.
This paper will leave aside the monumental buildings of the early Palaiologan era, and focus rather on works of art of more modest size and cost commissioned by female patrons, such as icons with their frames and revetments; other objects which might be used in a church, such as lamps, liturgical textiles, and reliquaries; and manuscripts. Some of these works of art were no doubt donated to embellish a church founded or supported by the patroness; we know, for example, that Anna Komnene Raoulaina Strateigopoulina donated manuscripts, liturgical vessels and other treasures to her newly established Constantinopolitan nunnery of Krataios, while the dowager empress Theodora Palaiologina, widow of Michael VIII, commissioned liturgical books and vessels, evidently for the nunneries of Lips and Sts Kosmas and Damian, as well as textile furnishings for her tomb at Lips. Maria Palaiologina, daughter of Michael VIII, donated golden textiles and a gospel book with new binding to the church at the Chora. Other objects were commissioned as specific individual donations, often as ex votos in thanksgiving for a healing miracle or the cure of barrenness.

I shall draw on the evidence of the relatively small number of still surviving objects with inscriptions linking them to female owners or donors, as well as on epigrams preserved only in manuscript form, which, I will argue, have become dissociated from the objects on which they were originally inscribed, but are still useful in reconstructing patterns of female patronage. For it is especially the epigrams that may shed light on the motivations of the women who commissioned these works of art and paid the poets to write the accompanying verses which illuminate the pious devotion that inspired their gifts. We must always be mindful, however, of the reality that, as far as we can tell, these verse inscriptions were all the work of male poets, and therefore we can only speculate as to the extent to which the sentiments expressed are those of the patroness or those deemed suitable by the poet.

ICONS, ICON FRAMES AND REVETMENTS

a. Surviving objects

Let me begin with a group of surviving framed icons that are definitely connected with female patrons. Two of them are preserved at the Vatopedi monastery on Mt Athos. The earlier one (Fig. 1), an icon of the Virgin Dexiokratos, that is, holding the Christ child in her right arm, dates to the first half of the fourteenth century, even though monastic tradition claims that it is one of the ninia or dolls of the ninth-century iconophile empress Theodora. It is covered with...
a now much damaged silver gilt frame which retains three plaques from the original epigram, which no doubt was laid out in a manner similar to the somewhat earlier Freising icon of Manuel Dishypatos (Fig. 2). Much of the epigram can be reconstructed thanks to its transcription in an eighteenth-century manuscript at Vatopedi. The new edition of the epigram by Andreas Rhoby and Wolfram Hörandner slightly changes the word order, so that the verses now read:

O Virgin, certain hope of those who are at a loss,
Be thou my shelter and the salvation of my soul,
For I know that Thou art <the protectress?> of orphans and strangers,

Washing away the slimy mud of my sins;

Anna Philanthropene cries out this prayer to Thee.  

Anna used to be identified as the second wife of Manuel III Komnenos, emperor of Trebizond (1390–1416), but has recently been shown to be Anna Philanthropene Kantakouzene Komnene Palaiologina Bryennissa, granddaughter of Theodora Synadene, the foundress of the Bebaia Elpis convent in Constantinople. Anna’s portrait survives on fol. 4(8) of the Lincoln College Typikon (Lincoln College gr. 35) together with that of her husband, Michael Philanthro-
penos. She obviously commissioned the manufacture of the silver frame for the icon and its epigram, inscribed with a prayer to the Virgin of Certain Hope, as a gift to the convent; we cannot know whether she commissioned the icon as well, or if the frame was intended to embellish an icon already in the possession of the convent. The motivation for her donation was to supplicate the Virgin to cleanse her of her sins so as to ensure the salvation of her soul. In her epigram she addresses the Virgin directly, and her words take the place of the donor portrait seen in some other revetments, such as that of Maria Akropolitissa who extends her hands from the lower right-hand corner of the frame toward an icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, now in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.12

The second silver gilt icon frame at Vatopedi with the inscription of a female donor was commissioned by a certain Papadopoulina in honour of her sister Ioanna Arianitissa13 (Fig. 3). The frame and revetment were intended for an icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, as shown by the inscription flanking the Virgin’s head. A later, eighteenth-century icon of the same type of the Virgin has now been installed in the Palaiologan frame.14 The twelve-line dodecasyllable epigram has been inscribed on two panels inserted at the base of the frame. The two panels were reversed at some point in time, no doubt in the course of a refurbishing of the icon. The verses are to be read horizontally, and can be translated as follows:

Not every grace is the grace of man,
Nor do natures have only one relationship.

13 The identity of this Arianitissa has been much discussed in the recent literature. The Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit lists only one woman of this name, eparchissa in Berroia in 1375 (no. 1314, now replaced by 91321) and assumes that she was the recipient of the frame as a gift from her sister Papadopoulina (no. 21746). The Acts of Vatopedi, however, mention an earlier Arianitissa, wife of Michael Doukas Arianites (PLP, no. 1312) and daughter of Theodore Sarantenos (J. Bompard/J. Lefort et al. [eds.], Actes de Vatopedi, Paris 2001, no. 64, pp. 348, 354.25–29). She had died by 1335 when Sarantenos drew up his will. I am grateful for this reference to Ivan Drpić, who also stated in a personal communication of February 10, 2010, that he believed the revetment was more likely to have been made in the first half of the fourteenth century.
For Papadopoulina bestows upon her sister Ariantissa, whose name is Grace,
Not ordinary things,
But the pure image of the bride of God
Which the ranks of angels hesitate to look upon.
Out of love adorning it with gilt silver,
She gives it to her as a spark of wondrous love.
Therefore may grace be bestowed upon the sisters
... of tender love
And the most certain preservation of life.  

Unusually this revetment seems to have been commissioned as a personal gift from one sister to another, although eventually the icon made its way into the treasury of the Prodromos monastery in Berroia and later ended up at Vatopedi.  

A remarkable group of icons associated with a Greco-Serbian princess was brought together for the first time in six centuries at the “Byzantium: Faith and Power” exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum in 2004. All three icons date to the second half of the fourteenth century, and it is assumed that they were commissioned by Maria Palaiologina, the wife of a Serbian despot who ruled over a part of northern Greece. Maria was half Greek and half Serb, but she proudly bore the names of four Byzantine imperial families, since her full name was Maria Angelina Komnene Doukaina Palaiologina. In 1362, at the age of 12, she was married to Thomas Preljubović, who became ruler of Epiros and Thessaly, and she held the title of basilissa of Epiros from 1366/7 until her death in 1394. It has been presumed by modern scholars that she ordered the manufacture of all three of these icons of extraordinary quality; two of them are preserved to this day at the monastery of the Transfiguration at Meteora, where her brother Iosaph, the former emperor of Thessaly John Uroš Doukas Palaiologos, was second founder and abbot. Although the inscriptions give only her name and no prayer or vow, it has been assumed that the two icons were given to the monastery in exchange for the prayers of the monks for Maria and her husband Thomas. Because of Maria’s close ties with the abbot, it is likely that Maria rather than Thomas initiated the commission and donation. Maria is also known to have donated a cross, a kratetera (perhaps an asteriskos?), and two patens to the same Transfiguration monastery. This donation was confirmed by a document of 1386, following her husband’s death in 1384.

The first icon from Meteora depicts the Virgin and Child surrounded by bust-length images of saints (Fig. 4). Within the portrait of each saint is a small slot in which relics of the saint would have been placed. The donor Maria, identified by inscription, is depicted kneeling in prayer at the feet of the Virgin. Although the icon has been badly damaged and the relics are gone, the remaining faces of the saints reveal that this icon was painted by a skilled artist from...
Meteora, Transfiguration monastery, icon of the Virgin and Child surrounded by saints, fourteenth century
northern Greece. It is theorized that originally a paired panel of Christ with a prostrate Thomas as donor formed a diptych.

The second icon from the Transfiguration monastery depicts the Doubting of Thomas, an appropriate subject since Maria’s husband was named Thomas. A remarkable, indeed unique, feature of the iconography is that Maria and her husband are depicted not as small kneeling donor figures, as was the usual custom, but are grouped with the apostles as full-size figures. Maria stands out particularly with her red dress and crown, while only the head of her husband is visible. In view of her dominant portrayal in the icon, I assume that she was the primary donor.

The third object associated with Maria, a lavishly decorated pair of icons, is housed in the Diocesan Museum at Cuenca in Spain, and is usually referred to as the Cuenca diptych. The left-hand panel bears many similarities to the Meteora icon, with an image of the Virgin and Child surrounded by bust-length portraits of saints with slots for relics. Maria kneels at the feet of the Virgin. The right hand panel depicts a standing Christ figure with Thomas, now obliterated, kneeling at his feet. It is assumed that the figure of Thomas, a despised tyrant, was deliberately destroyed after his murder in 1384. The Cuenca diptych is famed not only for the quality of the painting, but for the extraordinary decoration of its silver gilt and jeweled revetment. Of an original 954 pearls, 939 still survive, but only sixty-seven of the original 312 gemstones, which included rubies, sapphires, garnets and turquoises, are intact. Once again the opulence of the ornamentation provides some idea of the wealth that was at the disposal of this princess and her husband.

b. The evidence of epigrams

A group of eight epigrams by Manuel Philes from the first half of the fourteenth century provides additional evidence for the identity of female donors and the motivations for their commissioning of icons, frames or revetments. These epigrams range in length from 8 to 27 lines, and I would argue that most if not all of these poems were originally inscribed on silver gilt frames for icons. The lemmata or titles of these poems indicate that they were primarily intended for icons of the Virgin, while one was destined for the image of a female saint, Anastasia Pharmakolytria. It is possible that in some cases the verses were painted around the border of a wooden icon (as on an icon of the Virgin Dexiokratousa from Sinai), but they were more likely to be engraved on the metal frames, either on panels, as in the Vatopedi and Freising icons, or around the border as in the middle Byzantine Limburg-an-der-Lahn reliquary. The longest surviving poem on a Palaiologan icon frame is the fourteen-verse epigram on the Freising icon (Fig. 2), distributed in panels around the border. The Vatopedi icon of Papadopoulina (Fig. 3) has twelve verses inscribed on two panels at the base of the icon; if two more such panels were added at the top, the frame could easily contain an epigram of 24 verses.

Most of these epigrams which have become dissociated from their original icons are ex votos, that is, objects given to a church or monastery in thanksgiving for the safe birth of a child or for recovery from illness, such as a headache or haemorrhage; one contains a prayer for deliverance from sterility. The donor may offer the object on her own behalf, or on behalf of a family...
member, such as a newborn infant who survived a dangerous sickness. As an example of an ex-voto poem, we might consider the verses composed by Philes at the request of the nun Eulogia Komnene Palaiologina, the niece of Andronikos II Palaiologos, who credited the Virgin with saving her from numerous illnesses:

*O Virgin, even before I experienced my mother’s breast and swaddling clothes, Even before I saw the light and drew breath, I had Thou alone as my nurse and light and breath, And as a vigilant protectress with my Lord. For my ephemeral nature, easily susceptible to disease*

Straightway afflicted me with frequent illnesses, So that sometimes I was on the point of death and ending my life; But Thou, Who art guarantor of a healthy soul, Restored the vitality of my body, Refuting the judgments of the physicians. And now again Thou deliverest me from my pains, Concocting the antidotes of Thy miracles. Therefore accept the thank-offering of silver gilt, Receive also the love that lies ineffably within it. For Thou knowest, as I do, Thy grace, When I unmarried, having renounced vanity before vainglory, Donned the shabby monastic garment, For a marriage of good hopes. These verses are addressed to Thee, O venerable Maiden, By Eulogia Palaiologina, of Komnenian stock, Dearest child of the great stratopedarches, Niece of the most pious emperor.

These verses contain several elements of a standard miracle account, the woman who has been cured of numerous maladies by resorting to the miraculous assistance of the Virgin. As in hagiography, the poet slips in the typical criticism of doctors who despaired of healing a patient only to see her cured by divine intervention. Eulogia refers specifically to a silver gilt frame or revetment, the sostron.

An epigram recently analyzed by Edmund Ryder was addressed to St Anastasia Pharmakolitria (“the poison-curer”) by Irene the panhypersebaste, daughter of Theodore Metochites, as a prayer for the recovery from illness of her son-in-law Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (ca. 1285–1331). It specifically alludes to an image of the saint, with her traditional martyr’s cross and flask of healing medicine, and was most probably associated with an icon of this holy woman venerated as a healer.

With the exception of the aforementioned dedication of an icon to St Anastasia and Maria Palaiologina’s commission of the icon of the doubting Thomas, it is remarkable that all of these icons or icon frames known to have been commissioned by female donors were dedicated to the Virgin. At least two of them were dedicated to the Virgin of the Zoodochos Pege, the miraculous spring located at a monastery just outside the walls of Constantinople; others were for images of the Virgin Dexiokratousa or Hodegetria. Some of the epigrams reflect a special affinity between the female patron and the Virgin, especially when the donor is afflicted with a condition specific to women, such as infertility or a haemorrhage, which I interpret as menstrual problems. One of the epigrams addressed to the Theotokos of the Zoodochos Pege by the wife of Syrstephanos, in

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24 PLP, no. 21370.
thanksgiving for her deliverance from an excessive flow of blood, begins with verses acknowledging the Virgin’s preeminent role among women:

*Thou alone amongst women dost bear God as an infant,*
*Thou alone amongst women dost remain a virgin while giving birth,*
*Thou alone amongst women dost save the race of mortals.*

Another epigram that could be described as expressing “female solidarity” was addressed by Maria Kasiane Raoulaina to the Virgin of the Pege in thanksgiving for the deliverance of her infant child from a near-fatal illness.

*O thou who delivered Eve from her intense suffering And dost sympathetically watch over my birth pangs (For God <was born> of Thee without the natural pain of childbirth)…*

Here Maria expresses the sentiment that the Virgin as a mother herself was particularly solicitous of women experiencing the pain of childbirth to which they were liable because of the original sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

It is also noteworthy that on several occasions when a married couple commissions a diptych with icons of Christ and the Virgin, the wife is associated with the Virgin, while her husband is linked with Christ. This arrangement can be seen in the Cuenca diptych, and probably was true also of the diptych at the Metamorphosis monastery at Meteora, from which the icon of Christ is missing. This same pattern can be observed in a pair of epigrams by Philes, which must have accompanied a diptych of the Virgin and Christ. The verses of the husband, Philanthropenos Doukas, are addressed to an icon of Christ, while those of his wife Philanthropene are addressed to the Virgin. Both poems pray for the wife to be released from sterility and be blessed with the birth of a child.

This is not to imply by any means that the dedications of Byzantine patrons and patronesses were always gender-linked. There are numerous examples of women sponsoring churches and icons dedicated to Christ, and of men dedicating churches and icons to the Virgin. It is nonetheless remarkable that in this particular data set, almost exclusively of elite women from Constantinople, there seems to be such a clear preference for the Virgin on the part of female donors. This finding parallels the recent determination by John Cotsonis of the overwhelming tendency for women to select an image of the Virgin for their seals. He cautions, however, that men display a similar, if lesser, devotion to the Virgin on their seals, while women’s seals show no special allegiance to female saints.

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29 For a parallel in the frontispiece of an eleventh-century manuscript see the remarkable pair of miniatures of Theodore Gabras and his wife Irene in St Petersburg, State Public Library, MS 291, fols. 2v and 3r, dated to 1067. Here Christ lays his hand on the head of Theodore, while the Virgin clasps Irene’s hand; both donor figures are standing. For color illustrations see A. C. Cutler/J.-M. Spiesser, *Byzance médiévale*, 700–1204, Paris 1996, pls. 258–259.
Devotion to the Virgin can also be seen in some epigrams originally inscribed on objects of minor art, such as lamps. Thus an anonymous female donor gave a glass lamp to the Pege monastery in thanksgiving for her cure from dropsy, for which the waters of the sacred spring were deemed particularly effective. Philes compresses many allusions and metaphors into a nine-line epigram:

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Attaining light and life, O Virgin,  
I have contrived for thee a light-bearing vessel;  
For thou didst restore me again to good health  
When I was afflicted with the dread disease of dropsy.  
For through the showers of thy dew  
Thou didst dry out the fluids of my inner organs.  
For thou bearest a secret fire which consumes moisture.  
Therefore accept this light in a transparent lamp,  
So that such a miracle may not be hidden to mankind.

Philes plays with the imagery of fire and water, particularly appropriate for a lamp in which one can imagine the wick immersed in a layer of oil floating on water, as he alludes to the fire of the Virgin, which can dry out the moisture of the dropsy. He also refers to the paradox of the water of the sacred spring being able to heal a disease characterized by an over-accumulation of fluids and excessive thirst. Finally, the light and life of the first verse may well allude to the cross-shaped inscription of ΦΩΣ and ΖΩΗ that is sometimes found on Byzantine lamps.

Another poem once associated with a lamp was written by Philes on behalf of a certain Theadora Komnene. The husband whom she calls blossoming from the purple, hence, porphyrogenetos, may be the despot Demetrios Palaiologos, youngest son of Andronikos Palaiologos, who is also termed πορφυρενθής in another poem by Philes. O Virgin, since you have the warmth of compassion, Graciously accept the lamp as a gift; And grant in exchange to shed your light On my sweet husband, blossoming from the purple, Chasing out the darkness of his spiritual suffering. Theodora, the scion of the Komnenoi, <addresses> these <words> to Thee.

Surviving objects of minor art known to have been commissioned by women are very rare in the Palaiologan period; I have been able to locate only one cross and one cross reliquary. The cross reliquary, or stavrotheke, is in the Galleria dell’Accademia in Venice. It is made of wood and was provided with its silver gilt adornment...
by a certain Irene Palaiologina, as we are apprised by a four-line epigram. Irene, who describes herself as the niece of the emperor, has not been identified. Her verses, implicitly addressed to Christ, describe her commissioning of the silver decoration as a petition for salvation, <in hope of> redemption from her sins.39

The cross which now belongs to the Dionysiou monastery is particularly precious as a work of art commissioned by one of the last empresses of Byzantium (Fig. 5). It is made of wood sheathed with a silver gilt cover worked in high and low relief. The obverse features the Crucifixion, the reverse a figure of Christ standing in the Jordan River with a fish swimming at his feet. The cross is further embellished with floral ornament and cabochon gems. A plate at the base of the obverse vertical arm contains an inscription stating that the cross was a votive offering (ἀνάθημα) from Helena Palaiologina, wife of Manuel II Palaiologos.40

MANUSCRIPTS

The final section of this paper will be devoted to female patrons and donors of manuscripts. With a couple of exceptions, epigrams were not included in these volumes, so we must rely on the information provided by scribal notes and inscriptions. Women commissioned a number of fine manuscripts that have survived from the Palaiologan period; the patroness who first comes to mind is the so-called “Palaiologina,” whose monogram is found in a gospel book in the Vat. Gr. 1158 (fols. 5v and 6). In their publication of 1978, Hugo Buchthal and Hans Belting assembled a group of late thirteenth-century manuscripts with similar figural decoration, and hypothesized an atelier patronized by the bibliophile Theodora Raoulaina, theorizing that many of the books were commissioned for the monastery of St Andrew in Krisei that she refounded.41 Subsequent scholarship has added to the number of manuscripts associated with the Atelier of the Palaiologina, prompting John Lowden and Robert Nelson to reexamine the subject in a 1991 article.42

they made a number of important correctives to the thesis of Buchthal and Belting, noting that the increasing size of the group of manuscripts (due to new attributions) and especially the large proportion of lectionaries made it unlikely that they should be attributed to one patroness. They also suggested that the workshop that produced these manuscripts was in operation for longer than originally thought, probably functioning well into the early fourteenth century. Finally, they showed that the copy of the typikon of the Lips convent now in the British Library should be added to the group, and demonstrated that the dowager empress Theodora Palaiologina, widow of Michael VIII, was the patroness of at least one manuscript associated with the group, and may have commissioned others as well.43

The work of Lowden and Nelson thus makes us reconsider the hypothesis that a single imperial patroness was responsible for such a large number of commissions, and replaces the Buchthal-Belting model with “a more complex, unstable and unpredictable model, one that would allow for constantly varying collaboration among artisans … and their equally diverse clients”.44 The fact remains, however, that at least three manuscripts associated with the Palaiologina group were commissioned by women: the original Palaiologina gospel book; the typikon for the Lips convent, restored by Theodora Palaiologina; and the gospel book, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. VI, 28, dated by a colophon to 1285 and containing a prayer for a certain Anna and for the unnamed female owner of the manuscript (Fig. 6).45 The unpublished prayer may be translated as follows:

Verily, my Christ, <grant> to Anna and to me, the owner of this manuscript, to achieve salvation, and the forgiveness of sins, the inheritance of blessings, unspeakable joy, most radiant places, the choirs of all the righteous, the exceedingly bright choir of patriarchs and prophets, of apostles, martyrs, choirs of holy women, ascetics and saints, and with the female martyrs, the first of them. Thelkla the apostle. Verily, verily, Christ, may these things come to pass through the intercessions of these <holy personages> and of your immaculate mother; verily may I attain this. This book was completed on the 28th of July, of the thirteenth indiction, in the year 6793.46

The words of this prayer reflect the patroness’s consciousness of her sex, since it mentions her hope to be eventually united in heaven with choirs of holy women and female martyrs, especially Thelkla, the companion of St Paul who is deemed the first female saint. The emphasis on the serried ranks of holy women in heaven suggests that the patron may have ordered the gospel book for presentation to a convent, in the hope of the nuns’ prayers for her salvation and that of Anna, whose relationship to the donor cannot be determined.

45 The colophon is on fols. 440r–v, not on 441v–442r as erroneously stated by Buchthal and Belting, who were confused by the double numbering of the folio. The sex of the owner is indicated by the feminine participle της κτησαμένης. I should like to express my thanks to Robert Nelson who first drew my attention to this colophon. I should note that Anna has normally been identified as the donor/commissioner, but I believe that the Greek phrase Ἀμήν δὲ κάμου should be interpreted as referring to two separate individuals.
46 Here is a diplomatic transcription of the Greek text: Ἀμήν. Χριστε μου, γένητο τυχεί τῆς σωτηρίας Ἀμήν δὲ κάμου τῇ κτησαμένη, καὶ τῶν κακῶν συγγινόμην, καὶ τῶν κακῶν τὴν κληρονομίαν, χαρὰν τὴν ἀνεκλάλητον, φανερωτάτους τόπους, δικαιοί πάντων τοῦ χωρίου, τῶν ὀπλευμένων χωρίων πατριαρχῶν ται [lege τε] πρωφητῶν, ἀποστόλων, μαρτύρων, χωρίων ἀγίων [fol. 440v], ἀσκητῶν καὶ ὅσων, καὶ σὸν ταῖς μάρτυρις πράων τὲ θέκες τὴν ἀποστολάς. Ναι ναί, Χριστε, καὶ γένητο ταῖς τούτων παρακλήσεις καὶ τῆς ἄρχαντος σου μητέρας, Ἀμήν καὶ γένητο μοι. Εἴληφε τέλος δελτος ή τε Ιουλίου μηνι ιη’, ἵνα θεὶς ψεύξει’.
While the donation to a convent is hypothetical in the case of the Laurentian gospel book, women’s gifts of manuscripts to nunneries can be securely attested in a number of cases, as with the *typikon* for the Lips convent. In its present fragmentary condition it retains no elegant headpieces or portraits, but has titles in gold ink, ornamented initial letters, and occasional strips of ornament in pseudo-Kufic script or geometric designs, and the missing initial pages may have included portraits of the foundress’s family. In contrast, the *typikon* for the Bebaia Elpis convent, founded by Theodora Synadene, is one of the masterpieces of early Palaiologan manuscript illumination with its impressive series of portraits of members of the foundress’s family. This deluxe version of the *typikon*, often called the Lincoln College Typikon, was surely ordered by Theodora Synadene at the time of her foundation of the convent in the first part of the fourteenth century.  

No doubt it was reserved for use on special occasions, while a plain, unillustrated copy met the everyday needs of the convent.

Another patroness of a Constantinopolitan convent, Anna Komnene Raoulaina Strategopoulina, is known to have donated to the convent of Christ Savior Krataios several books, including a parchment manuscript of 319 folios now at the Pantokrator monastery of Mt Athos (Pantokrator 6). The book contains panegyrical readings for feast days, as well as two hagiographical works on female saints, Gregory of Cyprus’s *Logos* on St Marina and the tenth-century *vita* of St Irene of Chrysobalanton; it was thus particularly suited for a nunnery library. Anna, who was perhaps the daughter of Theodora Raoulaina, lived at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century. A scribal note informs the reader that Anna contributed other books and sacred vessels to the convent, and begs the nuns to

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47 On this *typikon* and the relevant bibliography see I. Hutter, Die Geschichte des Lincoln College Typikons, in: Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik, 45, 1995, pp. 79–114.
treat the deluxe and wondrous book (πλουσιότατη και θαυμασία βίβλος) with reverence and care. The nuns should make sure their hands are clean before touching the book, and take care not to let the pages be spattered with oil or wax. The scribes further note that the book was expensive, and that they had gone to a great deal of trouble to assemble all the material in the volume. 48

Other women donated books both old and new to male monasteries. Maria Palaiologina’s gift of an eleventh-century gospel book to the Chora monastery in the early fourteenth century is commemorated in a 48-line epigram by Manuel Philes. Maria, often called “Mary of the Mongols” because of her marriage to the Mongol khan Abaga, is best known because of her inclusion in the Deesis mosaic in the esonarthex of the Chora church. Philes’s verses inform us that she donated golden textiles to Chora and also commissioned a new deluxe binding for the gospel book (attested in the late nineteenth century at the Prodromos monastery near Serres, now in the library of the Dujčev Center in Sofia). Philes’s poem was copied in the manuscript in two columns on two pages inserted at the end of the book (fols. 246r–v). The author of an unpublished catalogue entry on this manuscript, Jean-Marie Olivier, informs me that the present cover, in badly deteriorated purple silk, may be the remains of the Palaiologan rebinding. 49 Following the pattern of so many other female donators, Maria notes that she has made these gifts to the Virgin Chorine in thanksgiving for the blessings and favors she has enjoyed from the Mother of God, and for compensation for her salvation from myriad dangers, perhaps an allusion to her dispatch to the court of a Mongol khan as a diplomatic pawn. 50 We also know that Maria donated to the convent of the Panagiotissa very valuable <liturgical> vessels and books. 51

Other women made donations of manuscripts to monasteries on Mt Athos. Thus Theodora Raoulaina gave to the Lavra in 1300/1 a twelfth-century manuscript of commentaries by Theophylaktos of Ohrid on the Four Gospels. 52 A note at the end of the gospel book, next to the information about her donation, urges the monks of the Lavra to pray for Raoulaina. A ten-line epigram of 1455, penned by the Lavriote monk Dositheos, also exhorts the monks to be mindful of Raoulaina, the donor of the manuscript, and to pray for her spiritual salvation. This provides excellent proof that a century and a half after the original gift Raoulaina’s soul could still be assured of the continuing prayers of the monks of Lavra.

A few years later, a large lectionary with evangelist portraits (Lavra A111) was donated to the Lavra monastery by a certain Irene, probably Irene-Yolanda of Montferrat, the estranged wife of Andronikos II. The note recording her donation requests the prayers of the monks who read the lectionary. 53 Unusually large in format

48 Lampros, Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts on Mt. Athos (cit. n. 3), I, no. 1040, pp. 92–94. See also J. O. Ro-

49 Personal communication of September 1, 2008. Efforts to obtain a photograph of the binding and of the manuscript pages containing the poem have proved fruitless.

50 On this poem, first edited by P. N. Papageorgiou in: Byzantinische Zeitschrift, 3, 1894, pp. 326–327, see N. Tete-


52 On this manuscript of 344 folios, now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (Coislin gr. 128), see B. Montfaucou-

53 Text of the notice in S. M. Pelekanides, Οἱ θησαυροὶ τοῦ Ἱγίου Ὀρος, Α’, Εἰκονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα, Athens 1979, III, pp. 234–235 with images at pp. 57–61. The Greek text reads as follows:
(380 × 270 mm), this manuscript may have originated in Thessalonike, where Irene lived apart from her husband between 1303 and 1317. Another gift of an empress to an Athonite monastery was the beautiful psalter (Iviron 1384) commissioned by Anna of Savoy, widow of Andronikos III. It was copied in 1346 by the scribe Chariton of the Hodegon monastery in Constantinople. A four-line epigram states that the empress Anna Palaiologina had the psalter made as a thankoffering for herself and her imperial son, i.e. John V. The deluxe manuscript, of substantial size (295 × 235 mm), has script in red-gold minuscules, titles in gold uncial, and some elegant headpieces.

In striking contrast to this large-scale psalter is a small one from the monastery of St Catherine’s on Mt Sinai (Sinait. Gr. 61). Dated probably to the early fourteenth century, nothing is known of its origins except that it was somehow associated with the nun Theotime. In her donor portrait she is depicted prostrated before the Virgin, yet another reminder of female devotion to the Mother of God.

**Conclusion**

Let me begin with the caveat that the distinction between “commissioning” and “donation” of works of art is not always easy to establish. Clearly many of the objects I have discussed, such as icon frames for the Pege monastery, were specially ordered to be offered as ex votos. Lec tionaries must have always been commissioned as gifts, rather than for personal use. Papadopoulina ordered an icon frame as a present to her sister. In the case of the nun Theotime, the small size of her psalter suggests that she ordered it for her private devotions, but that at some later time it made its way to the monastery at Sinai. It is noteworthy, however, that both Maria Palaiologina (Mary of the Mongols) and Theodora Raoulaina donated older (and presumably prized) manuscripts to monasteries; in the first case the book was at least two centuries old, in the second case at least a century old.

I can summarize my overview as follows. Elite women continued to commission deluxe works of art in the Palaiologan period, just as they founded or refounded churches and monasteries. It is difficult to determine the marital status of most of these patronesses of minor arts and manuscripts, but only a few can be definitely identified as widows, in strong contrast to female founders and restorers of Palaiologan monasteries, most of whom had lost their husbands. The discrepancy can no doubt be explained by the much larger sums needed for building projects, necessitating access to the dowry which reverted to Byzantine women upon their husbands’ death.

55 I. Spathanakis, Corpus of Dated Greek Illuminated Manuscripts, Leiden 1981, no. 258; S. M. Pelekanides et al. (ed.), The Treasures of Mount Athos: Illuminated Manuscripts, II, Athens 1975, pp. 325–326. The statement by Donald Nicol that Anna gave the psalter to Iviron because her husband died there (The Byzantine Lady: Ten Portraits, 1250–1500, Cambridge 1994, p. 94) has no basis in fact; Andronikos III died in Constantinople (PLP, no. 21447). The Greek text of the epigram reads as follows:

Προσετέθη τὸ παρὸν ἄγιον Εὐαγγέλιον ἐν τῇ λάβρᾳ τοῦ ἁγίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀθανασίου παρὰ Εἰρήνης τῆς εὐσεβεστάτης αὐγούστης τῆς παλαιολογίσσης καὶ οἱ ἀναγινώσκοντες αὐτὸ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς.

Female patrons ordered much the same type of objects as their male counterparts; but when it came to icons, women showed a distinct preference for the Virgin over Christ and male saints. They made their donations of commissioned works of liturgical art to both male and female monasteries, just as they founded male monastic houses as well as convents. The motivations for their donations, clearly expressed in both prose dedicatory inscriptions and in verse epigrams, fall into two primary categories: 1) gratitude for healing or benefactions, often fulfilling a vow to make a gift if their prayers were answered; 2) gifts to monasteries in the hope of prayers for salvation by the community of monks or nuns.

Finally, I should like to stress that the patronesses I have discussed in this paper all commissioned works of art for spiritual reasons. Although a rara avis, such as Theodora Raoulaina, might order secular manuscripts for her personal reading, to the best of my knowledge there is virtually no specific evidence for Palaiologan elite women commissioning secular buildings or works of art.\[57\] I am convinced, however, that elite women also ordered their own clothing, linens, jewelry, and toilet articles, and perhaps even household furnishings such as furniture, ceramic vessels and tableware. Information on these secular commissions is inaccessible to the modern scholar, but we should not forget women’s patronage of the artisans who manufactured both deluxe and more ordinary personal items and furnishings for aristocratic and imperial households.

**Illustration credits:** Figs. 1, 3: after The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi (cit. n. 8), Figs. 437, 433. – Fig. 2: after Grabar, Les revêtements en or et en argent (cit. n. 14), Fig. 39. – Fig. 4: after Evans, Faith and Power (cit. n. 17), cat. 24B. – Fig. 5: after The Treasures of Mount Athos (cit. n. 40), pp. 346–347. – Fig. 6: Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Florence.

\[57\] The sole exception that comes to mind is Anna of Savoy who commissioned a tower and gateway in the upper citadel at Thessalonike in the mid-fourteenth century. The only patroness mentioned in E. Maguire/H. Maguire, Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture, Princeton 2007, is Irene the sebastokratorissa of the twelfth century.