Happiness or Its Absence in Art

Happiness or Its Absence in Art

Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION:
"HAPPINESS: A(RT) HISTORY"[1]

RONIT MILANO

The Department of the Arts of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel, held an international symposium on the theme of 'Happiness in Art' in March 2011. Art historians from three continents gathered to explore the issue of how artists and patrons conceived happiness, or how they suppressed it, in differing forms of art emanating from different societies in diverse periods in time. The symposium focused predominantly on art historical matters and sought to understand how visual culture picture happiness; participants at the symposium probed philosophical, historical or political questions only tangentially. The ten papers selected for publication in this volume range widely across time, each one discussing the theme in a distinctive fashion and each employing different methods and approaches. This collection of essays demonstrates, however, the historical breadth of the talks delivered at Ben-Gurion University, and they indicate the vibrant discussions elicited during the symposium. Before characterizing the individual contributions in this volume, I will explain the motivation for the focus on the theme of happiness in the symposium.

The choice was largely inspired by my own research on eighteenth-century French portraiture. Recognizing that smiles were a new artistic motif prevailing in portraits of the time, I explored the interrelationship between smiling and expressing happiness, that is, a happy state of mind. In my work I propose that the smile demonstrates an increasing need to portray happiness as a desirable mental state.[2] The pursuit of happiness became a prominent Western ideal in the eighteenth century, one that societies and individuals have sought ever since. Indeed, happiness is a prominent theme in our contemporary political and social discourse. Despite a marked focus on the subject in scholarly writings over the past decade – based, perhaps, on economic factors and a growing public and private concern with well-being – the artistic aspects of happiness have been considerably less well studied. Hence, the current collection of essays, like

the symposium it draws from, seeks to stimulate further a spirited study of the aesthetic, historical and philosophical aspects of happiness.

Art – not merely as a reflection of ideas but also as part and parcel of a cultural alignment that articulates them – is an important channel or resource for understanding the changing perceptions of happiness throughout history. Today the term happiness is interrelated with the idea of well-being, or the good life. It is commonly tied to political concepts of freedom and human rights that modern Western society gradually implemented, beginning especially in the eighteenth century. But whereas the modern outlook locates happiness within our own power and for which we bear personal responsibility, the ancient world viewed happiness as a concept linked to providence and fate. According to the historian Darrin M. McMahon, antiquity dismissed human agency and construed happiness as "the whim of the Gods, the gift of good fortune, the determination of fate."[3]

Greek art visualized the pursuit of happiness through allegorical representations of *Eudaimonia* (a word commonly translated as *happiness* or *welfare*), and by means of the Archaic smile as on the celebrated *kouroi* of the period. Using allegory to signify happiness interpreted the state of being as a transcendent, almost godlike condition, conforming to the perception formed and promulgated by ancient philosophers. During the subsequent Roman era, 'artistic smiles' decreased significantly in number, which might be explained by the different Roman concept of virtue in comparison with the Greek idea. Roman art concentrated on creating generating moral values relating to patriotism and personal sacrifice, values generating solemn and austere images.

Predominantly sponsoring religious beliefs, Byzantine art communicated happiness as neither intellectual nor ideal conditions but rather as emotive and sensuous states. In our volume's first article, Mati Meyer interprets bodily gestures as poignant expressions that collectively form the visual representation of feminine happiness in the Byzantine world. In medieval culture, the concept of happiness was removed from an earthly agenda and was ascribed instead to the afterlife, where God will confidently remake his kingdom in a paradise regained after the loss of Eden.[4] Following this idea, Gil Fishhof next explores the iconographical program in the small Romanesque chapel at Berzé-la-Ville, France, suggesting that the painted cycle within offers a medieval perception of happiness as a spiritual, religious exaltation resulting from the presence of the Lord and mankind's

love for him. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar employs a similar perspective in her analysis of the iconography of the twentieth-century Franciscan church of the Visitation in Ain Karim, Jerusalem. Investigating the painted cycles in light of the writings of the architect and archaeologist of the church, Kenaan-Kedar distinguishes between didactic and emotional elements, both uniting to form the complete iconographical plan.

Whereas medieval culture legitimized love and happiness by signifying the relationship between man and God, or between a mother and her child, love between man and woman was rarely represented during these centuries and when it was, it was often with the intention to deny happiness and promote melancholy. Polina Shtemler writes in her essay that, according to a particular medieval mindset, a man's passionate love for a woman made him inappropriately submissive to her and was therefore interpreted not only as a sign of sickness but of nearing heresy. By appropriating the visual signs of sinners and outcasts of medieval society, illustrations of lovesickness represented their protagonists as ill, passive and morally degenerated, thus distancing sexual love from personal happiness. The absence of happiness, recognized as sorrow or melancholy, was indeed prevalent in much late-medieval imagery. This was not so much a result of actual mental crises, but rather of the impetus to employ our theme as a moral warning. The outcome was a gap between earthly and spiritual joy. However, at the dawn of the early modern era the breach between what was understood as inaccessible happiness on earth and the ultimate happiness of heaven began to narrow, and the concept of happiness was increasingly associated with life on earth.

Late Renaissance culture had already embraced a vigorous polemic on this very issue, including ground-breaking attempts to reconcile conventional Christian virtue with the pursuit of personal and earthly happiness. Turning to American culture, Jason David LaFountain's article starts with H. L. Mencken's famous definition of Puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, is happy." LaFountain argues to the contrary that Puritan theologians were preoccupied with developing a robust notion of happiness, particularly as it informed their belief in the practice of godly living as art work. Spiritual felicity is the 'Object' of Puritan art, and 'artful' Puritans thus constituted lively pictures of Christian happiness.

During the age of Enlightenment daily pleasures gradually replaced religious exaltation. Paris – the new capital of Western culture in the eighteenth century – celebrated individuality. It was in Paris, above all but

also in London and the American colonies in the second half of the century that a subjective, self-indulgent and self-gratifying understanding of happiness began to emerge.[5] Enlightenment thinkers set about disputing the best means to attain happiness.[6] Human concern for the *pursuit of happiness* gradually grew during the Age of Enlightenment, reaching its apogee in 1776, when the American Declaration of Independence recognized it as a fundamental human right: "…that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." In Paris, contemporary art privileged earthly or secular pleasures, reflecting the fact that happiness had become, to quote a letter from Voltaire in 1726, "the great and only concern."[7]

Exploring the depiction of happiness in eighteenth-century painting, William Barcham argues that art of the time innovatively chose happiness as a subject that led to an enlightened state of mind. Painting of the period not only consistently depicted joyous moments in life, but it also manifested modern man's attempt to shape his life on earth. The pursuit of happiness took shape in eighteenth-century art by representing an assortment or array of experiences producing pleasure: portraits were adorned with smiling faces of their subjects;[8] the establishment of peaceful, rural estates, dairies, and other kinds of rustic retreats flourished, together with the building of fanciful architectural complexes. One might add to this list the many conversation pieces of the era that celebrated sociability as a signifier of happiness. The intense focus of art on representing the state of happiness reflects the importance of the theme in eighteenth-century society and culture.

Yet happiness was not a term easy to define. Voltaire referred to happiness in the *Encyclopédie* as a sequence of happy events – a state of continuous pleasures.[9] Testifying to the complexity of this concept is Jean Pestré's definition of the word *happiness,* also published in the *Encyclopédie*:

> "[happiness] Is taken here for a state, a situation we wish would last without changing; and in that, happiness is different from pleasure, which is a nice feeling, but short and transient, and which can never be a state. All men are united in their desire to be happy. [...] But the human condition does not endure such a state: every moment of our life cannot be filled with pleasures. The most delicious state has many languid intervals. After the first alertness of feeling has gone, the best that can happen is to become in a tranquil state. Our most perfect happiness in this life is therefore, as we said at the beginning of this article, a tranquil state."[10]

Pestré's definition brings us closer to modern and contemporary perceptions of happiness as representing well-being. The modern world has reconceived happiness in a fundamental shift in meaning. The term nowadays is broadly tied to economic growth and consumerism – developments and phenomena that initiated in the eighteenth century and have extended since then.[11] Ayelet Carmi's article discusses North American images of witches which convey the elusive and tortuous links between happiness and its absence in American society during the Victorian age. Despite the allegedly dichotomous visualization of two types of witches, Carmi suggests a more intricate disposition that reflected – but also shaped – the American perception of happiness at the time. Milly Heid then discusses the concept of happiness in Paris somewhat later, at the turn of the twentieth century, and she reads Matisse's *La Joie de vivre* as the epitome of the prevailing approaches of the period to concepts of individual and collective happiness.[12]

Happiness, however, could also be analyzed in a political perspective: if eighteenth-century art doubted the legitimacy of absolute monarchy and late nineteenth-century art continued to propagate the concept of personal freedom and social equality, Eastern and Central European art of the early twentieth century overtly promoted socialist ideals. In her article Esther Levinger investigates art's role in the formulation of the 'social whole' which was believed both to generate and signify social happiness. Exploring constructivist art, Levinger demonstrates how diverse visual forms represent happiness in the shape of a social totality ideal.

Relating to the equation 'Happiness = Well-being,' contemporary images of happiness can be perceived not only in the context of fine art, but also in a wider sense:[13] Alma Kittner analyzes the ways in which industrial design, commercial logos and the shape or color of products form and exploit our perception of happiness. She argues that 'wellness spaces' and 'wellness products' activate utopian fantasies, thus transferring images of art into popular culture. Closing this volume with Kittner's study, which recognizes the substantial role that traditional imagery plays in the contemporary formulation of the concept of happiness, sparks our curiosity to see how art will communicate happiness (or its absence) in the future. Considering the evolution of the visualization of happiness in art over the last two millennia, speculating on the matter is stimulating: allegories have evolved into spiritual images, which in turn gradually transformed into realistic and worldly representations of happiness. In the twentieth century they were reformulated as transcendental, as visuals that

evoke an idea of happiness. Can the modern transformation be viewed as a return to allegory? If so, it is undoubtedly different from the allegory of ancient art. Today, even people who are culturally prepared to reflect on or interpret hidden messages, hardly have the time or willingness to do so. In an era when practical manuals instructing us how to achieve happiness become bestsellers, transcendent ideas are expected to provide a tangible experience as well, which the viewer can then quickly interpret into a moment of self-awareness.[14] No wonder then that in the past two decades, art – mostly through performative events – centers on immediate experiences of varied types, many of them offering situations in which viewers identify and locate themselves in relation to the concept of happiness.

Notes

[1] This title pays homage to the historical overview of the theme of happiness, written by Darrin McMahon, which served as an important scholarly source for most of the essays in this volume, and in particular for the introduction: Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

[2] Ronit Milano, "The Face of an Enlightenment: The Portrait Bust in Eighteenth-Century France" (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2012).

[3] Ibid., 7; McMahon's ideas on the matter are summarized in his essay: "From the Happiness of Virtue to the Virtue of Happiness: 400 B.C. - A.D. 1780," *Daedalus* 133, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 5-17.

[4] McMahon, *Happiness*, 138.

[5] For the new circumstances that promoted the pursuit of happiness and pleasure, see: Olivier Bernier, *Pleasure and Privilege: Life in France, Naples, and America, 1770-1790*, (Garden City , N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981); Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts, eds., *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1996); Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightened Pleasures: Eighteenth-Century France and the New Epicurianism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), esp. 71-102, in which art's agency is analyzed.

[6] Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680-1715*, trans. J. Lewis May (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964 [originally published under the title: *La crise de la conscience européenne, 1680-1715*, Paris: Boivin, 1935]), 335-47.

[7] Quoted by Darrin M. McMahon in his paper: "The History of Happiness and Contemporary Happiness Studies," presented in conference on *New Directions in the Study of Happiness*, held in Notre Dame University, Oct. 22-24, 2006, 10, accessed November 12, 2012,
http://www.nd.edu/~adutt/activities/documents/McMahonNotreDameTalk.pdf

[8] Regarding the emergence of the smile in portraits, see: Colin Jones, "The French Smile Revolution," *Cabinet* 17 (2005): 97-100; see also his "Pulling Teeth in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *Past and Present* 166 (2000): 100-45.

[9] "Le bonheur pris indéfinitivement, signifie une *suite* de ces événements. Le plaisir est un sentiment agréable & passager, le bonheur considéré comme sentiment, est une suite de plaisirs, la prospérité une suite d'heureux événements…" Voltaire, "Félicité," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert (Paris, 1751-1772), 6:465, accessed November 12, 2012, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/

[10] Jean Pestré, "Bonheur*," Encyclopédie*, 2:322. Originally: "Se prend ici pour un état, une situation telle qu'on en désirerait la durée sans changement; & en cela le bonheur est différent du plaisir, qui n'est qu'un sentiment agréable, mais court & passager, & qui ne peut jamais être un état. Tous les hommes se réunissent dans le désir d'être heureux. […] Mais la condition humaine ne comporte point un tel état: tous les moments de notre vie ne peuvent être file par les plaisirs. L'état le plus délicieux a beaucoup d'intervalles languissants. Après que la première vivacité du sentiment s'est éteinte, le mieux qui puisse lui arriver, c'est de devenir un état tranquille. Notre bonheur le plus parfait dans cette vie, n'est donc, comme nous l'avons dit au commencement de cèt article, qu'un état tranquille…" My translation.

[11] John Benson and Laura Ugolini, *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society Since 1700* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006). In relation to gender and art in the nineteenth century, see: Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a political perspective, see: Derek Bok**, *The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[12] On that matter see also: Donald B. Kuspit and Lynn Gamwell**, *Health and Happiness in 20th-Century Avant-Garde Art*, exh. cat. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press and Binghamton: Binghamton University Art Museum, State University of New York, 1996).

[13] One may add to this discussion the contribution of Street Art to the shaping of contemporary perceptions on happiness or its absence. See: Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York, N.Y.: Abrams, 2008).

[14] One of the most popular manuals, which was followed by many others, is: Tal Ben-Shahar, *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007).

CONSTRUCTING EMOTIONS AND WEAVING MEANING IN BYZANTINE ART

MATI MEYER

Can concepts like happiness or unhappiness, the themes of the present volume, be applied to the study of Byzantine art? If so, how should they be understood? Was Byzantine happiness akin to our sense of happiness? Although generally assumed to be one of the 'basic emotions' common to all human beings, happiness cannot have meant the same in a different culture and eras as it does today.[1]

We can illustrate this point with an example from the church of the Panagia tou Arakou at Lagoudera in Cyprus, dated 1192. A devotional inscription in verse addressed to and beside the cult image of the Virgin and written on the lower south wall of the naos prays that the donor, one Leo, son of Authentos, and his wife and children may live in happiness and in the end be favored among the saved in Paradise: "…εὔθυμον εὑρεῖν βίου λοιποῦ τὸ πέρας … καὶ λήξεως τύχουσι τῶν σεσωσμένον" ("… to find a happy conclusion to the rest of their life … and receive the death of the saved").[2] The wish for *happiness* is expressed not in relation to a decorative program centered on temporal events but on a time to come, the Day of Judgment, in a program replete with images from the Christian past.[3] Discussion of happiness seems irrelevant to the art in this church, and I would claim that in general the peculiar Western notion of *happiness* does not fit well with what we know of Byzantine culture in general and Byzantine art in particular.[4]

The physical and mental capacity to have emotions is universal, but emotions are ultimately formed within a given society.[5] Because they are socially constructed, emotions are liable to change over time. As a consequence, cautions Barbara Rosenwein, their study from a 'presentist' approach can turn into a major methodological trap.[6] This trap is present not only in the study of Western medieval sources but also in their Byzantine counterparts. In a recent short essay on emotions Martin

Hinterberger observes that "The very fact that emotions appear so frequently in Byzantine texts, especially when compared to modern historiographical writings […] immediately provides evidence for changes in the meaning of emotions that occurred from the Byzantine period up to modern times, changes that separate Byzantine culture from the Western modern world."[7] The cultural and social dimension of the emotions implied in Hinterberger's observation is at the core of studies undertaken so far on this subject by scholars of Byzantine history, literature, and liturgy. These have focused on such emotive expressions as grief, sorrow, and mourning.[8] Art historical studies have followed the same path, and rightly so.[9] In a culture in which great emphasis was placed on the events of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ and on Mary's central role in them, this state of research is not surprising.

Yet despite the acknowledgment that emotions in texts and art are an unquestionable aspect of Byzantine culture, no attempt has yet been made to discuss them as separate from the religious experience.[10] Taking as a starting point the concern with emotions in their cultural-historical dimension evident in the literature over the past few decades, this paper seeks to identify and discuss a range of emotive qualities related to one of the most largely overlooked themes in Byzantine art: sexuality.[11] The objective is not to claim that the representation of these will teach us how Byzantines felt in real situations, but rather to point at the particular emotional state of the protagonists involved in sexual encounters in a number of works dated between the ninth and fifteenth centuries.[12] My first aim is to offer such an analysis by examining some of the techniques with which Byzantine artists expressed emotions and the ways these emotions are construed. Whereas the historian has to grapple with words and texts in order to seek the expression of emotions, the art historian must map them through formal tools, including a whole array of nonverbal gestures and signs — looks exchanged between protagonists, hand gestures, bodily posture and movement — that usually can be interpreted in more than one way. The problems inherent in this evocative arsenal are especially acute in Byzantine art, which usually presents, at first glance, a restrained, unemotional, and immovable façade equivalent to what Rosenwein terms *silences* in the historical sources. As she writes, "Some sources are unemotional in tone and content. These are as important as overtly emotional texts."[13] What Rosenwein means by *silences* is that documents silent on a given emotion do not necessarily indicate their absence in the culture producing the documents so much as a disinclination to speak about them. In a similar way, Byzantine art, whose

aesthetic focused on spiritual beauty and Christian symbolism meant to arouse strong feelings, does not overtly display the emotions expected in any given circumstance involving the interaction of individuals.[14] My second purpose will be to set the depiction of emotions as related to intimate encounters between male and female in their narrative context in order to elucidate what their possible meanings may have been vis-à-vis sexuality. A central question is: is the representation of emotive responses to sexual encounters in Byzantine art only textually conditioned, or it is also culturally conditioned? This paper will attempt to shortly address this issue and assess the cultural impact on the images.

The Byzantines — or at least Byzantine male authors — perceived all human sexual activities as sinful unless contained within the marital context and with procreation as the goal. Nevertheless, scenes of sexuality, some of them imbued with what we now perceive as erotica, are more widespread than might be expected in Byzantine art. They occur not only in expected settings, such as luxury 'secular' objects, but also in Old and New Testament narratives.[15] The use of erotic scenes alongside Christological ones is not surprising. The Byzantine elites were well aware of the Hellenic and Christian origins of their culture and expressed them visually, just as they quoted both Homer and the Bible.[16]

Using terms borrowed from Angeliki Laiou's *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, I group the images to be discussed under two headings: 'lovemaking by consent,' comprising images of lovemaking by mutual accord, and 'love by coercion,' depicting sexual appropriation or rape.[17] Distinguishing between these groups is not always clear-cut, as gestures from one group tend also to illustrate images in the other, at times eliding their differences. Our discussion will proceed according to gestural imagery and its emotive quality, with interpretation greatly indebted to the textual or contextual circumstances.

Couples depicted making love are meant to convey the realistic dimension of conception in a lawful marital context, but they may also illustrate illicit consensual sexual behavior. A case in point is the image of the zealous Phinehas, son of Eleazar, stabbing to death a fornicating couple, the Israelite Zimri and the Midianite woman Cozbi, out of fear of miscegenation (Num. 25:7–13). Early Church fathers interpreted the biblical event as a moral discourse on the dangers of lust, with Phinehas playing the role of Christianity, Zimri that of thought, and Cozbi the type of reflection inspired by the devil.[18] The negativity of the sexual encounter was

continued in such middle Byzantine texts as the *Palaia Historica*, a ninth-century compilation of narratives of events from the Creation to Daniel, based on paraphrased and apocryphal versions of biblical episodes and enriched with passages from various Eastern Christian writers; the text refers to the sexual act of Zimri as πορνεύοντα, prostituted.[19] In the *Sacra Parallela* (Paris, BnF, gr. 923), possibly produced in a Greek monastery in Italy, Zimri and Cozbi are shown naked, wrapped in a blanket or drapery, and engaged in a bold sexual embrace.[20] The man's right hand covers the woman's breasts, a conventional gesture indicating a sexual act (discussed below); the woman seems to share the intimate moment willingly by pointing downward to her or his genitals. Phinehas, mounted on a horse, pierces their bellies with his lance (fig. 1).[21] The characters' nakedness and the woman's long hair act as visual metonyms to reinforce the negative content of their deed.[22] One can easily infer the feelings shared by the couple; their relaxed, affectionate postures bespeak an intimate and consensual act of lovemaking in spite of the negative subtext.

Fig. 1: *Phinehas Stabbing Zimri and Cozbi to Death*. *Sacra Parallela*, Rome (?), after 843(?). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 923, fol. 274v (photo: Paris, BnF).
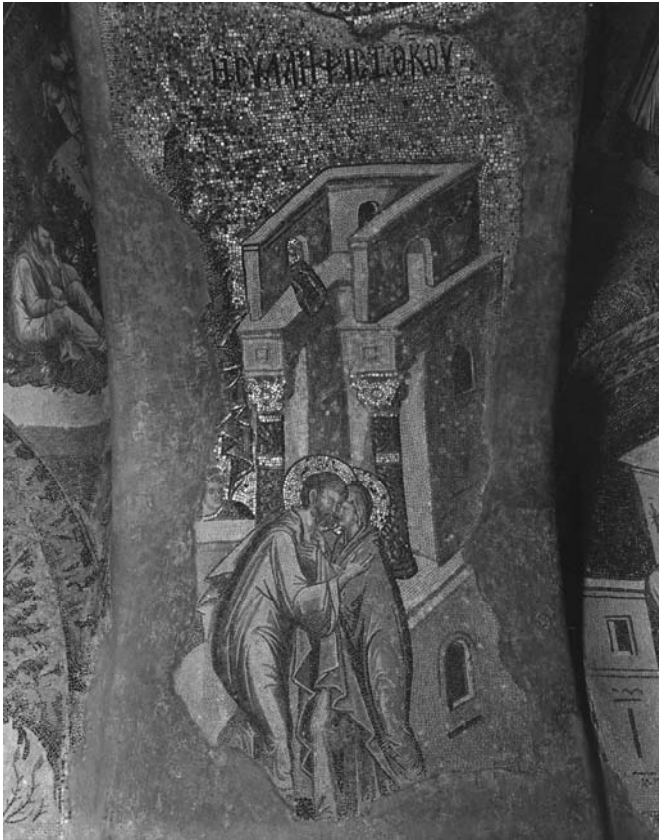
Fig. 2: *Meeting of Anna and Joachim*. Istanbul, Kariye Camii (Chora Monastery), mosaic in inner narthex, ca. 1321 (photo: Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC).

Another gesture, this time divorcing the sexual act from its physical dimension, is the 'cheek-to-cheek kiss.' Seemingly derived from a conventional embrace, it is used mostly in the depiction of 'spiritual' conception in which physical impregnation, usually of a barren woman, is facilitated by divine intervention.[23] A case in point is the portrayal of the doubly divine annunciation of Mary's birth — "And behold Joachim came with his flocks, and Anna stood at the gate and saw Joachim coming and ran immediately and hung on his neck" — in a now-damaged mosaic in the inner narthex of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul, dated ca. 1321 (fig. 2).[24] The gold-nimbed couple tenderly embraces cheek to cheek, Joachim

slightly hovering over his wife; their arms are interlaced and the eyes are fixed on each other, intimating Mary's conception. Judith, Anna's servant, peers at them from the left, and her figure, along with the red drapery hanging to the left of the building, carries symbolic meaning that pertains to the sanctity of the moment — a prelude to the birth of the Virgin, which is analogous to the Incarnation — and testifies to the authenticity of the event.[25] Only the dynamic movement of the figures toward each other, certainly not their placid facial expressions, conveys the presumed joy of the couple in the wake of the divine double annunciation.

Here the Byzantine artist hints delicately at the sexual act and, at the same time, underscores its sacred and supernatural nature.[26] This example articulates the couple's yearning for a child, which alludes to an acute reality in Byzantium, a polity that suffered from a close to fifty percent infant and child mortality rate.[27] The issue of the barren woman was an important concern in the Byzantine world, where the main goal of marriage was procreation; its absence presented a legal motive for divorce.[28]

A man placing his hand on a woman's bosom or shoulder is another pictorial device used to convey the idea of a sexual encounter with a procreative goal.[29] A telling example is the miniature in the Romance of Alexander that depicts King Philip and his wife, Olympias (Venice, Hellenic Institute, cod. gr. 5; fig. 3).[30] The miniature illustrates Philip's warning to his wife that "If you do not bear me a son when I return from the war, you will no longer know my embrace." The scene takes place in front of a conventional architectural backdrop that may suggest the imperial palace. On the left, the king speaks to Olympias and places his left hand on her right arm and his right hand on her bosom. The 'hand on the shoulder' gesture, understood in Classical art as demonstrating affection, may also indicate the husband's possession of the woman and his sexual intent.[31] The fulfillment of this intent is visualized at the right, where Philip once again places his hand on Olympias's shoulder, extending his right arm to embrace her. The queen returns his gaze, seemingly complying with his demand, while she lifts a red curtain and leads her husband into her chambers. Their fixed gaze intimates not only the sexual act that is to follow, but also their mutual consent.[32]
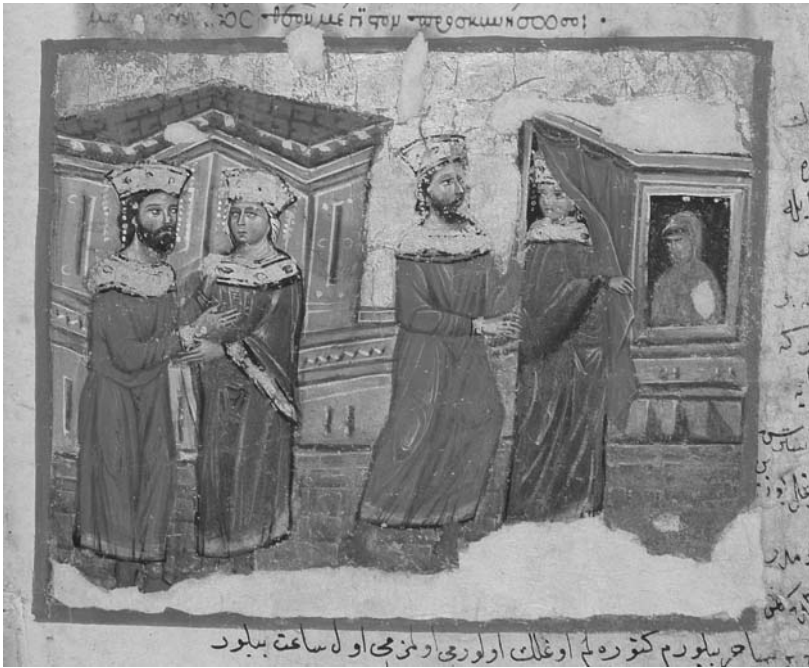
Fig. 3: *Philip Asking Olympias for a Son; Olympias Leading Philip to Her Quarters. Romance of Alexander*, Trebizond, fourteenth century. Venice, Hellenic Institute, cod. gr. 5, fol. 6r (photo: Hellenic Institute, Venice).

The mutable emotive meaning of gestures is reflected in the use of the 'hand on the shoulder' in the story of the Levite and his concubine (Judg. 19:22–23) illustrated in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzos (Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library, cod. Taphou 14; fig. 4).[33] Here the worthless men of Gibeah demand to "know" the Levite, who instead surrenders his concubine and brings her out to them (Judg. 19:25).[34] To illustrate the text "and they knew her," the Levite is shown in the doorway handing the woman over to the mob by pushing her onward, his hand touching her left shoulder. A young man stands to the woman's right, embracing her with one arm on her breast as he draws her out to have his way with her. This gesture, otherwise generally employed to denote 'consensual lovemaking,' is used here to hint at 'love by coercion.' The concubine's reluctance to be handed over to the mob and the dread of the act facing her are suggested by her missing left arm (apparently the artist did not depict it) as she possibly clings to her man while attempting to break away from her
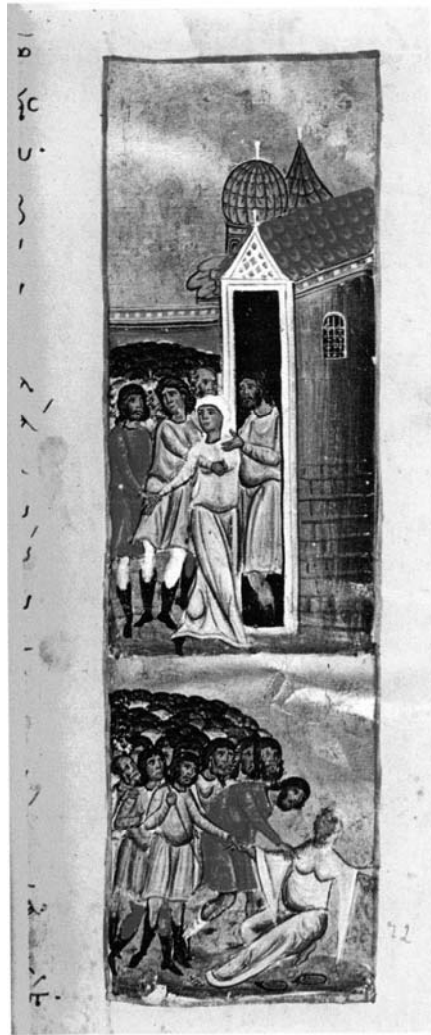
Fig. 4: *The Levite Handing over His Concubine to the Men of Gibeah. Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzos*, Constantinople, 1075–85. Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library, cod. Taphou 14, fol. 109v (after: Panayotis L. Vocotopoulos, *Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem*, trans. Deborah M. Whitehouse [Athens: Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 2002], fig. 72).

assailants. The gestures of the two perpetrators taking possession of her are noteworthy; one holds her right hand while the other threads his hand through her arm to fondle her breast. Both 'fondling the breast' and the seizure of the arm denote a coercive, violent act.[35] This act illustrates the sexual meaning intermingled with violence implied in the word ἐνέπαιζον, the Septuagint version of "and they abused" (Judg. 19:25, 20:5), seen in the lower part of the miniature.[36]

The violence perpetrated on the woman induces a range of emotional responses. A sense of terror is seen in her turning away from her attackers; the sexual urgency of the men is manifested in their brutal seizure of the woman. These reflect a society in which physical punishments were imposed on such liminal women as adulteresses, prostitutes, and procuresses who acted outside of marital bonds and posed a threat to the patriarchal system.[37]

To the imagery conveying sexual content may be added the gesture of a man's hand holding a woman's chin, as if fondling it; the sexual suggestion of this 'chin-chuck' is obvious.[38] In Greek art, especially in Attic vase painting, the gesture had connotations of affection or of supplication for favors.[39] It was adopted in such middle Byzantine objects as the plaque adorning a tenth-century bone casket now in the National Museums, Liverpool (fig. 5).[40] In this scene of an amorous couple, a fully clothed male figure stands cross-legged beside a naked female figure in a slight contrapposto, touching her chin gently. Obviously courting the woman, the male has been identified as Hippolytos or Ares and the female as Phaedra or Aphrodite. The sexual intent of the scene is accentuated by the curving stance of the female figure, echoing that of her suitor and suggesting their mutual consent.

The 'hand on the wrist' is an unambiguous sign of non-consensual lovemaking. This motif originating in Greek art and culture to designate a 'legitimate' sexual act was used in Middle Byzantine art to convey the idea of sexual coercion.[41] Such imagery appears especially on a number of carved caskets, including a well-known twelfth-century example in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt (fig. 6).[42] At the right end of the back panel, a naked, bearded male usually identified as Herakles is shown reclining on a bed and holding the wrist of Auge, pulling her toward him and coercing her into lovemaking. The man's gesture is a visible sign of his sexual intent toward a female who hardly seems well disposed toward him, as is clear from the way she turns her body away from her suitor.

Fig. 5: *Amorous Couple*. Byzantine casket, back, wood overlaid with bone, middle or second half of the tenth century. Liverpool, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Inv. no. M8038 (photo: Courtesy National Museums, Liverpool).

What was the agenda of the erotic scenes appearing on luxury items like these two carved caskets? Henry Maguire, who analyzed the mythological figures on such caskets, surmises that the ambiguity in the identification of these eroticized figures is intentionally designed to avoid the danger of exposing the viewer to idolatry.[43] In a later expanded study, he and Eunice Dauterman Maguire contend that the mythological scenes that depict naked figures were also intended to entertain the viewer.[44] Alicia Walker recently suggested that erotic images were meant to educate the elite Byzantine audience, especially women, about the need for proper sexual behavior and the importance of resisting prenuptial temptations. As a

result, she argues, the ivory caskets and their visual erotic messages may have been valuable in raising their viewers', and particularly women's, awareness of romance, eroticism, and morality.[45]
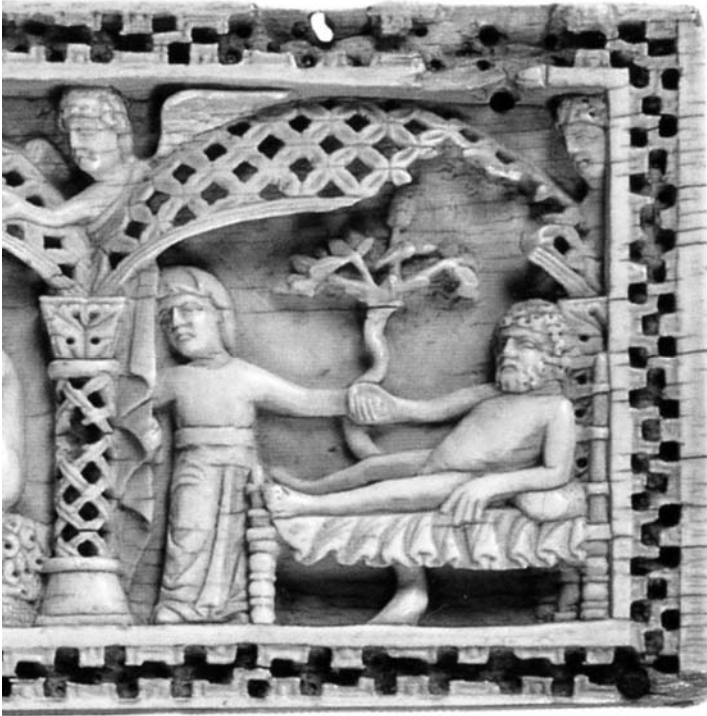

Fig. 6: *The Rape of Auge by Herakles*(?). *Darmstadt Casket*, Constantinople(?), ivory, first half of tenth century. Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Inv. no. 33.36 (photo: Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum).

We can draw several general conclusions about how sexuality may trigger various types of emotions. Emotions are a forceful agent in human actions; although they are internal, they are externalized via gestures, postures, and facial expressions, and for this reason they can be inferred in Byzantine art. In Christological scenes, particularly from the twelfth century onward, the emotive expressions are usually displayed through dramatic and even violent gestures of grief and by emphatic and exaggerated facial expressions. An illuminating example is the wall painting with the *Lament over the Dead Christ* in the eastern aisle of the monastery church of the

Dormition at Gračanica (Serbia), dated 1318–21, where the female mourners on the left display their intensely emotional grief with abandon (fig. 7).[46] By contrast, in the physical encounters discussed above, the iconographic signs that convey feelings are subtle, requiring careful reading to grasp their full meaning.[47] The gestures are not dramatic, and the figures for the most part maintain placid expressions. It was mainly through gestures appropriated from the Classical visual repertoire, not facial expressions, that the Byzantine artist hinted at the possible state of mind and emotional condition of the represented figures.

Fig. 7: *The Lament over Christ*. Monastery church of the Dormition, Gračanica (Serbia), wall painting in eastern aisle, 1318–21 (photo: courtesy of BLAGO Fund, California, www.srpskoblago.org).

Whenever an artist deemed it important to illustrate consensual lovemaking, he supplemented the emotional narrative with elements of tenderness and affection, and when he wished to illustrate a non-consensual act, in which a male figure may have perpetrated violence against a woman, he chose gestures that elicit such emotional responses as fright, discomfort, and restlessness, which occur in moments of distress. The rendering of these emotions is not limited to works of secular character, as one might expect, but are also present in art concerned with religious themes. In both

instances they reflect the values of contemporary Byzantine society and the inherent culture of the individuals who produced them.

It is clear that more work must be done on the depiction of emotions in Byzantine art. It is my hope that this short analysis of imagery dealing with emotions regarding sexual behavior in particular will serve as a springboard for a larger study on how Byzantine artists in general portrayed human emotion.

Notes

[1] Ziyad Marar, *The Happiness Paradox* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003); Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006). The expression of happiness is recognized in psychological studies as one of a series of universal facial expressions of emotion: Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, "Constants Across Cultures in the Face and Emotion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17, no. 2 (1971): 124–39; Idem, *Pictures of Facial Affect* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1976).

[2] Andréas Nicolaïdès, "L'église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre: étude iconographique des fresques de 1192," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 (1996): 5; David and June Winfield, *The Church of the Panaghia tou Arakos at Lagoudhera, Cyprus: The Paintings and Their Painterly Significance*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 37 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003), 65–69.

[3] The prayer to be among the chosen in the day of the Last Judgment is common in dedicatory inscriptions. See: Andreas and Judith Stylianou, "Donors and Dedicatory Inscriptions. Supplicants and Supplications in the Painted Churches of Cyprus," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 9 (1960): 97–128.

[4] The *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität* gives the adjective form of εὐτυχείος and the adverb εὐτυχῆ, translated as *glücklich*, which is the English equivalent of *lucky, fortunate, happy, felicitous, blessed, providential*, and *by luck, through luck, happily*; *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität*, ed. Erich Trapp and Wolfram Hörandner, vol. 1 (A–K), fasc. 1– 4 (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001), 632. Liddell and Scott translate εὐτυχέω, εὐτυχής as *to be well off, successful, prosperous*, *to succeed in doing*; H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* Revised supplement, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), see on-line, accessed December 12, 2012, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057 %3Aentry%3Deu)tuxe%2Fw.

[5] See, e.g., Paul Ekman's hypothesis "that particular facial behaviors are universally associated with particular emotions"; Ekman and Friesen, "Constants Across Cultures," 128. Although the discussion of emotion as antithetical to reason is as old as Plato and has been discussed ever since, only in recent years has the subject of the emotions—their origins, influences, definitions, and descriptions— come into question in such disciplines as psychology, philosophy, medicine, and economic sciences; Keith Oatley and Jennifer M. Jenkins, *Understanding Emotions*

(Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Robert Solomon, *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Gerben A. van Cleef et al., "The Interpersonal Effects of Emotions in Negotiations: A Motivated Information Processing Approach," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, no. 4 (2004): 510–28. For the social-historical study of emotions see, e.g., Rom Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of Emotions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[6] Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 821-845; Eadem, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Passions in Context* 1 (2010): 3–5. For a different view, arguing that human emotions and other emotive responses are a constant form from prehistory to our days, see Keith Oatley, *Emotions: A Brief History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), ch. 2, esp. 28–29.

[7] Martin Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 124.

[8] See, e.g., Niki J. Tsironis, "The Lament of the Virgin Mary from Romanos the Melode to George of Nikomedia" (PhD diss., University of London, 1998); Eadem, "From Poetry to Liturgy. The Cult of the Virgin in the Middle Byzantine Period," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 91–102; Eadem, "Emotion and the Senses in Marian Homilies of the Middle Byzantine Period," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 179–96.

[9] The major work remains to this day Henry Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977): 123–74, and idem, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 91–108. See also Maria Vassilaki and Niki Tsironis, "Representations of the Virgin and their Association with the Passion of Christ," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 453–63.

[10] See especially Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 123–34, with previous bibliography. The author briefly discusses a series of emotions — joy, sorrow, fear, envy, and anger — culled from theological and imperial written sources.

[11] Sexuality denotes "the meanings placed upon human sexual physiology, sexual sensations, and sexual behavior within a particular community." Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 3. For a discussion of sexuality related to medieval times see, e.g., Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon, 1989); Judith Bennett, "Medievalism and Feminism," in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. Nancy F. Partner (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1993), 7–29; Madeline H. Caviness, *Reframing Medieval Art: Difference, Margins, Boundaries* (Boston: Tufts University electronic book, 2001), introduction, see on-line, accessed December 12, 2012, http://nils.lib.tufts.edu/Caviness.

[12] On the theme of sexuality see: Carolina Cupane, "Topica romanzesca in oriente e in occidente: 'avanture' e 'amour,'" in *Il romanzo tra cultura latina e cultura bizantina: testi della III settimana residenziale di studi medievali, Carini, 17–21 ottobre 1983*, ed. Cataldo Roccaro (Palermo: Enchiridion, 1986), 47–72; Eadem, "Byzantinisches Erotikon: Ansichten und Einsichten," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 37 (1987): 213–33; Paul Magdalino, "Eros the King and the King of 'Amours': Some Observations on 'Hysmine and Hysminias,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992): 197–204 (literature); Angeliki E. Laiou, "Sex, Consent and Coercion in Byzantium," in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 109–221 (legislation); Liz James, ed., *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*: *Papers from the Thirty-First Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 1999); Mati Meyer, *An Obscure Portrait: Imaging Women's Reality in Byzantine Art* (London: Pindar, 2009), 251–80 (art history).

[13] Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods," 17.

[14] Viktor V. Bychkov, 'Byzantine Aesthetics,' in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 4 vols., ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1: 321–22. A case in point are the impassive facial traits and austere appearance of saints in Byzantine art, a sign of ascetic denial of the flesh that allowed him or her to be closer to the divine; Henry Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 48–99.

[15] See, e.g., John Hanson, "Erotic Imagery on Byzantine Ivory Caskets," in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. James, 171–84; Barbara Zeitler, "Ostentatio Genitalium: Displays of Nudity in Byzantium," in ibid., 185–201.

[16] See, e.g., Robert Browning, "The Continuity of Hellenism in the Byzantine World: Appearance or Reality?" in *Greece Old and New*, ed. Tom Winnifrith and Penelope Murray (London: Macmillan, 1983), 111–28.

[17] The terminology is borrowed from Laiou, "Sex, Consent and Coercion."

[18] Origen, *Num. Hom*. 20, 5 (*PG* 12:726–36); Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. Bapt. Christ*. (*PG* 46:597B–C). For the treatment of this subject in early Christian and Jewish art see Andreina Contessa, "Pinhas, lo zelante. Un personaggio problematico nell'arte cristiana," in *Raccontare Dio: il Midrash e la tradizione di Israele*, ed. Raffaello Zini (Novellara [Reggio Emilia]: Aliberti, 2002), 115–59.

[19] Afanasii Vassiliev, ed., *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*: pars prior (Moscow: Universitatis Caesareae, 1893), 255.

[20] The manuscript is a theological and ascetic florilegium of biblical and patristic citations; Kurt Weitzmann, *The Miniatures of the Sacra Parallela: Parisinus Graecus 923*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination 8 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979). For the possible Roman provenance see: Irena Oretskaia, "A Stylistic Tendency in Ninth-Century Art of the Byzantine World," *Zograf* 29 (2002–3): 5–18, esp. 11–14.

[21] Fol. 274v (*PG* 96:237); Weitzmann, *The Sacra Parallela*, 60–61, pl. XXI, fig. 78.

[22] Meyer, *An Obscure Portrait*, 275–81.

[23] Ibid., 18–21.

[24] Protevangelium of James 4:4, 23; *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991–92), 2:427. The appearance of the scene in art is to be related to the feast of the Virgin's conception on the ninth day of December, which was incorporated into Orthodox liturgy in the ninth century. See: Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 3 vols., Bollingen series 70 (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966), 1: 65, pls. 96, 97; Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *L'iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1992), 1: 30–31; *Eadem*, *L'iconographie de l'enfance*, 1: 82; Cyril Mango and Ahmet Ertuğ, *Chora: The Scroll of Heaven* (Istanbul: Ertuğ and Koçabıyık, 2000), 76–77, pl. 25.

[25] On the symbolic meaning of this element, see: Mati Meyer, "The Window of Testimony: A Sign of Physical or Spiritual Conception?" in *Interactions*: *Artistic Interchange Between the Eastern and Western Worlds in the Medieval Period*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art and Department of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University, in association with Penn State University Press, 2007), 256–57.

[26] The portrait of the artist in Byzantium is elusive, since few signatures survived, most of them postdating the twelfth century. Whenever available, they indicate male artists at work. See: Robin Cormack, "Painter's Guides, Model-Books," in *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale*, ed. Michele Bacci (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2007), 11–29. No signatures of artist women in Byzantium are known, but historical documents attest a small number of them may have been active in book illumination. See: Annemarie Weyl Carr et al., "Women as Artists in the Middle Ages: 'The Dark is Light Enough,'" in *Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. Delia Gaze, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1997), 1: 14–17.

[27] For the rates of infant mortality in Byzantium, based on both archaeological and written evidence, see: Arietta Papaconstantinou and Alice-Mary Talbot, eds., *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009), 283–308. The urgency of this phenomenon can be also inferred from visual material. Women in rural Byzantium may have prayed for the well-being of children before painted images of female saints in eponymous chapels. Especially venerated was Saint Anna, who was perceived as an intercessor for safe pregnancy and childbearing. See: Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 96–98.

[28] Gary Vikan, "Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 154–55.

[29] The gesture connotes similar associations in Western medieval art. See: François Garnier, *Le langage de l'image au Moyen Age,* I. *Signification et symbolique*; II. *Grammaire des gestes* (Tours: Le Léopard d'Or, 1982, 1989), I:194 and 195 B–C.