WOMEN, MEN AND EUNUCHS

Gender in Byzantium

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2

WOMEN AND ICONS, AND WOMEN IN ICONS

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This chapter asks how gender might be understood as a factor in the interpretation of the production and meanings of Byzantine icons. It attempts to construct a methodology of reading texts and images which might elucidate both the role of women in the production of icons and also the choice of women for the subject matter of icons, particularly in the imagery of iconoclasm. This is a field influenced by 'feminist' scholarship, where one must work within rapidly developing frameworks; the situation in the Byzantine field offers no exception to this: previous commentaries are likely to reflect phases of feminist scholarship. In the case of women and icons, the field has been influenced by an empiricist period of feminist scholarship which emphasised the need to *find* women and give them a more visible role in history. In art history in general this significant phase of feminism involved looking beyond the recognition of Old Masters and looking for Old Mistresses – or explaining why old mistresses could not be found. The equivalent in Byzantine studies was the search for women artists or women patrons or women viewers, as an empirical and visible category. Their discovery might, it could be proposed, offer an insight into the values that enabled medieval women to live with dignity. The aim here is different. It is to focus on texts and icons as possible evidence for the nature of gender construction in the culture. It uses them, not as evidence for women, but as representations of women, no doubt mostly by men. In order to give a concise focus, the chapter responds to the issues set by one Byzantine icon recently acquired by the British Museum (see Plate 1). The prominent presence of women in the imagery of this icon cannot be understood in any straightforward way; but it offers clues to the complex issues of women's roles in Byzantium.[1]

The icon in the British Museum represents the annual com-

memoration of the ending of iconoclasm in 842; this *Triumph of Orthodoxy* is portrayed through portrait figures of victorious iconophiles accompanied by some of the icons that they have vindicated. The style of the icon points to a date of production around 1400, quite probably in Constantinople, although neither the precise date nor the precise provenance are crucial in the present discussion. More essential is the question of how to interpret it as a document connected with Byzantine iconoclasm. If the icon is a document about the portrayal of iconoclasm, then it, like texts about iconoclasm, should be seen as a profoundly ambivalent witness. The events of iconoclasm from 730 to 842 embodied the longest period in Byzantine history of sustained, bitter, political and ecclesiastical polemics. Whatever sparked off the actual war on religious images, it soon became a highly politicised struggle.[2] Both sides, whether fighting for or against icons, were involved in the presentation and packaging of their cases in order to encourage their supporters or to convert their opponents. Inevitably the texts and images that attempted to prove or disprove traditional acceptance of the Christian use of icons are therefore not neutral historical records. They are wonderfully evocative documents.

Our perspective of iconoclasm, no less than did that of the Byzantines themselves, depends on such highly loaded documents. But we have the additional factors of viewing iconoclasm not only with hindsight and all the associations of the European Reformation and Enlightenment movements but also through the random survivals of material, and chiefly through the eyes of the iconophile record (or their doctoring of the iconoclast materials). The gap between the events of the period and our perceptions is immense. Yet we do know that the materials we have must have expressed the desires of the iconophiles, or the anger and fears of the iconoclasts. They must be at the centre of any attempt to understand the 'rationality' of Byzantium, and of any exploration of the 'mystical' or 'magical' practices of the Middle Ages. Whether or not Peter Brown was right to cast 'the iconoclast controversy in the grip of a crisis of over-explanation', much still needs to be done to understand the 'distortions' of our evidence.[3] This is a different inquiry from the traditional questions of what iconoclasm was and why it happened at this particular moment in time, or how far we can recreate a 'sequence of events'. Rather than a source of 'facts', the documents of iconoclasm may be read as evidence of the discourses (both verbal and visual) of religious polemics. Read in this way, they do not tell

us what happened; rather they tell us why it happened and what was at stake! No text, no picture about iconoclasm is what it seems at face value.

It became clear in Byzantium during iconoclasm that the resolution of the dispute over the legitimacy or otherwise of figurative images in Christianity depended on an agreed definition of orthodox belief. One side or the other would come to be judged as heretical. The issues were too important to be resolved in any other way than by the legal structure of a Church council.[4] Iconoclasm is therefore distinctively a period involved in the determination of heresy; and this means that our surviving materials must be totally imbued with the characteristics of such a period. Similarly, social patterns during iconoclasm are likely to match other historical periods of confrontational heresy. At the least we can expect iconoclasm to have promoted violent and chronic episodes of personal abuse and communal persecution, even if the name we give to the period may exaggerate the amount of actual destruction and play down the religious controversy over the legitimacy of Christian images.

The question that arises for art historians is how to apply such a historical pattern to visual analysis. What is at issue here is not the legitimacy of the theological arguments put forward, either to justify the use of icons as part of the tradition of Christianity, or on the other side to attack images as innovation and idolatry; and the art historian might in this context want to put to one side questions of the underlying political, social, cultural or even religious *causes* of the outbreak of iconoclasm at this historical moment. Instead it may be worth pursuing the implications of treating iconoclasm as a standard period of heresy in which we can predict that Byzantine society will have been plunged into the episodes of persecution that always accompany heresy: society must have been divided into groups who each perceived themselves at the centre, surrounded by the unacceptable marginality of heretics. In other words, there must have been definable *patterns* of polemics during the whole period of iconoclasm, which may have had long-term effects on the culture. The work of R.I. Moore has notably opened out the discussion of persecution in the medieval west and shadowed its art historical implications there; but since Moore treated the Byzantine record as a continuation of the repressive attitudes of the Roman Empire, and distinct from a more tolerant western European phase between late antiquity and the re-emergence of persecution in the eleventh century, he did not turn his attention to the east.[5]

The practices and effects of persecution should reveal themselves to the observer of Byzantine iconoclasm. For example, both during and after iconoclasm, certain groups are liable to be identified as the enemies of the norms of right-thinking society; we can expect to find both iconoclasts and iconophiles engaged in the activities of identifying and attacking individuals and groups as deviants in society. An implication of this model is that both sides may actually identify and attack the same deviants as 'the enemy', thereby complicating the picture. We have to untangle cases where both sides, while opposing each other, may actually produce similar polemics against the same groups – accusing the 'opposition', for example, of innovation, novelty and the perversion of proper tradition. Indeed it is part of my argument that the ambivalence of the targets and of the polemics of persecution during iconoclasm – a persecution that was both physical and mental, for we have iconophile and iconoclast martyrs and exiles – has not been fully recognised.

The potential targets of persecution in the Byzantine Middle Ages are not difficult to conjecture; we all know the commonest stereotypes of the other: Jews, Muslims, pagans, monks, hermits and women. It is only this last group, women, that I propose to examine as potential deviants, and the focus of anger, although the polemics over Jews and Muslims are equally revealing for the historian, and racism turns up in iconophile abuse against blacks (who as an additional complication happened to belong to Monophysite communities in this period!).[6] In focusing on women as deviants in this way, I shall be attempting to reverse what is increasingly being taken as established fact – namely that Byzantine women are the favoured champions of iconophile orthodoxy before, during, and after the fight over icons. I am suggesting that we have here a conspicuous case where an empirical, common-sense approach may over-simplify and distort the way in which this culture worked.[7]

This chapter re-examines the issues of women and icons through a new and evocative piece of visual evidence. The British Museum panel (39 × 31 cm) is a relatively small icon coloured in tempera and gold on gesso over cloth on wood (see Plate 1).[8] It represents the Restoration of Icons after iconoclasm, commemorated each year in the Orthodox Church as the Festival of Orthodoxy on the First Sunday in Lent (and probably instituted by Patriarch Methodios in 843). This painting is not from this foundation period, but dates on grounds of style from around 1400. It is a fine and delicate work of art, one of those successful Byzantine works of art that despite their

small scale achieve a remarkable impression of monumentality. It originally included several inscriptions, though they are now badly rubbed (red letters on gold are generally quick to flake off). We can still see enough to be sure that naming the saints was a feature of the panel. The function of this panel may have been to act as the display icon for devotion and kissing in a church on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Another feature of that day was the reading of the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a long text that identified the orthodox and anathematised the heretics and was another pointer to the perception in Byzantium that iconoclasm was marked out as a violent period of deviance.[9] The restoration of 'Orthodoxy' in 843 meant that henceforth icons could be manufactured and venerated; the decision was confirmed not by a formal Church Ecumenical Council, in the way that the Council of Nicaea II in 787 marked the end of the first period of iconoclasm, but by the declarations written for the Sunday of Orthodoxy which re-established proper tradition.

The icon depicts the annual festival through portraits of iconophiles and representations of icons. The panel is divided horizontally into two registers, and the figures are set against a gold ground. The central representation at the top is one of the most renowned icons of Constantinople – the icon of the Virgin Mary *Hodigitria*, claimed to have been painted by the evangelist St Luke from life and so to represent her authentic appearance.[10] We know a great deal about this remarkable miracle-working icon of the Virgin and Child from other representations and texts.[11] By the fourteenth century it was kept in a special tabernacle in the Monastery of the Hodigitria in Constantinople, but taken out and carried publicly in procession every Tuesday. This miraculous icon is represented here on a red draped stand, with red curtains drawn back to reveal it.[12] This 'icon within an icon' is so much the central feature of our painting that at first sight its subject might have been taken as *The Icon of the Virgin Mary Hodigitria* rather than the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* or *The Restoration of the Icons*.[13] The felicitous notion that St Luke painted a portrait of the Virgin and Child seems first to be found in texts during the period of iconoclasm, and is just one indication of the inventiveness of the iconophiles.

The particular figures in the icon are no doubt selected for their special connection either with the struggle against iconoclasm or with the establishment of 'Orthodoxy'.[14] The text of the *Synodikon* included, in addition to the recitation of Orthodox doctrine, a section of salutations (*Euphemiai*) to individuals, living

or dead. The prominent figures on the left in the upper register are the rulers at the time of the official ending of iconoclasm in 843: the regent empress Theodora together with her young son, the emperor Michael III. They wear the dress and insignia of their power and are clearly labelled with their titles. On the right is the Patriarch Methodios (in office 843–7) with three monks. In the register below, certain figures are made prominent by their position and by their triumphant act of displaying icons. In the centre the figures holding between them an icon of Christ are probably St Theophanes the Confessor and St Theodore the Studite. The name of St Theophanes is decipherable above the left figure.[15] To their right is a bishop, and four further figures, of which we can most confidently make out the names of the two on the extreme right: St Theophilaktos the Confessor and finally St Arsakios. Other fragmentary letters point to the inclusion between St Theodore the Studite and St Theophilaktos of the two monastic brothers who fought on behalf of the iconophile cause during iconoclasm, St Theodore and St Theophanes, the *Graptoi*.[16] On the left side are three more male saints, and on the extreme left is a martyr saint, portrayed as a nun. She too holds an icon of Christ (as Emmanuel?), its character as a panel painting made explicit by the clue of a little ring at the top. The nun is clearly identified by her inscription as St Theodosia (Plate 1).[17]

It might be reasonable at this stage to explain the particular choice of saints on this icon – including the more unusual figures in Byzantine art of St Theodosia and St Arsakios – as due to the special interests of the (unknown) patron or patrons of this commission. Perhaps, for example, these were their name saints. This line of interpretation is probably excluded by the fact that the special choice of saints is not unique to this particular icon; other representations of this subject also include St Theodosia.[18]

It seems therefore that we can assume a series of icons that regularly included the prominent figures of empress Theodora and St Theodosia. It is their inclusion in this scene and on this icon amongst all the theologians and monks to which this chapter draws attention.

The pride of position that highlights the empress Theodora records that it was her, rather than her infant son Michael, who personally legitimated the orthodoxy of the decision on icons in accord with the Patriarch Methodios. Yet despite the importance of the representation here of an empress, a woman in power, it might be argued that her presence here gives less an emphasis on woman

29

Plate 1 Icon of the *Triumph of Orthodoxy c.1400*
Source: Courtesy of the British Museum

30

than on imperial presence and consequent state legality of the triumph of icons. In this respect, the sole woman in the register below is therefore much more arresting, particularly as she is singled out as a person carrying an icon as well as a cross of martyrdom. The presence of St Theodosia and her possession of an icon is the more significant clue. It begins to look feasible to formulate an argument that this icon displays the importance of women in the promotion and use of icons in the Orthodox Church. Where else can you think of an image where women take such pride of place over men in Byzantium?

The British Museum icon would appear, then, to add new support to the view that icons are in some way the special concern of women. It might be said to be literally demonstrating the gendered role of women in the cult of icons. This is not the interpretation that will be maintained here. I shall be arguing, to the contrary, that we have a far from literal discourse here; only by treating this imagery as part of complex polemics of iconoclasm can we begin to see its evocations. For this reason there is a need to review critically the arguments that women in Byzantium did hold a special role in the promotion of icons, especially the case that is argued at length by Judith Herrin.[19] She initially saw, but dismissed, the conceptual trap in this subject: 'When I first read Byzantine accounts of female devotion to icons, I dismissed them as yet another example of the common slurs on womankind perpetrated by uniformly male writers; after closer inspection, I feel that this opinion should be revised.'[20] She accordingly went on to treat these male writings as reflections of empirical fact that could be taken to establish the crucial importance of women in the development of icons and triumph of iconophiles. Nevertheless, perhaps her first instincts were right!

The motive for asking about women as sponsors and consumers of art is obvious enough – there is the crude estimate after all that if half the population of medieval Byzantium consisted of women, then half the viewers of icons were women.[21] Women were certainly involved in the production of icons – quite frequently as patrons, as several donation inscriptions show, often referring to the patronage of widows. Women have often been supposed to participate in the manufacture of art too – silks and textile icons have been suggested as the products of women's labour, and it is not impossible that such a tapestry as the large sixth-century Virgin and Child with saints, now in the Cleveland Museum, was woven by women.[22] Any art history of the Middle Ages must therefore expect to consider the

31

factor of women. The interest of Herrin's work is its radical claims: that women are the key factor in explaining the prevalence of icons in east Christian art. Her argument is that the whole Early Christian 'explosion' of art must be understood as a paradox, dependent on the role of women.[23] The scenario proposed is that once Constantine began to promote state Christianity, images were made for homes as well as churches; consequently women, despite their confinement to the private domain, found themselves privileged with access to imaged saints as intercessors – particularly to icons of the Virgin Mary. It was through their display in homes that icons promoted private, personal devotions – they became domestic cult objects. So it was women – homebound, restricted in their access to churches and frustrated in religious passion – who became the particular devotees of icons. Herrin concludes that icons, and especially icons of the Mother of God, were a suitable vehicle for the expression of female religiosity; with icons, women could make devotions privately at church or at home, at any time and independently of control by male priests: 'women were more probably iconophiles than iconoclasts'.

Such a skeletal summary cannot do justice to the detailed case put forward, but it should highlight the key issue for us. How far does the visual evidence work in support of such an interpretation? Herrin has two particularly notable works of art to enhance her case, both probably produced in the sixth century. The first example is the icon of the Virgin and saints in the collection of St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai.[24] Is this a plausible case of an icon that represents women's interests? There are certainly difficulties. One is the fact that we know nothing about any of the circumstances of the panel's production, except that at some unknown time it entered a male monastery.

The only way to connect the Sinai icon with women must therefore be from its own internal visual clues. How far does a formal analysis take us? The answer is that its evidence is at best ambivalent; and perhaps it is more indicative of male devotional practices – or at least male-based traditions. The question is how to analyse a painting that contains expressive sacred figures who belong spiritually to several hierarchical levels. The two figures who are portrayed as closest in status and visual accessibility to the viewer are the two male intercessionary saints, St Theodore and St George (unless this is St Demetrios). They are shown frontally, and the device of frontality is used also for their eyes; the visual effect of such eye contact is to

link the gaze of the viewer with the saint viewed. The viewer is presented with reversing mirror, almost with a merging of, identities. Who is looking at whom?[25] Since it is the saints', and not the Virgin's, eyes who make this contact with the viewer, the visual logic is that the path of prayer in the icon passes from the viewer to the male saints through the Virgin to Heaven. The Virgin acts as a mediator who communicates *within* the sacred space of the icon between these interceding saints and the angels and God above. If the term 'patriarchal' means anything, this must be a case where it might seem applicable, for the values of the imagery are clearly intelligible within a male-oriented event. Had the artist wished the viewer to feel in direct and close contact with the Virgin, there were a number of compositional devices to employ that would have achieved this – most obviously the frontal gaze with all its evocations. Instead of this, however, all the compositional devices of the icon play down the effective prominence of the female figure. Mary is compositionally at the centre of the image, but she eludes the gaze of the viewer. Such considerations of the gaze do not, of course, allow us to determine the gender of the Byzantine viewing audience of this icon (which was no doubt a considerable one over the centuries); but they do demonstrate that to represent the Virgin Mary in an icon does not create a direct or simple platform of access to the Mother of God for the male or female viewer. The prominence of Mary in Christianity is demonstrated but not explained by her popularity in icons.[26]

The other key image that Herrin treats as an example of female art is the monumental sixth-century wall painting of Turtura in the catacomb of Commodilla in Rome. But in this case the painting includes its own textual documentation, and gives us some information about the details of the process of the production. The painting marks the tomb of Turtura, which was one of the latest burials, as it happens, to occur in the Roman catacombs.[27] A long verse in Latin inscribed directly below the painting records that this is a commemoration by her son on the death of his mother Turtura at the age of 60. He praises her chastity during 36 years of widowhood after the death of her husband Obas (she must have been widowed at the age of 24). It is her chastity that is emphasised: her name Turtura has given her the fidelity of a turtle, *turtur* (not a simile that has survived the test of time). He commemorates her function as both father and mother to her son.[28] The whole panel celebrates a solid 'patriarchal' view of the correct moral behaviour of women. The son proclaims

his legitimacy and Christian family values. It is not remotely a 'feminist' painting.

The visual analysis of these two important images scarcely supports the idea of special female devotion or patronage. In this respect the situation seems comparable with the west where in the better documented Late Middle Ages the issue of male and female devotion to the Virgin has been characterised by Caroline Bynum as a time when 'there is no evidence that women were especially attracted to devotion to the Virgin or to married women saints – indeed there is some evidence that they were less attracted than men'.[29] Bynum argues that women were more attracted to meditate on the nature of Christ and men than on that of the Virgin, though she is careful to deny simple gender roles in the Middle Ages.[30]

The images discussed by Herrin are central productions of early Byzantine spirituality, and their visual evidence is certainly relevant to the issue of gender roles. But they offer an ambiguous and insufficient basis for Herrin's proposals. The visual evidence must lead us to query her whole case for a special connection between women and icons. It is not only the simple correlation between women's needs and the production of icons of the Virgin that is uncomfortable; so also is the proposed dichotomy of public and private circumstances. There is always the danger of an anachronistic extension of modern cultural notions of public and private to the Middle Ages.[31] These issues have recently been illuminated by a number of recent studies of religious practices in the home.[32] Perhaps it is true that icons in the domestic sphere were sometimes set up in 'bedrooms' (another cultural construction) or other rooms.[33] But one clear development in the Early Christian period, both in east and west, is that the liturgy was being widely celebrated at aristocratic homes in private oratories. Church officials opposed the practice, and their control over the celebration of the liturgy was to some extent reasserted in the period after iconoclasm by the expansion of private oratories in public churches. But the implication of oratories in private houses is that both the arrangements and the icons in them were likely still to have been in the control of male priests.[34] What is apparently true from a perusal of texts is that recorded cases of icons in the home appear equally in the domain of male and female devotions.

The case against Herrin's empirical construction of the role of women in the promotion of icons and the importance of private female devotions to icons seems to me substantial. One may accept

that one of the factors leading to the period of iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries was a reformist reaction to the over-production and abuse of icons; but this factor is not something that was created primarily by female power. The rise of icons and the increase in the cult of the Virgin is obviously something we want to explain; but a gender-specific explanation is too simple.

Yet this critical response to the suggested connection of women with icons brings us back again to the evidence of the British Museum panel, which at face value would seem to be a major new visual element in supporting the correlation of women and icons. Why otherwise does its imagery so conspicuously celebrate famous women iconophiles? Does it offer medieval support for seeing devotion to icons as a female rather than a male predilection? We shall therefore need to look at more of the primary medieval material and ask how to interpret it. This will bring us back also to the questions of the significance of heresy and persecution during iconoclasm and how to interpret the discourses of polemic. We must try to correlate all these trails before we can begin to understand the rhetoric of the British Museum icon.

There is no need here to bring together again all the primary texts that might be adduced to correlate women and icons, since reference to just a few key examples will show some structural patterns. When in the fourth century Eusebius wrote a letter, often interpreted as critical of image making, the recipient was Constantine's sister.[35] Tertullian attacked idolatry and material imagery in the context of the deceitful adornment of women.[36] As we get closer to iconoclasm, we appear to find more graphic correlations between women and icons: a 'grotesque' example is the sick woman who scraped off from her wall some of the fresco decoration of the two medical saints Cosmas and Damian, put the powder in water, and drank it as medicine.[37] We can also read that a group of women rioted in 726 when Leo III ordered the removal of the icon of Christ on the Chalke Gate, the main entrance to the Great Palace.[38] This incident has often been taken to mark the outbreak of iconoclasm. As for events during the periods of iconoclasm, there is the 'political' fact that both phases were officially ended by women: the empresses Irene and Theodora under whom icons were officially restored in 787 and 843 were both in power as regents for their sons.[39]

These few passages are enough to indicate the range of materials, though it must be obvious that they represent only a fraction of the examples of conduct connected with icons, relics and miracles by

both men and women. No one has attempted to quantify the textual records in terms of gender; such an enterprise would be doomed anyway from the outset if we conceded that the texts are loaded and not an objective set of reports. Perhaps such stories as the sick woman and her *al fresco* medicine were not read as simple iconophile or iconoclast statements of fact; they may already have been manipulative and have caused a shiver to run down the Byzantine spine. Her conduct is anyway easy to match with the male equivalent: in 573 Gregory of Tours, shortly before his consecration as bishop, fell ill with dysentery and despaired of his life. His usual medicine of an infusion of dust from the tomb of St Martin fortunately did the trick.[40]

These passages also show that, although the period of iconoclasm brought the questions of the power of images to a head, the use of icons was a long-running issue in the disputes over the definition of an 'Orthodox' Christian world. Perhaps the clearest 'fact' among the ostensible championship of icons by women is the status and power of the empresses Irene in 787 and Theodora in 842. But how far can we deduce that the women were literally in control of events? There are alternative interpretations: one is to explore whether the façade of these widows as regents for their sons concealed a certain vacuum of power in the state, into which the court officials and Church stepped in alliance. There are also more specific questions when the sources are treated in detail. Can we be certain that the initiative in 842 was taken by Theodora, rather than by her co-regent Theoktistos? How true or how conventional is the kind of flattery of Theodora – 'manly nobility in feminine garb' – that appears in the *Life* of St Michael the Synkellos?[41] One possible response at this point is to argue that to pursue such details may be less important than to collect the expressed *perceptions* of the Byzantines. If the communal public view of events was that women were the cardinal promoters of icons, the notion that women played the pre-eminent role in icon worship might be maintained. Indeed so long as it was a 'myth' in which society believed (and which invigorated women), then the precise details may be left aside.

It does not, however, seem reasonable to leave the issue so much in the air. This is because the notion of a major gender-derived explanation for the prevalence of icons in Byzantium is too fundamental an interpretation of the society to be left open. Clearly the arguments for the promotion or banning of icons were not superficial issues about 'art'. They were fundamental questions about the nature

of the sacred and the working of God's creation; it was an intensely religious and political decision, and both the secular and ecclesiastical authorities were implicated in the eventual outcome. In other words, the climate in which iconoclasm developed was intensely political and involved all the questions of how a Christian empire should properly function. Iconoclasm was inevitably to be viewed in its time as either the answer to problems faced by the Byzantine empire, or as a wrong turn for a Christian state. Ever since Constantine, unity and orthodoxy was the prime aim of official Byzantine state policy, well embodied in Justinian's *Novella*.[42] To achieve the 'general harmony' that Justinian desired, the emperor needed to control the Church and Christian belief. This involved the radical repression of religious dissidents, and the elimination or neutralisation of opposition: in a word, persecution. A well-tried technique of persecution was to define and polarise some opposition group outside the norms of society, although it might be as fictitious as modern constructions of the 'loony left'. On such a model of persecution carried out by iconoclasts against iconophiles, we would expect the construction of marginal groups conveniently to be tarred with heresy and to become scapegoats. Equally we would expect the iconophiles to employ the same techniques of polemic against their opponents. Unsurprisingly, attention was turned to representative groups of the 'other' for a Christian community: the Jews and Muslims. Since it is the iconophile evidence that we have most available, it is their version of the polemic that is easiest to view. The iconoclast emperors were classed as 'saracen-minded'; acts of iconoclasm are visually identified in the Khludov Psalter with the Jewish rejection of Christ and their behaviour during the Crucifixion; and we find that the champion of the iconophile side in the eighth century, John of Damascus, wrote a book on heresy in which Islam is characterised not as a rival religion, but as the 101st heresy of Christianity.

It is the perennial strategies of polemic, therefore, that may be embodied in Byzantine statements about women and icons, for here too is a traditionally marginal group in medieval society. The complication for an analysis of the surviving evidence along these lines is that it is difficult to find which of the two (or more) sides might have first implicated and exploited women as the unacceptable opposition. The story of rioting *women* at the Chalke Gate might be *iconoclast* polemic, but we first find it in *iconophile* sources from decades after the 'event'. Perhaps stories about women and icons coloured the perceptions of both sides, and in due course had to be

absorbed somehow into later iconophile writing. Certainly the emphasised heroes of the iconophile side as represented in the art of the succeeding period are not women; they are the patriarchs and monks of the period, such as Nikephoros, Methodios and Theodore of Studion.

The post-iconoclast cultural history of the empress Theodora suggests further ambivalence and sub-texts rather than any straight-forward documentation of the literal role of an imperial woman. Her *Vita* is itself decidedly slanted towards the narration of events in the life of her husband Theophilos, the last iconoclast, and her loyalty to him after his death (before she lost power). Another text has the double-edged story of Theodora surprised in her bedroom by the court jester Denderis who denounced her as kissing icons, although we are led to believe that the story was discounted by Theophilos and that he accepted her version that it was no more than nostalgic play with dolls preserved from her childhood.[43] We can find pictorial images of Theodora that similarly act as more than narratives to be read at face value. Images of Theodora are comparatively rare in Orthodox art, and for that reason alone are likely when chosen to be the vehicles of some considered message. Although her inclusion in the Constantinopolitan pictorial church calendar of the illuminated 'Menologion' of Basil II (Vatican gr. 1613) may appear relatively straightforward to explain, if we go much later in time and to the sphere of the later Orthodox art of Russia, her appearances are much more evocative. One especially eloquent indication of the dramatic possibilities of her imagery is to be found in a recently discovered icon, sold at Sotheby's in 1991 and now in a private collection in London. This large and impressive Russian icon of the eighteenth century features Theodora, surrounded by a series of pictures of her 'life'.[44] While the production of such an image in Russia at that period may represent an affirmation of traditional Orthodox beliefs on icons in the face of the policy of the westernisation of Russia, or may have some other more political context, for the present discussion its significance lies particularly in its 'invention' of a set of events during Byzantine iconoclasm that inherently betray another ambivalent perception of the iconophile empress.[45] It is true that Theodora is conspicuously connected with icons – including the Mandylion of Edessa (which as a matter of fact only arrived in Constantinople in 944) – and used an icon to cure her sceptical iconoclast husband from an illness (although even this failed to cure his scepticism). Later on in the cycle, we see that Theophilos was rescued from Hell through

the efforts of Theodora and we also see Theodora with her Orthodox son Michael parading the restoration of icons. It is clear that once again it is clear to see that we are in the presence of a visual affirmation of traditional male perceptions of the ideal woman as good mother and faithful wife rather than a gendered declaration of the 'female' devotion to icons of the iconophile empress Theodora.

If a method of interpreting the implications of representing women in icons has been adequately blocked out so far in this chapter, then we are ready now to focus on the figure of St Theodosia in the British Museum icon and ask how to understand her prominence in the icon, where she is one of the few figures displaying an icon – one that represents the figure of Christ.

Who is St Theodosia? There is in fact only one candidate with the distinguishing attributes of a martyr's cross and an icon: St Theodosia of Constantinople, whose first recorded notice is in the Menologion of Basil II (around 1000) where she appears on 18 July as a martyr of Constantinople during iconoclasm.[46] As a saint, she has received little attention in modern scholarship because of the *mythical* nature of her life. Her construction as a saint can be partially traced.[47] The Menologion notice is chronologically bizarre – she is described as living in the reign of Constantine V but killed under his father Leo III by a blow from a ram's horn. To understand her story, it is best to look at accounts of the first events of iconoclasm; it is in these accounts, as they evolve, that she makes her entrance into history. The key to St Theodosia lies in the details of the recorded destruction of the Chalke image of Christ under Leo III.

Among the recorded accounts that we have of the episodes at the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace, probably the earliest is in the *Vita Stephani iunioris* (written by the deacon Stephen in 806). In this version of the events (which the *Vita* dates to 730) we read of the involvement of 'pious women'. These women happened to get involved in the rioting and pulled down the ladder from which the emperor's agent was destroying the image; in retaliation for their act and at the request of the iconoclast patriarch Anastasios (730–54), the women were executed. In the *Chronographia* of Theophanes (written between 810 and 814), the text dates the events to the year 726 and mentions the crowd that attacked and killed the emperor's agents and was subsequently punished; this crowd is described not as women, but as citizens outstanding in nobility and culture. In the *First Letter of Pope Gregory II to Leo III*, an 'invented' document of the early ninth century, we return to the version that describes the

involvement of zealous women who pulled down the ladder and killed the emperor's agent; these women were put to death by the soldiery.

These three versions all belong within the period of iconoclasm, though they were written down relatively late in that period and at several generations remove from the events that they purport to document. After 843, the accounts of the beginning of iconoclasm become more detailed (or more embroidered). For example, a *Passio* written soon after 869 tells about the discovery on 31 January 869 of the relics of the Orthodox who were involved in the fight at the Chalke Gate. The document tells the story of their martyrdom – and it is clear enough that the sources of information are the versions of the *Vita Stephani* and *Chronographia* of Theophanes: the text narrates that when the Chalke image was burnt on 19 January, the Orthodox came to the gate and killed the emperor's agent. One group consisted of ten saints and Maria the Patrician, a woman of imperial descent. The men were imprisoned and executed on 9 August. The intact bodies were found in 869 and included that of Maria.

Some of the details of this version of the Chalke Gate martyrs are altered in other writings of the tenth century and in the Menologion of Basil II. The aristocratic Maria who featured in the earlier version is now named Theodosia and is a nun. This is the St Theodosia of our icon, and it follows that the icon that she holds must be understood to be the Chalke icon of Christ that she tried to protect. Despite the flimsy, not to say bogus, historical basis from which St Theodosia of Constantinople emerged, she achieved increasing popularity in late Byzantium. Indeed when the Turks entered Constantinople on 29 May 1453, they met a crowd of the faithful going with candles to the church of St Theodosia. By this period St Theodosia of Constantinople had been merged with St Theodosia of Tyre, and had taken over her festival day of 29 May. The pilgrim Antony of Novgorod also records the cult of the relics of St Theodosia (kept in a silver casket and carried in procession in 1200 to cure the sick).[48] Her relics were even more famous for their healing abilities after 1261.[49]

The saint who appears on the British Museum panel as a champion of icons was then an invented fictitious woman. In fact as we go through all these texts about the destruction of the Chalke icon and the involvement of differently defined trouble-makers, it seems clear that another radical interpretation needs to be considered: that this

icon of Christ never existed either, and iconoclasm did not begin with this episode at all. All the evidence is compatible with the interpretation that the idea of an icon of Christ over the imperial doorway in 726 or 730 was an iconophile myth invented around 800 when a new icon was put there by Irene (perhaps in her sole reign of 797–802) and a false pedigree of tradition was invented, in order to forestall any backlash attack on iconophiles as innovators (and hence heretics).[50] This became an amazingly powerful myth – both in the primary and secondary writings, although it is significantly not mentioned, for example, in the reports of the 787 Council of Nicaea.[51] The power of polemics is the best way to understand both the 'propaganda' that iconoclasm began with the incidents at the Chalke Gate and that women as a group were implicated in the defence of icons.

The invention of 'evidence' by all sides during iconoclasm is indeed phenomenal. They were at this game all the time and knew it: indeed at the Council of Nicaea in 787, you were not allowed to quote texts to support your case, unless you brought along the whole manuscript and could point to your text in context; the iconoclasts in 754, so it was said, had brought along only quotations (*pittakia*) which they had either invented or doctored.[52] But the iconophiles were just as guilty in the invention of an extraordinary quantity of documents during the period – imperial letters (e.g. Leo III to Muslims), references to icons that never existed (St Luke's icon of the Virgin and Child which features in the British Museum panel), Church councils that never existed and so on.[53] No text from the period of iconoclasm can be handled as an objective piece of writing to be taken at face value; such texts and pictorial evidence were designed to have a function in a period of a polemic. Arguments about whether St Theodosia existed or not are quite fruitless; equally fruitless is the literal use of her story to prove that it was women who were the chief iconophile opponents of iconoclasm.

It is often noted that the accounts that we have of Byzantine iconoclasm are written by the winners, not the losers. But their interpretation involves far more considerations than this alone. Another issue is the sources of the accounts of the events at the Chalke Gate, since the texts are not written by eyewitnesses. How far would a knowledge of their sources (and of the character of their sources) influence their interpretation? In any case the *Life* of St Stephen the Younger is in a special category of saints' lives, highly rhetorical and polemical, a brilliant piece of literary discourse which

41

sets out to character-assassinate the leading figures of the iconoclast movement. Similarly the *Chronographia* of Theophanes is less a list of chronological events than it might appear: its telegraphic sections, written in the years immediately before the second outbreak of iconoclasm, seek to blacken the characters of the iconoclast emperors through various constructed images. A problem that faced the writers of these texts was how to gloss the initial failure of the iconophiles; how to convey in the best light the right and proper conduct of the dissent and opposition of the iconophiles at the outbreak of iconoclasm, but at the same time how to exonerate their failure. One strategy was surely to identify this as a struggle between unevenly matched social groups. In the account of Theophanes, the iconophiles comprise the nobility and the intelligent who find themselves opposed in Leo III with an emperor who is both upstart and stupid and with a patriarch without scruples. The image is of the traditional aristocracy destroyed by new radicals. In the *Life* of Stephen the Younger, the opposing groups are the brutal soldiery and pious defenceless women (who naturally must lose). This is the fictional discourse of the unfair opposition between the strong and the weak. Indeed there may be a further sub-text connected with the inclusion of women here. Are not women potential Amazons, enemies of established society? Was it therefore iconoclast sources that first spoke of a crowd of screaming women at the Chalke Gate, opposing law and order?

The accounts of the superiority of the iconoclasts at the Chalke Gate reflect conventional discourses of opposition and dissent. We cannot from their words draw the sure conclusion that iconoclasts were stupid; or that women were particular promoters of icons. Such texts are themselves interpretation, not fact.[54] So, of course, is our icon. But there is more to say about the particular metamorphosis of the character of opposition at the Chalke Gate. From the initial stories of a crowd of right-thinking men or pious women, a crowd that failed to stop iconoclasm, both texts and icon have developed the identification of one outstanding female martyr saint. She herself in time evolves from 'Maria the patrician' into 'Theodosia the nun', and this metamorphosis must again represent a dynamic of Byzantine perceptions.[55] It is perhaps relevant in finding an explanation that a dominant key figure among Byzantine iconophiles at the time of the emergence of Maria the Patrician was the aristocrat and intellectual Photios. Her transformation around 1000 into Theodosia the nun again takes place against a shifting cultural climate in

Constantinople, when we can detect a predominance of stated monastic values.

This chapter set out to examine the possibilities of interpretations of specific gender roles in the production, viewing and choice of imagery of Byzantine icons. The panel in the British Museum was taken as the starting point, since at face value it might offer a visual document of the importance of women in the promotion of icons; it offered a site where all these issues seemed to intersect. But in the event the icon has offered less a depiction of women's attitudes than a frame through which to seek the Byzantine techniques of presentation of iconoclasm. Women are visible because they had a part to play in the discourses of heresy and persecution.[56]

In the Byzantine state, heresy was a serious problem for the emperor, who saw it as a threat to imperial unity. All dissidents must be converted or eliminated. They needed to be judged by society as 'the enemy'; they had to be undermined by some strategy. Among all the potential strategies, subverting opposition into some unacceptable grouping was an obvious one. Hence the subversive value of infiltrating the female element into the perception of the opposition, of implying some feminine and unacceptable component.[57] It may be no coincidence, therefore, that Eusebius likewise bolsters his argument against the use of images by insidiously connecting the desire for them with a woman. Women were the natural victims when a group was needed who must be losers. For the iconoclasts, women could be identified as the opposition – as iconophiles – because they were 'outsiders' and made to be scapegoats. Paradoxically, iconophile writers might elusively accept the idea that women were the champions of icons; it would then exonerate them for the decades of being on the losing side. One needs to be circumspect in assessing the idea of Kazhdan that 'in the words of deacon Ignatios, the author of Tarasios's biography, during iconoclasm feminine weakness turned out to be more steadfast than masculine strength'.[58]

All this adds up to the conclusion that the supposed special importance of women in the promotion of icons is a chimera. What we see in the British Museum icon and read in these texts is to be interpreted as shadowing something much closer to a traditional model of male oppressive strategies. The gender equation in the production and viewing of icons is as much in need of investigation as ever. But in looking for frameworks to explain the rise and popularity of devotional icons as well as the violence of the iconoclast

ban, the preferable model is one in which icons are seen as *necessary* as a symbolic expression of a Christian world view rather than any simple and mechanistic connection of women and icons.

NOTES

1 See Catia Galatariotou, 'Byzantine women's monastic communities: the evidence of the typika', *JÖB* 38 (1988), 263–90, for an important treatment of the issues. Also see L. Brubaker, 'Image, audience and place: interaction and reproduction', in L. Brubaker and R. Ousterhout, eds, *The Sacred Image, East and West* (Urbana and Chicago, 1995), 204–20, esp. 206 ff.

2 M. Barasch, *Icon. Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York, 1992), maps philosophical and religious thinking on images that preceded Byzantine iconoclasm.

3 Peter Brown, 'A Dark Age crisis: aspects of the iconoclastic controversy', *English Historical Review* 88 (1973), 1–34; reprinted in P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 251–301.

4 Iconoclasm was foreshadowed by a similar situation when the Quinisext Council addressed some key questions of artistic representative practices (canon 73 banning crosses on floors, thus repeating earlier council decisions; canon 82 proclaiming a high-profile decision about representing Christ as a person, not as a lamb, which apparently precipitated an increase in images of Christ – as on the coins of Justinian II; and canon 100 excommunicating all corrupting images). These discussions formed a precedent (if not a catalyst) for the elevation of decisions about imagery to this ecclesiastical level. See H. Ohme, *Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bishofsliste. Studien zum Konstantinopeler Konzil von 692* (Berlin, 1990).

5 See R.I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent* (Oxford, 1977 and 1985) and *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford, 1987). This is not the place to ask how far the 'Dark Age' period represented changing methods of persecution – there are many different ways of suppressing opposition. For Byzantium, see P.J. Alexander, 'Religious persecution and resistance in the Byzantine empire of the eighth and ninth centuries: methods and justifications', *Speculum* 52 (1977), 238–64; reprinted in P.J. Alexander, *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire* (Variorum, 1978); and for Islam see J. Bray, 'The Mohammetan and Idolatry', *Studies in Church History* 21 (1984), 89–98. For anti-semitism and questions of heresy in the seventh century, see J.F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. 337 ff.

6 K. Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Psalters* (Cambridge, 1992), uses anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim texts to identify the precise imagery used in the visual polemics of the Khludov and other marginal Psalters.

7 Similarly P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Wisconsin, 1992), makes the point that 'our' view of

the fourth century has been distorted by the fifth-century Christian rhetoric of triumph.

8 The British Museum icon came to light at Sotheby's at a sale on 15 February 1984; the provenance was a private collection in Sweden (see the catalogue *Russian Pictures, Icons*, lot no. 156). It was subsequently exhibited at Bernheimer Fine Art in 1987: see Y. Petsopoulos, *East Christian Art* (London, 1987), 49–50. It was acquired by the British Museum in 1988 (inventory no. M&LA 1988, 4–11,1). For other discussions of the icon, see U. Abel, *Ikonen – bilden av det heliga* (Hedemora, 1988), 32–3; R. Cormack, 'The Triumph of Orthodoxy', *National Art Collections Fund Review* 1989 (London, 1989), 93–4; and N.P. Ševčenko in 'Icons in the liturgy', *DOP* 45 (1991), 45–57, esp. 48.

9 J. Gouillard, 'Le synodikon de l'orthodoxie: édition et commentaire', *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 1–316.

10 This icon of the Virgin Mary has the usual sigla for Mother of God.

11 See G.P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1984), esp. 363–6, for references to texts; for images, see M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, 'The interpretation of a wall-painting in Vlacherna Monastery near Arta' (in Greek), *Deltion tis Christianikis Archaiologikis Etairias* 13 (1985–6), 301–6, and Ševčenko, 'Icons in the liturgy', 45–57.

12 The large panel of the *Hodigitria* is held up by two winged figures with red hats, not apparently angels. N.P. Ševčenko saw these as members of the brotherhood who maintained the cult, suggesting that their wings were a device to elevate both them and the festival to a 'heavenly' or 'liturgical' level so that 'the image celebrates simultaneously the historical event, its inner meaning, and its eternal reenactment'. Dionysius of Fourna speaks of two 'deacons' with 'shoes woven of gold' holding the *Hodigitria*; see P. Hetherington, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna* (London, 1974), 64.

13 There are traces of a title on the icon to the right of the representation of the Virgin Hodigitria; the letters that can be made out (..IA..) most likely represent ORTHODOXIA.

14 The eighteenth-century compilation of Dionysius codifies the subject as 'the Restoration of the Holy Images'; see Hetherington, *The Painter's Manual*, 64–5.

15 The name of the right figure began with TH.

16 For the sources and discussion of the *Graptoi*, see M.B. Cunningham, ed. and tr., *The Life of Michael the Synkellos* (Belfast, 1991).

17 The identifications of the figures given here differ in some cases from the original Sotheby's catalogue entry of 1984 and the entry by Petsopoulos of 1987. The inscriptions are considerably rubbed, and some are more certain than others. For example, in the upper register, the name and title of emperor Michael III is easily legible; beside the empress Theodora, we can read THEODO(ra) and PISTE (faithful in Christ). Beside the figure of Patriarch Methodios wearing a sakkos, ME(ethodios) is readable. In the lower register with eleven figures, the extreme left saint is clearly inscribed THEODOSIA. The next three inscriptions cannot be read. The fifth figure from the left (Theophanes) has the letters

(Theo)PHAN(es) and his companion TH(eodoros). The next few inscriptions are very rubbed, and it is not entirely clear to which figures they apply. The seventh figure, the bishop, may have the letters (Th)EO(dore) and the eighth may have THEOPH(anes); the tenth and eleventh figures have THEOPHILAK(tos) and ARSAKIOS. Petsopoulos read the last three figures as Theodore, Theophilos and Thessakios.

18 Two other later icons of this subject are published. One panel (43.5 × 37.5 cm) is in the collection of the Church of St George of the Greeks in Venice; see M. Chatzidakis, *Icônes de Sainte-Georges des Grecs* (Venice, 1962), no. 63, 96. It is signed by the Corfiote painter Emmanuel Tzanfournaris (c.1570–5; died after 1631), and is titled *Orthodoxy* (*Orthodoxia*). Chatzidakis recorded the various inscriptions that allow identification of most of the participants: Theodora and Michael III; Methodios; Theophylactos of Nicomedia; Michael of Synnada; Euthymios of Sardis; and Emilianos of Cyrica. In the register below Chatzidakis identifies the figures as the 'confessors': Theophanes and Theodore the Studite in the centre with an icon. On the left: Theodosia (with an icon); Ioannikios; Stephanos the Higoumenos; Thomas; and Peter. On the right: Makarios of Pelekete; Stephen the Younger (with an icon of the Virgin); Joseph; John Katharon; Arsenios; Andrew. The other icon (50 × 40.5 cm) in the Benaki Museum, Athens, is entitled *The Restoration (Anastelosis) of the Icons*; see A. Xyngopoulos, *The Collection of Helen A. Stathatos* (in Greek) (Athens, 1951), cat. 6, 8–10. This has the signature of the same artist as the icon in Venice. This is the largest of the three icons, and the most complex; there are more figures including several women and singers (with 'authentic' coloured costumes), for which see N.K. Moran, *Singers in Late Byzantine and Slavonic Painting* (Leiden, 1986), fig. 87, 136, 149. Some hold candles or inscriptions that anathematise iconoclasts. Xyngopoulos assumes that the figure of the nun with the icon of Christ Emmanuel on the left side of the lower register is St Kassia. Our parallels would, of course, suggest that she is St Theodosia, but the suggestion is no doubt based on the notice by Dionysius of Fourna, who mentions this saint and not Theodosia; see Hetherington, *The Painter's Manual*, 65. In the 'Restoration of the holy images', Dionysios enumerates Methodios, deacons holding the Hodigitria icon, Theodora and Michael, and other figures including John, Arsacios, Isaiah and Kassia. St Kassia would, of course, have been an appropriate choice: she was a hymnographer in the first half of the ninth century who supposedly competed in a bride show for the emperor Theophilos with Theodora, and who was assumed to be on the iconophile side. (Since writing, this icon has been restored and restudied by A. Drandaki).

The subject also appears in the wall-paintings of 1525 by Theophanes the Cretan in the catholikon of the Laura monastery on Athos and at Stavroniketa on Athos. In the Athonite examples (for the Laura, see G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos* [Paris, 1927], plate 131, 2; and also M. Chatzidakis, *The Cretan Painter Theophanes* [Athos, 1986], pls 122–3) the scene (*Anastelosis ton sebaston kai hagion eikonon*) is altered by the placing of the Hodigitria icon and the imperial figures and Methodios below and the other figures in the register above. Tassos Papacostas has

46

pointed out to me that the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* appears in the sixteenth century in wall paintings at the catholicon of the monastery of St Neophytos near Paphos around 1500 (the cycle includes Church councils) and at St Sozomenos at Galata in 1513. The list can be further increased from wall paintings in the Balkans.

19 See J. Herrin, 'Women and the faith in icons in Early Christianity', in R. Samuel and G. Stedman Jones, eds, *Culture, Ideology and Politics* (London, 1982), 56–83; its thesis is repeated in her book *The Formation of Christendom* (Oxford, 1987), esp. 307 ff. and 331–2. She has considered the issues in other papers, in particular 'In search of Byzantine women: three avenues of approach', in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, eds, *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Beckenham, 1983, and reprinted, London, 1993), 167–89. Her most recent study is found in '"Femina Byzantina": the Council in Trullo on Women', *DOP* 46 (1992), 97–105. On Herrin, see also A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley and Oxford, 1991), esp. 202–3; and E. Kuryluk, *Veronica and her Cloth* (Oxford, 1991). For a different study of 'women's place' with reference to a later period, see L. Garland, 'The life and ideology of Byzantine women: a further note on conventions of behaviour and social reality as reflected in 11th and 12th century historical sources', *B* 58 (1988), 361–93.

20 Herrin, 'Women and the faith in icons', 68.

21 Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The visual and the visionary: the image in late medieval devotions', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 161–82, has important observations on women as an audience for art in the late medieval west.

22 For a study of the period that revolves around the Cleveland tapestry, but which does not even mention the issue of women, see J. Pelikan, *Imago Dei. The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (New Haven and London, 1990). Of course the famous case of the Bayeux Tapestry needs to be taken as a methodological caution, for there is no straightforward evidence for its traditional attribution to women; see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London, 1984). A wider question raised by the notion of women as artists is what is to be defined as 'art'; see within the frame of Islamic art, R. Hillenbrand, 'The major minor arts of Islam', *Art History* 1 (1989), 109–15.

23 Sister Charles Murray, 'Art and the Early Church', *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. 28 (1977), 303–45, remains an important but controversial treatment of the Early Christian period which plays down the dichotomy seen by Herrin between the Old Testament prohibition of images and their encouragement within the pagan commemoration of the dead.

24 K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons I* (Princeton, 1976), cat. 3, 18–21. Also on this icon, Robin Cormack, 'Reading Icons', *Valör. Konstvetenskapliga Studier* 4 (1991), 1–28.

25 For an important analysis of how the frontal gaze influences the meanings of such a picture, see R.G. Osborne, 'Death revisited; death revised. The death of the artist in archaic and classical Greece', *Art History* 11 (1988), 1–16.

26 See M.P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Princeton, 1992).

27 See J. Osborne, 'The Roman Catacombs in the Middle Ages', *Proceedings of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985), 278–328.

28 For a transcription of the text, see B. Bagatti, *Il Cimitero di Commodilla o dei Martiri Felice ed Adautto* (Vatican, 1936), esp. 42:

> Suscipe nunc lacrimas mater natique suprestis,
> quas fundet gemitus; laudibus ecce tuis,
> Post mortem patris servasti casta mariti
> sex triginta annis. sic viduata fidem
> Officium nato patris matrisque gerebas
> hic reqiexcit in pace Turtura.
> In subolis faciem. vir tibi vixit Obas
> Turtura nomen abis set turtur vera fuisti
> cui coniux monens non fuit alter amor
> Unica materia est quo sumit femina laudem
> quod te coniugio. exibuisse doces
> que bisit PLM annus LX.

29 C.W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (California, 1982), 140–1.

30 J.D. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* (New York, 1959), esp. 64, discusses the new development of the discourse of Pope John VII (705–7) as 'servant of the Mother of God', and in tenth-century Byzantium the representation of Leo Sakellarios in his Bible in the Vatican Library (Reginensis gr. 1) offers a striking example of the representation of male devotion to the Virgin. There are notable other examples of devotion to the Virgin from the early Byzantine period, such as the (lost) mosaic panel in St Demetrios at Thessaloniki which is roughly contemporary with the Mt Sinai icon of the Virgin and saints. It shows a prominent male donor presented to the Virgin by St Demetrios, whereas the woman in the composition, presumably his wife, is relegated far off to the right at the very margin of the panel; see R. Cormack, 'The Church of Saint Demetrios: the watercolours and drawings of W.S. George', reprinted in R. Cormack, *The Byzantine Eye* (Variorum, 1989), study II, fig. 32.

31 See L. Imray and A. Middleton, 'Public and private: marking the boundaries', in E. Gamarnikow, D. Morgan, J. Purvis and D. Taylorson, eds, *The Public and the Private* (London, 1983), 12–27; S. Ardener, ed., *Women and Space. Ground Rules and Social Maps* (London, 1981), esp. L. Sciama, 'The problem of privacy in Mediterranean Society', 89–111. For a feminist consideration of the intersection of the dichotomies of political/social and public/private, see J.B. Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (Princeton, 1981).

32 See T. Mathews, '"Private" liturgy in Byzantine architecture: toward a re-appraisal', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 30 (1982), 125–38; N. Teteriatnikov, 'Upper-storey chapels in churches of the Christian East', *DOP*, 42 (1988), 65–72, esp. 71; J.P. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC, 1987); J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1990).

33 See A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The social structure of the Roman house', *Proceedings of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988), 43–97.

34 See N. Gendle, 'The role of the Byzantine saint in the development of the icon cult', in S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint* (London, 1981), 181–6.

35 Eusebius, *Letter to Constantia*, PG 20, 1545 ff; see C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Englewood Cliffs, 1972), 16–18.

36 D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images* (Chicago, 1989) esp. 397 ff. Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, I, 8, *PL* 1, 1312–13. One question here is how far this was already a repetition of a classical *topos*.

37 L. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1907), 137 ff., lines 17 ff. see E. Kitzinger, 'The cult of images in the age before iconoclasm', 107 n. 89 and 147–8, esp. n. 273, on the question of the date of the story, whether before or during iconoclasm. This article is reprinted from *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150, in W.E. Kleinbauer, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies by E. Kitzinger* (Bloomington, 1976).

38 The sources do, of course, offer several cases of female iconophiles – such as the mother of St Stephen the Younger and the mother of St Theodore of Stoudios, and also the wife of the jailor of St Stephen the Younger and his fellow iconophiles in prison who both fed them and even showed them icons which she kept locked up in a chest (one a Virgin and Child, the others represented Peter and Paul). But the sources likewise offer instances of male iconophilism.

39 The well-known reports that the empresses Irene and Theodora kept icons in their rooms happen to date some time after iconoclasm (George Kedrenus, *Synopsis historion*, I. Bekker, ed., 2 vols [Bonn, 1838–9], I 901A, and Theophanes Continuatus, I. Bekker, ed. [Bonn, 1838], 105A).

40 Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, L. Thorpe, ed. (Harmondsworth, 1974), 13, n. 67, referring to *Vita Sancti Martini*, II, I.

41 See Cunningham, *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, chap. 25, 101 and 162, n. 171; the editor sees this as a *topos*.

42 J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Church Divisions. The Church 450–680* (New York, 1989), esp. 209–10. See M. Maas, *John Lydus and the Roman Past* (London, 1992), esp. chap. 5, on Justinian's manipulations of pagans as the opposition.

43 The primary source is Theophanes Continuatus, 105.

44 See *Russian Pictures, Icons and Works of Art* (Sotheby's, London), sale catalogue for 28 November 1991, lot 559, 110–11. The scheme of the icon is to show St Theodora in the centre, surrounded by twelve scenes of her life.

45 In discussion at Princeton, Simon Franklin pointed to the possible political significance of such a reference to royal women in eighteenth-century Russian; and Russian colleagues pointed to the existence of a cycle of St Theodora in the Moscow Kremlin.

46 For St Theodosia of *Constantinople*, see Menologion text in *PG* 117, 548–9; cf. H. Delehaye, *Synaxarion ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Brussels, 1992), 828–9. For laudations of St Theodosia, see *BHG* 1773(2).

49

The only other candidate is St Theodosia of Tyre, martyred in Caesarea on Easter Sunday, 307, but she has no particular connections with icons.

47 See Cyril Mango, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959), esp. 117 ff., for a sceptical treatment of the legend of St Theodosia.

48 Antony of Novgorod, see B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient* (Geneva, 1889), 103 (translated from Loparev, 26).

49 For collected information on the cult and Church of St Theodosia, see Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople*, 346–51. From the early thirteenth century a series of icons of St Theodosia was produced at the monastery of St Catherine on Sinai, where she obviously had a special significance – explained by Doula Mouriki as 'due to her important contribution in the safeguarding of icons'; see Mouriki, 'Icons from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries', in K.A. Manafis, ed., *Sinai. The Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens, 1990), 111 and fig. 39.

50 That the episode of the Chalke icon's existence on the Gate and its destruction under Leo III is a fiction, see the full treatment by Marie-France Auzépy, 'La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Leo III: propogande ou réalité?', *B* 60 (1990), 445–92, who concludes that the story of an icon as well as the story of its destruction was invented around 800.

An obvious parallel to the Chalke icon 'myth' is the iconophile claim that the pre-iconoclast apse of Hagia Sophia had contained a figurative image which was destroyed by the iconoclasts; the claim is found in iconophile writings and displayed in the famous epigram around the Virgin and Child of 867 (see C. Mango and E.J.W. Hawkins, 'The Apse mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul', *DOP* 19 [1965], 113–51). Interestingly the public inscription written above the Chalke icon of empress Eirene (according to the *Scriptor incertus de Leone*, I. Bekker, ed. [Bonn, 1842], 355) has been described as a 'garbled version' of the Hagia Sophia epigram (see S.G. Mercati, 'Sulle iscrizioni di Santa Sofia', *Bessarione* 26 [1922], esp. 204–5, and Mango, *The Brazen House*, 121): '[The image] which Leo the emperor had formerly cast down, Eirene has re-erected here.' Mango and others accept this text as a source contemporary with the events; the only dissident seems to be Lydia Tomic, 'Fragment of a historical work of the 9th century' (in Serbo-Croat), *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog Instituta* 1 (1952), 78–85, who, on the basis of the references to Bulgaria, dates the text after 864. One answer to this argument is that these references may be a later accretion. The epigram may, however, be evidence that supports her later dating. D. Stein, *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreit und seine Entwicklung bis in der 40er Jahre des 8 Jahrunderts* (Munich, 1980), had already hinted that the story of the destruction of the Chalke icon could be a literary *topos* (modelled on the *Vita Symeonis Stylites*, for example, in which a soldier destroys an image of the saint; see P. van den Ven, ed., *La vie ancienne de S. Symeon Stylite le jeune* [Brussels, 1962], 140).

51 Mango, *The Brazen House*, esp. 108 ff., discusses the Chalke image; and he devotes Appendix 1, 170–4, to a detailed treatment of the controversy over the dating of the destruction of the image to 726 or 730. He points

out (111) that the *Parastaseis* text has a missing folio which means that the description of the Chalke Gate in this version is incomplete; the lacuna is filled by Preger from the later *Patria* which speaks of an image of Christ on the Gate below the statues of Maurice and his wife and children. Mango points out that if the *Parastaseis* was written during iconoclasm, it could not have included this passage. A. Cameron and J. Herrin, eds, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden, 1984), 174–5, 'tend to think' that the *Patria* does represent the original text of the *Parastaseis*. But much is resolved if one accepts that the Chalke Christ icon did not exist until the reign of Eirene. The *Patria* passage would then become one further document compiled after the early ninth century.

52 See C. Mango, 'The availability of books in the Byzantine Empire, AD 750–850', in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen* (Washington, DC, 1975), esp. 30–1, reprinted in C. Mango, *Byzantium and its Image* (London, 1984), study VII; and cf. D.J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986), 39. Also for the texts, see H. Hennephof, *Textus Byzantinos ad Iconomachiam pertinentes* (Leiden, 1969).

53 A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's text of the correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 269–332; see esp. 322 for a statement on icons. 'Umar II was caliph 717–720, and Leo emperor 717–741. We only know the text from the Armenian history of Ghevond (perhaps to be dated to around 900), and from a Latin version in *PG* 107, 315–24, attributed to Leo VI; together, they imply a Greek basis. See also R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold* (London, 1985), 261–2.

54 During discussion of a version of this chapter which I gave at Princeton in January 1993, the point was made against my reasoning that when ninth-century writers recorded information, they *knew* the facts, because they were as intelligent as us; they were not stupid. Their accounts should, then, be treated as a correct record of these facts. It will be clear that I do not accept this criticism, just as I would not accept at face value many contemporary reports about women – like, for example, the suggestion that Nancy Reagan was more influential over the President's formulation of foreign policy than were his advisers.

55 Yet another transformation would seem to have occurred by the time of Dionysios of Fourna (c.1670–c.1745–6) who lists St Kassia: see above, n. 16.

56 Similarly, the seventh homily of Photios on the unveiling of the image of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia in 867, while celebrating the victory of the iconophiles, conspicuously devotes much of the text to the acceptance into the Church of a group of repentant heretics. See C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photios* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 290 ff.

57 As a parallel see C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), on the manipulations of the notions of male and female in imperial Rome.

58 A.P. Kazhdan, 'Byzantine hagiography and sex in the fifth to twelfth centuries', *DOP* 44 (1990), 131–43, esp. 132: see *BHG* 1698.28–9.