



# Saints and Holy (Wo)Men in Byzantine Literature and Art

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Session 4: The Life in Monasteries: Ascetics, Monks and Nuns

# ■ The Life in Monasteries: Ascetics, Monks and Nuns

## Literary Analysis: the *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton (BHG 952)*, transl. by J.-O. Rosenqvist

After reading the text, you should be able to discuss the following topics based on specific passages from the text:

- Contextualization of the text: author; place, time and characters of the story
- Three phases in Irene's life:
  - 1. Secular life:** the bride-show and the encounter with Ioannikios (p. 9-13). Why is this encounter of great importance to Irene's life and the rest of the narrative?
  - 2. Monastic life (the life in the monastery):** Irene as a nun and as an abbess:
    - Irene's ascetic way of life, virtues and examples for imitation.
    - What does distinguish Irene from the other nuns of the convent? (p. 15-19)

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- Three phases in Irene's life: 2. Monastic life (continued):
  - Recognition of the advanced spirituality of Irene: admiration by the abbess (p. 18-19); the spiritual gift from God and her good reputation (p. 22-23); her teaching activity (p. 23); her succession as abbess (p. 23-29)
  - What is the meaning of the term “abbess’ double” introduced by S. Constantinou (see the relevant book chapter, p. 157-161)?
  - The acquisition of her new identity as an abbess: How is this presented in the text (p. 29-45 and 75-81) and commented by S. Constantinou (p. 134-138 and 143-144)?
  - Why do the demons call Irene “wooden/made of wood” (p. 45, see also Constantinou p. 140-143)?  
What does this characterization mean?

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- Three phases in Irene's life:
  - 2. Monastic life (continued):**
    - Spiritual supremacy of Irene in relation to the worldly/political authority: the episode with Irene and the emperor (p. 89-101)
  - 3. Death and sanctification:**
    - The dead body of Irene as a relic (p. 105-113)
- What is the role of Irene's body in her path to holiness? To answer this question, you should read the chapter by S. Constantinou (p. 127-161).