



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

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Session 6: Female Sanctity (including Imperial Sanctity)

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## Discussion of the article “The Literary Portrait of Byzantine Female Saints” by N. Delierneux

After reading the article, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- **Men vs. Women in Byzantium:** What was the opinion of Byzantines on female nature and how could women reach spiritual advancement and holiness? (p. 363)
- **1. ‘Female Sanctity within the Monastery’ (p. 364-371):** What are the qualities and virtues that an ascetic or monastic woman should have based on the various examples provided by Delierneux?
- Which are the most important stages in the life of Makrina that demonstrate her spiritual progress and holiness?
- Why is Theodora an unusual case of a monastic woman?
- What do we learn here about the *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton (BHG 952)* which we have already examined in a previous session?

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After reading the article, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What does distinguish holy cross-dressers from other nuns? Specify the unusual features presented in the *Life of Matrona* (BHG 1221).
- **2. ‘Saintly Hermits’ (p. 371-373):** What is the ascetic profile of a female hermit based on the examples provided by Delierneux? Which well-known example of a female hermit is mentioned here and why is it believed to have widely influenced the Byzantine audiences?
- **3. ‘Saintly Wives’ (p. 373-376):** How is the ideal of *celibacy* reconciled with *marriage* in the *Lives* of holy wives? Which are the different aspects of the reconciliation between these contrasting ideas?

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After reading the article, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- 4. ‘Imperial Sanctity’ (p. 376-378): Which examples of imperial women are investigated here? What does make the concept of sanctity in the *Lives* of holy empresses different? Consider the possible authors, the time of composition of the relevant *Lives* and the respective historico-political circumstances of the time.
- 5. ‘Female Martyrs’ (p. 379-380): Which categories of female martyrs are mentioned here? Explain. How would you categorize the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity (BHG 1482)* which was examined in a previous session?