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Female Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Era

Let me preface this paper with some introductory remarks upon my use of the term “pilgrimage”. As became particularly clear at a recent symposium on Byzantine pilgrimage, held at Dumbarton Oaks, contemporary scholars find it difficult to agree on a definition for “pilgrimage” in a Byzantine context.¹ One of the reasons for this is the lack of an equivalent term in medieval Greek, parallel to the Latin *peregrinatio*. Most Byzantinists tend to use the term “pilgrimage” rather loosely, to refer both to long-distance journeys to visit a holy shrine or living holy man, and to short-distance trips to a local or regional church for the sake of prayer or search for healing. In fact most accounts of visitations to shrines stress not the journey itself but the act of *proskynesis* or veneration of relics upon arrival at the tomb of a holy man or woman. It is in this broad sense that I shall be using the word “pilgrimage” in this paper.

During the early centuries of the Christianized Roman Empire of Late Antiquity, many women pilgrims made the arduous journey to the Holy Land, following in the footsteps of the empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, who visited Jerusalem ca. 326–327.² Among the

¹ The symposium, entitled “Pilgrimage in the Byzantine Empire, 7th–15th c.,” was held May 5–7, 2000. Selected papers from this symposium will be published in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002). For discussion of the meaning of the term “pilgrimage”, see, for example, the papers by P. Maraval, A. W. Carr, J.O. Rosenqvist and R. Greenfield, and the introduction by A.-M. Talbot.

² Hunt 1982, 28–49; J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: the mother of Constantine the Great and the legend of her finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, 1992).

women who came from Rome and points further west, we know of Melania the Elder in 372,³ Egeria in 381–384,⁴ Paula and her daughter Eustochium in 385,⁵ and Melania the Younger in 417.⁶ In the 5th c. there were also pilgrimages from Constantinople, by the empress Athenais-Eudokia,⁷ for example, in 438–439 and by Matrona of Perge ca. 450.⁸ More humble women made the trip as well, such as the prostitutes from Constantinople who traveled to Jerusalem to fulfil a vow of penance, with their expenses paid by St. Markianos the Oikonomos.⁹ I might also mention St. Mary of Egypt, a perhaps legendary figure of uncertain date, who joined a group of Libyan and Egyptian men sailing from Alexandria to the Holy Land to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. She is portrayed in her *vita* as a nymphomaniac, who began her journey with shameful purposes, earning her passage by prostitution. But once she reached the Holy City, she underwent a conversion experience at the church of Constantine on Golgotha, and became one of the best known of the “repentant harlot” type of female saint.¹⁰

Long-distance pilgrimage by women evidently continued into at least the 6th and 7th centuries. The *vita* of John the Hesychast (d. 559) tells of a woman who traveled from Cappadocia to Jerusalem with her nephew,¹¹ while the 7th-c. Miracles of the Mother of God of Choziba recount that a

³ Hunt 1982, 168–171.

⁴ J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem–Warminster, 1981).

⁵ Hunt 1982, 171–174.

⁶ E. A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger* (New York, 1984), ch. 34–35.

⁷ K. G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1982), 183–188.

⁸ Life of St. Matrona of Perge, ch. 13–14, tr. J. M. Featherstone in Talbot 1996, 32–34.

⁹ *Vita* of St. Markianos the Oikonomos, ed. M. Gedeon, Βυζαντινὸν Ἑορτολόγιον (Constantinople 1899), 276, ch. 12: πολλαὶς γὰρ ἐξ αὐτῶν [sc. prostitutes] ἀναλώματα παρέχων ἐπὶ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα ἐξέπεμψεν, αἱ καὶ συμπολίτιδες τῶν ἁγίων ἀνεδείχθησαν.

¹⁰ *Vita* of St. Mary of Egypt, tr. M. Kouli in Talbot 1996, 65–93.

¹¹ *Vita* of John the Sabaita the Hesychast, ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig, 1939), 218–219.

concession was made to female pilgrims who were allowed to stay overnight at this male monastery in the Judean desert.¹²

Some details on pilgrimage by noblewomen of this era can be found in the anonymous *narratio* about the 6th-c. (?) woman of senatorial rank (*synkletike*) who, like Mary of Egypt, fled Jerusalem to live as a hermit in the Judean Desert. This no doubt fictional character was supposedly a native of Constantinople, betrothed to the son of an *illoustrios*. Reluctant to go through with the wedding, the *synkletike* persuaded her father to let her first visit the Holy Land. He finally agreed, providing her with an escort of male, female and eunuch attendants, supervised by a sort of major-domo. She visited the *loca sancta* and the holy fathers in the desert monasteries, distributing most of the 3000 gold pieces her father had given her for alms. She then managed to escape to the desert where she lived in a cave disguised as a hermit.¹³

Although hagiographical texts and church histories generally praise the piety of these women pilgrims who made long journeys to pray at the Holy Places or to visit desert fathers, there was in fact opposition among certain of the Church Fathers to pilgrimage, particularly that by women.¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa discouraged pilgrimage for monks, saying that “they should leave their body behind and go to the Lord, not from Cappadocia to Palestine”.¹⁵ Similar sentiments were voiced by Athanasios of Alexandria, in a letter to a group of virgins who had travelled from Egypt to the Holy Land for prayer at the Holy Places. As paraphrased by Susanna Elm, he argued that

¹² C. Houze, “Miracula beatae Virginis Mariae in Choziba eodem Antonio Chozebita auctore,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 7 (1888): 360–363.

¹³ B. Flusin, J. Paramelle, “De syncletica in deserto Iordanis (BHG 1318w),” *Analecta Bollandiana* 100 (1982): 305–317. This *synkletike* is not to be confused with the 4th-c. (?) Synkletike from Alexandria described in a *vita* by Ps.-Athanasios (BHG 1694).

¹⁴ See S. Elm, “Perceptions of Jerusalem Pilgrimage as Reflected in Two Early Sources on Female Pilgrimage (3rd and 4th centuries A.D.),” *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989): 219–223.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, ep. 2.18., ed. G. Pasquali, *Gregorii Nysseni opera VIII.2. Epistulae* (Leiden, 1959), 18; cf. B. Kötting, “Gregor von Nyssa’s Wallfahrtskritik,” *Studia Patristica* 5 [=Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 80] (1962): 360–367.

they did “not have to journey to Jerusalem to find paradise on earth ... The virgins are always in the Holy Land since whoever leads a life of sanctity carried Jerusalem inside him or herself.”¹⁶ In the same century Evagrius Pontikos disapproved of a deaconess’ plans to travel into the Egyptian desert to visit the ascetic fathers there, on the grounds that such a laborious journey was needless and would expose her to temptation. In his words, “I praise her intentions but I do not approve of her undertaking. I do not see what she will gain from such a long walk over such a laborious route ... Thus, I beseech your holiness to prevent those <women> who have renounced the world from needlessly walking around over such roads.”¹⁷ In another letter Evagrius asked Melania the Elder to advise her nuns to avoid such pilgrimages because they are “alien to every soul that has retired from this world.”¹⁸ The most extreme opposition to female pilgrimage was expressed by Arsenios, a hermit who lived in the Egyptian desert in the 5th c. When a wealthy woman, the wife of a senator, came to Canopus from Rome, he refused to see her. She went to his cell anyway, and he angrily attacked her: “How did you dare to make such a voyage? Don’t you know that you are a woman, and should not ever go out? Will you go <back> to Rome and tell the other women, ‘I saw Arsenios’, and they will turn the sea into a path for women coming to visit me?” The woman asked Arsenios to pray for her, but instead he prayed that “her memory be eradicated from his heart”. This attitude was shared by the archbishop Theophilos of Alexandria who told the distraught female pilgrim, “Don’t you know that you are a woman, and it is through women that the devil wars against holy men?”¹⁹ We must conclude that there were ambivalent attitudes in Late

¹⁶ S. Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994), 333–334. See Athanasios of Alexandria, “Letter to the Virgins Who Went to Jerusalem to Pray and Have Returned”, Fr. tr. by J. Lebon, “Athanasiana Syriaca II.”, *Le Muséon* 41 (1928): 189–203.

¹⁷ G. Bunge, tr., *Evagrius Pontikos. Briefe aus der Wüste* (Trier, 1986), ep. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ep. 8.

¹⁹ T. Nissen, “Das Enkomion des Theodoros Studites auf den hl. Arsenios,” *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 1 (1920): 251–252.

Antiquity toward long distance pilgrimage, especially when women were concerned. The Egyptian church fathers seem particularly strict in this regard, discouraging female pilgrimage both to holy shrines and to living holy men, especially the latter.

Another aspect of female pilgrimage was travel for much shorter distances as a devotional exercise or to seek miraculous cures, either from relics of a deceased saint or from contact with a living holy man. One well documented Late Antique shrine was the sanctuary of St. Thekla, which flourished in the 4th–6th centuries near Seleukeia on the southern coast of Asia Minor.²⁰ As one might expect for a saint who was the companion of St. Paul and the first female martyr, Thekla was very popular with women, and her shrine attracted numerous female pilgrims, although many men came as well. Pilgrims came both for pietistic purposes, as did Egeria in 384, and in search of healing. Egeria spent two days at the sanctuary, performing what Stephen Davis, in his recent book on the shrine, has termed the “pilgrimage liturgy”, that is prayer, reading aloud of the Acts of St. Thekla, and the celebration of the eucharist.²¹ A community of virgins resident at the sanctuary provided hospitality for female pilgrims; monks performed a similar role for male visitors. The majority of the pilgrims to Hagia Thekla were from the vicinity of Seleukeia,²² but we know of one woman who came from Klaudiopolis, 80 km. distant, and another who voyaged with her husband from Cyprus.²³ Pilgrims came by boat, on foot and by mule; at least two women were healed by the saint of leg fractures suffered when they fell off their mules en route to the shrine.²⁴ Young children came as well; we hear of a tod-

²⁰ We are well informed about the shrine and Thekla’s cult in the 4th and 5th c. by the anonymous *Life and Miracles* written in the mid-5th c., ed. G. Dagron, *Vie et Miracles de Sainte Thècle* (Brussels, 1978). See also S. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thekla: a Tradition of Women’s Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001).

²¹ Davis 2001, 66.

²² Davis 2001, 71.

²³ See Dagron 1978, mir. 14 and 15.

²⁴ Dagron 1978, mir. 17–18.

dlar, who was going blind in one eye, brought by his nurse from a village 13 km distant.²⁵ Pilgrims often offered birds as gifts to the saint, swans, cranes, geese and doves, and one miracle recounts a charming scene in which children chase after birds or were alternatively pursued by them.²⁶

The distractions and dangers of mixed pilgrimage are reported as well. On one occasion, on the last day of the festival of St. Thekla, when the church was thronged with visitors, a male pilgrim commented that he was completely distracted from the service by the beauty of a female worshipper: "I saw a woman ... who was so pretty, so beautiful, so charming that during the entire *synaxis* I fixed my eyes on her marvelous beauty, and could only make one prayer: 'to be able to enjoy her beauty'."²⁷ At another time two men from Eirenopolis (in Isauria) got drunk in a garden outside the shrine. When they found a virgin wandering outside the sacred precincts, they attempted to seduce her. But they fell into a drunken stupor before they could carry out their rape.²⁸

A shrine of the 7th c., that of St. Artemios, located in the church of St. John Prodromos in Constantinople, had a specialized healing cult, the cure of hernias and swollen testicles.²⁹ Thus one would expect it to have a primarily male clientele. But many women came as well with their afflicted sons, and might stay a week or two in a specially designated area of the church, awaiting a nocturnal visitation from the saint.³⁰ Sometimes St. Artemios himself performed the cure, but on at least one occasion a new mother with an infant son had a vision of St. Febronia, whose oratory was in the same church, to the right of the main altar. The hagiographer comments, "For there are times when Christ's martyr [Artemios]

²⁵ Dagron 1978, mir. 24.

²⁶ Dagron 1978, mir. 24.

²⁷ Dagron 1978, mir. 33.

²⁸ Dagron 1978, mir. 34.

²⁹ See V. S. Crisafulli, J. W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden, 1997).

³⁰ E.g., Crisafulli – Nesbitt 1997, mirs. 12, 28, 31, 36, 45.

relies upon St. Febronia to assist in the miracle-making when women are in question.³¹ There was also a case of a young woman who developed a hernia, and went to the shrine with her mother. After two weeks of incubation had proved fruitless, the martyr appeared to the mother in a dream and instructed her to pray to St. Febronia. Indeed in the middle of the night St. Febronia appeared and healed the young woman by applying a wax-salve to her genitals. The author of the miracle account explains that “the martyress Febronia ... became the saint’s assistant in the vision.”³²

A similar mix of male and female pilgrims, spending the night in close quarters, is also described in detail in the 6th-c. miracles of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos.³³

Visitation to a living holy man in hope of a healing miracle is well illustrated by the lengthy *vita* of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger, who inhabited a pillar on the Wondrous Mountain, near Antioch, for much of the 6th c.³⁴ Although outnumbered by male pilgrims, women in search of healing are frequently attested in the *vita*. Sometimes they brought their afflicted children, sometimes they came on their own behalf. They might be the victims of demonic possession, or were deaf, dumb or blind, or crippled. Very often they suffered from specifically female complaints, such as excessive menstrual flow, barrenness, abnormal pregnancies, inability to lactate, or breast cancer.³⁵ Particularly striking is the way in which St. Symeon used his healing touch to cure these women. In the case of women who came with newborn babies because they had no milk,

³¹ Crisafulli – Nesbitt 1997, mir. 45.

³² Crisafulli – Nesbitt 1997, mir. 24.

³³ On this shrine, see L. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian* (Leipzig–Berlin, 1907), and Fr. tr. by A.-J. Festugière, *Sainte Thècle, saints Côme et Damien, saints Cyr et Jean (extraits), saint Georges* (Paris, 1971), 83–213.

³⁴ On his life and miracles, see P. van den Ven, *La Vie ancienne de s. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1962–70).

³⁵ For women with excessive flow of blood see van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 118–119, for abnormal pregnancies see ch. 139, for barrenness see ch. 140, for painful and ulcerated breasts (breast cancer?) see ch. 154 and 254.

Symeon touched their breasts and anointed them with his saliva. With no concern for the women's sense of modesty, he first made them squeeze their nipples in front of the assembled crowd to demonstrate that their breasts were dry, and then himself squeezed their breasts until milk poured out. Thereupon he sprinkled the spectators with breast milk as if to prove the miracle!³⁶

Sometimes the women came with their husbands, children or traveling companions, but on many occasions there is no mention of escorts for these female suppliants. In only a few cases does the hagiographer provide information on their hometowns or countries of origin. Women were included in a group that came all the way from Georgia,³⁷ but more commonly the women came from the region of Syria and southern Asia Minor, more specifically from Cilicia³⁸, Laodikeia, Isaurian Seleukeia, Daphne (a suburb of Antioch), Apameia,³⁹ and villages in the vicinity of the Wondrous Mountain.⁴⁰ Another indication that most of these women were traveling relatively short distances is found in the story about Symeon's healing of barrenness. He is said to have alleviated the sterility of women from "many eparchies"; within a year they returned to his column on the Wondrous Mountain, with newborn babes in arms, so obviously they cannot have lived very far away.⁴¹

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The tradition of long-distance female pilgrimage to the Holy Land seems to have disappeared in the middle Byzantine period, yet one more example of the discontinuity between Late Antiquity and the medieval Byzan-

³⁶ Van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 138.

³⁷ Van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 103.

³⁸ E.g., a woman from Rosopolis, located on the gulf of Issos, between Piereia and Seleukeia (van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 118).

³⁹ For Laodikeia see van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 150, for Seleukeia ch. 192, for Daphne ch. 193, and for Apameia ch. 223.

⁴⁰ E.g., Kalinea (van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 229).

⁴¹ Van den Ven 1962–70, ch. 254.

tine era. Although one can find scattered references to male Byzantine pilgrims traveling to the *loca sancta* between the 8th and 15th centuries,⁴² I have not been able to track down a single instance after the 7th c. of a Byzantine woman who made this journey for purposes of pilgrimage. The exception that proves the rule is to be found in the Life of St. Lazaros of Mt. Galesion, which tells the tale of a Constantinopolitan nun who disguised herself as a man with the intention of going to Jerusalem. She joined a group of pilgrims traveling via Ephesus, and along with them made a detour to visit the holy man on his pillar on the nearby holy mountain and to hear his homily. Lazaros immediately saw through her disguise and scolded her, saying that women shouldn't travel all about in this fashion, and opposing pilgrimage in general with the words, "Wherever anyone does good, there is the <true> Jerusalem!"⁴³ echoing statements by 4th and 5th-c. church fathers.

The reasons for this cessation of female pilgrimage to the Holy Land are no doubt varied: one could cite the transformed political situation in the Levant after the Arab conquests, and the appearance of important new pilgrimage sites in Greece and Anatolia, as the cults of new saints developed and holy shrines in cities such as Constantinople and Thessalonike were enriched with revered relics. But since these two factors would affect male pilgrims as well, the explanation of this phenomenon must lie in changing expectations of proper female conduct with the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Women became more secluded, and one of the few sanctioned occasions for leaving the house was for purposes of worship at churches and monasteries and visits to holy men. These shifts in pilgrimage patterns in the middle Byzantine period, away from the Holy Land to local and regional shrines, are obviously a topic in

⁴² See my article, "Byzantine Pilgrimage to the Holy Land from the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century," in *The Sabaitic Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven, 2001), 97–110.

⁴³ Engl. tr. by R. Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh Century Pillar Saint* (Washington, D.C., 2000), ch. 95.

themselves, whose investigation would be richly rewarding. The rest of my paper will focus on women's short-distance pilgrimage in the middle and late Byzantine centuries, including ways in which it did and did not differ from pious journeys by Byzantine men.

Like their male counterparts, women went on pilgrimage for a variety of purposes, and one should distinguish between their spiritual journeys to a shrine housing miraculous relics, from which they most often sought miraculous healing, and their visitation of a living holy man. Visits to saints' tombs or shrines housing relics were often made in search of a miraculous cure of a disease, chronic affliction or infertility, and were obviously solemn affairs. Other pilgrimages, made with the purpose of making prayers for intercession or salvation, could also acquire a festive and recreational aspect, especially if they coincided with a saint's annual feast day and a *panegyris* or fair.⁴⁴ A particularly vivid description of the pleasure experienced by a woman pilgrim in her visit to a rural shrine is to be found in a 14th-c. text on the miracles of St. Eugenios of Trebizond. It relates how a certain Barbara, wife of a *kouropalates*, "cherished what one might call a divine and boundless affection for the famous church of the ... great martyr Prokopios and the surrounding area. Westerly winds come from the so called Mountain of Mithras which rises above, and especially in spring people come there and enjoy the flowers and plants and take great delight in the sight of their bloom and in the thick grass."⁴⁵

Pious laypeople, many women among them, had recourse to living holy men for spiritual instruction, confession of sins, benediction, obtaining of amulets and other sorts of pilgrimage tokens and souvenirs (*eulogiai*), and, more rarely, healing. The Life of St. Lazaros is particu-

⁴⁴ On the Byzantine *panegyris*, see S. Vryonis, "The *Panegyris* of the Byzantine Saint: A Study in the Nature of a Medieval Institution, its Origins and Fate," in S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint: University of Birmingham 14th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (London, 1981), 196–227.

⁴⁵ J. O. Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond in codex Athous Dionysiou 154* (Uppsala, 1996), 268–271.

larly instructive on this type of pilgrimage, as it describes male and female pilgrims, usually from Ephesus or its vicinity, who made their way up the holy mountain of Galesion to see Lazaros on his pillar.⁴⁶ Many of these pilgrims made repeated visits, to hear Lazaros give homilies from his pillar, or to seek his spiritual counsel and blessing. Among them were a recently widowed woman, who eventually decided to take the monastic habit; a prostitute stricken with contrition who confessed her sins to the father and took the extraordinary step of kissing him on the face; the battered wife of a priest from a nearby village who in revenge had poured polluted blood in the eucharistic wine and came to confess her terrible sacrilege; and a stingy woman who was converted to compassion and came to Lazaros to receive further instruction in the virtues of almsgiving.

As we have seen, laywomen and nuns who left their homes or convents for spiritual purposes most often visited local shrines; more rarely, they might engage in short-distance pilgrimage to a nearby rural or urban shrine. Miracle accounts do not often specify the place of origin of visitors to a shrine, and this may be because in fact most of them were local people. Where such information is provided, in texts like the *vitae* of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion and Mary the Younger, we may note that journeys up to 75 or 100 miles are not unheard of. We can read, for example, of women traveling from Nicaea or Prousa to Constantinople, from Verroia to Thessalonike, from Chios to Ephesus. Thus a nun came annually from Chios to fetch a jar of holy oil from Mt. Galesion and took it back to her nunnery to work healing miracles.⁴⁷ On occasion, to avoid such long journeys, a woman might request that a vessel of holy oil be sent to her by messenger. Thus the wife of the *strategos* of Thebes asked that a vial of *myron* be sent to her from the shrine of Theodora of Thessalonike to heal her blind servant girl.⁴⁸ Healing shrines most often, however, attracted a

⁴⁶ This paragraph is heavily indebted to a forthcoming article by R. Greenfield, "Drawn to the Blazing Beacon: Visitors and Pilgrims to the Living Holy Man and the Case of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion", forthcoming in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002).

⁴⁷ *Vita* of Lazaros of Galesion, ch. 76 (Greenfield 2000, 165).

local clientele, as Speros Vryonis has observed in connection with the related phenomenon of the *panegyris*.⁴⁹ Let me cite a few figures from three Byzantine miracle collections that provide information on the provenance of pilgrims. At Pege, in suburban Constantinople, of the 28 men whose healing is recorded between the 5th and 10th c. only three came from outside the city, and none of the 17 women.⁵⁰ In the Life and Miracles of St. Theodora of Thessalonike two of the seven men and two of the eight women whom we know to have been cured at her shrine in the late 9th c. came from outside the city.⁵¹ The figures are higher for the Constantinopolitan shrine of the patriarch Athanasios, active in the early 14th c.: 8 of 21 male pilgrims came from outside the capital (38%), and 4 of 18 women (22%).⁵²

Some of the evidence I cited earlier, from the miracle collections of Late Antiquity, demonstrated a link between the gender of the saint and that of the pilgrims to his or her shrine. Such was the case at the shrines of St. Thekla and St. Artemios, for example, although neither shrine catered exclusively to members of a single sex. An important recent finding, however, borne out by the researches of others as well, such as Paul Halsall,⁵³ is that on the whole, and especially in later centuries, there is surprisingly little correlation between the gender of the pilgrim to a healing shrine and the gender of the saint from whom assistance is sought.

⁴⁸ *Vita* of Theodora of Thessalonike, ed. S. A. Paschalides, 'Ο Βίος τῆς ὁσιομυροβλήτιδος Θεοδώρας τῆς ἐν Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessalonike, 1991), ch. 56; Engl. tr. in Talbot 1996, 212.

⁴⁹ Vryonis 1981, 198.

⁵⁰ For this anonymous miracle collection, see "De sacris aedibus deque miraculis Deiparae ad Fontem" in *AASS* Nov. 3:878–89.

⁵¹ For this *vita*, see Paschalides 1991.

⁵² On these miracles, see A.-M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Late Byzantium: The Posthumous Miracles of the Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople by Theoktistos the Stoudite* (Brookline, Mass., 1983).

⁵³ See his Fordham University dissertation, *Women's Bodies, Men's Souls: Sanctity and Gender in Byzantium* (New York, 1999).

Men sought miraculous cures at the tombs of holy women, while female pilgrims regularly visited holy men and the relics of male saints. To give some examples, the relics of Theodora of Thessalonike cured seven men and eight women, those of Mary the Younger twenty-one men and eleven women, and Thomais eight men and five women.⁵⁴ Even for specifically female maladies, such as menstrual disorders, breast cancer or breastfeeding problems, women were as likely to approach holy men (or their relics) as holy women. I have already remarked upon this above in the case of St. Symeon the Younger.

There continued to be some exceptions to this pattern. The relics of St. Euphrosyne the Younger, whose shrine flourished in Constantinople in the Palaeologan period, predominantly attracted female pilgrims. Of the twelve patients specifically named, eleven were women; there is also a vague (and somewhat surprising) allusion to an unspecified number of barren women from Rome who sent to the shrine for girdles of silk and for oil from the lamp over the saint's tomb, believed to promote fertility. But it was not only the female complaint of sterility that brought women to Euphrosyne's relics, but non-gender-specific cases of deafness, paralysis, demonic possession and periodontal disease.⁵⁵ I would conclude then that the gender of the pilgrim does not usually seem to have been a major factor in the choice of pilgrimage destination.

Notwithstanding this evidence against patterns of gender-based piety, there were still differences between male and female pilgrimage in the middle and late Byzantine periods. For one thing, women were denied access to certain monasteries that housed healing relics or miracle-working monks, whereas I have found no data for men being excluded from the shrine of a female saint. The Life of the patriarch Tarasios reports, for example, that some women suffering from an issue of blood were unable

⁵⁴ See Talbot 1996, xiv–xv, and A.-M. Talbot, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts", forthcoming in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002).

⁵⁵ For the miracles of St. Euphrosyne the Younger, see *AASS* Nov. 3:861–877.

to visit his tomb because the typikon of his monastery forbade entrance to women. In desperation they disguised themselves as eunuchs in order to enter and obtain oil from the lamp over his tomb.⁵⁶ Likewise a demoniac woman who was unable to approach the tomb of Elias Spelaiotes donned male dress so that she could spend the night next to his grave and be healed by incubation.⁵⁷ There were simpler ways to get around this problem of access. A woman might send a male relative or servant to the monastery to bring her holy oil or a hair in a vial,⁵⁸ or healing relics might be carried to the door of the church.⁵⁹ A living holy man might meet a female pilgrim outside his monastery, as did St. Peter of Atroa.⁶⁰

Even where women pilgrims were normally welcomed, as at the monasteries of Lazaros on Mt. Galesion, they sometimes came to be viewed as a temptation and distraction for the monks. Such was the fate of a woman from Ephesus, Irene, newly widowed, who began frequent visitations to the holy man on the nearby holy mountain, eventually took the monastic habit, and considered herself a disciple of the holy man. In the end, however, Lazaros told her not to come up the mountain anymore because of the disruption she caused to the monastic community.⁶¹ Or consider the case of Paul of Latros who visited Ephesus on the feastday of St. John the Theologian; after being attracted by the sight of a female pilgrim to the shrine, he resolved never again to attend this annual festival in order to avoid temptation.⁶²

⁵⁶ S. Efthymiades, *The Life of the Patriarch Tarasios by Ignatios the Deacon* (Aldershot, 1998), ch. 66.

⁵⁷ *Vita* of Elias Spelaiotes, *AASS* Sept. 3:881–882, ch. 82.

⁵⁸ E.g., *vita* of patriarch Ignatios, *PG* 105:561C.

⁵⁹ See C. Bouras, *Nea Moni on Chios: History and Architecture* (Athens, 1982), 167 and n. 2.

⁶⁰ V. Laurent, *La Vie Merveilleuse de Saint Pierre d'Atroa* (Brussels, 1956), ch. 51, p. 169.

⁶¹ *Vita* of Lazaros of Galesion, ch. 57 (Greenfield 2000, 145).

⁶² H. Delehaye, "Vita s. Pauli Iunioris in Monte Latro" in T. Wiegand, *Milet 3.1. Der Latmos* (Berlin, 1913) 111.

One reason for the discouragement of travel by women, even for pious purposes, was the dangers they might encounter, especially of sexual violation. This was why the nun on her way to Jerusalem in the 11th c., mentioned earlier in this paper, disguised herself as a man. There was a real danger of rape for women pilgrims: the widow Irene, who made frequent visits to Mt. Galesion, never traveled alone for this very reason. Indeed on one occasion she narrowly escaped being raped when the young men who lay in wait alongside the road for her and her two pious female companions fell asleep, and so missed their chance to seize the women.⁶³ The Life of Lazaros also tells of a young woman travelling with a group of pilgrims from Cappadocia to the shrine of St. Michael at Chonai in Phrygia. When Lazaros first met her, she was “terrified and shaking with fear” for fear of sexual assault along the road; so the holy man took her under his protection until he was able to deliver her into the hands of her relatives once they arrived in Chonai.⁶⁴

In concluding these rather selective observations on the phenomenon of female pilgrimage in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine era, I should like to remark on the value of such a study to shed light on the everyday lives and devotional practices of Byzantine women. As has been frequently noted, the women of Byzantium, especially those of the lower and middle classes, are by and large both invisible and silent. The scholarly literature has not reached consensus about the degree of seclusion of Byzantine women, in large part because of the limited and contradictory nature of the evidence, but it does seem that these women spent most of their lives at home. Information on the religious life of Byzantine laywomen is particularly skimpy. It is for this reason that further investigation into female pilgrimage should prove fruitful; for visitation of shrines and attendance at *panegyreis* were among the few socially acceptable occasions for women to leave their houses. A somewhat more liberal

⁶³ *Vita* of Lazaros of Galesion, ch. 56 (Greenfield 2000, 143–144).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* ch. 7 (Greenfield 2000, 83).

picture emerges, of women who freely walked from their villages up a mountainside, participated in nocturnal processions in Constantinople, took an ailing child in a small boat across the Sea of Marmara to seek a miraculous cure,⁶⁵ or spent the night next to a saint's tomb. Although they were sometimes accompanied by their husbands, a male escort was by no means required. I would argue that in order to gain a better understanding of the spiritual life of these women it is necessary to go beyond the lives of female saints, which by now have been so well studied, and to look in addition for women pilgrims in miracle accounts and in the *vitae* of the male saints whom many women came to view as their confessors and spiritual fathers.

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⁶⁵ See M.-F. Auzépy, *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre* (Aldershot, 1997), ch. 50.