

FAMA ET MEMORIA:
PORTRAITS OF FEMALE PATRONS IN MOSAIC
PAVEMENTS OF CHURCHES IN BYZANTINE
PALESTINE AND ARABIA
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When we think of portraits that memorialize the contributions of female donors to the construction and adornment of Byzantine churches, or to support their liturgical functions, the images that come to mind are likely lavish, impressive, and imperial.¹ These portraits, found in a small number of well-preserved churches, were executed in mosaic on the walls in carefully chosen locations within the building. Two well-known examples are the Theodora panel from San Vitale in Ravenna and the portrait of the Emperor Constantine IX and Empress Zoe in the southern gallery of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The women in such portraits are customarily depicted with male members of the imperial family, which gives visual representation to the social reality that their status, identity, and wealth were linked with men. Given the level of prestige associated with these donors and their donations, even without their portraits we would likely know a good deal about them and their acts of patronage from literary sources.² In contrast, female donor portraits in average churches (which neither received imperial funding nor attracted the attention of historians) are a valuable source of information concerning women's patterns of patronage in small towns and villages throughout the Byzantine Empire.

Unfortunately, many of these churches are either in a greatly deteriorated condition or no longer survive at all. Archaeology has made significant contributions to the discovery and identification of many churches but, due to their frequently poor state of preservation, any wall portraits they may have contained are no longer extant, and the question of their patronage often remains a mystery. Taken together, Byzantine Palestine and Arabia represent a unique exception. In these

provinces, churches have been discovered with mosaic floor pavements that contain portraits of donors, both male and female. The churches in which such pavements have been found are located in two regions: in the northwestern Negev desert between Be'er Shev'a and Gaza, which was part of the Byzantine province of Palaestina Prima, and to the east and northeast of the Dead Sea in the former province of Arabia.

The present study concentrates on the patronage of women in these eastern Byzantine provinces during the sixth century as evidenced by their portraits and inscriptions. These were certainly women of means, albeit neither members of the imperial court nor senatorial *matronae* (married woman). Rather, these women represent a middle group that is virtually absent in scholarship on Byzantine women, which has focused almost exclusively on women of the imperial family and its circle.³ When scholars have turned their attention to non-elite women, they have tended to move to the opposite end of the spectrum, for example, by attempting hypothetical reconstructions of peasants' lives.⁴ The lack of a middle ground is understandable: as a distinct "class," these women are virtually invisible in the material and literary records.⁵ Yet these trends also result from the relatively limited number of scholarly approaches to the study of Byzantine women.⁶ As Liz James notes, "Within historicising subjects such as history, art history, Byzantine studies and archaeology, the proposition that feminist studies should be the study of named, individual women...frequently underlies much research."⁷ Efforts have been made to reconstruct the socio-economic world of Byzantine women in order to better understand their economic status, legal position, and activities in the public, religious, and private spheres.⁸ However, this approach dangerously assumes an overall consistency and continuity of social experience.⁹ By avoiding overarching generalizations about "women's experience," we may, in fact, be able to recover something of the conditions for experience among various groups of women.¹⁰

We know that women in Byzantine Palestine and Arabia acted as patrons of churches, but that is not enough to understand the "reality" of their lives. What did it mean to be a female

patron? How was that role constructed and what motivated women's donations? "Women aren't enough" for this next stage of analysis, and gender studies—which integrates both men and women—has an important role to play.¹¹ Women may not always be present in the historical record, but gender is—and it can be used to explain absences. As James avers, "That which is absent can be used to define what is present and women's absences can be as telling as their presence."¹² In the case of our female donors, women are present in formal but absent from informal portraits, whereas men are found in both categories, a telling difference. While a wealthy *matrona* might have possessed personal power and authority, she could only exercise it on behalf of a shared interest: her family's honor, prestige, and piety. Similarly, opportunities for women's self-expression were both limited and tightly controlled. Women of rank were expected to set an example for their "social inferiors."¹³ For late Roman and Byzantine women, identity was not based upon who they themselves thought they were but, rather, upon who others thought they were. For *matronae*, standing was dependent upon *fama* (reputation), which was negotiated by class, wealth, and the projection of moral excellence.¹⁴ Furthermore, emulation of social elites was key to the activities of prosperous yet non-elite women of Palestine and Arabia, including their appearance in portraits. In turn, elite women imitated the imperial court and imperial women adopted the emblems of wealth employed by elite men, such as the *mappa* (a folded piece of cloth used ceremonially to signal the start of competitions in the hippodrome).¹⁵ Thus, for a number of reasons, as James aptly concludes, "Women alone are not enough in understanding women's lives in Byzantium."¹⁶

PORTRAITS IN MOSAIC PAVEMENTS

Portraits in floor mosaics can be broadly divided into two types: formal (either portrait busts, or static, full-length figures as in Fig. 1) and informal. Informal portraits, such as the portrait in the pavement of the nave of the Church of the Deacon Thomas in the 'Ayun Musa valley (Fig. 2), capture the donor engaged in the routine activities of daily life.¹⁷ The main field of the nave

mosaic is paved with an inhabited vine scroll composition. In the center scroll of the second row, a man identified as “Stephanos” turns to confront a lion. “Stephanos” is the only figure who is identified in this composition, which contains scenes of hunting, wine-making, and pastoralism. Without the inscription, nothing would indicate that this is a portrait. There are many similar pavements in this region and throughout the Near East, in which none of the participants is singled out. For example, the nearby mid sixth-century Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius in Khirbet el-Mukhayyat (Fig. 3) clearly draws from the same repertory of images, but here the participants perform their duties in anonymity.¹⁸

The subject of the present study is formal portraiture, for no informal portraits of women have been discovered. Women are formally presented in either bust or full-length form. In some cases, the portraits are accompanied by inscriptions that provide information concerning the identity of the donor. In some instances, when a formal portrait is not accompanied by an inscription, there might be an inscription located in another area of the church which makes it possible to identify its subject. In the portraits, women may be depicted alone, with men, and with other women.

The fifth-century Church of Amos and Kasiseus, located at Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, has a chapel adjacent to its north side. The chapel contains two superimposed levels of mosaic pavements, evidence that it was renovated at least once. The uppermost mosaic pavement of the chapel, which lies above the fifth-century floor, contains a dedicatory inscription at the eastern end of the main carpet which records that the chapel was “renewed and finished by the priest John” in the month of August in the 13th indiction, or 565 (Fig. 4). Only a portion of the hall is extant and the mosaic floor has sustained considerable damage. Nonetheless, two portraits have survived. The main carpet of the mosaic is surrounded by a geometric border made up of a regular pattern of squares. The majority of the squares are inhabited by birds, with two important exceptions. The central squares in the northern and eastern borders contain portrait busts of a cleric and

a woman (Figs. 5 & 6). The portraits are not accompanied by inscriptions; however, a second inscription located in the church assists in the identification of these benefactors and contributes to a hypothetical reconstruction of the damaged portion of the pavement with two additional female donors.

The second inscription, placed between the columns of an architectural façade located in the eastern portion of the main field, reads: “For the salvation of, and as a present of, your servant Sergius, the son of Stephanos, and Procopius, the son of Porphyria, and Roma, and Mary, and Julian, the monk.”¹⁹ It seems reasonable to suggest that the northern portrait depicts the monk, Julian, and the eastern either Porphyria, Roma, or Mary. Moreover, it is likely that there were originally two additional portraits, one in the southern border and another in the western, representing the other two women. A symmetrical arrangement of this sort would be consistent with the prevailing compositional principles followed by mosaicists in the sixth century.²⁰ Significantly, the same trio of women served as benefactresses of the nearby Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius, dedicated in 557. An inscription placed in the southeast aisle of the church reads, “O Saint Lot, receive the prayer of Roma and Porphyria and Mary, your servants.”²¹ The women were probably residents of the area around Mt. Nebo, were clearly prosperous, and apparently eager to display their status and piety in donations to several churches.

Byzantine women controlled substantial amounts of property.²² Marriage arrangements were dependent upon the dowry of the bride: the groom had to be able to match the value of her family’s portion.²³ The groom’s contribution included property as well as personal gifts such as clothes, shoes, and jewelry.²⁴ A wife controlled her maternal dowry and any personal gifts during her husband’s lifetime, but gained control of the land only after his death. Apparel formed a significant part of the wedding contract and for good reason: a woman’s status was determined by her personal appearance. The female portrait bust at Khirbet el-Mukhayyat is consistent with this understanding of women’s experience: she is elegantly attired and her jewelry—a

gem-studded tiara, pearl-drop earrings, necklace and jeweled fibula—is prominently displayed. Her head is surrounded by a large nimbus in various shades of blue. Inescapable, perhaps, is a comparison with the roughly contemporary portrait of the imperial family in the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna. The finery and the overly large nimbus worn by Theodora are both echoed on a smaller scale in the donor portrait at Khirbet el-Mukhayyat. Anne McClanan recently argued that imagery of imperial women was widely disseminated through the Empire during the early Byzantine period.²⁵ In a culture of imperial emulation, such imagery would have set the standard for female portraiture. Portraits of empresses are not mimetic but, rather, depict their imperial office. In the same way, the depiction of the female donor's social status is a more important concern than is verisimilitude in portraiture.

A similar example of a female performance of status in a mosaic portrait can be found in Gerasa, in northern Jordan. Gerasa, part of the Hellenized league of cities known as the Decapolis, experienced a peak in population during the Byzantine period.²⁶ At the same time, an extensive building program was undertaken in the city, which resulted in the construction and decoration of a dozen churches. The majority of the mosaic pavements in these churches suffered partial to complete iconoclastic destruction.²⁷ Nonetheless, donor portraits survive on two floors and, therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that some of the other churches would have contained similar depictions of their benefactors. The Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, the northern basilica in a complex of three adjoining churches, was completed in 533.²⁸ Formal portraits of two major benefactors flank a *tabula ansata* (rectangular frame with projections used to contain an inscription) located in front of the chancel rail. To the north, Theodore, the *paramonarius* (a cleric appointed to serve as the caretaker of a church or monastery), stands between two highly schematized trees (Fig. 7).²⁹ A pendant portrait to the south depicts a woman named Georgia, who is identified by inscription as the wife of Theodore, the *paramonarius* (Fig. 1). She has been rendered as a hieratic, full-length figure standing

frontally with arms raised in the attitude of an *orans* (praying one). Like her husband, she does not stand on the ground line but hovers above the ground in the space between the two trees. Georgia's blue tunic is adorned with black bands on the sleeves of the lower arms, *clavii* (vertical stripes decorating a tunic), and a wide blue border around the bottom. The blue *orbiculi* (small circles) near the hem contain swastika motifs, common apotropaic symbols. Her red slippers match the red cloak, which is fastened in the center of her chest with a large fibula. A necklace of gems or beads and drop-earrings complete the ensemble.

Two further examples will suffice to convey an impression of female donor portraiture in Palestine and Arabia. The raised bema in the sanctuary of the small Chapel of Elias, Maria, and Soreg, in the eastern sector of Gerasa, was paved with mosaics.³⁰ The pavement contained sixteen scrolls formed by two grape vines that emerge from behind the trunk of a date palm at the center of the composition (Fig. 8). The scrolls contain hunting and agricultural scenes, representations of single animals, and the portraits of three benefactors—Soreg, Maria, and Elias. A vine with leaves and a small cluster of grapes curves to frame the woman identified by inscription as Soreg (Fig. 9).³¹ This full-length frontal figure stands on the ground line created by the vine. She wears a light blue tunic embellished with dark green bands around the sleeve, neck, hem and lower sides. Her garment is further ornamented with slender dark green *clavii* and *orbiculi* formed of dark and light green tesserae. Like the apotropaic swastikas near the hem of Georgia's tunic, the circular *orbiculi* on Soreg's garment likely represent mirrors, a common protective motif believed to deflect demons.³² She wears a red cloak that is fastened at the breast with a round fibula. The dark red tesserae used to delineate the edges and folds of her cloak are also used for her slippers. Gold drop-earrings dangle from her ears. Soreg holds a palm frond in her raised right hand. Beneath her cloak, she raises her left hand in a deferential gesture commonly used when in the presence of the sacred (in this case, the locus of the Eucharistic liturgy). The image of Maria in this church is the only portrait of a veiled woman which has been discovered in Jordan (Fig. 10).

Her red veil and cloak cover an olive green dress trimmed with bands of tiny white diamonds. As this standing, frontal figure stares directly ahead, she clasps a white cross to her breast.

The final example is perhaps the most interesting. In 1977, a salvage excavation on Kibbutz Kissufim in the western Negev desert uncovered fragments of a mosaic floor which belonged to a basilica completed in 576.³³ Most of the nave pavement was found in a ruinous state; however, one of the northwestern inter-columnar panels contains a formally-arranged portrait of two elegantly attired half-length female figures (Fig. 11). The older woman, who is not bedecked with jewelry, holds an oval platter with both hands and offers a fowl of indeterminate species splayed on the platter. The inscription to either side of her head identifies her as “Kalliora,” which means good or propitious hour. The excavator suggests that the woman represents a personification, although considering the woman’s age and dour expression this interpretation seems unlikely.³⁴ Although the nature of her relationship with the younger woman cannot be established, it is reasonable to assume that the portrait depicted an actual person. The younger woman, identified as the Lady of Sylto by an inscription to either side of her head, displays her largesse by scattering sixteen coins with her right hand and clutching what appears to be a *mappa*, a traditional late antique symbol of consular authority, in her left.³⁵ If the cloth is indeed a *mappa*, this may be the first female portrait in which the presence of this traditionally male symbol of consular authority can be positively identified.

There are numerous similarities between this mosaic portrait and steelyard weights that bear images of empresses. McClanan’s description of the empress steelyard weight from Yalova, Turkey (Fig. 12), which she cites as a representative example, applies equally to the Lady of Sylto:

The female figure terminates mid-torso; the body is swathed to cover all but the hands and the neck and the face. This counterpoise is identified as an empress primarily because of its diadem. While the earrings and necklace bespeak wealth, any aristocratic woman could wear them.³⁶

McClanan has also observed the frequent presence of a folded cylindrical object in the left hand of female steelyard weights, an object which she admits could be a *mappa* but which she considers more likely to be a scroll.³⁷ Due to the hardness and inflexibility of the medium, it is often difficult to determine whether a cylindrical object in a sculpture is a rigid scroll or a pliable *mappa*. In the case of the Lady of Sylto, however, it is clear that she does not hold a scroll. Equivocation concerning the object in the Lady of Sylto mosaic results from the fact that the lower half of the figure, including the cloth, ends abruptly at the bottom of the portrait. It is possible that she holds the top of a money bag, but this seems unlikely based upon a comparison with other money bags. Moreover, the white color of the cloth, and the manner in which it is folded suggests that the object is, in fact, a *mappa*.

The closest parallels for the manner in which the Lady of Sylto holds the object and scatters the coins appear in consular lists and diptychs.³⁸ The consuls hold the *mappa* in their right hands; with their left, they hold the scepter of office. When the *mappa* is not raised in the air, it is held in the same position as in the portrait of the Lady of Sylto. One consular list, the so-called Codex-Calendar of 354, made for the Roman aristocrat Valentinus, is preceded by portraits of the two eponymous consuls for the year (Constantius II and Caesar Gallus), portraits which are quite similar to the imagery on consular diptychs.³⁹ In the portrait of Constantius II, the consul distributes largesse with his right hand while holding the scepter in his left. In the sixth century the position of consul was subsumed by the emperor.⁴⁰ According to Corippus, when Justin II was inaugurated as consul “the emperor would come out in his trabea from the holy palace and distribute riches to the people with his right hand, giving them his ritual donation and scattering it like snow.”⁴¹ Thus the mosaic portrait at Kissufim appears to have been influenced by early Byzantine steelyard weights, but also has characteristics in common with late antique and early Byzantine consular diptychs. The portrait of the Lady of Sylto is thus a hybridization of two categories of objects that enjoyed wide circulation throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

IMPLICATIONS

Late antique and early Byzantine portraits were not true likenesses of specific individuals, even when they strove to give the appearance of individualism.⁴² In many ways, portraits were types and, as such, are now subject to various interpretations depending upon their medium and placement.⁴³ The donor portraits examined here were prominently displayed within the mosaic programs of their churches. They are not found in spaces particularly used by women: the portraits all appear either in village churches or small chapels in rural areas, where women and men shared the nave as a common space, rather than adhering to customs of gender segregation (with women's space on the north side of the church and men's on the south) such as existed in urban, metropolitan churches.⁴⁴ The only portrait which has been examined here that is located in "women's space" is the mosaic of the Lady of Sylto and Kalliora in the Church of St. Stephen at Kissufim. However, the presence of an informal male portrait, "Orbikon," placed next to the two female donors negates the possibility that the area was understood as women's space. Moreover, it appears that conventional practices which proscribed women from physically entering the sanctuary did not extend to their images. The portraits of Georgia at Gerasa and of the female donor (Porphyria, Roma, or Mary) at Khirbet el-Mukhayyat are both placed in privileged positions at the eastern edge of the nave, near the entrance to the sanctuary. In the small chapel of Elias, Soreg, and Maria at Gerasa, both Soreg and Maria appear on the floor of the bema within the sanctuary. Many donor portraits, both female and male, are found near entrances, that is, in highly visible areas that received a steady flow of traffic, whether laity or clergy. As a result, the donor would have been among the first and last thoughts of a person crossing the threshold.⁴⁵

None of the mosaics in which portraits—of both women and men—appear has been dated before the second quarter of the sixth century. Michele Piccirillo and Lucy-Anne Hunt have attributed the appearance of portraits in the churches of Palestine and Arabia to the "Justinianic Renaissance," implying that such portraits were part of the artistic trends of the imperial capital,

Constantinople, which subsequently diffused throughout the provinces.⁴⁶ However, such portraits do not appear in the floors of churches in other areas of the Empire and are probably best explained as a product of the prosperity of the region, which reached its height in the sixth century, and of the cultural predilections of its inhabitants. Whereas wealthy Antiochenes invested their money equally in churches, private buildings, villas, and baths, the Palestinians and Arabians spent theirs mainly on ecclesiastical buildings.⁴⁷ Nearly every town and village in these two provinces boasted multiple churches, all built and adorned (according to inscriptions) primarily with the offerings made by private donors, including military and civil officials. The donations were made in fulfillment of a vow to Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, as an intercession, for the salvation of those who made the offering and, frequently, in memory of family members. In a period for which little is known about women outside of the imperial circle, portraits and inscriptions reveal that prosperous women in these provinces were important patrons of their local churches. In 1949, Sylvester Saller and Bellarmino Bagatti noted that thirty-six individuals were mentioned among fourteen inscriptions from four churches on Mt. Nebo in the first half of the sixth century.⁴⁸ Of these, eight were clergy and the remainder laity. Among the laity, eighteen were men and ten were women; this is a high proportion of women, particularly when we consider that women may well have played influential roles in the decision to make other donations that are recorded as coming from families rather than individuals. While no statistics have been compiled since 1949, subsequent discoveries in the region are consistent with these proportions.

Christian *philanthropia* (philanthropy) offered women opportunities for involvement in the public sphere as well as for self-expression, even if the venues considered appropriate for women to display their beneficence were limited.⁴⁹ While imperial women could afford to establish poorhouses, hospitals, and religious foundations including churches, women of more modest means could make donations to these institutions. This type of active public role for women, and their emergence as

important benefactors, can be traced back to the early Hellenistic period and evolved, through late antiquity, in tandem with the general evolution of *euergetism* (the acquisition of status and admiration through benefactions).⁵⁰ Judith Herrin argues for a decidedly “feminine element” in the public decoration of eastern Mediterranean cities during late antiquity.⁵¹ In addition to the continuing presence of commemorations of empresses, whose portraits were disseminated widely in a variety of media, statues of female benefactors were also found inside the cities along with conspicuous inscriptions and monumental buildings which would have served as constant reminders of their generosity. As Van Bremen notes, “Paradoxically, the disappearance of a clear distinction between private and public life enabled women to move outside their traditionally female sphere into the male world of public life and politics, but their behavior was still defined and constrained by the same traditional ideology.”⁵² This traditional ideology required that women appear to be modest, virtuous, pious, and devoted to their families, a set of values reflected in the donor inscriptions of the churches in this study, which frequently define women by their familial relationships.

As part of the local public discourse, donor portraits of women communicated status and promoted specific ideals. While there is variation among the female donor portraits (some of the women are veiled, others are not, and one has a nimbus), all of the women are depicted formally. The formality is best explained by the models available for imitation: portraits of imperial women, and of the elites who emulated them. Kate Cooper correctly asserts that, “In the face-to-face society of late imperial Rome, identity *was* prestige.”⁵³ The wide distribution and circulation of steelyard weights and coins with imperial portrait types, in addition to other forms of public commemoration, provided a clear notion of what was considered appropriate, as well as ready templates for imitation. The anonymous women who appear informally (and not as portraits) in the mosaic pavements were all servants or slaves, that is, a class of persons with whom the prosperous women of Arabia and Palestine could not afford to be associated. Standards differed for men, for as long as men were

depicted as engaged in activities which typified either their social status or occupation, informal portraiture was acceptable.

Geographical location also played a role in the appearance of donor portraits in the floor mosaics of Arabia and Palestine, that is, of the Holy Land. This rural society of relatively wealthy landowners understood that their wealth and identity were inextricably linked with the religious history of the region. For instance, Leslie Brubaker has shown how the Augusta Helena was (re)constructed as a model of appropriate female behavior by imperial and elite women of the fourth and fifth centuries, who associated themselves with the empress through the images and monuments they commissioned.⁵⁴ Imperial women in particular analogized themselves with Helena through their patronage activities; Brubaker notes a pattern of “female imperial commission in Syro-Palestine” before discussing Aelia Eudoxia’s church in Gaza (c. 405) and Eudokia’s extensive patronage during her long residence in the Holy Land.⁵⁵ The acts of *philanthropia* on the part of imperial women would have been especially well known to those living in the region. In a society in which standards of correct behavior were established by the elite, the prosperous women of Byzantine Palestine and Arabia would have eagerly adopted the models offered by imperial women. Like imperial women, they defined themselves by gender, but with a vastly different level of resources, determined by their class. In addition to winning divine approval, the donation of funds for the building and decoration of churches, which the portraits and inscriptions publicize and commemorate, offered an appropriate vehicle for public self-expression for relatively well-to-do women, who could thus secure for themselves a permanent place in the memory and affections of the entire community.⁵⁶

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END NOTES

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strengthening the essay and framing it for the journal's audience.

2. See Anne McClanan, "The Empress Theodora and the Tradition of Women's Patronage in the Early Byzantine Empire," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June McCash (Athens: U Georgia P, 1996), pp. 50-72.

3. Selected recent publications include: Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium A.D. 527-1204* (London: Routledge, 1999); Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001); Barbara Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium, 1025-1204: Power, Patronage and Ideology* (New York: Longman, 1999); Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester UP, 2001); Anne McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

4. Angeliki Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31.1 (1981): 233-60.

5. Non-aristocratic female ascetics are an exception.

6. For an excellent critical overview of feminist research in Byzantine studies, see Liz James, "Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. xi-xxiv.

7. James, "Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies," p. xii.

8. A select bibliography includes: Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4e-7e siècle)*, 2 vols., I. *Le droit imperial*; II. *Les pratiques sociales* (Paris: Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d' Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, Collège de France, Monographies 5 & 6, 1990 & 1992); Judith Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt (Detroit & London: Wayne State UP, 1983), pp. 167-89; Alexander Kazhdan, "Women at Home," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 1-17; Angeliki Laiou, "Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 9 (1985): 59-102; Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," pp. 233-60; Robert Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When—and Why?," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 27-87; Alice-Mary Talbot, "Women's Space in Byzantine Monasteries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 113-127; Alice-Mary Talbot, "Late Byzantine Nuns, By Choice or Necessity," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 9 (1985): 103-17.

9. Ioli Kalavrezou, "Women in the Visual Record of Byzantium," in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. Ioli Kalavrezou (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003), pp. 13-20.

10. Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996), p. 85; Elizabeth Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the "Linguistic Turn," *Church History* 67:1 (1998): 5-10; Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053-1075.

11. James, "Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies," p. xvii, who uses (with modification) the title of Allen Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," in *Studying Medieval Women*, ed. Nancy Partner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1993), pp. 143-70. Important earlier theoretical studies include Caterina Galatariotou, "Holy women and witches: aspects of Byzantine conceptions of gender," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1985): 55-96; Lynda Garland, "The Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women," *Byzantion* 58 (1988): 361-93; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), pp. 2-4; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 136; Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 415.
12. James, "Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies," p. xvii.
13. James, "Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies," p. xvii.
14. "As they sought to describe and interpret their own experience, the women of late antiquity may not have seen themselves as women in gendered terms; we, for whom 'woman' is an important interpretive category, tend to derive what may be a false generality for a society to which class and estate were the dominant signifiers, and which expected its members to identify at once with multiple relational roles" (Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, p. 113).
15. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 43-45. The ceremonial function of the *mappa* began with Emperor Nero. As the Roman crowds restlessly awaited the games, he rose from his banquet and signaled the start of the festivities by tossing down his napkin.
16. James, "Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies," p. xxi. Postcolonial theory is helpful in understanding the complicated ways in which elite and nonelite negotiated their relationship, including emulation of the elite class.
17. Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1992), pp. 180-88.
18. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 164-65. Examples of both types of portraiture—formal and informal—are sometimes found in the same mosaic pavement. The basilica church on Kibbutz Kissufim, which will be examined below, is an example.
19. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 174.
20. As exemplified by the arrangement of the various elements in the panel with the architectural façade that encloses the inscription.
21. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 165.
22. Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," p. 173. As Herrin demonstrates, marriage contracts and wills are "related legal documents" which provide evidence of women's rights of ownership and control of wealth.
23. Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women," p. 174.

24. Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women," pp. 174-78, based upon analysis of legal documents from Southern Italy. Many can be found in F. Trinchera, *Syllabus Graecarum Membranum* (Naples, 1865) or Gertrude Robinson, ed., *The History and Cartulary of the Greek Monastery of S. Elias and S. Anastasius of Carbone* (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies, 1929).
25. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses*, p. 29, 121.
26. Pamela Watson, "The Byzantine Period," in *The Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. Burt MacDonald, Russell Adams, and Piotr Bienkowski (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 2001), p. 466.
27. Whether the destruction was initiated by Christians or Muslims is a matter debated by scholars. In many cases, it can be argued that those who disfigured the images or rendered them unintelligible were highly skilled craftsmen, likely mosaicists, due to the level of skill required by the techniques used in the disfiguration and the attention to careful reconstruction of the pavement.
28. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 288-89.
29. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 288-89. Theodore's face is a modern restoration.
30. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 296
31. "Soreg" was the word for the reticulated stick fence which surrounded the Second Jewish Temple at a distance of ten cubits from the outer walls. It was the barrier beyond which gentiles and the ritually unclean could not pass.
32. Henry Maguire, "Magic and the Christian Image," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1995), pp. 51-71. From classical antiquity into the Middle Ages, mirrors were frequently adorned with a small circle in the center of the non-reflective side and representations of mirrors in art appear as circles with a dot in the center.
33. Rudolph Cohen, "A Byzantine Church and Its Mosaic Floor at Kissufim," in *Ancient Churches Revealed*, ed. Yoram Tsafrir (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), pp. 277-82.
34. Cohen, "A Byzantine Church and its Mosaic Floor at Kissufim," pp. 279-80.
35. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 70-71. For consular diptychs, Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1929) remains the fundamental study. Also see Kimberly Bowes, "Ivory Lists: Consular diptychs, Christian appropriation and polemics of time in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 24.3 (2001): 338-57.
36. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses*, p. 37.
37. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 42-45; Norbert Franken, *Aequipondia: Figürliche Laufgewichte römischer und früh-byzantinischer Schnellwaagen* (PhD dissertation, Rheinisch-Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 1994); Richard Delbrueck, *Spätantike Kaiserporträts von Constantinus Magnus bis zum Ende des Westreichs* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1933).
38. Examples include the consular diptychs of Clementinus (513) and Orestes (513/530). The consular diptych of Boethius (487) provides evidence for the appearance of money bags (Figs. 13 & 14).

39. Henri Stern, *Le Calendrier de 354, étude sur son texte et ses illustrations* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1953); Bowes, "Ivory Lists," p. 345; Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen*, p. 50, 63, 66, 69.
40. Roger Bagnall, Alan Cameron, Seth Schwartz, and Klaas Worp, *Consuls of the later Roman Empire* (Atlanta: Scholars P, 1987), p.7, 23. The Emperor Justinian abolished the office in 541; Justin II restored the consulship for himself in 565.
41. Flavius Cresconius Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, 4.9-13, ed. and trans. Averil Cameron (London, 1976), p. 110.
42. Ernst Kitzinger, "Some Reflections on Portraiture in Byzantine Art," in *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies by E. Kitzinger*, ed. W. Eugene Kleinbauer (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976), pp. 256-69.
43. Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991), p. 104; Franken, *Aequipondia*; Bente Kiilerich, *Late Fourth-Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts: Studies in the So-called Theodosian Renaissance* (Odense, 1993); McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Emperresses*, pp. 60-64.
44. For the place of women in the early Byzantine churches of Constantinople, see Thomas Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1971), pp. 130-34. Sharon Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 89-111, p. 94 observes the same practice (shared space) in the rural churches of Greece.
45. Similar placement of inscriptions occurs in late antique synagogues, e.g., the Synagogue at Hammath Tiberias. I am grateful to Jodi Magness for bringing this parallel to my attention.
46. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 22; Hunt, "The Byzantine Mosaics of Jordan in Context," pp. 115-21. Hunt adheres to an imperiocentric notion of the diffusion of artistic trends. She suggests that the early seventh century date of the Great Palace mosaic proposed by James Trilling ("The Soul of the Empire: Style and Meaning in the Mosaic Pavement of the Byzantine Imperial Palace in Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 27-72) should be lowered to the early sixth century which would permit it to have exerted influence over the mosaics in Palestine and Arabia. She does not consider the possibility that trends could have flowed in both directions.
47. Claudine Dauphin, "Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion," *Levant* 12 (1980): 124-25.
48. Sylvester Saller and Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Town of Nebo (Khirbet el-Mekhayyat), with a brief survey of other Christian Monuments in Transjordan* (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1949), pp. 202-203.
49. Christian *philanthropia* manifested itself in Byzantine society through social welfare and hospitality.
50. Reet Van Bremen, "Women and Wealth," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt (London: Wayne State UP, 1983), p. 233. From the Hellenistic period onward, *euergetism* was expected of elite men in

- political office; gradually women became involved in making public donations.
51. Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium," p. 12.
52. Van Bremen, "Women and Wealth," p. 236.
53. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, p. 84.
54. Leslie Brubaker, "Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 52-75. As Brubaker recognizes, "The Helena who was memorialised in late antique and early Byzantine elite female commissions may or may not have much to do with any actual person; the Helena who was important to this group of women depends on memories preserved through stories and, especially, objects that recreated her in the following centuries" (pp. 56-57).
55. Brubaker, "Memories of Helena," pp. 61-62.
56. As attested by Choricius of Gaza, who wrote concerning a portrait of Stephen, governor of Palestine: "At the extreme right of these groups [groups in the central apse] is a person who is in all respects like an emperor, and who is worthy both of being included in the register of God's friends and of bearing the name of the chief of God's deacons of old: this for many reasons and especially because, with the bishop as partner of his labors, he has donated the church to his fellow citizens, knowing well that whereas other liberalities result only in the adornment of the city, the construction of churches brings in not only beauty but a name for godliness besides" (*Laudatio Marciani* 1, 30; trans. by C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453. Sources and Documents* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1986), p. 62).



Figure 1. Georgia, wife of Theodore the paramonarius, Gerasa, Church of S.S. Cosmas and Damianus, 533 CE (Photo: author)



Figure 2. Stephanos, informal portrait, 'Uyun Musa, Church of the Deacon Thomas, 6th c. (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 187)



Figure 3. Nave mosaic, Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius, 557 CE (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 153)

Figure 4. Nave mosaic, Wadi 'Afrīt, Upper Chapel of the Priest John, 565 CE (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 175)





Figure 5. Portrait of male donor, Wadi 'Afrat, Upper Chapel of the Priest John, 565 CE (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 166)



Figure 6. Portrait of female donor, Wadi 'Afrat, Upper Chapel of the Priest John, 565 CE (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 167)



Figure 7. Theodore the paramonarius, Gerasa, Church of S.S. Cosmas and Damianus, 533 CE (Photo: author)



Figure 8. Sanctuary Mosaic, Gerasa, Chapel of Elias, Maria and Soreg, 6th c. (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 296)



Figure 9. Soreg, Gerasa, Chapel of Elias, Maria and Soreg, 6th c. (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 281)

Figure 10. Maria, Gerasa, Chapel of Elias, Maria and Soreg, 6th c. (Photo: M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 296)





Figure 11. Lady of Sylto and Kalliora, Kissufim (Negev), unattributed basilica church, 576 CE (Photo: with permission of the Israel Museum) Source: Y. Israeli & D. Mevorah (eds.), *Cradle of Christianity*, Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2000.

Figure 12. Empress steelyard counterweight from Yalova (Turkey), early Byzantine date (Photo: with permission of Istanbul Archaeological Museum (5940))





Figure 13. Consular diptych of Clementinus, 513 CE (with permission of Liverpool Merseyside County Museum, UK)



Figure 14. Diptych of Orestes, 513/530 CE (with permission of V&A Museum, London, UK (139-1866))