

Pentcheva and "Building Churches in Armenia: Art at the Borders of Empire and the Edge of the Canon" by Christina Maranci. Other articles that make reference to Byzantine issues.

³⁰ See <http://www.amoriumexcavations.org/> for information on the work there.

³¹ See <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/aphrodisias/> for information on the work there.

³² Cemal Pulak, "Yenikapi Bizans batıkları," Gün Isiginda. Istanbul'un 8000 yılı, Marmaray, Metro, Sultanahmet kazıları, Istanbul, 2007, pp 203-215.

³³ See <http://www.doaks/research/byzantine> for the Dumbarton Oaks website.

³⁴ For example, see <http://www.metmuseum.org> for the continuing presence of both the Museum's 1997 and 2004 Byzantine exhibition web features.

Decoding the Habit of the Byzantine Nun

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Two assumptions have been made in past study and understanding of the monastic habit, or *schema*, of the Byzantine nun. Because Byzantine nuns were not part of orders as were their sisters in the Medieval West, such as Carmelite nuns, it has been assumed that nuns did not wear a uniform. The second assumption is that nuns simply wore black tunics, cloaks, and veils in the absence of such a uniform.¹ This essay will bring together literary and pictorial sources that discuss the *schema*, or habit, of Byzantine women religious. In doing so, a picture of the female monastic habit in Byzantium will emerge that had an identifiable uniform but was more varied than has been understood to date.

Before turning to contemporary descriptions of the garments themselves, it is important to define what is meant by *nun* in this paper. I will be casting my net broadly to include not only the coenobitic nun who took the veil in a formal ceremony, but also ascetics and other women who dedicated themselves to a religious life, even when vows were not taken. Such religious women dressed differently from laywomen and took care to dress appropriately for her vocation, whether that was one of ascetic, solitary, virgin or veiled nun.² Her clothing symbolically suggested to the wearer as well as the outside world a woman's religious vo-

cation and may have provided security and respect not typically granted to women. Thus, three types of women will be addressed in this study: Coenobitic nuns who lived communally and took vows, women who practiced some form of asceticism, and cross-dressing nuns. While the first category is better understood, the remaining two categories are more difficult to tackle. Particularly in the early Byzantine period we have much evidence for women – virgins, former prostitutes, and matrons – taking up a life in which they renounced (male) family, material goods, and lived as virgins, alone or in groups. Additionally, these women often practiced asceticism in their restrictive eating, bathing, sleeping habits, and most importantly for this paper, in the clothing they wore, such as chains, hair shirts, and girdles. While this group did not take vows, their commitment to the religious life is highlighted in the lives of saints, and it is clear that an ascetic uniform of sorts developed. Cross-dressing nuns would seem more appropriate for a discussion of the male monastic *schema*, which they donned to enter monasteries for various reasons, sometimes to be closer to a husband or father, sometimes for reasons of safety. However, the subversive cross-dresser is often described for what they *do not* wear: proper female religious attire. Furthermore, tales of cross-dressing nuns often highlight a climactic moment when the woman's true sex is discovered and a re-dressing moment, as I call it, ensues when she is forced to wear her appropriately gendered clothing. Such stories often reveal rich descriptions of the appropriate garb for nuns, which the cross-dresser accepts at the end.

The majority of evidence for Byzantine female monastic dress is literary, and this can be combined with a study of the surviving pictorial evidence for nuns' dress. Regrettably we have no surviving garments to study. Our literary evidence consists of six *typika* or foundation documents for Byzantine convents, which, among many other things, prescribe the

clothing of the nuns in varying detail. Additionally, anecdotes concerning the worldly clothes given up upon entering the convent and clues about the ranking of nuns through dress can sometimes be gleaned from these documents. The evidence of the *typika* is supplemented greatly by descriptions of nuns in the lives of saints. Here we have to sift through the embellishments of authors who make the female religious protagonist appear even more pious by noting her "[unwillingness] to take a new garment, hood, or shoes..."³ Nevertheless, patterns and norms can be detected. A few mentions of nuns in other types of texts, such as histories, are also of use.

The pictorial record is dominated by icons of famous sainted nuns such as Theodosia, a nun of the iconoclastic period whose image is featured in no fewer than five icons at Mt. Sinai alone.⁴ In icons we should understand the image of the female monastic as a type that develops over the course of the empire's history and can be readily identified. But discreet "types" – the coenobitic urban nun or the desert dwelling ascetic, for example – are telling in themselves. Byzantines identified the proverbial sitter of these portraits in large part through clothing, a marker that told the viewer "who" in the same way that physiognomic likeness is privileged today. Religious women are also seen in the occasional donor or funerary portrait as well. In these cases, the subjects were likely painted close to the time that they lived. Therefore, their clothing may be represent with even greater accuracy.⁵ Finally, historical images, genre scenes, and other types of loosely narrative scenes, largely found in manuscript illumination, sometimes picture nuns as part of the scene.

From these sources we find that nuns wore a few basic garments: the tunic, cloak and some sort of head covering, a *maphorion* or *skepe*. A hood, *koukoulion*, was another alternative for headgear. There is some evidence that some nuns

wore a scapular or stole of some kind but it is unclear if this was a standard, even for coenobitic nuns. Ascetics often added special garments such as hair shirts to their outfits as part of their renunciation of material goods.

The Nun's *Schema*

The nun's habit is most often referred to in general terms, using especially the term *schema*. A *schema* may have originally referred to simply to a tunic worn by a monk or nun, as it was used in early patristic writing.⁶ But it quickly comes to be used for the entire habit and can also be understood metaphorically to refer to the monastic life. Occasional qualifiers, such as "black" give us further clues about the habit.⁷ But we are usually left with only vague references. For example the sixth-century Saint Synclectica of Palestine relates her acquisition of the *schema*, "Know, holy father, that you will honor me with the habit and clothe me in sackcloth and provide me with your books. And so it happened, for when he saw my desire and my weeping, he stood and gave me the holy habit, clothing made out of rough fabric..."⁸ The "sackcloth," a term for any rough tunic, is in this case specifically made of hair. The hair shirt demonstrates Synclectica's piety through this ascetic practice of wearing uncomfortable clothing and it additionally illustrates her poverty. These references to the *schema* are often couched in metaphors about an individual's sanctity, making it more difficult to glean any concrete information. For example in the *typikon* of the Philanthropos convent, written in 1307, it is noted that the *hegoumene*, or abbess, must wear the "divine and angelic habit."⁹ "Angelic" is a term used for tonsured monks or nuns and "divine" further denotes a high-ranking monastic – an abbess or founder – but it tells us nothing of what the garments looked like. Furthermore, the use of these terms is so common, also being applied to male monastic dress, so that it becomes almost meaningless.

More can be understood about the nun's *schema* from references to single garments. A tunic was the basic garment of any Byzantine citizen, lay or otherwise, and nuns were no exception. Tunics, along with cloaks, are mentioned in more descriptions of nuns' dress than any other article of clothing, but the tunic seems to have no distinguishing characteristics when worn by a nun. It was, so far as we know, the same as a laywoman's tunic in form. Nuns' tunics were full length, as was the case with most women.¹⁰ The majority of nuns reportedly wore a *himation*, which is a general word for a tunic. *Chiton*, another general word for tunic, is commonly used in descriptions as well. These terms also denote tunics for lay, monastic, men or women; we know that courtiers sometimes wore the *himation* or *chiton* as part of ceremonial dress. For example, *chitonion*, the diminutive of *chiton* denotes a woman's tunic in particular. While gender differences existed in clothing,¹¹ no literary descriptions or images survive that can accurately tell us what details of a tunic differed by gender. Men's clothes could be shorter but monastics, male and female, tended to wear full-length garments.¹² A *sticharion* is another general term used for a tunic in lay society, but a *sticharion* is also a long sleeved tunic worn by any clergyman ranked at least as a deacon. The ecclesiastical *sticharion* had details such as stripes for bishops while lower ranks wore plain ones. It seems unlikely that nuns wore an ecclesiastical form of the garment, but it may suggest a long unbelted tunic by extension.

A *rhakos* is a term used by some Byzantine authors to denote a ragged garment. Given the way in which the term is often used, the *rhakos* was probably a tunic, and not an outer garment. The word appears in descriptions of a beggar's garment, for example, and did not have to be strictly monastic. Writers probably considered it a useful term to convey the idea that a garment was used, old, coarse, and perhaps dirty. A wide range of women are described wearing a *rha-*

kos, from matrons who took up ascetic lives of piety, such as Mary the Younger (d. ca. 903),¹³ and coenobitic nuns, such as Athanasia of Aegina living in the first half of the ninth century,¹⁴ demonstrating that women religious wore tunics that were distinguished from those donned by much of Byzantine society in their being heavily worn.

Cloaks

Cloaks (*mandyes*) comprise the second category of garments commonly worn by nuns. Cloaks were particularly important for women religious for reasons of modesty. Saints' lives often describe men owning single tunics, who had given away their cloaks and other clothes to the poor.¹⁵ While female saints are equally charitable – Athanasia of Aegina provided food, clothing and "other gifts" in her charitable work¹⁶ – they are far less likely to renounce all clothing, save for a tunic, as the cloak was necessary for propriety. Of course, warmth was another important reason for wearing cloaks, and the *typika* that mention them note that they are for winter or made of wool for sufficient protection against the cold. Interestingly the fabric of others garments is rarely mentioned; cloaks are, by contrast, often described as woolen. As with tunics, the appearance of impoverishment was important for many nuns. Irene of Chrysobalanton whose story takes place in the wake of the Iconoclastic period in the ninth century, for example, wore a *tribonion*, meaning that her cloak was threadbare.¹⁷ However, the evidence seems to suggest that a nun's cloak was like the cloak of any layperson, though perhaps more somber in color and of meaner cloth.

If lay and monastic tunics and cloaks were of the same form, then it is likely that headgear or other insignia, of nuns such as a scapular, must have signaled their monastic identity. Yet we have few mentions of these possible insignia, with two of the six *typika* for convents and one vita

mentioning a scapular, or vest (*analabos*), that was worn over a tunic as the insignia of a nun who has taken formal vows. Literary sources known to date demonstrate that no solitary, virgin, or pious matron wore a scapular, but it has been assumed to be the primary signifier of the habit of a coenobitic nun, along with the headgear.¹⁸ It is, however, difficult to confirm how commonly the scapular was worn by Byzantine nuns and there is no evidence that it was a required garment for the habit.

The pictorial record is of little help in identifying the specific form of the nun's *schema*. In miniature paintings and church decoration, nuns are typically depicted in a concealing cloak, making it difficult to discern if a scapular was worn underneath. *The Lincoln College Typikon* (Oxford, Lincoln College, Ms. Graecus 35, 1327-35), for example, depicts novices, choir sisters, and the founders in its group portrait of the convent's membership. According to their *typikon*, the middle- and highest-ranking nuns of this convent were required to wear a scapular and the foundation document specifically details that two vests were to be given to each nun upon her tonsure.¹⁹ Yet the scapular is not visible in any of the images of the illustrated *typikon*. Four out of the five Late Byzantine icons of the saintly nun Theodosia from Mt. Sinai depict her in a scapular, which peeks out beneath her cloak. In one bust icon it is impossible to tell for sure, but the cuffs of Theodosia's tunic, which are white, suggest that the black cloth beneath her cloak is a separate garment, which is likely to be a scapular. The apparent absence of the scapular in literary descriptions can, paradoxically, be attributed to it being worn often. Many references to nuns refer to their wearing or taking the habit, which must have included the scapular if the *typika* are to be believed. The remaining *typika* that do not specify the wearing of a scapular, but instead reference the *schema* in general terms; in these descriptions the scapular must have been understood as an integral part of the *schema*.

Similarly, proper headgear may have been assumed to be part of the *schema* in the *typika* as well, as it is mentioned less often than one might expect. No image exists of a nun without a covered head so there is no question of the importance of the headgear to the habit. Stories of cross-dressing nuns grapple with the issue of women, dressed as monks, walking around with uncovered heads, attesting to the importance of veiling. For example when the late fifth-century St. Matrona of Perge is discovered to be a woman, she is sure to tell the abbot that she always pulled her cloak over her head in church, faking a headache so that the other men would not find it odd that she/he covered her/his head.²⁰ The abbot then "...bade her rest in one of the monastery's cells and, in compliance with the usage of her sex, to tie round her head [as a head covering] a piece of cloth that happened to be at hand."²¹ Note that getting her head covered superseded the need to have a proper type of veil.

Maphorion is a general term for veil and, like many of the terms discussed thus far, can be worn by monastics or the laity, male or female. It seems that in many cases, the form of the headgear is not important as long as a nun's hair did not show. However, in *typika* and descriptions of coenobitic nuns, the specific term σκέπη is used. The Greek word σκέπη literally means protection. It was used at times to refer to protective clothing, such as head or footwear.²² Interestingly though, it does not appear to be used to describe a nun's headgear until the Late Byzantine period. Prior to this time, the term *maphorion* was used instead, which suggests that a *skepe* is a distinct type of headgear that evolves over time. In the *typika* of the convent of Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople founded around 1300,²³ the author defines a *skepe*, comparing it to the lay turban (*phakiolion*), which suggests perhaps that it was not a well-known use of the word.²⁴ The *skepe* is a veil that appears to have a wrapped, sometimes squarish structure, placed over the crown of the head, and may have

wound under the chin as well. The nun Theodosia wears this same head covering in the five icons at Mt. Sinai and in the British Museum's *Triumph of Orthodoxy* icon. All of these representations are Late Byzantine, one from the thirteenth century and four of the fourteenth and later centuries. In portraits of women who are identifiable as nuns, only Late Byzantine images show headgear with the more voluminous turban-like structure, as opposed to a simple veil, thus the *skepe* is a Late Byzantine development in headgear. The *maphorion* was the accepted headgear for a nun prior to this time and continued to be used for novices throughout the late period.

While it is not explicitly stated in any *typikon*, I posit that the additional use of the *skepe* evolved as part of a ranking system in the dress of nuns. The *skepe* was worn only by initiated nuns, and perhaps even the highest ranking among them, while the *maphorion* remained for novices and lower-ranking nuns. The group portrait in the *Lincoln College Typikon* depicts a group of thirty-two nuns. The novices in the foreground wear white, brown and black veils, *maphoria*, whose color possibly distinguishes their age and/or their ranks. The majority of the nuns in the upper registers wear black *skepe*. In Byzantine society in general, the use of hats becomes more prevalent over time, and the variety of hats increases beginning in the Middle period.²⁵ It is entirely likely that the shift in the headgear for nuns coincides with this larger fashion phenomenon. In the Early Byzantine period, religious women may have been easily distinguished from the laity by the fact that they wore veils. As head coverings became more common, it was necessary for female monastics to stand out from laywomen in new ways, adding garments such as the scapular and *skepe* to their repertoire of dress.

A *koukoulion*, or hood, provided another option for coenobitic nuns to set themselves apart from laywomen. The

koukoulion was also worn by monks, often with a mark of one's monastery on it.²⁶ The male version of the garment was independent from the cloak or other garment and could be worn resting on the shoulders or pulled over the head. The few literary references to nuns wearing *koukoulia* make it difficult to discern if this was a standard part of the *schema* for women and if it had the exact same form as the men's *koukoulion*. Theodora of Thessaloniki (812-892)²⁷ wore one as part of her burial clothes. We can assume that she was buried in her *schema*, given the other garments mentioned, the *sticharion* and scapular. No other headgear is mentioned, so this might have been an alternative to the *skepe*. We can glean from reading Palladius that it was common for an early fifth-century nun to wear a hood when going outside the convent. "She was never willing to take a new garment, hood, or shoes, but said, 'I have no need for them unless I must go out' The others all go out every Sunday to church for Communion, but she stays behind in her cell dressed in rags, ever sitting at her work."²⁸ This passage suggests that hoods are for outdoor wear and may have been worn in addition to, rather than instead of, a *skepe* or *maphorion*.

Asceticism

All nuns practiced asceticism to some degree or other. Even coenobitic nuns, who lived in relative comfort when compared to desert-dwelling solitaries, renounced material goods and restricted their eating in some form. Dressing provided a natural venue for ascetic practices, which is especially evident in the lives of saints. To begin with, nuns of any type had few clothes. Tropes abound in Saints' Lives related to the renunciation of clothing. A paradigm of poor dress in which the saint rids herself of fine clothing including jewelry, and then dons ragged clothes, exists in most *vitae*. Typically, there is also a moment of tension where another garment is needed - for proper burial, for presentation to an

outsider, or because the saints' ragged garments had been destroyed due to long wear. At this point the author dramatically notes that the saint only has the clothes on her back. Irene of Chrysobalanton living in the ninth century serves as an example,

The necklaces and jewels she [Irene] wore, and all other things that she kept as imperial gifts ever since she had been liberally received by the Empress, all these she willingly either distributed to the poor and to her own servants or brought to the convent as an offering to God. Then she had her hair shorn, and with it was shorn too, all her mundane and earthly concern. She also changed her dress, arraying herself in a ragged hair shirt, as she wished to wear out that tender and delicate body to have a soul that was renewed and flourished....²⁹

Later the story continues,

But as the Saint did not possess another garment but the one that the flame had consumed together with her precious flesh, the laudable disciple went away, and bringing a garment of her own dressed her spiritual mother. For it was also a part of her virtues not to possess a second dress, but once a year at Easter, on the great Holy Thursday, to leave off the one she had been wearing all the year and don a new one, handing the old garment over to some poor woman.³⁰

The practice of wearing one set of clothes until they are worn goes back to the very beginnings of monasticism, as seen for example in the writings of Shenoute (ca. 348-464).³¹ The women in this early monastery, as the men, gave up their clothing to the double monastery upon entrance and in return were given one outfit that was like everyone else's. The in-

tent here was not so much to designate that they had chosen a life of poverty, but rather to avoid jealousy: "...ignorant people may not be inhabited by covetousness for a beautiful garment, or a covering, or a cloak, or anything like this, and so that no one shall say that anything as their own possession."³² This practice was continued in organized monastic communities, as *typika* demonstrate. Monastic documents refer to rules to curb jealousies between monks and nuns. However, the greater emphasis on vows of poverty in *typika* when compared with early monastic writings, such as that of Shenoute, suggest that the appearance of poverty became increasingly important. In the *typikon* of Philanthropos (ca. 1307)³³ the author, Irene Laskarina Palaiologina, who acknowledges copying the twelfth-century rule of *Kecharitomene*, states that the vows of poverty were "omitted...because of their length."³⁴

Doling out new clothes merely once a year was undoubtedly extreme and must not always have been the practice. The convents at Lips and Anargyroi (both *typika* dated 1294-1301)³⁵ for example, both gave out clothes seasonally. Most of the convents mention bans on personal property in their rules. As so many women joined convents after having had full lives, often after being widowed or in less likely cases divorced, the practice of giving up one's clothes was a necessary step to keep uniformity in the convent. Many of the *typika*'s rules however point to this not always being the case. For example, the *typikon* of the convent of *Kecharitomene* (dated 1110-16)³⁶ specifies that bequests could only be used to accommodate more nuns, and could not go towards bettering the lifestyle of the individual. Similarly the Lips *typikon* noted that only liturgical cloths could be accepted as gifts. The implication in these rules is that nuns tried to obtain extra clothing through gifts from the outside world. The ascetic renunciation of clothing, therefore, was most likely an ideal not always followed by

those who could afford to bend the rules.

Going back to the paradigmatic example of Irene, another common thread in the *vita* is the hair shirt. Irene took on this garment to "wear out [her] tender and delicate body."³⁷ The hair shirt, worn either underneath the tunic or in place of the tunic, was the ascetic's garment of choice. A hair shirt was probably more akin to a pelt – hot, scratchy, unprocessed wool probably from a goat, rather than a sheep, which were commonly bred for finer, softer wool. St. Athanasia of Aegina wore an "inner garment [of] goat hair "shirt", which irritated her flesh with its roughness, and her outer "clothing" was a ragged garment of sheep wool; and this "former garment" was the unseen one and was covering her sacred body."³⁸ Sackcloth – coarse, undyed wool – was also common and served a similar function as the hair shirt. More often than not, hair shirts were worn under the tunic in order not to promote a certain pride in one's ascetic practice. When worn alone, it was the nun's only garment and a more extreme expression of piety. For example, Palladius' *Lausiac History* of the sixth century describes Synclectica of Palestine's garment of hair as comprising her habit, on its own.³⁹

Other ascetic practices were more extreme and were less common for women than men. The wearing of chains and restrictive girdles or belts for example. Self-mortification was the domain of men, so it is not surprising that chains, girded loins, and the like were rare in the dress of Byzantine nuns and female ascetics.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, they were used from time to time according to *vitae*. Theodora of Kaisaris (700-50) wears chains, for example.⁴¹ St. Matrona of Perge, living at the end of the fifth century, wore a leather belt, "...he [the Abbott Bassianos] did not give her woolen girdles and veils, such as women are accustomed to use, but wide, dark leather men's girdles and white men's cloaks, which they wear constantly."⁴² While the *vita* describes Matrona as first dressing as a monk during her stay in a male monastery, at a later point

in her life she wears these "men's girdles and white men's cloaks" when serving as the abbess of a convent. Of course, the leather as opposed to wool girdle underlines her more fervent ascetic practice. Belts were tightened to help with abstaining from food and possibly also onanism, although masturbation was considered largely to be a male problem. Evagrius (ca. 536-ca. 600) describes the symbolism of the belt, "The belt which they [the male monks] wear about their loins signifies their rejection of all impurity and proclaims that 'it is a good thing for man not to touch a woman.'"⁴³ The Canons of Maruta, of the early fifth-century, dictated that monks sleep with girdles on to prevent masturbation.⁴⁴ Wool girdles, more often worn by women, according to Matrona's biographer, probably served these same functions, albeit in a gentler manner.

Shoes are somewhat of a mystery because they are rarely seen in pictorial images. Nuns, if they are represented in full-figure, are covered by long tunics falling to the ground. Sandals, when they are described in literary sources, are mentioned but with no clues as to the form of the sandal. The fourth-century Saint Macrina is described in "worn sandals" without further comment.⁴⁵ A few *typika* refer generally to shoes, however, suggesting that sandals were not the only option. The convent of Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople provided its nuns with two new pairs of shoes a year that were "suitable for women like yourselves."⁴⁶ This must refer to shoes that were modest in some way, in style, coverage, material or some combination thereof. In the eastern Mediterranean, sandals would not have been practical year round, so warmth must have been a consideration as well. The nuns at the Lips convent, also in Constantinople, were granted a generous three pairs of shoes a year. Two pair were shoes simply to protect the feet, but the third pair was "looser and high enough to cover the legs..."⁴⁷ Leggings tied just below the knee, with slipper soles, rather than leather

ones, are known as part of ecclesiastical dress.⁴⁸ These types of leggings, which may have been worn by laity as well, are loose and high, fitting the prescription of the *typika*. Furthermore, leather, due to its expense is not likely to have been intended here; in addition, the author would probably have termed them "boots" if he were referring to leather shoes that covered the leg.

Form and Meaning of the Schema

Color is a crucial element in fully understanding the nun's habit. Color was likely to have been the primary factor in distinguishing a nun's *schema* from a laywoman's cloak and tunic. The assumptions made by scholars about color have blinded us from the full range of choices in habit. Furthermore, color relates in some cases to the meaning of the *schema*.

The vast majority of surviving icons and other painted images of nuns depict the *schema* as black or at least dark brown or blue. Past authors, writing on the topic of the nun's *schema*, have time and again stated that nuns' habits were black, without qualification.⁴⁹ This is reinforced by certain literary sources and surely, many garments worn by nuns, although maybe not the entire habit, were black. Speaking of Emperor Romanos' (r. 1028-34) first wife before he married the Empress Zoe (r. 1042), Michael Psellos (ca. 1017-1078), for example, describes her being forced into a convent and thus freeing her husband to marry the Empress, "Her hair was cut off, she was clothed in the nun's robe of black, and admitted into the nunnery, while her husband was taken up to the palace, to wed into the imperial family."⁵⁰ Only two *typika* prescribe the color of garments. The Bebaia Elpis *typikon* required a black *himation* (over a white under-tunic). The nearly contemporary Lips convent, however, required simply white tunics. Neither *typikon* specifies a color for the nun's cloak, only noting that they be made of wool, which

implies that the wool was undyed. Undyed wool would vary from off-white to brown or gray. Black very likely just meant dark in color, as pure black was extremely difficult to achieve in the dying process and expensive to make.⁵¹ Many nuns whom we now see pictured in art wearing dark brown, hunter green, midnight blue or even deep purple cloaks may have been described as wearing black by their contemporaries.

Digging further into the literary and pictorial record, however, a wider range of color emerges. An examination of nuns' portraits demonstrates the variety in color choice, especially in the cloak. An icon from the second half of the thirteenth century representing St. Phevronia, now at Mt. Sinai, depicts her in a brown cloak. She wears a reddish-brown cloak over a white tunic in an icon with the Virgin from 1400, now at the Louvre. The nuns in the Lincoln Typikon wear a bluish black cloak. In a late thirteenth-century fresco found in the Vlacherna monastery in Arta depicting the procession of the Hodegetria icon, what I argue are a group of nuns stand, on the left, in red cloaks with white *skepe*, led by their abbess dressed in bright blue. Finally, a double-sided icon late fourteenth/early fifteenth century icon with St. Anastasia, today in the Hermitage, shows Anastasia in a rich green *maphorion*.

Dovetailing nicely with the visual sources, writers of the day mention the same wide variety of colors. St. Athanasia of Aegina wore sheep's wool, which is generally light-colored in its natural state. At one point in her story, she is dressed by her fellow nuns in a gray garment.⁵² Paternuthios in the fourth century is among the first to outline what the monastic habit consisted of: a hood, sleeveless tunic belted with linen cloth and a sheepskin.⁵³ The Pachomian rules, also of the fourth century, are similar.⁵⁴ While these reference early Egyptian monks, most of these first Egyptian communities had monks as well as nuns. At this time and place we can

assume that the women were wearing the same garments as the men, for no distinctions were made when women are mentioned in the texts. Natural, undyed fabrics were inexpensive, in keeping with vows of poverty, and more easily made. Additionally, the undyed garment is light in color, which is more appropriate for the desert climes of Egypt, where the first *schema* developed.

The white tunics of the nuns at the Lips convent, mentioned earlier, could point to another meaning ascribed to the habit, that of purity. In the first eight days after baptism, it was customary to wear white robes.⁵⁵ The white robes of religious women may have signified being 'born again' without sin, as it did for the newly baptized. Adult baptism gave way to infant baptisms in the seventh-century,⁵⁶ but the association between the color white and a sinless state surely did not disappear. For example, much is made in the story of the pious housewife, Mary the Younger, about the saint's renunciation of her bright, multi-colored dresses.⁵⁷ At burial she only had one white linen garment remaining, despite her wealth, having given all of her other garments away to the poor. After her death, she appears to a male artist living as a recluse and asks him to paint her portrait. In it we learn she wears a "white garment and a red headdress"⁵⁸ which we can assume was her standard garb in her capacity as a holy woman because her portrait was easily recognized when sent back to her town of Vizye where she had become famous for her miracles. White here stands in opposition to her colorful dresses, suggesting a purity befitting her pious position.

The red headdress worn by St. Mary the Younger may point to her noble status as Jaroslav Folda has suggested.⁵⁹ For example, St. Marina, the third-century martyred virgin, is always pictured in a red veil, as seen for example in the thirteenth century icon of her from the Menil collection⁶⁰ (fig. 1) or in mosaic in the narthex of Hosios Loukas Katholikon from the late tenth or early eleventh century. Another third-

century aristocratic nun, St. Agatha, who was from an important family in Sicily, also wears a red veil in her eleventh-century portrait at Hosios Loukas.

St. Mary the Younger's father, brother and husband served in the military and her husband was known for his efforts against the Bulgarians.⁶¹ But her *vita* does not suggest that she is high born by Byzantine standards, so we may consider another meaning for the red veil, that of a bride of Christ. In the fourth century when St. Macrina's brother, Gregory, dressed her for burial, he chose a red dress, the color of a bride, befitting her status as 'bride of Christ' to wear beneath a black cloak.⁶² The many portraits of nuns in which they wear red veils perhaps refers to bridal garments rather than their aristocratic upbringing. A menologium icon for August of ca. 1200, now in the collection of St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai, depicts six female saints dressed as nuns, four of them in red headdresses. St. Marina, whose martyrdom is celebrated on August 16 is one of those wearing red in the icon. Several portraits survive of her in which she wears the signature red *maphorion* over a dark tunic. These include an eleventh to twelfth century icon from Sinai in which she stands with St. Catherine. Marina, like St. Macrina, she was a virgin.

Color might also indicate climate. The island of Aegina, off the coast of Attica, was the home of St. Athanasia, who wore light, natural-colored wool garments, as mentioned earlier. The labor performed by Athanasia and her fellow rural nuns might have recommended that they wear light clothing as compared with the urban nuns of Constantinople's convent of Bebaia Elpis, who wore black. Furthermore, on an island, choice of colors and fabrics may have been limited and thus color might also signify relative access to markets. At the White Monastery in Egypt, the men and women following Shenoute in the late fourth and early fifth century, harvested and wove flax for their clothing, as well as to support the

monastery. While in one letter Shenoute himself complains to the weavers about his ill-fitting garment, one decorated with red fringe, even though he required that everyone else dress alike.⁶³ Flax garments would be golden in color if left undyed, which we can assume to be the case as no other colors are mentioned. The lighter color would be preferable in the Egyptian desert, so it was a practical choice as well.

The choice of these garments for the *schema*, and the codification of these articles of clothing grew organically based on nearby models and on what was practical, taking their cues from the male habit. The earliest monastic rules such as those by Pachomius and Basil the Great both of the fourth century, wrote with an audience of men in mind, despite the fact that the monasteries also had female followers. St. Macrina was the first exemplar of coenobitic living for women, but given that she was Basil the Great's sister, her mode of dress seems to have been in accordance with Basil's dictates. Most early models for hermetic living were also men, Antony the Great being the most famous example.⁶⁴ Thus women's monasticism developed in parallel with male monasticism including the *schema* for both genders. The garments discussed above, save for the *skepe*, could have been worn by men or women (tunics, cloaks, and scapulars), although they may have had gender distinctions in cut or details, differences which are now lost to us. Hair shirts and other garments for ascetics come directly from the male wardrobe with no gender differentiation as far as can be determined.

Did a Uniform Exist for Byzantine Nuns?

While these early monastic rules contributed to a codification of the *schema*, the question of whether or not nuns wore a uniform should be considered. The conventional wisdom has been that Byzantine nuns did not wear a uniform, as did nuns in the Medieval West because they were not part of orders that prescribed specific garments and colors. The rules

found in Byzantine *typika* as well as those of early monastic leaders, have been viewed more as a dress code, one in which parameters were set for propriety's sake.

Uniforms are distinct from a simple dress code in several ways, according to scholars who study theories of uniforms. Jennifer Craik, for instance, notes that uniforms carry with them the risk of punishment when not worn correctly.⁶⁵ What comes to mind for us in modern society are military uniforms which are not only issued by the military, but have to be worn in precisely the correct way or a soldier risks punishment. *Typika* stress obedience to the superior, but it is not possible to discern what consequences there were for not following the rules of dress. Finally, uniforms typically fit into a hierarchy as markers of rank. Divisions based on headgear – the *maphorion* and the *skepe* – and possibly the use of the scapular were used to distinguish choir nuns from novices. Due to modern manufacturing, uniforms are now identical. Byzantine standards are another matter. I argue that when the color, fabric, and cut were the same the garments would be considered identical, in other words, a uniform.

Five out of the six surviving *typika* for convents demonstrate that convents provided clothing for the nuns, further supporting the idea that the habit was a true uniform. Women were more restricted than men in their ability to leave the grounds of the convent and one *typikon* – from the Convent of the Mother of God Pantanassa at Baionaia on Crete written in ca. 1400 – dictated that nuns could not buy or sell any goods, nor could their relatives do it for them, without the presence of the superior. Naturally, if convents restricted the movement of the nuns, they had to compensate by supplying necessities to them, including clothing. Women were encouraged to turn over their clothing upon entrance to the convent for various purposes such as donating clothing to the poor or other nuns. This Late Byzantine rule

follows early patristic writings such as Shenoute and Basil the Great, who both suggest that clothing be commonly held and discouraged individual ownership of such items.

Conclusions

Pulling together these findings on color, the garments themselves, as well as the information about how garments were acquired allows us to draw some conclusions about the *schema* of Byzantine religious women. No matter where or when one lived, all women who took up the religious life wore simple garments of tunics, cloak, and headgear, usually of wool or coarse linen. In the beginnings of monasticism in the fourth century, the first nuns in Egypt and later Palestine and Syria, wore undyed or white garments, both made from local flax or wool. Early nuns wore veils, *maphoria*, and additionally may have worn a *koukoulion* (hood) to cover the head when outside of the convent. The undyed garments embodied poverty, as dye was expensive. When garments are referred to in the literary record as white, they may also mean simply light in color, or undyed textiles. The use of white, whether a true white or an off white, connoted purity and living a life free of sin. White remains a color chosen by certain groups of nuns throughout Byzantine history, but especially those living in warmer climates, where it may have been more practical to wear lightly colored clothing.

The hair shirt, worn by the very first desert fathers, was also worn by ascetic women, as well as by some coenobitic nuns. The hair shirt's rough texture served as a true renunciation of the material world, embodied in soft fabrics. Additionally, the hair shirt recalled John the Baptist, the original wearer of the garment in the Christian world. In reality the distinction between the hair shirt and some undyed coarse wool garment or sackcloth was probably slight and certainly the two fabrics carried the same meaning.

By the Middle Byzantine period, nuns' garments are commonly referred to as black, which as mentioned earlier, to our eyes would simply be dark in color, not necessarily a true black. The earliest reference to black clothing is in the Vita of St. Macrina of 380-3. She dons the "black cloak of a monastic."⁶⁶ As the pictorial record is scant before the Middle Byzantine era, it is hard to say how many nuns chose black as compared to white or undyed garments; the literary record indicates that the lighter colors were favored early on. By the ninth century, however, the pictorial record along with literary descriptions demonstrates that the black/dark cloak was most common among nuns. It is important to point out that while black was most often used for cloaks, the variation in the color of the tunic in all periods is much greater, with white, gray, and red seen throughout the pictorial and literary record.

Brides of Christ, committed virgins living alone or in groups, may have worn red to indicate their status as brides, as did St. Macrina, who was buried in red dress. The red veil was the most common choice of red garment. I posit that the red color pointed to the nun's status as bride of Christ, rather than simply her possible noble lineage, although the two often went hand in hand, as with St. Marina.

The nun's veil, *maphorion*, remained relatively unchanged throughout the Byzantine era, although some nuns wore a dark veil, and others white or red, as discussed above. In the Late Byzantine period, the veil takes on a more voluminous form like that of a turban. This is what is known as the *skepe*, which is reserved for the highest-ranking coenobitic nuns. The development of the *skepe* parallels the introduction of the turban into Byzantine dress for both men and women more generally.⁶⁷ It is not surprising that similarities between lay and monastic garments would develop as nuns so often led full lives as laywomen before entering monastic life.

The Byzantine women's monastic *schema* can thus be described as a uniform. Instead of denoting a particular community or convent, the color signified the type of nun and/or locale – committed virgin, ascetic, coenobitic urban nun, or desert dwelling nun. Their headgear came to signal their rank. Symbolically, the garments embodied the vows of poverty and obedience taken by the nuns, either formally or informally. These prescriptions for dress were codified in a literal sense in *typika*, which enforced the wearing of this uniform. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly for our understanding of the function of the *schema* in Byzantine society, the uniform habit was written into the literary record and painted into the standardized images of nuns seen especially in icons of holy women. The Byzantine viewer identified a nun by her garments and accordingly understood who she was, where she came from, and her rank.

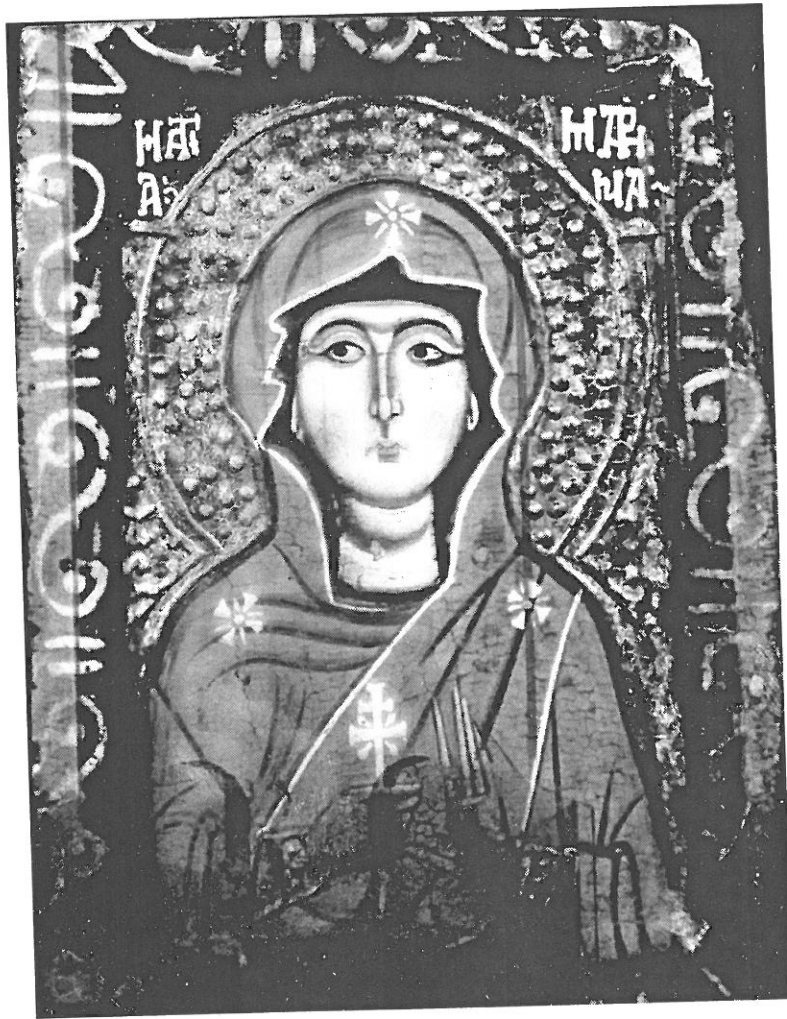


Fig. 1: St. Marina icon, Menil collection, 13th c. (accession number 85-57.04 DJ)

Notes

¹ Two recent examples of sources that describe the *schema* in this way are, C. Connor, *Women of Byzantium*, (New Haven, 2004), 168 and A.M. Talbot, "nun" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, A. P. Kazhdan ed., (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

² On types of 'nuns', see A.M. Talbot, "Female Sanctity in Byzantium" in *Women and Religious Life in Byzantium*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishers, 2001), 1-16.

³ R.T. Mayer, ed., *Palladius, The Lausiaca History*, (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1965), 140.

⁴ D. Mouriki, "Portraits of St. Theodosia in Five Sinai Icons," in *Thymiamas te Mneme tes Laskarinas Boura*, (Athens: Benaki Press, 1994), 213 ff.

⁵ H. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7. Maguire demonstrates that Saints' lives show a practice of artists painting portraits from life. We cannot know if devotional images in churches and manuscripts were done in this way, but there is some evidence that they could have been.

⁶ S.T. Tovar, "The Terminology of Egyptian Monastic Garments," in *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium 400-1453*, Michael Gruenbart et al. eds., (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 219-224.

⁷ As inἐσθήτα μεταμφιεσμένη τὴν μελαινα...." E. Renauld ed., *Michel Psellos Chronographie*, (Paris, 1926,) II:10.

⁸ T. Vivian, "A Woman in the Desert: Synclectica of Palestine" in *Journeying into God: Seven Early Monastic Lives*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 46.

⁹ J.P. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 1383-8.

¹⁰ There are exceptions among laity; women who are shown doing manual labor are occasionally shown in a three-quarter length tunic, such as on the tenth- to eleventh-century ivory plaque from a casket depicting Adam and Eve at the forge, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 17.190.139.

¹¹ J. Ball, *Byzantine Dress: Representations of Secular Dress in Eighth- to Twelfth-Century Painting*, The New Middle Ages Series, (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 98-100.

¹² An exception here may be *idiorrhythmic* monks and/or monks who labored and served the choir brothers, *diakonetai*, both of whom I posit wore short garments. This idea was first presented in *Decoding the Monastic Habit in Image and Text*, for The First Kallinikeion Conference of New York Byzantinists, Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek

Studies, Queens College, April 2007.

- ¹³ A.E. Laiou, "Life of St. Mary the Younger," in *Holy Women of Byzantium*, A.M. Talbot ed., (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 239.
- ¹⁴ L.F. Sherry, "Life of St. Athanasia of Aegina," in *Holy Women*, 139.
- ¹⁵ Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Trans. by H. J. Magoulias, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 47. Choniates describes Kosmas a deacon from Aegina, "He was so eager to demonstrate his pity for mankind that he gave the indigent his cloak, sometimes the tunic that covered his body, and his linen-covered head-dress, as well as providing beggars and those who collected alms for the needy with goods from his own dwelling."
- ¹⁶ Sherry, "St. Athanasia," in *Holy Women*, 144.
- ¹⁷ J.O. Rosenqvist, ed., *The life of St. Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell Int. [distributor]. 1986), 18.
- ¹⁸ Currently, Orthodox monks and nuns must wear a scapular (in modern Greek, *schema*), which is likely the reason why it has been assumed to be part of the habit in the medieval period.
- ¹⁹ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1551.
- ²⁰ J. Featherstone and C. Mango, "Life of St. Matrona of Perge" in *Holy Women*, 26.
- ²¹ Featherstone and Mango, "St. Matrona," 28.
- ²² E.A. Sophocles *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, (NY: F. Ungar Publishing Company, 1957) and H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). Notably the term *skepe* is not found in G.W.H. Lampe's *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* which generally has more complete entries for monastic terms.
- ²³ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1512.
- ²⁴ "I give the name of 'skepai' to these head coverings which you term 'phakiolia' and 'magoulikia' in the popular idiom." Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1551.
- ²⁵ Ball, *Byzantine Dress*, 46-9.
- ²⁶ B. Bitton-Askelony and A. Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006), 190, and Tovar, "Egyptian Monastic Garments," 221.
- ²⁷ A.M. Talbot, "Life of St. Theodora Of Thessalonike," in *Holy Women*, 159.
- ²⁸ Mayer, *Palladius*, 140
- ²⁹ Rosenqvist, *St. Irene*, 14-15.
- ³⁰ Rosenqvist, *St. Irene*, 49.
- ³¹ R. Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002),

- ³² Krawiec, *Shenoute*, 24, n. 99.
- ³³ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1383
- ³⁴ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1388.
- ³⁵ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1254 and 1287.
- ³⁶ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 649.
- ³⁷ Rosenqvist, *St. Irene*, 15.
- ³⁸ Sherry, "St. Athanasia of Aegina," 154
- ³⁹ Vivian, "Synectica of Palestine," 51.
- ⁴⁰ P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 262-3.
- ⁴¹ Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography database, "Theodora of Kaisaris," A.M. Talbot, ed., 356, lines 14-15.
- ⁴² Featherstone and Mango, "St. Matrona," 63.
- ⁴³ Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, *Cistercian Studies Series*, Number 4, J.E. Bamberger trans., (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publishers, 1981), 14.
- ⁴⁴ Bitton-Askelony and Kofsky, *Monastic school of Gaza*, 189.
- ⁴⁵ Connor, *Women*, 26.
- ⁴⁶ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1551.
- ⁴⁷ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Foundation Documents*, 1276.
- ⁴⁸ There are several examples in Bayerisches National Museum, *Sakrale Gewänder des Mittelalters*, (Munich, 1955).
- ⁴⁹ See note 1.
- ⁵⁰ Translation from Greek mine. Greek text in Renauld, *Michel Psellos Chronographie*, II:10. Καὶ ἡ μὲν τὰς τε τρίχας ἀποτμηθεῖσα καὶ ἐσθῆτα μεταμφιεσαμένη τὴν μέλαιναν, ἐπὶ τι καταγώγιον μετατίθεται, ὁ δὲ Ῥωμανὸς (τοῦτο γὰρ ὄνομα τῷ ἀνδρὶ) ἐπὶ τὰ βασίλεια πρὸς τὸ τοῦ βασιλέως κῆδος ἀναλαμβάνεται
- ⁵¹ J. Harvey, *Men in Black*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 55.
- ⁵² Sherry, "St. Athanasia," 154.
- ⁵³ Tovar, "Egyptian Monastic Garments," 219.
- ⁵⁴ Tovar, 219-224.
- ⁵⁵ S. Brock and S. Harvey, "Pelagia of Antioch" in *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, (Berkeley, 1998), 58.
- ⁵⁶ R. Taft, "Baptism," *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.
- ⁵⁷ Laiou, "Mary the Younger," *Holy Women*, 261 and 266-7.
- ⁵⁸ Laiou, "Mary the Younger," 272.
- ⁵⁹ J. Folda, "The Saint Marina Icon: Maniera Cypria, Lingua Franca, or Crusader Art?" in *Four Icons in the Menil Collection*, (Houston, 1992), 107-26.

⁶⁰ Menil Collection accession number 85-57.04 DJ.

⁶¹ Laiou, "Mary the Younger," 239.

⁶² Macrina is described in Connor, *Women*, 26, "You have in your hands everything she put away. Look at her cloak, look at the veil on her head, the worn sandals on her feet; this is her wealth, this is her fortune. Apart from what you see there is nothing laid by in hidden chests or chambers in reserve. She knew only one repository for her own wealth, the treasury of heaven." Later her burial garment, provided by her brother Gregory, is a red dress, the "dress of a bride" according to Connor and she wears a "black cloak of a monastic" over that. "She shone even in the dark mantle; God's power, I think, added even such grace to her body that, exactly as in the vision I had while dreaming, rays of light seemed to shine out from her beauty."

⁶³ Krawiec, *Shenoute*, 22 and 27, n. 60.

⁶⁴ P. Halsall, "Women's Bodies, Men's Souls: Sanctity and Gender in Byzantium," Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 1999. Halsall shows the number of female subjects of *vita* versus men and points to a decline in holy women throughout the Byzantine period, see especially Table 4.1, 112.

⁶⁵ J. Craik, "The Cultural Politics of the Uniform," *Fashion Theory*, 7:2 (2003), 128.

⁶⁶ Connor, *Women*, 26.

⁶⁷ Ball, *Byzantine Dress*, 65-67.

The Life of St. Anna/Euphemianos ¹

Introduction, Translation and Commentary

by

Vasileios Marinis

Introduction

St. Anna/Euphemianos belongs to an extraordinary group of Byzantine women who attained sanctity by disguising themselves as monks and living in male monasteries or in solitude.² The current catalogue comprises thirteen *vitae* of such women, ranging from the fifth to the ninth centuries. The number is large enough to justify the suggestion that transvestite nuns while unusual were not especially exceptional.³

Anna's *vita* is found in a single manuscript of the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* (Paris. gr. 1582, fourteenth century) at the end of the entry for October 29. The *vita*'s original composition is usually placed shortly after the saint's death in the first half of the ninth century. The only *terminus post quem* provided by the text itself is 806, the end of the patriarchate of Tarasios, who is referred to as "the patriarch of Constantinople at the time." The anonymous author of the *vita* was most certainly not someone who knew Anna personally, for the *vita* is vague in details of events, persons, and locations crucial to the saint's life. For example, Anna's uncle, who has a significant