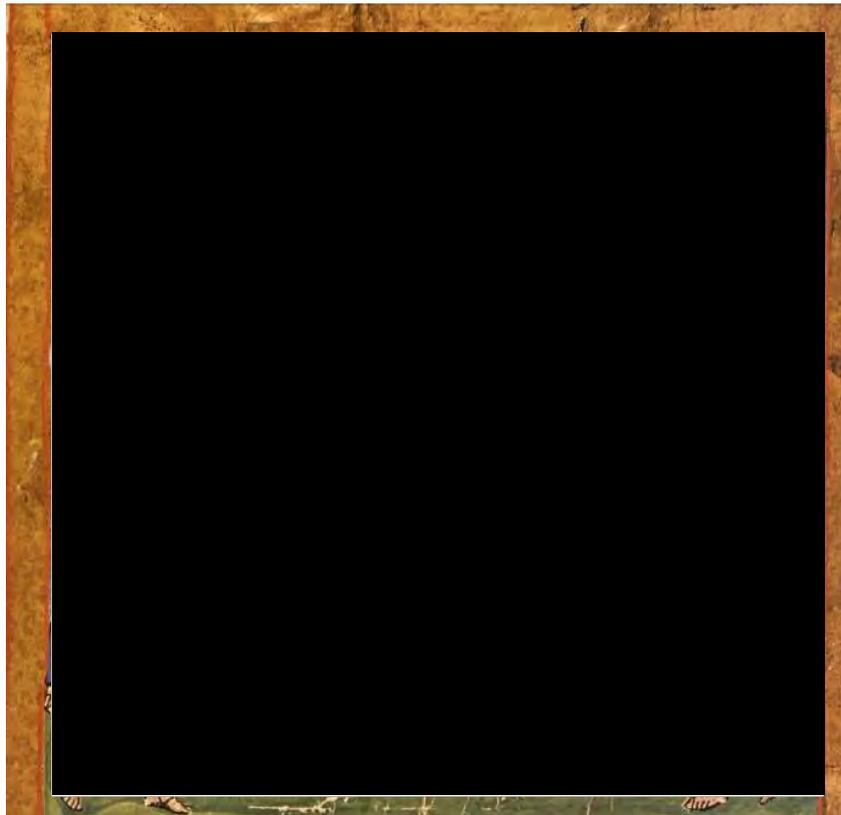


**FROM WOMB TO THE TOMB:
THE BYZANTINE LIFE COURSE AD 518 – 1204**

BY EVE DAVIES MPhil BA HONS AHEA



Mount Athos, Monastery of Iveron, cod. 1, fol. 300r: the
Dormition of the Virgin. 11th century.

**A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

Status and gender studies are now well established paradigms of Byzantine social history. But academic enquiry has, so far, overlooked the significance of age. This is perhaps because most biographical accounts open with conception and birth, and move forwards to death, which seems so logical to us that the Life Course trajectory has not stood out as a defining characteristic of Byzantine biographical narratives. However, Byzantine authors do not present their characters as stagnant; characters are often shown to develop in persona across their lives. The study of age and life-stage is crucial to understanding the Byzantines' evolving familial roles and societal responsibilities.

This thesis deconstructs the Life Course patterns as presented to us by authors writing AD 518 to 1204, a critical period in the development of Byzantine culture. The start point is 518, the year that the Justinian dynasty commenced, a period characterised by a rich and abundant supply of evidence. The end point is 1204, the year that the Latins captured Constantinople and the sources distinctly change in style and influence. This thesis draws upon several types of evidence including literature, coins and tombstones in order to expose this hitherto unexploited but fundamental facet of Byzantine identity.

For Reuben and Simon

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Please note that primary source abbreviations appear in the Bibliography

AnalBoll – Analecta Bollandiana

AJA – American Journal of Archaeology

AJP – American Journal of Philology.

ALCR – Advances in Life Course Research

AASS – Société des Bollandistes ed., Acta Sanctorum Bollandiana (Brussels, 1863-1948)

BBTT – Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations

BMGS – Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies

BF – Byzantinische Forschungen

BSA – British School at Athens

BZ – Byzantinische Zeitschrift

ChHist – Church History

CQ – Classical Quarterly

CW – Classical World

DOP – Dumbarton Oaks Papers

EHR – English Historical Review

EJA – European Journal of Archaeology

GorThR – Greek Orthodox Theological Review

G&R – Greece & Rome

GRBS – Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies

HThR – Harvard Theological Review

*I Aph2007 – J. Reynolds, C. Roueché and G. Bodard, eds, 2007 *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias*, Available online: <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007> (Accessed 21st March 2011)*

JECS – Journal of Early Christian Studies

JHS – Journal of Hellenic Studies

JÖB – Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik

JRA – Journal of Roman Archaeology

JRS – Journal of Roman Studies

NT – Novum Testamentum

*PG – J.P. Migne ed., *Patrologia cursus completus. Series Graeca*. (Paris, 1857-66)*

OC – Oriens Christianus

TM – Travaux et Mémoires

REB – Revue des Études Byzantines

SEG – Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum

INTRODUCTION

My thesis focuses upon the Life Course in the East Roman Empire. At the outset of this study, I must first define the Life Course, before moving on to justify the selection of this specific timeline. When applied to historical frameworks, the Life Course perspective focuses on social – and not biological – constructions of aging, specifically the timings and transitions between life-stages (for example, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age).¹ While the course of an individual’s life is determined by certain biological features (puberty, reproductive fitness, death etc.), the trajectory of life is not fixed but it is dependant upon variables including culture, status and gender. This is important because changes in the construction of the Byzantine Life Course tell us a great deal about individual identity, familial roles and societal responsibilities. In the modern era, when the structure of the population is changing, constructions of the family are evolving and life expectancies are lengthening, it is increasingly important to understand the founding principles of current Life Course models in the context of modern cultural inheritance.² Throughout this thesis, ‘Life Course’ is grammatically capitalised because of its significance as the methodological approach to the enquiries here.

A historical Life Course perspective analyses the interplay between the sequence of socially defined events in a person’s life and the chronological context in which they lived.³ In this thesis, I analyse the connections between the Byzantines’ self-presentations of their Life Course trajectories in the period AD 518 to 1204. The reasons for the selection of this epoch are numerous. Roman and Late Antique Life Courses have received extensive coverage and so the sixth century is a logical start

¹ Levy 2005, 9.

² Miller 2003, 12.

³ Levy 2005, 376.

point. The year 518 has come to signify in the secondary literature a critical marker in the consolidation of the Byzantine Empire: it is significant because the year marks the beginning of the reign of Justin I (518-527), characterised by the political stabilisation of the Empire.⁴ I trace the development of the Byzantine Life Course up to the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, whereupon source material becomes too scant to be able to ascertain a reliable understanding of Life Course constructions. The Palaiologan evidence (produced after the reoccupation of Constantinople 1261-1453) is deserving of an altogether separate enquiry. Throughout this thesis I will consistently attach a date to a source, unless referring to the same source in the same paragraph, because I refer to many sources and they were produced over a vast expanse of time. Across the period AD 518 to 1204 perceptions of age and aging and the impact of status and gender on these perceptions undergo a process of change and continuity, which will be the subject of discussions here.

As this is the first study into the Byzantine Life Course, it should serve as an overview of the development of the Life Course AD 518-1204 and a basis from which future investigations can be launched. I draw upon evidence spanning seven centuries for several reasons: most importantly, the methodology of this study depends on analysis of quantitative data and, due to the scarcity of sources, I must use an extensive timeframe in order to acquire a reasonable amount of data.⁵ Furthermore, over the course of this period, constructions of the Life Course remain relatively static, with a few important exceptions, which will be highlighted in the conclusion. Therefore, it is logical to look at the entire timeframe concurrently. Nevertheless, one does not want to

⁴ Haldon 2008, 250.

⁵ Furthermore, palaeographers are sometimes only able to date a script roughly to a 200 year period: therefore, our approach must consider our epigraphic data within a broad chronological framework.

take a synchronic view: it is important to draw out distinctions in attitudes and conventions as they develop over time. It is imperative to remember that each source is subject to specific contextual influences which shape and mould its' meanings and messages.

Byzantine authors normally introduced their biographical writings with an overview of their subjects' status, gender and age, demonstrating the importance of the Life Course to the Byzantines.⁶ Gregory the Cleric's *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (c.894) exemplifies this three-part emphasis: the *vita* opens with her birth in Aegina; her elite status is determined by the description of her parents as '[those] who had been attended by many servants'; and her gendered characteristics are constructed when Gregory describes the budding saint as 'graceful and intelligent' and claims that by age seven she was admired for 'her pretty face and her inherent modesty...'.⁷ Within the first five chapters of the modern edition of the *Life* (which contains 61 chapters), Gregory has defined Theodora's status, placed her firmly within a set of gendered conventions and begun to trace her development using age as a signpost.⁸ This is a standard *trope* in hagiography: the age or life-stage of the developing saint is crucial from the outset of the narrative.

Even in those rare *Lives* that omit birth and childhood, age remains critical. In the opening of the *Life of Symeon the Fool* (c.642-9), Leontios of Neapolis revealed that Symeon and John were young men and that they were about 22 years old.⁹ Status and gender roles remained important as well: Leontios tells us that Symeon and John had

⁶ For more on age, gender and status, see my forthcoming article: Davies 2012.

⁷ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 1-3 (Eng. trans. 165-167): 'τῆ τοῦ προσώπου ὠραιότητι τῆ τε ἐκ γένους σωφροσύνη...'

⁸ Gendered conventions: Smith 2004: 1-22; James 1997b: xi-xxiv.

⁹ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134).

horses, a sign of their wealth; and that they were literate.¹⁰ The two young men fit into the gendered construct of devoted and protective sons: each is accompanied by an aged mother or father.¹¹ It is notable that in describing any of these three attributes (status, gender, or age) authors often allude to family heritage, family wealth, family responsibilities or family role. Symeon's and John's families' wealth was noted in order to indicate their status. In terms of gender, the sons are presented as dutiful when bringing their aged parents on their journey to Jordan with them. In terms of life-stage, Symeon and John's youthfulness is contrasted with their parents' infirmity. Age, gender and status are tools used by hagiographers in order to portray their character's familial identity. Age and familial role are interlinked.

In histories too, authors usually emphasise the age, gender and status on the first occasion of their character's appearance. For instance, when writing his *Chronographia* in the eleventh century, within the first two paragraphs of the modern edition, Psellos tells us that Basil II and Constantine VIII were 'princes', both of whom had seen the last of their 'boyhood days' (Ἦστην δὲ ἄμφω ἤδη μὲν παρεληλακότε τὴν ἡβην) so that the audience is in no doubt to their status and age.¹² In the same paragraph, Psellos goes onto describe the new Emperor's personal attributes: Basil 'gave an impression of alertness, intelligence and thoughtfulness'.¹³ This is contrasted with his younger brother's tendencies: 'Constantine appeared to be apathetic, lazy and devoted to a life of luxury'.¹⁴ Although the two brothers were of the same status (imperial princes), Psellos firmly set them apart when constructing their age and gender: Basil was the older and

¹⁰ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134).

¹¹ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134).

¹² Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 2 (Eng. trans. 27).

¹³ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 2 (Eng. trans. 27): 'ἐργηγορῶς αἰεὶ καὶ σύννους ἐδείκνυτο καὶ πεφροντικῶς'

¹⁴ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 2 (Eng. trans. 27): 'ὁ δὲ γε Κωνσταντῖνος ἀνεμῆνος τοῖς πᾶσιν ὄπτο, ῥαθῦμος τε τῆς ζωῆς ἔχων καὶ περὶ τὸν ἀβρὸν βίον ἐσπουδακῶς.'

more experienced brother and averse to ‘effeminacy’ (τὸ ἀβρὸν).¹⁵ Age, gender and status are integral to Byzantine authors’ construction of their characters. This is a standard structure to biographical writing and so I might deduce that these three attributes were integral to the Byzantines’ understanding of personal identity in reality too. Therefore, a Life Course perspective is fundamental in the analysis of preserved sources.

Life Course methodologies originated in sociological and anthropological disciplines, but subsequently gained momentum in a wide range of academic fields.¹⁶ In the 1990s, perhaps in response to contemporary concerns for an increasingly aged population, research focused on relationships of dependency and obligation, with particular attention towards groups constructed as ‘dependants’ (such as children and the elderly).¹⁷ Relationships remain an integral component of the Life Course approach. While there is a wealth of academic literature on the Roman family and familial relationships, understanding of the Byzantine family has received comparatively little attention, and in many cases is based on assumptions arising from Roman evidence.¹⁸ More recently, academics from a range of disciplines have pointed to the importance of focusing investigations on self-identity across time, with less emphasis on ‘dependant’ groups and familial relationships.¹⁹ This thesis aims both to analyse relationships (inter-

¹⁵ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 4 (Eng. trans. 29). Sewter translates ‘ἡ ἀβρός’ to mean ‘effeminacy’ but ‘delicacy’ or ‘luxury’ is a more accurate translation of the Greek text.

¹⁶ Hockey and James 2003, 9.

¹⁷ For instance, see: Matras 1990; Hockey and James 1993, 13: their methodologies are underpinned by concepts of dependency.

¹⁸ For studies on the Roman and Late Antique family, see: Bradley, 1991; Clarke 1998; Corbier 1991; Crook 1986; Dixon 1991; 1992; 1997; 2001c; Evans Grubbs 1995; Gardner 1998; George 2005; Guroian 2001; Hallett 1984; Harevan 2001; Harlow and Parkin 2009; Hope 1997; Kuefler 2007; Martin 1996; Rawson 1991; Saller and Shaw 1984; Saller 1994; Wiedemann 1989; For studies on the Byzantine family, see: Brubaker and Tougher (forthcoming); Kaldellis 2006; Laiou 2000b; Smythe 2006; Talbot 1990; 1996.

¹⁹ Hockey and James 2003, 9; Harlow and Laurence 2002, 1.

generational, as well as same-generation) and to track nuances of self-identity across the Life Course continuum.

In historical disciplines, Life Course approaches to research have been evolving over the past twenty years. In *The Greek Way of Life: from Conception to Old Age* (1990), Robert Garland applied Life Course methodologies (though he did not say that he was using this specific approach) to his analysis of Ancient Greek literature (including philosophical, historical, and medical works). But it was not until Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence published their volume, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome* (2002), that Life Course studies came to fruition as an explicit approach to researching social history in Antiquity.²⁰ Since then, Lisa Alberici's thesis, *Age and Aging in Late Antiquity: a Life Course Approach* (2008) has built further upon both the chronological expanse of Life Course studies (her work focuses on fourth and fifth century evidence) and the scope of Life Course constructions (she is particularly interested in ascetic notions of age and social roles).²¹ This thesis commences research at the chronological point that Alberici's research closes.

The Byzantine Life Course has never been subject to analysis. Analysis of Byzantine life-stages has hitherto focused upon children and the elderly, perhaps reflecting a common misconception that adult-related attributes are 'normative'. Alice-Mary Talbot and Chris Gilleard have focused on old age; Ann Moffatt and Dorothy Abrahamse and, more recently, the contributors to a volume edited by Arietta Papaconstantinou and Alice-Mary Talbot have concentrated on childhood while Cecily

²⁰ Harlow and Laurence 2002, 3.

²¹ Alberici 2008, 1.

Hennessy has focused exclusively on the childhood as portrayed by artistic evidence.²²

Yet, it has been established by Life Course analysts that a fuller understanding of identity, age and aging can be gleaned through studying a series of transitional life phases, instead of isolated stages.²³ René Levy surmised: ‘a life course approach takes fully into account the fact that our lives are ongoing processes and not just single states or events that can be adequately captured and understood using snapshots’.²⁴

Understanding the entire Life Course is the only way to put isolated pieces of evidence into context and thus exploit them. Herein lays an inevitable methodological limitation: in the analysis of the Byzantine Life Course I require a framework of life-stages to work around (for example, infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood and old age) which entails placing a structure upon a continuous trajectory.²⁵

In order to address this problem, the chapters of this thesis are organised thematically to treat each life-stage as transitional, approaching each phase in conjunction with its antecedent and postcedent phases. Every chapter aims to address a specific life-stage: for instance, the chapter entitled ‘Conception to Childhood’ focuses on infancy. And within the life-stage of infancy, for instance, our hagiographers and historians refer to many sub-stages: embryo (τό ἔμβρυον), newborn (ὁ βρέφος), suckling infant (ὁ νήπιος ὑπομάξια), not-yet talking infant (ὁ νήπιος). As can be seen throughout this thesis, the Byzantines present transitions between life-stages as fluid, according to the context. Garland (the Ancient Greek Life Course expert) has observed that age terminology may have varied with status and gender and chronological aging

²² Talbot 1984; Gilleard 2007; Moffatt 1986; Abrahamse 1979; Papaconstantinou and Talbot, eds, 2009.

²³ Matras 1990, 115.

²⁴ Levy 2005, 4.

²⁵ Burgoyne 1987, 38.

was not always systemised.²⁶ Therefore, the structure of the chapters here aims to account for continuity between life-stages and fluidity in the Byzantines' life-stage markers.

Over the course of this period the borders of Byzantium were in a perpetual state of flux. The sixth century was characterised by expansion under Justinian I, with territories gained in North Africa (including Carthage), Italy (including Rome) and southern Spain. This study draws upon *vitae* written on the periphery of the Empire in Syria and Palestine and it is impossible to determine how representative the attitudes found here are of a widespread Byzantine culture.

Furthermore, this study only looks at Greek language manuscripts, even though some of the *vitae* were written in several languages. For example, there is both a Greek and a Syriac version of the *Life of Synkletika of Palestine* and both versions were composed in the sixth century.²⁷ I will focus on Greek-language inscriptions too. The *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (SEG)*, which is the primary source of epitaphs exploited in this thesis, records all Greek inscriptions recovered and published up until 1995. This source of inscriptions provides a sample of data that enables me to quantify tombstones of each century proportionally to one another.²⁸ While focusing on evidence produced in Greek, to the exclusion of Byzantine sources of other languages, may inhibit my understanding of regional variations and local customs, I have done this because this single-language analysis will highlight *topoi* recognisable to the largest proportion of the Empire, who spoke Greek. Distinctions in regional – and linguistic – constructions of the Life Course might be the subject of future studies.

²⁶ Garland 1990, 14.

²⁷ Lowden 2008, 462.

²⁸ Horrocks 2008, 777.

Translators have tended to use Latin opposed to Greek spelling in their texts. For instance, Sewter has spelt Alexios ‘Alexius’ and Komnenos ‘Comnenus’. In order to be faithful to the Greek texts, I will use ‘o’ instead of ‘u’ and ‘k’ instead of ‘c’, except when quoting.

By 780, following the Islamic conquests and the increasing stabilisation and expansion of local power bases in the west, the Empire had receded to the extent that it was roughly equivalent to the borders of modern day Turkey (with the additions of parts of southern Italy and Greece). In parallel, the eighth century is characterised by a dramatic reduction in preserved evidence: chapter six highlights the decrease in tombstone production at this time and, as recorded in Appendix B, few hagiographies were produced during the eighth century. This lack of evidence might be seen as a consequence of the striking decrease in Byzantine territory and the Empire’s diminished political authority in the face of Arab, Persian and Lombard successes.²⁹

Following the so called ‘Dark Ages’, our sources take on a different style of rhetoric. The authors of hagiographies are no longer located on the peripheries of the Byzantines Empire, as Cyril of Scythopolis had been, but conglomerated in urban centres.³⁰ Perhaps as a result of this geographical relocation of authors, the sources appeal to a new, more elite audience. It will be outlined, for example, how George Eleusius, who was writing in the seventh century, appealed to an audience of all statuses and ages. By way of contrast, Ignatios the Deacon, who was writing in the ninth century, included birthing metaphors in order to heighten the emotion of his rhetoric and his style is clearly intended for an adult, elite, audience. In our histories too Psellos

²⁹ Haldon 1990, 2.

³⁰ Efthymiades 2011, 95.

(c.1017-1096) and Anna Komnene (December 1, 1083-1153) write in a more elevated style than Theophanes or George the Synkellos and the later authors make multiple allusions to Homeric prose.³¹ For instance, when describing Nikephoros Bryennios' army, Anna wrote: 'They were all young, as skilled as Homer's Teucer in archery'.³² Homer did not describe Teucer as young and so, in this example, one might deduce that Anna considered youth to be a valuable attribute in archers. In searching for Life Course constructions, one must be mindful of the Homeric allusions – and indeed other references – as the authors were sometimes drawing upon *topoi* not specific to their own epoch but familiar to the Ancient Greeks and Romans too.

Sources of Evidence

This study draws upon several types of evidence: written evidence revealed in histories, legal codes and hagiographies; artistic depictions taken from illuminated manuscripts, church decoration and coins. Numerical age data is extracted from the hagiographies and presented in bar chart format at the outset of each of the first five chapters in order to present an overview of ages specific to that chapter. Finally, in the last chapter, I look at the epigraphic record: this study draws upon a sample of Byzantine tombstones that represents 1,386 commemorated individuals in 1,116 inscriptions (a minority of the inscriptions honour the death of more than one person). This list of sources is by no means exhaustive, but simply aims to provide an overview of the Life Course from a diverse range of perspectives. As each type of evidence is

³¹ Kaldellis 1999, 66; Macrides 2000b, 68.

³² An. Komn., Vol. II: 224 (Eng. trans. 321): 'νεανία γὰρ ἦσαν σύμπαντες οὐχ ἥττους τοῦ ὀμηρικοῦ Τεύκρου εἰς τοξικὴν ἐμπειρίαν.' Homer, *Illiad* IV, 123.

prone to specific limitations, a wide range of evidence types will enable us to identify anomalies and, perhaps, use the context of any inconsistencies to explain their prevalence. Parallel *topoi* in the sources demonstrate the consolidation of rhetorical strategies and shared ambitions.³³ I hope that this approach will not only expound ideals and expectations; but additionally expose the daily life of the individual.

In this study, I have drawn upon evidence types where age-related behaviours are most evident. Hagiographies, legal codes and epitaphs have the highest saturation of numerical age data. Histories provide a counter-balance, highlighting age-related behaviours and attributes. Selectively using the evidence is problematic: not all instances of each genre can be analysed and there are many more histories, hagiographies and legal codes yet to be analysed. Other evidence types such as sermons and *typika* are largely absent in favour of evidence with an increased focus on the Life Course. Artistic depictions are drawn upon largely for illustrative purposes, especially in instances when they support constructions of age or an age-related behaviour apparent in other genres. By employing this approach, I endeavour to produce an overview of the Life Course, highlighting common themes and *topoi* as a basis for future studies to delve deeper.

There are some limitations common to all source types. The texts are largely written by males – with the obvious exception of Anna Komnene – who were educated and elite. As a result they usually focus upon exceptional subjects, who often constitute members of the imperial family, ‘predestined’ patriarchs and saints.³⁴ As can be seen in Appendix B, female numerical age data is scant. It has already been noted that many of

³³ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 135; Hinterberger 2000, 145.

³⁴ Angold and Whitby 2008, 839; Bonnell and Hunt 1999, 8.

the saints are depicted as wealthy including, Symeon the Fool and Theodora of Thessalonike.³⁵ In the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (c.894), Évelyne Patlagean has already noted that it is precisely the rejection of extensive material wealth and high status that characterises the Byzantine saint.³⁶ Gregory the Cleric asserted that Theodora's '...wealth was her rejection of all the material fortune of the world'.³⁷ According to Gregory, the greater the wealth of the saint: the greater the sacrifice. While legal codes were at least theoretically relevant to people of all statuses, their 'ambitious intellectual level' and 'continued employment of Latin' deemed them inaccessible to the vast majority of people and probably only of interest to the upper classes, whose interests they predominantly protected.³⁸

In terms of gender, men are more frequently the subject of the sources than women.³⁹ In the sample of hagiographies used here and presented in Appendix B, data is drawn from 42 *vitae*, which represent 44 subjects (David, Symeon and George of Lesbos are all the focus of one *vita*) and a total of 55 main characters (as already seen, John takes a major role in the *Life of Symeon the Fool*). Of these, men represent 37 of the 55 main characters (67.27%), while women represent 18 of the 55 main characters (32.73%), and many of these women exhibited masculine attributes.⁴⁰ Similarly, it will be noted throughout this thesis that men are more frequently the subject of artistic depictions than women and elderly women are almost entirely absent from our sources. While women's voices tend to be muted in our texts, women are often invisible in our

³⁵ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134); *V. Theod. Thess.*, 1 (Eng. trans. 165).

³⁶ Patlagean 1983, 103.

³⁷ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 1 (Eng. trans. 165): 'πεπλάσμεθα· πλοῦτος δὲ τὸ πᾶσαν τὴν ὑλικὴν τοῦ κόσμου περιουσίαν'.

³⁸ Stolte 2008, 692.

³⁹ Brubaker 1997, 53.

⁴⁰ Kazhdan 1990, 131.

artistic sources. As can be seen in the final chapter, which discusses gender imbalances in tombstone commemoration, these kinds of gender imbalances are prevalent in most of the evidence types.

In terms of age, the sources tend to treat adulthood as the ‘normative’ life-stage, sometimes to the exclusion of other life-stages. Béatrice Chevallier Caseau asserted that while hagiographers sometimes explicitly stated that they would exclude childhood anecdotes, they nevertheless included them, showing that the Byzantines felt that certain attributes (in this case, sanctity) could be apparent from childhood.⁴¹ I found evidence of this in other genres: Anna Komnene (1083-1153) wrote: ‘In Diogenes’ reign, my father was only a youth; he had done nothing worthy of note, unless childhood doings are to be made the object of *enkomion*’.⁴² Anna implied that she suppressed other information about Alexios’ ‘infancy’ (*νηπίου*).⁴³ Nonetheless, she wrote that he was an obedient child, emphasising the connection with his adult character.⁴⁴ Writing c.1203, Theodosios Goudeles listed the traditional assets pertaining to his subject, Patriarch Leontios, including his race, city of origin and family, but subsequently wrote: ‘However, why do I care about the country of this brave one or about his earthly parents, as a reason supposedly for exaltation of him, who exchanged his country for the higher one, and was blessed to have God as his father because of his way of life and his proximity to the good?’⁴⁵ Theodosios Goudeles inferred that Leontios’ life as a patriarch was most important; but that his birth and parentage were nonetheless

⁴¹ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 127.

⁴² An. Komn., Vol. I: 6 (Eng. trans. 19): ‘Τὰ γὰρ πρὸ τοῦδε οὐδὲ μειράκιον ἦν καὶ οὐδὲν ὃ τι ἄξιον συγγραφῆς αὐτῷ πέπρακτο, εἰ μὴ τις ἐγκωμίου λόγον καὶ τὰ παιδικὰ αὐτῷ θήσαιτο.’

⁴³ An. Komn., Vol. I: 116 (Eng. trans. 113).

⁴⁴ An. Komn., Vol. I: 116 (Eng. trans. 113).

⁴⁵ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35): ‘Ἄλλα τί μοι πατρὶς τῷ γενναίῳ τούτῳ καὶ πατέρες οἱ κατὰ γῆς εἰς λόγον διῆθεν ὑφώσεως, τῷ τὴν ἄνω ἀλλαξαμένῳ πατρίδα καὶ πατέρα διὰ βίου καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐγγύτητος εὐτυχήσαντι τὸν Θεόν;’

fundamental to his construction of his subject. As can be seen in chapter four, the sources are predominantly occupied with adulthood; childhood anecdotes serve to show adulthood characteristics as innate and not learnt. Furthermore, anecdotes about infancy and childhood were written with hindsight, following a pre-determined agenda, shaped by subsequent adulthood achievements.

Methodology

In seeking nuances of Life Course constructions, this study combines a qualitative and quantitative approach. This is because the Byzantines marked Life Course junctures in a wide variety of ways and so, in order to ascertain the fullest understanding of the Life Course, numerical age data must be contrasted against rhetorical and pictorial constructions of the Life Course.

In order to produce quantitative data, this study draws upon numerical age data extracted from both hagiographies and epitaphs. The age data extracted from hagiographies is presented in bar chart format at the outset of each of the first five chapters. The age data collected from epitaphs is presented in bar chart format in the final chapter of this thesis. Both sets of data are divided into genders in order to compare gendered distinctions in the use of numerical age. The Byzantines' concept of numerical age is therefore fundamental to these enquiries. I must first consider whether the Byzantines had a broad understanding of numerical age as a Life Course marker. Did they keep records of their own numerical age? Was numerical age conceptual or actual in the mind of the Byzantines?

A key component to the record of age is the commemoration of an annual age marker such as a birthday. In Ancient Rome, papyrus military calendars recorded imperial birthdays and anniversaries and funerary markers commonly commemorated age at death and so it is reasonable to assume that the Romans counted increasing age with the passing of years.⁴⁶ In Byzantium, there is evidence of imperial birthday celebrations up until the twelfth century as well.⁴⁷ However, the Emperor's birthday celebration may have been an exception, as the sources do not show lower social strata celebrating birthdays in Byzantium. Nevertheless, at least one of the *vitae* shows us that the Byzantines sometimes recorded a date of birth. In the *Life of John the Hesychast* (c.554-558), Cyril of Scythopolis wrote: 'As he himself [John] told me, he was born on 8 January of the seventh indiction in the fourth year of the reign of Marcian, dear to God'.⁴⁸ This anecdote reveals that records of birth dates could be kept by the family or individual, at least in the sixth century. I must, of course, point out that this was not moderated in anyway and it would be easy for an individual or hagiographer to manipulate the data as he or she wished. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Byzantines understood the concept of a birth date, and they realised that if it was recorded, the individual could count their age in years. Angeliki Laiou-Thomadakis argued that age was usually unmentioned in the fourteenth-century *pratika* because it was largely unknown.⁴⁹ But, as will become apparent, numerical age was conceptually understood by the Byzantines, even if – as is probable – few people actually knew their birthday or age in years with any accuracy.

⁴⁶ Beard, North and Price 2009, 74.

⁴⁷ Moffatt 1996, 266.

⁴⁸ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Ioh. Hes.*, 201 (Eng. trans. 220): 'Τοιγαροῦν ἐγεννήθη, ὡς αὐτός μοι διηγήσατο, κατὰ τὴν ὀγδόην τοῦ Ἰαννουαρίου μηνὸς τῆς ἐβδόμης ἰνδικτιόνος τῶι τετράρτωι ἔτει τῆς Μαρκιανοῦ τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς βασιλείας.'

⁴⁹ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977, 271.

The fact that 29 of the 44 (65.9%) saintly subjects surveyed in this thesis were attributed with at least one numerical age in their *vitae*, even if just an age at death, adds further evidence to the suggestion that the Byzantines did carry concepts and expectations of how people should behave at specific ages. Authors clearly felt it was important to note age in texts, in order to enhance their descriptions, but they probably manipulated ages in order to fit in with their intended audience's preconceptions about familial and societal roles at certain times of life. For instance, it is recorded that Thomais of Lesbos, whose *vita* was written in the tenth century, successfully resisted marriage for as long as possible, until her parents forced her to marry at the age of 24.⁵⁰ As has been noted before, the hagiographer most likely inserted the age of 24 not because it was truthful to Thomais' biography, but because the age of 24 was perceived to be the upper age boundary for a female's first marriage.⁵¹ Ascetic ideology was in many ways founded upon principles of familial life. In this example, the age of 24 may have marked the upper boundary at which a woman could expect to marry for the first time. While ages recorded in hagiographies are, of course, largely representative of monastic Life Courses, here it is clear that these ages do mirror lay Life Course trajectories.

Age statements were sometimes employed in hagiographies to emphasise that the protagonist had surpassed 'traditional expectations of age-associated behaviour'.⁵² For example, Euthymios the Great, whose *vita* was written by Cyril of Scythopolis (c.554-558), was said to be tonsured and made lector at age three, which seems unusual,

⁵⁰ *V. Thoma. Lesbos*, 235 (Eng. trans. 303).

⁵¹ Laiou 1989, 240-1; *V. Thoma. Lesbos*, 236 (Eng. trans. 304).

⁵² Alberici 2008, 208.

if not highly improbable.⁵³ The inclusion of a specific age was always used to evoke a response in the audience, most usually to express the comparatively advanced maturity of the subject. Multiple previous studies have highlighted that age was often only noted when the subject was very young or old.⁵⁴ This suggests that, ideologically, numerical age was perceived only to be significant at specific stages of life, not consistently throughout the Life Course.

An age statement might be included to emphasise the exceptional longevity of the subject. This is common in hagiographies, where saintly individuals are shown to live well into old age.⁵⁵ But alternative types of evidence suggest old age was a rarity. Late Antique skeletal remains provide an average age of death of 36.5.⁵⁶ A study of Late Antique epitaphs suggests that most of the population died between the ages of 25 and 34 (females) and 35 and 44 (males) (for the limitations of using tombstone data to establish life expectancies, please see chapter six).⁵⁷ Fourteenth-century fiscal documents show us that 71% of females would die before the age of 45 and 74% of males would die before the age of 50.⁵⁸ The lower life expectancy of women can be explained by the perils induced by childbirth. The hagiographic *topos* of focusing on saints who lived into old age merely highlighted the exceptional high-standing of the individual. And in the penultimate chapter, it is suggested that the relative rarity of grandparents in the evidence might reflect the uncommonness of anyone living long enough to make a notable impact of the lives of their grandchildren.

⁵³ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 7 (Eng. trans. 6).

⁵⁴ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977, 271; Alberici 2008: 208.

⁵⁵ Talbot 1984, 269.

⁵⁶ Talbot 1984, 276.

⁵⁷ Patlagean 1977, 97.

⁵⁸ Laiou 1977, 296.

Alberici has already suggested that the age statements in hagiographies are not necessarily truthful.⁵⁹ The wide and varied spread of age statements collected from hagiographies suggests that numerical age was included to create a sense of accountability and to emphasise the authenticity of the *vita* (Appendix B). It must be emphasised at this point that I will not be analysing actual numerical age data (as I would be if I used, for instance, skeletal data) but the Byzantines' own records of numerical age. Numerical age is a concept used by the Byzantines to measure time in correlation with development across their lives. Here, I can exploit this numerical age data – not accepting it as numerically accurate – but instead taking the figures as conceptually significant Life Course markers to the Byzantines.

A major point of this thesis is to understand at what numerical age or stage in development the Byzantines thought it appropriate to, for instance, acquire an occupation, marry and reproduce and so on. This methodology assumes that the Byzantines' rhetorical, numerical and pictorial constructions are based on their perception of reality, or at least what was considered appropriate. Therefore, the model of Life Course stages produced here will reflect how the Byzantines perceived the Life Course to progress in correlation with numerical age and developmental markers. I will not be analysing factual evidence (if such a thing existed) but the Byzantines' self-presentation of their lives. This thesis focuses on how the Byzantines perceived and portrayed the Life Course.

While I have outlined many drawbacks to the employment of numerical age data, there are many benefits too. Dennis Hogan asserted that there is clear statistical regularity in the patterning of social roles in the Life Course, and numerical age is a key

⁵⁹ Alberici 2008, 15.

component to analysis here.⁶⁰ Age data is meaningless without supplementary information about the associated societal norms and so here it is used in conjunction with additional information revealed in the textual and archaeological evidence. The comparison and reconciliation of the statistical data (numerical age statements) with the accompanying literary descriptions of age will provide a nuanced understanding of Byzantine Life Course trajectories.

Similarly to numerical age data, textual analysis cannot be depended upon to expose the lived experience of the Life Course accurately but will show us rhetorical constructions of the Life Course. For instance, as can be seen in the penultimate chapter that hagiographies celebrate elderly saints who were able to overcome their physical infirmities and resist dependence on their community. Cyril of Scythopolis wrote in the *Life of Abba Kyriakos* (c.554-558), that ‘despite being such an old man, [he] was strong and zealous, standing for the office of psalmody and serving his visitors with his own hands. He was not in the least debilitated but was able to do everything...’⁶¹ In this example, the saint showed no signs of physical aging, a phenomenon I presume to be a rhetorical *trope* (for more on this, see chapter five). This rhetorical construction demonstrates how the elderly were admired when they were able to overcome their physical infirmities and continue their day to day practices. This concept is surely founded on the Byzantines’ experience of their daily lives but it may not always accurately represent the daily realities of their lives. This is demonstrated when the same author provides us with a conflicting view of old age. In the *Life of John the Hesychast* (c.554-558), Cyril of Scythopolis wrote that the saint said: ‘And I thought it

⁶⁰ Hogan 1978, 573.

⁶¹ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 235 (Eng. trans. 259): ‘καὶ τοσοῦτος γηραλέος ὄν στερρος ὑπῆρχεν καὶ πρόθυμος καὶ ἰστάμενος εἰς τὸν κανόνα τῆς ψαλμοιδίας καὶ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους πρὸς αὐτὸν ὑπηρετεῖ ἰδίας χερσιν. καὶ οὐδὲ ὄλωσ ἡτόνει, ἀλλὰ πάντα ἴσχυεν ἐν τῷ ἐν δυναμοῦτι αὐτὸν Χριστῷ.’

right, while I am still in bodily vigour, to serve and minister to fathers, so that when I become weak, I shall not be blamed for being served by others'.⁶² In the later excerpt, it is notable that the elderly were expected physically to deteriorate and be cared for by the younger generations. I can deduce that the hagiographic representation of the saintly as vigorous and resistant to physical aging is an inversion of the Byzantines' usual expectations of the aged as infirm and dependant. The rhetorical representation of the Byzantine Life Course shows us what was conceivable to the Byzantines, and moreover it highlights Byzantine ideals in contrast to normative occurrences.

It must be remembered that texts are not accurate or reliable accounts of historical events and some hagiographies are satirical and, in large parts, fictitious. In the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful* (composed c.821-2), reality and fiction are interwoven.⁶³ For instance, Martha Vinson asserted that the imperial bride shows featured here are unlikely to have actually taken place.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in the eleventh-century *Life of Mary the Younger*, descriptions of the political and military events, including a five year siege of Vizye, are likely to have been copied from earlier texts.⁶⁵ The unreliability of sources for data concerning historical events does not compromise my enquiries here. I am concerned with perceptions and conventions which are most transparent in the fictitious tales and elaborations of Byzantine authors.

This thesis deals, in the main part, with rhetorical constructions of the Life Course. Authors' constructions of the Life Course are shaped by the genre and intended audience of their writings. So, after the ninth century, hagiographies tend to be written

⁶² Cyr. Scyth. *V. Ioh. Hes.*, 207 (Eng. trans. 226): 'δίκαιον δὲ ἡγησάμην, ὡς ἔτι εἶμι ἐν τῇ ἰσχύι τοῦ σώματος, διακονῆσαι καὶ δουλεῦσαι τοῖς πατράσιων, ἵνα ὅταν ἀτονήσω, ἀκατάκριτος ἔσωμαι ὑπὸ ἄλλων διακονούμενος.'

⁶³ Rydén 2002, 16.

⁶⁴ Treadgold 2004, 39; Vinson 2004, 108.

⁶⁵ Laiou 1996, 248.

in a more elevated rhetorical style which I presume signifies that they were intended to be read or heard by a more elite audience.⁶⁶ As I will trace throughout this thesis, sources are saturated with literary *topoi* and *tropes*: some of which are so implicit that they are almost unidentifiable. Nevertheless, these texts are littered with insights into the daily realities of the Byzantines, even if, these realities are only seen through the eyes of the authors: literate adults. The authors play into their audiences' preconceptions and shared cultural assumptions about peoples' behaviours at specific stages of life. The deconstruction of these writings not only exposes *tropes* and *topoi* but, additionally, a shared cultural conception of the Life Course.

The quantity of evidence across the various stages of the Life Course is patchy. For instance, none of the evidence-types reveal much about miscarriages or still births. Authors must have deliberately omitted such occurrences in line with rhetorical formulae, given the high prevalence of neonatal mortality in pre-modern societies.⁶⁷ In the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful* (c.822), Niketas describes a dream in which his deceased grandfather was sat down amongst 'many newly baptised little children, standing around him holding lamps.'⁶⁸ Niketas visualised his younger sister (who had died soon after her birth) sat upon his grandfather's lap in heaven. This account of Saint Philaretos' deceased granddaughter focuses on her happy transition to the afterlife and her proximity to the (deceased) members of the family unit. I deduce that this positive perspective of infant mortality was thought to be the kindest way to incorporate such an evocative theme into Byzantine narratives.

⁶⁶ Efthymiades 2011, 95.

⁶⁷ Talbot 2009, 305.

⁶⁸ *V. Philaretos*, 114 (Eng. trans. 115): 'καὶ νήπια πολλὰ νεόφωτα ἐστῶτα κύκλω αὐτοῦ κρατοῦντες λαμπάδας.'

Evidence suggests that life-stages were not clear cut and the Byzantines perceived life-stages to overlap with one another. The deconstruction of textual evidence suggests that women were considered to have attained the life-stage of adulthood once they had passed puberty and were capable of bearing children. This is apparent from a number of texts of different genres which draw upon the literary *topos* that women of disparate numerical ages, but of childbearing age, were indistinguishable from one another in terms of their attractiveness (later in this thesis I will analyse, for instance, the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful*, which was written c.822, and Psellos' *Enkomion of his Mother*, which was written c.1054). In the *Lives of David, Symeon and George* (c.863-865), David's mother described her age using her children as a signpost: her eldest child was referred to as the 'fruit' of her youth (καρπὸς νεότητός μου), while her youngest child was described as the 'seal' of her old age (γῆρως ἐπισφάγισμα).⁶⁹ The sequence that the mother gave birth to the children was used as a chronological framework to describe the woman's adulthood. In this example it is apparent that, in terms of physical development, childbearing defined a woman's adulthood.

However, in terms of mentality, there is ample evidence to suggest that the Byzantines perceived both men and women not to be fully competent until they were aged 25. I will look at Justinian's *Institutes* (535), one of the most fundamental legal codes in Byzantium, in order to draw out comparisons between hagiographic numerical age data and legal age limits. Here it is decreed that males and females should receive curators until they are 25.⁷⁰ Here, it is implied that individuals under the age of 25 had not yet attained full mental competence. The same concept is reiterated in hagiographies: prior to the age of 25, Matrona of Perge (whose *vita* was written in the

⁶⁹ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 218 (Eng. trans. 160).

⁷⁰ *Just. Inst.*, XXIII, 42 (Eng. trans. 304).

sixth century and rewritten by Symeon Metaphrates in the tenth or eleventh century) waged war with her desires: aged not more than 25 years old, she stayed in church all night, praying and fasting.⁷¹ The statement of a numerical age here is only a vague testament to Matróna's actual age, and is utilised moreover, to portray that she was not yet an adult. References to the age of 25 are reiterated time and time again in the sources (including the ninth-century *Life of Michael the Synkellos* and the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, and the eleventh-century *Chronographia* of Psellos and the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion*). One might understand that the age of 25 symbolically represented the transition to mental maturity expressed by the power to resist desires in *vitae*.

Not only did the Byzantines conceptualise the commencement and termination of life-stages variably, but they often juxtaposed different life-stages against one another too. Each life-stage can only be understood in the context of the complete Life Course trajectory. In some cases hagiographers and historians (including Cyril of Scythopolis, writing c.554-558; Ignatios the Deacon, writing c.830; Basil of Thessalonike, writing in the early-tenth century; Psellos, writing in the eleventh century; Skylitzes, writing c.1096 and Theosterikos, writing c.1100) marked progression from youth to adulthood when writing of their subject's newly fixed character. In other cases, authors constructed the attributes associated with a specific life-stage in opposition to another life-stage (one of the classic Byzantine *topoi* here is that young men were physically strong but mentally incompetent, while old men were physically weak but wise).⁷² In

⁷¹ *V. Matr. A*, 791 (Eng. trans. 20); Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 921 (Eng. trans. 3).

⁷² Davies 2008, 109.

order to expose these underlying patterns, one must approach specific life-stages with flexibility, enabling us to compare commonalities and disparities between ages.⁷³

In sum, the Byzantines' concepts of transitions between life-stages were nuanced, depending on the era, status and gender of the individual, as well as the author's conception of the individual's personal circumstances. Added to this, the Byzantines conceived of 'age' in a plurality of ways too, including numerical age, physical development, familial role and mental competence. Indeed, this list of age markers and measurements is not exhaustive: in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George* how, for women, it was possible to mark Life Course stages with the birth of children (emphasising the importance of puberty and the menopause in the female Life Course). This thesis aims to highlight nuances in the construction of the Life Course while identifying commonalities across individuals of different epochs, genders and statuses. In doing so, I will highlight, for the first time, that the Byzantines had a clear concept of the Life Course.

⁷³ For oppositionalism as a methodology, see Moi 2002.

**CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTION
TO CHILDHOOD**

The textual construction of a subject's infancy was formulaic.¹ Writing in the fourth century, Aphthonios advised writers to record birth, nation, homeland, ancestors and parents.² Menander, his contemporary, instructed biographers to commence their narratives with specific information: race and city, family and events at birth (dreams and portents).³ Middle Byzantine authors continue to follow these precedents. Most of the hagiographies studied here open their accounts with a short overview of their subjects' place of birth and parentage. To cite just a handful of many examples, in the opening to the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.830), Ignatios the Deacon writes that George is an inhabitant of Kromna, near Amastris, and his parents are named Theodosios and Megethos, who are described as 'truly the greatest temple of virtues'.⁴ In the first paragraph of the *Life of Anthousa of Mantineon* (written in the tenth century) it is recorded that the saint was born in the region of Mantineon to pious parents named Strategios and Febronia.⁵ Similarly, in the *Life of Leontios, Patriarch of Jerusalem* (written c.1203), Theodosios the Monk listed the traditional assets pertaining to his subject, including his race, city of origin and family at the outset of his narrative.⁶ These three examples, which are representative of the majority of hagiographies, show the relative continuity in the employment of this literary device over the course of the period.

However, from around the sixth century onwards, Christian symbolisms are incorporated into the standard preamble. In this chapter, it can be seen how key points of Christ's infancy (e.g. conception and birth) are integrated into the standard

¹ Portions of this chapter originally appeared as Davies 2010.

² Aphthonios, *Progymn.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 108).

³ Menander, *Rhetor*, 80 (Eng. trans. 81).

⁴ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 3): 'τὸ τῶν ἀρετῶν ὄντως μέγιστον τέμενος'.

⁵ *SynaxCP*, 848 (Eng. trans. 16).

⁶ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35).

hagiographical model.⁷ For example, the modern reader is familiar – as the Byzantine audience would have been – with Luke’s Testament, in which the angel Gabriel visited Mary, advising her that she would carry the son of God.⁸ This scene is replicated in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), where George Eleusius tells us how before Theodore’s birth, an imperial messenger predicted to his mother that her unborn son would become a bishop.⁹ Menander advised encomiasts to stress dreams and portents at birth. But in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, based on the scriptural model, signs and symbols of divinity are apparent before the baby is born.

Anecdotes from conception onwards became incorporated into the hagiographical model. Again, drawing upon the example of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, it was at his conception that Theodore’s life story began when a ‘very large and brilliant star descended from heaven into her womb’.¹⁰ This anecdote clearly parallels the biblical precedent, whereupon the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary.¹¹ It is also reminiscent of the Magi following a star in order to find Jesus.¹² Theodore’s mother was advised that the star marked ‘the brilliant adornment of virtues and graces which God has sent down upon the babe in your womb that you saw in the likeness of a brilliant star’.¹³ Theodore – like Jesus – was destined to be exceptional from his conception. George Eleusius asserted: ‘For thus, he [God] is wont to consecrate his worthy servants

⁷ Luke 2: 22-40.

⁸ Luke, 1: 29-33.

⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 88): ‘son’ (is translated as καρπὸν, literally meaning fruit).

¹⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 88): ‘Συλλαβοῦσα τοίνυν ἐντεῦθεν ἡ γυνὴ βλέπει κατ’ ὄναρ ἀστέρα παμμεγέθη τε καὶ λαμπρὸν οὐρανόθεν ἐπὶ τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτῆς κατελθόντα.’

¹¹ Luke, 1: 35.

¹² Matthew 2: 1-7.

¹³ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 88): ‘Ἡ γὰρ λαμπρὰ τῶν ἀρετῶν καὶ τῶν χαρισμάτων εὐκοσμία ἐστὶν ἡ ἐν εἶδει λαμπροῦ ἀστέρος ὀραθεῖσά σοι, ἣν κατέπεμψεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ἐν σοὶ βρέφος.’

in the womb before they are born'.¹⁴ In this chapter it will become apparent that the Byzantines perceived the beginning of the Life Course, instead of starting abruptly at birth, was a transition from conception through to pregnancy, birth, baptism and weaning.

There are a number of limitations to the sources' presentation of infancy which have an impact upon my enquiries here. First, authors tended to write about deceased or older people in histories and hagiographies, at a time when their lifetimes' achievements were nearing completion. This biographical approach must have diminished the amount of accurate information available about the subject's infancy and, as has just been noted, rhetorical treatise encouraged authors to be creative in their accounts. The authors retrospectively applied specific attributes to their character, so that their anecdotes anticipated their subject's qualities in adulthood. For example, in the *Life of Nikon* (eleventh century), the author wrote: 'To speak briefly, it was clear from his very birth, as it is with noble plants, what sort of a person he would turn out to be with respect to virtue.'¹⁵ To the Byzantines, it was conceivable that infancy was pre-emptive of the subject's future qualities. Second, as people often do not remember their own experiences any earlier than around the age of three, writers cannot directly describe their own infancy. Third, one wonders the extent to which the Byzantine *literati* – who were mostly male, urban-dwelling and elite – had direct experience of caring for infants. This is especially true of monastic authors who had often dedicated themselves to God

¹⁴ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 5 (Eng. trans. 89): 'οὕτω γὰρ εἰώθει τοὺς ἀξιόους αὐτοῦ δούλους πρὸ τοῦ τίκεσθαι ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ ὄντας ἀγιάζειν.'

¹⁵ *V. Nikon*, 32 (Eng. trans. 33): 'ἐν ταύτῃ δὴ τῇ μονῇ μείραξ ἦν τίς ποτε ἐνδαιτιώμενος καὶ τῶ τῶν εἰσαγωγικῶν τάγματι κατειλεγμένος ὑπὸ καθηγγητῆ καὶ ποιμένι ἀνδρὶ θεῷ καὶ τροφίμῳ τῆς ἀρετῆς.'

from youth onwards.¹⁶ Despite these limitations, one can ascertain a clear understanding of how the Byzantines envisioned infancy within the model of the Life Course.

1.1 Defining the Start of the Life Course

Hagiographical age data reveals that infants' numerical age was not widely documented in texts: there is only one example of an individual being attributed with an age before the age of two years old (Table 1). The Byzantines probably recognised, as we do today, that an age in years inadequately described a baby, whose fast-paced development was more accurately described with words. Words could be employed to vividly portray a particular stage of infantile development. For example 'ἔμβρυον' (embryo) was used to describe an unborn baby.¹⁷ Alternatively, 'ὁ νήπιος' (babbling infant) was used to describe an infant not yet talking and could denote greater specificity than the generic terms 'τό βρέφος' (unborn or newborn baby) or 'ὁ παῖς' (child).¹⁸ When depicting the vulnerability of infants, Ignatios the Deacon (lived c.795-870), described them as 'suckling infants' (βρεφῶν ὑπομάξιων).¹⁹ Writing in the tenth century, Leo the Deacon used the same motif of vulnerable 'suckling infants' (ὑπομάξια βρέφη or νήπια ὑπομάξια) which tells us that prior to weaning, infants were thought to be at greater risk of tragedy than those who had been weaned.²⁰ The authors clearly thought that the different stages of infantile development were best portrayed with wordy descriptions, as opposed to numerical ages.

¹⁶ Patlagean 1975, 22.

¹⁷ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 213 (Eng. trans. 153).

¹⁸ *V. Ioannicii*, 385 (Eng. trans. 258); *An. Komn.*, Vol. I: (Eng. trans. 113).

¹⁹ *V. Taras.*, 72 (Eng. trans. 172).

²⁰ *Leo Diac.*, 149 (Eng. trans. 193); 107 (Eng. trans. 157).

I have found only one example of a person attributed with a numerical age between zero and two (Table 1). In the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (composed c.1100), Theosterikos tells us that the newborn saint was eight days old when his mother died.²¹ As this is the only example of a stated numerical age in babyhood, I can discern the importance of the mother and baby relationship, which is emphatically absent from an early stage of this baby's development. Usually, numerical ages were omitted from descriptions of infancy demonstrating how, when conceptualising this stage of the Life Course, numerical age was not as important to the Byzantines as developmental markers. I must therefore turn to the markers of infant progression: conception, pregnancy, birth, baptism and weaning.

There is no agreement amongst scholars as to when the Byzantines considered the Life Course to commence. Marcus Rautman and Jane Baun argued that baptism soon after birth symbolised social acceptance into the family unit.²² Chryssi Bourbou and Sandra Garvie-Lok found that breast milk was phased out of a child's diet from six months through to four years of age.²³ They have argued that the completion of weaning marked the end of nutritional dependence on the mother and an increased likelihood of survival to adulthood.²⁴ Paraskevi Tritsaroli and Frédérique Valentin used the results from grave excavations to conclude that babies were not considered to be fully fledged family members who could be buried alongside their relatives until they had been weaned at around the ages of three or four.²⁵ Therefore, this chapter takes a

²¹ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 3).

²² Rautman 2006, 8; for a breakdown of the ceremonies and rituals following birth including circumcision, baptism and naming the child see Baun 1994, 117; 123.

²³ Bourbou and Garvie-Lok 2009, 84.

²⁴ Bourbou and Garvie-Lok 2009, 84.

²⁵ Tritsaroli and Valentin 2008, 107.

fluid approach to the definition of infancy, starting with the union of the parents and conception, as the authors often do, through to the end of the weaning process.

Tables 1 and 2 document numerical age statements documented in 42 *vitae* composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries. The blue table represents boys' ages while the red table represented girls' ages, which are proportionately less. Out of the 42 *vitae*, there are a total of 13 numerical age statements for boys and girls up to and including the age of 7. There are no numerical age statements for girls aged 5 or less and only 3 age statements for boys aged less than 5. As discussed in detail above, these tables highlight that numerical ages were not usually employed by the Byzantines to describe an infant's age.

Table 1: Infant Ages Attested for Males in Hagiographies 6-12th century

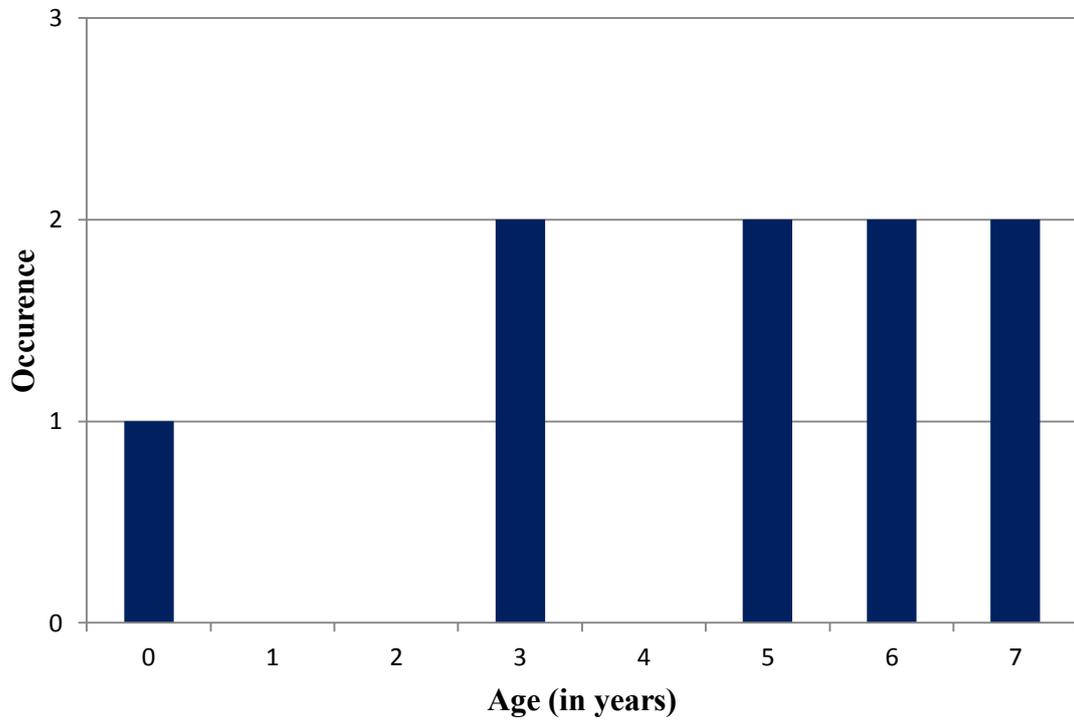
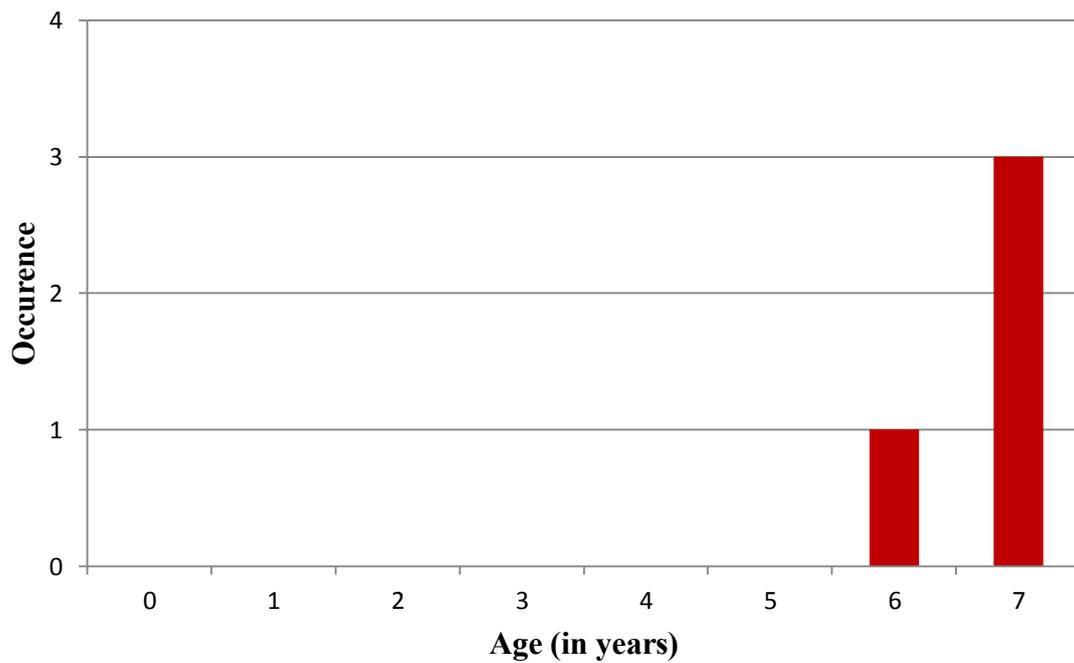


Table 2: Infant Ages Attested for Females in Hagiographies 6-12th century



1.2 Conception

The marital circumstances of the parents at conception and the legitimacy of the baby are significant in earlier Latin writings.²⁶ The concern for legitimacy is perpetuated in Byzantine sources. There is a notable significance attached to circumstances of conception, as a means to validating legitimacy, most markedly in the imperial dynasty. In Nikephoros' *Short History*, which was written in the ninth century, Herakleios (reigned 610-641) is said to have given only his bastard sons by a concubine as hostages, signifying their lesser value.²⁷ Psellos recorded that Michael VII Doukas (c.1050-1090) was subjected to a test, in order to see if he was fit to rule, because he was conceived and born before his father ascended the throne and therefore was not a *porphyrogennetos* (born in the purple).²⁸ Legitimacy was crucial to the descriptions of imperial newborns: as a means to validate their heritage and secure their succession.

It is clear that even outside of the imperial family, conception within marriage was the ideal. Illegitimate babies were shown to exhibit negative attributes as adults. In George the Synkellos' *Chronography* (ninth century), he tells us that Abimelech, a bastard, murdered his all his brothers except Jonathan and led his contemporaries into fornication.²⁹ This is an elaboration on the biblical version, in which Abimelech's impious behaviour was not recorded.³⁰ But in Byzantine writings, George portrayed the illegitimate Abimelech as a murderer of his legitimate brothers, who then led others to follow the path that generated his own illegitimacy: apparently random fornication. The

²⁶ Harlow and Laurence 2002, 84; Southon 2008, 68.

²⁷ Nikeph., *Short History*, 58 (Eng. trans. 59).

²⁸ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II. 148 (Eng. trans. 340); Dagron 2003, 44; McCormick 1997, 245: there is some evidence to suggest that up until the eighth century, the status of the imperial mother was not consolidated until she had produced an heir.

²⁹ George Synk., 186 (Eng. trans. 230); 354 (Eng. trans. 425).

³⁰ Judges 8: 31.

ecclesiast noted the illegitimate status of Abimelech, implying that his illegitimacy contributed to his impious behaviour. There is some suggestion that the Byzantines felt illegitimate offspring had a greater potential to be villainous.

In some instances, authors reformulated the legitimacy of their subject, in order to prevent potential invective against them. This was well established practice: the founder of the Byzantine Empire, Constantine the Great (reigned 306-337), was denounced in Zosimus' *New History* (early sixth century) on the basis of his illegitimacy.³¹ Samuel Lieu and Dominic Montserrat have suggested that sources reinterpreted the marital status of Constantine's parents, portraying him as legitimate.³² Andrew Louth has compared the Syriac (Monophysite) and Greek (Chalcedonian) versions of Maximus the Confessor's (c.580-662) *vitae*, finding the saint to be presented as the illegitimate son of a Persian slave and an Arab whore in the Syriac tradition, while he was presented as the son of two married aristocrats in the Greek tradition.³³ Illegitimate status was sometimes whitewashed in order to prevent defamation of adult character. This practice highlights the Byzantines' sensitivity to legitimacy.

In one isolated example, George Eleusius inverted the established connection between legitimacy and destined ideal behaviour in order to emphasise the exceptional nature of Theodore of Sykeon. We are told that the saint was conceived by a prostitute, out of wedlock, but – in the face of all opposition – became virtuous.³⁴ During an exorcism, a demon exclaimed: '...and now he has given authority to the son of a harlot

³¹ Zosim., 195 (Eng. trans. 29).

³² Lieu and Montserrat 1998, 81.

³³ Louth 1996, 119; Maxi. Confessor, *DE*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

³⁴ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 4 (Eng. Trans. 88).

to cast us out. Woe is me, wretch that I am, to be expelled by such a child!’³⁵

Theodore’s sanctity was empowered, because he – unlike most – overcame ‘the thistles of harlotry (ἐκ πορνικῶν ἀκανθῶν)...’.³⁶ Theodore was born of a prostitute and yet he was saintly: this unique rhetorical strategy overturned existing *tropes* and identified Theodore as an outstanding model of virtue.

A second theme relating to conception, which emerged alongside the dissemination of Christian doctrine, is the ease or lack of ease with which the parents conceived. Writing in the early sixth century, Paul of Elusa reported that Saint Theognios could grant fertility to women.³⁷ George Eleusius recorded in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century) that he himself was the result of such a miracle: Theodore of Sykeon had blessed his parents and enabled them to conceive after many years of sterility.³⁸ This is, again, a biblical motif: babies including Samson, David, Jacob and Esau and John the Baptist were all born to previously sterile parents.³⁹

In Byzantine saints’ lives, we are often told that the parents conceived their child after a long period of infertility, as the result of divine intervention.⁴⁰ In the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* (c.564) and the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.830) we are told that the parents tried to conceive a baby for thirty years before being successful.⁴¹ In the *Life of George of Amastris*, we hear how children who were born – despite their parents’ barrenness (στεῖρας) – were particularly godly because they were born in response to a

³⁵ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 15 (Eng. trans. 99): ‘καὶ νῦν τῷ τῆς πόρνης υἱῷ δέδωκεν ἐξουσίαν ἐκβαλεῖν ἡμᾶς.’

³⁶ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 105).

³⁷ Paul of Elusa, *V. Theog.*, 113 (Eng. trans. 158).

³⁸ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 100 (Eng. trans. 184); Hinterberger 2000, 149.

³⁹ Judges 13: 1-24; Ruth 4:13; Genesis 25: 19-21; Luke 1: 6-7.

⁴⁰ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 6 (Eng. trans. 5). This is a concept noted to be prevalent in western *vitae* by de Jong 1996.

⁴¹ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23); *V. Georg. Amast.*, 7 (Eng. trans. 2); 8 (Eng. trans. 3).

prayer.⁴² Luke of Steiris (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) was described as a ‘greatly longed for delight’.⁴³ A child born after many years of infertility was born in response to a request, a prayer, or an intercession: therefore, the child was not only highly desired but godly too.⁴⁴

In gratitude for the miraculous conceptions, the parents of such babies were often reported to have subsequently dedicated their child to a monastery, thereby returning their gift to God.⁴⁵ This can be seen in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (c.846): ‘after the saint had been weaned and had reached the age of three, his mother dedicated him to a monastery.’⁴⁶ It is apparent here that the Byzantines perceived babies to be completely dependant on their mothers until they had been weaned from breast milk. Martin Hinterberger observed that in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century) the saint granted George Eleusius’ parents another son, in order to compensate for the loss of their first son, who they had dedicated to God.⁴⁷ Miraculous conceptions symbolised the birth of a person predestined for honour. In hagiographies, the consequences of such miracles were far-reaching for the parents: they were sometimes expected to dedicate the baby to the service of God, without regard for the continuation of their family line.⁴⁸

We are led to believe that normally the youngest siblings were dedicated to God, only after familial succession had been secured through the elder siblings. In the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-865), it is recorded how the parents left

⁴² *V. Georg. Amast.*, 11 (Eng. trans. 4).

⁴³ *V. Luk. Steir.* 4 (Eng. trans. 5): ‘κομιδῇ ποθεινὸν ἐντρέφημα’.

⁴⁴ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 11 (Eng. trans. 4).

⁴⁵ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 145.

⁴⁶ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 46 (Eng. trans. 47): ‘ἀπογαλακτισθέντος δὲ τοῦ παιδὸς καὶ τριετοῦς ἤδη γεγονότος, προσήγαγεν αὐτὸν τῷ Θεῷ κατὰ τὴν αὐτῆς ὑπόσχεσιν.’

⁴⁷ Hinterberger 2000, 158.

⁴⁸ Talbot 2009, 289.

one pair in the world for a continuation of their ‘family line’ (γένους διαδοχήν), while the other pair, along with David, Symeon and George, they offered as a ‘sacrifice’ (θυσίαν καθαρὰν) and dedicated them to monasticism.⁴⁹ In the same *vitae*, the elder child is said to be first-born but nevertheless spiritually inferior to his younger brother, who was an ascetic monk.⁵⁰ Normally, parents prioritised familial succession above dedicating a child to monasticism.

It is clear that the birth of a male was particularly worthy of celebration. In the *Life of Elias of Heliopolis* (eleventh century), we hear of merriment on the birth of the first son, when a feast is prepared to celebrate the new arrival.⁵¹ It is significant that all of the miraculous babies recorded in hagiographies were the same gender: male.⁵² For instance, in the *Life Michael the Synkellos* (c.846), his parents were not infertile and had borne many children, but none of them were male so his mother spent time praying to ‘the Lord might grant male fruit to her body’.⁵³ Similar to other saints, Michael was the result of a request through prayer: he was highly desired. Perhaps it was thought to be especially pious to dedicate a miraculous baby to the monastic order when he represented the only male offspring.

The high status awarded to male offspring is not only found in hagiographies: Anna Komnene, writing c.1135, recorded that her brother, John, was the object of her father’s and mother’s prayers.⁵⁴ Once Eirene had given birth to a son both the Emperor and Empress were overjoyed.⁵⁵ We are told by Anna that John was naturally promoted

⁴⁹ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 152).

⁵⁰ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 230 (Eng. trans. 170).

⁵¹ *V. Elias Helio.*, 45 (Eng. trans. 94).

⁵² This is apparent in Late Antique *vitae* too: Paphnutius, *HM*, 127.

⁵³ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 44 (Eng. trans. 45): ‘ὅπως δόη αὐτῇ κύριος καρπὸν κοιλίας ἀρρενικόν’.

⁵⁴ *An. Komn.*, Vol. II: 62 (Eng. trans. 197).

⁵⁵ *An. Komn.*, Vol. II: 62 (Eng. trans. 197).

to the rank of emperor and bequeathed the empire as his heritage.⁵⁶ The regularity of rejoicing upon the birth of a son, narrated across a variety of genres, might imply that a specific value was attached to lower status male children too. For the elderly or incapacitated of all social statuses, economic security would have largely depended upon their sons' generosity.⁵⁷

I have followed the literary development of conception in pre-Christian writings, whereupon conception was significant in terms of legitimacy, through to the sixth and seventh century accounts, where narratives about conception started to take on two additional purposes: first, to incorporate biblical motifs and second, to foretell the subsequent character of the conceived. For instance, in the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* (sixth century) the authors records how it pleased God that the saint was born on property neighbouring Holy Sion.⁵⁸ In this anecdote, the holy place of conception was employed as proof of Nicholas's destined goodness. Furthermore, Spyros Troianos argued that the Byzantines sometimes connected circumstances of conception to birth defects and abnormalities.⁵⁹ The circumstances of conception took on a new significance for the Byzantines: in addition to the longstanding importance of the legitimacy of the conceived child, conception was also thought to impact upon the child's destiny.

⁵⁶ An. Komn., Vol. II. 63 (Eng. trans. 198).

⁵⁷ Skinner 1997, 394.

⁵⁸ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23).

⁵⁹ Troianos 1991, 6.

1.3 Pregnancy and Birth

In Roman texts, authors sometimes recorded omens that occurred during imperial pregnancies, but this was not common.⁶⁰ Looking at the Late Antique Life Course, Alberici pointed out that Ambrose's talents were considered to be apparent only from birth onwards.⁶¹ But conception took on a new significance in Byzantium and, paralleling the biblical model, we commonly find the occurrence of symbolic events after the conception of a predestined pious individual in hagiographies.⁶² Pregnancy became a significant part of saints' Life Course trajectories. In the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.830), Ignatios the Deacon wrote: 'Nor is it fitting to neglect the divine wonders that were worked before the birth of the saint; how he was chosen from above, and how he had his name not from men, nor on account of men, but rather was anointed and dedicated a priest before being born from the womb'.⁶³ In the same *vita*, the city leaders dreamt that the saint's mother, Megethos, was 'carrying a holy babe in her womb'.⁶⁴ In the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (c.894), Gregory the Cleric tells us: 'she [Anna] reconciled herself to the <Lord> from the time she was in her mother's womb through her monastic office and had directed her entire life in a manner pleasing

⁶⁰ Wiedemann 1989, 59.

⁶¹ Alberici 2008, 52.

⁶² This is not the only example in which Menander's instructions are adapted to a new Christian model. Instead of comparing the newborns to Romulus or Cyrus, as Menander had advised, the saints were compared to Christian figures. For instance, George of Amastris was compared to the Old Testament figures Isaac, Samuel and John; David, brother of Symeon, was compared to Samuel and Jeremiah, Lazaros of Mount Galesion was compared to Job. See: *V. Georg. Amast.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 3); *V. Laz. Gal.*, 509 (Eng. trans. 78); *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 154).

⁶³ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 3): 'καὶ ἄξιον μὴδὲ τὰ πρὸ γενέσεως τοῦ ἁγίου παραδραμεῖν εἰρηασμένα θεῖα τεράστια: ὅπως ἄνωθεν ἐκλεκτὸς ἐχρημάτισεν, ὅπως τὴν κλήσιν οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων, οὐδ' δι' ἀνθρώπων ἔσχεν, ἀλλ' ἱερεὺς, πρὶν ἐκ μητρῶν ἐκσπασθῆναι λαγόνων, καὶ χρίεται καὶ ἐπιφημίζεται. ἢ τοίνυν τοῦτον ὅσια μήτηρ ἐγκυμονοῦσα καὶ φέρουσα ἐν κοιλίᾳ, ἢ τῆς Ἐλισάβετ ὁμότροπος, τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ προδρόμου ὁμοδαίτον, καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἱεροὺς φοιτῶσα σηκοῦς, καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς σχολάζουσα'.

⁶⁴ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 3): 'γυναικα ἔφησαν ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχειν βρέφος ἅγιον'.

to God'.⁶⁵ Post-sixth century hagiographical writing was abundantly clear in its message: in certain circumstances, personal characteristics were not only ordained at birth, but during pregnancy too.

As early as the sixth century, the Byzantines wrote that an individual's characteristics were developed even before their birth.⁶⁶ Cyril of Scythopolis, writing in the sixth century, recorded that Sabas was predestined from the 'womb' (νηδίου).⁶⁷ Similarly, Nicholas of Sion (whose *vita* was written in the same century) was said to be 'from his Mother's womb he was chosen by God'.⁶⁸ Ignatios the Deacon wrote that Tarasios (whose *vita* was written in the ninth century) preserved his immutability of mind 'from the time he was in his mother's womb and in swaddling clothes'.⁶⁹ In the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-5), a monk of the local community pointed out a 'foetus' (ἔμβρυον) with a great future, exclaiming: 'the she now carries in her womb will be the way and the beginning and the leader of the offspring who succeed him as well as a light for the wilderness and a shining star for his compatriots...'.⁷⁰ The saintly David was said to be consecrated even before birth.⁷¹ Writing c.1203, Theodosios Goudeles asserted that God knows our affairs even before

⁶⁵ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 34 (Eng. trans. 197): 'καὶ ἦν ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς μητρίας ὠδίνος τῷ θεῷ ἀνατεθῆναι γινώσκομεν καὶ διὰ τῆς μοναδικῆς πολιτείας θεαρέστως τὸν βίον ἑαυτῆς διθύνασαν'.

⁶⁶ Orme 2001, 14.

⁶⁷ *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 84 (Eng. trans. 95).

⁶⁸ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 32 (Eng. trans. 33): 'ἐκ κοιλίας γὰρ μητρός ἐστιν ἐκλελεγμένος παρά τῷ θεῷ.'

⁶⁹ *V. Taras.*, 146 (Eng. trans. 198): 'καὶ αὐτὸς ταύτην ἀπαρασύλητον διεσώσατο ἐκ μητρικῆς νηδύος καὶ σμαργάνων'.

⁷⁰ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 213 (Eng. trans. 153): 'καὶ ὅπερ ἐν μήτρᾳ νῦν ἔμβρυον περιφέρει, ὁδὸς καὶ ἀνάβασις καὶ ἀρχηγὸς τῶν μετ' αὐτοῦ συγγόνων γενήσεται καὶ τῆς ἐρήμου λαμπτήρ τε καὶ τῶν ὁμοφύλων ἀστὴρ διαφανέστατος· ἠγίασται γὰρ αὐτῆς ἡ κοιλία ἐν ἅπασιν τοῖς κνοφορήμασι.'

⁷¹ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 154).

our birth.⁷² Throughout this period, hagiographies incorporated occurrences prior to birth, during pregnancy.

But it was not just unborn saints whose destiny was formulated before their birth. Anthousa of Mantineon, whose *vita* was recorded in the tenth-century *Synaxarion*, predicted that that Empress Eudokia, who was experiencing a difficult pregnancy, would give birth to one male who would become a Caesar and one female child who would become a nun.⁷³ It is significant that here, the future of the unborn children (Anthousa the girl, who also became a saint, and Chistopher or Nikephoros, the boy, who became a Caesar) was predetermined from their birth. Drawing upon evidence in hagiographies, Chevallier Caseau asserted: ‘The Byzantines believed that the future of their children was partly inscribed in their first few years’.⁷⁴ Hagiographers wrote that an individual’s characteristics were preordained from their conception.

Miraculous portents before birth were incorporated into histories much later than hagiographies. For instance, neither George the Synkellos nor Michael Psellos included anecdotes about events prior to the birth of their subjects in their writings. George the Synkellos, writing in the ninth century, maintained that it was from birth onwards that personality was formed.⁷⁵ Similarly, Michael Psellos, writing in the eleventh century, asserted: ‘At the time of our birth we are endowed with certain natural virtues or their opposites’.⁷⁶ Both of these historians insisted that it was from birth that a baby’s character began to be formed.

⁷² Theod. V. *Leontios*, 74 (Eng. trans. 75).

⁷³ *SynaxCP*, 851 (Eng. trans. 18).

⁷⁴ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 128.

⁷⁵ George Synk., 140 (Eng. trans. 174).

⁷⁶ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 139 (Eng. trans. 177): ‘ἀλλ’ ὡσπερ τὰ τῶν γενομένων σώματα, ἃ μὲν μεθ’ ὥρας εὐθὺς ἀποτίκτεται...’

But in the twelfth century, the historian, Anna Komnene, used the hagiographic *topos* in order to portray that her own parental devotion was apparent, even before her birth. When her mother was seized with the ‘pains of childbirth’ (τῆ γαστρὶ) while her father was away on campaign, ‘making the sign of the cross over her womb, she said, “Wait a while, little one, till your father’s arrival”’.⁷⁷ Anna wrote that as an unborn baby, she obeyed her mother’s command, signifying her devotion and obedience to her parents.⁷⁸ Anna recorded her mother’s prayers to God and noted that divine intervention occurred, an anecdote more commonly found in the pregnancies of hagiographies, but used here to represent the author’s obedience to her parents. From the sixth century onwards, hagiographical writers began to engage with the concept of an individual’s existence before their birth: indicating the foetus’ personality through a series of miraculous events and symbolisms. This strategy was not adopted in the historical texts until the twelfth century, when Anna Komnene exploited the *topos* to different ends: not to show her sanctity but, in contrast, to show devotion to her parents.

Michael Gorman and Spyros Troianos have already noted how in third-century Roman law, abortion was not treated as murder but focused upon deception of the father.⁷⁹ In the seventh century, Christian Law changed the penalty for abortion. The *Council in Trullo*, which met in 692, decided that ‘abortion’ (τά ἀμβλωθρίδια) constituted ‘murder’ (φόνος).⁸⁰ This penalty seems to have been specific to canonical rulings. In the *Ekloga* of Leo III (726), we read that if a woman was found to have

⁷⁷ An. Komn., Vol. II: 61 (Eng. trans. 196): ‘Καὶ ὡς γε τὴν βασιλίδα καὶ μητέρα ἔν τισι καιροῖς διηγουμένην ἤκουον, ὅτι πρὸς τρίτης ἡμέρας τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς τὰ ἀνάκτορα εἰσελεύσεως (ἐπανήγει γὰρ ἤδη ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ Ῥομπέρτου μάχης καὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἐκείνων πολέμων καὶ κόπων) ταῖς ὠδίσι συνεχομένη σταυροῦ τύπον τῆ γαστρὶ ἐνσημήνασα ἔφη: «Μεῖνον ἔτι, παιδίον, τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ἄφιξιν».’

⁷⁸ An. Komn., Vol. II: 61 (Eng. trans. 196).

⁷⁹ Troianos 1991, 4; Gorman 1982, 30.

⁸⁰ *Council in Trullo*, 171 (Eng. trans. 171); Troianos, 1991, 3.

procured an abortion, she was to be whipped and exiled (reiterating Roman law).⁸¹ While Troianos has argued that laws were not necessarily adhered to (abortion was difficult to prove due to the high prevalence of miscarriage and the difficulty in determining meditated killing of the foetus), it is clear that the secular texts did not equate abortion with murder.⁸² This adds further evidence to the concept that the increasing importance of foetal characteristics was directly linked to biblical motifs and Christian ideology.

Turning to the artistic evidence, I have found that depictions of pregnant women are rare. The scene of the Visitation is the most predominant portrayal of pregnancy, whereupon Mary, mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, embrace one another. The shift in stylistic representation of this scene can be seen to show the changing attitudes towards foetuses, as already noted to be exemplified in histories, hagiographies and Canon Law. A sixth-century mosaic in the Euphrasian Basilica at Poreč shows the two expectant mothers with protruding stomachs and enlarged busts (Figure 1.1).⁸³ Henry Maguire has argued that pre-iconoclastic depictions of the Virgin emphasised the physical pregnancy, which was ‘the first visible evidence of Christ’s Incarnation.’⁸⁴ The Visitation, then, encapsulated the physical proof of Christ’s human nature.

Maguire asserted that post-iconoclasm, images of the Visitation and Journey to Bethlehem became less popular in favour of new scenes, such as the Deposition from the Cross and the Lamentation over Jesus’ body, which emphasised the Virgin’s

⁸¹ *Ekloga*, 245 (Eng. trans. 140).

⁸² Troianos 1991, 4.

⁸³ The Visitation (Poreč, The Euphrasian Basilica, 6th century). See: Prelog 1986.

⁸⁴ Maguire 2011, 39.

emotions as a mother.⁸⁵ I have found that in the post-iconoclastic examples of the Visitation, Mary and Elizabeth tend not to show any visible signs of their pregnancies. In the scene of the Visitation in Paris Gregory 510 (which was produced c.879-882, Figure 1.2), the women's clothing drapes around their torsos, obscuring any physical indication of their pregnancies.⁸⁶ This is stylistically typical of ninth- and tenth-century scenes of the Visitation.⁸⁷ In fact, some of the eleventh- and twelfth-century examples share the same characteristics: in the eleventh-century Codex 587M at the Monastery of Dionysiou (Figure 1.3), the eleventh-century *Kynegetika* Marc. Gr. Z 479 (Figure 1.4), the twelfth-century Codex 2 at the Monastery of Panteleimon (Figure 1.5) and the twelfth-century fresco in the Church of Agios Georgios (Figure 1.6) the signs of pregnant 'bumps' are covered with drapery.⁸⁸ I might assert that in this period it was common to cover a pregnancy bump. This supports Maguire's assertion that, theologically, emphasis was transferred from the physical reality of Jesus' existence to the emotional experience of his life.

By the twelfth century, the emergence of foetal icons is apparent, theologically reiterating Christ's Incarnation but also demonstrating a clear interest in life before birth. The twelfth-century Annunciation Icon, now in The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, depicts Jesus as a haloed child on the upper torso of Mary (Figure 1.7).⁸⁹ Bissera

⁸⁵ Maguire 2011, 39.

⁸⁶ Paris Gregory (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, gr. 510, fol. 3r: the Annunciation and the Visitation. 879-882). See: Brubaker, 1999.

⁸⁷ Brubaker 1999, 379: 'Close parallels [to Paris Gregory 510, f. 3r] include the Khludov Psalter and Cappadocian wall paintings at Kiliçlar (ca.900) and Old Tokali (first quarter of the tenth century).

⁸⁸ The Visitation (Mount Athos, Monastery of Dionysiou. Cod. 587m, fol. 117v, 11th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974; A pregnant woman gazing at the statues of Castor, Hyacinthus, Narcissus and Nireus (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. *Kynegetika* Marc. gr. Z 479, fol. 13v, c.1060). See: Spatharakis, 2004; The Visitation (Mount Athos, Monastery of Panteleimon. Cod. 2. Fol. 236r: 12th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974; The Visitation (Kurbino, Church of Agios Georgios, 1191). See: Chatzidakis 1994.

⁸⁹ The Annunciation (Moscow, The Tretyakov Gallery, catalogue number 25539. Novgorod Icon, c.1130-1140). See: Pentcheva 2007.

Pentcheva explains that the placement of Jesus Christ on the chest of the Theometor visually represents his status as both human and divine as well as her status as a virgin and as a mother.⁹⁰ The stylistic representation of the foetus develops and by the fourteenth century, a fresco in the Timios Stavros Church, Cyprus, directly translates the Gospel of Saint Luke into fresco painting (Figure 1.8).⁹¹ In this depiction of the Visitation, John is seen ‘leaping’ (ἔσκιρτησεν) in Elizabeth’s womb.⁹² I might suggest that these images show that the unborn babies have already assumed personal attributes. Barbara Zisper has found a new emphasis on the physical development of the foetus in medical manuscripts dated to the fourteenth century too; most likely copied from earlier examples.⁹³ It is possible that this iconographic trend was born out of the promoted importance of foetuses in Byzantine histories, hagiographies and Canon Law.

Moving onto the birth scene in Byzantine evidence, hagiographers intertwined daily realities and miraculous events in their description of the birthing process. This style of narrative was built upon a long standing tradition: I have already noted how in the fourth-century, Menander advised future enkomiasts to note divine omens at birth.⁹⁴ In the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* (c.564), the author tells us that while being washing in the washbasin after his birth, ‘by the power of God he stood upright on his feet for

⁹⁰ Pentcheva 2007, 153.

⁹¹ The Visitation (Cyprus, Timios Stavros Church, 14th century). Unpublished.

⁹² Luke 2: 41-44.

⁹³ Brisson, Congourdeau, Solère 2008; Pers. comm. Barbara Zisper (29/04/10) ‘There are, however, a number of shorter texts, usually just a couple of pages long, on embryology, which appear frequently in medical manuscripts from the 14th century onwards. Nobody really knows where they come from. They are obviously late antique or medieval, and they are usually (falsely) attributed to Hippocrates. These texts can often be found in the first half of a manuscript, and they describe the formation of the fetus. The aim of these texts is to explain how the general humoral physiology of the human body comes into existence, and they are usually followed up by a discussion of bloodletting or prognosis, where these very general matters about the four humours and the colour of blood or urine become very important’.

⁹⁴ Menander, *Rhetor*, 80 (Eng. trans. 81).

about two hours'.⁹⁵ The above excerpt can be paralleled to the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053), in which Gregory the Cleric described how the midwife saw the baby standing upright; he was facing east and had his hands pressed tightly to his chest in the form of the cross.⁹⁶ In the full version of these birthing stories, interesting details can be noted such as multiple people attending the birth including the father of the child and the midwife, the baby being washed and the family being informed (at the birth of Nicholas of Sion, an uncle was informed).⁹⁷ But, much less ordinary, both babies stood up shortly after being born.

In addition to standing newborns, John of Moschos (lived c.550-619) wrote about mentally competent and talking newborns.⁹⁸ Hagiographers inverted what they thought to be normative infant behaviour – in a standard birth setting with midwives – to draw attention to the exceptional nature of the baby, whom they portrayed in their writings. Hagiographers strategically included excerpts about babies who were advanced for their age as evidence of their divine inspiration. Drawing upon longstanding rhetorical traditions, Byzantine writers described how signs of the subject's character could be apparent at the birth scene.

But birth stories do not only feature at the beginning of saints' lives, but also start to appear in other contexts and genres, revealing an increased interest in labour and birth. Rhetoricians employed the perilous birthing process metaphorically to portray beliefs or events in an unfavourable tone. In the *Life of Patriarch Nikephoros I of Constantinople* (c.843-846) Ignatios the Deacon elucidated: 'You tried to conceive

⁹⁵ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23): 'τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμει ἔστη ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὀρθὸς ὡς ὥρας δύο.'

⁹⁶ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 509 (Eng. trans. 78).

⁹⁷ Shaw 2001, 31.

⁹⁸ John Mosc. *PS.*, 2980 (Eng. trans. 95).

years of royal rule, but gave birth to aborted fetuses that died young'.⁹⁹ Metaphorical allusions to an infant's illegitimacy were applied to heresy. And, as if to demonstrate his knowledge of birthing practice, Ignatios subsequently described how the Patriarch spoke to the emperor as if he were slapping a baby at its birth to make it take its first breath.¹⁰⁰ The same author wrote in his account of the *Life of Tarasios*: 'For if the fetuses of the heresy have been aborted through a council of Kaiaphas, it is through an ecumenical council that children may be born to the Church and grow up to the measure of the stature of Christ...'¹⁰¹ Ignatios the Deacon employed birthing metaphorical allusions in order to heighten the emotion of his rhetoric.

Indeed, this style of narrative was not unique to Ignatios' ninth-century writings. I have found similar birthing metaphors in the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (c.1100) where it is recorded that the 'abortions of madness' (τὰ τῆς μανίας ἀμβλωθρίδια) came to him every day.¹⁰² In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), similar conception and birthing metaphors were employed'.¹⁰³ As the metaphorical discourse makes abundantly clear, pregnancy, birth and nursing were perilous times for a mother and baby. The fragility of a baby's life was so poignant to the Byzantine mind that writers exploited natal language to heighten the emotion in their narratives. But while authors were comfortable with the employment of birthing metaphors, there are few examples of them recording infant or maternal mortality. Scholars are in agreement that the Byzantines were concerned and anxious for their infants' chances of survival which

⁹⁹ *V. Nikeph.*, 147 (Eng. trans. 50); 208 (Eng. trans. 128): 'καὶ χρόνους βασιλείας ἐγκυμονῆσαι ζῆτῶν ὠκυμόρου ζωῆς ἀπέτεκες ἀμβλωθρίδια πῶς οἱ ἀπὸ κοιλίας φωνοῦντες Γραμματικοὶ μισθοῦ τὴν βασιλείαν ὑμῶν καθορίζοντες καὶ μακρὰν εὐετηρίαν ὑμῶν ἐρευγόμενοι'.

¹⁰⁰ *V. Nikeph.*, 185 (Eng. trans. 100).

¹⁰¹ *V. Taras.*, 125 (Eng. trans. 177): 'Διὰ γὰρ συνεδρίου καΐαφαΐκου τὰ τῆς αἰρέσεως ἐξημβλώκει κυήματα'.

¹⁰² Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 25 (Eng. trans. 29).

¹⁰³ *V. Luk. Steir*, 102 (Eng. trans. 103); 104 (Eng. trans. 105).

may have inhibited them from writing about such a sensitive subject, except in a metaphorical style.¹⁰⁴

Rare examples of mothers and babies being discussed in non-metaphorical terms include an excerpt from the *Life of John the Almsgiver* (c.641), in which we hear that new mothers encountered poverty, as well ‘abdominal pains’ (τῶν ἐγγαστρίων) from giving birth.¹⁰⁵ We have heard how in the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (c.1100), Theosterikos recorded that the saint’s mother died eight days after the birth of her first and only son.¹⁰⁶ In this example, the baby outlived the mother and survived into adulthood. But given that infant and maternal mortality rate must have been high (Talbot equated levels of infant mortality in Byzantium to modern day sub-Saharan Africa) I have found surprisingly few records of these occurrences in writings.¹⁰⁷ Patricia Skinner noted that it was unusual for writers to record miscarriages or stillbirths in hagiographies and contemporary understanding of these occurrences is usually based on miracle stories.¹⁰⁸ It is clear that authors did not want to engage with this topic, other than in a metaphorical style of rhetoric. Authors may have felt it fell beyond the parameters of their writings, which tend to focus on the deeds of people who subsequently became adults (a theme I will pick up again later).

Given the dearth of evidence on the demise of prenatal and neonatal infants, it is perhaps surprising that much of contemporary debate focuses on infants’ premature death, including the prevalence of exposure, burial customs as a reflection of the societal value attached to infants, the extent of parental bonds to their newborn infants

¹⁰⁴ Baun 1994; Talbot 2009; Tritsaroli and Valentin 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 202).

¹⁰⁶ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 3).

¹⁰⁷ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 144; Talbot 2009, 306.

¹⁰⁸ Skinner 1997, 395.

and their grief at the loss of their baby.¹⁰⁹ Anthony Littlewood, Alice-Mary Talbot and Dorothy Abrahamse have explored the high prevalence of infant mortality and Byzantine parental attitudes towards babies' demises.¹¹⁰ It has been argued by William Harris and Évelyne Patlagean that infant exposure diminished following new legislation implemented in the fourth century, which enabled parents to sell their babies, changed murdering an infant to a capital offence and made it illegal for a father to reclaim his child after neglecting it (diminishing the hope that a family could re-establish a relationship with their child).¹¹¹ Papaconstantinou asserted: 'The death of a child was generally less dramatized than it is today, in great part because, like most traditional societies, the Byzantines had more children and placed less emotional weight on each one individually, clearly expecting some of them to die early'.¹¹² But I would argue that analysts have muddied the separate issues of first, the chances of an infant's survival and, second, a family's attachment to their offspring.

There are ample examples in which parents demonstrate their devotion to their infants: in the *Life of Ioannikios* (c.846), we are told '...the prattlings of children are dear to their fathers'.¹¹³ The implication of this specific simile is that an infant's undeveloped speech, though incoherent to most, was highly valued by the devoted parents. Psellos similarly wrote in the eleventh century that Constantine X Doukas (reigned 1059-1067) was delightful with the children: 'joining gladly in their games,

¹⁰⁹ Abrahamse 1979; Harris 1994; Littlewood 1999; Patlagean 1975; Talbot 2009.

¹¹⁰ Littlewood 1999, 37; Talbot 2009, 283; Abrahamse 1979, 511.

¹¹¹ Harris 1994, 1; Patlagean 1975, 9.

¹¹² Papaconstantinou 2009, 9; Littlewood 1999, 37.

¹¹³ *V. Ioannicii*, 385 (Eng. trans. 258): 'ἐπεὶ καὶ φίλα πατράσι τὰ τῶν νηπίων ψελλίσματα'.

laughing at their baby-talk, often romping with them'.¹¹⁴ In the sources, we are afforded rare glimpses of the parental love and attachment to their not yet speaking children.

Writing in the early tenth century, Basil of Thessalonike applied the concept of parental care and devotion to infants, in order to portray his ascetic mentor's devotion and care towards him:

For it will perhaps seem inappropriate and will be judged ridiculous by people of intelligence not to demonstrate my strength in composition to the one who laboured to give birth to me through the gospel, who swaddled me with prayers and holy admonitions, who suckled me with the milk of virtues and nourished me with the living bread of divine knowledge and prepared me, to the best of his ability, to mature into a man of the congregation (company) of Christ, even if out of foolishness we entwine ourselves with infants whose minds are devoid of intelligence, especially since the proposition holds no danger for me, whether the narrative is equal to the magnitude of the deeds, or whether it fails to match the greatness of the actions.¹¹⁵

In Byzantine writings monastic relationships are often paralleled to familial bonds.

Here, I understand that Basil chose to equate Euthymios' devotion to him with parental devotion to an infant because, in his mind, this was the greatest show of care and affection. Bonds between parents and infants were presented as one of the strongest relationships. Sources do not emphasise the perils of death, but the joy brought about through acquaintance with infants. Marie-Hélène Congourdeau wrote that infants were gradually seen as human beings; not a fragile or terrifying enigma.¹¹⁶ Perhaps the Byzantines' seeming unwillingness to write about the perils of infancy was because

¹¹⁴ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 147, (Eng. trans. 340): 'γλυκύτερον γὰρ τοῖς παισὶ προσεφέρετο, προσέπαιζέ τε τοῦτοις ἠδέως καὶ προσεμεῖδία ψελλίζουσι...'

¹¹⁵ V. Euthyme le Jeune, 169 (Eng. trans. 1): 'καὶ γὰρ ἄποπον ἴσως καὶ γελοῖον δόξει τοῖς εὖ φρονούσι κρινόμενον τῷ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμᾶς ὠδινῆσαντι, εὐχαῖς τε καὶ νουθεσίαις ἱεραῖς σπαργανώσαντι, γάλακτί τε ἀρετῶν παιδοτροφῆσαντι καὶ ἄρτι ζωτικῇ θείας ἐπιγνώσεως θρέψαντι καὶ εἰς ἄνδρα τελεῖν, τό γε εἰς αὐτὸν ἦκον, τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρασκευάσαντι, κἂν ἐξ ἀφροσύνης ἡμεῖς ἔτι ταῖς φρεσὶ νηπίοις ἀνοηταῖνοισι σφᾶς αὐτοὺς παρενείρωμεν, μὴ τὴν ἐαυτῶν ἐν λόγοις ἐπιδείξασθαι δύναμιν, καὶ ταῦτα ἀκινδύνως ἡμῖν ἐχούσης τῆς ὑποθέσεως, εἴτε ἐξισομένου τοῦ λόγου τῷ μεγέθει τῶν πράξεων ἢ καὶ ἀποδέοντος τῆς τῶν ἔργων μεγαλειότητος.'

¹¹⁶ Congourdeau 1993, 176: 'Celui-ci est peu à peu considéré comme un être humain, et non plus comme cette énigme fragile et menaçante, lieu de toutes les terreurs.'

they felt it was more important to focus on the positive experiences brought about by infants.

Infants were certainly valued very highly in Byzantium, and one of the ways in which the authors identified villains in their narratives was to describe them exploiting vulnerable babies. Byzantine narratives depicted the savagery of their enemies, recording that they attacked humanity at the most vulnerable life-stage. In Nikephoros' *Short History* (c.814-820), villagers made a pot full of boiled baby's blood to inspire men to fight.¹¹⁷ As we have already seen, Ignatios the Deacon, writing in the ninth century, ridiculed pagans who accused women of killing 'suckling infants' (βρεφῶν ὑπομάξιων) in reminiscence of the Ancient Greek goddess, Gello.¹¹⁸ Later in the tenth century, Leo the Deacon employed the same rhetorical device: the Scythians made sacrificial offerings by drowning 'suckling infants' (ὑπομάξια βρέφη).¹¹⁹ The use of the adjective 'suckling' to describe these infants is particularly insightful because it shows us that the Byzantines perceived breastfeeding infants to be at their most vulnerable, reiterating Bourbou and Garvie-Lok's findings that the Byzantines perceived the completion of weaning to be an important developmental marker.¹²⁰ These vulnerable 'suckling infants' were employed in narratives in order to conjure up the ferocious nature of the opponents.

Infants were not only susceptible to attack from opponents: they were also more susceptible to being involved in accidents. In the *Life of Nikon* (c.1042), we hear of a

¹¹⁷ Nikeph., *Short History*, 120 (Eng. trans. 121).

¹¹⁸ V. Taras., 72 (Eng. trans. 172). For more on the rhetorical *topos* of women killing their children, see Stathakopoulos 2011, 35-46.

¹¹⁹ Leo Diac., 149 (Eng. trans. 193).

¹²⁰ Bourbou and Garvie-Lok 2009, 84.

suckling infant loosing his genitalia as a result of an accident.¹²¹ Prior to weaning, the vulnerability of infants was not solely attributable to malnutrition and poverty but also to the occurrences of accidents and misfortune.¹²² We are provided an insight into the high-dependency of an infant, not only for his or her food, but also for his or her safety.

1.4 Baptism and the Formation of Relationships

Unlike references to birth, parentage and ethnicity – the snippets of information usually included in hagiographical introductions – references to baptism are only occasionally made. This is surprising, given that I have already traced an increasingly Christianised biographical style in Middle Byzantine hagiographies and, in the seventh century, Canon Law ordered all infants to be baptised.¹²³ Nevertheless, I can determine that it became standard practice to baptise a child in infancy as, where baptism is mentioned, the ritual exclusively occurred during infancy.¹²⁴ Perhaps the hagiographers' tendency to exclude baptism may have been a result of their tendency to mimic Christ's biography, wherein baptism took place as an adult.

I understand that one of the fundamental purposes of baptism, evident from at least the sixth century, was the sealing of familial relationships. Prokopios (c.500-565) revealed the ceremonial practise of purification through washing for baptism was used

¹²¹ *V. Nikon*, 232 (Eng. trans. 233).

¹²² Bourbou and Garvie-Lok 2009, 78.

¹²³ *Council in Trullo*, 165 (Eng. trans. 165). On the time at which a person was baptised, please see: Moffatt 1972, 82.

¹²⁴ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 68 (Eng. trans. 69); *V. Mich. Synk.*, 46 (Eng. trans. 47); *V. Philaretos*, 106 (Eng. trans. 107); Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 24 (Eng. trans. 221); Hennessy 2008, 21.

in adoption ceremonies too.¹²⁵ The similarities between the adoption and baptismal ceremonies indicate the shared purpose of both: to consolidate family ties.¹²⁶ Baptism incorporated the first public expression of the new baby's name. We see in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (ninth century) that the ritual of baptism formally marked the first use of the name: 'For during those days, when she had laid with her husband, she conceived in her womb and bore a son. In the bath of regeneration she called his name Michael, which means "general of God"'.¹²⁷ Here we see how the parental choice of a name foretold the future character and vocation of the baby. Baptism, then, offered a formal opportunity to welcome the baby into the family, but it additionally enabled the family to project their aspirations onto their child.

These familial relationships extended beyond the natal family and included godparents. In the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* (c.564), a couple miraculously conceived upon the intervention of the saint and they requested him to be their son's 'godfather' (ἀνάδοχος).¹²⁸ As Ruth Macrides has observed: 'Monastic charters of all periods expressly forbade monks to act as godparents; yet they did so'.¹²⁹ In the excerpt from the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* we see that a monk or ecclesiast may have been able to obtain direct familiarity with an infant through a mutually bonding spiritual link. In this excerpt I can discern that becoming a godparent was an honour and a mark of the parents' respect for their friend or acquaintance. In the *Life of John the Almsgiver* (c.641), the Patriarch became the Patrician's children as a mark of friendship and a bond

¹²⁵ Prok., *SH* 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

¹²⁶ Macrides 1987, 141: There are similarities in terminology between adoption and baptism from the ninth-century.

¹²⁷ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 46 (Eng. trans. 47): 'ὑπηρέτει δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ καθηγγητῇ, ἐξ ᾧν ἐκεῖνος ἔγλιχε τιθηνίζεσθαι.' 'Bath of regeneration' could be literally translated as the 'bath of re-birth'.

¹²⁸ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 70 (Eng. trans 71).

¹²⁹ Macrides 1987, 144; 154.

of affection.¹³⁰ The bond brought about through spiritual parenthood extended from the godparent to the baby and included the parents. Writing his *Short History* in the ninth century, Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople saw the baptismal ceremony as a method of conferring new family allegiances not only upon the infant, the godparent and the parents, but on the family of the godparents too.¹³¹ I have noted how, certainly for the upper echelons of society, relationships forged through baptism incorporated all members of both sides of the biologically unrelated families.

I have clearly established that the baptismal ceremony was a method of forging non-blood ties. Nikephoros reveals that for the upper classes, spiritual parenthood could forge familial alliances and strategic allegiances.¹³² Although not condoned by the church, Nikephoros revealed that baptismal ceremonies could have the secondary purpose of betrothing infants; again confirming that one of the purposes of baptism was to consolidate family alliances.¹³³ The theological texts lead us to believe that baptism held a specifically spiritual value, but analysis of the texts expose that, to the Byzantines, the Life Course rite of baptism consolidated the social and familial identity of the child through the acquisition of a name and the formulation of relationships with their natal family, their godparents and their godparent's family.¹³⁴

The relationships initiated at baptism, in the same way as those at adoption ceremonies, were intended to last for the duration of the lives of those involved. So when he was writing the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful* (c.822), Niketas asserted that during the scene of his grandfather's (who was also his godparent) death, the old man

¹³⁰ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 24 (Eng. trans. 221).

¹³¹ Nikeph., *Short History*, 74 (Eng. trans. 75).

¹³² Nikeph., *Short History*, 38 (Eng. trans. 39); 4 (Eng. trans. 5).

¹³³ Nikeph., *Short History*, 74 (Eng. trans. 75).

¹³⁴ Macrides 1987, 147.

attached the utmost significance to speaking to his godson, over all his other grandchildren because of their spiritual bond.¹³⁵ Philaretos' preference for his godson over his other grandchildren was reiterated in his dying words to him: 'He [Philaretos] then took the third, spiritual son Niketas, lifted him up on his bed and kissed him, and both wept, the old man as well as the boy'.¹³⁶ Philaretos requested in his prayer: 'Make him also worthy of the holy and apostolic garment and make him, my Lord, inseparable from me in the place where you have shown me to settle'.¹³⁷ This passage reveals the ongoing commitment of godparent to child: a relationship set up to endure from infancy through to the death of either partner and even, as is suggested in this passage, beyond death through into the afterlife.

1.5 Conclusions

There is a marked difference between Late Antique and Middle Byzantine perceptions of infancy: there is an increased interest in the formulation of the individual's character prior to birth. This is supported across a variety of sources. Miracles and symbolic events occurring before birth were included in hagiographies regularly from the sixth century onwards. In the seventh century, Canon Law newly equated abortion with murder. I have already noted how the ninth- and tenth- century histories of Ignatios the Deacon and Leo the Deacon employed copious quantities of pregnancy and birthing metaphors in their narratives. Writing in the tenth century, Basil

¹³⁵ *V. Philaretos*, 106 (Eng. trans. 107).

¹³⁶ *V. Philaretos*, 106 (Eng. trans. 107): 'Ἐἶτα κρατήσας τὸν τρίτον καὶ πνευματικὸν αὐτοῦ υἱόν, τὸν Νικήταν, καὶ ἄρας αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης κατεφίλησεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἔκλαυσαν ἀμφότεροι, ὃ τε γέρων καὶ τὸ παιδίον.'

¹³⁷ *V. Philaretos*, 108 (Eng. trans. 109): 'Ἀξίωσον αὐτὸν καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἀποστολικοῦ σχήματος γενέσθαι καὶ ἀχώριστόν μοι αὐτὸν ποιήσον, κύριέ μου, κύριε, εἰς τὸν τόπον ὅπου ἔδειξάς μοι κατοικεῖν.'

of Thessalonike poignantly summarised the newfound emphasis on the development of life before birth, when writing: ‘For just as eggs nurtured in the womb generate life, so concealed thoughts progress to deeds’.¹³⁸ Here the Byzantines valued unborn babies for the potential they promised. In the twelfth century, Anna Komnene applied hagiographical *topoi* to the construction of her own infancy, suggesting that she was obedient to her parents before she was born.¹³⁹ By the twelfth century (and perhaps earlier, according to Pentcheva), foetal icons were produced, depicting Jesus and John the Baptist before they were born.¹⁴⁰

I have demonstrated how the Byzantines had clear conceptions about the start of the Life Course incorporating conception, pregnancy, birth, baptism and developmental makers, such as learning to talk. Throughout this chapter I have traced how hagiographies, histories and artistic works devote an increasing amount of space to the embryonic, foetal and neonatal stages of the Life Course. This is clearly a result of the influential model of Jesus’ infancy. This tells us that the Byzantine Life Course was not perceived to start abruptly at birth but it was a transitional phase from conception through to weaning. The use of auspicious occurrences before and after birth as a rhetorical tool demonstrates that the Byzantines considered this life-stage to be significant, formative and pre-emptive of the individual’s future life trajectory.

¹³⁸ V. Euthyme le Jeune, 199 (Eng. trans. 15): ‘καὶ γὰρ ὡς περ τὰ ἐν κόλπῳ θαλπόμενα ζωογονεῖται, οὕτως καὶ λογισμοὶ κρυπτόμενοι εἰς ἔργα προβαίνουσι.’

¹³⁹ An. Komn., Vol. II: 61 (Eng. trans. 196).

¹⁴⁰ Pentcheva 2007, 153.

**CHAPTER TWO: CHILDHOOD
TO ADOLESCENCE**

Byzantine authors habitually stated that they would devote little space to childhood in their writings.¹ Academics have found the same to be true also of Medieval Western biographical literature.² Theophanes (who lived c.758-818) included a story about his own childhood simply to illustrate that he was an eyewitness, adding a sense of reliability to the account.³ Looking at Latin Roman and Medieval sources, Teresa Carp noted the ‘traditional literary bias... in favour of depicting adult life and activity almost to the exclusion of infancy and childhood’.⁴ The authors’ intentions to exclude childhood anecdotes can be interpreted to imply a lack of interest in childhood; but it will become apparent in this chapter that this would be an erroneous assumption.

Evidence shows us that childhood was integral to the construction of the Byzantine Life course and that children were valued on several levels. Based on biblical anecdotes, infants and children were sometimes valued for their innocence and incorruptible nature.⁵ Blake Leyerle has observed that John Chrysostom, writing in the late fourth and early fifth century, valued babies and children because ‘unlike adults, [they] know when to stop eating; once they have finished their hunger, they leave off nursing. Children are also readily reconciled’.⁶ Looking at evidence from this period, in the tenth-century *Spiritually Beneficial Tales*, written by Paul, Bishop of Monemvasia, a child is asked to request the company of the one who baptised him. The child returned to his governor three times, each time claiming not to have found the one who baptised him. Eventually, the governor realised that the child was not looking for the priest, but

¹ Rautman 2006, 8.

² Orme 2001, 289.

³ Theoph., 434 (Eng. trans. 601).

⁴ Carp 1980, 736.

⁵ Matthew 18:3.

⁶ Leyerle 1997, 266.

for God. In this instance, Paul of Monemvasia valued the simple reasoning of the child.⁷ Similarly, in the *Life of Elias of Heliopolis* (eleventh century), the saint was ‘about twelve years old’ when he was serving at a feast, ‘joking and rejoicing with them [adults]’ and clearly not understanding the humour ‘inasmuch as he was an innocent child’.⁸ Elias’ uncorrupted mentality and innocence were valued. Pictorial depictions draw upon the same theme: Christopher Walter wrote that the regular way to represent a human soul in Byzantine iconography was to depict a baby, naked or swaddled.⁹ There is an example of this motif in the scene of the Dormition of the Virgin, as depicted in an eleventh-century codex at the Monastery of Iveron, Mount Athos, where a newborn infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, symbolises the Virgin Mary’s soul (Figure 2.1).¹⁰ This highlights how the innocence of infants and children could be viewed positively.¹¹

The Byzantines particularly valued obedient children. On occasion, youngsters were credited with charming characteristics, typical of their life-stage. For instance, Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written in the early tenth century) ‘was judged by those who saw him, even before his maturity, as gentle, well-behaved, gracious, sweet-speaking, orderly, compliant, obedient to his parents’.¹² Ideal children were obedient and complied with their parents’ wishes (later in this chapter it will be noted that the virtue of obedience to parents was sometimes inverted in the *vitae* in order to demonstrate a child’s strength in the face of opposition). Furthermore, Basil of

⁷ Paul of Monem., *ST*, 78 (Eng. trans. 93).

⁸ *V. Elias Helio.*, 46 (Eng. trans. 94): ‘ἦν δὲ Ἡλίας ὡσεὶ ἐπὶ ἑπτὰ δώδεκα. ὑπηρετεῖ οὖν ἀστειευόμενος καὶ συγχαίρων τῷ δείπνῳ ὡς οἶά τε παῖς ὑπάρχων καὶ ἀπονήρευτος.’

⁹ Walter 1976, 119.

¹⁰ The Dormition of the Virgin Mount (Athos, Monastery of Iveron, cod. 1, fol. 300r, 11th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974.

¹¹ Gould 1997, 40; Alberici 2008, 57.

¹² *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 171 (Eng. trans. 2): ‘ὄσης ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς γεννήσεως χάριτος ἐπεπλήρωτο οἶος ἦν τοῖς ὀρώσι καὶ πρὸ τῆς ἡβῆς κρινόμενος, προσηγῆς, κόσμιος, μειλίχιος, ἡδυεπής, εὐτακτος, εὐπειθής, γονεῦσιν ὑποτασσόμενος’.

Thessalonike listed characteristics such as Euthymios' 'sweet-speaking' voice that was specific to the saint as a child. While it is true that I am looking at adult-centric perceptions of children, it would be a mistake to think that children were solely judged as 'potential adults', based on criteria used to determine the positive attributes of an adult.¹³

There were some negative characteristics that were specific to children. In Paul of Monemvasia's tenth-century *Spiritually Beneficial Tales*, a Scythian child who had not been baptised but who continued to receive Holy Communion was characterised as ignorant of adult matters.¹⁴ Children were normally absorbed with their immediate desires and hagiographers sometimes inverted this *topos* to show their subject as exceptional. For instance, in the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the author tells us that as a child, Luke did not eat until sunset on Wednesday and Friday and refrained from eating fruit, 'which some might disbelieve knowing that for children fruit is the most delightful food'.¹⁵ Luke, who renounced this self-indulgence associated with childhood, '...was so unusual and extreme a lover of self-control that even from childhood he abstained not only from meat but from cheese and eggs and everything else that provides pleasure'.¹⁶ It may be understood that lay children were normally thought to focus on their desires and impulses, without demonstrating any self-control. The initial examples alone show us that the Byzantines held notions of distinctly childish attributes.

¹³ Wiedemann 1989, 105: proposed the term 'potential adults'; Harlow and Laurence 2002, 49: criticise this phrase for its inability to account for traits specific to children.

¹⁴ Paul of Monem., *ST*, 76 (Eng. trans. 92).

¹⁵ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9): 'ὁ κἄν ἀπιστῆσειέ τις, εἰδὼς ὅτι παισὶν εἰς βρῶσιν ὀπῶρα τὸ χαριέστατον.'

¹⁶ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9): 'Ὁ δὲ οὕτω καινός τις ἦν καὶ ἔκτοπος ἐραστής ἐγ κρατείας, ὅτι εὐθὺς ἐκ παιδῶν οὐ κρέατι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τυρῶ καὶ ὠῶ καὶ παντὶ ἄλλῳ τῶν ἡδονῆν ἐχόντων ἀπετάξατο.'

Therefore, it is unsurprising that authors used childish attributes to denounce the ‘immature’ behaviour of adults.¹⁷ Authors sometimes described mature but stupid or villainous characters as exhibiting puerile ignorance. For instance, in the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), the author tells us: ‘For being fools, they are like immature children (νηπίων) who delight in pebbles and stones on the seashore and do not spare to throw away their ancestral inheritance and very rich possessions as a result of great mindlessness and folly and to exchange these for things small and of no worth’.¹⁸ In the twelfth century, Anna Komnene described her father’s enemies as having ‘infantile minds’ (τοῦ νηπιώδους... φρονήματος), indulging in ‘childish play’ (παιδαρίων ἄθυρμάτων) and waging war as if inexperienced and ignorant children.¹⁹ Discussing education and the curriculum, Anna commented that a game of draughts was childish teachings, as opposed to intellectual concepts which were, by inference, the study of mature individuals.²⁰ Then, as now, childish attributes were used as similes and metaphors in literature to portray undesirable adults in a negative light.

There are a number of limitations to the study of childhood, specific to this life-stage, which impact upon my enquiries here. It has already been widely acknowledged that textual anecdotes about childhood were usually employed by Byzantine authors to introduce the development of adulthood qualities.²¹ In his fourth-century treatises, Menander advised future encomiasts to make notes of miracles and omens occurring

¹⁷ Orme 2001, 197.

¹⁸ *V. Nikon*, 54 (Eng. trans. 55): ‘νηπίων γὰρ δίκην ἀτελῶν, οἱ ἄφρονες διακείμενοι κάγχηξι καὶ λιθιδίοις ἠδομένων ψαμμίδεσι, καὶ κλήρον πατρικὸν καὶ πολύλοβον κτήσιν προζέσαι μηδαμῶς φειδομένων ἐκ πολλῆς ἀνοίας καὶ ἀφροσύνης καὶ τούτων ἀντωνεῖσθαι τὰ μικρὰ καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄξια, οὕτω προστετήκασιν τῇ ματαιότητι καὶ τῶν μενόντων προτιμῶνται τὰ φεύγοντα καὶ τῶν αἰωνίων τὰ πρόσκαιρα καὶ τῶν ἀφθάρτων τὰ φθαρτὰ καὶ ἐπίκηρα.’

¹⁹ An. Komn., Vol. III: 195 (Eng. trans. 395); An. Komn., Vol. II: 158 (Eng. trans. 273): ‘as children do at play’ (ὥσπερ ἐν παιδιαῖς μειρακίων); An. Komn., Vol. III: 242 (Eng. trans. 472).

²⁰ An. Komn., Vol. III: 218 (Eng. trans. 496).

²¹ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 162; Angelov 2009, 97.

during childhood, as a means to introduce adulthood characteristics.²² Following these instructions, Prokopios related in his *Secret History* (sixth century) how the Empress Theodora worked on the stage from her childhood, inferring that this led to her sexual depravation in later life.²³ Sometimes childhood anecdotes were used in order to chart the development of the individual over time and show their character as stable and constant. Writing in the twelfth century, Anna Komnene included details about her father's childhood (νηπίου) education in order to support her construction of his adult attributes (learned and wise).²⁴ Clearly, the details of these narratives may not have been truthful to an individual's life, but the fact that the Byzantines usually constructed childhood as an indication of adulthood in their texts demonstrates that they considered childhood to be formative. The rhetorical technique of constructing childhood as a means to introducing adulthood exposes the Byzantine perception that childhood was, first and foremost, perceived as an important life-stage for development.²⁵

A further limitation, which has also been noted before, is that – as far as one can discern – most of the evidence I am dealing with here was produced by adults.²⁶ By way of contrast, Hennessy asserts that children might have been involved in the production of pictorial evidence; especially manuscript illuminations, but their influence on the style and meaning of such prestigious works of art would have presumably been very minimal.²⁷ As such, it is unsurprising that these Byzantine sources predominantly focus on adulthood and look at childhood from an adult perspective. I understand that some excerpts about childhood were included didactically to record models of

²² Menander, *Rhetor*, 76-92 (Eng. trans. 77-93).

²³ Prok., *SH*, 104 (Eng. trans. 105).

²⁴ An. Komn., Vol. I: (Eng. trans. 113).

²⁵ Hennessy 2008, 124.

²⁶ The approximate ages at which individual Byzantine authors wrote is detailed in: Kazhdan and Constable 1982, 53.

²⁷ Hennessy 2008, 31.

parenting. Furthermore, anecdotes about children were often used to reflect upon the guardians and carers who looked after them. For instance, when Psellos described Constantine X Doukas' (reigned 1059-1067) children, he added: 'From infancy he saw to it that they had a good education, both in mind and body'.²⁸ Psellos revealed information about Constantine's children simply to demonstrate the Emperor's excellent parenting skills. Children here are simply presented as an adjunct to the adult, who is the focus of the narrative.

However there are some examples of the Byzantine authors directing their didactic writing to the benefit of children themselves. In the seventh century, George Eleusius wrote in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*: 'And I have written them [the anecdotes] after his death so that the young, through hearing of his virtuous manner of life as a child, may strive to emulate his angelic and blameless life, and be accounted worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven...'.²⁹ According to George, Blatta, Theodore of Sykeon's sister, tried to imitate her saintly brother; modelling her own behaviour on Theodore's.³⁰ Similarly, Luke of Steiris' sister, who was one of the author's sources for Luke's *vita* (tenth century), was said to be like her brother in both conduct and disposition.³¹ In both examples, children mimic the positive attributes of their contemporaries. In the *Life of Tarasios* (ninth century), Ignatios the Deacon wrote: 'He so much embraced and clasped to himself humility as his helpmate from babyhood, so that it could not only be seen and thus bring good reputation to himself, but be also

²⁸ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 147 (Eng. trans. 340): 'εὐπαιδευσίαν τε ἅμα τούτοις καὶ γυμνασίαν ἐντεῦθεν προμνηστευόμενος.'

²⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 19 (Eng. trans. 102): 'γεγράφηκα δὲ αὐτὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄφιξιν αὐτοῦ, ὅπως καὶ οἱ νέοι παῖδες ἀκούσαντες τὴν παιδικὴν καὶ ἐνάρετον αὐτοῦ πολιτείαν ζηλώσωσι τὸν αὐτοῦ ἀγγελικὸν καὶ ἄμεμπτον βίον καὶ καταξιοθῶσι τῆς τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείας.'

³⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 94).

³¹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 44 (Eng. trans. 45).

prompted others to model themselves upon his own example'.³² Child saints were constructed as model children to be emulated by those exposed to their life stories. I can perhaps deduce therefore, that hagiographies were written throughout this period to inform children, as well as adults, about models of appropriate behaviour.

2.1 Defining the Start of Childhood

Infancy – a period when numerical ages (especially ages in years) were not usually stated – appears to have ended within the first three to four years of life (Tables 1 and 2). Numerical ages took on a new significance once the subject had reached around three years of age. Statements of age can provide an insight into the associated expectations of infantile development at particular stages. In the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (c.846), the author tells us: ‘When the boy had been weaned and had reached the age of three, she [his mother] offered him to God in accordance with her promise’.³³ The suggestion that children were usually weaned around the age of three is supported by archaeological evidence.³⁴ It is arguable that weaning, which occurred around the ages of three or four, marked the completion of infancy and therefore, the commencement of childhood.

The numerical age data pinpoints the ages of five to nine for boys and six to seven for girls as significant (Tables 3 and 4). The mother of Theodore of Sykeon

³² V. Taras., 93 (Eng. trans. 179): ‘Ταπεινώσιν δὲ ὡς ἐκ βρέφους οὐσαν συνέριθιον οὕτως ἠγκαλίσατο καὶ περιεπτύξατο, ὡς μὴ μόνον ἐν αὐτῷ θεωρεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ εὐδόκιμον ἀποφέρεισαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς ἐτέρους διαβῆναι τυπουμένους τῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὑποδείγματι.’

³³ V. Mich. Synk., 46 (Eng. trans. 47): ‘ἀπογαλακτισθέντος δὲ τοῦ παιδὸς καὶ τριετοῦς ἤδη γεγονότος, προσήγαγεν αὐτὸν τῷ Θεῷ κατὰ τὴν αὐτῆς ὑπόσχεσιν.’

³⁴ Bourbou and Garvie-Lok 2009, 66.

(whose *vita* was composed in the seventh century) reputedly set her sights on enlisting her son in the Emperor's service for training when he was about six years old.³⁵ In the *Life of Athanasia of Aegina* (c.916), John of Stoudios specified that the saint was handed over to a tutor to learn the Holy Scriptures and Psalms at the age of seven.³⁶ The educational development of Nicholas of Sion (whose *vita* was composed in the sixth century) and Theodora of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was composed c.894) was mentioned at the age seven too.³⁷ It is prudent to assume that the age of seven was an important educational marker for both male and female children.³⁸

Tables 3 and 4 detail numerical age statements documented in 42 *vitae* composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries. As in the previous chapter, the blue table represents boys' ages while the red table represented girls' ages, which are, as usual, proportionately less. Out of the 42 *vitae*, there are a 25 numerical age statements for boys and 8 for girls between the ages of 3 and 18. As explained above, noteworthy peaks occur at the age of 18 for boys while for girls, the ages of 7, 12 and 18 are significant markers.

³⁵ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 5 (Eng. trans. 89).

³⁶ *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 142).

³⁷ *V. Nichol. Sion.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23); *V. Theod. Thess.*, 3 (Eng. trans. 167).

³⁸ Hennessy 2009, 84.

Table 3: Childhood Ages Attested for Males in Hagiographies 6-12th century

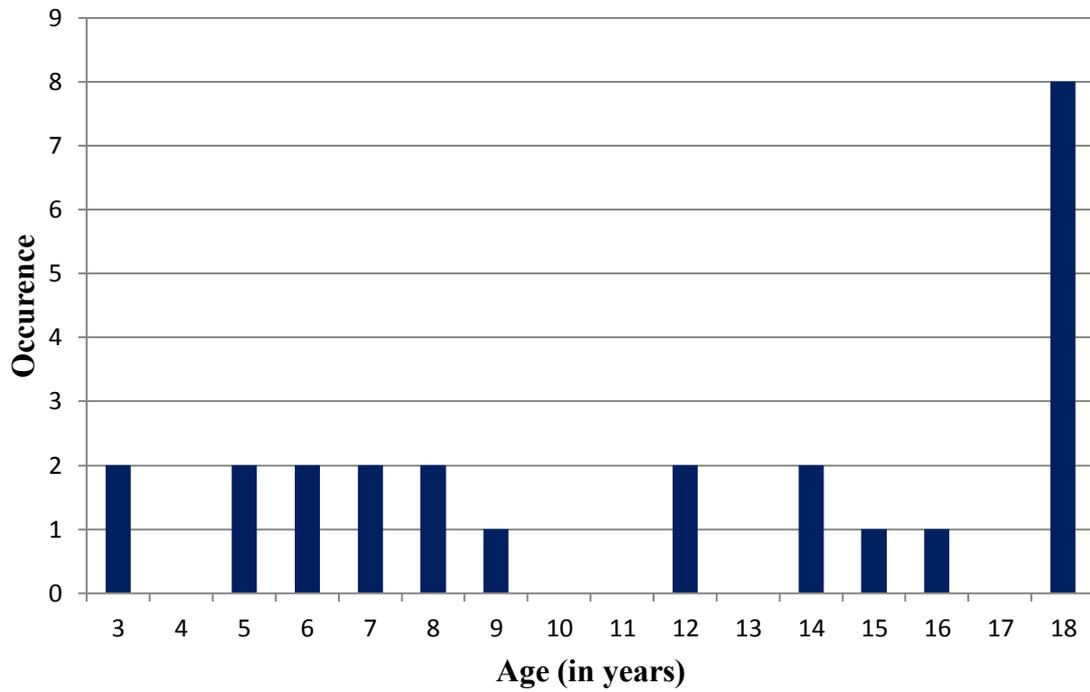
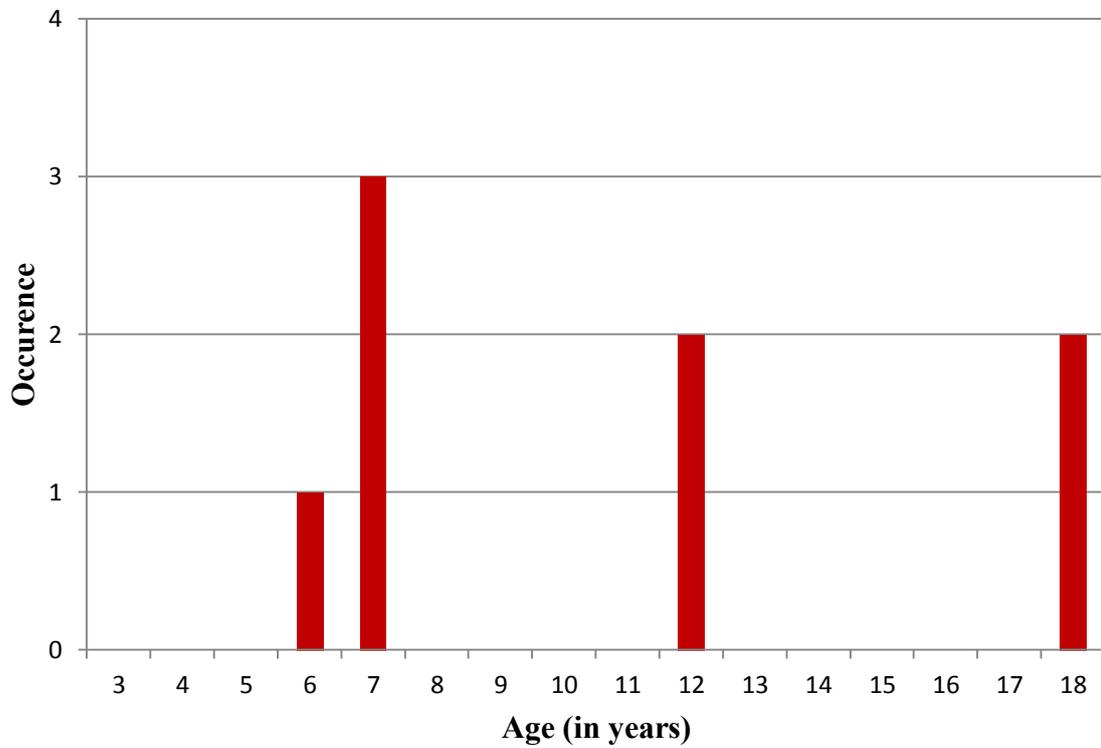


Table 4: Childhood Ages Attested for Females in Hagiographies 6-12th century



2.2 Relationships

In the Middle Byzantine texts, intergenerational relationships were shown to provide good examples of behaviour for children to copy. Cyril of Scythopolis, writing c.554-558, tells us: ‘He was a man who had made his renunciation at a tender age and had been formed by the godly Sabas...’.³⁹ Saint Sabas provided a role model for his youthful disciple to imitate. In the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (c.894), Gregory the Cleric described how children were influenced by those around them:

For the reed is not as likely to catch fire because of its dryness; as the disposition of those under guardianship is liable to be influenced by the one in authority over them, for good or evil, especially if they should chance to be infants, inasmuch as their undeveloped mind soon adapts and conforms to the habits of the guardian who converses <with them>. For, as someone said, he who walketh with wise men will be wise, and association with the wicked is not without danger.⁴⁰

Historians analysing Latin Late Antique and Early Medieval writings have established that children were perceived to learn through imitation.⁴¹ Greek Late Antique texts take the same stance: Gregory of Nyssa (who lived c.335-394) suggested that children learn through imitation.⁴² In similarity to the earlier Latin and Greek writings, the authors imply that children learn through imitating the people around them. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the authors emphasised the impact of adults’ behaviour on the children with whom they came into contact.

Hagiographers tended to value the influence of elder men on younger men. For example, in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George* (c.863-865), David was in a field

³⁹ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 196 (Eng. trans. 205): ‘ἄνδρα ἐξ ἀπαλῶν ὀνύχων ἀποταξάμενον καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ Σάβα παιδευθέντα...’

⁴⁰ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 3 (Eng. trans. 167): ‘ἴν’ ἐκ σπαογάνων αὐτῶν ὁ ταύτης βίος λαμπρύνηται καὶ θαυμάζηται· οὐχ οὕτω γὰρ καλάμη πρὸς πυρὸς ἔξωψιν ἐπιτηδεία διὰ ξηρότητα, ὡς ἡ τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα διάθεσις ἐτοιμοτάτη πρὸς ὑποδοχὴν τῆς τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας, καὶ μάλιστα εἰ τύχοιεν νηπιῶζοντες, διὰ τὸ τὰς τῶν νέων ψυχὰς ἀπαλωτέρας οὐσας ἐτόιμους εἶναι πρὸς ὅτι ἂν εἴποις μάθημα.’

⁴¹ Alberici 2008, 215; Nelson 1994, 97.

⁴² Greg. Nyssa, *V. Macr.*, 148 (Eng. trans. 21).

when a thunderstorm broke out. He was scared, but then a man, who was ‘very old and venerable’ (γηραιότατον πάνυ καὶ ἱεροπρεπέστατον) advised him to have faith. David imitated the old man by exhibiting courage.⁴³ The contrast between old and young is interesting here because it shows us that the Byzantines perceived intergenerational bonds to encourage the adoption of positive attributes normally associated with other life-stages. The same *trope* appears in the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042): ‘Now in this monastery there was once a young boy living and counted in the ranks of the novices under a teacher and shepherd, a godly man and nourisher of virtue’.⁴⁴ The mentor is metaphorically seen to feed his pupil with virtues. Adult role models provided examples of ideal behaviour for children to imitate and thrive upon.

Based on the perception that children’s characters were easily moulded, the Byzantines attached importance to ensuring that their children kept appropriate company.⁴⁵ In the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), the devil posed as a friend to the saintly child.⁴⁶ The author marked Theodore’s exceptional resistance to bad influences when he, even though a naive child, was not led astray by the devil.⁴⁷ In the tenth-century *Spiritually Beneficial Tales* of Paul of Monemvasia, John the Theologian reputedly condemned a bishop who neglected his guardianship role, causing the child under his care to keep the company of fornicators and thieves.⁴⁸ Elias of Heliopolis (whose *vita* was written in the eleventh century) was able to resist mimicking the debaucheries he saw when serving at a feast.⁴⁹ Gregory the Cellarer, writing Lazaros of

⁴³ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 155).

⁴⁴ *V. Nikon*, 212 (Eng. trans. 213): ‘ἐν ταύτῃ δὲ τῇ μονῇ μείραξ ἦν τις ποτε ἐνδιαιτώμενος καὶ τῶ τῶν εἰσαγωγικῶν τάγματι κατειλεγμένος ὑπὸ καθηγητῆ καὶ ποιμένι ἀνδρὶ θείῳ καὶ τροφίμῳ τῆς ἀρετῆς.’

⁴⁵ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 159.

⁴⁶ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 9 (Eng. trans. 93).

⁴⁷ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 9 (Eng. trans. 93).

⁴⁸ *Anast. Sin. T4*, 1108A (Eng. trans. 121).

⁴⁹ *V. Elias Helio.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 98).

Mount Galesion's *vita* in the second half of the eleventh century, asserted that bad company ruins good morals.⁵⁰ Normally, innocent children were thought to be easily led astray in the company of villains.

The concern for the type of people in contact with a child is made plain in the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (c.1100), whereupon Theosterikos tells us that the child did not approach 'dancers' (χορευτρίαις) of both sexes or 'people who spend their time with wine', and he did not listen to 'their indecent speech'.⁵¹ It was thought to be best if children did not socialise with the immoral people, who held the potential to corrupt them. The Byzantines feared that acquaintances could have a negative impact on a child's development. Consequently, when Anna Komnene (lived c.1083-1153) described her father's role in choosing carers for orphans, she was keen to emphasise that he distributed them among his relations and others who he approved of.⁵² To Anna, ideal guardians were a model of propriety for the children to copy. Texts portray Byzantine children as shaped by the people around them; in hagiographies, exceptional children were marked as saintly if they were able to resist other people's negative influences.

Saintly children, then, demonstrated extraordinary virtues when they were able to complete ascetic feats without the influence of a role model. As a child, Luke of Steiris (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) did not use a 'teacher or guide, but waged war of his own accord against everything that gratifies the belly, welcoming

⁵⁰ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 509 (Eng. trans. 75).

⁵¹ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 4): 'τίς γάρ τοῦτον εἰ δὲν ποτὶ ἐν παιδικοῖς ἀθύρμασι διατρίβοντα, ὡς ἔθος τούτοις ἐστίν, σκιρτᾶν, ἀλλεσθαι, τρέχειν, κυλινδεῖσθαι, ἀλαλάζειν τίς τοῦτον χορ εὐοντα ἢ χορευτρίαις παρακαθήμενον ἢ ὄλωσ πλησιάζοντα ἐθεάσατο καὶ ἀκούοντα ἄσημα ῥήματα τίς ἐν συμποσίοις τῶν ἐν οἴνοις χρονιζόντων, οἷς τραγωδίαί καὶ θόρυβος καὶ λέσσαι κἂν πρὸς βραχὺ τοῦτον ἑώρακεν προσεγγίζοντα οἴκοι δὲ καθεζόμενος καὶ τὸ τυχὸν πτυκτίον μετὰ χεῖρας ἔχων, ἀνεγίνωσκεν ἐπι μελῶς.'

⁵² *An. Komn.*, Vol. III: 214 (Eng. trans. 409).

from the depths of his soul toils and fasting and everything that grieves the flesh'.⁵³ Similarly, in the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), the saint required no teacher or guide as a child.⁵⁴ Children were marked out as exceptional when they were able to adopt the lifestyle of an ascetic, having never learnt them from role models. Some saintly children were noted to be exceptional for their ascetic lifestyle, which they had never been exposed to. But normally, the Byzantines expected lay children to learn through imitation of examples.

Furthermore, some of hagiographers inverted the relationship between teachers, who guided their student, and the student, who obeyed the teacher's instructions.⁵⁵ Nicholas of Sion, whose *vita* was written in the sixth century, surpassed his teacher when reciting the Holy Scriptures.⁵⁶ According to Anthony, writing c.631, George of Choziba corrected the behaviour of his elder, speaking to him with 'humility and respect' (ταπεινώσεως καὶ εὐλαβείας).⁵⁷ In the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053), Gregory the Cellarer inverted the usual role of a tutor teaching a pupil too: Lazaros taught his tutor, Nicholas, not to be miserly to the poor.⁵⁸ In another inversion of the adult-child relationship, Lazaros corrected the uncharitable behaviour of his uncle.⁵⁹ Normatively, tutors were expected to provide pupils with a model of good behaviour.

⁵³ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9): 'καὶ ὁ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων θαυμάζειν ἄξιον, ὅτι μηδενὶ πρὸς ταῦτα διδασκάλῳ καὶ ὀδηγῷ χρησάμενος, ἀλλ' οἰκοθεν καὶ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ πρὸς ἅπαν μὲν τὸ τῆ γαστρὶ χαριζόμενον ἐκπολεμῶθεῖς, πόνους δὲ καὶ ἔνδειαν καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο τὸ τὴν σάρκα λυποῦν ἐκ ψυχῆς ἄσπασάμενος.'

⁵⁴ *V. Nikon*, 44 (Eng. trans. 45); 46 (Eng. trans. 47).

⁵⁵ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 154.

⁵⁶ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23).

⁵⁷ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 101 (Eng. trans. 73).

⁵⁸ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 510 (Eng. trans. 81).

⁵⁹ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 510 (Eng. trans. 80).

One Life Course construct that we repeatedly find in hagiographies is predestined child saints outshining their elders and superiors in virtue, inverting normative age-associated attributes. This rhetorical technique emphasised the exceptional nature of the child saints who were cleverer than their elders. By inference, parents, guardians and tutors normally played a critically influential role in providing a good example, leading to the formation of a child's intellect and moral disposition.

Parents and guardians, in particular, influenced the prospects of the children under their care through the decisions that they made for their children's future. For instance, the *Council in Trullo* (c.692) ruled that when choosing whether to commence the monastic life children's voices are not to be thought of any value in such matters.⁶⁰ Justinian's *Institutes* (c.535) clearly identified fathers as decision-makers: through the power of *patria potestas*, fathers chose the direction of their children's lives.⁶¹ The implications of this legal evidence are reiterated in the *vitae*, where a father vetoed any decision regarding the child's pursuit of monasticism. For instance, in the *vita* of Saint Sabas, which was recorded by Cyril of Scythopolis c.554-558, a monk discussed the young boy's future with the saint's father.⁶² In these examples, there is a direct comparison with Roman legislation and practice: fathers played a dominant role in arranging their child's affairs.

Yet, the Byzantines seemed to have recognised that mothers had an influential role in the upbringing of their children too. It was common for women to take an active role in the education of their children.⁶³ Gregory of Nyssa wrote about his sister's

⁶⁰ *Council in Trullo*, 119 (Eng. trans. 199).

⁶¹ Just. *Inst.*, Book I: Of Persons; Book IX: The Power of Parents.

⁶² Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 180 (Eng. trans. 189).

⁶³ Kazhdan 1998, 16.

childhood in the context of her mother's role as tutor in the fourth century.⁶⁴ The Byzantines increasingly emphasised the mother's role in a child's upbringing and in the *Life of Tarasios* (ninth century), Ignatios the Deacon wrote that the saint's mother shaped his characteristics: 'she prompted him to be both a pious son and a temple of true temperance, she trained him not to associate with knavish people of his age and admonished him to be on friendly terms with those who were devoted to venerable virtue and to cleave to them with bonds of spiritual love'.⁶⁵ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the saint's mother chose to raise him with great respect for the soul as her parents had raised her.⁶⁶ Mothers were recognised to have a direct impact upon the upbringing of their children: particularly their religiosity.

In fact, Byzantine authors were so consumed with the impact of parental roles on childhood that, from at least the seventh century onwards, parenting styles were incorporated into the standard preamble of *vitae*. Deviating from Menander's instructions, hagiographers began to note the type of upbringing their subject received. For instance, in the *Life of George of Choziba* (c.631) it was noted how George was 'raised' (ἀνήγετο) with piety and holiness.⁶⁷ In Mary of Egypt's *vita*, Sophronios the Patriarch of Jerusalem (634-638) wrote that Zosimas was brought up in accordance with monastic principles and customs.⁶⁸ In Elias of Heliopolis' *vita*, which was composed in the eleventh century, the saint was said to be 'descended from the most pious native born citizens of Helioupolis of Second Phoenicia near mount Lebanon, from Christian

⁶⁴ Greg. Nyssa, *V. Macr.*, 148 (Eng. trans. 21).

⁶⁵ *V. Taras.*, 75 (Eng. trans. 173): 'σεβάσμιον υἱὸν ἐγκρατείας ἀληθοῦς καὶ ναὸν ἀποδείκνυσι, πρὸς μὲν τοὺς συνηλικιώτας καὶ μοχθηροὺς μηδεμίαν ἔχειν συνουσίαν παιδεύουσα'.

⁶⁶ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 21).

⁶⁷ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 97 (Eng. trans. 71).

⁶⁸ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3700 (Eng. trans. 71).

upbringing and lowly means...'.⁶⁹ In the *vita* of Saint Theodora the Empress, which was written c.867-912, the author noted how 'noble the birth and upbringing' (ὡ καλῆς γεννήσεως καὶ ἀνατροφῆς) that produced such a 'flower' (βλάστημα).⁷⁰ The emphasis on the childhood of Theodora lay in her noble birth, upbringing and parentage. In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), an emphasis is placed on the 'upbringing' (ἀγωυήν) of the saint too.⁷¹ It is arguable that an increasing tendency to incorporate parenting styles into the standard preamble of *vitae* is symptomatic of an increasing awareness of parents' or guardians' capacities to determine their children's futures.

In histories too, parental influence on a child's upbringing can be noticed. Skylitzes recorded in the late eleventh century that Segios was always warning Romanos I Lekapenos (reigned c.920-944) to take care of his children and not to let them grow up undisciplined.⁷² Anna Komnene, writing c.1135, asserted that Alexios' mother carefully planned the type of upbringing she wanted her son to have, and her son was obedient to these 'precepts' (τὰς νουθεσίας).⁷³ Anna depicted sons spending time with their fathers and grandfathers.⁷⁴ Both of John Doukas' (died c.1088) grandsons accompanied him to canvas votes.⁷⁵ Historians included parenting styles in their rhetoric in order to reflect positively on both on the parents and the children.

⁶⁹ *V. Elias Helio.*, 45 (Eng. trans. 94): 'ἀνατροφῆς χριστιανικῆς καὶ βίου ἰδιωτικοῦ'.

⁷⁰ *V. Theodorae imp.*, 271 (Eng. trans. 382). Please note here that the word βλάστημα is translated to mean 'offshoot' in *V. Luk. Steir.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 5). Horticultural metaphors: *V. Nikon*, 32 (Eng. trans. 33).

⁷¹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 5).

⁷² Skyl., 232 (Eng. trans. 224).

⁷³ An. Komn., Vol. I: 116 (Eng. trans. 113).

⁷⁴ An. Komn., Vol. I: 79 (Eng. trans. 87).

⁷⁵ An. Komn., Vol. I: 85 (Eng. trans. 90); Hennessy 2008, 51.

Often parents were shown to have a significant impact on the character of their children.⁷⁶ Parental attributes were sometimes detailed as a means to describe the destined characteristics of their child. In the *Life of John the Almsgiver* (c.641), the author described the saint's parents: his father was called Epiphanius (Ἐπιφάνιος, translated as conspicuous) in reflection of his parents' reputable standing.⁷⁷ John's well-natured parents were employed in the text to reflect upon the character of John himself.⁷⁸ After relating information about Euthymios of Thessalonike's parents, tenth-century Basil asked, 'Since that truly holy man of God sprang forth from such parents, why is it necessary to recount with how much grace he was filled with as a result of his birth?'⁷⁹ The author implied that recalling the characters of the parents enabled the reader to understand the character of the child. Similarly, in the *Life of Athanasia of Aegina* (c.916) John of Stoudios recorded: 'being born of' (ἐξ ὧν γεννηθεῖσα) and 'reared' (ἀναχθεῖσα) by these pious parents qualified her holy status.⁸⁰ The young saint embodied her parents' positive attributes. In these *vitae* one can note that authors perceived a direct connection between parental attributes and their offspring.

Some of the authors, however, who were intent on portraying a saint's detachment from earthly parents, were reluctant to portray similarities between parents and children.⁸¹ In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), Theodosios Goudelis wrote that 'earthly parents' (πατέρες οἱ κατὰ γῆς) are not a reason for exultation of the saint.⁸²

Nevertheless, Theodosios included details about Saint Leontios' parents: 'The parents

⁷⁶ There are exceptions to this generalisation, for instance, Theodore of Sykeon was born of a harlot (discussed in previous chapter). See: Hennessy 2008, 21.

⁷⁷ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 19 (Eng. trans. 199).

⁷⁸ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 19 (Eng. trans. 199).

⁷⁹ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 171 (Eng. trans. 2): 'ἐκ δὴ τούτων ὁ ἱερός ἐκεῖνος ἐκβλαστήσας καὶ ἀληθῶς τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, τί δεῖ λέγειν'.

⁸⁰ *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 142).

⁸¹ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 156.

⁸² Theod. *V. Leontios*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35).

of the wonderful one had a sufficiency of wealth, and in their own city they were not insignificant, nor were they undistinguished...'.⁸³ This shows us that this author could not detach his writings from contemporary expectations: parentage was significant to the Byzantines. Authors described parental attributes as a means to depict the future nature of the child. This shows us that the Byzantines perceived a connection between parental attributes and their offspring's attributes.

2.3 Education and Training

Authors often noted that their subjects were learned and intelligent from an early stage of the Life Course. Cyril of Scythopolis wrote in the *Life of Theodosios Koinobiarches* (c.554-558) that the saint 'was from childhood a most proficient cantor in the holy church of Komana, where he was accurately instructed in the office of the Church and learnt thoroughly the Psalter and the other Holy Scriptures'.⁸⁴ His contemporary, Nicholas of Sion, learnt the Holy Scriptures and Psalms too.⁸⁵ In the *Life of Mary of Egypt* (seventh century), the female solitary was able to recite the Scriptures and Psalms.⁸⁶ In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203) Theodosios Goudeles recorded how the saint could learn books by heart.⁸⁷ Patlagean wrote: 'Those who take early to the hermit's life always receive miraculously the education which they would otherwise

⁸³ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35): 'Γεννίητορες δέ οι τῷ θαυμασίῳ, Βίου μὲν διαρκῶς ἔχοντες, κἀν τῇ ἰδίᾳ πόλει οὐκ ἄσημοί τινες'.

⁸⁴ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Theod.*, 236 (Eng. trans. 262): 'ὅθεν καὶ τῆς Κομάνων αὐτῆς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας ψάλτης χρησιμώτατος γέγονεν ἐκ παιδὸς καὶ τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸν κανόντα ἀκριβῶς ἐξεπαιδεύθη καὶ ἐξέμαθεν τό τε ψαλτήριον καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς θείας γραφάς.'

⁸⁵ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23).

⁸⁶ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3720 (Eng. trans. 87); Patlagean 1983, 103: Points out that when Mary of Egypt was attributed with the ability to recite the Scriptures, having never read them, we see the importance of education.

⁸⁷ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 60 (Eng. trans. 61).

have lacked – an indication of how important education was’.⁸⁸ Hagiographers show us that learning to read facilitated a child’s access to models of ideal conduct in the Scriptures. These examples suggest that reading and reciting enabled a student to learn morals and adapt their behaviour accordingly.⁸⁹ Access to the teachings of the Scriptures, through listing, reading, and reciting, provided a model of virtuous behaviour for ideal children to imitate.

These examples imply that education – and more specifically the ability to read and recite the Scriptures and Psalms – was valued by authors. As the ability to write was referred to significantly less frequently than the ability to read or recite, I must consider the extent of these subjects’ literacy. Prior to the tenth century, I have found no statements alluding to the importance of learning to write. This situation changes significantly and in the tenth century one begins to see references to writing as integral to education. For example, in his tenth-century *Spiritually Beneficial Tales*, Paul of Monemvasia recorded how a monk taught a child how to read and write in the hope of tonsuring him.⁹⁰ In the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (c.1100), Theosterikos tells us: ‘When he reached the age of a youth his father took him to a teacher to learn reading and writing in the way customary for boys’.⁹¹ This shows us that by the tenth century, reading and writing had become valued aspects of monastic training. Similarly in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Illuminated Gospels, Saint John the Evangelist can be seen dictating to Prochoros, showing us that writing from speech as opposed to copying

⁸⁸ Patlagean 1983, 103.

⁸⁹ Manuscripts aimed at children: Hennessy 2008, 124; 153.

⁹⁰ Paul of Monem., *ST*, 68 (Eng. trans. 86).

⁹¹ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 20 (Eng. trans. 5): ‘αὶ ὅτε ἔφθασεν εἰς τὸν χρόνον τῶν μειρακίων, τὰ ἐξ ἔθους γράμματα τοῖς παισὶν ὁ πατὴρ ἐκμανθάνειν παρέδωκεν (φιλομαθῆς δὲ ὢν ὁ παῖς καὶ φιλόπονος, ἐν ὀλίγοις χρόνοις πάντα ἐξέμαθεν) εἰ τα καὶ ψαλτήριον.’

from text was a valuable skill (Figures 2.2 to 2.6).⁹² Chevallier Caseau has noted that: ‘It seems clear that in Byzantium, literacy was a prerequisite for sainthood...’.⁹³ But it seems clear from this survey that only from the tenth century did the package of reading and writing become a prerequisite for sainthood. Before the tenth century, perhaps reading skills (and not necessarily writing skills) were valued.

Authors recorded that a child’s personal skills were perceptible from a young age. In the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* (sixth century), Archbishop identified him as ‘the “chosen vessel” (σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς) of the Lord.’⁹⁴ In the eleventh century, Michael Psellos revealed that the Byzantines attempted to predict the future greatness of children, although the writer himself dismissed this as nonsense.⁹⁵ Skylitzes, writing c.1096, recorded that when Basil I was a young boy, the ruler of the Bulgars observed his noble glances, his gracious smile and his natural manners.⁹⁶ In the twelfth century, Anna Komnene recorded that Alexios noticed potential talents in children despite their ‘young age’ (ἡλικία).⁹⁷ These childhood skills are normally recorded in the context of the individual’s future career.⁹⁸ To the Byzantines, it was conceivable that a child’s future competencies were apparent to an adult onlooker.

⁹² Saint John the Evangelist dictating to Prochorus (Mount Athos, Monastery of Dionysiou, cod. 588m, fol. 225v, end of 10th century or beginning of 11th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974; Saint John the Evangelist dictating to Prochorus (Mount Athos, Monastery of Esphigmenou, cod. 19, fol. 1v, 11th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974; Saint John the Evangelist dictating to Prochorus (Mount Athos, Monastery of Dionysiou, cod. 587m, fol. 1v, 11th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974; Saint John the Evangelist dictating to Prochorus (Mount Athos, Monastery of Panteleimon, cod. 25. Fol. 143v, 12th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974; Saint John the Evangelist dictating to Prochorus (Mount Athos, Monastery of Dionysiou, cod. 35, fol. 168v, 12th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974.

⁹³ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 155; Angelov 2009, 121; Alberici 2008, 214.

⁹⁴ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 24 (Eng. trans. 25).

⁹⁵ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 14 (Eng. trans. 205).

⁹⁶ Skyl., 116 (Eng. trans. 119).

⁹⁷ *An. Komn.*, Vol. I: 135 (Eng. trans. 128).

⁹⁸ Brown 2000, 155-175; Alberici 2008, 222.

Accordingly, the authors lead us to believe that their contemporaries chose specific children, who had signs of natural skill, to train into specific vocations. In the case of Nicholas of Sion, the Archbishop ‘blessed him and ordained him to the rank of the readers without receiving of him anything at all for the act of ordination’.⁹⁹ Skylitzes, writing c.1096, revealed that the Bulgar ruler’s subjects were angry that Basil I was allowed to return home.¹⁰⁰ Theodosios Goudeles described how Leontios took a disciple, Antonios, from his homeland when he was still young and taught him.¹⁰¹ The Byzantines retrospectively invented a child’s innate abilities, leading the reader to believe that the subject was naturally predisposed to their vocation from childhood.

The evidence is clear in stating that training for specific vocations started during childhood. In the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century), the author recognised that asceticism required training from an early age: ‘This Abba Daniel became a monk at Sketis as a child. At first he lived in a community for forty years; then he practised asceticism in solitude’.¹⁰² In the *Life of Mary of Egypt* (seventh century), Zosimas had been trained since childhood in line with his Christian faith.¹⁰³ According to Gregory the Cleric, writing in the ninth century, Theodora of Thessalonike reputedly trained herself to fast in her childhood.¹⁰⁴ In histories, one can see both soldiers and saints training from their childhood. Leo the Deacon, writing in the tenth century, noted particularly adept soldiers who from childhood had practised bravery and daring.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 24 (Eng. trans. 25): ‘εὐλογήσας, ἐχειροτόνησεν αὐτὸν τῇ τάξει τῶν ἀναγνωστῶν, μὴ λαβῶν παρ’ αὐτοῦ χειροτονίας ἔνεκεν τὸ σύνολον.’

¹⁰⁰ Skyl., 116 (Eng. trans. 119).

¹⁰¹ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 84 (Eng. trans. 85).

¹⁰² *V. Danie. Sketis*, 114 (Eng. trans. 115): ‘Οὗτος ὁ ἀββᾶς Δανιὴλ ἐκ παιδόθεν ἀπετάξατο ἐν Σκήτει. καὶ τὰ μὲν πρῶτα ἐν κοινοβίῳ ἐκαθέσθη ἐπὶ ἔτη τεσσαράκοντα, ὕστερον δὲ κατὰ μόνας ἠσκεῖτο.’

¹⁰³ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3697 (Eng. trans. 70).

¹⁰⁴ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 21 (Eng. trans. 183); Chevallier Caseau 2009, 149; Pitarakis 2009, 217; Leyerle 1997, 260.

¹⁰⁵ Leo Diac., 20 (Eng. trans. 73).

Equally, ascetics such as Theodore of Koloneia and Basil had disciplined themselves since childhood.¹⁰⁶ Successful adults were shown to have been practising their vocation since childhood. Childhood was a time to both identify natural competencies and capitalise on these skills through vocational training.

In manuscript illuminations, depictions of the child David show him practising the skills required for his future. The *Khludov Psalter*, illuminated in the ninth century, depicts the child David hunting a bear.¹⁰⁷ As a child, David is represented as small and has short brown curly hair. On the parallel page adult David, who is represented as tall and has long black hair, can be seen administering the final blow to Goliath (Figure 2.7).¹⁰⁸ Authors and miniaturists retrospectively recorded their subjects' pastimes as a child in order to track the development of their adulthood qualities. The repeated connection between childhood training and adult achievements reveals that childhood was valued as a period of practice.

As children were thought to acquire skills, in part through their natural heritage and in part progressively as they aged and gained experience, it is unsurprising to find exceptional children being identified by their ability to mature and progress quickly.¹⁰⁹ According to Cyril of Scythopolis, Bishop Abramios (whose *vita* was written 554-558), was exceptional because had loved his own company from 'boyhood' (παιδὸς).¹¹⁰ The same hagiographer tells us that Euthymios surpassed his contemporaries in learning and piety too.¹¹¹ George Eleusius claimed that the young Theodore (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) 'was quicker at learning than all the other boys and made great

¹⁰⁶ Leo Diac., 165 (Eng. trans. 205); 100 (Eng. trans. 150); 102 (Eng. trans. 152).

¹⁰⁷ *Khludov Psalter* (Moscow, State Historical Museum, gr. 129, fol. 147v and 148r). See: Ščepkina 1977.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Samuel 17:1-58.

¹⁰⁹ Angelov 2009, 124.

¹¹⁰ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 274).

¹¹¹ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 6 (Eng. trans. 7).

progress'.¹¹² In the *Life of George of Amastris*, which was written c.830, Ignatios the Deacon tells us: 'He proceeded to progress in wisdom beyond his years'.¹¹³ The author of the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (ninth century) wrote that, as a boy, the saint outdid all his contemporaries.¹¹⁴ I understand from this *topos* that ideal children were thought to mature faster than their contemporaries.

Academics have given a great deal attention to the *Puer Senex* (literally, boy old man) motif in Roman and Western Medieval thought.¹¹⁵ In this *topos*, children or adolescents are described to exhibit qualities normally ascribed to old men. Byzantine writers employed this motif too.¹¹⁶ Perhaps a more accurate name for the Byzantine equivalent is '*pais geron*' (παῖς γέρον) (boy old man). Exceptional children were identified by their ability to overcome the normative restrictions of their age.¹¹⁷ For example, Luke of Steiris (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century), exhibited signs of maturity beyond his chronological age: he did nothing in 'childish fashion' (παῖδας ἐποίει).¹¹⁸ Luke was exceptional: 'Most children enjoy and delight in toys, jokes, games, lively activity, and running, but for Luke there was none of this, but rather calmness, tranquillity, a steady character and maturity in all things'.¹¹⁹ Luke had the reserved deportment of an adult, even as a child, when he was expected to be energetic.

¹¹² *V. Theod. Syk.*, 5 (Eng. trans. 89): 'καὶ διὰ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ χάριτος ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς παῖδας εὐμαθῆς γενόμενος προέκοπτεν ἐν τῇ τῶν γραμμάτων σοφίᾳ.'

¹¹³ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 15 (Eng. trans. 4): 'προέκοπτε συνέσει μᾶλλον ἢ ἡλικία.'

¹¹⁴ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 46 (Eng. trans. 47).

¹¹⁵ Alberici 2008, 209-213; Carp 1980, 736-739.

¹¹⁶ Talbot 1984, 273.

¹¹⁷ Papaconstantinou 2009, 7.

¹¹⁸ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9).

¹¹⁹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9): 'τῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀθύρματα, γέλωτες, παιδιαί, κινήσεις, ἄτακτοι, δρόμοι, τὸ φίλτατόν τε καὶ ἥδιστον· Λουκά δὲ οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον, ἀλλ' ἡρεμία, γαλήνη, βεβηκὸς ἦθος καὶ τὸ πρεσβυτικὸν διὰ πάντων ὑποφαινόμενον.'

Indeed, Luke of Steiris is not the only example of the ‘*pais geron*’ (παῖς γέρον) motif. In the *Life of Nikon* (eleventh century), his disciple summarised the saint’s childhood:

For he alone beyond his other peers, while still of an early age and being counted among children, did not have the mind of a child. Nor did he devote himself to toys and sports and races and horses and the other things desirable and beloved by the young. And in that immature and early age he displayed the wisdom of an old man.¹²⁰

Normally, children were expected to play with toys and enjoy sport and races.

Similarly, writing at the turn of the twelfth century, Theosteriktos has us believe that Niketas of Medikion never indulged in childish plays.¹²¹ Sainly children were shown to be resilient to normative childish attributes, instead showing maturity for their age.

Gilleard surmised: ‘the Church viewed the earlier stages of life as little more than rehearsals for a worthy old age...’.¹²² This maturity was not only valued in the Church: in the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene (c.1083-1053) wrote that as a youngster, her father was uninterested in ‘childish games’ (παιδιὰ) too.¹²³ Here it is apparent that in and outside of the Church, adults destined for greatness, including sainthood or imperial duties, were celebrated for their advanced maturity as a child too. Carp traced the origin of the *topos* to the writings of Plato and Aristotle and it is possible that writers exploited the notion simply to draw upon long established rhetorical formulae for distinguishing children who were destined for greatness.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *V. Nikon*, 32 (Eng. trans. 33): ‘μόνος γὰρ οὗτος ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἄλλους τῶν συγγόνων τὴν πρώτην ἔτι μετιὼν ἡλικίαν καὶ εἰς παιδᾶς ἐξεταζόμενος οὐ κατὰ παιδᾶς εἶχε τὸ φρόνημα, οὐδ’ ἀθύρμασι προσανείχε καὶ παιδιαῖς καὶ δρόμοις καὶ ἵππασίαις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα παισὶ νέοις ποθεῖνὰ καὶ ἐπέραστα, ἀλλ’ εὐθύς ὡσπερ ἐκ πρώτης γραμμῆς πρὸς πᾶν θέλημα σαρκικὸν ἀπεμάχετο.’

¹²¹ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 4).

¹²² Gilleard 2007, 360.

¹²³ An. Komn., Vol. III: 177 (Eng. trans. 383); Angelov 2009, 115.

¹²⁴ Carp 1980, 736.

2.5 Work and Economic Value

Sources reveal that children were an integral component of the familial team, often conducting menial tasks in the house and in the workplace.¹²⁵ Prior to this period, fourth-century Paphnutios wrote about a son who accompanied his father on fishing trips.¹²⁶ Indeed, this trend continues into this period and a mosaic situated in the Great Palace (Istanbul), probably produced in the sixth century, depicts a boy feeding a donkey (Figure 2.8).¹²⁷ Writing at a similar time, Cyril of Scythopolis recorded a young apprentice called Auxentios, who was working on the construction of a reservoir, and was squashed by falling rocks while his adult supervisor escaped unharmed.¹²⁸ In the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful* (c.822), Philaretos sent his son out into the field to look for a lost ox.¹²⁹ This was a pointless task, as the father knew that he had already given his ox away. Later in the narrative, the same son was instructed to look for his father's mantle (which was also given away to a peasant).¹³⁰ All these young boys were expected to assist their adult superiors.

Indeed, some responsibilities were specific to a trade. For instance, in the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the young boy – who was born into a family of farmers – attended to his family's flock of sheep.¹³¹ In the tenth-century *Spiritually Beneficial Tales* of Paul of Monemvasia, sons of farmers were expected to care for the animals: 'They possessed large flocks and herds and this was their custom handed down from

¹²⁵ Hennessy 2008, 29.

¹²⁶ Paphnutius, *HM*, 118.

¹²⁷ Boy feeding donkey (Istanbul, Great Palace, 6th century). See: Cimok 2001.

¹²⁸ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 187 (Eng. trans. 196).

¹²⁹ *V. Philaretos*, 68 (Eng. trans. 69).

¹³⁰ *V. Philaretos*, 82 (Eng. trans. 83).

¹³¹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

[the time of] their forefathers: each day at dawn they used to gather the animals together at the gate of the village and each man would send either his son or his boy with his own beasts'.¹³² The *Kynegetika*, which was illuminated in the eleventh century, shows children assisting adults to hunt birds with reeds (Figure 2.9).¹³³ While these images are not necessarily representative of daily life, the sources unanimously portray that children were involved in the completion of tasks, which varied according to the status of their family.

Fetching water seems to have been a common task for children. An old man instructs a boy to fetch water in the *Life of George of Choziba* (seventh century).¹³⁴ In the *Life of Ioannikios* (ninth century), the young boy was 'fetching water '(ἀποσταλέντα ὕδωρ) when he was approached by demons.¹³⁵ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the author tells us that, as a young monk '...he ceaselessly carried wood and water and tended to the cooking and table preparations, mending nets and looking after the catch'.¹³⁶ In this example, as one of the youngest monks, Luke took on the normative responsibilities of a child. In the *Life of Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (eleventh century), two boys visited a cave to fetch water.¹³⁷ It is prudent to point out at this point that all of these examples have focused on male children. But, in fact, assistance with familial responsibilities was not unique to males. In the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), a mother and daughter made cakes and the daughter was instructed to

¹³² Paul of Monem., *ST*, 134 (Eng. trans. 150).

¹³³ *Kynegetika* Marciana (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z 479, fol. 2v: Children and adults hunting birds with reeds. c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004.

¹³⁴ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 98 (Eng. trans. 72).

¹³⁵ *V. Ioannicii*, 398 (Eng. trans. 281); Talbot 2009, 290.

¹³⁶ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 56 (Eng. trans. 57): 'Τοιγαροῦν οὐ διέλειπε ξυλοφορῶν ἐκεῖνος, ὕδροφορῶν, μαγειρείου καὶ τραπέζης ἐπιμελούμενος, δίκτυα καταρτί ζων, ἀλείας μεταποιούμενος.'

¹³⁷ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 523 (Eng. trans. 130).

fetch the water.¹³⁸ It has been noted in previous Life Course studies that adolescence is the first life-stage in which male and female Life Courses noticeably diverge.¹³⁹ But the differentiation in responsibilities for girls and boys seen here may be indicative of a culture in which responsibilities were gender differentiated from an early age.

It is also noticeable that histories tended not to record children conducting menial tasks, such as fetching water. This is most likely because histories focus on imperial elite children, who were valued for their bravery, education and intelligence.¹⁴⁰ But hagiographies show predestined saints as obedient, subservient and hardworking from a young age. In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the author tells us that as a child, Luke received his orders with pleasure.¹⁴¹ Children were depicted conducting menial tasks in hagiographies and images and I presume that they were responsible for these tasks in daily life.

As children were valued contributors to the family, sometimes authors presented orphans as being subject to exploitation and manipulation.¹⁴² George the Synkellos, writing in the ninth century, recorded that, in order to prevent misfortune in the event of parental death, fathers named guardians to their children.¹⁴³ There was often no real substitute for a living parent, and George the Synkellos tells us how that named guardians did not always protect the child, as had been intended.¹⁴⁴ By way of contrast, some of authors focus on the positive characteristics displayed by foster-parents. Michael Psellos (lived c.1018-1081) described how Basil the Parakoimomenos, in the

¹³⁸ *V. Nikon*, 98 (Eng. trans. 99).

¹³⁹ Harlow and Laurence 2002, 69-72; Alberici 2008, 62.

¹⁴⁰ Angelov 2009, 102.

¹⁴¹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 56 (Eng. trans. 57).

¹⁴² Miller 2003, 19.

¹⁴³ George Synk., 210 (Eng. trans. 261).

¹⁴⁴ George Synk., 210 (Eng. trans. 261).

absence of parents, protected his nephew Basil II and behaved as a ‘kindly foster-parent’ (εὐνους ἐτιθηεῖτο τροφεύς).¹⁴⁵ Anna Komnene (lived c.1083-1153) informs us that Alexios happily entrusted orphans to be ‘brought up’ (ἐπέσκηψε) by lay guardians, as well as ecclesiastical guardians.¹⁴⁶ In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), Theodosios the Monk wrote that orphanhood was the worst state of all.¹⁴⁷ But it is possible that the monastic authors sought to advertise monasticism as a viable alternative to lay guardianship.

Most of the excerpts about orphans focus on the economic exploitation of children.¹⁴⁸ In the *Life of George of Choziba* (seventh century), the orphaned saint’s guardian (his uncle) attempted to marry him to his female cousin in order to secure the ‘family property’ (τοῖς γονικοῖς) and the cousin’s economic welfare.¹⁴⁹ Fortunately for George, another uncle intervened, arguing ‘he is old enough [to choose for himself]’ (Ἡλικίαν ἔχει).¹⁵⁰ In the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053), villagers stole the possessions of one female orphan and two male orphans; the girl was forced to work for a living.¹⁵¹ Villagers and relatives could take advantage of orphans, whereas it was inferred that monks would not have the same worldly concerns. By contrast, monastic authors tell us that monasteries provided orphans with sustenance.

The tenth-century *Synaxarion* reveals that Theodosia of Constantinople entered a monastery upon the death of her father, when she was seven, presumably to secure her

¹⁴⁵ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 3 (Eng. trans. 28). For the special significance of uncles, see Chevallier Caseau 2009, 159.

¹⁴⁶ An. Komn., Vol. III: 214 (Eng. trans. 409).

¹⁴⁷ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 74 (Eng. trans. 75).

¹⁴⁸ Skinner 1997, 399; Laiou 1977, 79.

¹⁴⁹ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 97 (Eng. trans. 71).

¹⁵⁰ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 98 (Eng. trans. 72).

¹⁵¹ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 546 (Eng. trans. 152).

welfare.¹⁵² Theoktiste of Lesbos, whose *vita* was written by Niketas Magistros c.900, was placed in the care of a monastery by her relatives when her parents died, although she maintained contact with her married sister.¹⁵³ It is notable that it is mostly female children, who probably embodied less economic value, who were committed to monasteries after their fathers' deaths. Parents were thought most able to protect a child from economic hardship; in the absence of parents, the monastic authors presented the care of monks as preferable to the care of relatives. The exploitation of children by greedy relatives and lay guardians exposes the perception that economic value was attached to children; specifically male children. Monks, by inference, were unlikely to take economic advantage of children.

Conclusions

When looking at the life-stage of childhood in the hagiographic evidence, it is notable that the central characters in Middle Byzantine *vitae* always grew up to become adults. Late Antique hagiographies do feature saints who never reached maturity, but these accounts of martyrdoms exploit the grief of such a tragically early death to emphasise the devotion to God and the sacrifice of life. Child martyrs, sacrificing a potentially longer life, trumped adult martyrs. Aside from children who were martyred, the only other example of authors citing children who died before reaching maturity is when they were used to reflect on another character. For instance, before her death at age 12, Blatta (Theodore of Sykeon's sister) 'sympathised with him [her brother] and

¹⁵² *SynaxCP*, 829 (Eng. trans. 5). Talbot 1996a, 3.

¹⁵³ *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 230 (Eng. trans. 110).

loved him dearly'.¹⁵⁴ From this, I understand that Theodore, whose *vita* was written in the seventh century, was loved by his family. Anna Komnene affectionately described her ill-fated fiancée, Constantine Doukas: 'he was unrivalled for his sweet disposition and his childish grace in all his movements and games'.¹⁵⁵ I understand that Anna was destined to be Empress but for the tragic death of her fiancée. In both of these cases, the deceased children were referred to in support of the subject's (Theodore's and Anna's) adult characters. This tells us that in the Byzantine Life Course, childhood was only valued in the context of subsequent adult achievements. It is unsurprising therefore that the Byzantines focused upon the formative experiences of their subjects in descriptions of their childhoods.

I have shown throughout this chapter, that the overwhelming majority of saints were said to exhibit saintly virtues during their childhood.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, some child saints were even attributed with the power to perform miracles. In the *Life of Sabas* (sixth century), the young boy conducted miracles in excess of the power thought to belong to someone of his age: 'the result that the fathers of the coenobium were amazed to find such virtue and aptitude in one so young in age'.¹⁵⁷ When George of Choziba, whose *vita* was written by Anthony c.631, completed a miracle while he was a boy, everyone was amazed that a 'youth and a novice '(νέου και ἀρχαρίου) was able to perform such a feat.¹⁵⁸ The miracle performed by a boy was unexpected. In the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), a father appealed to the saint to cure his son: 'But the virtuous

¹⁵⁴ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 94): 'Εἶχεν δὲ καὶ ἀδελφὴν μικροτάτην ὀνόματι Βλάτταν, ἥτις πολὺ συμπαθοῦσα καὶ ἀγαπῶσα αὐτὸν ἠγωνίζετο εἰς τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ'.

¹⁵⁵ *An. Komn.*, Vol. I: 104 (Eng. trans. 72): "Ἦδὺ μὲν οὐκ ἐν λόγοις μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν παντοίαις κινήσει καὶ περιστροφῶις παιγνίων ἀπαράμιλλον.'

¹⁵⁶ Talbot 2009, 302; Carp 1980, 737.

¹⁵⁷ *Сγг. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 92 (Eng. trans. 101): '...ὥστε θαυμάζειν τοὺς τοῦ κοινοβίου πατέρας τὴν τοσαυτὴν ἐν νεαζούσῃ ἡλικίᾳ ἀρετὴν τε καὶ ἐπιτηδεϊότητα.'

¹⁵⁸ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 101 (Eng. trans. 73).

child of Christ did not know what he ought to do for him and indeed was greatly perplexed, for he was so young'.¹⁵⁹ Theodore demonstrated his own sanctity, in spite of his youth: 'And this became known throughout the entire neighbourhood so that all gave glory to God who bestows wisdom and grace even upon children'.¹⁶⁰ Chevallier Caseau asserted: 'Holiness is not seen as a feature of childhood unless the child is a future martyr and the Holy Ghost speaks through the child's mouth. Children can be God's messengers, but that role is not the same as being holy'.¹⁶¹ But we have seen here that children could be virtuous and holy and they could perform miracles.

Childhood, according to the authors, was pre-emptive of the future Life Course trajectory but the authors emphasised that the children were inexperienced, novices, and they became perplexed and fearful under pressure.¹⁶² In the *Life of Mary the Younger* (c.1025), the author narrated how it was easier for mature people to enter the arena of virtue.¹⁶³ The Byzantines believed that children could be saintly, but they would be increasingly powerful as they matured.

Byzantinists have argued that a new interest in childhood can be noticed in eleventh-century writings onwards. Dimitar Angelov wrote: 'Almost all encomia that contain episodes of childhood and adolescence date to the period between the late eleventh century to the late thirteenth century'.¹⁶⁴ Congourdeau agreed: 'By the eleventh century, texts convey the "feeling of childhood", well before the French in the 18th

¹⁵⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 14 (Eng. trans. 98): 'Ο δὲ εὐάρεστος παῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἦδει τί ἔμελλε ποιεῖν ἐπ' αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ γε καὶ ἐξεπίστετο ὡς νέος ὢν.'

¹⁶⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 100): 'Καὶ γνωστὸν ἐγένετο περὶ τοῦτου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ περιχώρῳ ἐκείνῃ, ὥστε πάντας δοξάζειν τὸν θεὸν τὸν καὶ τοῖς νηπίοις σύνεσιν καὶ χάριν δωρούμενον.'

¹⁶¹ Chevallier Caseau 2009, 131

¹⁶² *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 101 (Eng. trans. 73); *V. Theod. Syk.*, 16-18 (Eng. trans. 98-100).

¹⁶³ *V. Mary Youn.*, 692 (Eng. trans. 254).

¹⁶⁴ Angelov 2009, 89.

century'.¹⁶⁵ Chevallier Caseau asserted: 'Childhood and family details were of great interest to a medieval reader'.¹⁶⁶ But it is has been found here that an interest in raising children and parenting models gains momentum from the sixth century onwards. Byzantine authors were directly interested in childhood as a formative period. The children presented were destined for greatness and one does not usually see exceptionally badly-behaved children who then grew up to become ideal adults. In the Byzantine Life Course model, childhood attributes were thought to be pre-emptive of adulthood attributes.

¹⁶⁵ Congourdeau 1993, 176 : 'Per ce texte du 11e s., Byzance inaugure, bien avant le 18e siècle français, ce que les historiens appellent le "sentiment de l'enfance.'

¹⁶⁶ Talbot 2006, 52; Chevallier Caseau 2009, 139.

**CHAPTER THREE:
ADOLESCENCE TO MATURITY**

Youth is presented as a period of instability.¹ Sources universally present youths as subject to elevated levels of emotion. For instance, George the Synkellos described in his ninth-century *Chronography* how the youthful Solomon was devoted to God, until he became distracted by his ‘mad obsession for women’ (γῦναικομανιάν).² Desire and passion were not the only extreme emotions that youths were susceptible to. In his tenth-century *History*, Leo the Deacon characterized adolescents as impetuous and seething with youthful anger.³ Similarly, in her twelfth-century *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene noted that ‘youths’ (μειράκιον) were ‘usually the victims of overwhelming impulses’.⁴ Indeed, this presentation of emotional youth is prevalent in hagiographies too. In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), Theodosios the Monk wrote that ‘younger ones’ (τοῖς νεωτέποις) are ‘hot-headed’ (θερμότεροις).⁵ Youths, according to the Byzantines, had not yet learnt to manage their emotions and were controlled by their urges, whims and desires.

Given that the Byzantines presented youths specifically as susceptible to overwhelming emotions, it is unsurprising that the life-stage of youth is constructed as atypical of the subject’s subsequent adult character. Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem, tells us in the *Life of Mary of Egypt* (seventh century) that the young woman turned to prostitution during her youth but later reformed herself.⁶ In the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century), a young monk confessed that he was afflicted with sexual desire throughout his youth which he was relieved of as an adult.⁷ Cyril of Scythopolis wrote in the *Life of John the Hesychast* (c.554-558) of how mature adults retrospectively

¹ The terms ‘youth’ and ‘adolescence’ are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

² George Synk., 212 (Eng. trans. 264).

³ Leo Diac., 66 (Eng. trans. 116); 6 (Eng. trans. 58).

⁴ An. Komn., Vol. II: 147 (Eng. trans. 262): ‘ὡς ἐπίπαν τάς τῶν τοιούτων ὀρμῆς ἀκαθέκ τους γινώσκων’.

⁵ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 40 (Eng. trans. 41).

⁶ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3712 (Eng. trans. 80).

⁷ *V. Danie. Sketis*, 122 (Eng. trans. 123).

accounted for inappropriate behaviour in youth due to being ‘young and foolish’ (νέος καὶ μᾶταιος), revealing to us that it was excusable to make mistakes during youth.⁸

Psellos, who composed his *Chronographia* in the eleventh century, wrote the Constantine IX Monomachos’ actions were the result of what I may call ‘youthful folly’ (ἴν’ οὕτως εἴπομι νεανίεθμα), implying that as a youth, he was more susceptible to making mistakes.⁹ In the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (eleventh century), Neilos assaulted people because he was young and impulsive.¹⁰ In both Byzantine histories and hagiographies, youth could be presented as a blip in the otherwise untarnished record of an individual. Character was not considered to be fixed or consistent during youth.

The Byzantines often attributed irrational behaviour to adolescents and they sometimes depicted them as a threat to society. In his *Secret History* (sixth century), Prokopios wrote that ‘partisans revolutionized the style of wearing their hair... giving silly people the notion that their bodies were so splendidly sturdy’.¹¹ In this anecdote, some people were said to be intimidated by the youths’ physical display of power. The ‘young men’ (νεανία) were a force to be reckoned with: ‘They robbed their betters in the open Forum and in the narrow alleys, snatching from passers by their mantles, belts, gold brooches, and whatever they had in their hands. Some they killed after robbing them...’.¹² Academics have already noted that this rebellion specifically represented

⁸ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Ioh. Hes.*, 217 (Eng. trans. 235).

⁹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 133 (Eng. trans. 171).

¹⁰ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 572 (Eng. trans. 319).

¹¹ Prok., *SH*, 78 (Eng. trans. 79): ‘Καὶ πρῶτα μὲν τοῖς στασιώταις τὰ ἐς τὴν κόμην ἐς νεώτερον τινα μετεβέβλητο τρόπον... ὅτι δὴ αὐτοῖς οὕτω καλὸν τε τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἄδρον εἶν [ἄν] ὥστε δεῖν γε αὐτοῖς πρὸς τῶν τοιούτων ἱματίων καλύπτεσθαι...’ Note that Dewing chose to translate the word τοῖς στασιώταις as partisans, while Atwater used the term ‘young bandits’.

¹² Prok., *SH*, 84 (Eng. trans. 85): ‘ἐλωποδύτουν τοὺς ἐπιεικεστέρους ἐν τε ὅλη ἀγορᾷ κὰν τοῖς στενωποῖς, ἀφαιρούμενοι τοὺς παραπετωκότας τὰ τε ἱμάτια καὶ ζώνας τε καὶ περόνας χρυσᾶς καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοιεν. τινὰς δὲ πρὸς τῇ ἀρπαγῇ καὶ κτείνειν ἠξίουσαν...’

urban dwelling youths.¹³ Irrespective of whether Prokopios accurately represented the age of the members of the circus factions, to Byzantines of other life-stages, youths were sometimes feared for their potential to be reckless, impulsive and dangerous.

Clearly, not all youths were perceived to be dangerous and the sources do account for individual variations in the attributes of youths. In the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.830), the saint was able to renounce the bad habits of his contemporaries: ‘Because of his preference and selection of the good when he was not yet an adult, he ran away in the pleasures of youth’.¹⁴ George was marked out as exceptional when not fulfilling the normative characteristics of youth.¹⁵ This anecdote affirms the concept that most youths were susceptible to making mistakes and, by nature, were easily led to malevolence.¹⁶ As in Ancient Greek and Roman literature, both Byzantine hagiographies and histories treat youth as an atypical life-stage, set apart from others, based on perceptions of emotional instability and the consequent potential to commit acts of immorality.¹⁷

3.1 Defining Adolescence

Starting with numerical age data presented in legal codes, gendered disparities in the transitions to adolescence are clear. For example, in Justinian’s *Institutes* (535), it is implied that the age of 12 for women, and 14 for men (when marriage could legally

¹³ Gregory 2010, 131; Cameron 1976, 155.

¹⁴ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 5): ‘ῥᾶον δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὸ κακὸν μετατρέπεται, αὐτὸς τῆ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ αἰρέσει καὶ ἐκλογῇ τῶν τῆς νεότητος ἡδέων ἐναντίον ἀποδιδράσκων.’

¹⁵ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 5).

¹⁶ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 5).

¹⁷ Finley 1989, 8.

occur) to 25 (when a curator or guardian was no longer required), constituted youth.¹⁸ In the *Ekloga* of Leo III (726), the age of marriage is increased to 15 for a man and 13 for a woman, but gender differences are maintained.¹⁹ The gendered disparity in legal ages suggests that girls were expected to fulfil spousal roles sooner than their male counterparts.

In sharp contrast, Canon Law decreed that the passage into monasticism was achievable at a younger age for boys than for girls. The *Council in Trullo* (692) determined that boys aged 10 and over could choose to enter monasticism, while girls could not make the equivalent decision until they had reached 17 years of age.²⁰ It is stated that these ages correlated to the age at which the result of knowledge and judgment after years of discretion have been reached.²¹ This might suggest that these ecclesiasts thought men reached full mental competence sooner than women. Another interpretation of this evidence might be that the Byzantines felt it was more important for women to maximise the opportunity to get married as opposed to entering monasticism.

In the hagiographic numerical age data, the start of adolescence was markedly different for males and females. The numerical ages of 12 through to 16 are commonly attested for men (Table 5). While for women, the single numerical age of 12 occurs with regularity, in isolation from other pubescent ages (Table 6). Comparing these ages with the previously referred to legal codes, Justinian's *Institutes* (535) stated that 12 for women and 14 for men represented the age of puberty.²² Both the hagiographic and legal evidence suggests that youth started earlier for women than for men. The

¹⁸ Just. *Inst.*, XXIII, 42 (Eng. trans. 304).

¹⁹ *Ekloga*, 170 (Eng. trans. 72). Chapter II.

²⁰ *Council in Trullo*, 119 (Eng. trans. 199).

²¹ *Council in Trullo*, 119 (Eng. trans. 199).

²² Just. *Inst.*, XXIII, 42 (Eng. trans. 304).

hagiographic numerical data highlights the age range of 12 to 16 as significant for boys, so one might understand that male puberty occurred on an individual basis, or that male youths enjoyed a more gradual transition to youth. For females, the universal significance of the numerical age of 12 might indicate that individual variation was less important in determining the start of youth. The gendered discrepancies in transitions to youth can perhaps be explained by the fact that the age of 12 was legally significant for women, in terms of betrothal and marriage, while betrothal and marriage do not appear to be so important in the constructions of male adolescence (see below).

The next age to arise frequently in hagiographies, for both men and women, is the numerical age of 18 (Tables 5 and 6). This age is significant for saints as it normally marks the age at which the character, male or female, left their homeland. Abramios (whose *vita* was written c.554-558) went to Constantinople, Abba Kyriakos (whose *vita* was written c.554-558) went to Jerusalem, Synkletika of Palestine (whose *vita* was written in the sixth century) went to the desert, Theoktiste of Lesbos (whose *vita* was written in the ninth century) became a hermit and Lazaros of Mount Galesion (whose *vita* was written in the eleventh century) left his homeland for Attaleia at this age.²³ It seems that to the hagiographers, age 18 marked that time of life at which the saint moved away from home.

In legal codes, the age of 18 is not significant. Equally, this age is seldom mentioned in histories and there are only two examples of a reference to this age in the histories studied.²⁴ The first example is in Prokopios' sixth-century *Secret History*,

²³ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 273); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 224 (Eng. trans. 247); *V. Synk. Palestine*, 300 (Eng. trans. 51); *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 231 (Eng. trans. 111); *V. Laz. Gal.*, 511 (Eng. trans. 86).

²⁴ Prok., *SH*, 58 (Eng. trans. 59); Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 4 (Eng. trans. 29).

where Germanos' daughter, Justina, is briefly referred to because she remained unmarried at the age of 18, which I understand to be old for first marriage in the extended imperial family.²⁵ While age 18 is mentioned in the context of moving away from the homeland, this may not have been as relevant to lay individuals who were not normally expected to move away from the vicinity of their family.

Tables 5 and 6 detail numerical age statements documented in 42 *vitae* composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries. Out of the 42 *vitae*, there are a 22 numerical age statements for men and 7 for women between the ages of 12 and 25. This numerical age data has been used alongside the textual evidence to postulate that the Byzantines considered the ages of 12 to 25 for women and roughly from 12 to 16 through to 25 for men to constitute youth. The significance of the numerical age of 25 as the marker of maturity and full adulthood will be considered in the next chapter.

²⁵ Prok., *SH*, 58 (Eng. trans. 59).

Table 5: Adolescent Ages Attested for Males in Hagiographies 6-12th century

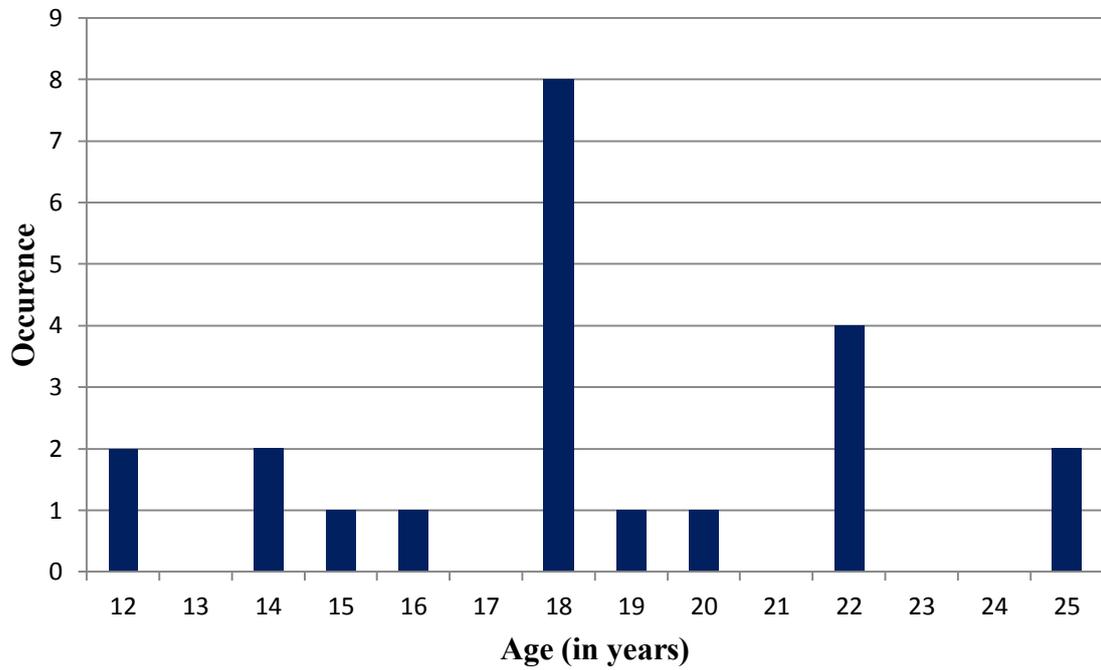
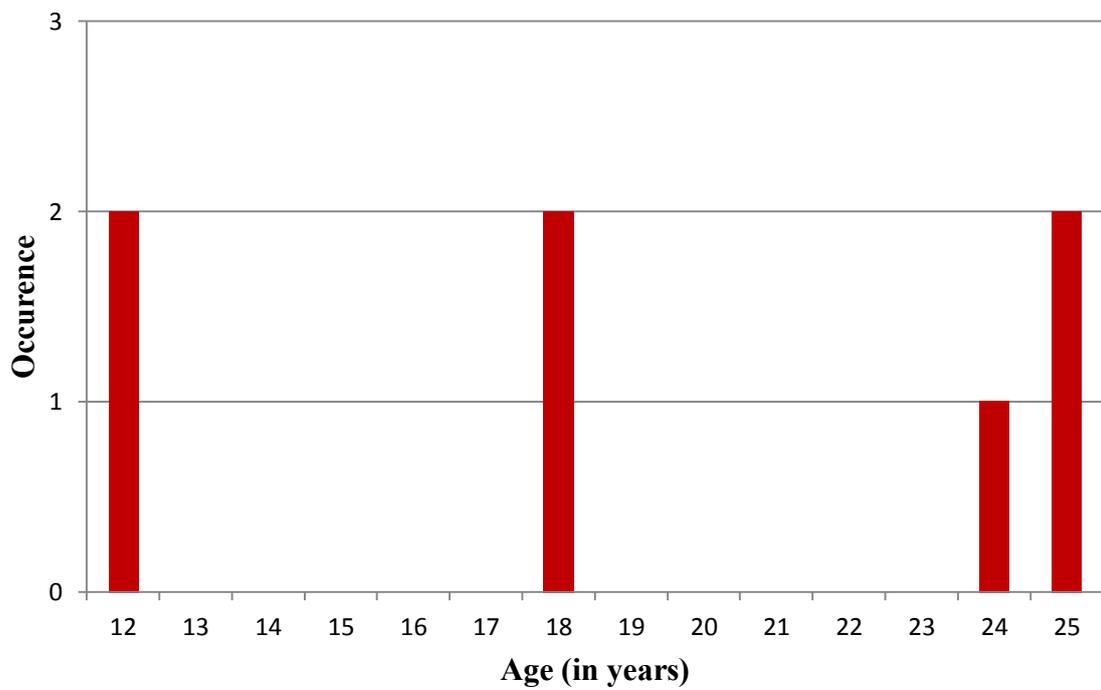


Table 6: Adolescent Ages Attested for Females in Hagiographies 6-12th century



The Byzantines defined that start of youth in a plurality of ways and so I must not terminate enquiries with numerical age. Turning to physical aspects to the definition of youth, my first case in point arises from Justinian’s *Institutes* (535), which defined the commencement of youth in terms of the completion of physiological puberty (*habitu corporis*) for males, but not for females.²⁶ Interestingly, it might have been thought appropriate to judge physiological signs of puberty for males, but not for females.

Alternative genres of evidence strongly emphasise feminine physiology when marking female adolescence. For instance, in the *Life of Empress Theodora* (c.867-912), in the completion to the description of the saint’s childhood, the young woman is said to be a natural beauty.²⁷ At a similar point in his narrative, Gregory the Cleric (writing c.894) stated that Theodora of Thessalonike was admired for the beauty of her ‘body’ (ὠραιότητι).²⁸ He continued: ‘Therefore a huge swarm of noblemen sought to marry the young girl and kept pestering her father in an importunate manner’.²⁹ In the *Life of Irene, Abbess of Chrysobalanton* (c.980), Empress Theodora reputedly ordered her servants to seek a wife for her son Michael who was distinguished in her physique (σῶματος).³⁰ In the tenth- or eleventh-century version of the *Life of Matrona of Perge*, Symeon Metaphrates wrote that Matrona reached the age for marriage and because she was very beautiful, she married a man.³¹ Rhetorically, female adolescence was marked

²⁶ Just. *Inst.*, XXIII, 42 (Eng. trans. 304); Alberici 2008, 82: ‘In some circumstances, anyone under the age of twenty five would have needed to be appointed with a guardian... Although legal rulings set the age of majority at twenty-five, according to Roman law a person was subject to *patria potestas* until the death of his or her father... The ‘almost absolute authority’ of the father was a feature of Roman law and continued to be a considered part of father/child relationships in late antiquity’.

²⁷ *V. Theodorae imp.*, 259 (Eng. trans. 363).

²⁸ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 3 (Eng. trans. 167). Note that the Greek word ὠραιότητι can be used to mean ripeness of fruits or bloom of youth. This reinforces the horticultural connection between in of youth.

²⁹ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 3 (Eng. trans. 167): ‘διὰ τοῦτο πολὺ τῶν εὐπατριδῶν πλῆθος ἐζήτει τὴν νέαν μνηστεύσασθαι καὶ τὴν ταύτης πατρί’.

³⁰ *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9).

³¹ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B.*, 920 (Eng. trans. 2).

by a description of her physiological appearance and, as a result, the number of suitors who sought to marry the woman.

Beauty, marriage and reproduction were directly linked in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-865) when a young girl is described to excel in beauty of ‘body and soul’ (σώματος τε καὶ ψυχῆς) and the mother urged her to marry to continue the ‘family line’ (τοῦ γένους διαδοχῆς).³² In all cases, comments about beauty allude to the recently developed sexual maturity of the young girl and her consequent marital and reproductive prospects. It is clear that the Byzantines connected the achievement of female physiological puberty to a new sexual allure that deemed marriage appropriate.

Turning to look at the physical development of men in greater detail, sources portray how the growth of the first beard was widely recognised as a pictorial and rhetorical symbol as the ‘flower of youth’.³³ Writing in the eleventh century, Psellos used the symbolism of a new beard to mark the height of youth. He wrote that Iberian youths ‘all of them young men, just growing their first beards, in the flower of their youth, tall men and men of equal height, as though they had been measured off with a ruler...’³⁴ Psellos employed botanical metaphors when describing youth too: ‘He was a finely-proportioned young man, with the fair bloom of youth in his face, as fresh as a flower, clear-eyed, and in very truth “red-cheeked”’.³⁵ Writing in the twelfth century, Anna Komnene used the same physiological distinctions and horticultural metaphors when describing Bardas and Michael (the chief cup-bearer), who were ‘both in the

³² *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 234 (Eng. trans. 193).

³³ Alberici 2008, 78; Hennessy 2008, 116; Hatzaki 2010, 101.

³⁴ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 10 (Eng. trans. 36): ‘ἀρτιφνεῖς πάντας τὸ γένειον καὶ αὐτὸ δὴ τὸ νεοτήσιον ἀποφύοντας ἄνθος, ὑψηλοὺς καὶ ἰσομέτρους ὡσπερ ὑπὸ κανόνα τὸ μέγεθος...’

³⁵ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 45 (Eng. trans. 76): ‘κατεσκευάστο δὲ τὸ τε ἄλλο σῶμα παγκάλως καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἐς ἀκριβῆ ὠραιότητα· εὐανθῆς τε γὰρ ἦν καὶ τὸ ὄμμα λαμπρὸς καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς μιλοπαρῆος.’

flower of youth with beards newly-grown...³⁶ Authors are drawing upon a Homeric *trope*, where the ‘flower of youth’ is used to describe coming of age in connection with heroism in the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*.³⁷ One might presume that boys started to grow beards after puberty but in these narratives, the growth of the first beard is a rhetorical *trope*, used to identify youths at the height of their physical prowess and perhaps several years beyond puberty. These horticultural metaphors celebrate male virility but, unlike descriptions of female transitions to puberty, the metaphors are not connected to marriage and reproduction. While physical development was a significant marker of youth for both males and females, these physiological signs were interpreted differently in alignment with gender roles.³⁸

For men, symbols of puberty – including the growth of the first beard – were not connected to marriage but to their entrance into adult male social circles. For example, in the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (late tenth century), the description of Luke’s first beard directly precedes the description of the saint enrolling at school (presumably for extended education).³⁹ The author continued to describe how Luke mingled with his contemporaries, which highlights the fact that the growth of the first beard was associated with new opportunities for socialisation.⁴⁰ In Leo the Deacon’s tenth-century *History*, Patrikos Constantine joined his comrades against the Scythians after he had sprouted his first beard.⁴¹ In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), the acquisition of a beard

³⁶ An. Komn., Vol. III: 40 (Eng. trans. 358): ‘ἀκμάζοντας καὶ ἀπιφθεῖς τὸ γένειον.’

³⁷ Homer, *Illiad XIII*, 440; Pers. comm. Tom Garvey (10/11/09) whose PhD research at the University of Virginia is titled *The Flower of Youth: Coming of Age in Homer*.

³⁸ Hatzaki 2009, 107.

³⁹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 56 (Eng. trans. 57); Lemerle 1986, 112: In the eighth and ninth centuries, children began their secondary education age eleven or twelve and finished it at age eighteen.

⁴⁰ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 56 (Eng. trans. 57).

⁴¹ Leo Diac., 110 (Eng. trans. 159).

enabled the youthful monks to mix with their elders without sexually tempting them.⁴² Across a wide array of contexts, a beard enabled the beholder to enter the sphere of his youthful and adult contemporaries. In sum, the pubescent physiognomy of men and women was interpreted in alignment with their respective social roles: vocational integration for men and securing marital ties for women.

Having looked at physiology and numerical age as markers of maturity, I must next turn to mental competence. As outlined at the outset of this chapter, youth was considered to be a period of impulsiveness and desire. The negative associations of the mental attributes of youth are detailed by Ignatios the Deacon in his account of the *Life of Tarasios* (ninth century). Here the Patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople (784-806) advised the Emperor Constantine VI (771-797) not to divorce his wife, Maria of Amnia.⁴³ It is revealing that at this point in the narrative Ignatios twice referred to the Emperor as a youth, presumably not only to portray the Emperor's age (23 or 24 years old), but additionally, to emphasise the Emperor's immature judgement when choosing to divorce his wife in order to marry his mistress.⁴⁴ In this instance, the term life stage was used to both describe the man's age and to emphasise his mental immaturity. In other instances youthful terminology is applied to people of other life-stages in order to convey their mental immaturity. For instance, Nikephoros, writing in the ninth century, recorded that Telesios, although mature, behaved like a youth.⁴⁵ Anna Komnene, writing c.1135, criticised an old man for his 'puerile mind' (τοῦ νηπιώδους...φρόνηματος).⁴⁶ The Byzantines' connotations of unrestrained and

⁴² Theod. *V. Leontios*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).

⁴³ *V. Taras.*, 126 (Eng. trans. 190).

⁴⁴ *V. Taras.*, 129 (Eng. trans. 191): 'Τίς ἐπὶ μείζουσιν ὑπεροχαῖς τῆς τετραπορφύρου Βασιλείας ὑμῶν γαυρούμενος δείκνυται'.

⁴⁵ Nikeph., *Short History*, 148 (Eng. trans. 149).

⁴⁶ An. Komn., Vol. III: 195 (Eng. trans. 477).

impulsive youthfulness enabled authors to draw upon the associated attributes of this life-stage in order to condemn the behaviour of people of other life-stages.

Of course, hagiographers tended to show their saints as resilient to the impulsive nature normally attributed to youths. For instance, in the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.831), the author wrote that as the saint's 'body grew, he demonstrated an increase in virtue proportionate to his physical growth'.⁴⁷ George's mental development paralleled his physical development and, by inference, I understand that he was able to overcome the normative inadequacies expected of someone his age. All of these genres show us that, to a large extent, youth was identified by unbalanced emotions.

Finally, I must look at familial roles as components to the definition of youth. In female Life Course constructs, the description of childhood directly leads onto the description of marriageable age.⁴⁸ Marriageable age is not necessarily the age at marriage but it is a term used to describe the age appropriate for marriage and it includes betrothal and, in the case of saints, resistance to marriage. Focusing on marriageable age immediately after childhood was a long-standing formula in hagiographical female Life Course constructions: before this period commences, the *vitae* of Macrina of Nyssa (fourth century), and Melania the Younger (fifth century) lead from childhood directly onto betrothal.⁴⁹ Alberici and Harlow have noted that in Late Antique sources, the ceremony of marriage – 'to Christ or to an earthly husband – represented an important visual and social transition to adulthood for girls'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 15 (Eng. trans. 5): 'ὅθεν ἀνάλογον τὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐπιδοσιν τῇ προκοπῇ ὑπέφαιναν τῇ τοῦ σώματος'

⁴⁸ *V. Theodorae imp.*, 259 (Eng. trans. 363); *V. Matr. A.*, 791 (Eng. trans. 19).

⁴⁹ Greg. Nyssa, *V. Macr.*, 152 (Eng. trans. 22); Gero. *V. Melaniae Iunioris*, 136 (Eng. trans. 27).

⁵⁰ Alberici and Harlow 2007, 200.

The concept of a choice between marriage to Christ (as a metaphor for monasticism), or marriage to a husband, was still prevalent in this period. Theodore of Sykeon (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) apparently sent his sister, Blatta, ‘forth as a bride to the heavenly bridal-chamber and rejoiced in Christ’.⁵¹ Irene of Chrysobalanton (whose *vita* was written c.980) rejected an imperial betrothal in order to become a bride of Christ.⁵² Further examples of this *topos* will be found when I examine female epitaphs in the final chapter. Employing analogies to marriage in descriptions of female monasticism portrays exactly how fundamental marriage was in the Life Courses of women. The marker of marriage – or resistance to marriage – was the centrepiece in descriptions of female youth.

But, as I have briefly noted when looking at the age data extracted from hagiographies, betrothal and marriage (or resistance to them) are less significant in accounts of male youth. This may have been for several reasons. First, men may have been expected to marry later in the Life Course.⁵³ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), Stephen was united in marriage after he had reached full vigour.⁵⁴ Second, marriage was not considered to have such a great impact on the consequent structure of the male Life Course. For example, when the Emperor Theophilios chose Theodora as his imperial bride, the author emphasised the changed destiny in the woman’s life.⁵⁵ Outside of the imperial family, women were still expected to take on the religion and social status of their marital family, relinquishing their natal traditions.⁵⁶ The emphasis

⁵¹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 105): ‘ὡς νύμφην εἰς τὴν ἐπουράνιον παστάδα προέπεμψεν αὐτὴν τῷ Χριστῷ χαίρων.’

⁵² *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 12 (Eng. trans. 13).

⁵³ Alberici 2008, 12; See Saller 1987 and Shaw 1987 for male and females ages at marriage in the Roman period.

⁵⁴ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 6 (Eng. trans. 7).

⁵⁵ *V. Theodoraē imp.*, 260 (Eng. trans. 366).

⁵⁶ Laiou 1972, 47; Meyendorff 1990, 104; Vinson 2004, 120.

on the female's change in familial status suggests that males enjoyed a large degree of continuity. Third, as will be explored in this thesis, men's principal responsibility was to their parental family whereas women's was to their marital family.

3.2 Relationships

Rhetorical constructions of female youth often focus on the suitors who desire her and the search for a spouse or rejection of marriage. Here, one can often detect the role of the woman's parents or guardians. For instance, in the *Spiritual Meadow* (c.600), John Moschos described parents who were discussing how wealthy their adolescent daughter's suitor should be.⁵⁷ In the *Life of the Empress Theodora* (c.867-912), after the description of childhood, the author reflected on her parents' considerations when selecting a husband.⁵⁸ In Byzantine discussions of 'marriageable age', parents and guardians taking are seen to be taking a prominent role.⁵⁹

In hagiographies young girls are commonly shown resisting marriage, to the disappointment of her parents. In the *Life of Synkletika of Palestine* (sixth century), Pseudo-Athanasios described her father's concerns for the continuation of family lineage and wealth when his daughter chose not to marry.⁶⁰ As has already been mentioned, in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-5), a young girl desired to enter the monastic life, but her mother urged her to marry and perpetuate the

⁵⁷ John Mosc. *PS*, 3090 (Eng. trans. 179).

⁵⁸ *V. Theodora imp.*, 257 (Eng. trans. 361).

⁵⁹ Kazhdan 1990, 138.

⁶⁰ *V. Synk. Palestine*, 299 (Eng. trans. 48).

family line.⁶¹ In the *Life of Thomais of Lesbos* (mid-tenth century), aged 24, the saint was forced by her parents to take a husband.⁶² In the Metaphrastic version of the *Life of Matrona of Perge* (tenth or eleventh century), one of the saint's followers renounced marriage, in spite of her parents' protests.⁶³ In Psellos' eleventh-century enkomion of his mother (in which he mimicked the hagiographic style), he recorded how his grandfather attempted to persuade Theodote to marry with the use of force.⁶⁴ The rejection of marriage was perceived to be an outright contravention of parental desires, telling us that normatively, not only did parents play a leading role in the negotiation of their daughters' marriages, but that they also had a vested interest in securing their marriage.

In the tenth-century *Synaxarion* entry for Anthousa, daughter of Constantine V, her father had urged his daughter to marry. After his death she found herself unconstrained.⁶⁵ The death of a parent (in this instance, the father) could free a daughter to pursue monasticism. This reinforces the point that normally, parents played a dominant part in the negotiation of their daughter's betrothal and marriage. In hagiographies, female youth was characterised by betrothal or marriage.

Parents often resisted their sons' attempts to enter the monastic order. Michael the Synkellos (whose *vita* was composed in the ninth century) 'put aside for himself a very small and meagre amount of money and took to flight, that he might not be held

⁶¹ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 234 (Eng. trans. 193).

⁶² *V. Thoma. Lesbos*, 236 (Eng. trans. 302).

⁶³ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 936 (Eng. trans. 22).

⁶⁴ Psellos, *EM*, 91 (Eng. trans. 56).

⁶⁵ *SynaxCP*, 600 (Eng. trans. 23).

back by family friends, and kinsfolk'.⁶⁶ Writing in the tenth century, Basil of Thessalonike described how, in order to strengthen his resolve, Euthymios repeatedly chanted: 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew. 19:29) and 'Everyone who has left father or mother or brothers or wife or children for my sake will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life' (Matthew. 10:37).⁶⁷ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century) the young saint's family tried to sabotage his asceticism by tricking him into eating meat and after suffering 'rebukes and recriminations' he left the family home for Jerusalem.⁶⁸ Clearly, hagiographers were playing upon literary conventions whereupon saints renounced family and civilisation.⁶⁹ But additionally, parents resisted their sons' attempts to pursue monasticism.

When male youths chose to pursue monasticism, the emphasis sometimes lay in their contravention of parental desires to pursue a lay career. In the *Life of Sabas* (c.554-558), Cyril of Scythopolis described how his father, John, a commander who was in command of the Isaurian regiment, and mother Sophia, '...urged him to stay there; enlist in the army and become senator of the regiment..'.⁷⁰ Sabas responded: 'Having once enlisted in the service of God the King of all, I cannot cancel this service, and those who try to draw me from it I cannot bear to call my parents'.⁷¹ Sabas renounced

⁶⁶ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 48 (Eng. trans. 49): 'διανείμας ταῦτα πτωχοῖς μικρά τινα καὶ πάνυ ὀλίγα χρήματα εἰς ἑαυτὸν καταλιπὼν φυγῆ ἔχρησατο, ὥστε μὴ κρατηθῆναι αὐτὸν παρὰ τε ἀγχιστῶν καὶ γνωρίμων καὶ συγγενῶν.'

⁶⁷ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 177 (Eng. trans. 4): 'ἐκ δὴ τούτων ὁ ἱερός ἐκεῖνος ἐκβλαστήσας καὶ ἀληθῶς τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, τί δεῖ λέγειν'; Matthew. 19:29; Matthew. 10:37.

⁶⁸ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 9); 16 (Eng. trans. 17): 'ὄνειδη καὶ διαβολὰς καὶ μέμψεις'.

⁶⁹ Talbot 1990, 126; Brown 1982, 103-152.

⁷⁰ *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 92 (Eng. trans. 101): 'καὶ προτραπεῖς ὑπ' αὐτῶν αὐτόθι μεῖναι καὶ στρατεύεσθαι καὶ πρεσβύτερον τοῦ νομέρου γενέσθαι ἀποπεμψάμενος αὐτοὺς ἔλεγεν.'

⁷¹ *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 92 (Eng. trans. 101): 'ἐγὼ μὲν ἐστρατεύθην τῷ παμβασιλεῖ θεῷ καὶ τὴν στρατείαν αὐτοῦ ἀθετῆσαι οὐ δύναμαι, τοὺς δὲ ἀποστήσαι με ταύτης ἐπιχειροῦντας γονεῖς λέγειν οὐκ ἀνέχομαι.'

his own family but embraced fellow monks as brothers.⁷² When, in the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (early twelfth century), Athanasios resisted his father's aspirations for his career as a clerk of the public services, his father beat him.⁷³ While parents of daughters cited marriage and reproduction as a reason not to pursue monasticism, parents of sons tend to cite lay vocations as a reason not to pursue monasticism. This exposes how aged parents might rely on their sons, both emotionally and financially.

In male saints' lives, the pursuit of monasticism is seen as a rejection of the responsibility to care for the natal family. In the *Life of Symeon the Holy Fool* (c.642-649), John was concerned about who would feed his parents in their old age and who would console them in his absence.⁷⁴ Symeon was concerned that he was sacrificing the happiness of his mother, who would otherwise see him grow up.⁷⁵ In the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.830), the author wrote that the saint did not 'consider the old age of his parents, this well known and blessed impediment to the better way'.⁷⁶ This statement directly implies that lay sons were expected to care for their elderly parents and that this responsibility inhibited some sons from realising their monastic ambitions. Niketas of Medikion (whose *vita* was composed in the twelfth century) renounced all those that he cared for: 'his father, friends, kinsmen, those of his own age, his fellow sextons, and others' in order to pursue monasticism.⁷⁷ It has long been established that hagiographies

⁷² Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 92 (Eng. trans. 101).

⁷³ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 20 (Eng. trans. 9).

⁷⁴ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 126 (Eng. trans. 136).

⁷⁵ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 140 (Eng. trans. 147).

⁷⁶ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 19 (Eng. trans. 5): 'ἀλλ' εἰς οἰκέτης καὶ ζῆν ὑποζύγιον τὴν τούτου πρὸς τὴν ἔξοδον χρεῖαν ἐπήρκεσεν· ἥκιστα μὲν γονέων φροντίσας γήρωσ, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ πολυθύλητον καὶ τῆς ἀμείνονος ὁδοῦ εὐλογον κάλυμμα.'

⁷⁷ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 5); 19 (Eng. trans. 4): 'πατρί, φίλοις, συγγενέσιν, ὁμήλιξι σὺν νεωκόροις διαφέρουσιν, ἐξέπητι τῆς θρεψαμένης καὶ ἔρχεται... τῆς αὐτῆς'

stressed the renunciation of familial ties when pursuing monasticism.⁷⁸ Here the male rejection of family ties was a direct infringement of their duty to care for their aging parents.

In order to emphasise the gravity of the rejection of this familial duty and obligation, hagiographers often vividly depict the strength of the bond between parents, particularly mothers and their sons, before their consecration. For example, up until the age of 22 when Symeon (whose *vita* was written c.642-649) chose to pursue monasticism, he reputedly depended on the comfort of his mother, sleeping with her at night and never spending more than two hours apart from her.⁷⁹ Similarly, Theodore of Sykeon (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) slept with his mother before moving to the oratory when he was 14 years old.⁸⁰ These two *vitae* share some commonalities: both were composed in the mid seventh century and, more importantly, both mothers were single (Theodore's mother was a prostitute and Symeon's mother was widowed), suggesting that the mother and son bond was thought to be particularly strong in instances where the eldest son was the male representative for the household. Indeed, upon the death of his father, Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was composed early in the tenth century) 'was everything to his mother, a son, helper, caretaker, protector, reliever from distress, procurer of happiness, he served her as guardian, father, defender, a man who assumed for the most part the care for all domestic matters and responsibility for external matters as well'.⁸¹ It is clear the sons,

⁷⁸ Abrahamse 1979, 510; Alberici 2008, 89: 'Gregory mentioned how Caesarius would never have a wife, children or inherit property inferring that his audience should count these as significant life markers associated with adulthood'.

⁷⁹ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 130 (Eng. trans. 139).

⁸⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 92).

⁸¹ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 172 (Eng. trans. 6): 'τελεῖ μέντοι κἀντεῦθεν ἐν τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς καταλόγοις καὶ πάντα τῇ μητρὶ γίνεται, υἱός, ἀντιλήπτωρ, φροντιστής, προστάτης, τῶν ἀνιώντων ἐπικουφιστής,

especially eldest sons of single mothers, were particularly valued as carers of their parents.

In hagiographies composed across the sixth to twelfth century, youth was the first life-stage at which sons were noted to care for their aging parents. In the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century) that the tension between family obligations and divine zeal became first apparent at youth: ‘but his mother and the women who lived with her did not realise that he had irrevocably chosen his blessed mode of life and that his resolve was no youthful fancy...’.⁸² But over the course of this period, there is a noticeable transition in the presentation of the relationship between parents and children. In the *vitae* of Sabas (sixth century), Theodore of Sykeon (seventh century) and Symeon the Fool (seventh century), the saints’ parents’ appealed to their youthful sons not to enter the monasteries, but the saints nevertheless pursued their chosen vocation. Indeed, when Symeon considered waiting for his mother’s death before pursuing his vocation, his superior reminded him: ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead’ (Exodus 20: 12).⁸³ Destined saints renounced their familial relationships, despite their sense of duty, in testament to their devotion to God.

But I can sense a shift in obligations when, in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George* (c.863-865), the author justified David’s relationship with his mother – in spite of his monastic vocation – when quoting the commandment ‘Honour thy father and thy mother’ (Exodus 20: 12).⁸⁴ In spite of his monastic status, David met her, bestowing the

τῶν εὐθύμων περιποιητής, ἀντιχρηματίζει ταύτη κηδεμών, πατήρ, ὑπερασπιστής, τὸ μέγιστον ἀνὴρ, πάντων τῶν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τὴν φροντίδα καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἀναδεξάμενος.’

⁸² *V. Theod. Syk.*, 13 (Eng. trans. 97): ‘ἔτι δὲ ἀγνοοῦσα ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ σὺν αὐτῇ γυναῖκες τὴν μακαρίαν αὐτοῦ διαγωγὴν ἄτρεπτον οὖσαν καὶ μηδαμῶς λυομένην, διὰ τὴν ἔτι παιδικὴν αὐτοῦ ἡλικίαν ἀνέφερον αὐτῷ ἄρτοθους καθαρούς καὶ ὀρνέων ἐψητῶν καὶ ὀπτῶν διαφοράς.’

⁸³ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 128 (Eng. trans. 137).

⁸⁴ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 161).

honour due a mother and his mother ‘was nearly ready to die from overwhelming joy’, which not only referred to her happiness to see her son, but also her advanced age and imminent death.⁸⁵ Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written in the early tenth century) reputedly continued to care for his female relatives from his monastery when buying a plot of land and building a convent for his mother and sisters.⁸⁶ In the tenth-century *Life of Luke of Steiris*, the saint is shown to be both devout and dutiful: he did not neglect his ‘duty to his parents’ (τοῦ καθήκοντος τοῖς γονεῦσιν).⁸⁷ Respect for parents is increasingly valued by Byzantine authors, even in the cases of saints who had been previously expected to renounce their familial relationships altogether.

In the tenth-century *Life of Luke of Steiris*, it is noted that before becoming a monk, the saint herded sheep, and this may have been a means of providing his parents with a modest income.⁸⁸ Only upon his father’s death did Luke choose to apply ‘himself more attentively to prayer alone and to the study of Holy Scripture’.⁸⁹ Lazaros of Mount Galesion (whose *vita* was composed in the eleventh century) returned to his village, made enquiries about his relatives and met his mother long after he had pursued monasticism.⁹⁰ Similarly, in the *Life of Nikon* (c.1042), the saint returned to see and speak to his father once his father had become old and nearing death.⁹¹ The author wrote: ‘the sound of his father’s words... reached the blessed one’s ears and moreover

⁸⁵ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 161): ‘τοῦτον δ̄ θεασαμένη μικροῦ δεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης χαρᾶς θνήσκειν ἐμέλλε, καὶ γὰρ ὀλιγοψύχησεν ἐν τῷ δαπέδῳ, <νεκρῶ> οὐδὲν διενηνοχία, πεσοῦσα. ὁ δὲ χεῖρα ταύτη ὀρέξας ἀνέστησε νεκρῶν προσειπῶν καὶ ὑποπρεπῶς κατασπασάμενος.’

⁸⁶ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 202 (Eng. trans. 16).

⁸⁷ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

⁸⁸ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

⁸⁹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 14 (Eng. trans. 15): ‘μόνη δὲ τῆ εὐχῆ καὶ τῆ τῶν ἱερῶν γραφῶν μελέτῃ προς εκτικώτερον ὀμιλῶν.’

⁹⁰ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 519 (Eng. trans. 116).

⁹¹ *V. Nikon*, 72 (Eng. trans. 73).

he was a man who loved his father'.⁹² By the tenth century, male saints were no longer expected to completely sever ties to their natal family. The death of a parent was a monumental Life Course marker, and for some saints, it freed them to pursue monasticism without concern for the care of their natal family.⁹³

3.3 New Responsibilities

I have tracked the responsibility of male youths, particularly eldest sons, to their natal families. Indeed, Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was composed in the tenth century), waited for his sister to marry – thereby creating a son-in-law to provide for his natal family – before pursuing monasticism.⁹⁴ As single women were not financially secure, sometimes they followed their male relatives into monasticism. For instance, in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (ninth century), after his father died when he was 25, Michael chose to enter the monastic order. The saint's dependants, including his mother and sisters, consequently chose to follow the same path.⁹⁵ These are 'contingent' women whose lives are recorded to bolster the authors' construction of the subject's attributes. The modern reader is only afforded small glimpses of these women's lives through incidental details which were recorded to reflect upon the

⁹² *V. Nikon*, 72 (Eng. trans. 73): 'ἔφθασε γάρ, οὐκ ο δ' ὅπως, ἕως τῶν ἀκοῶν αὐτοῦ ὁ ἥχος τῶν πατρικῶν ῥημάτων καὶ τῆς θρηνητικῆς ταυτησι τραγυδίας, πρὸς τε φιλοπάτωρ καὶ ἄλλως φίλοις ὄν καὶ πρὸς λιτὰς αἰεὶ οὐκ ἀτέρμων οὐδ' ἀντίτυπος'.

⁹³ *SynaxCP*, 600 (Eng. trans. 23); *V. Luk. Steir.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

⁹⁴ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 173 (Eng. trans. 3).

⁹⁵ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 48 (Eng. trans. 49): 'τοῦ δὲ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ τέλει τοῦ βίου χρησαμένου καὶ τῆς τούτου μητρὸς κηρευσάσης, ἣν αὐτῇ οὐ μικρὰ φροντίς τὸ πῶς διοικήσῃ τὴν αὐτοῦ μητέρα καὶ τὰς αὐτοῦ ἀδελφάς. ὡς δὲ κατενύγη οὐ μετὰ πολὺν χρόνον ἢ αὐτοῦ μήτηρ ταῖς αὐτοῦ θείαις παραινέσεσι, βλέπουσα τὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς φύντα οὕτως ἐναρέτως βιοῦντα, ἠρετίσατο μονάσαι σὺν ταῖς αὐτῆς θυγατράσιν ἐν τινὶ τῶν μοναστηρίων τῆς ἀγίας Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν πόλεως.' It is common for mothers to follow their sons into the monastic order once their husband can no longer provide for them, for example: *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 109 (Eng. trans. 118).

subjects themselves. While these women's lives are shaped around their male relatives for rhetorical purposes, the *topos* exposes the tendency for women to follow their male relatives by default.⁹⁶ This tells us that eldest males sometimes became responsible for the well being of their natal family from youth onwards if, as in the case of all of the cited examples, their mothers were widowed. Male youth then, was characterised by the acquisition of new familial responsibilities.

Significantly, there are also examples of male relatives following the eldest brother into monasticism: in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George* (c.863-5) both of David's younger brothers followed him to the monastery once they were on the verge of manhood.⁹⁷ However, David's younger siblings – who are all male – are the subject of the *vita* too, unlike the female relatives of Michael the Synkellos. This is just another example of the elevated importance attached to male characters.

In the evidence, there is an implicit connection between the transition into manhood and occupation, which may be reflective of the new responsibility to care for natal family from youth onwards. In the *Life of Elias of Heliopolis* (eleventh century), I can directly see the link between youth and gaining a profession when the saint was advised: 'But though you are young in age, for you have just completed your twentieth year and you have only begun growing a beard, rely on your craft like a man. Open a workshop and live in Damascus with us'.⁹⁸ In this instance, Elias 'devoted himself in his workshop to producing and selling packsaddles for camels'.⁹⁹ Men were expected to

⁹⁶ Moen 2001, 179.

⁹⁷ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 161).

⁹⁸ *V. Elias Helio.*, 48 (Eng. trans. 96): 'ἀλλὰ νέος ὄν λοιπὸν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, ἤδη γὰρ τὸ εἰκοστὸν διήλθες ἔτος, καὶ γενειάζειν ἀρξάμενος πιστεύη ὡς ἀνὴρ ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ· ἀνοιξὸν ἐργαστήριον καὶ ἔσο ἐν Δαμασκῷ σὺν ἡμῖν διατρίβων.'

⁹⁹ *V. Elias Helio.*, 48 (Eng. trans. 96): 'ἐπέισθη οὖν ὁ ἅγιος, καὶ τῆς σκέψεως λοιπὸν εἰς ἔργον ἐλθούσης, σχολάζων τῷ ἐργαστηρίῳ αὐτοῦ σάγματα καμήλων ποιῶν ἐπίπρασκεν.'

practise a profession from youth onwards perhaps so, in some circumstances, they could to support their natal family.

The connection between the transition to youth and beginning work is apparent in the lives of monks too, where youths were expected to work on behalf of their spiritual family, as opposed to their natal family. Abba Kyriakos (whose *vita* was written c.554-558) served his elders from youth onwards by chopping wood, carrying water and cooking.¹⁰⁰ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the author described how the young saint worked hard when he reached his ‘prime’ (ἀκμῆς).¹⁰¹ As a youth, Saint Nikon (whose *vita* was composed c.1042) hated idleness and was eager to serve others.¹⁰² In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), an elder admired the young hardworking saint and ‘considered him blessed for his disposition, he admired him for his subservience, seeing that from such a young age he had taken up the Lord’s yoke with all his heart’.¹⁰³ Even within monasticism youths were valued for their ability to serve their elders and ideal youths were praised for their hard work.

Although male youth was closely associated with the commencement of work, authors were keen to point out that the youngsters were initially inexperienced at their professions. Looking at the histories, Prokopios wrote in his sixth-century *Secret History* that Constantine was ‘absurdly young’ (νέον δὲ κομιδῆ) and had had no experience of lawyers’ wrangles.¹⁰⁴ Writing in the eleventh century, Psellos asserted that when Basil II the Porphyrogenetos (reigned 976-1025) came to the throne: ‘The combination of youth and unlimited power gave him opportunities for self-indulgence

¹⁰⁰ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 224 (Eng. trans. 247).

¹⁰¹ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

¹⁰² *V. Nikon*, 42 (Eng. trans. 43).

¹⁰³ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 44 (Eng. trans. 45) : ‘τι καὶ γένοιτο· καὶ ἐμακρίζεν μὲν αὐτὸν τοῦ φρονήματος· τῆς δ’ ὑπακοῆς ἐθαύμαζεν, ὁρῶν ἐν νεότητι τὸν τοῦ κυρίου ζυγὸν ολοκαρδίως ἀράμενον.’

¹⁰⁴ Prok., *SH*, 242 (Eng. trans. 243).

and he enjoyed them all to the full'.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, when comparing Basil to his younger brother, Constantine VIII (reigned 1025-1028), Psellos noted: '...the Empire's well-being depended on the elevation of the older and more experienced brother'.¹⁰⁶ Although youthful, Basil's senior position to his brother enabled him to ascend the imperial throne. In the twelfth century, Anna distinguished between the approach taken by a young soldier and an older soldier to war: 'Certain others who had many years experience in war earnestly opposed the idea and advised him to adopt a waiting policy... The majority of the younger officers preferred to fight, especially Constantine Porphyrogenetos'.¹⁰⁷ She presented the young men's eagerness for action as a consequence of the fact they had no experience of the misery of war.¹⁰⁸ The young soldiers were portrayed as inexperienced and eager: novices with physical aptitude.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, in the hagiographies youths are often presented as inexperienced. In his seventh-century *Spiritual Meadow*, John Moschos didactically wrote about a youth who presumed to have a pure heart but entered taverns which would corrupt him.¹¹⁰ In the Metaphrastic version of the *Life of Matrona of Perge* (tenth or eleventh century), a nun hesitated to admit the saint to the monastery, explaining that her youth and inexperience of labour prevented her.¹¹¹ In the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053), a monk criticised Lazaros because he tonsured youths and did not discipline

¹⁰⁵ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 4 (Eng. trans. 29): 'βασιλικὰς τε ῥαθυμίας καὶ ἀναπαύλας ἑαυτῶ ἀπεμέτρει, καὶ τῆς τε νεότητος, τῆς τε βασιλείας ὅσον εἰκὸς παραπέλαυνεν.'

¹⁰⁶ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 2 (Eng. trans. 27): 'εἰ μὴ τῷ πρώτῳ καὶ ἀκριβεστάτῳ ἢ αὐτοκράτῳ ἀπεκκηρώθη διοίκησις'

¹⁰⁷ An. Komn., Vol. I: 155 (Eng. trans. 144): 'Οἱ δὲ πλείονες τῶν νεωτέρων τοῦ στρατοῦ τὸν πόλεμον προὔτρεποντο καὶ πάντων μᾶλλον Κωνσταντίος ὁ πορφυρογέννητος καὶ Νικηφόρος ὁ Συναδηνὸς καὶ ὁ τῶν Βαράγγων ἡγεμὼν Ναμπίτης καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ τοῦ προβεβησίου σιλευκότου Ῥωμανοῦ τοῦ Διογένους υἱεῖς, ὁ τε Λέων καὶ ὁ Νικηφόρος.' Aird 1999, 48.

¹⁰⁸ An. Komn., Vol. I: 167 (Eng. trans. 156).

¹⁰⁹ An. Komn., Vol. I: 167 (Eng. trans. 156).

¹¹⁰ John Mosc. *PS*, 3080 (Eng. trans. 169).

¹¹¹ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 940 (Eng. trans. 32).

them or make them learn self-control.¹¹² Alan Cameron and Chris Gilleard have commented on the Byzantines' perception of adolescents as undisciplined.¹¹³ In all of these citations, elders were expected to guide the youths (a theme revisited in the penultimate chapter).

The same *topos* is reiterated in the visual evidence, where in an eleventh-century copy of the liturgical *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus, grey bearded Gregory, who is the focus of the scenes, is juxtaposed against a young and inferior assistant appearing in the background (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).¹¹⁴ Figuratively, Gregory takes up a larger amount of space and has a halo. His younger assistant, although standing, is the same height as him. The young cleric has his arms folded in order to minimise the space used for his depiction, he wears plain robes and direction of gaze points at Gregory, all indicating the youth's inferior rank. Cecily Hennessy found that artistic symbolisms of youth could also be used to portray low social status: the Byzantines associated youth with inferior status.¹¹⁵ The value and seniority attached to age and experience will be picked up again when I look at old age in chapter five.

There is some evidence to suggest that, depending on the locality, it was customary for occupations to be transmitted from father to son. Writing in the seventh century, John of Moschos narrated the tale of a son, the eldest in his family, who refused to participate in his father's business.¹¹⁶ The tale clearly plays into the *topos* of renouncing a familial Life Course trajectory (as discussed earlier), but it additionally

¹¹² *V. Laz. Gal.*, 556 (Eng. trans. 241).

¹¹³ Cameron, 1979, 15; Gilleard, 2007, 632.

¹¹⁴ *Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, cod. 6, fol. 178r (Mount Athos, Monastery of Agios Panteleimonon, c.1080). See: Galavaris 1969; *Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, cod. 6, fol. 77v (Mount Athos, Monastery of Agios Panteleimonon, c.1080). See: Galavaris 1969.

¹¹⁵ Hennessy 2008, 44.

¹¹⁶ John Mosc. *PS*, 3092 (Eng. trans. 180).

highlights the expectation that sons should continue the trade of their fathers. And, as mentioned in previous chapters, the significance of the eldest son is emphasised as there were other brothers but he was the oldest.¹¹⁷ Writing in the tenth century, Paul, Bishop of Monemvasia, implied that transmitting occupations from father to son was customary, as he highlighted an area where occupations were transmitted through the female line, suggesting that this custom was particularly unusual.¹¹⁸ Normatively, I assume, occupations were transmitted down the male line.

Connected to the expectation that male youths attained new responsibilities, some of the texts indicate that youth was a time to prove oneself. For example, in the *Life of Abramios* (c.554-558), the author recorded that at age 18 the saint had distinguished himself both inside and outside of the monastery.¹¹⁹ In his *Chronicle* (sixth century), John Malalas wrote that a man was appointed *triumvir* after growing up and proving his courage.¹²⁰ Saint Nikon (whose *vita* was written c.1042) reputedly proved his new virtues at this life-stage too: ‘For just as he was leaving behind youth and seizing on young manhood, his intelligence was increasing with his virtue and he gave proof indeed of his sharp love for God’.¹²¹ In the accounts of saints and emperors’ adolescence, there are the first demonstrations of their developing noble character.

By contrast, some characters exemplified their youthful inexperience and arrogance when trying to prove themselves. In the *Life of Euthymios the Great* (c.554-558), the saint was displeased when he saw a young monk trying to surpass the

¹¹⁷ John Mosc. *PS*, 3092 (Eng. trans. 180).

¹¹⁸ Paul of Monem., *ST*, 125 (Eng. trans. 140).

¹¹⁹ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 273).

¹²⁰ Malal., 214 (Eng. trans. 113).

¹²¹ *V. Nikon*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35): ‘ἄρτι δὲ τὴν ἡβήην ἀμείβων καὶ τῆς μείρακος ἡλικίας ἀπτόμενος, συναυξουμένην εἶχε τῆ ἀρετῇ καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν· τὸν δὲ γὰρ δριμύνην αὐτοῦ πρὸς θεὸν ἔρωτα ἔργῳ ἐνδεικνύμενος’.

community in abstinence.¹²² In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), a young farmer was punished for his display of excessive zeal when his innards erupted.¹²³ In these examples the Byzantines sometimes perceived youths to be arrogant and self-assured. Writing in the seventh century, Anastasios of Sinai didactically narrated a tale about a boastful youth, who was otherwise chaste and devoted to God, but who died and went to hell.¹²⁴ In the *Life of Tarasios* (ninth century), Ignatios the Deacon tells us that the ‘young’ Emperor Constantine VI (reigned 780 – 797) ‘considered his opinions as much more just than legal written documents’.¹²⁵ This tells us that while the Byzantines expected male youths to become involved in public life, they did not wholly trust them.

It is unsurprising therefore, that in the instances where a youth was promoted to a high rank, the decision was often criticised. George the Synkellos, who wrote his *Chronology* in the early ninth century, disapproved of Ananos, a youth, being promoted to the high priesthood because he was brash and exceptionally daring.¹²⁶ In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), the archpriest of Amathous was criticised because of his youth for being shameless and reckless.¹²⁷ The Byzantines perceived that youths could not always be trusted to meet the demands of positions of responsibility.

But, authors sometimes liked to mark out their heroes and heroines as exceptional for their age. So, in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), a bishop appointed the young Theodore, aged 18, to the episcopate even in the face of

¹²² Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 18 (Eng. trans. 13).

¹²³ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 130 (Eng. trans. 131).

¹²⁴ Anast. Sin. T5, 135v (Eng. trans. 116).

¹²⁵ *V. Taras.*, 120 (Eng. trans. 188): ‘νεωτερικαῖς φρεσὶ, κατὰ τὴν ποιήσιν, κουφιζόμενος τὸ δοκοῦν ἑαυτῷ νόμων τῶν ἐγγράφων ἐτίθετο πολλῶ δικαιότερον.’

¹²⁶ George Synk., 413 (Eng. trans. 490).

¹²⁷ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 120 (Eng. trans. 121).

fierce opposition because he had not reached the ‘proper’ (καίρὸν) age.¹²⁸ Bishop Theodosios defended his decision: ‘Therefore, do not regard his youthfulness, but rather regard the nobleness of his soul...’.¹²⁹ The bishop justified Theodore’s appointment at an early age, asking his critics not to consider his youthfulness but to consider his spirit of God instead.¹³⁰ And so the Byzantines recognised that there were exceptions to their construction of inexperienced and arrogant youths.

Authors fall silent on female responsibilities during youth and our images are equally obscure. The illuminations found in the *Kynegetica* (c.1060) depict vigorous men conducting physical chores while women are largely depicted in metaphorical sketches about the behaviour of animals (Figures 3.3 to 3.6).¹³¹ For instance, a dog is moaning like a woman (Figure 3.7).¹³² These images do not tend to provide an insight into the daily realities of women’s lives. One might surmise that, in the context of agricultural work, a woman’s role was not thought to be of interest to a Byzantine reader or onlooker.

¹²⁸ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 18, (Eng. trans. 102).

¹²⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 18 (Eng. trans. 102): ‘Μὴ οὖν προσέχετε τῷ νέῳ τῆς ἡλικίας αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς εὐγενείᾳ’.

¹³⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 18 (Eng. trans. 102).

¹³¹ *Kynegetika* Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 2r (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004; *Kynegetika* Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 3r (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004; *Kynegetika* Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 24v (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004; *Kynegetika* Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 17v (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004.

¹³² *Kynegetika* Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 18r (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004.

3.4 Physicality and Physiognomy

Visual and textual sources portray young men as valued for their physical strength and their admirable physique. Starting with the material evidence, youthful soldiers with impressive physiques were contrasted with older, frailer ecclesiasts in the sixth-century Justinian Mosaic in the San Vitale, Ravenna (Figure 3.8).¹³³ The same visual *trope* reoccurs in the tenth-century Harbaville Triptych (Figure 3.9).¹³⁴ These pictorial depictions celebrate the physiology of youth, in comparison to old age.

This *topos* continues to appear in the written evidence. For instance, in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (ninth century), the young saint could physically outperform the older monks: ‘When all the fathers went out gathering faggots and each carried only one burden, he bore two burdens and would bring them to the bakery’.¹³⁵ George the Synkellos, who wrote in the early ninth century, suggested youths did not know their own strength.¹³⁶ Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written in the early tenth century) demonstrated his youthful power and miraculous strength when he moved stones, which two or even three of the ‘strongest men’ (γενναιοτάτων ἀνδρῶν) would scarcely be able to lift off the ground.¹³⁷ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century) Demetrios, exalting in the ‘strength of youth’ (σφριγῶν νεότητι), dug out a pit for the

¹³³ Justinian I and his entourage (Ravenna, San Vitale, 6th century). See: Barber 1990.

¹³⁴ Harbaville Triptych: the deesis and saints (Paris, Louvre, 11th century). See: Grabar 1980.

¹³⁵ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 51): ‘ἐξερχομένων δὲ πάντων τῶν πατέρων ἐν συλλογῇ τῶν μαννουθίων καὶ πάντων πρὸς ἕνα φορτίον βασταζόντων, αὐτὸς δύο φορτία ποιῶν ἐν τῇ ἀρτοκοπείᾳ ἐκόμιζεν.’

¹³⁶ George Synk., 336 (Eng. trans. 405).

¹³⁷ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 195 (Eng. trans. 13).

storage of barley, grain and legumes.¹³⁸ Clearly, strength and physiognomy were celebrated attributes of male youths.

The Byzantines' admiration of youthful physique is clearest in instances when people were recorded to have physically harmed youths. John Moschos (lived c.550-619) recorded the instance of an old Abba unjustly blaming a youth for a murder that he had not committed. In the narrative, soldiers – under order – reluctantly tortured the young man and were relieved when they subsequently received orders not to proceed in killing him.¹³⁹ The soldiers, who were trained killers and who prided themselves on their physique, were noted to find it particularly troublesome to kill a physically admirable youth. Theosteriktos wrote in the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (c.1100) that Athanasios resisted his father's attempts to clothe him in silk and as a result his father beat him so 'his back grew ulcerated as a result of the intolerable blows' (τὸν νῶτον αὐτοῦ κατασαπῆναι ἐκ τῶν ἀφορήτων πληγῶν) and had to undergo surgery by doctors'.¹⁴⁰ Athanasios endured physical punishment because of his piety. Yet, the father cried with sorrow after beating his young son: '...his father felt remorse and said to his son, bathing in him tears, "Go away, my child, set out on the good journey that you have chosen. May Christ your helper, protect you from all the traps of the devil"'.¹⁴¹ The sadness expressed by perpetrators who physically harm youths exemplifies the Byzantine reverence of youthful physiology.

¹³⁸ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 130 (Eng. trans. 131).

¹³⁹ John Mosc. *PS.*, 2924 (Eng. trans. 54).

¹⁴⁰ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 30 (Eng. trans. 9).

¹⁴¹ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 30 (Eng. trans. 9): 'εἰπόντος δ' τοῦ νέου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὅτι <<ἀδύνατον μεταπεισθῆναί με, κὰν μεληθῶν με κατατέμνης,>> καταλυγείς ὁ πατήρ καὶ τοῖς δάκρυσι συγχυθείς, ἔφη ἡ πρὸς τὸν παῖδα· <<ἄπιθι, τέκνον· στέλλου τὴν καλὴν πορείαν, ἣν ἠρετίσω· καὶ ἔστω σοι Χριστὸς ἀγωγός, ῥυόμενός σε ἐκ πάντων τῶν παγίδων τοῦ διαβόλου.>>'

Sources express that strength and appearance were nowhere more admired than in the military professions. Hennessy found that nearly all visual depictions of Byzantine soldiers emphasise their youthful muscular physique.¹⁴² A good example of this depiction of virility is the Barberini Ivory, where both the Emperor (perhaps Justinian I, who reigned 527-565) and the soldier on the left are depicted with muscular legs and arms (Figure 3.10).¹⁴³ Hagiographers exploited the association of youth and military profession by applying militaristic metaphors to their saintly characters. For example, in the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), the author compared the saint to a soldier.¹⁴⁴ Metaphorically speaking, Nikon was armed with his disciplined mind – not his youthful body – to wage war against the enemy: the devil.¹⁴⁵ The same metaphor was used in the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century) when the saint bid farewell to war, welcomed peace, swapped the scimitar and spear for pruning hooks and mattocks.¹⁴⁶ The use of these military metaphors portrays how, to the Byzantines, the endurance required for asceticism was comparable to the athleticism and vigour required of military training.¹⁴⁷

In contrast to military constructions of youth, however, saints apparently neglected their physical needs. For example, in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century) his family continued to try to care for the saint after he had moved to the oratory (when he was 14 years old): ‘they used to carry up to him fresh white loaves and all kinds of boiled and roast birds’¹⁴⁸ Signifying Theodore’s renunciation of his family

¹⁴² Hennessy 2008, 187.

¹⁴³ Barberini Ivory (Paris, Louvre, 6th century). See: Cutler 1993.

¹⁴⁴ *V. Nikon*, 42 (Eng. trans. 43).

¹⁴⁵ The same *topos* is employed: *V. Georg. Amast.*, 13 (Eng. trans. 4).

¹⁴⁶ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 60 (Eng. trans. 61).

¹⁴⁷ For the *topos* of martyrs as athletes, see: Gilhus 2006, 197.

¹⁴⁸ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 13 (Eng. trans. 97): ‘ἀνέφερον αὐτῷ ἄρτους καθαρούς καὶ ὀρνέων ἐψητῶν καὶ ὀπτῶν διαφοράς.’

and lay lifestyle: ‘...he never touched any of these things but after his mother and her sister had gone down he would come out of the chapel and throw all the food out on the rocks and go in again, and the birds and beasts ate it all up’.¹⁴⁹ The rejection of food was just one aspect to asceticism which resulted in the physical depletion of the body. Hagiographers inverted the normative associations of youth and physical prowess when depicting saints who ignored their physical needs.

In many cases, youth was the first life-stage at which saints could practise their asceticism. In the *Life of David, Symeon and George* (c.863-5), the author wrote: ‘There the noble <David> displayed endurance of many trials and tribulations, though he was still an adolescent (for he was 16 years old)’.¹⁵⁰ In the *Life of George of Amastris* (c.830), Ignatios the Deacon marked the saint’s decision to enter the monastic order: as he turned away from ‘all luxuries and attractiveness of face and body’ (ἀποστρεφόμενος δ’ εὐχροίας καὶ σωμάτων καὶ συμμετρίας).¹⁵¹ Luxury and vanity, which were presumably associated with youth, were rejected by saintly youths. In the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), the youth ‘had great control over his stomach and eyes, knowing that the blossom of youth is unstable...’.¹⁵² Hennessy suggested that ‘youth adds power to martyrdom’.¹⁵³ Asceticism and denial of the body were particularly admired during youth, when the body was considered to be at its greatest physical strength and beauty.

¹⁴⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 13 (Eng. trans. 97): ‘ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸ κατελθεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐξερχόμενος ἔξω τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἔρριπτεν πάντα ἐπάνω πέτρας καὶ εἰσήρχετο, καὶ κατησθίοντο ὑπὸ τῶν πετεινῶν καὶ θηρίων.’

¹⁵⁰ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 215 (Eng. trans. 156): ‘πολλοὺς δὲ ἀγῶνας καὶ καμιάτους καρτερῶν ἐνταῦθα ὁ γεννάδας ἐπιδειξάμενος, ἀτελεῖ σχεδὸν τὴν ἡλικίαν ἔχων (ἑξκαιδέκατον γὰρ ἔτος ἦγε),’

¹⁵¹ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 5).

¹⁵² *V. Nikon*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35): ‘αἱ γαστρός μιν ἰσχυρῶς ἐκράτει καὶ ὀφθαλμῶν, εἰδὼς ὅτι τὸ ἀκμάζον τῆς νεότητος εὐπτῶτον ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ὀλισθηρὸν γίνεται καὶ πολλὰ τούτου καὶ χαλεπὰ τὰ πτώματα καὶ ὅτι ἐν οὐδενὶ ἄλλῳ ὡς κακοπαθείᾳ θεὸς θεραπεύεται.’

¹⁵³ Hennessy 2008, 97.

In the accounts of youthful ascetics composed from the eleventh century onwards, hagiographers recorded particularly explicit accounts of the depletion of the youthful saints' bodies. For example, in the *Life of Elias of Heliopolis* (eleventh century), one can sense the distress that the passage was intended to evoke: the 'flogging extending from head to waist, it tore the flesh that was soft, because of his youth...'.¹⁵⁴ Gregory the Cellarer wrote in the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053) that the youth mortified his body so much that he appeared to be nothing but skin and bones.¹⁵⁵ Lazaros' youthful contemporaries, including Kerykos, did the same.¹⁵⁶ In the *Life of Leontios*, written early in the thirteenth century, the saint collected thorns and lay naked upon them: 'For having through compression touched young human flesh, being dispatched like arrows as if from a mighty hand through the reaction to his reclining the thorns made the little body bleed profusely and by pricking it caused him bitter pangs'.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, he appeared like a worn out rag, full of holes.¹⁵⁸ While earlier hagiographies had narrated martyrdoms, these post-tenth century hagiographies reinvented youthful martyrs, who were characterised by self-inflicted physical torment. This inversion of youthful physical prowess stresses the personal sacrifice of the saint, who rejected their celebrated youthful attributes, in deference to God.

¹⁵⁴ *V. Elias Helio.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 98): 'καὶ κάτωθεν τῆς γῆς ἀντιτυπούσης πρὸς τὰς πληγὰς, ὡς ἀπὸ τῶν μαστίγων εἶχεν ἀπὸ κεφαλῆς ἕως ζώσεως, συναπέσπα τὰς σάρκας ἅμα τε ἀπαλὰς οὔσας τῇ ἡλικίᾳ.'

¹⁵⁵ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 558 (Eng. trans. 251); 580 (Eng. trans. 361).

¹⁵⁶ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 559 (Eng. trans. 253).

¹⁵⁷ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 38 (Eng. trans. 39): 'Νεαρῶν γὰρ σαρκῶν ἀνθρωπείων ἐκ συνωθήσεως ἐφραμέμεναι, ὡσεὶ βέλη ὡς ἐκ χειρὸς ἰσχυροῦ τῆ ἐκ τῆς κατακλίσεως ἀποϊπάλσει πεμπόμεναι, κάθαμιμον ἀπεφαινον τὸ σωματίον, δριμείας δ' αὐτῶ τὰς ὀδύνας ἐποίουν καταπέρουσαι.'

¹⁵⁸ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 58 (Eng. trans. 59).

3.4 Sexual Awakening

Both hagiographies and histories record many examples of youths being overwhelmed by their passions and desires, telling us that the Byzantines perceived youth to be a time of trial. For example, in spite of her future holiness, Mary of Egypt was apparently promiscuous during her youth. Sophronios (Patriarch of Jerusalem c.634-63) recorded how, when Mary was 12 years old, she rejected her love for her parents and went to Alexandria to destroy her virginity and have sexual intercourse.¹⁵⁹ This raises several points. First, Mary's sexual lust during youth was seen as a direct contravention of her parent's wishes, reiterating the earlier finding that parents were deeply involved in their daughter's pre-marital life, specifically her virginal status, betrothal and marriage. Second, she was attributed with the numerical age of 12 when she reputedly started to lust for sexual intercourse, reaffirming my earlier point that 12 years of age marked the transition to youth for females. Third, and most importantly for my argument here, Mary's lust for sexual intercourse was presented as overpowering: she both disregarded her own virginity and her love for her parents, which were both highly esteemed in Byzantine society, in order to pursue her desires.

In the Byzantine narratives, it was not just females who were credited with uncontrollable sexual desire: male youths were too.¹⁶⁰ In the *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton* (c.980) several young men were attributed with passion, including one of the nun's ex-suitors, and Nicholas, who was charged with the care of the close-by

¹⁵⁹ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3712 (Eng. trans. 80).

¹⁶⁰ Alberici 2008, 67.

vineyard.¹⁶¹ Hagiographies portrayed how youths specifically found sexual renunciation challenging.

In saints' lives, one of the ways in which youths could overcome this testing time was through resistance to their sexual desires. When John the Almsgiver (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) was 15 years old, he was tempted, but resisted beautiful women in a dream.¹⁶² In his youth, Luke the Steiris (whose *vita* was composed in the tenth century) was relieved of his feelings of passion when he dreamt that a hook came down and tore out his 'fleshy member' (σαρκῶδες).¹⁶³ Subsequently, Luke was able to sleep in the same place as women without being tempted.¹⁶⁴ In hagiographies, dreams were utilised to portray the youthful saints' conscious decision to resist their sexual urges, without compromising the construction of the saints' sanctity in their everyday lives.

Youths were not only subject to sexual temptation, but the cause of sexual temptation too. In Prokopios' *Secret History*, the Empress Theodora was presented as a sexual predator who specifically preyed on 'young men' (νεανίας) all 'at the peak of their physical powers' (σώματος ἀκμάζοθσι) with 'fornication' (λαυεύειν) as their chief object in life.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, the prostitute, Mary of Egypt (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) targeted young men who were vigorous in their bodies.¹⁶⁶ Synkletika of Palestine (whose *vita* was composed in the sixth century) was thought to be sent as a

¹⁶¹ *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53); 66 (Eng. trans. 67).

¹⁶² Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 215).

¹⁶³ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 44 (Eng. trans. 45).

¹⁶⁴ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 100 (Eng. trans. 101).

¹⁶⁵ Prok., *SH*, 106 (Eng. trans. 107). For details on Prokopios' rhetorical strategy and invective, see: Brubaker 2004.

¹⁶⁶ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3712 (Eng. trans. 81).

temptation for the monks.¹⁶⁷ Pseudo-Athanasios recorded how Synkletika was in the prime of life and brought up in great luxury, suggesting that youthful high-status women were particularly desirable, perhaps because they were not worn down by work.¹⁶⁸

In the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century), an old man attempted to seduce his 18 year old daughter-in-law.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, in the *Life of Ioannikios* (ninth century), when the saint healed a young woman's sexual desire through his touch, the passion subsequently manifested itself in a nearby man.¹⁷⁰ In this representation of sexual desire, it is presented as demon-like and contagious, revealing that the Byzantines feared losing control of their passions.¹⁷¹

Youthful women and beardless males, specifically, were presented as sexually tempting to men; especially young men who had not yet learnt to control their desires.¹⁷² Being young and very beautiful was a potential obstacle to holiness for Matrona (whose *vita* was composed in the sixth century).¹⁷³ It was precisely the youthful body and the 'rosy and beautiful face' (ἀγαθὴ τὴν ὄψιν) of Theodora of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written c.894) that concerned her mentor, Anna, as to whether she was suitable for a chaste life.¹⁷⁴ According to Theodosios the Monk, Patriarch Leontios of Jerusalem (whose *vita* was written c.1203) suspected that he would be tempted by the daughters of a priest, whose beauty was alluring and capable of 'enticing the soul of a youth' (νέου ἐφελκύσασθαι ψυχὴν).¹⁷⁵ It has long been

¹⁶⁷ *V. Synk. Palestine*, 300 (Eng. trans. 51).

¹⁶⁸ *V. Synk. Palestine*, 300 (Eng. trans. 51).

¹⁶⁹ *V. Danie. Sketis*, 136 (Eng. trans. 137).

¹⁷⁰ *V. Ioannicii*, 399 (Eng. trans. 282).

¹⁷¹ *V. Ioannicii*, 363 (Eng. trans. 304).

¹⁷² Theod. *V. Leontios*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).

¹⁷³ *V. Matr. A*, 791 (Eng. trans. 20).

¹⁷⁴ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 183).

¹⁷⁵ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 46 (Eng. trans. 47).

established that the Byzantines presented women as posing a threat to a men's' sexual resistance.¹⁷⁶ Here youthful women, in particular, were the cause of temptation.

3.6 Conclusions

There is a clear development in the depiction of male youth. At the beginning of this period, saintly men, including George of Choziba's brother (as seen in the next chapter), Theodore of Sykeon, Symeon the Holy Fool, George of Amastris and Niketas of Medikion (to name a few of the examples cited) reputedly rejected the responsibility to care for their natal parents in their old age. In the *Life of Symeon the Holy Fool* (c.642-649), Leontios of Neapolis defended monks who left their parental family, writing that it is better to serve the Lord.¹⁷⁷ The normative responsibility of sons to care for their parents is stated plainly here, and saints are shown to renounce this role.

But from at least the tenth century onwards, some of the destined saints' Life Course trajectories started to incorporate familial responsibilities. For women, this entailed respecting parents' wishes to marry, and for men, this entailed caring for aging parents. Thomais of Lesbos and Theodote (Psellos' Mother) succumbed to their parents' wishes for them to marry. And David of Lesbos, Euthymios of Thessalonike, Lazaros of Mount Galesion and Nikon maintained contact with their natal family after their tonsure. In the early period, devotion to God and the monastic family was levelled against devotion to the natal family. But this *topos* began to be reinterpreted from the tenth century or perhaps earlier, in alignment with constructions of ideal sons and

¹⁷⁶ Galatariotou 1984, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 126 (Eng. trans. 136).

daughters who were able to both fulfil their duties to God and to their families. This might suggest that it had become inconceivable to present an 'ideal' person rejecting their familial duties because Byzantine society increasingly valued familial ties.

The Byzantines exhibited ambivalent attitudes towards youths. In artistic and textual depictions, physique, corporeal strength and beauty were revered. Histories described the sadness upon the death of a soldier because of the loss of a young life. Writing in the tenth century, Leo the Deacon recorded how Bardas, who was in the prime of life, was killed when he was hit in the eye with a lance by his own cousin.¹⁷⁸ Youth promised potential and the authors portray how death at this life stage was particularly tragic.

In contrast, the Byzantines usually viewed the mentality of youths with disdain: perceiving them to embody inexperience, impulsiveness, passion and lack of control. Writing in the eleventh century, Gregory the Cellarer surmised: 'our thoughts tend towards evil things from our youth...'.¹⁷⁹ Based on these perceived negative attributes, some adolescents were treated with apprehension and distrust by people of other Life Course stages. In John Moschos' *Spiritual Meadow* (c.600), an elder accused a young goldsmith of tampering with the gold as the finished donation weighed more than the amount of gold he had provided. But John revealed that the youth had actually added his wages to the church donation in an act of piety.¹⁸⁰ Youths could be perceived as untrustworthy almost automatically by some adults.

Authors sometimes marked out their subjects as exceptional, when displaying their resilience to the negative attributes normally associated with youth. In his tenth-

¹⁷⁸ Leo Diac., 40 (Eng. trans. 91).

¹⁷⁹ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 508 (Eng. trans. 74).

¹⁸⁰ John Mosc. *PS*, 3088 (Eng. trans. 178).

century *History*, Leo the Deacon wrote that the Emperor Nikephoros (reigned c.802-811) ‘was never drowsy, nor did he become enslaved by certain pleasures (for no one could say that they had seen him indulging in revelry even during his youth)...’.¹⁸¹

Psellos shows us how the rhetorical construction of youth could be used to praise a character’s resilience to bad influences:

Even when he [Michael VII] was a youth, with the down of his first beard (τὸν ἱουλον) still fresh on his cheeks, he was in no way the inferior of his elders in wisdom (τὴν σύνεσιν). He was addicted to no pleasures, was no slave to gluttony, did not encourage sumptuous banqueting. From the delights of love he abstained so rigorously that of most of them he had no knowledge at all and was quite ignorant of sexual practices condemned by law. So excessive was his modesty, in fact, that indecent jest, or even a mere mention of the word 'love' would bring to his cheeks a deep blush in a moment.¹⁸²

In the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (eleventh century), the youth resisted sexual temptation on numerous occasions such as when he led a virgin back to her hometown; later he resisted sexual intercourse with a woman dressed as a nun and again when another woman tried to tempt him.¹⁸³ This is contrasted with some soldiers who pursued a young girl in their desire for her.¹⁸⁴ Writing in the twelfth century, Anna Komnene described how her husband Nikephoros Bryennios ‘did not wish to prove his inexperience or his youth [so] he restrained his raging anger against the barbarians and continued to march on in good order and the same formation’.¹⁸⁵ Anna felt strongly enough about the associations of youth to defend her father against any accusations of

¹⁸¹ Leo Diac., 78 (Eng. trans. 129).

¹⁸² Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 175 (Eng. trans. 368): ‘Ἄρτι δὲ πρῶτως ἀνθοῦντα ἔχων τὸν ἱουλον καὶ ταῖς θριξίν ἤδη πθκάζων τὴν παρειάν, οὐδεν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων διενηνόχει τὴν σύνεσιν· οὔτε γὰρ ἡδοναῖς ἐδεδώκει, οὔτε γαστρὸς ἠττητο, οὔτε κωμάζειν ἀπαρακαλύπτως εἴλετο· ἐρώτων δὲ τοσοῦτον ἀπέσχετο, ὥστε μὴδὲ εἰδέναι τοὺς πλείους καὶ ὅσοι πόρρω τοῦ νομίμου τυγχάνουσι· τοσοῦτον δὲ αὐτῷ τὸ περιὸν τῆς αἰδοῦς, ὡς καὶ εἴ τις ἐξενέγκοι ῥῆμα φαῦλον τοῦ στόματος ἢ γυμνὸν ἔρωτος ὄνομα, ἐρυθήματος εὐθὺς γέμον δεικνύειν τὸ πρόσωπον.’

¹⁸³ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 511 (Eng. trans. 83).

¹⁸⁴ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 514 (Eng. trans. 93).

¹⁸⁵ An. Komn., Vol. III: 205 (Eng. trans. 402): ‘Ὁ γοῦν τὸ δεξιὸν κέρας ἐπέχων Νικηφόρος ὁ Βρυέννιος καῖσαρ, τῆς κατὰ τὴν οὐραγίαν μάχης αἰσθόμενος, ἐσφάδαζε μὲν ἀμύνειν τοῖς ὀπισθεν, οὐκ ἤθελε δὲ ἀπειρίας ἢ νεότητος ἐνδείξασθαι τι, ἀλλ’ ἐπέιχε καίτοι λυττῶντα τὸν κατὰ τῶν βαρβάρων θυμὸν καὶ σὺν εὐταξίᾳ ἐπὶ ταῦτο στήματος τὴν πορείαν ποιεῖσθαι ἐσπούδαζε.’

instability and impulsiveness in his youth too, attributing to him knowledge beyond his years.¹⁸⁶

All importantly, youth was recognised as a temporal life-stage and the Byzantines recognised that many youths reformed their bad ways upon the commencement of adulthood. At the beginning of this chapter it was shown how some of the saints, including Mary of Egypt and Daniel of Sketis were able to rid themselves of their sexual desire after their youth. It has already been noted by Hennessy that sexual sins could be forgiven upon marriage.¹⁸⁷ Psellos attributed the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos' (reigned c.1042-1055) early mistakes to his youth.¹⁸⁸ Anastasios of Sinai wrote in the seventh century that God will forgive sins committed during the life stage of youth.¹⁸⁹ If youth then was perceived to be a period of instability, one would expect the Byzantines to have perceived adulthood as a period of continuity and fixed character.

¹⁸⁶ An. Komn., Vol. I: 10 (Eng. trans. 32).

¹⁸⁷ Hennessy 2008, 16.

¹⁸⁸ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I., 133 (Eng. trans. 171).

¹⁸⁹ Anast. Sin. T3, 224 (Eng. trans. 135).

**CHAPTER FOUR: MATURITY
TO OLD AGE**

Adults are usually the focus of Byzantine narratives. And yet the life-stage of adulthood itself was seldom explicitly mentioned. In Byzantine texts, subjects were assumed to be adults, unless it was stated otherwise. One might presume that this is because the writings were largely directed towards an adult audience. But, as outlined in previous chapters, the inclusion of didactic childhood anecdotes in hagiographies, including the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), the *Life of Tarasios* (ninth century) and the *Life of Luke the Steiris* (tenth century) may have been written to be heard by children, as well as adults. It could be hypothesised that adults, being the authors of writings, presented their own life-stage as normative. But Alexander Kazhdan found the average age of Byzantine writers in this period to be between 62 and 71 years old.¹ If correct, this reveals that most Byzantine authors were, in fact, old men. Perhaps this can be seen as a consequence of the perception that elderly men were wise and their memories spanned several generations giving them plenty of material to write about. This chapter therefore seeks to uncover why the Byzantines focused upon adulthood and presented it as the normative life-stage.

While it is true that adulthood is the chronological middle ground between all of the Life Course stages, in this chapter it will become apparent that the standardisation of adulthood was not just constructed through its central position in the flow of the Life Course. The Byzantines built upon this central positioning to promote a framework of archetypal characteristics (such as balance, moderation, and temperance) in order to present adulthood as the ‘standard’ life-stage.

These moderate traits of adulthood mentalities were sometimes juxtaposed against indulgent and excessive youth or restrained and experienced old age. In the

¹ Kazhdan and Constable 1982, 53.

saints' lives of this period, the stability of adulthood was usually contrasted against irrational youth. When Ignatios the Deacon (writing. c.830) described George of Amastris' youth, he shows us how the saint did not succumb to the expected downfalls of his age group, but 'ran away in the face of the pleasures of youth'.² As an adult, George was no longer subject to youthful temptations and his emotions were in a state of complete equilibrium: he had 'no anger, ill will, suspicion, or any other similar vice... his luxury was his self-control'.³ George fought to resist the pleasures and temptations typical of youth and, once he had developed into an adult, he had mastered his emotions. Ignatios marked George's transition from youth to adulthood when describing his newly acquired self-control and moderation.

In fact, many of the authors chose to describe a subject's newly acquired attributes in order to mark their progression from youth into adulthood. Basil of Thessalonike (writing in the tenth century) described Euthymios' 'youthful body' (νέω τῷ σώματι), which 'battled with pleasures' (ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ἀπομάχεσθαι).⁴ The author proceeded to mark the saint's progression into manhood, when recalling his balance: 'he was as immovable as a strong and unshakeable rock buffeted by waves'.⁵ This *topos* is prevalent in the *vitae* of women too: the *Life of Mary the Younger* (c.1025) reveals that once the young woman had passed maturity she never became even mildly angry.⁶ The concept of stability during adulthood is again reiterated. Theosterikos (writing c.1100) described how, as a youth, Saint Niketas did not fraternize with dancers, listen to their

² V. Georg. Amast., 16 (Eng. trans. 5): 'καὶ φεύγων μὲν ἀποτωθασμοὺς μειρακιώδεις'

³ V. Georg. Amast., 26 (Eng. trans. 7): 'ἐν οἷς οὐ θυμός, οὐ φθόνος, οὐ μῖσος, οὐχ ὑπόνοια, οὐκ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων ἐνεωρᾶτο, ἢ τε τῶν ματαιῶν ἐπιθυμία τιμῆς τε καὶ δόξης καὶ τύφου καὶ περιφανείας καὶ πάντων τῶν τοιούτων ἐκβέβλητο· τρυφή δὲ ἦν ἢ ἐγκράτεια, καὶ δόξα τὸ μὴ γιγνώσκεισθαι, πλοῦτος δὲ ἢ ἀκτημοσύνη καὶ τὸ πᾶσαν τὴν ὑλικὴν περιουσίαν ὡς κόνιν ἀποτινάξασθαι.'

⁴ V. Euthyme le Jeune, 176 (Eng. trans. 11).

⁵ V. Euthyme le Jeune, 176 (Eng. trans. 11): 'ἀπερίτρεπτος ἦν οὐδὲν ἤττον ἢ κυμάτων προσβολαῖς πέτρα στερρὰ καὶ ἀτίνακτος· καὶ γὰρ τοῖς τοιοῖσδε λογισμοῖς'.

⁶ Gero. V. Melaniae Iunioris, 693 (Eng. trans. 257).

indecent speech, or spend his time with those who drank wine – a list of activities that one must understand less than ideal lay youths participated in.⁷ As an adult, Niketas was not subject to feelings of ‘wrath’ (ὀργῆς) or ‘anger’ (θυμοῦ) or ‘malice’ (μνησικακίας) or ‘hatred’ (μίσους) or ‘slander’ (καταλαλιᾶς) or ‘condemnation’ (κατακρίσεως).⁸ In sum, Niketas was not susceptible to overwhelming or excessive emotions. Sainthood typically involved resistance from desire and revelry, often contrasted against the ‘debauched’ behaviour of surrounding contemporaries. Here adulthood was marked by the saint’s newly established emotional passivity: the saint had mastered control over his or her desires.

The ideal attributes of balance and moderation during adulthood are not unique to saints: Psellos, writing in the late eleventh century, described Michael IV the Paphlagonian’s (reigned 1034-1041, aged 23/4 to 30/31) transition to adulthood:

It was as if he had grown up to manhood, no longer a boy, and from that moment he governed his Empire in a fashion at once more manly and more noble. There is one more trait in the emperor which I cannot refrain from admiring. It is this, that although his origin was humble, in the hour of his great good fortune he did not lose his sense of balance, nor was he overwhelmed by his power. None of his usual habits were changed.⁹

Psellos admired Michael for his stability: the emperor was mentally unaltered by his regal status, symbolising his maturity. Psellos similarly praised Constantine IX Monomachos (reigned 1042-1055, aged 41/2 to 54/5) when he was unaffected by triumphs over George Maniakes, showing his ‘moderation’ (μετριοφροσύνη).¹⁰ Similarly, Psellos attributed Constantine X Doukas (reigned 1059-1067) with

⁷ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 4).

⁸ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 20 (Eng. trans. 7).

⁹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 57 (Eng. trans. 90): ‘καὶ ὡσπερ ἀνὴρ ἐκ μειρακίου γενόμενος ἀνδρικότερον ἅμα καὶ γενναιότερον τῆς βασιλείας ἀντεῖχετο. Καὶ τοῦτο πρῶτον θαυμάζειν ἔχω τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος. ὅτι ἐξ ἐλάττονος τύχης τῆς μεγίστης ταύτης εὐδαιμονίας τυχὼν, οὐτ’ ἐξέπλάγη τὸ φρόνημα, οὔτε ἤττων εὐρέθη τοῦ κράτους, ἀλλ’ οὐ τι τῶν καθεστώτων ἠλλοίωσε.’

¹⁰ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 7 (Eng. trans. 192).

moderation ‘after his marriage’.¹¹ Incidentally, one rarely hears of marriage as a marker in the male Life Course, while marriageable age is a fundamental marker in the female Life Course. In these examples adults were typically said to act with moderation and sometimes the Byzantine authors cited this attribute in order to highlight their subject’s transition to this mature life-stage.

Similarly, Psellos marked a subject’s progression from prime adulthood into old age when detailing the character’s decreasing sense of balance. In the *Chronographia*, Psellos’ description of Constantine VIII the Macedonian (reigned 1025-1028, aged 64/65 to 67/68) links the ‘old age’ (γηραιός) of the Emperor with his ‘quick temper’ (ὀξύρροπος) and ‘uncontrolled anger’ (θυμοῦ).¹² His description of Romanos III Argyros (reigned 1028-1034, aged 59/60 to 71/72) sharply contrasts with the expectation of ideal adults too. The elderly emperor suddenly behaved ‘as if he were another person altogether... there was no moderation about it. From the highest summit he crashed down to the depths, all in one brief moment’.¹³ For Psellos, the moderation which was characteristic of prime adulthood diminished as the subject progressed into old age.

Significantly, hagiographers did not show the same depletion of balance and moderation in their aged saints. The increased valued attached to the elderly in religious contexts as opposed to lay contexts will be picked up in the next chapter. My case-in-

¹¹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 140 (Eng. trans. 255): ‘τῆς γὰρ ἀγοραίου προπετείας καὶ κομψότητος μακρὰν ἑαυτὸν ποιησάμενος, ἐν ἀγοραῖς διέτριβε τὰ πολλὰ καὶ περὶ τὴν πατρίαν βῶλον ἐπραγματεύετο.’ Pers. Comm. John Wortley (10/09/09): ‘Originally, σωφροσύνη meant moderation, sobriety in a general sense, but in the Christian era it came increasingly to mean sexual continence; hence, chastity: the antithesis of πορνεία’. V. Thoma. *Lesbos*, 234 (Eng. trans. 298): Halsall translated σωφροσύνη to mean ‘prudence’ or ‘moderation’.

¹² Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 27 (Eng. trans. 53).

¹³ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 35 (Eng. trans. 65): ‘οὐ γὰρ ἐμέτρησε κατὰ λόγους τὴν ὕφεσιν, ἀλλ’ ἀθρόον ἐξ ὑψηλοτάτης καταβέβηκει περιωπῆς.’

point here is that attributes including balance and moderation were described to be, for the most part, specific to adults in their prime. The projection of adults as moderate and balanced, in contrast to alternative life-stages, fulfilled the Byzantines' concepts of adulthood as the 'normal' life-stage.

4.1 Defining the start of adulthood

Defining adulthood is complex, as the Byzantines referred to at least four indications of maturity: social or familial role, numerical age, mental acuity and physical development. On occasion, the Byzantines acknowledged that these different facets of maturity developed independently of one another. For instance, Theodosios the Monk (writing c.1203) recorded that Leontios, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1176-1185) became a priest and consecrated himself to God 'in his still young body' (ἐν νεαρῷ ἔτι τῷ σώματι).¹⁴ Theodosios subsequently described how Leontios was mentally mature for his physical age.¹⁵ The Byzantines acknowledged that there were several measures of maturity and we will see that their conception of adulthood differed according to gender and status.

Beginning with numerical age, I must consider whether the Byzantines believed that adulthood started at a specific numerical age. Did they attach importance to the ages of 16, 18 or 21 as we do today? We have seen in the previous chapter how age 18 was significant in the saintly Life Course trajectory as a marker at which a saint moved away from homeland. The numerical age data collected from hagiographies could be

¹⁴ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 62 (Eng. trans. 63).

¹⁵ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 62 (Eng. trans. 63).

interpreted to suggest that the age range of 24-5 was significant for women, while 22-30 was significant for men (Tables 7 and 8). Cyril of Scythopolis (writing c.530-558) employed the term ‘twenty-life’ (τῶι εἰκοστῶι) to refer to the age when Abba Kyriakos became a solitary.¹⁶ The vagueness in stating an exact age could imply that the decade of a person’s twenties, in its entirety, represented the multi-faceted transition from adolescence to full maturity.

But a closer reading of the sources exposes the age of 25 as a symbolic marker for both genders, representing the characters’ transitions into full adulthood. As seen in the previous chapter, Justinian’s *Institutes* (c.535) decreed that males who had reached (*puberes*) [age 14] and females of ‘marriageable age’ (*viripotentes*) [age 12] should receive curators until they were 25.¹⁷ Here, it is implied that individuals under the age of 25 had not yet attained full mental competence. The *Council in Trullo* prohibited young men under the age of 25 from becoming deacons (the equivalent position for a woman was not achievable until the age of 40).¹⁸ Significance is attached to the numerical age of 25 in histories too. Psellos, writing in the late eleventh century, asserted: ‘At this stage of the history, I would like to introduce myself into the narrative, deriving from the virtues of Constantine some reflected glory... I was then twenty-five years old’.¹⁹ Psellos chose to establish his character within the text at the numerical age of 25 years, which tells us that he felt this age to be a significant point in his Life Course.

In some instances in hagiographies, the age of 25 is explicitly mentioned too. In the introduction it was outlined how, prior to the age of 25, Matrona of Perge (whose

¹⁶ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 225 (Eng. trans. 248).

¹⁷ Just. *Inst.*: XXIII.

¹⁸ *Council in Trullo*, 87 (Eng. trans. 87).

¹⁹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 141 (Eng. trans. 334): ‘Ἄλλ’ ἐνταῦθα τοῦ λόγου γενόμενος συνεισηνεγκεῖν καὶ ἑμαυτὸν τῷ συγγράμματι βούλομαι καὶ τῶν ἐκείνου παραπολαῦσαι καλῶν.’

vita was written in sixth century and rewritten in the tenth or eleventh century) waged war with her desires.²⁰ The statement of a numerical age here is only a vague testament to Matrona's numerical age, and was utilised, moreover, to portray that she was not yet an adult. I understand that the age of 25 symbolically represented the transition to mental maturity, embodied by the power to resist desires in the *vitae*. Aged 25, Michael the Synkellos (whose *vita* was composed in the ninth century) was attributed with the power to persuade his elders, a marker of his newfound mental maturity and the resulting influence that he held.²¹ Michael's disciple, Theodore, was tonsured aged 25.²² Theodora of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written c.894) was tonsured aged 25.²³ When one uses the birth date of Lazaros of Mount Galesion (lived c.966-1053) to calculate the age at which he journeyed to the Holy Land, one finds that he would have been 25 or 26.²⁴ The statistical data drawn from hagiographies does not pinpoint any specific numerical age as significant in adulthood but shows a broad spread across the twenties. Nevertheless, combining the data from hagiographies and the writings of alternative genres, the numerical age of 25 is disclosed as a signpost to symbolise the new maturity of the subject. One might surmise that ages throughout the twenties could be cited in conjunction with the onset of adulthood, while the age of 25 was a marker specifically associated with this transition to maturity.

Tables 7 and 8 reveal numerical age statements documented in 42 *vitae* composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries. Out of the 42 *vitae*, there are a 37 numerical age statements for men and 8 for women between the ages of 18 and 60. The

²⁰ *V. Matr. A*, 791 (Eng. trans. 20); Syme. Meta. *V. Matr. B*, 921 (Eng. trans. 3).

²¹ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 51).

²² *V. Mich. Synk.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).

²³ Talbot 1996c, 159; *V. Theod. Thess.*, 12 (Eng. trans. 180).

²⁴ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 511 (Eng. trans. 86).

numerical age data highlights that after the age of about 30 years old, age was infrequently documented for both genders until the age of about 50, which I understand to have been connected with the onset of old age (I will return to this in the next chapter).²⁵ This tells us that this period of adulthood, between the ages of 30 and 49, was perceived to be insignificant in terms of numerical age markers (Tables 7 and 8).

²⁵ Kazhdan and Constable 1982, 53.

Table 7: Adulthood Ages Attested for Males in Hagiographies 6th-12th century

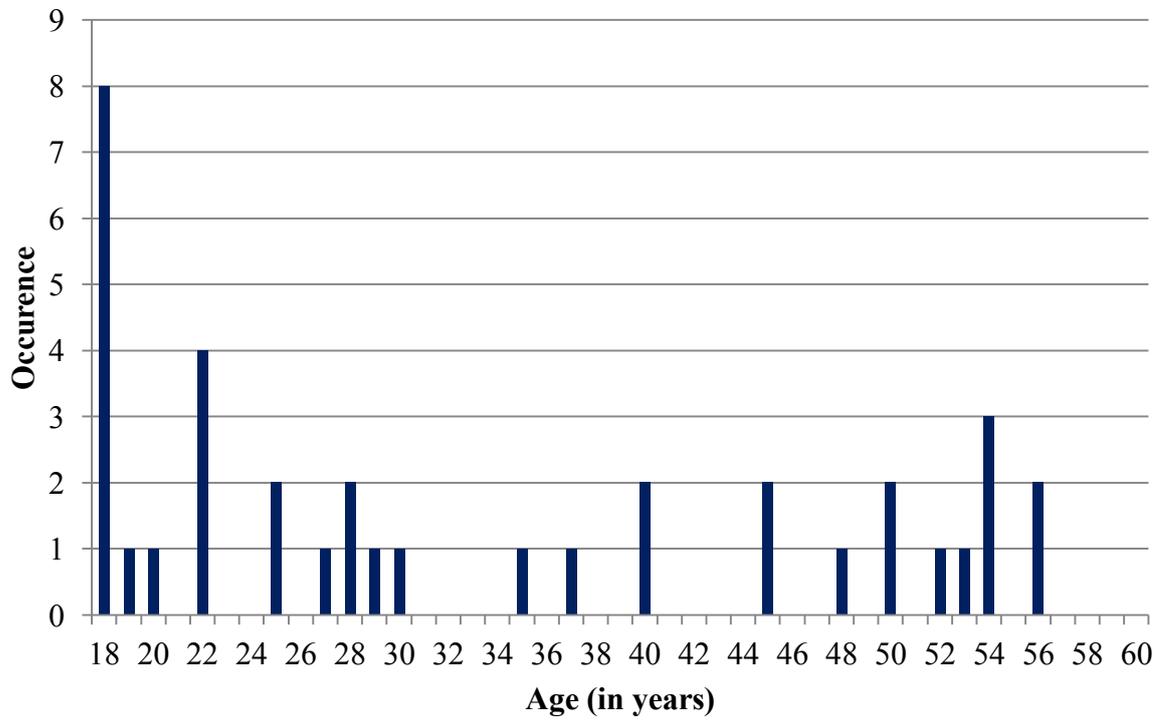
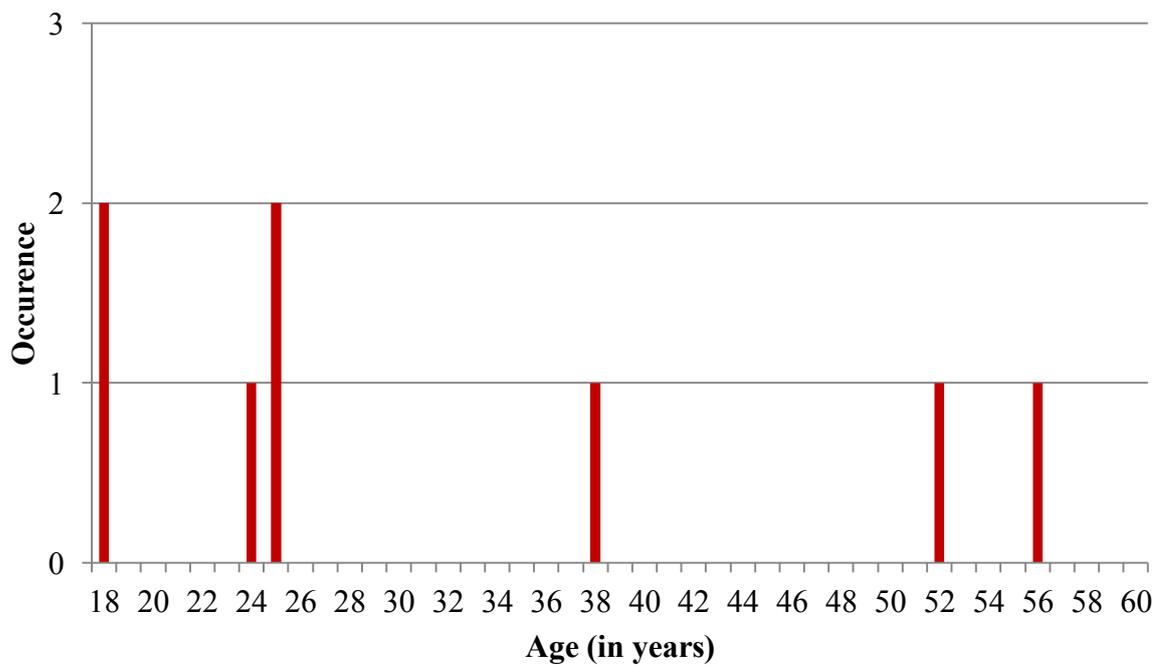


Table 8: Adulthood Ages Attested for Females in Hagiographies 6th-12th century



4.2 Physicality and Physiognomy

Next, I turn to look at the physical signs of development noted by the Byzantines. For women, adulthood seems to have been defined by child rearing potential, with puberty and the onset of reproductive qualities at the start of adulthood and the menopause at the end of adulthood. This is reiterated in our pictorial evidence too where ideal women such as Saint Anne were celebrated for their role as mothers.²⁶ The Byzantines struggled to distinguish between women of differing ages, who were all apparently capable of childbearing. When seeking an imperial bride in the *Life of Philaretos* (c.822), imperial envoys distinguished between the younger women and the grandmother: ‘Seeing that she, too, was shining all around with such beauty, although she was in her old age, the imperial envoys said to them “Do you have daughters?”’²⁷ But when the imperial envoys saw women of the two lower generations ‘modestly dressed by radiating beauty more ravishing than the appearance of any other’, they could not differentiate between the mothers and the daughters ‘because of the equal beauty of their appearance...’²⁸ While at a first glance one might understand this statement to be an allusion to the physical similarities between the female relatives, this does not explain why the grandmother – of the same family – was easily distinguishable from her younger relations. An alternative explanation of this passage is that the envoys could only differentiate between the women in terms of their reproductive abilities. This may suggest that to the Byzantines, women were predominantly valued for their child bearing potential, from puberty to the menopause.

²⁶ Pitarakis 2005, 156.

²⁷ *V. Philaretos*, 86 (Eng. trans. 87): ‘Θεωρήσαντες δέ και ταύτην τοιούτω κάλλει περιλάμψασαν, καιτοι εν γήρει υπάρχουσαν, ειπον προς αυτους οι Βασιλικοί: “Εισιν εν υμιν θυγατέρες;”’

²⁸ *V. Philaretos*, 88 (Eng. trans. 89): ‘Και θεωρήσαντες τας μητέρας και θυγατέρας κάλλει σφοδροτάτω περιεκλαμψάσας υπερ πασαν θεαν γυναικος εν καταστολη κοσμιω εξέστησαν...το ισόμετρον κάλλος.’

Employing a *topos* similar to that found in Niketas' *Life of Philaretos the Merciful*, Psellos (writing in the late eleventh century) described how his sister and mother were indistinguishable and he asserted that the only difference between them was their age.²⁹ Psellos boasted that no one could tell who was the mother and who was the daughter to look at them.³⁰ This rhetorical *trope* – evident in the writings of both Niketas and Psellos – highlights the importance of feminine physical attractiveness to both authors, who were incidentally describing their female relatives. One of the reasons for the similarity in mother and daughter's appearances was their not-so-disparate ages: Psellos revealed that his mother gave birth to his sister while she was a youth and so their age difference was minimal.³¹ Once his sister became a youth herself, Psellos asserted that mother and daughter were indistinguishable.³² Women who gave birth to children in their teenage years would probably still be capable of childbearing once their own daughters had attained puberty. This *topos* shows us that the Byzantines perceived women of child bearing capability to be difficult to distinguish between in terms of numerical age.

For lay women, bearing children was a fundamental Life Course marker, often associated with progression into adulthood. Pregnancy was an implicitly adult female role and yet many females in Byzantium would have given birth in their teenage years. In Psellos' enkomion of his mother, the author attributed Theodota with a new level of maturity and direction once she had attained motherhood, in spite of her young age.³³

²⁹ Psellos, *EM*, 111 (Eng. trans. 73).

³⁰ Psellos, *EM*, 111 (Eng. trans. 73).

³¹ Psellos, *EM*, 111 (Eng. trans. 73).

³² Psellos, *EM*, 111 (Eng. trans. 73).

³³ Psellos, *EM*, 93 (Eng. trans. 58).

For Byzantine women, the attainment of motherhood itself could be depicted as one of the transitional phases into full adulthood, irrespective of numerical age.

For men, the physical signs of adulthood were varied, portrayed in both texts and images through the depiction of the beard, the colour of the hair and the physical stature. Baun has spoken of the first cutting of the boy's beard as a marker of progression from childhood to maturity and it was noted in the previous chapter how the growth of the first beard marked the height of adolescence and enabled youths to enter the adult male sphere.³⁴ Anna Komnene (writing c.1135) admitted that references to the first beard were proverbial and so the writers referenced the growth of the first beard as a marker of youth, regardless of the actual historicity of the beard.³⁵ From the seventh century onwards, the texts show us that beards were socially visible markers of adulthood which 'masculinised' the possessor and enabled them to integrate with other adult men.³⁶ If coming of age was, in some contexts, defined through the appearance of the beard, beards clearly symbolised adult virility.³⁷

The presence and appearance of beards were fundamental to the construction of masculine identity. Skylitzes, writing c.1096, explained how Gryllos, a layman, concealed his beard in order to pose as the Patriarch Ignatios, a eunuch.³⁸ Eunuchs – specifically those who had been created prior to puberty – never attained a full beard.³⁹ The absence of a beard symbolised the emasculation of the eunuch: he did not fulfil

³⁴ Baun 2006.

³⁵ An. Komn., Vol. I: 10 (Eng. trans. 32).

³⁶ Tougher 2009, 136: In the early Byzantine period, Julian the Apostate had satirized himself when writing *Misopogon* (*Beard-hater*) after the people of Antioch criticised him for having a scruffy beard.

³⁷ Clark, G. 1998a, 172; Oberhelman 2008, 71; Rautman 2006, 47.

³⁸ Skyl., 110 (Eng. trans. 111).

³⁹ Ringrose 2003a, 56.

physiological masculine criteria. The Byzantines recognised adult ‘male’ men by, amongst other things, the appearance of their beards.

Monasticism was implicitly associated with the removal of hair due to the practice of tonsure, which involved shaving the front of the head, as opposed to the Western practise of shaving the crown of the head. In the writings of Cyril of Scythopolis (writing c.554-558), Sabas’ beard was burnt and ceased to grow: ‘He [Sabas] used to give thanks to God for the removal of his beard reckoning it to be divine providence so that he should be humbled and not take pride in the hair of his beard’.⁴⁰ In this instance, the unattractive appearance of the beard was interpreted as a sign of sanctity. Anna Komnene (writing c.1135) tells us how a priest was easily recognisable: ‘with his bare head, grey hair and shaggy beard’.⁴¹ In sum, from the beginning to the end of this period, it seems that baldness or unkempt beards were associated with monasticism or ecclesiastical rank. Laymen were expected to take great personal pride in their appearance, particularly their facial hair (as can be seen below). By contrast, monks, who had rejected the normative male attributes, could be depicted with an untidy beard, as if to symbolise their deliberate detachment from lay masculinity.

While monks and ecclesiasts were renowned for their shaggy beards, Byzantine writers also portray the importance of beards to laymen. There are several instances when Leo the Deacon (writing in the tenth century) and Skylitzes (writing in the eleventh century) tell us that men grabbed one another’s beards in hand to hand fights.⁴²

Anna Komnene, who clearly disliked John Italos for his role in betraying the Byzantine

⁴⁰ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 107 (Eng. trans. 115): ‘...ἄχρις οὗ τις θεία δύναμις ἐπιστᾶσα ἰάσατο αὐτὸν καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἀκαθάρτων ἐνίσχυσεν πνευμάτων πλὴν ὅτι ἀπὸ τότε τῆς γενειάδος’

⁴¹ An. Komn., Vol. I, 86 (Eng. trans. 61): ‘Ἐδόκει δ’ οὖν ἱερεὺς τὸ φαινόμενον ἀπὸ γυμνῆς τῆς κεφαλῆς προσερχόμενος, πολιὸς τὴν τρίχα, τὸ γένειον λάσιος’

⁴² Leo Diac., 89 (Eng. trans. 139); Skyl., 293 (Eng. trans. 278); 333 (Eng. trans. 314); 472 (Eng. trans. 455).

Empire to the Italians, described how he would pull his opponent's beard in a fight.⁴³

The suggestion in this instance is that there was something slightly underhand about pulling an opponent's beard in fisticuffs. Nevertheless, it is clear that attacking a man's beard was a sure way to undermine the beholder's strength and virility.

Anna made a direct comparison between the beards of her father, Alexios, and her uncle, Isaac: 'My Uncle Isaac, again, was like his brother in stature, and not very different from him in other respects, his complexion however was paler, and his beard less thick than his brother's, especially round the jaws'.⁴⁴ It seems that Anna used the denser beard of Alexios than Isaac to support her construction of her father's superior virility. My case in point here is that the thickness and quality of beards were employed to portray nuances of masculinity.

Since beards symbolised virility, the removal of a man's beard was interpreted as an act of humiliation and punishment (with the exception of saintly feats of self-denial). Theophanes the Confessor, writing in the ninth century, recalled the humiliation and execution of Constantine the false patriarch when his persecutors shaved his face and cut off his beard, the hair on his head and his eyebrows.⁴⁵ After Constantine had been beheaded, in the absence of any hair, usurpers were forced to hang his head up by his ears.⁴⁶ Skylitzes, writing c.1096, described how once the Patriarch Euthymios had been deposed, supporters of the new patriarch, Nicholas, plucked out Euthymios'

⁴³ An. Komn., Vol. II: 36 (Eng. trans. 176).

⁴⁴ An. Komn., Vol. I: 111 (Eng. trans. 101): 'Ὁ μέντοι θεῖος ἐμὸς Ἰσαάκιος τὴν μὲν ἡλικίαν ἐφύκει τὰ δὲ ἀφ᾽ οὐδὲ κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα πολὺ ἀπεφύκει. Ὑπώχρος μὲν οὖν ἦν αὐτὸς τὴν ὄψιν καὶ τὴν ὑπὲρ τὴν οὐρανὸν δασύς, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τὰς γνάθους ψιλότεραν εἶχε τῆς τὰ δὲ ἀφ᾽ οὐδὲ κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα πολὺ ἀπεφύκει.'

⁴⁵ Theoph., 441 (Eng. trans. 609).

⁴⁶ Theoph., 441 (Eng. trans. 610).

beard.⁴⁷ The removal of a beard was clearly intended to invoke shame and undermine masculine identity.

In fact, Anna Komnene, writing c.1135, revealed that the removal of a beard was used as a threat against potential enemies of the imperial family.⁴⁸ In the episode of a plot against Alexios, Anemas and his conspirators had their hair and beards shaved before being walked through the Agora to have their eyes gouged.⁴⁹ The imperial Princess wrote that Pope Gregory VII of Rome inflicted torture on the ambassadors of King Henry IV of Germany when he clipped their hair with scissors, and sheared their beards with a razor.⁵⁰ It must have been common for prisoners to be shaved as, in order to feign capture and torture, Alakaseos shaved off his beard and hair.⁵¹ Again the removal of beards could be used to undermine lay masculinity.

In other accounts, the appearance of a beard could reflect on a man's mental or physical state. In the *Life of Sabas* (c.554-558), men cut off their beards in moments of anxiety.⁵² Skylitzes, writing c.1096, marked the demise of Romanos III Argyros when recording how his beard and his hair fell out after he had been poisoned by John the Orphanotrophos.⁵³ The Emperor Romanos' beard perhaps symbolised his loss of imperial control to John the Orphanotrophos and his brother, the future Michael IV the Paphlagonian (reigned 1034-1041). According to the authors, the loss of a beard could reveal the instability of a man's character. For lay or imperial status men sparse or

⁴⁷ Skyl., 193 (Eng. trans. 189).

⁴⁸ An. Komn., Vol. II: 149 (Eng. trans. 265).

⁴⁹ An. Komn., Vol. III: 68 (Eng. trans. 381).

⁵⁰ An. Komn., Vol. I: 48 (Eng. trans. 62).

⁵¹ An. Komn., Vol. II: 199 (Eng. trans. 303).

⁵² Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 192 (Eng. trans. 201).

⁵³ Skyl., 385 (Eng. trans. 368).

unkempt beards could symbolise either physical illness or mental volatility – the opposite of moderation and balance – ideal adulthood characteristics.

Some of the authors reveal that beard styles could be transmitted culturally and came to represent ancestry or race. Prokopios, writing in the sixth century, described how the partisans copied the ‘Hun’s’ (Οὐννικὸν) style of hair and ‘beard’ (τοῦ γενείου).⁵⁴ Leo the Deacon, writing in the tenth century, narrated the Rus’ custom of shaving their heads completely, except for one lock of hair, which they allowed to hang down the side of their head.⁵⁵ In Anna Komnene’s twelfth-century description of Robert Guiscard, she suggests that hair and beard styles were the result of ancient cultural customs.⁵⁶ The Princess subsequently expressed surprise that Bohemond, Robert Guiscard’s son had his hair cut short to the ears.⁵⁷ But Anna noted that the Venetians laughed at Bohemond’s beard, so that ‘he could not stand their ridicule’ and his infuriation fuelled the savagery of his subsequent attack.⁵⁸ It is unclear whether Bohemond was clean shaven or whether his beard was simply sparse, but it is clear that the inadequate appearance of a beard could be used to undermine the possessor’s masculine identity.

I have firmly established that the symbolism of a beard was not merely determined by its presence or absence. Leo the Deacon, writing in the tenth century, wrote at great length about the details of his characters’ beards, in order to support the construction of their age and character. When describing John I Tzimiskes (reigned 969-

⁵⁴ Prok., *SH.*, 78 (Eng. trans. 79).

⁵⁵ Leo Diac., 157 (Eng. trans. 199).

⁵⁶ An. Komn., Vol. II: 60 (Eng. trans. 195).

⁵⁷ An. Komn., Vol. III: 121 (Eng. trans. 422).

⁵⁸ An. Komn., Greek: Vol. I: 147 (Eng. trans. 138): ‘Ἡμέρας δὲ ἤδη ἀγαζούσης καταλαμβάνει ὁ Βαϊμοῦντος τὴν εὐφημίαν ἐξαιτούμενος. Τῶν δὲ εἰς τὸν πάγονα αὐτοῦ ἐφυβρι πάντων τοῦτο ὁ Βαϊμοῦντος μὴ ἐνεγκῶν αὐτὸς πρῶτος κατ’ αὐτῶν ἐξορμήσας τοῖς μεγίστοις τῶν αὐτῶν πλοίων προσεπέλασεν, εἶτα καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς στόλος.’ Hatzaki 2009, 94: Latins were usually clean shaven.

976), aged 45, Leo noted that his full beard was of moderate length and appropriate size.⁵⁹ The beard reflected upon the character's physical capabilities, as Leo continued to explain how he surpassed everyone of his generation in leaping, ball-playing, throwing the javelin, and in drawing and shooting a bow.⁶⁰ Notably, Skylitzes, writing in the eleventh century, copied this description when writing his *Histories* a century later.⁶¹ Leo also described Nikephoros II Phokas' beard (reigned 963-969), aged 51, describing it to be of moderate size and spouting grey hairs on his cheeks.⁶² This description is subsequently used to complement the man's mentality as he is said to be wise and he always took the prudent course of action.⁶³ Again, Skylitzes lifted this physical and mental description from Leo's *History*.⁶⁴ Both historians note the numerical age of their subjects in conjunction with their description, highlighting the significance of age in this section of rhetoric. These excerpts tell us that Leo and Skylitzes perceived men in their forties to be full-bearded, fit and agile while men in their fifties were grey-bearded, wise and thoughtful. Authors must have been alluding to a recognisable *topos*: a full-bodied beard was linked with physical strength, but a grey beard was linked with wisdom (associations of wisdom, old age and grey hair are analysed in the next chapter).

Here the detailed description of beards feeds into a transitional model of male adulthood. Understanding the meaning behind a specific stylistic presentation of a beard involves analysing the context and the beholder's attributes, including their gender (male, eunuch), status (lay, religious), age (young adult, prime adult, old adult) and

⁵⁹ Leo Diac., 96 (Eng. trans. 146).

⁶⁰ Leo Diac., 97 (Eng. trans. 146).

⁶¹ Skyl., 313 (Eng. trans. 296).

⁶² Leo Diac., 49 (Eng. trans. 99).

⁶³ Leo Diac., 49 (Eng. trans. 99).

⁶⁴ Skyl., 313 (Eng. trans. 296).

ethnicity (Byzantine, Latin). All of these excerpts employ descriptions of beards as a reflection of the beholder's age and virility.

This *topos* is not only apparent in literature: numismatic evidence attached significant symbolic value to beard type too. As Alfred Bellinger and Philip Grierson have pointed out, beards 'bore no relation to an Emperor's real appearance' but were used to portray specific types of information about the beholder.⁶⁵ For example, in a series of Herakleios (610-641) coins, advancing age is portrayed using the imagery of an increasingly bushier beard (Figures 4.1 to 4.3).⁶⁶ As a child aged between 0/1 and 3/4, Herakleios Constantine is presented as beardless (Figure 4.1). The *nomisma* produced 626-629 traces the heir's physical development: aged 13/14 to 16/17 Herakleios Constantine is shown with facial hair (Figure 4.2). Although he acquired a beard with age, his beard never appears to be bushier than his father's, portraying his comparative youthfulness. This is most evident in the coin produced between 629 and January 632, when Herakleios (reigned 610-641) would have been aged roughly 53/54 to 56/57 years old: the reigning Emperor's beard is at its most extensive and he also fashions a lengthy moustache and outstretching sideburns (Figure 4.3). By contrast, his son, who would have been aged roughly 16/17 to 19/20 years old, models a short beard which frames his mouth and jaw. The bushiness of the beard represents the age of the depicted: the Byzantines used a transitional model of beard depiction to show advancing age.

⁶⁵ Bellinger and Grierson 1973, Vol. III: 110.

⁶⁶ Coins henceforth are referenced in the following way: Figures, Place of Production, Years Produced, Weight, Reference. Herakleios and Herakleios Constantine *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 613-616, 4.49g. See: Sear 1987, No. 734; Herakleios and Herakleios Constantine *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 626-629, 4.46g. See: Sear 1987, No. 743; Herakleios and Herakleios Constantine *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 629-January 632, 4.46g. See: Sear 1987, No. 752.

Moving on a century, a coin of Leo IV the Khazar (reigned 775-780) depicts four generations: the junior co-emperor Constantine VI (son, reigned c.780-797), the reigning emperor Leo IV (father), the deceased Constantine V (grandfather, reigned 741-775) and Leo III the Isaurian (great-grandfather, reigned 717-741) (Figure 4.4).⁶⁷ The adults are differentiated from the child by beard configuration: Constantine VI (child) has no beard while Leo IV (alive at the time of production), Constantine V (deceased at the time of production) and Leo III (deceased at the time of production) all have beards. As Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner has already pointed out, it was acceptable for deceased individuals to be shown with a beard, and this symbolism of facial hair did not detract from the seniority of the reigning emperor.⁶⁸ Leo III, although dead when the *nomisma* was produced, is depicted with the bushiest beard, indicating that he was the eldest. This pattern of increasingly bushy beards, reflecting the advancing age of the possessor is becoming familiar.

But from at least the late eighth century, this pattern of increasingly fuller beards, paralleled to advancing maturity, was not consistently employed. Emperors and Empresses started to present their co-rulers and descendants as beardless, regardless of their age. One of the first coins to depict masculine beardlessness as a symbol of his inferior status is a Constantine VI and Irene (reigned in partnership 780-797) *nomisma* produced 792-797 (Figure 4.5).⁶⁹ When this coin was produced, Constantine would have been roughly aged 21 to 26 years old – well beyond the age of 16, at which age his mother should have retired from her role as regent – and so this beardless depiction of Constantine VI symbolically reinforces the presentation of Irene as superior to her

⁶⁷ Leo IV and Constantine VI *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 776-778, 4.40g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1583.

⁶⁸ Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1978, 21.

⁶⁹ Constantine VI and Irene *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 776-778, 4.46g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1594.

son.⁷⁰ This shift provides one of the strongest tenures of evidence to suggest that the symbolic meaning attached to beards had become decreasingly associated with the age of the person depicted and increasingly connected to their seniority: Irene deviated from standard trends and failed to depict her mature son's beard, in order to strengthen her own imperial status.

Similarly, in the series of Michael III (reigned 840-867) coins, Michael is initially shown beardless (Figure 4.6); he only acquired a beard on coins produced post 856, once his mother was forced into retirement from her role as regent, and when he was aged 15 or 16 years old (Figure 4.7).⁷¹ This model of beard configuration, which presents only the senior emperor as bearded (if male) and co-emperors as beardless (regardless of the gender of the reigning monarch), was emulated by Michael II the Amorian (reigned 820-829), Theophilos (reigned 829-842) and Basil I the Makedonian (reigned 867 to 886), amongst many other regents. This point has already been firmly established by Bellinger and Grierson: 'Co-emperors are frequently distinguished from each other by the elder being shown as bearded, the younger as beardless'.⁷² But, what is new here is that while beards had initially been primarily representative of age and maturity (as seen in the Herakleios and Leo IV the Khazar coins), from the late eighth century their symbolic meaning evolved to identify, moreover, the highest ranking person. So in a numismatic context, the appearance of a beard determined who was the highest ranking person (not necessarily the eldest person) and so one can surmise that the depiction of a beard was loaded with significance.

⁷⁰ Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 352.

⁷¹ Michael III and Theodora *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 843-856, 4.44g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1687; Michael III *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 856-866, 4.37g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1688.

⁷² Bellinger and Grierson 1973, Vol. III: 110. See also: Kalvrezou-Maxeiner 1978, 20: 'But in all existing examples only Basil, the senior emperor, is shown bearded'.

The case of the Constantine VII the Porphyrogennetos (co-Emperor 908-945, Emperor 945-959) series of gold coins exemplifies my point as a play for power is acted out before our eyes. When Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944) became co-Emperor, alongside 15 year-old Constantine, the elder of the two men, Romanos, is depicted as bearded, while Constantine, the man with the birth right to his imperial position, is shown beardless (Figure 4.8).⁷³ Constantine does, however, take the most prominent position on the left side of the coin, taking a more elevated grasp on the cross than his co-Emperor Romanos. This *nomisma* was issued between Romanos' proclamation as co-emperor in December 920 and his displacement of Constantine as senior Augustus three months later. Just a year later, the second coin in the series displays Romanos being crowned by Christ on the reverse of the coin while Constantine VII and Romanos' son, Christopher, appear on the obverse of the coin (Figure 4.9).⁷⁴ Significantly, all three men are bearded and Constantine's seniority is only indicated by his position on the left side of the obverse of the coin. This example is one of the strongest indications of Romanos' stronghold of the imperial leadership: he chose to depict his son as bearded while positioning him next to the rightful heir to the throne. This tells us that while beards could depict age, moreover, they were used here to state intentions for succession.

In the third example, only Romanos and his son are portrayed: Constantine has altogether disappeared, and significantly, so too has Christopher's beard (Figure 4.10).⁷⁵ When Christopher is shown next to his father, the numismatic portrayal reverts to

⁷³ Constantine VII and Romanos I *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, December 920-921, 4.36g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1741.

⁷⁴ Constantine VII *Porphyrogennetos* with Romanos I and Christopher *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 921, 4.39g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1743.

⁷⁵ Romanos I with his eldest son, Christopher Lekapenos *nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 921-931, 4.30g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1745.

standard practice: that is, only the senior Emperor is shown as bearded. This confirms to us Christopher's bearded depiction in the second example served to challenge Constantine's succession and imperial status. Beards were employed to state imperial status and aspirations. It is unsurprising therefore, that after Constantine VII the Porphyrogennetos overthrew Romanos and finally claimed the throne in his own name in the late months of 944, he chose to depict himself in isolation from anyone else, with a full-bodied beard (Figure 4.11).⁷⁶ This exaggerated depiction of a beard symbolised Constantine's newfound power and independent imperial status.

This evolution in the meaning attached to beards impacted upon the way in which beards were depicted. Comparing the seventh-century example of Herakleios' full and long beard – which is defined with individual hairs – to the post eighth-century examples, one can notice an increasing simplification of beard imagery. In the later examples, beards are less detailed and more rudimentary, often only appearing as a more prominent line to define the jaw bone.⁷⁷ As beards were decreasingly associated with the representation of age, transitional beard types such as those seen on the Herakleios Constantine *nomisma* or the Leo IV the Khazar *nomisma* were no longer required. Quite simply, by the eighth century, the mere presence or absence of the beard was adequate enough to show who the imperial leader was, and incidentally, this usually happened to be the eldest person depicted on the coin.

⁷⁶ Constantine VII *Porphyrogennetos nomisma* (AV): Constantinople, 945, 4.38g. See: Sear 1987, No. 1747.

⁷⁷ Bellinger and Grierson 1973, Vol. III: 110.

4.3 Consolidation of Personality

In the chapter two, I argued that the Byzantines often retold childhood anecdotes in order to foretell future adult traits. But the Byzantines acknowledged that this was not a foolproof method of prophecy and there are exceptions in the evidence. Psellos (writing in the late eleventh century) wrote about Leo the Torikian: ‘He had not yet grown up to manhood before a brilliant career – the usual kind of nonsense often talked of with regard to certain people – was predicted for him by a great number of persons’.⁷⁸ Here, Psellos shows his scepticism when discussing how some people tended to draw upon childhood events in order to foretell future attributes. Childhood attributes, Psellos cautions, were not necessarily representative of characteristics beyond maturity.

In hagiographies produced throughout this period, the commencement of adulthood is usually marked with a summary of the saint’s personality, allowing the author to promote the protagonist as a ‘good’ adult. Cyril of Scythopolis (writing c.554-558) distinguished Abramios’ childhood from his adulthood with a short summation of his virtues.⁷⁹ Ignatios the Deacon (writing c.830) described how when George of Amastris ‘arrived at manhood’ (ἄνδρας) he exhibited ‘the moderation of his character, gentleness, calmness, graciousness, the soundness of purpose, kindness of word and greatness of deed’.⁸⁰ Basil of Thessalonike (writing in the tenth century) introduced Euthymios’ adulthood: ‘And since I am at this point in my narrative and briefly

⁷⁸ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 14 (Eng. trans. 205): ‘τούτω γοῦν τῷ ἀνδρὶ οὐπω ἀκμάσαντι τύχην τινὰ λαμπρότητος, οἷα δὴ πολλὰ εἴωθεν ἀλόγως περὶ τινων λέγεσθαι, οἱ πλεῖστοι κατεμαντεύοντο...’

⁷⁹ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 273).

⁸⁰ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 5): ‘εἶχε γὰρ πολλὰ τὰ τοῦτο τὸ κλέος περιποιούμενα· τὸ ἐπιεικὲς τοῦ ἥθους, τὸ πρᾶον, τὸ ἥσυχον, τὸ μειλίχιον. τὸ τοῦ φρονήματος εὐσταθές, τοῦ λόγου τὸ προσηγές, τῶν ἔργων τὸ μεγαλοπρεπές.’

reviewing the many forms of his virtues...’⁸¹ When introducing Mary the Younger’s adulthood Gerontios, writing c.1025, records that she was meek, moderate and a model of charity and piety.⁸² Theosterikos (writing c.1100) marked Niketas of Medikion’s transition into adulthood when he wrote: ‘He changed in spirit and underwent a glorious transformation...’.⁸³ In fact, it is safe to assert that many hagiographers employed a character description in order to introduce adulthood: it was a standard formula. Byzantine authors clearly liked to differentiate between youth and adulthood and this reveals to us that adulthood was perceived to be distinctly different from previous Life Course stages.

This method of introducing adulthood is also employed in histories. Some of the historians wrote a summary of their subjects’ character in order to mark the transition in the narrative to adulthood. Psellos, writing in the eleventh century, observed that Michael IV the Paphlagonian (reigned c.1034-1041) ‘in the fullness of manhood’ (σφριγῶντος) was ‘entirely devoid of Hellenic culture’, and he ‘exercised severe control over the desires’ while ‘his tongue was well-equipped to this end, for it lacked monotony, and he spoke fluently, with a voice both fine and resonant’.⁸⁴ Psellos composed a character assessment of himself in his twenty-fifth year, focusing on his skill as an orator.⁸⁵ He chose to intersect the narration of his twenty-fifth year (which could, of course, mean that he was referring to the age of 24) with a lengthy summary of

⁸¹ V. Euthyme le Jeune, 176 (Eng. trans. 10): ‘καί μοι ἐνταῦθα τῆς διηγήσεως γενομένῳ καὶ πολλὰς ἀρετῶν ἰδέας ἐν βραχεῖ παραδραμόντι τοῦ συγγράμματος ἐπικρινάτω εὐγνώμων ἀκροατῆς παρ’ ἑαυτῷ ἐνθυμούμενος’.

⁸² Gero. V. Melaniae Iunioris, 693 (Eng. trans. 257).

⁸³ Theost. V. Niket. Medikion , 19 (Eng. trans. 5): ‘τί ποεῖ καὶ τί βουλεύεται μεθίσταται τῷ νοῖκαὶ μεταπλάττεται πλάσιν ἀρίστην, ἐκ δυνάμεως εἰς δύναμιν μετιόν’.

⁸⁴ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 56 (Eng. trans. 90): ‘Παιδείας μὲν γὰρ ἑλληνικῆς ἄμοιρος παντάπασιν ἦν’; ‘καὶ οὐ τὰ πάθη τὸν ἐκείνου κατῆγε λογισμὸν ἢ ἐκεῖνος τούτων ἐδέσποζεν’; ‘καὶ ἡ γλῶττα οὐχ ὀμαλῶς ξυγκειμένη, ἀλλ’ ἐπιτροχάδην ἀγορεύουσα καὶ λαμπρὸν τι ἤχοῦσα’.

⁸⁵ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 134 (Eng. trans. 173).

his attributes. The numerical age here might be significant: in chapter three it was asserted that the age of 25 could be used to mark the commencement of adulthood.

Turning to Skylitzes' (writing c.1096) character descriptions, he records that when Basil I the Makedonian (reigned 867 to 886) was a young man, he was valorous in spirit and he carried out orders effectively.⁸⁶ Anna Komnene, writing c.1135, united the description of maturity with a description of character: 'At that time there was at court a certain Synadenos of Eastern origin and illustrious descent, fair of face, of profound intellect, courageous in battle, verging on young manhood, and above all akin to the emperor by race'.⁸⁷ As in hagiography, historians chose to mark maturity with a description of fixed character. This all pervading *topos* shows us that the Byzantines perceived maturity onwards – but not before – to be the time at which a person's personality became consistent, fixed, and worthy of appraisal.

4.4 Relationships

In lay society, progression into adulthood could be marked by the change in the primary familial role from daughter to wife and mother or son to husband and father. For women, maternal status in conjunction with marriage marked the transition into adulthood. By contrast, for men, their role as head of the household could come to fruition prior to marriage, in the event of their father's death. Marriage, then, constituted

⁸⁶ Skyl., 121 (Eng. trans. 122).

⁸⁷ An. Komn., Vol. I: 66 (Eng. trans. 46): 'Ἦν δὲ τῆνι καὐτα Συναδηνός τις ἐξ ἀνατολῶν ὀρμώμενος, ἐκ γένους λαμπροῦ, τὸ εἶδος ὠραῖος, τὴν φρένα βαθύς, ῥωμαλέος τὴν χεῖρα, τὴν ἡλικίαν ἐς μειράκιον παραγγέλλων καὶ ἄλλως δὲ προσήκων αὐτῷ κατὰ γένος.'

a conglomeration of family roles and responsibilities: a concept that saints often shied away from.

In hagiographies, marriage was often presented as an obstacle to divine obligation, as commitments were diluted. In the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-865), the conflict Theodora faced between respecting God, for whom she ought to restore icons, and respecting her husband Theophilos, an iconoclast is clear.⁸⁸ Questions of primary allegiances (whether they were to God or to their spouse) are encapsulated in the author's statement describing how the pious empress loved her husband, but loved Christ even more.⁸⁹ In the previous chapter, it was noted how both male and female saints were often unwillingly forced through the expected familial trajectory of marriage by their parents. Examples include the *Life of John the Almsgiver* (c.641), in which the saint married in obedience to his father's wishes and the *Life of Athanasia of Aegina* (c.916), in which the saint refused marriage but was nevertheless married twice on her parents' insistence.⁹⁰ Although it is tempting to think of the Byzantines choosing between marriage and monasticism, many of the characters in the texts experienced both lifestyles at different junctures in their lives, enabling us to understand conflicts between the expectations of husbands and monks on one hand, and wives and nuns on the other hand.

Those destined to be saints, even when married, did not fulfil Byzantine expectations of the ideal archetypal spouse. Sainly spouses of both sexes were often said to withhold sexual intercourse.⁹¹ In the *Life of Daniel of Sketis*, which was

⁸⁸ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 248 (Eng. trans. 221).

⁸⁹ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 213).

⁹⁰ *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 144); Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 200).

⁹¹ Alwis 2011, 1.

composed in the sixth century, Andronikos simply had sex with his wife in order to conceive, and upon the safe delivery of their second child, they no longer engaged in sex.⁹² After getting married, John the Almsgiver (whose *vita* was composed in the seventh century), resisted intercourse with his wife until his father-in-law discovered that they were not reproducing.⁹³ Similarly, Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) slept with Euphrosyne, his wife, ‘producing the child [Anastaso] as the offspring of the mother’s wish, not of pleasure and believing that the child was sufficient to assuage his wife’s and mother’s sorrow on his behalf’.⁹⁴ Theodosios the Monk surmised (c.1203) that a Palestinian deacon, who was in the prime of life, did not have sex with his wife.⁹⁵ Hagiographies present sexual intercourse as justified only by reproduction and not pleasure, a mode of marriage that was presumably unique to destined saints.⁹⁶

Hagiographies described the rebellious behaviour of the reluctant brides and grooms, who refused to comply with expectations of how ideal husbands and wives should behave. Women renounced their wifely role when neglecting their personal appearance. In the Metaphrastic version of the *Life of Matrona*, composed in the tenth or eleventh century, once the young woman was married, she did not bath, wear make up or wanted to have intercourse with her husband.⁹⁷ Psellos, writing in the late eleventh century, drew upon the same hagiographic *topos* when describing his mother’s

⁹² *V. Danie. Sketis*, 166 (Eng. trans. 167).

⁹³ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 200).

⁹⁴ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 173 (Eng. trans. 6): ‘ταύτη τοι καὶ πατήρ θυγατρὸς μιᾶς τῆ συζύγῃ συνευασθεὶς ὁ τῆς σωφροσύνης πρὸς ἀποδείκνυται, μητρικῆς βουλής καὶ οὐχ ἡδονῆς ἀποκύημα εὐπορήσας τὸ ἔκγονον· Ἀναστασῶ δὲ αὐτὴν διὰ τὴν τῆς τοῦ γένους ἐκπτώσεως ἐπιζομένην προσαγορεύσας ἀνάστασιν καὶ δόξας ἰκανῶς ἔχειν τὴν παιδα τὴν ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ λύπην τῆ τε συνεύγῃ καὶ αὐτῇ τῆ μητρὶ ἐπιλύεσθαι’.

⁹⁵ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 128 (Eng. trans. 129).

⁹⁶ Alwis 2011, 2.

⁹⁷ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 920 (Eng. trans. 2).

appearance.⁹⁸ Men renounced their husbandly role by failing to provide for their families. According to Niketas, writing c.822, Philaretos the Merciful endured a tense relationship with his wife, who he perpetually lied to about the whereabouts of their property (which he had given away).⁹⁹ Exasperated by Philaretos' familial negligence, 'His children began to wail with their mother, saying to each other "It was to our misfortune that we made this man's acquaintance..."'.¹⁰⁰ Saints rejected models of spousal propriety in order to exhibit their sanctity, thus clearly showing us how spouses were expected to behave: wives should dress attractively and have intercourse with their husbands and husbands should financially provide for their wives.

For a married woman, a solid demonstration of her sanctity came when she persuaded her husband to pursue monasticism with her. In his *Spiritual Meadow* (c.600), John Moschos related the tale of a husband who chose the monastic life for both himself and his wife.¹⁰¹ In this example, there is no mention of the wife protesting against being tonsured. While in the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century), Athanasia pleaded with her husband Andronikos: 'In truth, my lord, I wanted to say this to you even while the children were alive, but I was ashamed. But now, after their death, I say to you: if you want to listen to me, you will put me in a monastery, so that I may weep for my sins'.¹⁰² Athanasia makes it clear that she has already postponed the decision to the end of her familial responsibilities for their children, suggesting that, for women, the responsibility to rear children could inhibit the pursuit of monasticism.

⁹⁸ Psellos, *EM*, 90 (Eng. trans. 55).

⁹⁹ *V. Philaretos*, 70 (Eng. trans. 71).

¹⁰⁰ *V. Philaretos*, 72 (Eng. trans. 73): "Ἡρξαντο δὲ τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ θρηνεῖν ἅμα τῇ μητρὶ αὐτῶν λέγοντες πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς ὅτι "Κακῶς ἐγνωρίσαμεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον..."

¹⁰¹ John Mosc. *PS.*, 2969 (Eng. trans. 88).

¹⁰² *V. Danie. Sketis*, 170 (Eng. trans. 171): 'ὄντως, κύριέ μου, καὶ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ τῶν νηπίων ἠθέλησά σοι εἰπεῖν καὶ ἠρυθρίων· ἴδου οὖν καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον αὐτῶν λέγω σοι· ἐὰν ἀκούσης μου, βάλλεις με εἰς μοναστήριον καὶ κλαίω τὰς ἀμαρτίας μου.'

In another example, John of Studios, writing in the tenth century, recorded how Athanasia of Aegina's parents forced her to marry a second time, but she was relieved of her spousal obligations when her husband agreed for them both to enter monasteries.¹⁰³ Athanasia's request to become a nun was insistent and yet it took several years of cohabitation to persuade her husband that they should both pursue monasticism. In Paul of Monemvasia's tenth-century *Spiritual Tales*, a woman on her death bed requested that a priest intercede on her behalf and appeal to her husband to release her to a monastery. When the priest approached the husband, the husband replied that it was improper for his wife [age 21] to leave him to become a nun.¹⁰⁴ Here, the husband made an exception and allowed his wife to enter the convent since it was clear that she would die.¹⁰⁵ In this example the age of the wife is significant in the decision, implying that it may have been more acceptable for older couples to separate and pursue monasticism, while younger couples were expected to fulfil their familial duties.¹⁰⁶

In the Metaphrastic version of the *Life of Matrona of Perge* (tenth or eleventh century) the wife argued with her husband about moving to a monastery.¹⁰⁷ Matrona's husband locked her in her bed-chamber and restricted her access to visitors.¹⁰⁸ But Matrona is presented as persistent in her entreaties and eventually she persuading him to her way of thinking.¹⁰⁹ Men, as heads of the households, were perfectly qualified to choose the monastic life for themselves and their spouses. By contrast, women required

¹⁰³ *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 144).

¹⁰⁴ Paul of Monem., *ST.*, 95 (Eng. trans. 110).

¹⁰⁵ Paul of Monem., *ST.*, 93 (Eng. trans. 108).

¹⁰⁶ Rotman and Todd 2009, 149.

¹⁰⁷ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 921 (Eng. trans. 4).

¹⁰⁸ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 921 (Eng. trans. 4).

¹⁰⁹ Syme. *Meta. V. Matr. B*, 921 (Eng. trans. 4).

the approval of their husbands, and this persuasion could take time, commitment and dedication. In the above example recorded by Bishop Paul of Monemvasia, the wife asked a priest to intercede on her behalf, implying that he, as a man and as a priest, was better able to persuade her husband than she was. In these examples, the construction of female sanctity is empowered precisely by their determination to overcome patriarchal domination. Their perseverance and commitment to asceticism could be cited in justification of their sanctity.

Many of the authors had the husbands and wives of their saints conveniently die young, enabling them to remain obedient to their parents' wishes, while subsequently freeing them to devote their lives to God.¹¹⁰ John the Almsgiver's (*vita* composed c.641) children and wife died in the flower of their age.¹¹¹ John of Studios wrote (c.916) that Athanasia of Aegina was married for just 16 days before her husband was killed at war.¹¹² Her second husband died soon after marriage too.¹¹³ The frequency of the *topos* of premature widowhood alerts modern readers to the common occurrence of spousal death, which created the opportunity to pursue monasticism, or to remarry, or to remain a widow/er. Gregory the Cellarer, writing in the eleventh century, recorded the instance of a woman who attempted to poison her husband. After realising that she had failed to kill him, she confessed her sins at the local monastery and was tonsured.¹¹⁴ This is a rare insight into the available alternatives for ending unhappy marriages, of which admission to a monastery must have been an option (monasteries sometimes served as an equivalent to a modern day prison), even though it is rarely documented in

¹¹⁰ Kazhdan 1990, 132.

¹¹¹ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 200).

¹¹² *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 143).

¹¹³ *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 144).

¹¹⁴ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 551 (Eng. trans. 214).

hagiographies, as saints always ended their marriages as an expression of their devotion to God.

Sources indicate that parenthood was an aspiration for most men and women of lay status throughout the Byzantine period. Motherhood was implicitly connected to female models of adulthood. Even in instances when authors describe a woman's religiosity, they could draw upon pregnancy metaphors. For example, in the *vita* of Irene of Chrysobalanton (c.980) the Empress Theodora (c.815-867) is said to be 'pregnant' (ὠδίνησεν) with piety and the fear of God.¹¹⁵ The association of adult femininity and reproduction was inescapable, even in unrelated thematic contexts. Ignatios the Deacon, writing c.830, revealed how children were valued by parents for their ability to continue the family line, as an heir to their possessions and as a support in their old age.¹¹⁶ Theodosios the Monk, writing c.1203, tells us that when a man's wife was barren this made his life not worth living.¹¹⁷ Having children was clearly an important aspiration for many Byzantines. The tragically premature deaths of children or unexplained sterility – all too common occurrences within *vitae* – may reflect, first, a reality in which parenthood was fraught with misfortune, and second, the privilege of parents who raised healthy offspring.

Sources do, however, distinguish between a mother's and a father's affection for their children. Gregory the Cleric, writing c.894, attributed an especially deep care from mothers, as opposed to fathers, when he wrote: 'Therefore the Devil... since he knew that parents, and especially the mother, are compelled by the laws of nature to love their

¹¹⁵ *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 2 (Eng. trans. 3).

¹¹⁶ *V. Georg. Amast.*, 7 (Eng. trans. 2).

¹¹⁷ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 96 (Eng. trans. 97).

children...¹¹⁸ He asserted that Theodora of Thessalonike found it unbearable to live as a nun, watching her child grow up without a mother's comfort. According to Gregory, she exclaimed: 'I cannot endure to see the daughter born of my womb clothed in a cheap and tattered garment and subsiding on so little food'.¹¹⁹ Upon the reunion of David of Lesbos with his mother, his *vita* (c.863-50) reveals that she 'was nearly ready to die from the overwhelming joy, for she fainted and fell to the ground as though dead'.¹²⁰ In the *Life of Saint Nikon* (eleventh century), when an ill boy was healed, he stood up and ran to his mother.¹²¹ Gregory the Cellarer (c.1053) tells us that when Lazaros of Mount Galesion was presented to his mother after many years of separation, she showered him with affection.¹²² As outlined in chapter four, from at the ninth century onwards, a specific emphasis is placed on the relationship between mothers and their children.¹²³

Pictorial sources emphasise close contact between mothers and their children too. The ninth-century *Khludov Psalter* depicts a woman holding her child's hand and leading him through a crowd (Figure 4.12).¹²⁴ A similar topic is presented in the eleventh-century *Kynegetika*, where women, again, carry children from the burning houses. This image is particularly poignant as the women and children are contrasted

¹¹⁸ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 15 (Eng. trans. 185): 'κάτοχον οὖσαν· εἰδὼς δὲ ὅτι καὶ φύσεως ὄροις ἀναγκάζονται γονεῖς φιλεῖν τὰ τέκνα καὶ μάλιστα ἢ ὠδίνασα'.

¹¹⁹ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 15 (Eng. trans. 185): '<<μῆτερ κυρία μου,>> λέγουσα <<σοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς μόνης ποιουμένης τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν, οὐ φέρω τὴν ἐμὴν Θεοπίστην εὐτελεῖ καὶ διερωγῶτι ῥακίῳ περικαλυπτομένην ὄραν καὶ βραχυτάτῃ κεχρημένην τροφῇ. κέλευσον οὖν ἑτέρῳ μοναστηρίῳ ταύτην δοθῆναι, ἐπεὶ τὴν λύπην κατέχειν οὐ δύναμαι· μῆτηρ γάρ οὖσα καὶ μητρὸς φέρω σπλάγγνα.'

¹²⁰ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 218 (Eng. trans. 160): 'τοῦτον δὲ θεασαμένη μικροῦ δεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης χαρᾶς θνήσκειν ἐμελλε, καὶ γὰρ ὀλιγοψύχησεν ἐν τῷ δαπέδῳ, <νεκρῶ> οὐδὲν διεννοοῦσα, πεσοῦσα. ὁ δὲ χεῖρα ταύτῃ ὀρέξασε ἀνέστησε νεκρῶν προσειπῶν καὶ νίσιπρεπῶς κατασπασάμενος.'

¹²¹ *V. Nikon*, 166 (Eng. trans. 167).

¹²² *V. Laz. Gal.*, 519 (Eng. trans. 116).

¹²³ Hill 1997, 83.

¹²⁴ *Khludov Psalter*, MS. D.129, fol. 108r (Moscow, State Historical Museum, 9th century). See: Corrigan 1992.

against the men, who carry pieces of furniture (Figure 4.13).¹²⁵ In the same manuscript, the artist compared a foal bewailing its mother to a child bewailing its mother, reiterating the concept of a particularly strong bond between mothers and children (Figure 4.14).¹²⁶ All of these images portray close physical contact between the mothers and children, while the men are not in direct contact with the children.

Literary descriptions of parents' grief upon the death of a child expose the Byzantines' gendered expectations of parents too. In the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century), it is clear that the mother was the primary caregiver: 'One day, Lady Athanasia came early in the morning from her charity work of bathing and found her two children moaning. She got up and took them to her breast...'¹²⁷ As the children are shown beyond ages of weaning, this excerpt should be taken to mean that she cuddled them. The children reputedly died that day and when the father returned from work, he saw a great crowd of people in his house: 'Worried, he starting running and found almost the whole city in his house and the children dead...'¹²⁸ The man justified the loss of his children through his faith but the mother, who was constructed as the primary caregiver, reacted more dramatically and tried to strangle herself.¹²⁹ It is tempting to read the mother's reaction to the death of her children as symbolic of her greater attachment to the children. But these anecdotes cannot be used to expose male and female relationships with their children as they play into the Byzantines' perceptions of

¹²⁵ Kynegetika, Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 42v (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004.

¹²⁶ Kynegetika Marc. Gr. Z 479, fol. 46r (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004.

¹²⁷ V. V. *Danie. Sketis*, 166 (Eng. trans. 167): 'έν μιᾷ οὖν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐλθοῦσα ἡ κυρία Αἰθανασία ἀπὸ τοῦ λούσματος τῆς φιλοπονίας ὄρθρου εὐρίσκει τὰ δύο αὐτῆς τέκνα στενάζοντα, καὶ ἀνελθοῦσα ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης ἔθηκεν αὐτά ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος αὐτῆς.'

¹²⁸ V. *Danie. Sketis*, 168 (Eng. trans. 169): 'ὁ δὲ παραχθεις ἔδραμε καὶ εὐρίσκει σχεδὸν πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ παιδία ἀποθανόντα.'

¹²⁹ V. *Danie. Sketis*, 168 (Eng. trans. 169); Papaconstantinou 2009(b), 9.

gendered expressions of grief: the woman is constructed as emotional and impulsive, while the man is constructed as reserved, drawing upon his faith.¹³⁰

But from the ninth century onwards, female expressions of grief were redefined. Gregory the Cleric, writing c.894, recorded a husband and wife who were subjected to the tragic death of their child: the tragedy overwhelmed the mother (μήτηρ)¹³¹ But, Gregory praised the mother: ‘unlike most women, she was not swept away by the tragic event, her reason giving way to her suffering. Rather she used reason to withstand her suffering, and became a support for her husband in his despondency...’.¹³² In this example, the mother was able to invert the normative attributes of her gender, overcome her emotion, and support her husband through his grief. While it is arguable that these passages represent a shift in gendered expectations of parents, it is more likely that our author inverts standard gendered conventions of emotional women to highlight the religiosity of the mother.

In the *Life of Mary the Younger* (c.1025) the author wrote that the saint’s child died, aged five years old, but the mother did not tear out her hair, nor did she disfigure her cheeks with her hands.¹³³ Hagiographers, drawing upon the ideals of their time, marked the women of their narratives out as exceptional when showing them overcoming the grief for the death of their child. Anthony Kaldellis and Martha Vinson noted that from the ninth century onwards, one can notice the rise of the ‘pious housewife’, while Catia Galatariotou and Alexander Kazhdan point out the importance

¹³⁰ Barber 1997, 190.

¹³¹ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 169).

¹³² *V. Theod. Thess.*, 4 (Eng. trans. 169): ‘ἐπειδὴ μήτηρ, οὐχ ὡς αἱ πολλαὶ δὲ παρεσύρη τῷ πάθει, ἀλλὰ τὸν λογισμὸν ἀντιστήσασα, καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρός ὀδύνης παραιψυχὴ γίνεται, τοιαῦτα πρὸς αὐτὸν διεξιούσα’.

¹³³ Gero. *V. Melaniae Iunioris*, 694 (Eng. trans. 258).

of mothers as rhetorical constructs in Byzantine narratives.¹³⁴ This means that in the context of childhood mortality, mothers resisted the conventional vices of self-pity, but drew upon their faith in the face of their grief and adversity. Domestic women, although fulfilling lay trajectories and familial roles, were able to renounce the normative attributes of their gender as an expression of their faith. Given that hagiographers started to promote religious virtues in domestic roles, including motherhood, it could be suggested that the importance of the relationship between mother and child had been elevated by the ninth century.

The Byzantines perceived biological parents to be irreplaceable, often depicting guardians and carers as malevolent. In John Moschos' *Spiritual Meadow* (c.600), a widowed woman perceived herself to be more attractive to prospective suitors if she did not have any offspring from a previous relationship.¹³⁵ In Psellos' *Chronographia* (eleventh century), Romanos failed to protect the interests of his stepsons and Michael reputedly distrusted Diogenes.¹³⁶ Stepmothers, as well as stepfathers, were potentially malicious too: in the *Spiritually Beneficial and Strengthening Tales of Anastasios* (seventh century) a stepmother accused her 18-year-old stepson of squandering his father's wealth. The father summoned the son in order to establish that, in fact, the son was dutifully following his father's orders to organise provisions for the hosting of guests.¹³⁷ In the literature at least, the care provided by biological parents was deemed to be irreplaceable.

¹³⁴ Kaldellis 2006, 35; Vinson 2004, 115; Galatariotou 1984, 81; Kazhdan 1998, 11.

¹³⁵ John Mosc. *PS.*, 2930 (Eng. trans. 58).

¹³⁶ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 165 (Eng. trans. 363).

¹³⁷ Anast. Sin. T4, 131v (Eng. trans. 110).

It is surprising that modern literature tends to overlook the continuation of the parent and child relationship beyond childhood; Byzantine sources track the development of this relationship to the stage of adult offspring and elderly parents. This adult role to care for elderly parents warrants specific analysis as a Life Course responsibility. In the *Life of George of Choziba* (c.631), the saint's elder brother, Herakleides, entered monasticism while his parents were still living.¹³⁸ Anthony, the author, implied that it was unusual for the eldest son to pursue monasticism while his parents were still alive, suggesting that responsibility to parents fell, first and foremost, on the eldest surviving son.

In another example, Bishop Leontios of Neapolis, writing c.642-649, asserted that Symeon and John were accompanied on their journey by their aged parents.¹³⁹ Leontios tells us that Symeon did not have a father and his mother was about 80 years old and hinted that Symeon's entrance into the monastic community would leave his aged mother without family, and without the comfort and protection of her only son.¹⁴⁰ In the same *vita*, John was concerned about who would feed his parents in their old age and who would console them in his absence.¹⁴¹ Significantly, both Symeon and John were the eldest surviving sons in their families, leaving no one behind to care for their parents. Both youths were conscious that they were rejecting one of the normative responsibilities of their life-stage: to protect and comfort their aged parents, as well as provide them with a source of joy.

¹³⁸ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 97 (Eng. trans. 71).

¹³⁹ It was noted in the introduction that the infirmity of the aged parents is clearly contrasted against the youth of their sons in this passage.

¹⁴⁰ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 125 (Eng. trans. 135).

¹⁴¹ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 126 (Eng. trans. 136).

But the miracle stories in hagiographies do provide us with an insight into the (presumably) normative role of sons and daughters caring for their parents. In the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), a priest approached the saint appealing for intervention on behalf of his bed-ridden mother. When Saint Nikon was able to miraculously cure the mother of her ailments, both the son and mother were delighted.¹⁴² The son is presented as the mother's closest relative with a vested interest in her welfare: he brought his mother to the saint for healing, suggesting that he was the mother's primary caregiver. Kazhdan observed that Symeon Metaphrates emphasised the relationship between mothers and their sons.¹⁴³ These hagiographies reveal the responsibility of the son to his mother and the dependence of the mother on her son.¹⁴⁴

There is clearly something significant about being the first, or only surviving, male son; many of the saints are the first male offspring. Sabas, Nicholas of Sion, Theodore of Sykeon, George of Amastris, Euthymios the Younger, Niketas of Medikion and Michael the Synkellos are all stated to be the eldest male child.¹⁴⁵ Females are often not mentioned in the context of their siblings. It is not stated whether Mary the Younger, Theodora of Thessalonike or Theoktiste of Lesbos had siblings or not.¹⁴⁶ Anthousa daughter of Constantine V was one of six children, but none of this is mentioned in her entry in the *Synaxarion*.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that sons, particularly eldest surviving sons, held a special significance. It is arguable that this special significance is linked to the duty of sons to care for their parents.

¹⁴² *V. Nikon*, 166 (Eng. trans. 167).

¹⁴³ Kazhdan 1998, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Kazhdan 1998, 12.

¹⁴⁵ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 24 (Eng. trans. 25); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 87 (Eng. trans. 95); *V. Theod. Syk.*, 105 (Eng. trans. 22); *V. Georg. Amast.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 3); *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 171 (Eng. trans. 2); Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 3); *V. Mich. Synk.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).

¹⁴⁶ *SynaxCP*, 829 (Eng. trans. 5): Theodosia of Constantinople was an only child.

¹⁴⁷ Constan 1998b, 21.

There is a notable difference in the how the relationship between daughters and their elderly parents is presented, as compared with sons and their elderly parents. Psellos, when writing the enkomion of his mother (eleventh century) recorded how Theodote, his mother, supported her aged parents when providing them with comfort while they were ill or grieving.¹⁴⁸ Psellos' writings portray how daughters' responsibilities to their parents were not usually as a financial provider but, based domestically, as a comforter and carer.

In contrast, elderly parents seem to have expected their grown up sons to provide for them financially. In Skylitzes' *Histories* (c.1096), Basil I the Makedonian (reigned 867-886) was prevented from pursuing his intended career due to his responsibility to his mother. In the absence of a father or elder brother, Basil's mother: begged him to care for her in her old age. After she had died, he was free to pursue his ambitions.¹⁴⁹ In narratives focusing on non-monastic subjects, characters are seen to prioritise their responsibilities to their family. When Basil did subsequently move to the city to find a new trade, it was due to his inability to make a living as a farmer, and his consequent inability financially to support for his own family.¹⁵⁰ This reiterates that sons were not only expected to care for their elderly parents, but also to provide for them financially.

Skinner has argued that sons were normatively expected to take responsibility for their parents, comforting them both emotionally and materially.¹⁵¹ There are no records of parents explicitly requesting their son's financial support, but Ignatios the

¹⁴⁸ Psellos, *EM*, 102 (Eng. trans. 66).

¹⁴⁹ Skyl., 119 (Eng. trans. 120).

¹⁵⁰ Skyl., 119 (Eng. trans. 120).

¹⁵¹ Skinner 1997, 398.

Deacon does record the local community's anguish when they did not profit from George of Amastris, telling him:

“The city that has reared you and the church that nurtured you are distressed and complain bitterly since they have failed in their hopes of gaining great profit from you (for the city hoped to become famous for rearing him and to obtain from other cities surpassing glory, and the church, to be well governed and to maintain its customs). Now here you are aloof, pay your debt by staying at home and return payment to those who reared you, settling things justly.”¹⁵²

Here George is said to be indebted to those who raised him and that there is an expectation that he should repay his obligation.

The overwhelming proportions of examples cited above draw upon relationships between mothers and sons and so one must ask whether there was a special significance attached to this relationship.¹⁵³ Of course, the Bible itself promotes the relationship between mother and son in the motif of the Virgin and Christ-child. In Byzantine texts, the bond between mother and son is represented as close and durable. Skylitzes' narrative, it is explicitly mentioned that the father had died, and that the maintenance of the house and provision for his mother and brothers became the eldest son's responsibility.¹⁵⁴ The greater likelihood of female as opposed to male widowhood, due to possible differences in age at first marriage, could explain why aged mothers take a predominant role in hagiographies. The emphasis on sons, as opposed to daughters, may only be accountable in terms of gender expectations: male familial allegiance was primarily to his natal family, whereas female familial allegiance was primarily to her

¹⁵² V. Georg. Amast., 30 (Eng. trans. 8): ‘οἱ παραγεγάμενοι, τοιαῦτά τινα πρὸς αὐτὸν διεξήεσαν· <<ἢ θρεψαμένη σε πόλις καὶ τιθηνὸς ἐκκλησία πολλὰς παρὰ σοῦ τὰς ἐπικαρπίας ἐλπίζουσαι, ἢ μὲν ἀντὶ θρεπτηρίων περιβόητος γενέσθαι, καὶ κλέος ἀξιαίρετον [lege: ἐξαίρετον] τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπενέγκασθαι πόλεων, ἢ δὲ καλῶς κυβερνήσεσθαι καὶ μηδὲν τῶν αὐτῆς παρεξοσμένων [lege: παρεξοσμένων] νομίμων κατόψεσθαι, τῶν ἐλπίδων διαμαρτοῦσαι, ἀνιῶνται καὶ σχετλιάζουσι. νῦν οὖν διαναστάς, τῇ ἐπιδημίᾳ καὶ τῇ ὀφειλῇ ἐκπλήρωσον, καὶ τὰ τροφεῖα ταῖς θρεψαμέναις ἀπόδος δίκαια διαπραττόμενος.’

¹⁵³ Kaldellis 2006, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Skyl., 119 (Eng. trans. 120).

marital family. The responsibility of sons, specifically, to their natal parents in old age could explain parents' delight and rejoice expressed at the birth of their first son, as we've seen in earlier chapters.

Conclusions

Our sources portray huge variation in the Byzantines' conception of adulthood, taking into account a whole host of factors including, family or social role, mental development, physical development and, particularly in legal codes and hagiographies, numerical age. We have seen how, for women, adulthood, or at least a new level of maturity, might start with motherhood regardless of numerical age.¹⁵⁵ In other instances, authors refer to mature men as youths or childlike in order to project their immaturity and disapproval of their behaviour.¹⁵⁶ This chapter has highlighted some clear differences in the construction of adulthood for men as opposed to women: for women, maturity was defined by the production of offspring while, for men (particularly eldest sons), responsibility for the family would have passed to them in the event of their father's death. The sources present how the attainment of adulthood was, in most cases, subject to circumstance.

The responsibilities attached to adulthood for men and women evolved over the Late Antique to Middle Byzantine period. The importance attached to adults as parents and carers can be traced through transitions in hagiographic *topoi*. In the *Life of Euthymios of Thessalonike* (tenth century), the pursuit of monasticism by this male saint

¹⁵⁵ Psellos, *EM*, 93 (Eng. trans. 58).

¹⁵⁶ *V. Taras.*, 129 (Eng. trans. 191).

was seen as an outright rejection of love for one's parents.¹⁵⁷ For women, we saw in the previous chapter how the pursuit of monasticism impacted upon the perpetuation of the family line. At the same time, one can notice the rise of married men and women valued for their saint-like behaviour in domestic settings. The examples of grieving mothers who were able to overthrow the limitations of their gender and react to the death of their children with moderation and self-control exemplify my point. Normally adults were central to family life, caring, protecting and providing for older and younger generations alike.

At the outset of this chapter, I observed that adulthood is constructed as the normative life-stage in the evidence. Unless it is stated otherwise, the audience was expected to assume that the subject is an adult. Adulthood is the numerical and chronological mid point between the beginning and end of life, but this is not unique to the Byzantine period or culture. But, owing to the fact that adulthood was the longest life-stage in duration, and not broken into semi-stages (unlike contemporary constructions of the Life Course, which includes 'middle age'), adults would have probably constituted the largest proportion of the Byzantine population. The central position of adulthood in the Life Course and the high proportion of adults in Byzantine demography were two factors which supplied a foundation, upon which the Byzantines constructed a catalogue of 'normative' attributes. Authors wrote that adults were usually mentally balanced, moderate in their behaviour and able to exert self-control (in contrast to alternative Life Course stages). The Byzantines asserted that, for the first time, characteristics became fixed at maturity and no longer subject to change. Adult men were physically strong and capable, while adult women were identified by their ability

¹⁵⁷ V. *Euthyme le Jeune*, 176 (Eng. trans. 10).

to bear children. Adults, both male and female, were the focal point of family units, being expected to care for both their children and elderly dependants.

CHAPTER FIVE: OLD AGE TO DEATH

Byzantine sources are somewhat paradoxical about the mental attributes of the elderly: while some sources exhibit reverence for the experience and wisdom of old people, other sources portray the elderly as mentally imbalanced and forgetful. For example, in his sixth-century *Secret History*, Prokopios wrote that Justin succeeded to the throne, even though he already had ‘one foot in the grave’ (τυμβογέρων μὲν γεγονὼς ἤδη)...¹ He described how Justin was in his ‘dotage’ (ἡλιθιάζων) and ‘quite senile’ (κομιδῆ ἔσχατογέρων γενόμενος) and how he became the laughing stock of his subjects and they viewed him as incapable.² In his derogatory account of the Emperor’s character, Prokopios portrayed Justin as an incapable ruler, specifically during old age.

Authors could use old age as a basis for criticising the rulers they disliked. In another example Theophanes, in his ninth-century *Chronographia*, drew upon the physiological association of old age (grey hair) when describing an elderly emperor behaving illogically. In 773/4 AD, when Emperor Constantine V the Isaurian (reigned 741–775) was roughly 55 to 56 years old, Telegrios, the Lord of Bulgaria, tricked the Emperor into revealing who his allies were, enabling Telegrios to murder them.³ When Constantine realised his mistake, Theophanes described how the Emperor plucked his grey hairs, a rhetorical device used to highlight his advanced age.⁴ Old age can be seen to have a negative impact upon the decision making abilities of the ruler. In sharp contrast, Constantine V’s grandson, Emperor Constantine VI (reigned 780-797), who was also threatened by Bulgaria when he was aged 24 or 25, sent the elderly Lord

¹ Prok., *SH*, 70 (Eng. trans. 71). Dewing translated ‘τυμβογέρων μὲν γεγονὼς ἤδη’ as ‘an old man tottering to his grave’, but, for greater accuracy, I translate this as: ‘an old man already approaching the grave’ or, as common parlance would have it, ‘with one foot in the grave’.

² Prok., *SH*, 118 (Eng. trans. 119).

³ Theoph., 448 (Eng. trans. 618).

⁴ Theoph., 448 (Eng. trans. 618).

Kardamos some horse excrement as a sign that he was not intimidated by the old man.⁵ As leaders, old men were not perceived to be threatening or adept at their job, but on the contrary, cowardly and inept.⁶

These negative perceptions of the elderly in imperial positions continue to appear in the later sources. Psellos, writing in the late eleventh century, considered the Emperor Constantine VIII (reigned 1025-1028) to be ‘quick tempered’ (ὀξύρροπος) in his old age (γηραιός).⁷ Indeed, Psellos shows us that these traits were not restricted to men: ruling women could be criticised in their old age too. He asserts that as the Empress Eudokia (regent 1067-1071) ‘grew older’ (τῆς γνώμης ἐτήρησεν) she lost some of her old precision.⁸ References to age could be employed as tools by the authors, either to criticise or to praise their characters’ abilities to conduct their duties. Old age – when mentioned in connection with imperial leadership – was repeatedly used in histories to criticise an individual.

The case of Michael VI (reigned 1056-1057) exemplifies my point: his old age was linked to his inadequate ruling powers. When discussing his policies and actions, Skylitzes (writing c.1096) asserted that because of his ‘great age’ (κάρτα γέρον), he revived ancient customs which had become obsolete and were of no benefit to the Empire.⁹ Michael was presented as out of touch with contemporary affairs. According to Skylitzes, Michael lost support from his subjects as they switched allegiance to the usurper, Isaac Komnenos. Isaac apparently advised the people that Michael had only the name of emperor and was ruled by eunuchs: he was ‘a putrid, outdated, ancient old

⁵ Theoph., 470 (Eng. trans. 646).

⁶ Theoph., 470 (Eng. trans. 646).

⁷ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 25 (Eng. trans. 53).

⁸ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 154 (Eng. trans. 346).

⁹ Skyl., 482 (Eng. trans. 450).

thing' (τᾶλλα δέ ἄνδρα σαπρὸν καὶ κρονόληρον καὶ ἀχρεῖον).¹⁰ Skyltizes presented Michael as powerless against the court eunuchs, retrospective in devising policies and generally 'over the hill' (παρηκμακότα).¹¹ In this imperial arena, Skylitzes contended that Michael was of an age (the precise numerical value of which we are uncertain) which it is better to be 'retired' (τὴν ἀπραγμοσύνην).¹² This is one of the few Byzantine references to a retirement age, but it seems clear from these remarks that in the secular sphere, retirement was a consideration for the wealthy elderly.¹³

Anna Komnene (writing c.1135) tended to share her predecessors' negative views of old age and imperial leadership; but this depended on whose old age she was discussing. She wrote that Nikephoros III Botaneiates (reigned 1078-1081) had been brave in his youth, but he became 'chilled by old age' (ὕπο τοῦ γήρωσ ὑπόψυχός τε ὦν καὶ μᾶλλον περιδεής).¹⁴ My point here is that Anna specifically stated that, however brave Nikephoros had been in his youth, he was not capable as an elderly man: in this instance, Anna indicates that ruling ability deteriorated with age. Throughout this period, historians tended to take a negative stance on the abilities of the elderly in the secular sphere.

Sources present an entirely different perspective of elderly men and women in positions of religious leadership. One can often sense an implicit connection between the religious titles and advanced age: for instance, the titles of 'monk' (γέρων) and 'elder' (πρεσβύτες) have literary connotations with advanced age.¹⁵ Cyril of Scythopolis (writing c.554-558) boasted that he based his writings on the memories of

¹⁰ Skyl., 494 (Eng. trans. 459).

¹¹ Skyl., 480 (Eng. trans. 448).

¹² Skyl., 480 (Eng. trans. 448).

¹³ For Ancient Greece and Rome, see: Finley 1989, 15.

¹⁴ An. Komn., Vol. I: 90 (Eng. trans. 94); 66 (Eng. trans. 75).

¹⁵ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 110 (Eng. trans. 119); *V. Danie. Sketis*, 144 (Eng. trans. 145).

the most aged saints in this desert.¹⁶ In Cyril's description, the elderly saintly men were valued for their memories, spanning several generations.

Cyril of Scythopolis valued the elderly for their wisdom. He described how Gabrielios, an elderly solitary, could perform miracles specifically in his old age and wrote that he was 'intelligent' (εὐφρηής) and 'studious' (φιλομαθής).¹⁷ Sophronios wrote in the *Life of Mary of Egypt* (seventh century) that Zosimas, though an old man, was sharp in mind and wise.¹⁸ There is one occasion in the *Life of Ioannikios* (c.846) where the author attributed old men with delusion but this was recognised to be the result of demonic influence.¹⁹ It was not conventional for hagiographers to record the mental shortcomings of old age. In this religious context, the elderly were highly regarded for their knowledge, experience and memories, spanning several generations.

But these religious constructions sometimes traversed the boundaries between hagiographic and historical genres, particularly from the eleventh century onwards. For example, Psellos (writing in the late eleventh century) and Anna Komnene (writing in the mid twelfth century) occasionally drew upon the hagiographic associations of old age and wisdom in their history writings. Psellos wrote about Emperor Michael VII (reigned 1071-1078) that even as a young man, he '...resembles an old man, with something about him of the thinker'.²⁰ Capitalising on the implicit connection between wisdom, experience and old age (usually promoted in hagiographies), Psellos depicted Michael with a mature mental outlook for his age. Anna Komnene employed the same *topos* in order to describe her grandmother, Anna Dalassena (lived 1025-1102): 'In her

¹⁶ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 6 (Eng. trans. 2); 29 (Eng. trans. 25).

¹⁷ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 56 (Eng. trans. 53).

¹⁸ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3705 (Eng. trans. 77).

¹⁹ *V. Ioannicii*, 399 (Eng. trans. 340).

²⁰ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 175 (Eng. trans. 370): 'Το δὲ εἶδος αὐτῷ πρεσβυτικὸν οἶον καὶ σωφρονιστῆ προσῆκον ἢ παιδαγωγῶ ὅμοιον.'

earlier days too, when she was still counted among the younger women, it was quite wonderful how she seemed to have “an old head on young shoulders”.²¹ The technique of describing a child to have some of the attributes of the elderly, known as *puer senex* (Latin) or *παῖς γέρον* (Greek), was long established in hagiographic genres.²² Here in histories, Psellos and Anna applied the *topos* to youthful adults too, in order to emphasise their advanced maturity for their actual age. Later historians, writing from the eleventh century onwards, started to imitate hagiographic conventions when valuing the attributes of old age.

Anna Komnene further demonstrates my point when defending her elderly grandmother’s position of imperial authority. As an old woman, Anna described how, in old age, Anna Dalassena enjoyed balanced judgement and a broad knowledge of affairs.²³ When Alexios I Komnenos (reigned 1081-1118) came to the throne, he would have been aged 24 or 25. Justifying Anna Dalassena’s prominent role in her son’s government, Anna contrasted the attributes of her elderly grandmother – who would have been aged 55 or 56 to 76 or 77 during Alexios’ reign, to those of the young, writing that she would act in a more expedient way.²⁴ Normally, one would expect Anna Dalassena’s leading imperial role (alongside her son) to be criticised, on the basis of her gender. The fact that Anna chose to emphasise her grandmother’s age and experience, in order to justify the woman’s power and capabilities in the imperial arena, indicates that age and experience could be valued by Anna’s contemporary audience, even in the secular sphere if the author favoured the man or woman.

²¹ An. Komn., Vol. I: 124 (Eng. trans. 119): ‘Ὁ δὲ κατόπιν χρόνος καὶ ὁπότεν ἐκείνη ταῖς νεωτέ ραις συνεξητάζετο γυναιξί, θαῦμα ἀντικρυσ ἦν πολίων ἐν νεαρᾷ ἡλικίᾳ ἐπιδεικνυμένη φρόνημα.’

²² Talbot 1984, 273.

²³ An. Komn., Vol. I: 124 (Eng. trans. 119).

²⁴ An. Komn., Vol. I: 124 (Eng. trans. 119).

In the above anecdote, Anna's literary references to Homer place the reader under the illusion that the Byzantines had long recognised the wisdom of the elderly. Yet elderly men and women with imperial power previous to Anna Dalassena were commonly verbally condemned. Anna was clearly not an impartial observer to her grandmother's ruling abilities. Nevertheless, Anna's defence of her grandmother's imperial position, which highlights the positive attributes associated with advanced age (usually described in connection with saints), demonstrates a new respect for the ruling abilities of the elderly, which are not apparent in earlier discourses. This is just one of the many examples that show how the positive attributes accredited to the elderly in hagiographies, through a process of diffusion, subsequently appear in other genres. This chapter will track an emerging respect for elderly people and their age-associated attributes across different contexts.

5.1 Defining Old Age

Turning to the numerical age data, after a dip in the occurrences of ages recorded in hagiographies (between the ages of about 30 and 49), statements of numerical age reoccurring again more frequently in the early fifties (Tables 9 and 10). For instance, Cyril of Scythopolis (writing c.554-558) started to refer to Sabas as a 'revered old man' (σεβάσμιος οὔτος πρεσβύτης) when he was 54; while Euthymios the Great consecrated churches aged 52 and attended canonical councils aged 54; Abba Kyriakos was ordained a priest aged 53; and Abramios visited the Holy Land aged 56.²⁵

²⁵ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 110 (Eng. trans. 119); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 26 (Eng. trans. 22); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 226 (Eng. trans. 249); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 247 (Eng. trans. 277).

Aged 56, David of Lesbos (whose *vita* was composed c.863-865) celebrated the tenth anniversary of the establishment of his monastery, while his brother Symeon was exiled to Lesbos aged 54.²⁶ While one cannot necessarily note a pattern in the type of occurrences taking place in the fifties, one can deduce that ages in the fifties, as opposed to the thirties or forties, were deemed to be noteworthy by authors. This indicates that the Byzantines considered old age to start in a person's fifties.²⁷

Indeed, it was not just ages in the fifties that were more frequently cited: authors pay more attention to events occurring during old age too. In the *Life of Abramios* (c.554-558), Cyril of Scythopolis openly acknowledged that he had compressed occurrences during the ages of about 41 to 56.²⁸ In the cases of saints, when the subject died at an old age, authors sometimes overlooked prime adulthood in order to focus on the final life-stage of the subject, reiterating how important old age was to the construction of sanctity. In this chapter, I will consider why hagiographers chose to emphasise old age.

The first observation to be made is that old age was not universally significant: hagiographers frequently cited occurrences during male old age, while female old age is infrequently cited. On the occasions that elderly women were mentioned, it was often in connection with their familial role. For instance, it is noted in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century) that once the young saint had moved to the monastery, Elpidia, his grandmother, was no longer able to care for him and he refused to eat the meals that she brought to him.²⁹ The elderly woman continued to care for people

²⁶ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 218 (Eng. trans. 160); 231 (Eng. trans. 187); Abrahamse and Domingo-Forasté 1998, 144: Dispute this chronology and place his exile in 820. *V. Nikeph.* 152 (Eng. trans. 57).

²⁷ Dennis 2001, 2.

²⁸ *Cyr. Scyth. V. Abraam.*, 247 (Eng. trans. 276).

²⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 26 (Eng. trans. 110).

through her new role as a nun and ‘carefully provided everything necessary for the support of the women under her care; some had renounced the world, others were ill, and she had already created a very fine convent’.³⁰ I will look at the role of grandparents, and grandmothers in particular, later in this chapter. But here I am interested in Elpidia’s gendered attributes of care giving: once she was prevented from fulfilling her familial responsibilities to her grandson, she continued to meet gendered expectations of elderly women when supporting women in her convent.

While elderly women were defined by the fact that they could not bear children, mothers (and indeed, grandmothers) are often referred to in the context of their dependants. For example, in the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, Gregory the Cleric wrote (c.894) that Theopiste became Mother Superior when Theodora was 56 years old.³¹ Significantly, Theodora’s age is mentioned in the context of her daughter’s achievements and not her own. The next age referenced in the narration of Theodora’s *vita* is the age of 68, which is again mentioned in connection with someone else’s life: Theodora was 68 years old when Anna, the Mother Superior died.³² Apparently, Anna died after many years of dependency on Theodora.³³ Gregory described Theodora’s compassionate disposition towards the elderly woman as she ministered to her needs.³⁴ Gregory emphasised events in the lives of the people surrounding Theodora: through her role as a mother and a carer for the Mother Superior, the events of other people’s lives directly had an impact upon Theodora’s Life Course trajectory. Elderly women

³⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 26 (Eng. trans. 110): ‘πᾶσάν τε χρειώδη κατασκευὴν ταῖς παρ’ αὐτῆ τρεφομένας γυναῖξι φροντίσσα ταῖς τε ἀποταξαμέναις καὶ ταῖς πασχούσαις, καὶ μοναστήριον ἤδη κάλλιστον ἀποτελέσασα, ἔφθασεν εἰς τὰς τοῦ τέλους αὐτῆς ἡμέρας.’

³¹ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 32 (Eng. trans. 195).

³² *V. Theod. Thess.*, 33 (Eng. trans. 196).

³³ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 33 (Eng. trans. 196).

³⁴ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 33 (Eng. trans. 196).

seem to have been largely celebrated in connection with their familial role; in religious contexts, the equivalent gendered attributes, such as care giving, were admired.

The overwhelming majority of hagiographers writing in this period attributed their subject with an age at death, showing this to be an important rhetorical device. It has been long established that saints were usually recorded to have lived longer than ‘normal’.³⁵ The Empress Theodora’s age at death is not revealed in her *vita* (c.867-912), but the date of her death suggests that she died aged 52, which was not in keeping with saintly Life Course trajectories.³⁶ This is true of other saints too: Theoktiste of Lesbos (whose *vita* was written c.900) probably died around age 53 and Luke of Steiris (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) probably died around age 56.³⁷ None of these saints’ ages at death were stated within the *vitae*, probably because the author considered the inclusion of an expected or normative longevity to detract from the exceptional life of the saint. The hagiographers’ avoidance of stating ages in the fifties as an age at death identifies this age to be, or at least perceived to be, an unexceptional life expectancy.

In the case of the Empress Theodora, the author was careful to stress that, by dying at age 52, she did not live long into old age (a deviation from standard saintly biographical narrative of the period), instead presenting her as mature beyond her years.³⁸ As a sideline here, one must note that this is the same rhetorical strategy as seen in the writings of Psellos, when describing the Emperor Michael VII (reigned 1071-1078) as mature for his age, and Anna Komnene, when describing Anna Dalassena

³⁵ Talbot 1984, 269.

³⁶ *SynaxCP.*, 614 (Eng. trans. 24).

³⁷ *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 232 (Eng. trans. 112); *V. Luk. Steir.*, 142 (Eng. trans. 143).

³⁸ *V. Theodora imp.*, 270 (Eng. trans. 379).

(lived 1025-1102) as mature for her age, as seen earlier in this chapter.³⁹ Returning to my point here, saints' lives usually followed the entire Life Course of an individual, which often included advanced old age, so that the saint could serve as a role model to people of all ages. In this example, the Empress Theodora was known to have died before attaining old age, so the author attributed her with wisdom beyond her years, apparently so that she continued to fulfil the Byzantine audiences' concepts of sanctity, age and wisdom.

Tables 9 and 10 reveal numerical age statements documented in 42 *vitae* composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries. Out of the 42 *vitae*, there are a 35 numerical age statements for men and 9 for women between the ages of 60 and 120. The numerical age data in the range from 80 to 120 largely constitute statements of age at death. In the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (c.894), Anna, reputedly lived to the advanced age of 120 and this example represents one of the clearest examples of probable age exaggeration.⁴⁰ Talbot cautioned against reading these exceptional ages literally, but instead, interpreted them as an indication of the close association between old age and sanctity.⁴¹ One can assume that surges in the data around the ages of 80 and 100 denote these two markers as particularly prestigious landmarks for those who lived to achieve them. Exaggerated ages at death were just one of the rhetorical devices used by hagiographers to mark their subject out as exceptional.

Significantly, while hagiographers tended to record an age at death, this rhetorical device was not usually employed by historians. In Prokopios' *Secret History* (sixth century), Theophanes' *Chronicle* (ninth century), George the Synkellos'

³⁹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 175 (Eng. trans. 370); An. Komn., Vol. I: 124 (Eng. trans. 119).

⁴⁰ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 33 (Eng. trans. 196).

⁴¹ Talbot 1984, 269.

Chronography (ninth century), Leo the Deacon's *History* (tenth century), Psellos' *Chronographia* (eleventh century), Skylitzes' *Short History* (eleventh century) and Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* (twelfth century), ages at death are almost completely absent from descriptions of characters' deaths. The first exception demonstrates that ages at death were only important in the biographies of saints: George the Synkellos stated that Moses was 120 years old when he died.⁴²

However, there are other exceptions to this link between stating age at death and sanctity: Psellos tells us that Basil II died in his seventy-second year (aged 71).⁴³ Similarly, Skylitzes, who was writing c.1096, recorded that Nikephoros died at a great age.⁴⁴ One might conclude from these two examples that longevity attracted respect across contexts. In other instances, historians might note the occasion of someone dying before the expected longevity: Anna Komnene, writing in the twelfth century, commented when someone died 'prematurely' (καίρῳ), even though she still did not attribute them with an age at death.⁴⁵ Even in the case of her father, Alexios I, the imperial Princess did not record an age at death. In short, in all but a handful of exceptions, numerical age at death was not noted in histories.

Why might numerical ages at death be so prominent in the *vitae* but not in the histories? In hagiographies, numerical age statements may have been used to add authenticity to the *vita*.⁴⁶ This data was inserted by hagiographers, largely to support the description of their subject's advanced age. Many of the numerical age statements presented in hagiographies are quite unrealistic, especially given the high mortality rates

⁴² George Synk., 166 (Eng. trans. 205).

⁴³ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 24 (Eng. trans. 49).

⁴⁴ Skyl., 177 (Eng. trans. 172).

⁴⁵ An. Komn., Vol. III: (Eng. trans. 485).

⁴⁶ Alberici 2008, 208.

in Byzantine society. Therefore, one might deduce that hagiographers attributed a supernatural power to their saints, portraying them as able to defy the span of a 'normal' Life Course. The inclusion of a numerical age at death often verified the saint, showing them as having lived an extraordinarily long, saintly, life span.

Table 9: Elderly Ages Attested for Males in Hagiographies 6th-12th century

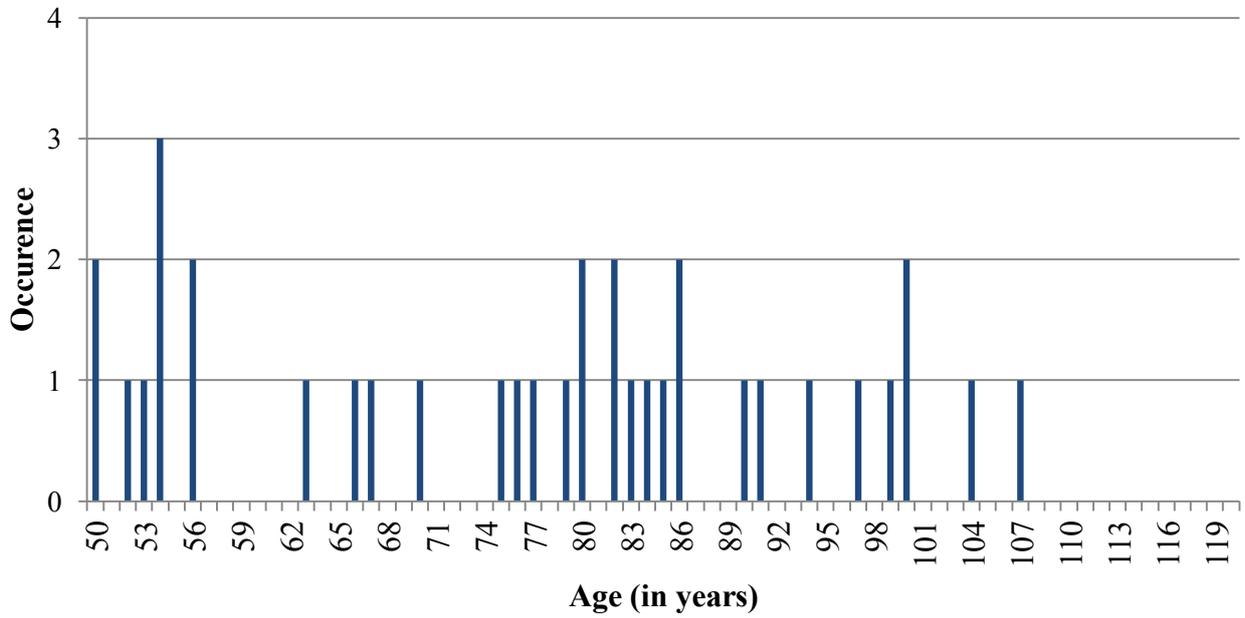
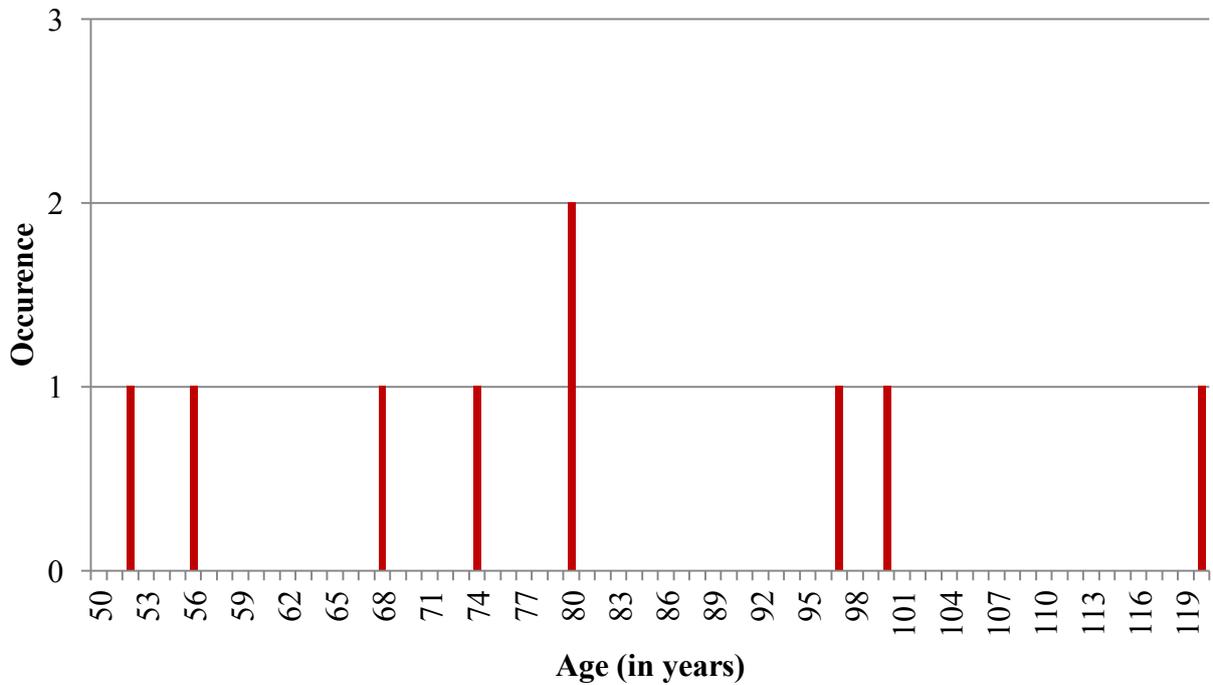


Table 10: Elderly Ages Attested for Females in Hagiographies 6th-12th century



5.2 Physicality and Physiognomy

The Byzantines expected the elderly to become increasingly frail with age. Gregory the Cleric, writing c.894, tells us that by age 74, Theodora of Thessalonike's 'body became weak because of extreme old age...'.⁴⁷ The infirmities of the elderly were so intrinsic to the Byzantine mindset that authors drew upon this *topos* for amusement or to emphasise certain sections of their narratives.⁴⁸ In the *Life of Saint Nikon* (c.1042), the elderly saint reputedly ran from the monastery to greet a young man and 'as a result caused the remaining worshippers to be amazed'.⁴⁹ Here, the physical exertion of the old man is used to highlight the eminence of his arriving guest. In the *Life of Leontios* (c.1203), a monk called Eulogios did not want his elderly superior to travel to Cyprus with him because he thought he was old and weak.⁵⁰ Across this period, hagiographers show their subjects decreasing in physical capabilities, in correlation to their advancing age.

Historians, too, exploited the same motif: in Skylitzes' *Histories* (c.1096), an old man joked that one piece of gold previously bought enough grain to load up two asses, but inflation had reduced the amount of grain to the extent that he – an elderly man – could now carry two pieces of gold's worth of grain.⁵¹ Skylitzes cited the decreasing strength of the aged man in a joke about grain prices during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas (reigned 963-969). To a Byzantine audience then, physical weakness was universally perceived to be inherent in old age.

⁴⁷ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 37 (Eng. trans. 200): 'διὰ τὸ εἰς ἔσχατον γήρας καταπτήσῃ τὴν μεγάλην'

⁴⁸ Elsner 2007, 204.

⁴⁹ *V. Nikon*, 40 (Eng. trans. 41): '(ἦν γὰρ ὁ θεοφόρος γέρον ἐκεῖνος καὶ πρό γε τούτου τῆ διορατικῆ χαρίσματος λαμπρυνόμενος), δραμαίως ἔξεισι τῆς μονῆς, ὥστε καὶ διὰ θαύματος ποιεῖσθαι τοὺς λοιποὺς θιασώτας τὸ ξένον τε καὶ ἀσύνηθες'.

⁵⁰ *Theod. V. Leontios*, 150 (Eng. trans. 151).

⁵¹ *Skyl.*, 278 (Eng. trans. 267).

Some of the hagiographers suggest that their subject's extreme asceticism had exaggerated the natural discomforts of old age. Cyril of Scythopolis tells us in the *Life of Sabas* (c.554-558) that John the Anchorite lost his bodily sight as a result of all his night vigils, abundant tears, and 'extreme old age' (τοῦ βαθυτάτου γήρους).⁵² Similarly, Basil of Thessalonike, who wrote the *Life of Euthymios of Thessalonike* in the tenth century, asserted that Theodore's body was suffering as a result of mortification through asceticism and 'old age and disease' (γήρα καὶ νόσῳ).⁵³ And Gregory the Cellarer, who wrote the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* in the eleventh century, described how the saint was old and his body was worn out by his asceticism so he experienced illnesses more frequently.⁵⁴ The hagiographers provide an insight into their subjects' devotion to God when, in the face of their aged-induced physical adversities, they continued to perform acts of asceticism.

Some of the saints lessened the extent of their ascetic practices on account of their advanced age and reduced physical capabilities. For instance, in the *Life of Euthymios of Thessalonike* (tenth century): 'the excellent disciple and servant sought [Euthymios] out a place for his superior [Theodore] which could provide tranquility for the old man and comfort for his body in the same location, and settled him there, after building a hut for his abode'.⁵⁵ At the end of his life, Theodore was afflicted with terrible diseases and was forced to move again, this time to Thessalonike, where he could enjoy the comfort of a bathhouse.⁵⁶ There are two notable points here: first,

⁵² Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 163 (Eng. trans. 173).

⁵³ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 186 (Eng. trans. 9).

⁵⁴ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 568 (Eng. trans. 302).

⁵⁵ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 187 (Eng. trans. 9): 'τόπον ἐπιζητήσας τῷ καθηγουμένῳ ὁ ἄριστος φοιτητῆς καὶ διάκονος, τὴν τε ἡσυχίαν τῷ γέροντι καὶ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν τῷ σώματι κατὰ ταῦτόν ἐμπαρέχειν δυνάμενον, ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικίσει τοῦτον, κελλίον αὐτῷ πρὸς κατοικίαν πηξάμενος.'

⁵⁶ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 187 (Eng. trans. 9): 'ἡ ἐκ τῶν βαλανείων παρηγορία χρῆσόμενος'.

Euthymios was valued in his role as a caregiver for his elderly superior. Towards the end of the chapter I will analyse the relationships between young and old: for now, it suffices to say that Euthymios' act of kindness positively reflects both on Theodore, whom he admired, and himself, when fulfilling obligations to care for the elderly. Second, it can be seen how it was acceptable for saints to lessen the extent of their practices in alignment with their aging physique.

The same point can be drawn from the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053): Gregory the Cellarer described how in the last three years of the saint's life he lost his teeth and became increasingly ill.⁵⁷ As a result of his infirmities, Lazaros lessened the intensity of his ascetic practices and started to eat cooked food and, at night, drink hot liquids which were sweetened with fruit juice or honey.⁵⁸ While the Byzantines did not permit retirement from religious vocations, the texts show us how saints often adapted their ascetic regimes in line with their age and physical abilities. This trend may be reflective of a reality in which the elderly were expected to lessen the extent of their physical chores with advancing age.

As usual, however, hagiographers sometimes invert this *trope*, showing their elderly saints as resilient to the normative negative associations of their advanced age. In the sixth century, Cyril of Scythopolis asserted that preceding his death, Euthymios (whose *vita* was written c.554-558) was in top physical condition.⁵⁹ Similarly, the same author presented Abba Kyriakos as physically able: 'In body he was tall and noble and

⁵⁷ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 542 (Eng. trans. 170).

⁵⁸ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 542 (Eng. trans. 170).

⁵⁹ *Cyr. Scyth. V. Euth.*, 59 (Eng. trans. 56).

with all his limbs in perfect condition'.⁶⁰ Cyril of Scythopolis cites his characters' resilience to aging as further evidence of their sanctity.

In histories, too, resilience to physical deterioration in old age could mark a subject out as exceptional. According to George the Synkellos, who wrote his *Chronology* in the early ninth century, some of the especially pious, including Moses, did not show physical signs of aging.⁶¹ In his history, George the Synkellos followed hagiographical typology when describing this holy man.

Drawing upon this long-established motif in hagiography, Anna Komnene (writing in the twelfth century), employed the rhetorical technique to describe her father's sworn enemy – Robert Guiscard – who was not a saint. He was roughly aged 66 to 70 years old when Alexios reigned as emperor, but he reputedly remained youthful in his looks until his death. The imperial princess wrote that Robert stayed youthful until his death in old age.⁶² Anna took a concept familiar from hagiographies and applied it to her description of Robert Guiscard in order to construct him as a worthy adversary, in spite of his advanced age.

But one may understand that, usually, the Byzantines expected physical appearance to change with age. Leontios of Neapolis wrote in the seventh century that youth and the beauty are extinguished either by old age or by untimely death.⁶³ While there are some instances where saints were described as resilient to physical signs of aging, most saints were noted to physically deteriorate; their bodies became bent with

⁶⁰ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 235 (Eng. trans. 259): 'τῶι σώματι εὐμεγέθης καὶ γενναῖος καὶ ἀσινῆ πάντα ἔχων τὰ μέλη'.

⁶¹ George Synk., 166 (Eng. trans. 205).

⁶² An. Komn., Vol. II: 60 (Eng. trans. 195).

⁶³ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 126 (Eng. trans. 136).

old age.⁶⁴ In the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (ninth century), the author constructed Michael and Job as decrepit ‘since they were old, worn down by many afflictions and illnesses and stooping...’.⁶⁵ Another universal marker of old age for both sexes was grey or white hair.⁶⁶ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), grey hair is described as a physical marker that demanded respect.⁶⁷ Byzantine authors commonly cited physical signs of old age, including grey hair and bent physiques.

I have tracked the symbolisms of male beards throughout this thesis and one of the most fundamental physical markers of masculine old age was a full, greying beard. Euthymios the Great, whose *vita* was written in the sixth century, was reputedly petite with hair completely grey and a long beard that reached his stomach.⁶⁸ In the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), a desert-dwelling ascetic, Antiochos, ‘had eyebrows that met each other and was African by race, about one hundred years old, and the hair of his head was as white as wool, and hung down to his loins, and so too did his beard, and his nails were very long’.⁶⁹ Similarly, in visual evidence, some of the most prominent Byzantine male saints are shown as grey-bearded. For example, Saint Peter is almost exclusively depicted with a grey beard in Byzantine artistic depictions (Figures 5.1 to 5.3).⁷⁰ In depictions of the Anastasis, such as that found in Codex 587m of the Monastery of Dionysiou, Adam exhibits a full grey beard whereas in earlier

⁶⁴ *V. Ioannicii*, 366 (Eng. trans. 307); *V. Mich. Synk.*, 74 (Eng. trans. 75); *V. Laz. Gal.*, 562 (Eng. trans. 268).

⁶⁵ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 78 (Eng. trans. 79): ‘ἔκ τε τοῦ γήρωσ καὶ τῶν πολλῶν θλίψεων, καὶ ἀμβλωπία κατεσχέθη καὶ κυφότητι’.

⁶⁶ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3705 (Eng. trans. 76); *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 230 (Eng. trans. 110); *V. Danie. Sketis*, 148 (Eng. trans. 149): ‘white haired’ (ὀλοπόλιος).

⁶⁷ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 34 (Eng. trans. 35).

⁶⁸ *Cyr. Scyth. V. Euth.*, 59 (Eng. trans. 56).

⁶⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 53 (Eng. trans. 137): ‘Ἦν δὲ σύνοφρος, ἄφρος τῷ γένει, ὡσεὶ ἑκατὸν ἐτῶν, καὶ ἡ θριξ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ λευκὴ ὡσεὶ ἔριον, καθηλωμένη μέχρι τῆς ὀσφύος αὐτοῦ, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ πάγων αὐτοῦ, οἱ δὲ ὄνυχες αὐτοῦ εὐμήκεις.’

⁷⁰ Saint Peter’s denial (Ravenna, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, 6th century). See: Mauskopf Deliyannis 2009; Saint Peter (Sinai, St Catherine’s Monastery, 6th or early 7th century). See: Evans and White 2004; Saint Peter (Trieste, Cathedral of San Giusto, 12th century). See: Dale 1997.

sequences of Adam's life, this is not the case (Figure 5.4).⁷¹ It is tempting to think that grey beards were an exclusive marker of elderly holy men, but this is not true. While authors and artists depicted beards in order to reflect qualities that were important in the construction of sanctity, these qualities were not exclusive to religious paragons.

Sixth- to tenth- century histories did not usually positively appraise the attributes of the elderly, but from the eleventh century onwards, histories started to detail positive characteristics in association with grey beards and old age. For example, in Psellos' description of Basil II (reigned 976-1025, aged 17 or 18 to 66 or 67), the Emperor's beard is used as a prop to show his wisdom:

In his old age the beard under his chin went bald, but the hair from his cheeks poured down, the growth on either side being thick and very profuse, so that wound round both sides it was made into a perfect circle and he appeared to possess a full beard. It was a habit of his to roll it between his fingers, a gesture to which he was particularly prone when roused to anger or giving audience, or when he was engaged in deep thought.⁷²

Psellos directly linked the physiognomy of a greying beard with wisdom and deep thought.

This cliché is also apparent in Anna's writings: upon hearing of the Komnenian rebellion, John Doukas (died c.1088) 'after stroking his beard a little while, like a man in deep thought, came to firm decision' to join the Komnenoi.⁷³ Gillian Clark has shown that grey facial hair was symbolic of increasing age and the evidence here has

⁷¹ Gospel Lectionary, cod. 587m, fol. 2r (Mount Athos, Monastery of Dionysiou, 11th century). See: Christou, Kadas and Tsioumis Pelekanidis, 1974.

⁷² Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 23 (Eng. trans. 49): 'Γηράσαντι δέ οἱ τὸ μὲν ὑπο τὸν ἀνθερεῶνα ἐπίωτο γένειον, τὸ δ' ὅσον ἀπὸ τῆς γένυος κατακέχυτο, δασεῖά τε ἡ θριξὶ ἐγεγόνει καὶ πολλὴ περίξ περιπεφύκει, ὅθεν καὶ ἐκατέρων περιελιχθεῖσα ἐς κύκλον ἀπηκριβώθη καὶ ἐδοκεῖ πάντοθεν γενειάσκειν. Εἰώθει γοῦν πολλάκις ταύτην περιελίττειν, καὶ μάλιστα ὅποτε τῷ θυμῷ διαπυρούμενος ἦν, καὶ ἄλλως δὲ χρηματίζων καὶ ἐς ἐννοίας ἀνακινῶν ἑαυτὸν ἐχρῆτο τῷ σχήματι.'

⁷³ An. Komn., Vol. I: 82 (Eng. trans. 88): 'ἐπὶ μικρὸν δὲ καὶ τῆς ὑπῆνης περιδραξάμενος, οἷον ἐν τοσοῦτῳ λογισμοῦς πολὺ λούσας ἀνελίττων, εἰς ἓν τοῦτο ἤρριπεν ἑαυτόν, συναποστατῆσαι κάκεινον.'

confirmed her argument.⁷⁴ However, in Theophanes' ninth-century *Chronographia*, Constantine V plucked his grey hair.⁷⁵ In the secular sphere, grey hair (and therefore old age) was initially construed as a sign of weakness. At the same time, in the religious sphere, some of the Byzantine's most prestigious holy men, such as Adam and Peter, were depicted with grey beards, portraying the positive value attached to grey beards (and therefore old age) in this context. But by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Psellos and Anna Komnene had started to associate beards with deep thought. This might reinforce the argument that old age, while initially only viewed positively in religious contexts, acquired increasing prestige in secular contexts, at least from the eleventh century onwards.

Turning to visual portrayals of women, there is an almost universal presentation of adult females. Hennessy has already pointed out that there are few depictions of female adolescence.⁷⁶ It is notable that elderly women are invisible in artistic evidence too. In visual sources, women are usually depicted as mature adults. A basic explanation for this seeming lack of interest in the age of women is that the Byzantines were only interested in women as adjuncts of men and consequently did not need to depict femininity in any detail. However, this theory is quashed when considering that social status is important in the visual depiction of women. For instance, clothing carries symbolic significance and Ruth Webb has shown how the absence of a veil marked a prostitute or a dancer prior to c.1080 (for examples, see Figures 5.5 to 5.7).⁷⁷ Perhaps the artists' reluctance to depict any feminine symbols of age is because visual signs of

⁷⁴ Clark, G. 1998a, 172.

⁷⁵ Theoph., 448 (Eng. trans. 618).

⁷⁶ Hennessy 2008, 62.

⁷⁷ *Kynegetika Marc. Gr. Z 479*, fol. 2r (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004; *Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, C. 61, f. 206r (Mount Athos, Monastery of the Pantokrator, 9th century). See: Brubaker 1999. *Kynegetika Marc. Gr. Z 479*, fol. 12v (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, c.1060). See: Spatharakis 2004. Hennessy 2008, 62; Webb 2008, 71.

age, such as grey hair and weathered skin, were so implicit with masculine seniority that they could not be transferred to a feminine context.

5.3 Relationships with Other Generations

Kazhdan observed: ‘the final aim of *homo byzantinus* was, in principle, a solitary, eremitical life, free from any form of social relationship’.⁷⁸ This is evident in the sixth-century hagiographical literature where the holy men were often self-created and entirely independent.⁷⁹ But it is clear that in the cases of some saints, the elderly required support from younger able-bodied people. As an old man, Sabas (whose *vita* was composed c.554-558) was reputedly cared for by Bishop Peter who brought him to the Episcopal palace, where he looked after him.⁸⁰ Similarly, he wrote that when John the Hesychast became old, his disciples opened the monk’s cell so that they could assist him.⁸¹ Cyril of Scythopolis depicts younger people caring for his subjects in their old age, probably in order to represent his subjects’ high standing.

When in the *Life of Euthymios of Thessalonike* (tenth century), the saint’s mentor, Theodore, was suffering from the ailments associated with old age, Euthymios apparently decided against moving him to the mountainside because ‘it was far distant from the dwelling place of human beings’.⁸² Instead, he built a hut in a village called Makrosina and he ‘ministered to his mentor, providing those things with which he

⁷⁸ Kazhdan 1982, 33;166.

⁷⁹ Brown 1982, 131.

⁸⁰ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 182 (Eng. trans. 191).

⁸¹ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Ioh. Hes.*, (Eng. trans. 240).

⁸² *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 187 (Eng. trans. 9): ‘ταύτης δ’ ἐχρημάτιζεν ἢ ἐν τῷ ὄρει κατοίκησις ἔρημος διὰ τὸ συνοικήσεως λαῶν βιωτικῶν πόρρω καθίστασθαι’.

longed to be nourished'.⁸³ There are several of points to be made here: first, one can note the humility of Bishop Peter, John's disciples and Euthymios when they choose to care for their elderly acquaintances. Second, the high respect with which Sabas, John and Theodore were regarded when their younger counterparts chose to assist them in their old age is apparent. It is clear that saints were not always isolated and depictions of their social relationships often provide important insights into their positive attributes and the high esteem with which they were regarded during their lives. Third, it is possible that the concept of younger monks and ecclesiasts caring for older, less able monks was underpinned by constructions of ideal familial relationships.

For biological families outside of monasteries and convents, the first chapter noted the importance attached to the birth of a son. Clearly, for imperial families after the mid seventh century, the birth of a son ensured succession within the family line and the event could be perceived as God-sent and a reward for pious behaviour.⁸⁴ For instance, Anna reported in the twelfth-century *Alexiad* that Nikephoros III Botaneiates (reigned 1078-1081) was particularly scared as an old man because he had no relatives or successors to protect him.⁸⁵ But, for lay families, the real value of their sons lay in their potential to care for their elderly parents. In Skylitzes' *Histories* (c.1096), we have seen how Basil I was expected to 'care' (γηροτροφεῖν) for his mother in her old age.⁸⁶ Talbot asserted: 'The Church Fathers stressed the obligation of children to care for their aging parents...'⁸⁷ While from youth onwards, individuals were expected to take

⁸³ V. Euthyme le Jeune, 187 (Eng. trans. 9): 'ὑπηρέτει δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ καθηγητῇ, ἐξ ὧν ἐκεῖνος ἔγλιχε τιθηνίζεσθαι.'

⁸⁴ An. Komn., Vol. II: 62 (Eng. trans. 197).

⁸⁵ An. Komn., Vol. I: 98 (Eng. trans. 100).

⁸⁶ Skyl., 119 (Eng. trans. 120). Note that the verb used here, 'γηροτροφεῖν', meant care specifically during old age.

⁸⁷ Talbot 1984, 275.

responsibility for their parents, Skylitzes shows us here that elderly relatives sometimes requested their younger relations to take care of them.

It was surely not possible for all grown-up children to care for their parents and in hagiographies one is afforded an insight into the lives of the saints' dependant relatives. My first observation is that saints' dependant relatives largely consisted of unmarried sisters or brothers and elderly mothers and grandmothers who often followed their saintly relative into monasticism. This is true of Sabas (*vita* written sixth century), David of Lesbos (*vita* written ninth century) and Michael the Synkellos (*vita* written ninth century), all of whom had relatives who imitated them in their choice of vocation.⁸⁸ The *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century) exemplifies this pattern: when the young Theodore was tonsured his mother remarried, his sister died and his grandmother 'wanted to remain with him [Theodore] always in order to enjoy still greater gladness and at the same time to minister him'.⁸⁹ She moved to the convent of Saint Christopher, to care for other women.⁹⁰ This hagiographical trend may be reflective of a reality in which some of the laity retired to monasteries when their families were no longer able to care for them.

In certain circumstances, monks were allowed to maintain relations with their biological family in spite of their vocation. Skylitzes, writing in the eleventh century, described how the Caesar Alexios Mouselias built a monastery in which to spend his final years and to be buried with his brother.⁹¹ Even once tonsured, Alexios' relationship with his brother endured for the rest of his life, which was symbolised by their joint burial in

⁸⁸ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 109 (Eng. trans. 118); *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 217 (Eng. trans. 161); *V. Mich. Synk.*, 48 (Eng. trans. 49).

⁸⁹ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 106): 'περισυνάξασα τὰ ἑαυτῆς πάντα, ἐβούλετο μένειν ἀεὶ σὺν αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸ πλείονος εὐφροσύνης ἀπολαύειν καὶ ἐν ταύτῳ τὴν ὑπουργίαν αὐτῷ ποιῆσθαι.'

⁹⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 106).

⁹¹ Skyl., 65 (Eng. trans. 67).

death. Surviving *typika* largely deal with limiting the jurisdiction of the founder's family.⁹² But it is clear that for the very elite, monasteries were places in which family archives could be stored and families could be buried together.⁹³ For elderly lay people, entering a monastery may have offered the opportunity to sever ties of dependency on younger relatives, without severing ties with the family completely.

The Byzantines clearly felt it was important for younger generations to respect the old. Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople (806 -815) described in his *Short History* how John Strouthos killed Tiberios without respect the tears of his 'grandmother' (μάμμης), Anastasia'.⁹⁴ Upsetting Anastasia, the elderly grandmother, clearly contravened models of propriety. In the *Life of Nikon* (c.1042), a soldier seized and struck Zosimas, 'the oldest monk, who was then the manager of the monastery there', and he 'felt no shame at that one's white hair nor at the virtue of the old man'.⁹⁵ One can sense that the Byzantines expected younger people to respect the elderly and, while they recoiled from physically harming youths, they found it equally abhorrent to hear of an old person being mistreated.

The relationship between young and old was mutually beneficial and the writings show us that the elderly could be valued for demonstrating and teaching their positive attributes to the young. For example, in the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century), it is recorded: 'When the disciple saw the wondrous work which the elder was doing, he was astonished, and glorified God for giving such patience to the elder to care

⁹² Apa Abraham, 233 (Eng. trans. 56); Constantine IX, 230 (Eng. trans. 290); Bandy 2000, 171.

⁹³ Talbot 1990, 127.

⁹⁴ Nikeph., *Short History*, 112 (Eng. trans. 113).

⁹⁵ *V. Nikon*, 198 (Eng. trans. 199): 'πρώτον μ ν τὸν ἐν μοναχοῖς εὐγρηότατον Ζώσιμον, ὃς ἦν τὸ τηνικάδε τὰ τῆς μονῆς διέπων, χειρωσάμενος καὶ μῆτε τὴν ἐκείνου πολιὰν αἰδεσθεῖς, μῆτε τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ πρεσβύτου δυσωπηθεῖς, πύξ παίειν αὐτὸν κατὰ κόρρης οὐκ ἠύλαβεῖτο ὁ ἀλαζὼν ἐκείνος καὶ πάντολμος.'

for the leper in such a way'.⁹⁶ The elder acted as a role model to his young disciples and taught them the virtue of care and patience. In the *Life of Nicholas of Sion* (sixth century), an elderly monk exposed a young monk's laziness by working much harder than he did. Nicholas of Sion advised the elder monk: 'For he [the young monk] is resting while you are wearing yourself out. For you are more advanced in years and should not have to endure so much or submit to this wear and tear'.⁹⁷ The elderly monk continued to demonstrate the virtue of hard work to the younger monks, in spite of his age, revealing to the reader that the elderly could overcome their physical weaknesses through their mental aptitude.

On occasion, elderly people reprimanded youngsters for behaving indecently. Anthony tells us in the *Life of George of Choziba* (seventh century) that a young man was telling indecent stories, making faces and snatching at food on the table.⁹⁸ The vocabulary used here is particularly insightful: an elderly monk addressed the younger monk as a 'child' (παῖ), both indicating the puerile behaviour of the monk and his inferiority due to his age.⁹⁹ The elderly not only served as role models to those younger than them, but additionally, in this instance they moderated their behaviour.

Sources of different genres universally portray their subjects' decreasing passion with age, so, while youths were commonly portrayed as sexually licentious, old people could be portrayed as uninterested in sex. Paul of Elusa's sixth-century writings warn old people from becoming complacent about their reduced desires, exhorting them to

⁹⁶ *V. Danie. Sketis*, 118 (Eng. trans. 119): 'ἰδὼν δὲ μαθητῆς τὸ παράδοξον ἔργον, ὃ ἐποίει ὁ γέρον, ἐξεπλάγη καὶ ἐδόξασε τὸν θεὸν τὸν παρέχοντα τοιαύτην ὑπομονὴν τῷ γέροντι οὕτως ὑπηρετεῖν τῷ λελωβημένῳ.'

⁹⁷ *V. Nichol. Sion*, 74 (Eng. trans. 75): 'ἐκεῖνος γὰρ ἀνάπαυσιν ἔχει, καὶ σὺ θλίβῃ σεαυτὸν.'

⁹⁸ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 107 (Eng. trans. 80).

⁹⁹ *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 107 (Eng. trans. 80).

remain cautious of sexual temptations.¹⁰⁰ But Leontios, who wrote in the seventh century, presented Symeon the Fool's sexual desire as easily resistible once he had passed the age of 51. Spending time in the circus (which was associated with sexual debauchery and revelry in Byzantine texts), Symeon held hands with dancing girls who fondled him.¹⁰¹ Yet, Symeon remained chaste.¹⁰² In the *Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (eleventh century), the devil appeared to him as an old beggar woman and tried to touch him, but Lazaros resisted the temptation and made the sign of the cross to send the devil away.¹⁰³ Psellos, writing in the eleventh century, asserted that Romanos III Argyros (reigned 1028-1034) and Zoe (reigned as Empress and Empress Consort 1028-1050) were unable to conceive an heir to the throne because the Emperor's desire (τὴν γνώμην) were dulled because he was more than twenty years older than Zoe.¹⁰⁴ Romanos was roughly 60 years old when he married Zoe and ascended the throne, so old age was associated with fading passion.

When in the company of the elderly, the young were shown to be protected from pursuing their desires. Indeed, the *Canons of the Council in Trullo* (692) advised that young nuns and monks should be accompanied by older members of their community when leaving the safety of their convents and monasteries, presumably to safeguard the youths from sexual temptation.¹⁰⁵ One might deduce that an older person's sexual desires were thought to be dulled and that they were less likely to be led astray than their younger counterparts.

¹⁰⁰ Paul of Elusa, *V. Theog.*, 109 (Eng. trans. 152).

¹⁰¹ Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 155 (Eng. trans. 159); Talbot 1997, 128.

¹⁰² Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 155 (Eng. trans. 159).

¹⁰³ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 568 (Eng. trans. 302).

¹⁰⁴ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 35 (Eng. trans. 65).

¹⁰⁵ *Council in Trullo*, 128 (Eng. trans. 128).

In some instances, older nuns and monks were able to prevent youths fornicating. In the *Life of Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton* (c.980), ‘a young man with unruly instincts... [was] wholly a victim of his abominable desire...’.¹⁰⁶ The Abbess guided him to the correct mode of behaviour.¹⁰⁷ In the same *vita*, Irene cured a ‘young girl’ (τὴν κόπην) of a seething passion.¹⁰⁸ Irene was able both to resist sexual temptation herself and, using her aged experience, to guide the young people with whom she came into contact to a better mode of behaviour too. Irene chastised her younger contemporaries and guided them to chastity.

It is clear that the elderly were expected to provide their advice, guidance and counsel to younger generations.¹⁰⁹ In the eleventh century, Psellos wrote that when Basil II (reigned 976-1025) was ‘by no means a fully-grown man... he discovered that to rely on his own unaided judgement was impossible’.¹¹⁰ Basil turned to Basil the Parakoimomenos, a foster-parent as model.¹¹¹ Psellos described how ‘The older man’s serious nature, too, had its influence on the emperor’s character’.¹¹² Anna Komnene emphasised her grandmother’s age and experience in the twelfth-century *Alexiad*, in order to depict Anna Dalassena as the best person to guide the Emperor, Alexios I Komnenos (reigned 1081-1118).¹¹³ Later historians show their senior characters advising, and sometimes leading, the younger people around them.

¹⁰⁶ *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 66 (Eng. trans. 67): ‘νέον τε ὄντα καὶ δυσκάθεκτον ταῖς ὁρμαῖς’.

¹⁰⁷ *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 66 (Eng. trans. 67).

¹⁰⁸ *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).

¹⁰⁹ George Synk., 124 (Eng. trans. 155); Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 176 (Eng. trans. 371).

¹¹⁰ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 3 (Eng. trans. 28): ‘...οὐδέπω πείραν εἰληφότι οὔτε τῶν στρατιωτικῶν καταλόγων οὔτε τῆς πολιτικῆς εὐνομίας.’

¹¹¹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 3 (Eng. trans. 28).

¹¹² Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 3 (Eng. trans. 28): ‘Διὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὁ Βασίλειος τὸν ὄγκον αὐτῷ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀναθέμενος, αὐτὸς πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνου ἐπαιδοτριβεῖτο ἀπουδίην.’

¹¹³ An. Komn., Vol. I: 120 (Eng. trans. 116).

While youths were criticised for disregarding the advice of their elders, the elderly were equally criticised for disregarding their responsibility to guide youths.¹¹⁴ This has been noted to be true of Ancient Greek and Roman societies too.¹¹⁵ For example, both Anastasios, writing in the late seventh century, and George the Synkellos, writing in the ninth century, described how John the Theologian entrusted the welfare of a child to a bishop.¹¹⁶ After the child had become a youth, the Bishop neglected his duty to care for the boy and, as a result, the boy became involved with a gang of robbers. Years later, John asked the Bishop what had become of the boy, and when he heard that he had fallen into inequity, he blamed the Bishop.¹¹⁷ John made amends to rectify the Bishop's negligence and pursued the boy in order to teach him appropriate morality. The elderly inspired younger generations to take the right course of action. In this example, the older person was held personally accountable for the conduct of the younger person under his care. One might understand that older generations were expected to take their commitment and responsibility to guiding younger generations seriously.

As the elderly were valued as guardians and role models, one would expect grandparents to take leading roles in the guidance of grandchildren, but they are seldom mentioned in the sources. This may suggest that most people did not survive long enough to become grandparents in Byzantine society. When grandparents are referenced, they usually took active roles in their grandchildren's upbringing. One of the only depictions of a grandfather arises in the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful* (c.822), where Niketas, the author, chose to include anecdotes depicting the strong bond

¹¹⁴ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. II: 153 (Eng. trans. 345). Skyl., 267 (Eng. trans. 256).

¹¹⁵ Finley 1989, 9.

¹¹⁶ Anast. Sin. T4, 1105A (Eng. trans. 123); George Synk., 422 (Eng. trans. 500).

¹¹⁷ Anast. Sin. T4, 1105A (Eng. trans. 123).

between himself and his grandfather. Niketas related how Philaretos played with his grandchildren.¹¹⁸ Indeed, when Philaretos died, Niketas recorded a dream in which he saw his grandfather surrounded by all his deceased grandchildren and ‘one little newly baptised child, sister of him who had the dream [Niketas] who had died a short time before, sat in the old man’s bosom, she too holding a lamp’.¹¹⁹ According to Niketas, Philaretos was able to re-establish his relationship with his deceased grandchildren in heaven. Grandparents, when they survived, feature as devoted guardians in the sources.

But it is grandmothers, in particular, who took prominent roles in the lives of young saints, fulfilling the associated attributes of their gender. This may reflect a culture in which the earlier age of female marriage and reproduction deemed the survival of a woman to grandparenthood more likely. In the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* (seventh century), the young saint’s grandmother is shown to be his most compassionate family member.¹²⁰ Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople (806-815) described how when Tiberios sheltered from John Strouthos in the Church of the Mother of God at Blachernai, his grandmother waited to share her ‘grandchild’s’ (ἐγγόνῳ) danger.¹²¹ The grandmother took an interest in her grandchild’s welfare. Grandmothers could even act as guardians to their grandchildren: in Paul of Monemvasia’s *Spiritually Beneficial Tales* (tenth century), a grandmother raised her orphaned granddaughter and secured a marital alliance for her.¹²² Similarly, in the *Life of Niketas of Medikion* (c.1100), Theosterikos tells us that once the saint’s mother died, he was brought up by his

¹¹⁸ *V. Philaretos*, 106 (Eng. trans. 107).

¹¹⁹ *V. Philaretos*, 114 (Eng. trans. 115): ‘Καὶ ἓνα νήπιον νεόφωτον, ἀδελφὴ τοῦ τεθεαμένου τὸ ὄναρ, ὃ πρὸ μικροῦ χρόνου ἐκοιμήθη, ἐκαθέτο ἐν τοῖς κόλποις τοῦ γέροντος κρατῶν καὶ αὐτὸ λαμπάδα.’

¹²⁰ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 14 (Eng. trans. 98).

¹²¹ Nikeph., *Short History*, 112 (Eng. trans. 113).

¹²² Paul of Monem., *ST*, 129 (Eng. trans. 144).

paternal grandmother.¹²³ Where they survived, grandmothers took active roles in the upbringing of their grandchildren.

5.4 Dying and Death

In *vitae*, the time of death is often foreseen: Sabas (whose *vita* was written in the sixth century) predicted Elias' death; John the Hesychast (whose *vita* was written in the sixth century) predicted his own death; Theodore of Sykeon (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) predicted Antiochos' death was imminent; Athanasia of Aegina (whose *vita* was written c.916) predicted her own death; Luke of Steiris (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) predicted his own death; Irene of Chrysobalanton (whose *vita* was written c.980) predicted her own death.¹²⁴ This short survey demonstrates that the prediction of death was an important symbolic event in the lives of saints throughout this period. But these premonitions of the date and time of death cannot be taken as realistic representations of the circumstances of lay people's demise.

In the texts, foresight of a death date enabled the dying person to make ceremonial preparations.¹²⁵ Nikephoros recorded in his *Short History* (c.814-820) that Herakleios (reigned 610 to 641), seeing his death was imminent, ordered his tomb to be opened.¹²⁶ In this example, it is notable that it was not a saint who foresaw his death but an emperor, showing us that foresight of death was not an exclusively saintly ability

¹²³ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 4).

¹²⁴ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 121 (Eng. trans. 130); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Ioh. Hes.*, 222 (Eng. trans. 242); *V. Theod. Syk.*, 54 (Eng. trans. 138); *V. Atha. Aegi.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 151); *V. Luk. Steir.*, 106 (Eng. trans. 107); *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 104 (Eng. trans. 105).

¹²⁵ Munitiz 2001, 10; Abrahamse 1984.

¹²⁶ Nikeph., *Short History*, 76 (Eng. trans. 77)

but a rhetorical device used to mark out exceptional subjects. In the *Life of Philaretos the Merciful* (c.822), once the old man had foreseen his death, he bought a sarcophagus from the Abbess: his prediction enabled him to prepare for his own death and burial.¹²⁷ Ignatios the Deacon, writing c.843-856, described how once the Patriarch Nikephoros had foreseen his own death, he was comforted and no longer feared what was coming.¹²⁸ Once Mary the Younger (whose *vita* was written in the eleventh century) had predicted her own death, distinguished men of the city came to bid her farewell.¹²⁹ In these narratives, the prediction of a death date enabled acquaintances to bid farewell to the dying person and allowed time to organise the funeral. For the dying person, a premonition of their death offered reassurance and comfort, as they eagerly anticipated the afterlife.

In the rituals leading up to death, the saint usually received the Eucharist. According to Sophronios, writing in the seventh century, Zosimas administered the Eucharist to Mary of Egypt in his last visit to see her.¹³⁰ Similarly, Niketas Magistros, writing c.900, recorded that Theoktiste of Lesbos received the Eucharist and then died.¹³¹ In spite of their lifestyles as female solitaries, both Mary and Theoktiste are said to have received the Eucharist before their demise, emphasising this activity as an important Christian ritual in anticipation of death. Indeed, Gregory the Cleric, writing c.894, described how Anthony did not have time to receive the Eucharist before his death, which – judging by the event’s noteworthiness – was unusual.¹³² Administering the Eucharist was usually accompanied by the final confession. For instance, in the

¹²⁷ *V. Philaretos*, 100 (Eng. trans. 101).

¹²⁸ *V. Nikeph.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 137).

¹²⁹ *V. Mary Youn.*, 701 (Eng. trans. 266).

¹³⁰ *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3708 (Eng. trans. 78).

¹³¹ *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 232 (Eng. trans. 112).

¹³² *V. Theod. Thess.*, 16 (Eng. trans. 179).

History of Leo the Deacon (composed tenth century) John I Tzimiskes (c.969-976) summoned the Bishop of Adrianople and confessed his sins.¹³³ Receiving the Eucharist was a key transitional moment in saints' lives as it enabled them to repent for their earthly sins and consider their destiny in the afterlife.

In the narratives, death seldom took place in isolation from other people.¹³⁴ Abba Kyriakos, whose *vita* was written in the sixth century, greeted the fathers of the *laura* before dying.¹³⁵ Theodore of Sykeon, whose *vita* was composed in the seventh century, pleaded with Antiochos (who was about a hundred years old) not to continue his journey from Constantinople to the East so that his death would take place in the monastery, where he would be in greater comfort and closer to people.¹³⁶ While on his death bed, Philaretos the Merciful, whose *vita* was composed c.822, reputedly summoned each of his children and grandchildren, so that he could give them his blessing.¹³⁷ Michael the Synkellos, whose *vita* was written in the ninth century, entreated God that he might die in the company of his disciples, Theodore and Theophanes.¹³⁸ In the *Life of Mary the Younger* (eleventh century) her children were present at her death and after bidding her farewell, they took her cloak.¹³⁹ Anna Komnene, writing in the twelfth century, described how when her father, Alexios I Komnenos (reigned 1081-1118) died, all his immediate family surrounded, him except his son John who had gone to claim the throne.¹⁴⁰ Patriarch Leontios of Jerusalem (whose *vita* was composed in the thirteenth century) addressed the parting words to all

¹³³ Leo Diac., 178 (Eng. trans. 220).

¹³⁴ Abrahamse 1984, 134.

¹³⁵ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 235 (Eng. trans. 259).

¹³⁶ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 54 (Eng. trans. 138).

¹³⁷ *V. Philaretos*, 104 (Eng. trans. 105).

¹³⁸ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 118 (Eng. trans. 119).

¹³⁹ *V. Mary. Youn.*, 701 (Eng. trans. 266).

¹⁴⁰ An. Komn., Vol. III: 230 (Eng. trans. 510).

and gave everyone the last kisses.¹⁴¹ While the elderly were typically cared for by younger generations in their old age, it was desirable to die in the company of other people. In the *Life of Leontios* (thirteenth century) the process of a dying person bidding farewell to friends and relations was compared to a young woman leaving her family in order to be married.¹⁴² These dramatised versions of death emphasise the importance of familial (biological or monastic) relationships at the Life Course finale.¹⁴³

The congregation of people around a person's death bed enabled the dying person to bid farewell to the living people. The separation was only temporal: some saints discussed their premonitions of being together with their loved ones in the afterlife. For example, in the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-865), it is written: 'But as he [Symeon] was breathing his last, seeking to relieve his brother's despair, he said to him, "This is the decision of the Lord, my friend. And in fact I am going away to prepare a place for you as the Lord has revealed to me and I will see you when the Lord calls you".'¹⁴⁴ Family ties were not terminated at death but were perceived to continue into the afterlife.¹⁴⁵ This again reiterates the enduring nature of family relationships to the Byzantines.

¹⁴¹ Theod. *V. Leontios*, 152 (Eng. trans. 153).

¹⁴² Theod. *V. Leontios*, 152 (Eng. trans. 153).

¹⁴³ Dennis 2001, 3: 'When the time came, one hoped to die surrounded by one's family and strengthened by the sacraments of the church...'

¹⁴⁴ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 255 (Eng. trans. 235): '«(οὕτως ἔδοξεν, ὃ φίλος, τῷ κυρίῳ)» πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἔλεγε «(τόπον καὶ γὰρ σοὶ προετοιμάσαι, ὡς ὁ κύριός μοι δεδήλωκεν· ἀπέρχομαι καὶ σὲ μετ' οὐ πολὺ, τοῦ κυρίου καλοῦντος, κατόψομαι. ἀνδρίζου τοίνυν καὶ ἴσχυε καὶ τὸ πιστευθέν σοι τότε ποιμνιον ἱερὸν ἀξίως τοῦ σὲ τιμήσαντος, περίεπέ τε καὶ ποιμαίνε, καὶ τοῦς βαρεῖς τῶν αἰρέσεων λύκους μακρὰν ἀπόθου τούτου καὶ δίωκε.)»'

¹⁴⁵ Dennis 2001, 7: 'Death was not the end of life but a change of life.'

5.5 Conclusions

For hagiographers, a saint who had lived to an advanced age, having experienced every life-stage, was an ideal subject as they could provide a role model to people of all generations. In the *Life of Saint Nikon*, which was composed c.1042, the author wrote that Saint Nikon, who lived into old age, was a role model:

And by his loving choice of the good he has been shown to be even a kind of monument, living and imperishable, and a catalogue of a more scrupulous life and character to the young, the ignorant and those born after his time, who prefer what is better, but through some weakness and softness of the soul reject it.¹⁴⁶

Nikon was constructed as a role model to people of all ages and of all generations (clearly, that the author disapproves of the behaviour of those born after Nikon). Yet I have already noted that Byzantine hagiographers attached a specific significance to the elderly, marking this stage of life out as particularly admirable. In the sixth-century writings of Cyril of Scythopolis, virtues, such as ‘experience’ (πείραι), ‘time’ (χρόνωι) and ‘grace’ (χάριτι) were consolidated with age.¹⁴⁷ Hagiographies are clear: the elderly exhibited the best model of behaviour for other people to imitate. Gilleard wrote: ‘Byzantine society placed more respect upon age than Roman society. Age itself was an important source of spiritual capital’.¹⁴⁸ Hagiographers perceived the elderly to provide excellent role models as they were usually (although not always) moderated, controlled and chaste. Is it any wonder then, that saints’ lives, which were written to disseminate

¹⁴⁶ *V. Nikon*, 30 (Eng. trans. 31): ‘καὶ τὸ τραχὺ καὶ ἄναντες τῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν ἀγοῦσης, τοῖς δὲ πλείοσι καὶ ἄβατον, οὐ τὸ τῆ φύσει ταύτης ἔδειξε περιόν, ἐν τῇ τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιμυξία, τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κάλλος μὴ λυμηνάμενος, ὡς προζῶν δηλωθήσεται, ἀλλὰ τῇ γνώμῃ μᾶλλον καὶ τῇ τὰ χρηστὰ φιλοῦσῃ προαιρέσει καὶ στήλῃ τις οἶάπερ ἀναδέδεικται ἔμφυχος καὶ ἀθάνατος καὶ πίναξ ἀκριβεστέρου βίου καὶ πολιτείας τοῖς ὀψιγόνοις καὶ νωθεστέροις καὶ τοῖς κάτω τοῦ χρόνου γεγεννημένοις, προαιρουμένοις μὴ τὰ ἀμείνω, δι’ ἀσθένειαν δ’ ἔσθ’ ὅτε ψυχῆς καὶ μαλακίαν παραιτουμένοις’

¹⁴⁷ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 58 (Eng. trans. 55).

¹⁴⁸ Gilleard 2007, 632.

models of appropriate behaviour to people of all ages and generations, often focused upon the later days of the subject's life?

A number of findings have arisen in this chapter. In terms of genre, there is a clear split, with pre-eleventh century histories propagating negative concepts of old age and sixth- to thirteenth-century hagiographies propagating positive concepts of old age. This may be reflective of the status of the subjects of these genres: elderly religious leaders tended to be respected whereas elderly imperial leaders tended to be heavily criticised. By the eleventh century, some of the positive attributes of old age traditionally noted in hagiographies began to emerge in histories. I have used this trend to tentatively suggest that there was an increasing respect for the elderly and their positive attributes in the secular sphere. This must not be overstated as I am largely basing this argument on Psellos' and Anna Komnene's descriptions.¹⁴⁹

One can also notice conventions associated with history writing reciprocally influencing hagiographical writings. While in earlier hagiographies, saints were often noted to be resilient to physical deterioration in old age, from the tenth century onwards some of the saints reduced the intensity of their ascetic practices in line with their age-induced physical impairments.¹⁵⁰ Retirement was not usually discussed by the authors in any context, but one can clearly see here that, certainly by the tenth century, the Byzantines expected the elderly of all statuses to adapt their commitments in line with their age and consequent abilities.

¹⁴⁹ Psellos, *Chron.*, Vol. I: 23 (Eng. trans. 49); Vol. II: 175 (Eng. trans. 370); An. Komn., Vol. I: 124 (Eng. trans. 119).

¹⁵⁰ Saints who were resilient to aging: Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 59 (Eng. trans. 56); Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 235 (Eng. trans. 259); George Synk., 166 (Eng. trans. 205). Saints who lessened their asceticism in old age: *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 187 (Eng. trans. 9); *V. Laz. Gal.*, 542 (Eng. trans. 170).

Finally, one can observe a clear split in the portrayal of elderly men and women. As usual, the narratives focus on men. Elderly women, whether saints or otherwise, tend to appear in roles such as monastic sisters, biological mothers and grandmothers (with the exception of female solitaries). These roles enabled the women to fulfil gendered attributes of care provision even into old age. While Niketas' loving portrayal of his grandfather, Philaretos the Merciful, shows us that grandfathers could take active roles in the lives of their grandchildren, it is grandmothers in particular who are shown to take leading roles in the welfare and upbringing of their grandchildren. This is partly accountable in terms of survival: grandmothers, having married and reproduced earlier in the Life Course than grandfathers, would have been more likely to have lived to see their grandchildren. It is nevertheless notable that in at least two instances of maternal death, the father handed his offspring over to the care of their grandmother, implying that there was a formal expectation that women and not men, regardless of age, should care for children.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Paul of Monem., *ST*, 129 (Eng. trans. 144); Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 4).

CHAPTER SIX:
TOMBSTONES:
AN INSIGHT INTO LIFE AND
DEATH

The original objective of this thesis was to use epigraphic data to chart the Byzantine Life Course.¹ However, it quickly became apparent why Byzantinists have not been quick to follow the precedent set by Roman historians and extract data from epigraphic sources in order to understand the construction of the Life Course. First, the sheer quantities of preserved Roman inscriptions enable analysts to draw upon vast samples of data, which are often specific to a particular region. In contrast, Byzantine tombstones are relatively rare.² This sample draws upon 1,116 Greek epitaphs, representing 1,386 people, most of which date from the first through to the third century (Table 11). Therefore this chapter draws upon evidence predating the sixth-century in order to explain the prevailing circumstances in tombstone commemoration during the period focused upon in this thesis (AD 518-1204). There are no preserved epitaphs from the end of the eighth-century to 1204 and so the evidence in this chapter can only be used to understand Life Course constructions in the early part of the period I am interested in. The reduced quantity of tombstones after the third century could be explained in several ways: first, Byzantine tombstones were never mass produced; second, Byzantine tombstones have been poorly preserved; third, Byzantine sites have not received as much archaeological investigation as Roman sites.

The drop in tombstone commemorations is not unique to Byzantium: Stanisław Mrozek analysed the quantity of Latin inscriptions over the first to fourth century, and his sample of data which is represented by the ‘Mrozek Curve’ presents a comparable pattern of dwindling epigraphic production for Latin inscriptions.³ Both the ‘Mrozek Curve’ and the data collected in this study provide evidence for a dramatic climb in the

¹ Portions of this chapter originally appeared as Davies 2011.

² Mango 2008, 147.

³ Mrozek 1973, 113-118.

production of epitaphs until the second century, and then an equally remarkable fall from around the third century onwards.⁴ One would expect tombstone production to correlate with the prosperity of the Byzantine Empire, but in the sixth century – a period of prosperity across the Byzantine Empire – the number of recovered tombstones remains comparatively low, suggesting that the abandonment of tombstone inscription was not related to the prevailing economy.⁵ Instead, the fall in the amount of recovered epitaphs is apparently linked to a shift in commemorative practices and new attitudes towards death.

The decrease in the quantity of tombstones may be explained in terms of a new Christian perception of death and the afterlife, which was characterized by the reduced significance of the physical being and the increased importance of the soul. In II Corinthians 5:6, it is recorded: ‘Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord’. While it is a hagiographical commonplace to note that God preserved the bodies of saints as proof of their holiness, saints were exceptional, and their unsullied dead bodies were recorded by the Byzantines to attest to a miracle. This was often indicated by the existence of a permanent shrine to their physical being after death.⁶ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), Luke’s disciples built a monastery in his memory.⁷ But most deceased people would not have been glorified with such grand commemorations. Eric Ivison has suggested that people turned to inexpensive, simple forms of remembrance, such as planting a cypress tree above a burial or embedding a piece of wood in the ground.⁸

⁴ Mrozek 1973, 113-118.

⁵ Laiou and Morrison 2007, 24.

⁶ *V. Elias Helio.*, 58 (Eng. trans. 106); *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 558 (Eng. trans. 240).

⁷ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 110 (Eng. trans. 111).

⁸ Ivison 1993, 57; 88.

This concept can be found in the texts, where Theosterikos (writing c.1100) revealed: ‘In order that the holy man’s [Niketas of Medikion] memorial should not be obscured but appear clearly to everybody, the God of the universe brought about that a plant called cypress spontaneously grew upon the memorial, exactly above his precious chest’.⁹ Jean-Baptiste Humbert’s archaeological analysis suggests that some graves were marked by an oval arrangement of stones.¹⁰ Perhaps the decrease in tombstone commemorations can be explained by a shift in beliefs: the Byzantines, following biblical teachings, felt that the interred body did hold much commemorative value.

On occasion, hagiographers hinted at some of the problems involved in securing a place for commemoration. In the previous chapter, Saint Philaretos (whose *vita* was written c.822) reputedly located and paid for a burial place at a monastery before his death, presumably to ensure that he would receive a burial fitting to his own preconceptions.¹¹ The location of interment clearly held symbolic meaning: in the *Life of Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion* (c.1053), Gregory the Cellarer revealed that the monks were concerned about where to bury the deceased saint, as the place of his burial could lead to metropolitan control of the land.¹² Male and female monasteries are presented as the most appropriate place for burial for lay people, as well as for nuns and monks.¹³ In the Roman period, specific sites outside of the city walls were dedicated to the burial of the dead. However, it seems that by the seventh century, if not before,

⁹ Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 17): ‘ἵνα δὲ μὴ ἄδηλον γένηται τὸ τοῦ ὁσίου μνημεῖον, ἀλλ’ ἐναργῶς φαίνεσθαι πᾶσιν, φυτὸν τὸ λεγόμενον κυπαρίσσιον ἐπάνω τοῦ μνήματος κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν τιμῶν αὐτοῦ στέρων, αὐτομάτως ἐκφυῆναι ὁ τῶν ὄλων θεὸς παρεσκεύασεν. ὅθεν πολλοὶ πίστει φερόμενοι, ἀπερχόμενοι ἐκεῖνο τὸ φυτὸν κατασπάζονται καὶ κάρφος ἐξ αὐτοῦ λαμβάνοντες, πρὸς ὑγ(ε)ίαν ἐπιφέρονται.’

¹⁰ Humbert 1993, 454.

¹¹ *V. Philaretos*, 100 (Eng. trans. 101).

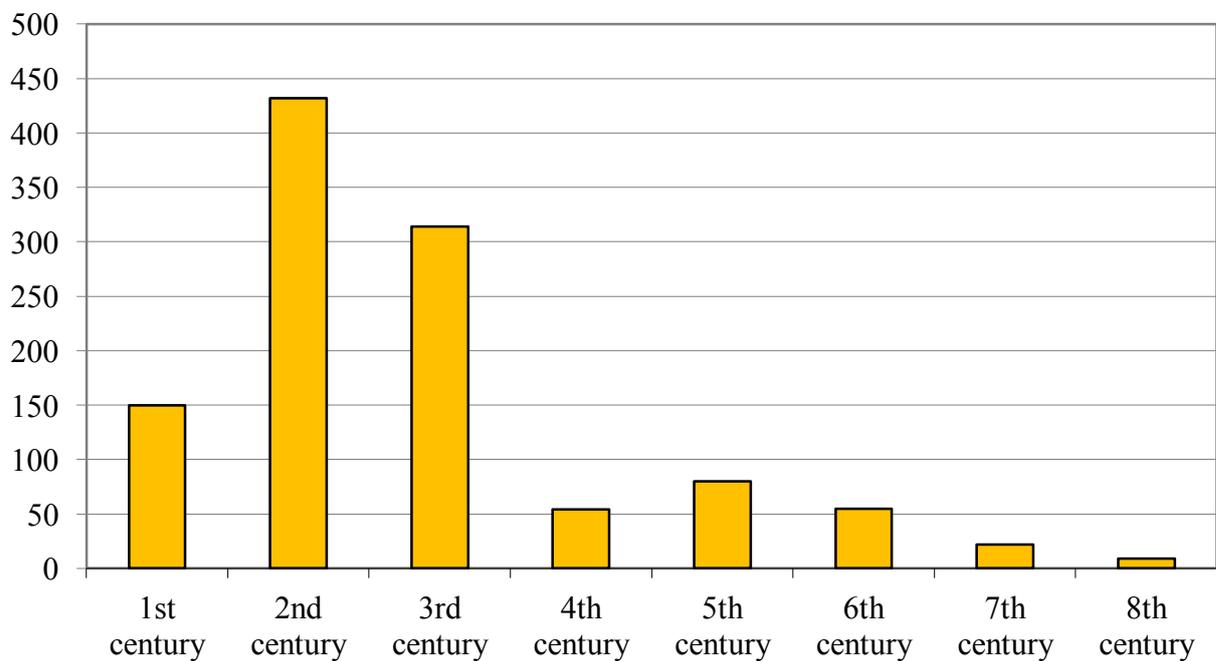
¹² *V. Laz. Gal.*, 580 (Eng. trans. 362).

¹³ Talbot 1996b, 49-69; Abrahamse 1985, 39.

bodies could be buried inside the city walls.¹⁴ As places of burial became integrated into living spaces, the quantity of preserved tombstones drops off; this could be a further reason why the tombstone record diminishes, as grave markers are more easily destroyed in densely populated and continually redeveloping urban areas.

In sum, tombstone evidence from AD 518 to 1204 is scant and so this chapter will incorporate evidence predating the sixth century as a means of understanding shifts in prevailing attitudes in the lead up to this period. There are a select number of tombstones from the sixth century onwards that can be used to understand Life Course trajectories in this period.

Table 11: Chronological Distribution of 1,116 Greek Epitaphs



¹⁴ Fowden 2001, 31.

In view of the comparatively small body of Byzantine tombstones, I clearly cannot apply methodologies developed for the analysis of Roman epigraphic evidence to Byzantine studies. A comparison of Roman and Byzantine epigraphic formulae is, however, insightful: the personal information revealed by Byzantine epitaphs is different from Roman epitaphs. The formulaic compositions produced in the Late Roman Empire usually reveal specific personal information in systematic order.¹⁵ In contrast, the information revealed on Byzantine tombstones is less standardised.

First, I should note that in Byzantine epigraphic formulas, the dedicator usually goes unmentioned, making marital or parental relationships impossible to reconstruct. Second, new sets of information were incorporated into Christian epitaphs. While one infrequently sees age at death, Carlos Galvão-Sobrinho found that following Christianisation, Latin commemorators began to include ‘death dates’ in epigraphic formulas.¹⁶ The inclusion of death dates in Christian Greek epitaphs is apparent from the sixth century onwards, though the Greek choice of verb sometimes makes it unclear as to whether it is the date of death or the date of burial that is recorded.¹⁷ Mary Hoskins-Walbank and Michael Walbank have pointed out that the increased frequency with which the date of death appears could be linked to a law passed by Justinian in 537, which insisted on the obligatory dating of all legal documents.¹⁸ Recording dates on documents and stonemasonry may have been part of a wider trend to increase accountability.

¹⁵ Sironen 1997, 119-20.

¹⁶ Galvao Sobrinho 1995, 453-458.

¹⁷ For example, Ἐτελιόθη meaning ‘finished’ (*SEG* XIII, No. 469, 114), is in the third person singular, which could refer to either the tomb or the person.

¹⁸ Hoskins Walbank 2006, 280; *Nov. Just.*, XLVII, 283.

The inclusion of death dates is likely to have been a mark of the Christian faith of the deceased too: Christian epithets portray the moment of death as a cause for celebration. One seventh-century epitaph reads: ‘Having lived in this life fifty-two years and departed to the ineffable ones of life on March 9, Indiction 15, Year 506 (612)’.¹⁹ Here, one can see that the date of death was thought to be a significant point of transformation and transition, worthy of commemoration. Galvão-Sobrinho coined the term ‘celestial birthdays’ to reflect the mentality of celebration of death, as promoted by Christian theology. Abrahamse noted that the Byzantines drew upon the biblical model in their commemoration of the dead, marking the third, sixth, ninth and fortieth days, and the first anniversary after a death.²⁰ It is plausible that the inclusion of death dates on tombstones served as a record for mourners to commemorate the deceased on the appropriate date, according to their faith. Similarly, some Byzantine monastic foundation documents request that the founder of the monastery is commemorated on the anniversary of his or her death date.²¹ The epitaphs attached a new significance to death dates, implying that the Byzantine Christians may have attached a new significance to commemorating the anniversaries of death.

Third, Byzantine tombstones do not reveal age at death as often as Roman epitaphs. Richard Saller and Brent Shaw have noted that in their samples of Latin epitaphs between 15% and 33% of tombstones detail age at death, depending on region,

¹⁹ *SEG* XXXI, No. 1435, 373.

διατρίψας ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ ἥ
Πέντα καὶ δύο ἔτη καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἰ
ἀναφραστοὺς Βίου μετέ ἰ
-Στη {τη}μη(ν) Δύστρου θ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιε' ἰ
ἔτους φς'

²⁰ Abrahamse 1985, 132.

²¹ Thomas and Constantinides Hero 2000, 434.

period and social class.²² Between the first and eighth centuries AD, an average of only 14% of Greek tombstones reveal age at death. The Byzantines may have considered age in life to be irrelevant in death. This reasoning seems implausible as the Byzantines sometimes noted marital status and some family relationships, which denoted the deceased's life-stage. Alternatively, the Byzantines may have tended not to record numerical age on tombstones because they did not have an accurate idea of the deceased's age at death. This explanation seems more likely as the paucity of Byzantine numerical age data is not restricted to epigraphic data but it is a problem that is common among many genres of written sources too.²³ The decreasing frequency of age statements on epitaphs implies that the Byzantines may have had only vague concepts of their numerical ages.

This chapter will now systematically analyse constructions of gender, status and age in the sample of tombstones in order to expose Byzantine perceptions of Life Course trajectories.

6.1 Gender Data

In the sample of tombstone inscriptions used here, there are no instances where the deceased is stated to be a eunuch. Unfortunately, eunuchs may be only identifiable as men in the tombstone evidence. Therefore, this chapter deals with the two sexes: male and female. Studies of Latin inscriptions have shown that between 31% and 48% commemorated females and between 52% and 69% commemorated males, depending

²² Saller 1984, 138; Pers. comm. – Manfred Clauss (20/06/09) c.56,000 Roman Latin epitaphs include age at death out of a sample of 150,000-170,000. This equates to 33- 38% of epitaphs.

²³ Stathakopoulos 2008, 309-316.

upon the region: varying between one in three and one in two female epitaphs (Table 12).²⁴ Here, the proportional representation of male and female tombstones is that roughly one in three epitaphs commemorated females in the first and second century, nearly one in two represented females in the third century, before returning to one in three epitaphs in the fourth and fifth centuries: the proportions plummet to one in four epitaphs representing females in the sixth and seventh centuries, but again return to one in three in the eighth century (when, however, the sample is too small to be reliable) (Tables 13 to 20). In Patlagean's study of inscriptions, she found a ratio of 37% female and 63% male dedications: roughly one in three epitaphs remembered females (Table 21).²⁵ This pattern suggests that when tombstone production was comparatively low in the sixth and seventh centuries, women were less likely to be commemorated. By contrast, when tombstones production was relatively high, women are represented in higher proportions. This might suggest that when fewer tombstones were produced, the commemorative function of epitaphs changed: the few that were made were dedicated to male elite individuals who embodied greatest ideological value because of their publicly visible roles.²⁶

It is the argument of this chapter that epitaphs normally perpetuate ideals about traditional gender roles: males are usually commemorated in terms of their occupation or public role, whereas women are usually commemorated in terms of their function within the family (daughter, wife or mother). Therefore, the quantity of epitaphs produced for each gender in any given period reflects the commemorative uses of

²⁴ Revell 2005, 47: Table 1.

²⁵ Patlagean 1977, 97.

²⁶ Pers. Comm. Ivison (06/03/09): 'Very few inscriptions are known or can be dated for the 7th- early 9th centuries; very few are gravestones. After this date (from early 9th onwards) all epitaphs on stone are restricted to elite individuals or the state and church and the inscriptions are not mass produced but special commissions, in the case of epitaphs being usually metrical poems concocted by Classicising poets - very much a product (and patrons of) the so-called Macedonian Renaissance?.'

epitaphs at that time. It will be argued that from the fifth century onwards, as tombstones became less popular and tombstones commemorating women constituted a smaller proportion of the total number of tombstones, inscriptions were increasingly used to commemorate publicly prominent individuals, and displayed less interest in family relationships.

Table 12: Percentage of Men and Women Commemorated in Latin Tombstones

(Revell 2005)

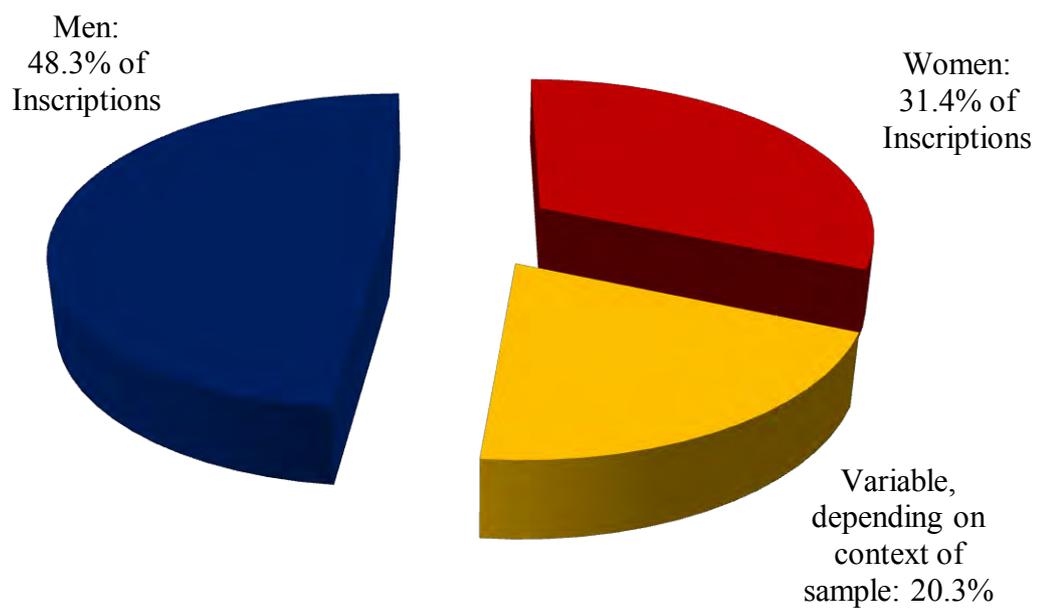
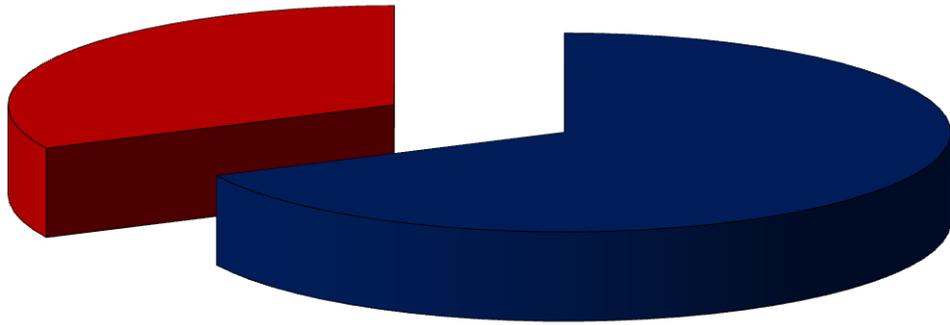


Table 13: Men and Women Commemorated in First Century

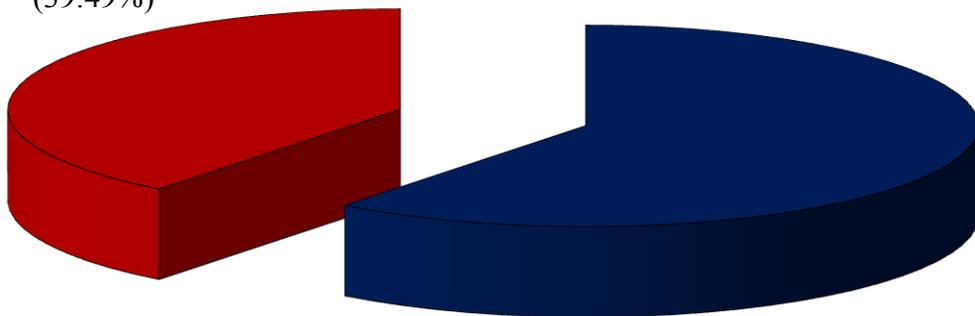
Women: 56
inscriptions
(32.18%)



Men: 118
inscriptions
(67.82%)

Table 14: Men and Women Commemorated in Second Century

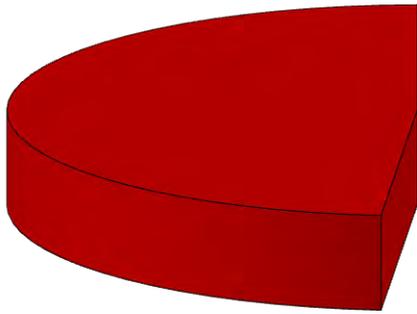
Women: 203
inscriptions
(39.49%)



Men: 311
inscriptions
(60.51%)

Table 15: Men and Women Commemorated in Third Century

Women: 208
inscriptions
(48.60%)

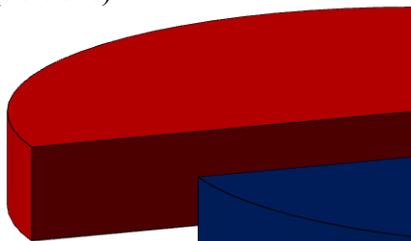


Men: 220
inscriptions
(51.40%)



Table 16: Men and Women Commemorated in Fourth Century

Women: 22
inscriptions
(30.56%)



Men: 50
inscriptions
(69.44%)

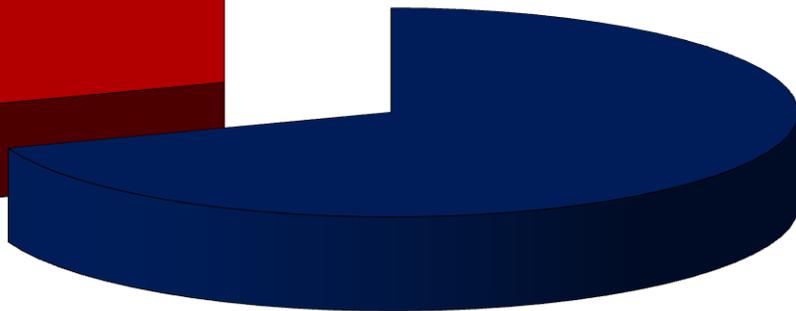


Table 17: Men and Women Commemorated in Fifth Century

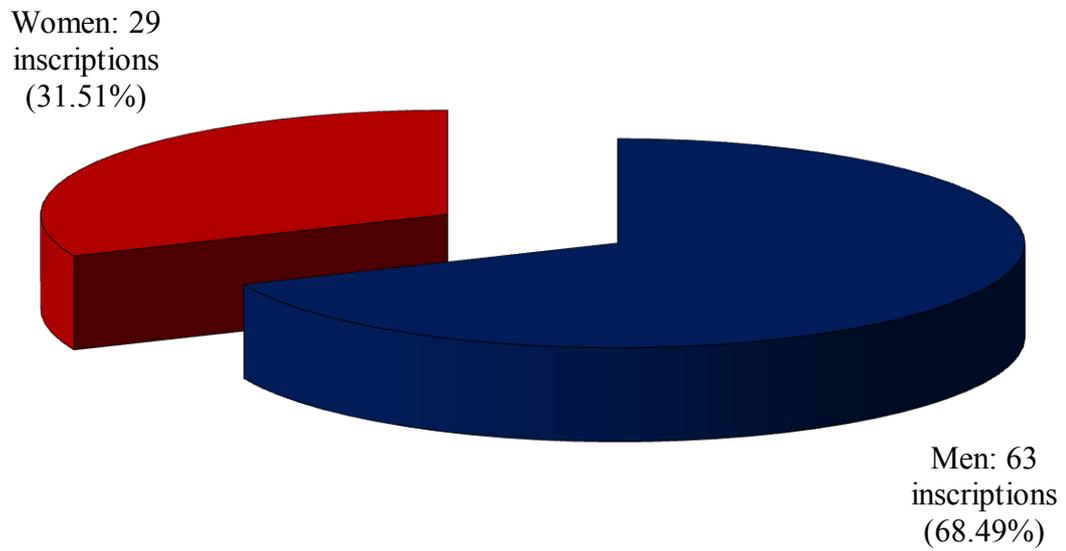


Table 18: Men and Women Commemorated in Sixth Century

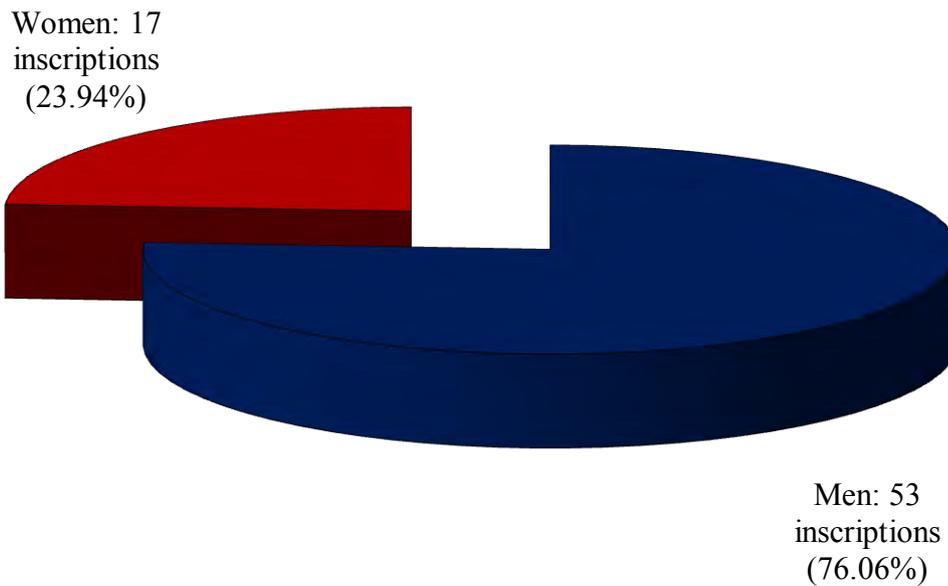


Table 19: Men and Women Commemorated in Seventh Century

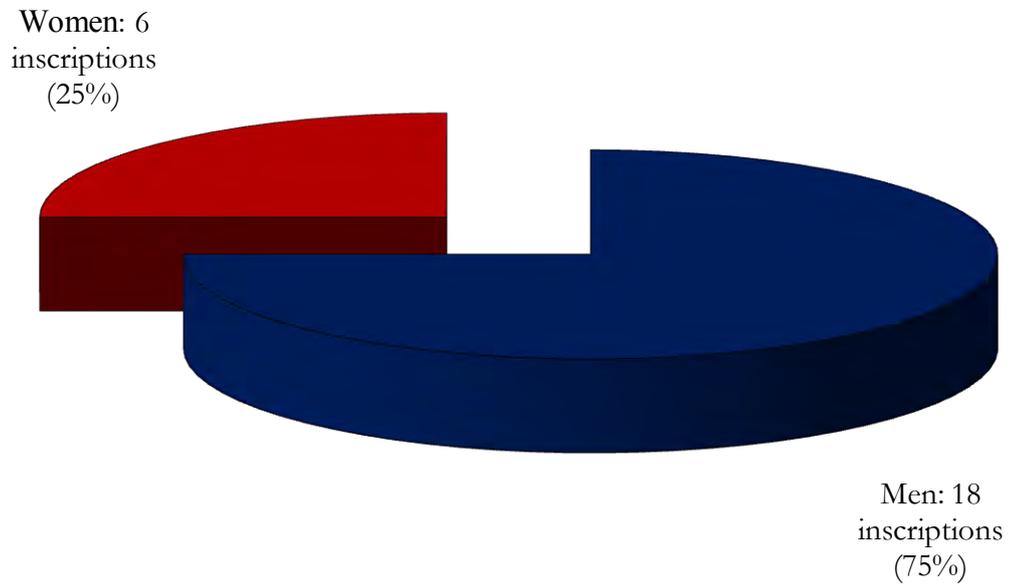


Table 20: Men and Women Commemorated in Eighth Century

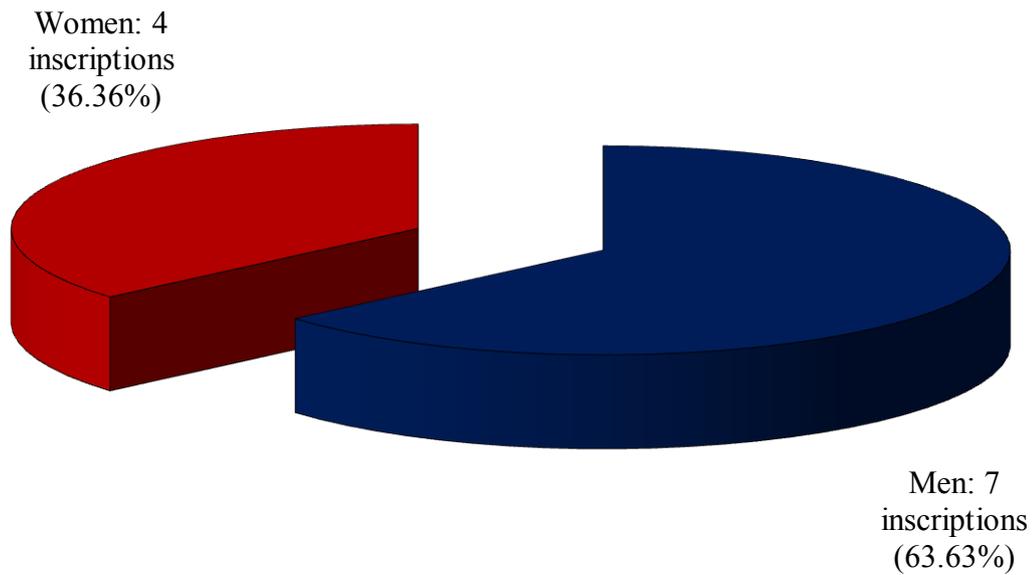
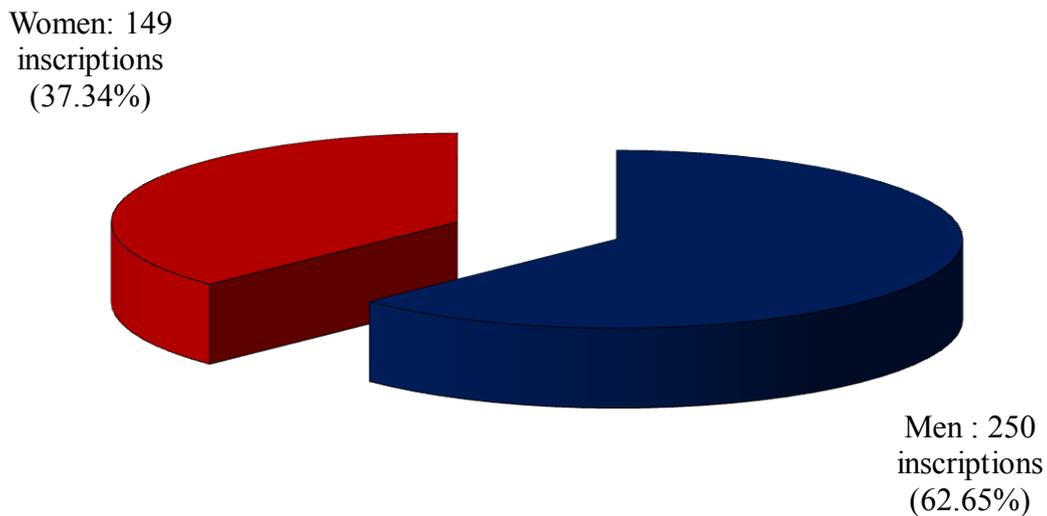


Table 21: Percentage of Men and Women Commemorated Ninth to Thirteenth Century (Patlagean 1977)



The data suggests that at times when age at death was a relatively popular inclusion in epitaphs, namely during the second, fourth, sixth and seventh centuries, it was popular in both male and female commemorations. Equally, in the first, third, fifth and eighth centuries, dedications for men and women followed the same tendencies and are less likely to reveal age at death. This data shows us that the inclusion of age statements in epigraphic formulae was not determined by gender but by contemporary trends. The biggest discrepancies between the proportion of male and female dedications revealing age at death occur in the fourth and seventh centuries. These are two of the centuries in which tombstone production was dramatically reduced when compared with preceding periods and consequently the study draws upon smaller samples, which may not accurately reflect the inclusion of age statements. Be that as it

may, the bulk of the evidence suggests that the inclusion of an age statement was not normally gender specific.

6.2 Status Data

Gustave Lefebvre analysed the format of the Christian inscriptions of Egypt from the second to twelfth centuries. He looked at religious formulas and acclamations and the titles and professions listed on the epitaphs, and concluded that: ‘The true Christian epitaph ignores circumstances in life...’²⁷ But I disagree: status and profession frequently feature in epitaphs. One might suggest that Christianity prompted a new egalitarian outlook towards the construction of epitaphs, which overlooked the ideologies pertaining to gender, status, profession and age, but Mark Handley warned against such a stance: ‘It is perhaps all too easy to get caught up in Early Christian notions of equality before the eyes of God. The social reality was markedly different’.²⁸ As we will see in this chapter, Byzantine tombstones incorporate information about the life of the deceased individual.

In the sixth century, the average cost of a grave has been estimated to be one and a half to two gold *nomisma*; naturally, the rich had the best access to tombstone commemorations.²⁹ For example, one seventh-century tombstone reads: ‘Here lies the servant of God Sergios, in remembrance of him being of high repute, former *eparch* and

²⁷ Lefebvre 1907, XXIX – XXXIV; XXXV – XXXVIII: ‘La véritable épitaphe chrétienne ignore la condition mortelle...’

²⁸ Handley 2003, 64.

²⁹ Hoskins-Walbank 2006, 283.

dux.³⁰ But it would be wrong to assume that tombstone commemorations were restricted to the upper echelons of society exclusively. In some instances, the wealthy sectors of society commemorated their slaves and attendants. Another fifth-century tombstone reads: ‘Primus, the esteemed servant, lies in this grave’.³¹ While it was conceivable that people of all statuses could be commemorated, the act of organising a commemoration was only accessible to those with the means to pay for it.

The evidence suggests that from the fifth century onwards, tombstone commemoration became more widely accessible. This is attested by the wide array of occupations that begin to appear in commemorations. Professions represented in the epitaphs include builders, butchers, barbers, shoemakers, glassworkers, stonecutters, midwives and bath attendants.³² A few examples from the sample include Eutyches, who died aged 21 and is recorded to have been a reader (ἀναγνόσ-τες), Joannes, who died aged 28 and is recorded to have been the emperor’s cup-bearer (π[ι]νκέρν[η]ς), and Alexandros, who died aged 58 and is recorded to have been a clothes-maker (ἀγναφ-ἀριος).³³ Publicly visible people, of professional statuses, were perceived as valuable and worthy of commemoration from the fifth century onwards.

³⁰ *SEG XIII*, No. 469, 114:

Ἐνθάδε κατάκειται ὁ δοῦλος
 Τοῦ Χ(ριστοῦ) Σέργιος ὁ ἐν ἐνδ(οξοτά)τη μνήμη
 Γενάμενος, ἀπὸ ἐπαρχῶν καὶ
 Δοῦξ,

³¹ Sironen 1997, 175: ‘ου δοῦλος τί-μειο(σ)’.

³² Sironen 1997: barber, 144, 276; bath attendant, 230; bishop, 156; blacksmith, 167; bowl seller, 281; builder, 143, 159; butcher, 138; cloth seller, 205; deaconess, 235, 236; elder, 188; embroiderer, 280; glassworker, 147, 180; manager of aqueducts, 153; midwife, 126; miller, 162; mosaic worker, 207; pastry cook, 230, 248; physician, 242, 250; priest, 285; proconsul democrats, 170; provision seller, 232; reader, 142, 155, 203, 233, 241, 248, 251, 283, 317; servant, 175; shoemaker, 145, 148; silk-merchant, 229; stonecutter, 129; stick maker, 234; subdeacon, 187, 263.

³³ *SEG XLI*, No. 894, 295: ‘ἀναγνόσ-τες (anagnostes)’; *SEG XLV*, No. 1485, 397: ‘π[ι]νκέρν[η]ς (pinkernes)’; *SEG XXVIII*, No. 1056, 300: ‘ἀγναφ-ἀριος (agnafarios)’

There are several reasons which would explain why tombstones became more accessible to people of a wide array of statuses. Factors affecting people of different statuses, such as a decrease in the price of tombstones, may have, in part, contributed to this increase in the accessibility to tombstones. But some occupations are more frequently attested than others. For example, Eriki Sironen's publication of excavated inscriptions records that church readers were commonly commemorated, accounting for nine out of the 44 professionals listed.³⁴ One might understand that it was the custom for churches to pay for their employees' commemorations, or that they could obtain preferential burial rates. In other words, access to epitaphs was determined by a person's specific occupation. Handley has suggested that in the West, people of all statuses were able to join 'burial clubs' specific to their professional group.³⁵ Although there is no written confirmation, the high prevalence of specific professions could be seen as evidence supporting the concept that burial clubs did exist in Byzantium, as well as the West.

Since I have found professional status to impact upon an individual's access to tombstone commemorations, at least from the fifth century, one might expect the proportional representation of women (who tended not to work in public roles) to be reduced.³⁶ Correspondingly, from the fourth century, male tombstones increasingly outnumber female tombstones. Most women are commemorated in connection with their husband's occupation. For instance, Hoskins-Walbank and Walbank cite a woman's sixth-century tombstone that was made using a pre-cut inscription, with spaces left for personally specific snippets of information such as the woman's name,

³⁴ Sironen 1997: reader, 142, 155, 203, 233, 241, 248, 251, 283, 317.

³⁵ Handley 2003, 35.

³⁶ For types of female occupations in antiquity, see: Cantarella 1987.

her husband's name and occupation and the date of her death.³⁷ As this tombstone was a pre-cut inscription, it must have used a standard epigraphic formula, applicable to most deceased wives. Therefore, it is safe to presume that in deceased wives' commemorations, the husbands' professional statuses warranted mention, which emphasises that while women were primarily identified in terms of their marital status and their husbands' professional status, their husbands were primarily defined in terms of their own professional status.

Indeed, some women are commemorated in conjunction with a profession. In one fifth- or sixth- century example, a midwife is commemorated.³⁸ In another example from the same period, an epitaph reads: 'The sepulchre of Euphemia the manager, a virginal woman of 45 years, prudent and having her hand ready for benefice according to her ability'.³⁹ But in this instance, even though the professional status of the woman is revealed, her unmarried status as a 'virgin' continued to be a significant statement within the commemorative data. Indeed, the very exclusion of a named husband may have implied that the woman was unmarried. This reiterates the point that marital status primarily defined a woman's identity, second to her own or her husband's professional status.

³⁷ Hoskins-Walbank 2006, 276.

³⁸ Sironen 1997, 126.

³⁹ Sironen 1997, 260. I have adapted Sironen's translation here: he translates *μειζοτέρα* to mean 'intendant', while Talbot 1996a, 330 translates the word to mean 'stewardess of an estate'. Here, I have simply used the word 'manager'. Equally, I have translated *νέας* not to mean young, but virginal, as this seems more apt in the description of 45 year old woman.

6.3 Age Data

In epitaphs, age statements are usually provided in isolated cases, when the deceased was either exceptionally young or old at the time of their death. As can be seen in Tables 24 to 30, the ages 29 to 49 are very poorly attested in the epigraphic record (these ages parallel the pattern of numerical age data found in hagiographies). But drawing upon census records, Laiou-Thomadakis found that in fifth- to sixth-century Byzantine Egypt, after precarious infancy, the average life expectancy was 44.7 years for men and 42.4 years for women.⁴⁰ One would consequently expect, if age on tombstones were representative of demographic age at death, the 29 to 49 age bracket to be the most commonly attested age at death. The fact that it is the least attested age bracket suggests that age at death was only documented on a tombstone if it was an exceptionally long or short life.

Ages arising most often in tombstone records denote periods of the Life Course which were perceived to be significant. The ages occurring least often denote stages within the Life Course when either it was not thought appropriate to produce a tombstone for the deceased (for example, neonates), or stages when age was not thought to be of significance (for example, people who died at an average or expected age of death).⁴¹ Louise Revell pointed out that there is no way of proving that age-commemoration patterns reflect mortality rates: ‘...not all the inscriptions give the age of the deceased, and it is impossible to know whether those that do are a representative sample of the age structure of all those commemorated with funerary markers’.⁴² Age at

⁴⁰ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977, 244. See: Laiou and Morrison 2007, 17; Bagnall and Frier 1995, 34.

⁴¹ Hennessy 2008, 28.

⁴² Revell 2005, 48.

death was included in epigraphic formulas by the commemorator when the life-stage of the deceased was thought to hold social significance. For this reason, the data used here will not be used to produce statistics on longevity, but instead, to understand the symbolic significance of commonly attested numerical ages and their significance in the Life Course.

A further limitation of using age data taken from tombstone records to understand Life Course trajectories is that age-rounding took place. Rounding to an age ending in either zero or five is common on Roman tombstones.⁴³ In Byzantine tombstones, the numeral five is not as prevalent. Out of the 25 tombstones that provide ages in sixth- to eighth- century sample, only one ends in the number five, which equates to a 4% occurrence, compared to the expected 10% occurrence of an age ending in any given numeral (zero to nine). In fact, this data indicates that the Byzantines avoided the number five. The lower prevalence of the numeral five in Greek as opposed to Latin inscriptions can be explained in terms of the effort needed to carve the numerals. In Latin, numbers ending in zero or five would be the least complex numerals to inscribe as they consisted of the least amount of individual digits. For example, ending in a combination of V X and L, the numerals ending in zero and five, are shorter than the numerals endings in three (III) or eight (VIII). Byzantine Greek inscriptions, not adhering to the practises attached to the employment of Latin numerals, had no reason to round to five. In practice, the Greek numeral 10 (ι') would have been simpler to inscribe than 15 (ιϵ') and would also take up less space. This is an important point, as some tombstones were pre-cut and the space left for age on a tombstone may have been

⁴³ Duncan-Jones 1977, 333-53.

predetermined.⁴⁴ Utilising rounded-ages enabled the inscriber to use digits that took up less space and were less time consuming to inscribe. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the Byzantines did not round to five, as the Latin inscribers did, as the Greek numeral five did not reduce the space and effort required.

Classical historians found that age rounding was more prevalent amongst adults' ages than children's ages, presumably because it is easier to keep count of the age of a younger person and because, as I have shown, recording an accurate age for children was more important.⁴⁵ The sixth- to eighth-century sample has been split into two sections: inscriptions recording ages under 20 (10 examples) and inscriptions recording ages of people 20 years old and above (15 examples) (Tables 22 and 23). The significance of the age 20 is not used here to imply that Byzantines perceived maturity to occur at this age, but in order to ensure that the data is analysed using the proportional range of the numbers zero to nine. In the sample of ages under 20, two of the ten inscriptions recorded the age ten, resulting in 20% occurrence of age ending in zero (Table 22). In the sample of inscriptions over 20 years old, three of the fifteen numerals end in zero, meaning that there is a 20% occurrence here too (Table 23). In both groups, this figure is 10% higher than one would expect if age rounding did not occur. The data shows that, in contrast to findings in Roman studies, in both commemorations for under 20 and over 20 year olds, rounding consistently occurred.⁴⁶ This small sample must be taken in context but it might be suggested that the Byzantines rounded to ages ending in zero both before and after maturation.

⁴⁴ Hoskins-Walbank 2006, 276.

⁴⁵ Revell 2005, 59; Scheidel 1996, 60.

⁴⁶ Age 10: *SEG* XLII, No. 869, 249; *SEG* XLIII, No. 1127, 414. Age 20: *SEG* XXXIV, No. 1468, 406; *SEG* XXVIII, No. 1057, 300. Age 50: *SEG* XLV, No. 850, 215.

Table 22: Age Rounding Under 20 Years of Age

Age	Reference	Quantity being commemorated at specific age	Percentage commemorated at particular age
5 months, 7 days	SEG, XXXIV, No. 1469, 406	1/10	10%
Almost 2	SEG XL, No. 861, 268	1/10	10%
2 years, ...months, 2 days	SEG XXXI, No. 886, 221	1/10	10%
2	SEG XXXIX, 1668, 526	1/10	10%
8	SEG XLII, 869, 249	1/10	10%
9	SEG XXXIX, 1669, 526	1/10	10%
10	SEG XLII, 869, 249	2/10	20%
10	SEG XLIII, 1127, 414.		
12	SEG XLII, 869, 249	1/10	10%
18	Insaph, 15.362	1/10	10%

Table 23: Age Rounding Over 20 Years of Age

Age	Reference	Likelihood of dieing & being commemorated at particular age	Percentage of dieing & being commemorated at particular age
20	SEG XXXIV, 1468, 406	2/15	13.33%
20	SEG XXVIII, 1057, 300.		
21	SEG XLI, 894, 295	2/15	13.33%
21	SEG XXXIV, 1468, 406		
22	SEG XXX, 1747, 495	1/15	6.66%
24	SEG XXXI, 288, 68.	1/15	6.66%
Almost 27	SEG XXXI, 1431, 375	1/15	6.66%
28	SEG XLV, 1485, 397	1/15	6.66%
29, 2 months, 15 days	Insaph, 13.309	1/15	6.66%
50	SEG XLV, 850, 215	1/15	6.66%
52	SEG XXXI, 1435, 373	1/15	6.66%
53	SEG XIII, 469, 114	1/15	6.66%
58	SEG, XXVIII, 1056, 300	1/15	6.66%
85	SEG XXXVI, 1329, 407	1/15	6.66%
98	SEG XXXI, 1470, 383	1/15	6.66%

However, evidence shows us that it was clearly more important to be specific about the age at death when commemorating infants. All of the children in this sample under the age of three are attributed a specific age. For instance, one is said to be ‘five months and seven days’, another ‘almost two’, and another ‘two years, ...months, two days’.⁴⁷ The emphasis on the precise record of age in infancy emphasised the short length of the child’s life, contrary to the parents’ hopes and expectations, and alluded to the importance of each day; it also conveyed the care and affection of the parents, who had kept record of their child’s exact age. It would have been easier to document a

⁴⁷ *SEG XXXIV*, No. 1469, 406; *SEG XL*, No. 861, 268; *SEG XXXI*, No. 886, 221

specific and accurate age for a younger individual, outlived and witnessed by others. Talbot has suggested that wealthier Christian families commemorated the sadness of their child's fleeting lifespan with the symbolically meaningful more permanent tombstone.⁴⁸ It was important to include a precise and detailed age-statement on infant commemorations, in order to emphasise the short life and the care of the parents, who were able to record their child's age with precision.

The significance of numerical age was transitive, depending on the age and status of the commemorated. An exceptional case of a specific age being recorded for an adult is recorded on Philosophia's sixth-century tombstone. She is recorded to have lived twenty-nine years, two months and fifteen days (Figure 6.1).⁴⁹ This is the only example in the sample of an adult tombstone recording age at death in terms of months and days, in addition to years. Despite the fact that the woman was married and her husband set up the memorial for her, she was buried collectively alongside her parents. Perhaps she was not buried with her husband because the woman died childless.⁵⁰ The inclusion of the wife's age, but not the parents' ages, distinguishes her as of a separate generation and the utilisation of a precise age statement, normally used in infant's epitaphs, emphasises her status as her parent's daughter and not as her husband's wife. In female commemorations, marital status primarily defined a woman's identity. But this example underscored my previous observation that maternal status was an important constituent of female identity.

⁴⁸ Talbot 2009, 304.

⁴⁹ *SEG XXXVI*, No. 1157, 348.

⁵⁰ *SEG XXXVI*, No. 1157, 348: Philosophia is attributed with the status of 'wife' (γνησία) but not mother, suggesting that her marriage was barren. Her own mother, who was buried with her, is described as 'thrice fortunate' (ἡ τρισεύμοιπος), presumably referring to her having three children. But the dedicator does not infer that Philosophia died too young to have children, indeed, at 29 Philosophia was attributed with a 'full span' (ἔζησεν ἐξεβίωσ) suggesting that Philosophia's Life Course ran its length but that no children were produced.

The ages and family roles revealed on tombstones can provide vital information about the disparity in expectations between males and females. Focusing on the second century (a quantitatively rich sample), highly attested periods of the Life Course include the age ranges of 22 to 28 and 64 to 70 for men and of 15 to 21 and 50 to 63 for women (Table 25). The highly attested age ranges occur earlier in the female Life Course than in the male Life Course. This could suggest that women were perceived to reach significant stages of their life earlier than men. Legal codes reflect a similar discrepancy between the rates of maturity for men and women. In the sixth century, girls could legally marry at 12 whereas boys could marry at 14.⁵¹ By the seventh century, the minimum age for marriage progressed to 13 for girls and 15 for boys: gender distinctions were maintained.⁵² In hagiographical rhetoric, early betrothal and marriage for women were signs of the beauty and the desirable nature of the girl.⁵³ For men, mental acuity, which was perceived to develop with age, was seen as an indication of the man's readiness for marriage. For instance, Leontios wrote in the seventh century that John the Almsgiver was ready to be married once he had developed in age and spirit.⁵⁴ In marriage, wives were valued for their physical development and reproductive role, whereas men were valued for protecting the family entity, which depended on the husband's maturity and mental acuity. It is arguable that social expectations of female familial responsibilities were achievable earlier in the developmental process than social expectations of male familial responsibilities. Taken together, the evidence suggests that women were expected to progress into the role of a spouse quicker than their male

⁵¹ Just. *Inst.*, XXIII, 42 (Eng. trans. 304)

⁵² *Ekloga*, 170 (Eng. trans. 72); See Scheidel 1996, 12.

⁵³ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 3 (Eng. trans. 167).

⁵⁴ Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 200).

counterparts. This reveals different social expectations of men and women of the same age, highlighting the fact that Life Course trajectories are gendered.

In Roman and Byzantine inscriptions, girls and young women are featured more frequently than older women. There are several potential explanations for this pattern. First, Revell noted that the drop in commemorations around the age of thirty for Roman women may have been because the grieving relatives perceived the woman's life to have been fulfilled, having achieved marriage and motherhood.⁵⁵ The Byzantine tombstones suggest that marriage and motherhood were defining boundaries in the female Life Course; after these had been achieved, the woman's life was thought to be fulfilled and there was less need to commemorate the deceased's demise.

Second, married women and mothers could be hidden in the epigraphic data due to collective familial commemorations, omitting individual names.⁵⁶ Patlagean found that in collective inscriptions, married daughters were nearly always omitted from familial inscriptions.⁵⁷ In the previously mentioned sixth-century gravestone of Philiosophia, her husband and dedicator chose to bury Philiosophia with her parents, perhaps freeing him to remarry, produce children and ultimately be buried with another family unit. While unmarried or childless women may have been buried with their natal family, married and mothering women may have been commemorated with their spouses' families, reflecting a change of familial allegiance for women.

Third, Christianity placed a high value on virgins, who – being unmarried – were more likely to be commemorated individually and therefore show up on the

⁵⁵ Revell 2005, 51/

⁵⁶ An example of a collective inscription which renders the members of the family indistinguishable from one another: *SEG XXXVI*, No. 1157, 348: 'ὁ-πὲρ εὐκαρπίας καὶ σωτηρίας Κουβαί-τηνῶν (for the prosperity and salvation of the Kouvaitenes)'

⁵⁷ Patlagean 1977, 98.

epigraphic record. Hagiographies emphasise the difficulty women had in resisting marriage and so one might deduce that, where age statements are absent, the commemorated virgin was more likely to have been young when she died.⁵⁸ However, women who remained chaste and unmarried beyond the normal age of marriage, known as ‘Brides of Christ’, are recorded too.⁵⁹ At Aphrodisias, an inscription recording a female virgin, dated between the fourth and sixth century reads: ‘Claudia, Justice has honoured you with (the) tomb of the dead, and has wedded your pure body (with it as a) lawful husband’.⁶⁰ Claudia’s death before marriage led the dedicator to talk of the union of the girl and her husband: the husband being a simile for her tomb. In this instance, Claudia may not necessarily have been young, but may have been a mature woman who resisted marriage. Her unmarried and virginal status, so vehemently emphasised in this epitaph, reiterates how even unmarried women were defined in terms of their marital status.

The concept of a life unfulfilled is attested in the male inscriptions too. A seventh-century tombstone records three young boys aged twelve, ten and eight, who are buried together. The inscription tells us that they died on the same day, recording that the tombstone was laid to document the tragedy of unfulfilled lives.⁶¹ In another inscription, Stephanos’ death from disease was described as occurring during ‘the prime

⁵⁸ Female resistance to marriage in hagiographies is looked at in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁵⁹ Alberici 2008, 179.

⁶⁰ *Iaph2007*, No. 15.347: ‘Κλαυδίη οίχου[έ]νων σε Δίκη κυ[δή]νατο τύμβω κουριδίωι καθ[α]ρὸν δὲ δέμας [συμ]μείξεν ἀκοίτ[η]’

⁶¹ *SEG XLII*, No. 869, 249:

‘Κωνσταντινου ζήσαντος ἐ’τη ιβ’, Μελλώ-
σου ζήσαντος ἐ’τη ι’, κ(αι) Νικήτα ζήσαντος ἐ’τη η’.
Τούτων μνήσθητι, Κ(ύριε, ἐν τῇ Βασιλείᾳ σου.
ἐτελειωθησαν μη(νι) Δεκεμβριῶ κζ’
(Konstantinos having lived 12 years
Mellosos having lived 10 years and
Niketas having lived 8 years.
May you remember these, Lord, in Your kingdom.
They died in the month of December 27.)’

of his life' (ἀκμὴν ἐξ Βιότοιου).⁶² In literary sources, authors usually label youths or recently matured men with the epithet that they were in the prime of life.⁶³ The themes of tragedy and unfulfilled life are common *topoi* in the verses of male and female epitaphs.

In the epigraphic evidence the emphasis on virginity is less evident for men than for women, but it is nevertheless an attribute occasionally commented upon. Jordanes is described as a 'virgin' (θενική), portraying the importance of the first sexual union as a life-stage marker for both men and women (Figure 6.2).⁶⁴ Yet in the Bible, the word 'virgin' (ἡ παρθένος) is most commonly used to refer to women alone.⁶⁵ Alberici has noted that in Latin texts, virginity was most commonly associated with women, and this seems to be the case in Byzantium too.⁶⁶ The emphasis on female virginity reiterates the Byzantine perception that women were defined by their marital and maternal statuses.

The male tombstones suggest that marriage was important as a Life Course marker for men too. A sixth-century inscription records that Theodoros died 'unmarried' (ἀγάμου).⁶⁷ It has already been noted that relationships between the deceased and commemorator are recorded less frequently in Byzantine epitaphs than in Roman epitaphs.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Byzantine inscriptions do record Joannes, who died aged 28, was 'son of Alanios and Salome'; Abraamios, who died aged 52 was 'son of

⁶² *Iaph2007*, No. 14.16.

⁶³ Leo Diac., 31 (Eng. trans. 83); 84 (Eng. trans. 135); *Alex.*, Vol. II: 122 (Eng. trans. 242); Vol. I: 132 (Eng. trans. 125).

⁶⁴ *Iaph2007*, No. 8.270.

⁶⁵ Matthew 1:23; 25:1; 25:7, 25:10; Luke 1:27; 1:34; Corinthians 7:25; 2:28; 7:34; 7:36; 7:37; 7:38; 11:2; Revelation 14:4.

⁶⁶ Alberici 2008, 170.

⁶⁷ *SEG XXX*, No. 1748, 495.

⁶⁸ Saller 1987, 21-34; Shaw 1987, 30-46.

the vicarious Joannes’; whereas Estotzas, who died aged 50 was ‘husband of Dodo’.⁶⁹ It has been found that for women, the Life Course marker of marriage was intertwined with the achievement of maternal status. Yet, for men, the attainment of fatherhood does not usually feature in the epitaphs. An inscription honouring Anastasios boasts that he: ‘lived for eighty-five years and saw the sons of his sons’.⁷⁰ Here, the mention of grandchildren is used to emphasize a man’s longevity, as opposed to complimenting his patriarchal virtues, as matriarchal virtues are found in female epitaphs. One can surmise that marriage is significant on male epitaphs, in isolation from parenthood.

Men re-emerge on the epigraphic record during old age.⁷¹ In the previous chapter it was asserted that old age was valued in Byzantium and age numerals in the inscriptions might have been included to highlight the deceased’s longevity.⁷² A tombstone from Arabia records that Themios lived to the age of 98.⁷³ Alberici asserted that, in hagiography: ‘The use of numerical data was added in order to indicate longevity... This was a rhetorical technique but the length in years also adds weight to the idea of authentic longevity’.⁷⁴ Longevity itself was an unusual and celebrated life-stage in Byzantium; inaccurate numerical ages may have been recorded on epitaphs in order to draw attention to the exceptional length of life.

There is a marked contrast between frequencies of elderly female and male commemorations. The above mentioned epitaph of 98-year-old Anastasios records him

⁶⁹ *SEG* XLV, No. 1485, 397: ‘[υἱ]ὸς Ἀλα|νί[ου] και Σαλό|μες (Son of Alanios and of Salome)’; *SEG* XXXI, No. 1435, 373: ‘ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου τοῦ βικαριου (son of the vicarious Joannes)’; *SEG* XLV, No. 850, 215: ‘τος, ἀνιρ Δόδο (husband of Dodo)’

⁷⁰ *SEG* XXXVI, No. 1329, 407: ‘ζήσας ἔτη πε’ και εἰδὼν [υἱ]-οὺς υἱων. ἔδωκεν [τὸ πν(εῦμ)α] τῷ θ(ε)ῷ και α [.....] (having lived for 85 years and seen the sons of his sons (i.e. grandsons))’

⁷¹ Laurence and Harlow (forthcoming), 11.

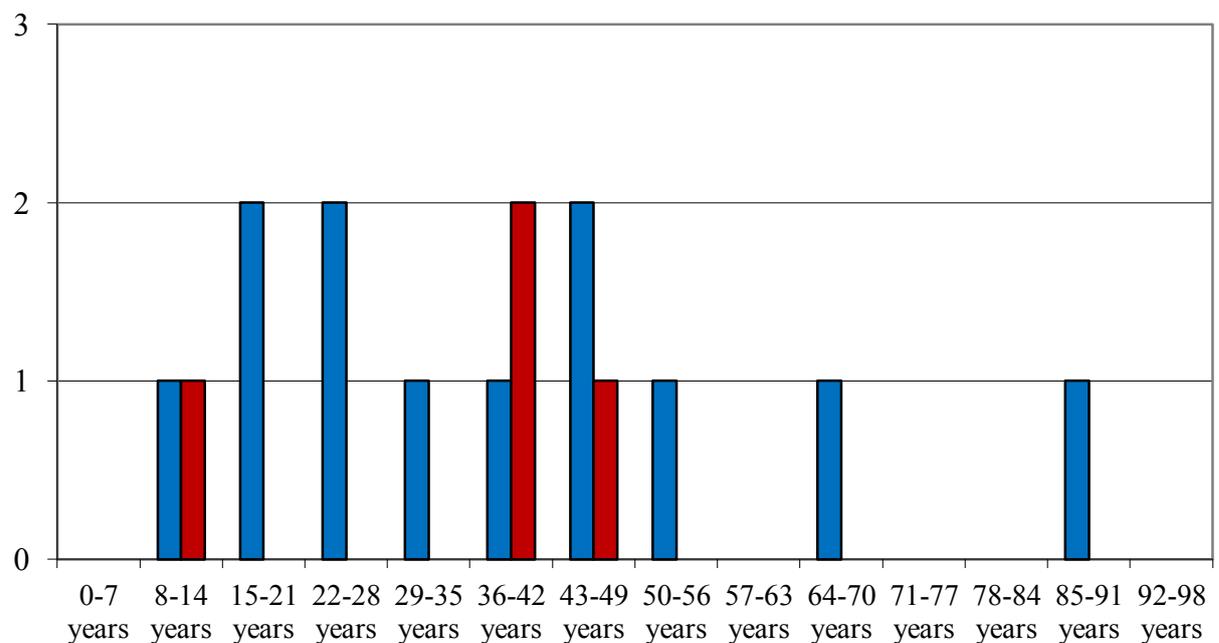
⁷² Talbot 1984, 273.

⁷³ *SEG* XXXI, No. 1470, 383.

⁷⁴ Alberici 2008, 221.

as an elder (πρεσβύτερος), suggesting that he held specific social status within his community.⁷⁵ But there are no comparable titles for women. The limited appearance of females in the epigraphic record may be accounted for by women’s inability (normally) to take on roles of high public visibility, which may have reduced their influence and the demand for their commemoration. In addition, commemorated women were valued in the roles of wife and mother, which may not have been considered to be as relevant when they were elderly.

Table 24: Age at Death on First-Century Tombstones



⁷⁵ *SEG* XXXVI, No. 1329, 407.

Table 25: Age at Death on Second-Century Tombstones

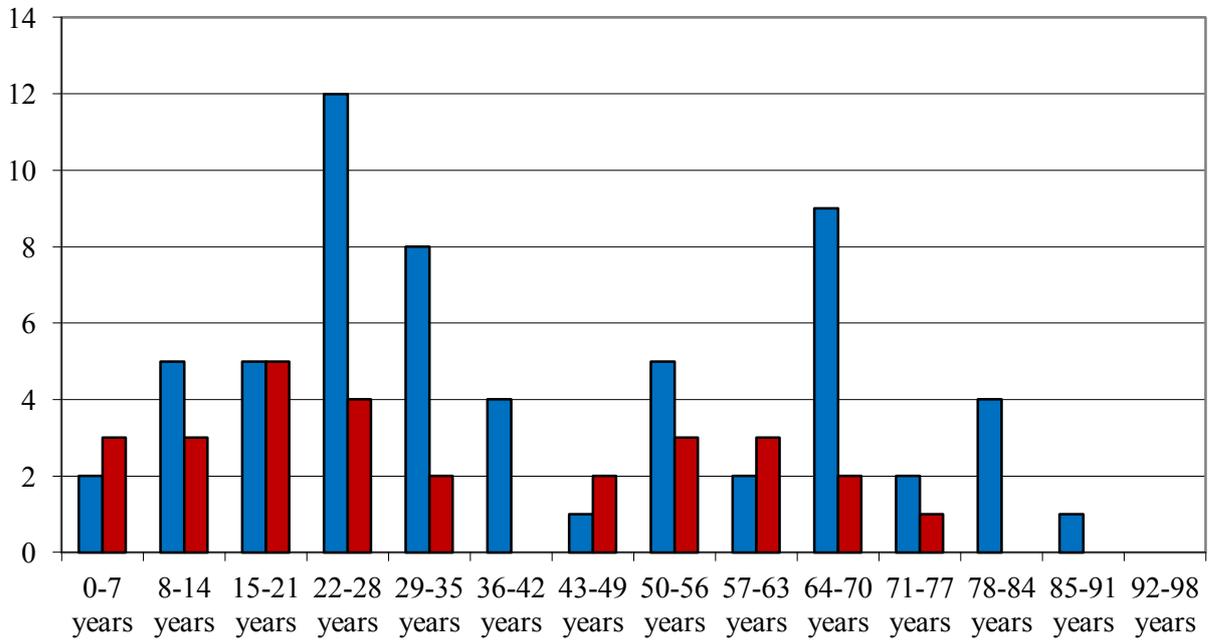


Table 26: Age at Death on Third-Century Tombstones

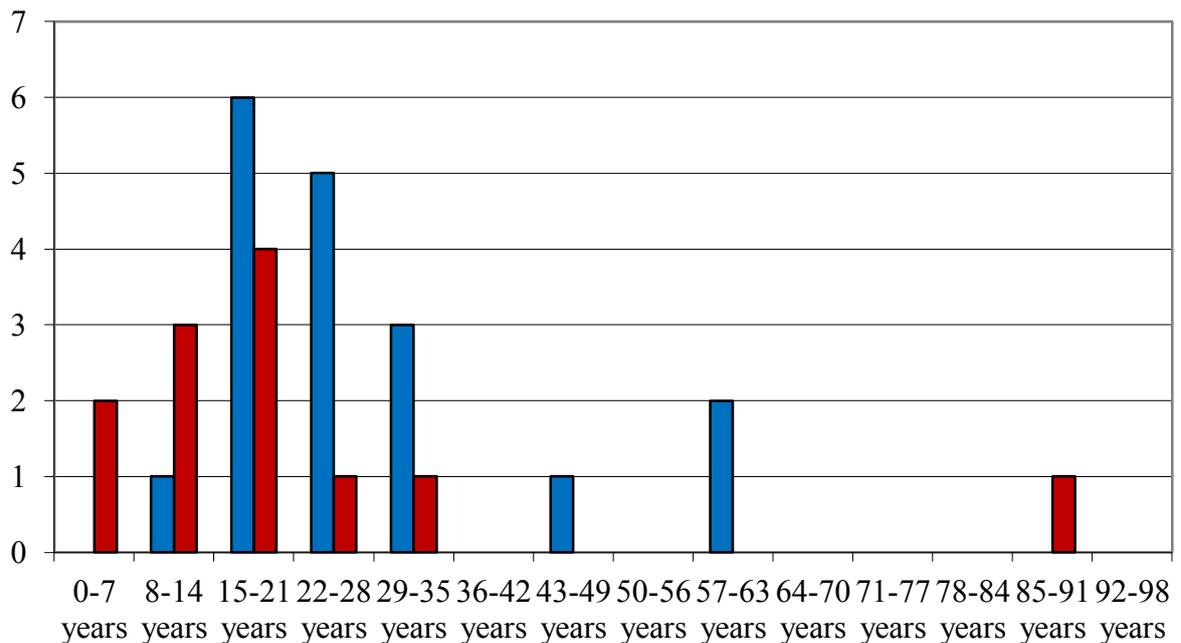


Table 27: Age at Death on Fourth-Century Tombstones

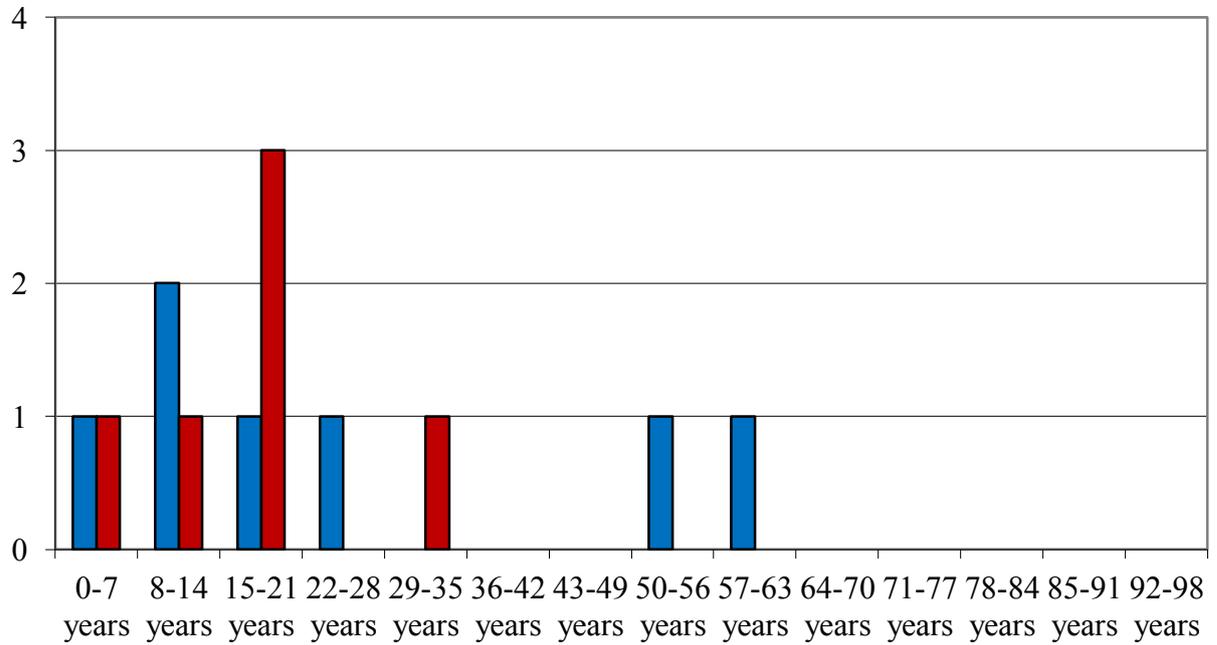


Table 28: Age at Death on Fifth-Century Tombstones

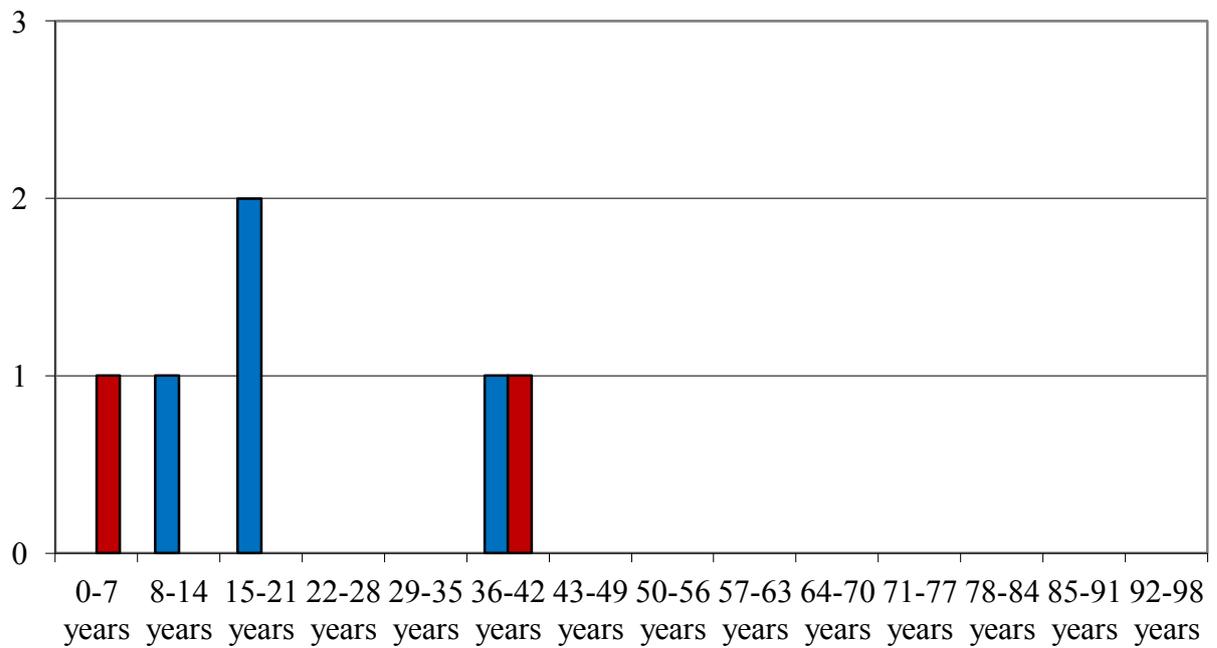


Table 29: Age at Death on Sixth-Century Tombstones

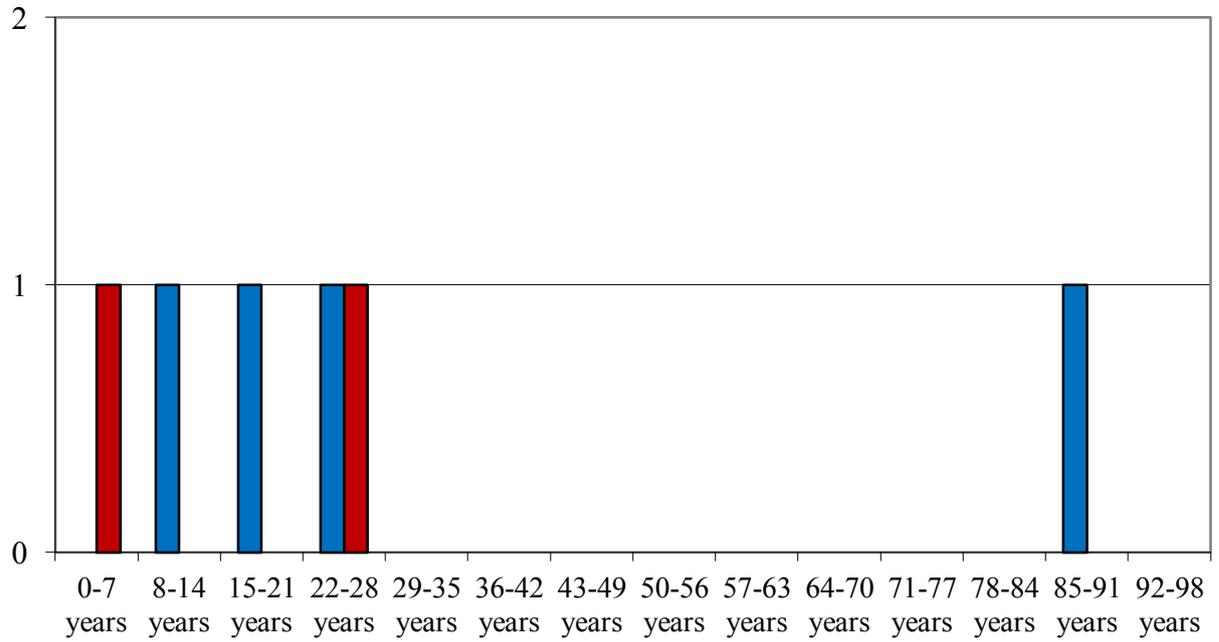
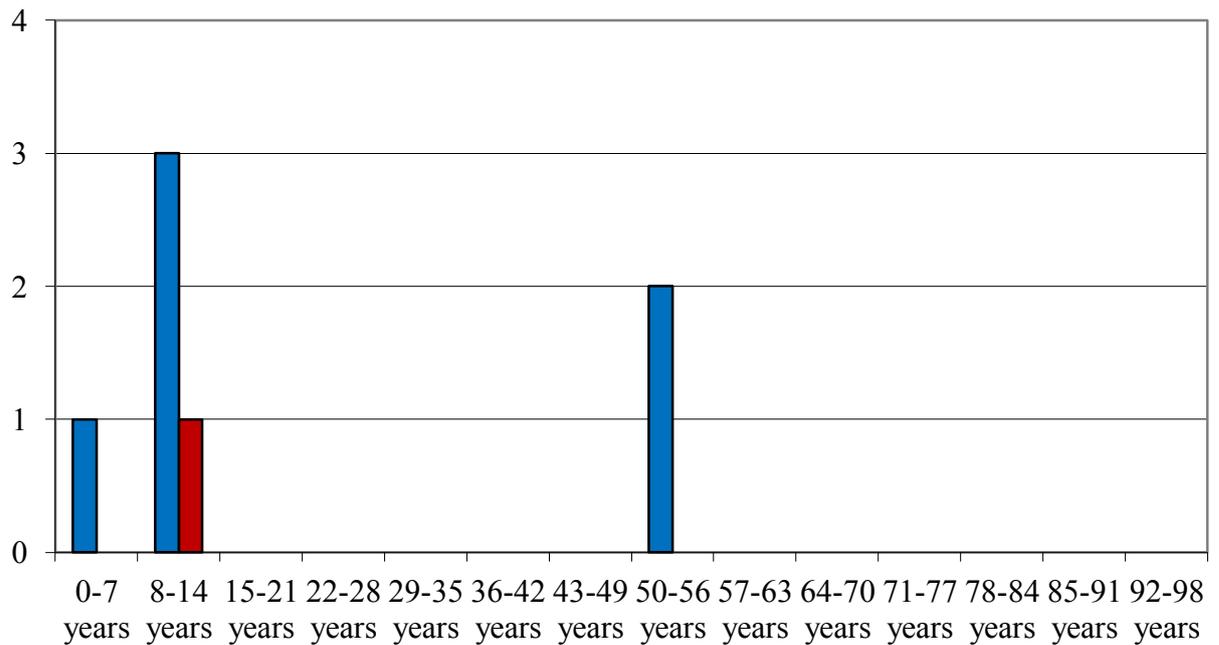


Table 30: Age at Death on Seventh-Century Tombstones



Note: None of the sample Eighth-Century Tombstones Stated Age at Death

6.4 Collective Burials

Hagiographies supplement tombstone data when exposing the importance of collective burials. In Anastasios' *Spiritually Beneficial Tales* (c.690), deceased twins who were buried together reputedly ejected an unrelated body from their grave.⁷⁶ In the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (c.894), Gregory the Cleric recorded that Theodora bade her daughter, Theopiste, to ignore normative family burial customs and she requested, in line with her monastic vows, for her daughter to be buried separately.⁷⁷ Ivison wrote: 'Byzantine burial practices must have served to reaffirm the structure of living society and so may suggest that the Late Byzantine society saw itself, and to some extent in fact was, [as] highly stratified and hierarchical, strongly emphasising family and corporate membership'.⁷⁸ The two quotes from hagiographies cited above might suggest that the Byzantines attached a high importance to collective, familial burials.

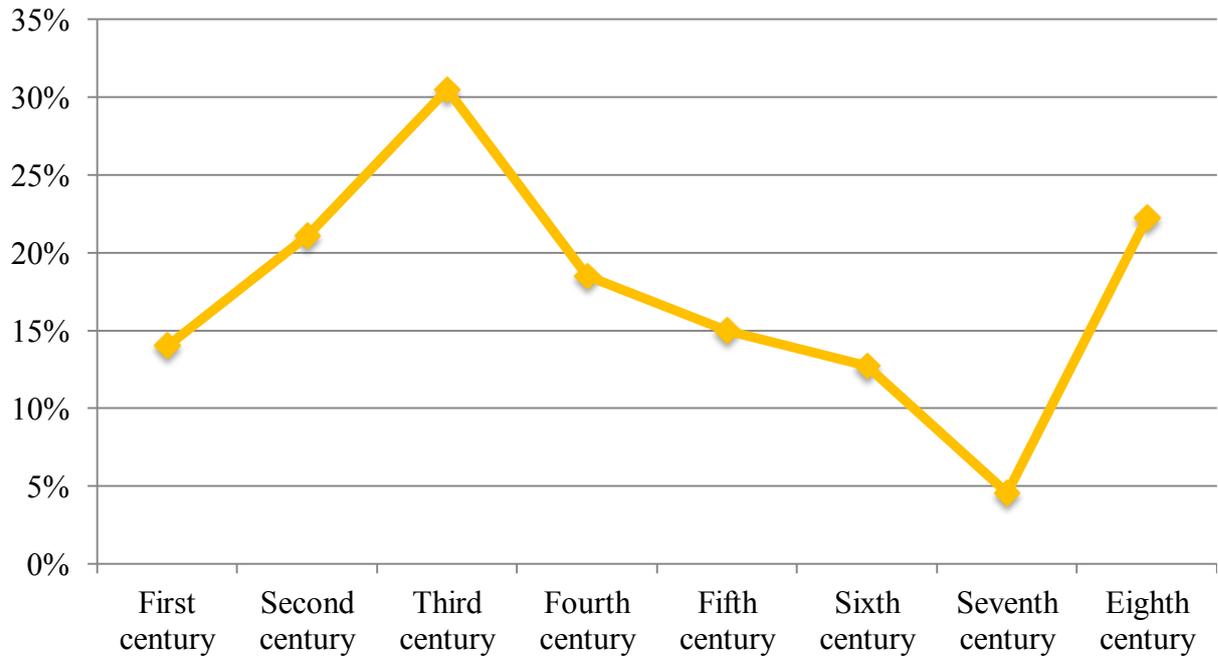
However, the epigraphic sample suggests that, as tombstone inscriptions reduced in popularity, the proportion of collective tombstones reduced in number too (Table 31). Simultaneous to the reduction in tombstones, commemorations of women reduced in number, both quantitatively and proportionally (Tables 16 to 20). This may reflect the fact that tombstones were no longer perceived as an important means to commemorate the family.

⁷⁶ Anast. Sin. T1, 65 (Eng. trans. 40).

⁷⁷ *V. Theod. Thess.*, 25 (Eng. trans. 201).

⁷⁸ Ivison 1993, 277.

Table 31: Percentage of Collective Inscriptions First to Eighth Century



6.5 Conclusions

Drawing upon the evidence provided by tombstones, a number of observations can be made about Byzantine perceptions of the Life Course. First, the sample of data used here shows that the Byzantines felt it was important to record the age of deceased infants with greater accuracy than deceased adults, suggesting that the value attached to determining numerical age dramatically decreased after about two years of age.

Second, women are visible in the epigraphic record up to the life-stage of marriage and reproduction but suddenly disappear in their mid-twenties suggesting that

their perceived value decreased with age and the fulfilment of familial roles. On the rare occasions that women are commemorated after achieving motherhood, their epitaphs celebrate their maternal virtues. For instance, in one fifth- or sixth-century tombstone, Eutychia is described as a ‘mother of good repute with her children’ (Figure 6.3).⁷⁹ Paradoxically, while the fulfilment of familial roles decreased the commemorative value attached to a deceased woman, in the instances where married women or women with children are commemorated, their familial status is emphasised.

From the fifth century onwards, publicly-visible men are commemorated most often, and occupations of all echelons of society begin to appear in the commemorative record. Unlike women, men continue to be commemorated into their old age. This suggests that in their role as a professional, and not necessarily as a family member, elderly men were highly-regarded. This is comparable with the pattern evident in the written sources, as noted in the previous chapter, which also grants significantly more page space to old men than old women. The only instance of an elderly male being commemorated in connection with his family role is when he is noted to be honoured to live long enough to see the birth of his grandchildren.⁸⁰ This may indicate something of the rarity of grandfathers and their consequent value in Byzantium, although it does not reveal the extent to which surviving grandfathers were incorporated into family life.

⁷⁹ *Iaph2007*, No. 15.357: ‘ἔνθα κα- τάκιτε Εὐτυχία ψευαμέ- νι θρέψα- σα κὲ εὐπρε- πὲς με- τὰ τῶν πε- διων αὐ- τῆς. Κυρία μνήσθιθι αὐτῆς Κ(ύρι)ε’.

⁸⁰ *SEG XXXVI*, No. 1329, 407.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has used a Life Course approach in the analysis of sources produced AD 518-1204 in order to understand perceptions of age, aging and life transitions in the Middle Byzantine period. I have found that on the one hand, the evidence primarily represents elite, adult, males. As a result, sources normalise high social status, adulthood and masculinity. Other nuances of gender, status and life-stage are often treated as ‘other’, in opposition to the ‘norm’, and can only be exposed through careful deconstruction. On the other hand, many of the written and pictorial sources depict the ascetic ideal, which hagiographers treat as an alternative to the ‘norm’, telling us both about self-identity within a biological family grouping and self-identity within a spiritual family. All of these rhetorical and pictorial constructs have provided us with an insight into a common perception of the Life Course, shared by Byzantines of different statuses, genders, ages, locations and epochs. It has been my primary purpose here to highlight the interplay between nuances in the construction of the Life Course and the passing of time and so now I turn to summarise some of the main differentiating factors.

In the first chapter, it can be seen how the impact of Christian doctrine is most marked when looking at the life-stage from conception to childhood. Fundamental markers of Christ’s infancy, such as his conception and birth, were incorporated into the standard hagiographical model. While Canon Law suggests that, by the sixth century, baptism had become integral to the occurrences during Byzantine infancy, hagiographers’ tendency to omit baptism may reflect how keenly they mirrored Christ’s infancy – which did not include baptism – according to the New Testament. The authors of hagiographies aimed to follow traditional biographical models and were, perhaps, more reluctant to highlight contemporary changes in practices: separate genres responded at different paces to contemporary practices. Roman and Late Antique

biographical narratives occasionally included divine omens occurring during the pregnancy of an individual destined for greatness, but Byzantine hagiographers started to include anecdotes about the circumstances of an individual's conception in the sixth century, again mirroring biblical biographies (including those of Christ, Samson, David, Jacob and Esau and John the Baptist). This rhetorical strategy of suggesting that a character was predestined for greatness even before their birth was subsequently adopted by Anna Komnene. The fact that this *topos* was able to traverse the boundaries of genre highlights its relevance to the Byzantine audience and enables us to see that the Byzantines conceptualised an individual's earliest existence as formative.

In the second chapter, children and childhood often appear as adjuncts to adults or adulthood. While children and youths represented a larger proportion of the population than they do today, their voices are not proportionately represented in the evidence. One rarely hears about children who did not subsequently attain adulthood, except when their character supports the construction of someone who did attain adulthood such as Theodore of Sykeon's sister or Anna Komnene's fiancé. In a rhetorical context, Byzantine authors largely employed this life-stage to anticipate the subsequent adult depiction of their character. And, as is apparent in the ninth-century *Khudov Psalter*, this formula could be used in artistic projections of Life Course development too. Papaconstantinou argued that there is continuity in attitudes towards children in the Classical and Byzantine eras but what changed is the way that authors wrote about childhood: they started to focus on the moral education and Christian upbringing of children.¹ There are some aspects of continuity between Classical and Byzantine rhetorical constructions of childhood: the '*pais geron*' (παῖς γέρον) motif

¹ Papaconstantinou 2009, 13; Hennessy 2008, 7.

continues to appear, and, like the Romans, the Byzantines held distinct concepts of positive and negative childhood attributes.² And in biographies childhood does not feature as the most prominent life-stage, but serves to affirm adulthood qualities.

But there are several marked differences between Byzantine perceptions of childhood and those of their predecessors. Children are shown practising their future vocation and developing skills specific to their gender and status.³ The construction of childhood as indicative of subsequent adult character shows us that the Byzantines, considered childhood to be formative.

In the third chapter, the Byzantines apparently perceived male youth to be a life-stage characterised by sexual awakening, inexperience, over confidence and overwhelming impulses and emotions. In fact authors sometimes constructed youth as an exceptional period, characterised by negative attributes in an otherwise positive Life Course construction. Sometimes authors applied the negative attributes of youths to people of other life-stages, in order to portray their irrational or immature behaviour, demonstrating the pervasiveness of negative connotations and youth. While authors sometimes showed their subjects to be resilient to bad traits, one can deduce that the Byzantines tended to conceptualise youth as a life-stage atypical of characteristics exhibited in other life-stages, and as a result, exceptions could be made to a character's less than ideal behaviour as an adolescent. But adolescence was not constructed in an entirely negative light: the Byzantines particularly valued youthful physique and strength. This is manifested in the abhorrence evoked by scenes such as the flogging of

² Harlow and Laurence 2002, 49.

³ For youth as the first life-stage of gender differentiation, see: Alberici 2008, 251.

Elias of Heliopolis, whose skin was soft and tore more easily because of his youth.⁴ These post-tenth-century hagiographies reinvented the youthful martyrs of early Christianity.

Physiological symbols of puberty were interpreted according to gender: for men, the growth of the first beard symbolised admission into an exclusively masculine arena (such as a monastery, the army, the imperial service or a school of extended education); while for women, puberty attracted marital prospects. These gendered discrepancies permeate all aspects of adolescence and it can be seen how, generally, females were considered to physiologically mature sooner than their male counterparts. In terms of family role, males were often expected take on financial responsibility for their natal family, especially in the absence of a living father or older brother, and women were expected to adopt the customs of their marital family. In male Life Course constructs, youth is characterised by the acquisition of an occupation (as already noted, training for this occupation may have started early in childhood). Meanwhile, for women, sources fall largely silent about their daily lives. For both genders great importance was attached to the continuation of the family line. For instance, in the *Life of John the Almsgiver* (c.641), the saint's father-in-law pressured the young man to have intercourse with his daughter so that they would reproduce.⁵ It might be significant that it is his father-in-law who applied the pressure, suggesting that the attainment of maternal status was especially important for women. Particularly in pre-ninth century hagiographies, saints of both sexes deviate from all of these normative expectations.

⁴ *V. Elias Helio.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 98).

⁵ *Leontios, V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 20 (Eng. trans. 200).

In the fourth chapter, which tracked adulthood from maturity to old age, a clear deviation between the Life Course trajectories of saints and laity became apparent. Saints are seen to renounce obligations to their parents, the prospect of marriage and childrearing. This *topos* evolves over this period and in some of the *vitae*, saints fulfil both ascetic and familial Life Courses. The sources' presentation of adulthood as the standard life-stage actually inhibits one's understanding of what was thought to be specific to adults. Nevertheless, by looking at the Life Course in its entirety, it is apparent that hagiographers and historians alike marked their characters' transitions to adulthood when describing their impulsiveness and desire as a youth, in contrast with their moderation, balance and self control as an adult. Throughout this period, authors of histories and hagiographies (Cyril of Scythopolis, Ignatios the Deacon, Basil of Thessalonike, Psellos, Skylitzes, Theosterikos and Anna Komnene) often introduced their character's adulthood with a short summary of their persona. Adulthood, by implication, was the first life-stage at which an individual's character was thought to be consistent and fixed.

In the fifth chapter, the authors' paradoxical treatment of old age became clear: the elderly were admired and respected in senior positions within the church, while they were sometimes viewed with disdain when in secular positions of leadership. The elderly were perceived to physically deteriorate – both in appearance and physical vigour – and the authors praised those who resisted this biological inevitability. But, symbols of age such as a bent physique, grey or white hair and, for men, a grey beard, could be used to portray the beholder's wisdom and experience, or, in the case of saints, their sanctity. The elderly were sometimes valued for their ability to resist sexual desire and to counsel and guide younger generations: especially in hagiographies. By way of

contrast, elderly imperial leaders were criticised for being out of touch and senile: particularly in histories. While these *topoi* seem contradictory at first, a number of distinctions must be drawn out. First, depictions of the elderly depended upon their status: lay or ascetic, with elderly saintly subjects being valued more highly. Second, in texts, depictions of the elderly depend on the genre, with hagiographies presenting a more positive appraisal of the attributes of the elderly than histories. Finally, and most importantly, depictions of the elderly depend on the epoch: from the eleventh century onwards, one can discern an increasing sense of respect towards the elderly in secular contexts.

In the sixth chapter, it was demonstrated that while tombstones predominantly represent the male elite, some information about the Life Courses of alternative sections of society can be gleaned when drawing upon specific epitaphs. For instance, commemorators felt the need to be very specific about infants' ages at death, often recording the figure in years, months and days. This formula was applied to an adult female commemoration in one instance, suggesting that her death after marriage but prior to reproduction may have inhibited her from receiving an adult-style memorial. The emphasis on marriage and reproduction as significant female Life Course markers in the epigraphic evidence is perhaps reflective of the commemorative procedure, which – at least in some cases – fell to the closest kin. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that from the fifth century onwards, some commemorations were set up by employers or 'burial groups'. Similar to hagiographic rhetoric, tombstones value exceptional longevities. This enables us to see that the associations between old age and sanctity may have been founded upon a widely held respect for people who lived to exceptional ages.

The Byzantine Life Course is special for several reasons. First, we have seen how it was the first Life Course model to conceptualise the start of life at conception instead of birth. Second, the premature death of a parent or sibling could have a far-reaching impact upon an individual's expected Life Course trajectory. Third, lay and monastic lives are continually contrasted in our sources, highlighting Christianised models of the Life Course. There is scope to further explore the afterlife as integral to the Byzantine Life Course.

Having summarised the variations of an individual's Life Course trajectory, I must now place these findings within the context of the household. Kazhdan has noted the paradoxical treatment of the Byzantine family by hagiographers: valuing both familial responsibilities and the rejection of the family unit in favour of monasticism.⁶ Sources reiterate this theme throughout the period analysed in this thesis. Sainly youths in their late teens and early twenties are distinguished for rejecting their family, as in the cases of Sabas, Symeon the Holy Fool, Theodore of Sykeon, George of Amastris and Niketas of Medikion.⁷ Stressing the importance of family values prior to their conversion to monasticism bolstered the strength of the saint's rejection of their biological family. The motif of the family and different relationships of dependency across the Life Course is an all pervading theme in both lay and spiritual discourses. The authors construct a tangible tension between responsibility to one's family and duty to God, which, given that hagiographies celebrate the lives of the most saintly, illustrates the importance of family values to Byzantines of the Middle period.

⁶ Kazhdan 1990; Talbot 1990.

⁷ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 92 (Eng. trans. 101); Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 126 (Eng. trans. 136); *V. Georg. Amast.*, 19 (Eng. trans. 5); *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 177 (Eng. trans. 4); Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 20 (Eng. trans. 9); *V. Theod. Syk.*, 8 (Eng. trans. 92).

Attitudes clearly change over time: it has long been established that expressions of family values strengthened from the fourth through to the ninth centuries.⁸ In this thesis it has been noted how from the seventh century onwards, Byzantine narratives give lengthy descriptions of parental virtues in order to reflect positively upon the child and his or her upbringing. But Patlagean noted the increased prominence of the family unit from the ninth century onwards.⁹ While saints were usually celebrated for the rejection of their biological family, this *topos* evolved from the ninth century onwards. For instance, Michael the Synkellos (whose *vita* was written in the ninth century), Anthousa, daughter of Constantine V (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) and Luke of Steiris (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) were praised for supporting their family, when only converting to monasticism in the event of parental death.¹⁰ Authors adapted their *topoi* so that their characters could fulfil the role of both a dutiful family member and a virtuous ascetic.

Indeed, from the ninth century, some of the saints continued relationships with their biological family, even after their admission to a monastery. David of Lesbos (whose *vita* was written c.863-5) met with his mother, in spite of his monastic status.¹¹ According to Niketas Magistros, writing c.900, Theoktiste of Lesbos maintained contact with her elder, married sister after her admission to a convent.¹² Furthermore, Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written in the early tenth century) bought a plot in order to build a female monastery so that his female relatives could reside in

⁸ Laiou 2009, 56.

⁹ Patlagean 1981, 427.

¹⁰ *V. Mich. Synk.*, 48 (Eng. trans. 49); *SynaxCP*, 600 (Eng. trans. 23); *V. Luk. Steir.*, 14 (Eng. trans. 15).

¹¹ *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 161).

¹² *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 230 (Eng. trans. 110).

comfort.¹³ In the *Life of Luke of Steiris* (tenth century), the saint is said to have continued his relationship with his parents after his tonsure too.¹⁴ Lazaros of Mount Galesion (whose *vita* was composed in the eleventh century) met his mother long after he had pursued monasticism.¹⁵ In the *Life of Nikon* (c.1042), the saint returned to see and speak to his father.¹⁶ Skylitzes, writing c.1096, presents monasticism as a way to perpetuate familial allegiances through the establishment of monasteries tied to familial burial plots.¹⁷ In the ninth-, tenth- and eleventh- century texts, familial ties were not terminated at enrolment into a monastery; the strength of family ties had become so strong as to overwhelm traditional hagiographic constructions of asceticism.

Clearly, the achievement of motherhood was extremely significant to the status of women in Byzantium throughout this period and this theme is evident in all of our source types. Female youth in hagiographies is often characterised by tension between parents, potential suitors and the subject, with regards to the pursuit of monasticism as opposed to marriage. When the young girls were admitted to convents, their parents often expressed grief at the loss of the prospect of grandchildren. For instance, in the *Life of Synkletika of Palestine* (sixth century), the *Life of John the Almsgiver* (c.641) and the *Lives of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos* (c.863-5), the authors explicitly describe the pressure applied by parents on their daughters for them to reproduce. For adult women with young children, their familial function might inhibit them from pursuing monasticism. And for elderly women, their Life Course was often described in

¹³ *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 202 (Eng. trans. 16).

¹⁴ *V. Luk. Steir.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 11).

¹⁵ *V. Laz. Gal.*, 519 (Eng. trans. 116).

¹⁶ *V. Nikon*, 72 (Eng. trans. 73).

¹⁷ *Skyl.*, 65 (Eng. trans. 67).

terms of the achievements of their children. But it is important to draw out developments in the value attached to motherhood over this period.

Talbot has already noted that for male saints, cults were perpetuated by disciples but, from the ninth century onwards, cults for female saints were initiated by wealthy relatives.¹⁸ This might suggest that, particularly for women, distinctions between ascetic and familial ideals were becoming less rigid, perhaps in response to an evolving respect for maternal Life Course constructions.¹⁹ There is further evidence for this hypothesis in alternative evidence types: in Psellos' eleventh-century writings, maternal status is used in isolation from factors such as numerical age to mark the completion of a woman's transition into adulthood. In fact, there is both pictorial and textual evidence to suggest that from at least the ninth century onwards women of childbearing capability were perceived to be indistinguishable in terms of numerical age. One might assert that from puberty to the menopause, the female Life Course was categorised by the potential to reproduce and not much else.

The writings of Anna Komnene exemplify my point: here the author imposes a matriarchal construction onto her family. The imperial princess poignantly surmises the change in family structure when her father married: 'her [Anna Dalassena's] dutiful son [Alexios I Komnenos] submitted to her [his mother's] wishes, not merely in his baby days, but when he was a candidate for admission to the ranks of the young men – and indeed until he married'.²⁰ Anna suggests that marriage marked a shift in matriarchal hierarchy: Alexios changed his primary allegiance from his mother to his wife. Of

¹⁸ Talbot 1996d, 68.

¹⁹ Kaldellis 2006, 35; Galatariotou 1984, 81; Kazhdan 1998, 11.

²⁰ An. Komn., Vol. I: 32 (Eng. trans. 49): 'καὶ ὁ εὐνους οὗτος υἱὸς ὑπέϊκε τῷ μητρικῷ θελήματι οὐ τὰ ἐν βρέφει μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐς μείρακας παραγγελίας καὶ μέχρις ἂν γυναικὶ συνηρμόσθη.'

course, Anna Dalassena is presented as powerful influence in Alexios' life, even after his marriage to Eirene.²¹ But the real value of this comment lies in the power attributed to the women surrounding Alexios. It seems that motherhood enabled a woman to yield a considerable amount of power through her offspring, especially if she had borne a son.

The role of sons has been tracked over the Life Course. In the first chapter, special significance was attached to the birth of the first son. Indeed, all of the miraculously-conceived babies are male. In the second chapter, boys were frequently shown accompanying their male relations on occupational errands. Furthermore, female child orphans and not male child orphans tended to be committed to care in a monastery, suggesting that males were more valuable to their extended relations. In the third chapter, male youths – specifically those who represented the eldest sibling in a fatherless household – are shown as the head of the household. In this situation, Symeon the Holy Fool (whose *vita* was written c.642-9), Theodore of Sykeon (whose *vita* was written in the seventh century) and Euthymios of Thessalonike (whose *vita* was written in the tenth century) were all shown to be prominent companions and caregivers to their widowed mothers too. In same chapter, male youths whose fathers were still alive might be expected to take on the occupation of their father at this juncture.

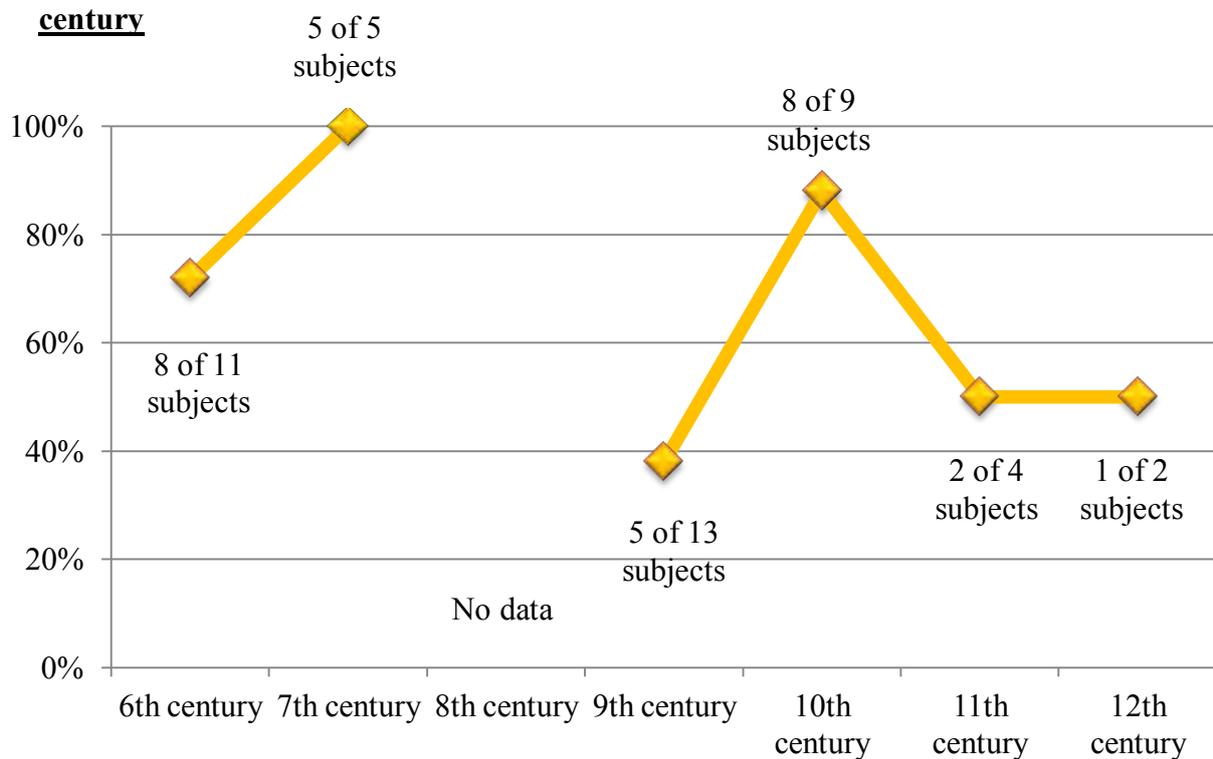
Before concluding I must turn to readdress a methodological question laid out at the introduction of this thesis: was numerical age conceptual or actual in the Byzantines' minds? Throughout this thesis, it has been apparent that authors interwove numerical age data into their narratives. These ages were not necessarily truthful as we saw in the introduction that the Byzantines probably did not record birthdays or count a person's age with any accuracy. Age was a numerical measuring stick. Hagiographies

²¹ An. Komn., Vol. I: 124 (Eng. trans. 119).

have provided us with a concise framework of numerical ages to work with: during infancy, numerical age statements in years were not usually used; age three to four marked the beginning of childhood and may have coincided with weaning; 12 for girls and 12 to 16 for boys marked the progression into youth and these ages were thought to coincide with puberty and mental development; age 18 was exclusively important to saintly Life Course constructions as a point when a saint left his or her native homeland; age 25 signified the start of adulthood in hagiographies, legal codes and histories. The next significant age in the data occurs at 50, suggesting that this marked the commencement of old age. In the penultimate chapter, it was noted that statements of age at death were particularly important to the construction of saints' lives, where the data was used to emphasise their exceptional longevity (an integral component to the construction of sanctity). The Byzantines clearly held a conceptual understanding of how numerical ages related to life-stages.

In the final chapter, statements of age at death on tombstones averaged 14% between the first and eighth century. In the introduction it was recorded that 29 of the 44 (65.9%) saintly subjects surveyed in hagiographies were attributed with one or more numerical ages. This statistic overlooks the inclusion of non-saintly numerical age data: in the *Life of Daniel of Sketis* (sixth century) and in the *Life of Mary the Younger* (c.1025), although no numerical ages were connected to the saints, they were recorded in connection with peripheral characters. The inclusion of numerical age statements varied according to the era of the *vita*: sixth- and seventh- century *vitae* regularly include age, but towards the end of this period, the eleventh- and twelfth- century *vitae* only record numerical ages in about half of all cases (Table 35). This might suggest that the Byzantines' concept of numerical age was becoming less distinct over time.

Table 32: Percentage of Hagiographies Stating Subjects' Numerical Ages 6th-12th



This study has highlighted pockets of evidence that could be exploited further in order to extend understanding of the Life Course. Nowhere in Iohannis Spatharakis' book, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscript* (1976), is it noted how accurately the illuminators represented the age of their subjects; the author merely mentioned the fact that artists often did not distinguish between their dead and living subjects.²² More recently, study into age and life-stage commenced in Hennessy's book, *Images of Children in Byzantium* (2008). While this is an invaluable study, one is inhibited from seeing the development of depictions of the Byzantines over the entire Life Course.²³ This thesis has incorporated some examples of material culture and

²² Spatharakis 1976, 253; 261.

²³ Hennessy 2008.

Byzantine art in order to track pictorial *topoi* and what they tell us about the Life Course. In the first chapter I tracked sensitivity to depictions of pregnancy from the sixth century onwards, which subsided to accommodate a new interest in embryology, most evident in the fourteenth century evidence, but clearly founded much earlier. Depictions of children learning skills such as writing, hunting, feeding animals and, in the case of David, slaying a bear, show us that the Byzantines considered childhood to be formative. Throughout the sections on male youth, adulthood and old age, increasingly fuller beards represented advancing age, and from the late eighth century onwards, full beards could also be used to mark seniority. It has also been noted that there is a distinct absence of elderly women in pictorial evidence demonstrating how femininity was most usually celebrated in terms of the ability to procreate. But the opportunity to make more ground, in terms of using images to understand constructions of age and aging, remains open.

The major contribution of this thesis to understanding the Byzantines is that now there is a model of the Byzantine Life Course, as the Byzantines themselves portrayed it. The Life Course model starts at conception and flows through to childhood, youth, adulthood, old age and ends with death (which did not necessarily occur after old age but could, and often did, occur at any point within the Byzantine Life Course). Different evidence types, while prone to limitations, are saturated with Life Course constructs that have enabled us to draw out conventions. The Byzantines' perception of a life-stage was specific to status: the elderly were largely praised in religious positions but often condemned in imperial positions. The Byzantines drew gendered distinctions between male and female Life Course trajectories too, with males starting adolescence later but enjoying a more prolonged youth than females. I can conclude that the Byzantine

construction of the Life Course remains relatively static over this period, with some important exceptions. First, from the sixth century onwards, there is a notable increase in space devoted to the embryonic, foetal and neonatal stages of life, and authors used these anecdotes to foretell adult attributes. One can deduce that the Byzantines began to mark the commencement of the Life Course at conception, as opposed to birth, in line with the biblical model. Second, from the seventh century onwards, parenting styles were recorded as a reflection upon the ability of the adult parents to guide the child and as a means of accounting for the child's formation. This suggests that the Byzantines were taking a greater interest in styles of parenting. Third and finally, from the ninth century onwards, duty to one's family became such a powerful concept that in some instances saints were shown to deviate from the traditional rejection of laity in favour of maintaining contact with their families. This shows us that the Byzantines attached increasing significance to family responsibilities, particularly the responsibilities of post-pubescent sons to care for their aging parents.

Gender methodologies have exposed the men, women and eunuchs in the male dominated writings as rhetorical constructions: gender being acknowledged as a literary tool of manipulation.²⁴ Looking at hagiographies specifically, Caroline Walker-Bynum, and more recently Judith Butler, found that saintly characters could invert the normative attributes of their sex in order to highlight themselves as exceptional.²⁵ Similarly, authors repeatedly inverted the expected attributes of a subject's age in order to highlight their exceptional nature. Elizabeth Clark argued that saintly women could overcome the 'limitations' of their sex, taking on the attributes of men; and surpassing

²⁴ Smith 2004, 1-22; James 1997b, xi-xxiv.

²⁵ Walker-Bynum 1984; Butler 2007.

gendered expectations.²⁶ Authors attributed the young with characteristics normally associated with the old and vice versa in order to praise or condone a subject's behaviour. When comparing gendered constructions in juxtaposition to one another, one learns the Byzantine's founding principles and expectations of what constituted masculine and feminine.²⁷ This thesis has found that, like gender, age and life-stage are manipulated by the authors to play into rhetorical strategies; and as such, one can deconstruct the expectations of people of certain ages, trace the Byzantine's understanding of emotional and physical development, and finally, by placing constructs of the 'young' in opposition to constructs of the 'old', as the writers sometimes do, one can understand the familial roles and responsibilities expected of someone at a specific Life Course juncture.²⁸ In sum, one can apply methodologies developed by academics for the deconstruction of gendered attributes to the study of the Byzantine Life Course.

²⁶ Clark 1998, 41; Galatariotou 1985.

²⁷ Galatariotou 1985.

²⁸ Life Course research focuses on the timing and ordering of events in the life span. The progression through familial roles (e.g. from daughter to wife or son to husband) signify transitions in an individual's Life Course. Of course, a single person can occupy multiple social and familial roles at any one time (Macmillan 2005, 4: 'Life courses are structured by virtue of the order *and* timing of multiple social roles over the life span'). Therefore, Life Course research analyses the appropriate time for the duration of a specific role, including when it commences and terminates. Perceptions of 'appropriate' times or ages for a specific role are governed by cultural traditions and therefore large-scale cultural and structural changes such as famine, plague or war, are important determinants in the structure of the Life Course. 'Normative' Life Course trajectories are subject to change across any given period and these shifts highlight emerging social trends and expectations of family members.

APPENDIX B: HAGIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please note: in the instances where two or more versions of a saint's life have been preserved, the data below specifies which version the data has been taken from.

Sixth century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Age included
Abramios, Bishop of Kratea	Male	554-558 ⁱ	Fifth century ⁱⁱ	18 ⁱⁱⁱ 27 ^{iv} 37 ^v	41 ^{vi} 56 ^{vii}	Yes
Abba Kyriakos	Male	554-558 ^{viii}	Fifth century ^{ix}	18 ^x 40 ^{xi} 77 ^{xii} 99 ^{xiii} 107 ^{xiv}	27 ^{xv} 53 ^{xvi} 81 ^{xvii} 86 ^{xviii}	Yes
Daniel of Sketis	Male	Sixth century ^{xix}	First half of sixth century ^{xx}	<u>Eulogios</u> More than 100 ^{xxi} <u>Male child</u> 12 ^{xxii} <u>Female child</u> 10 ^{xxiii}	N/A	Not Daniel's
Euthymios the Great	Male	554-558 ^{xxiv}	c.378 - 473 ^{xxv}	3 ^{xxvi} 29 ^{xxvii} 52 ^{xxviii} 54 ^{xxix} 75 ^{xxx} 82 ^{xxxi}	2 ^{xxxv} 34 ^{xxxvi}	Yes

				83 ^{xxxii} 90 ^{xxxiii} 97 ^{xxxiv}		
John the Hesychast	Male	554-558 ^{xxxvii}	c.454 - 558 ^{xxxviii}	18 ^{xxxix} 28 ^{xl} 50 ^{xli} 79 ^{xlii} 104 ^{xliii}	37 ^{xliv} 56 ^{xlv}	Yes
Matrona of Perge, (<i>Vita Prima</i>)	Female	Sixth century ^{xlvi}	Died c.510 ^{xlvii}	25 ^{xlviii} 100 ^{xlix}	N/A	Yes
Nicholas of Sion	Male	Sixth century ^l	Died 564 ^{li}	7 ^{lii} 19 ^{liii}	N/A	Yes
Sabas	Male	554-558 ^{liv}	c.439 - 532 ^{lv}	5 ^{lvi} 18 ^{lvii} 30 ^{lviii} 35 ^{lix} 40 ^{lx} 45 ^{lxi} 48 ^{lxii} 54 ^{lxiii} 56 ^{lxiv} 63 ^{lxv} 80 ^{lxvi} 86 ^{lxvii} 91 ^{lxviii} 94 ^{lxix}	N/A	Yes
Synkletika of	Female	Sixth century ^{lxx}	Sixth century ^{lxxi}	18 ^{lxxii}	46 ^{lxxiii}	Yes

Palestine						
Theodosios Koinobiarches	Male	554-558 ^{lxxiv}	c.424 - 529 ^{lxxv}	N/A	N/A	No
Theognios (Cyril of Scythopolis' Account)	Male	Before 556 ^{lxxvi}	Died 527 ^{lxxvii}	N/A	N/A	No (although Paul of Elusa's subsequent edition did include some ages) ^{lxxviii}

Seventh century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Ages included
George of Choziba	Male	c.631 ^{lxxix}	Seventh century ^{lxxx}	70 or more ^{lxxxi}	N/A	Yes
John the Almsgiver	Male	Written after 641 ^{lxxxii}	c.560 - 619 ^{lxxxiii}	15 ^{lxxxiv}	N/A	Yes
Mary of Egypt	Female	Seventh century ^{lxxxv}	Anytime between the fourth and sixth century ^{lxxxvi}	<u>Mary</u> 12 ^{lxxxvii} <u>Zosimas</u> 53 ^{lxxxviii} 100 ^{lxxxix}	<u>Mary</u> 29 ^{xc} 76 ^{xc} 78 ^{xcii}	Yes
Symeon the Fool	Male	c.642 - 649 ^{xciii}	Sixth century ^{xciv}	<u>Symeon</u> 22 ^{xcv} <u>John</u> 22 ^{xcvi}	<u>Symeon</u> 51 ^{xcviii}	Yes

				<u>Symeon's Mother</u> 80 ^{xcvii}		
Theodore of Sykeon	Male	After reign of Heraklios (641) ^{xcix}	Died c.613 ^c	<u>Theodore</u> 6 ^{ci} 8 ^{cii} 12 ^{ciii} 14 ^{civ} 18 ^{cv} <u>Blatta (sister)</u> 12 ^{cvi}	<u>Blatta (sister)</u> 15 ^{cvii}	Yes

Eighth century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Ages included	Stated ages	Inferred ages

Ninth century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Ages included
David, Symeon and George	Males	863-865 ^{cviii}	David: 717/8-783/4 ^{cix} Symeon: 764/5-	<u>David</u> 9 ^{cxii} 16 ^{cxiii}	<u>David</u> 46 ^{cxiii}	Yes

			844/5 ^{cx} George: 763/4-845/6 ^{cx}	45 ^{cxiv} 56 ^{cxv} 66 ^{cxvi} <u>Symeon</u> 8 ^{cxvii} 22 ^{cxviii} 28 ^{cxix} 54 ^{cxx} <u>George</u> 80 ^{cxxi} 82 ^{cxxii}		
George of Amastris	Male	c.830 ^{cxxiv}	Died c.830 ^{cxxv}	N/A	N/A	No
Ioannikios Boilas	Male	Ninth century ^{cxxvi}	c.762-846 ^{cxxvii}	84 ^{cxxviii}	N/A	No
Irene, Empress	Female	After 821 ^{cxxix}	c.780 - 803 ^{cxxx}	N/A	N/A	No
Michael the Synkellos	Male	Ninth century ^{cxxx}	c.761-846 ^{cxxxii}	<u>Michael</u> 3 ^{cxxxiii} 25 ^{cxxxiv} 50 ^{cxxxv} 85 ^{cxxxvi}	<u>Michael</u> 37 ^{cxli} 39 ^{cxlii}	Yes

				<u>Theodore</u> 25 ^{cxxxvii} 76 ^{cxxxviii} <u>Theophanes</u> 22 ^{cxxxix} 67 ^{cxl}		
Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople	Male	c.843-6 ^{cxliii}	c.756 - 826 ^{cxliv}	N/A ^{cxlv}	N/A	No
Philaretos the Merciful	Male	c.821/822 ^{cxlvi}	c.720-790 ^{cxlvii}	N/A ^{cxlviii}	N/A	No
Stephen the Younger	Male	c.807 ^{cxlix}	c.713-765 ^{cl}	N/A	N/A	No
Tarasios, Patriarch of Constantinople	Male	Ninth century ^{cli}	Born before 730 ^{clii}	N/A	N/A	No
Theodora, Empress	Female	c.867 - 912 ^{cliii}	c.815-867 ^{cliv}	N/A ^{clv}	N/A	No
Theodora of Thessalonike	Female	c.894 ^{clvi}	812 – 29th August 892 ^{clvii}	<u>Theodora</u> 7 ^{clviii} 25 ^{clix} 56 ^{clx} 68 ^{clxi} 74 ^{clxii}	<u>Theodora</u> 61 to 68 ^{clxvi} <u>Daughter</u> 37 ^{clxvii}	Yes

				80 ^{clxiii} <u>Daughter</u> 6 ^{clxiv} <u>Anna</u> 120 ^{clxv}		
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Tenth century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Ages included
Anthousa, daughter of Constantine V	Female	Tenth century ^{clxviii}	c.756/7-808/9 ^{clxix}	52 ^{clxx}	19 ^{clxxi}	Yes
Anthousa of Mantineon	Female	Tenth century ^{clxxii}	Early eighth century – c.771 ^{clxxiii}	N/A	N/A	No
Athanasia of Aegina	Female	c.916 ^{clxxiv}	First half of ninth century ^{clxxv}	7 ^{clxxvi}	N/A	Yes ^{clxxvii}
Euthymios the Younger	Male	Early tenth century ^{clxxviii}	c.823 - 898 ^{clxxix}	7 ^{clxxx} 18 ^{clxxxi}	60 ^{clxxxii}	Yes
Irene, Abbess of Chrysosbalanton	Female	c.980 ^{clxxxiii}	c.830 - 930 ^{clxxxiv}	97 ^{clxxxv}	N/A	Yes
Luke of Steiris	Male	Tenth century ^{clxxxvi}	Died c.946 - 955 ^{clxxxvii}	14 ^{clxxxviii}	21 ^{clxxxix} 33 ^{cxc} 43 ^{cxc}	Yes

					46 ^{cxci} 49 ^{exciii} 56 ^{exciv}	
Theodosia of Constantinople	Female	Tenth century ^{cxcv}	Eighth century ^{cxvii}	7 ^{cxvii}	N/A	Yes
Theoktiste of Lesbos	Female	c.900 ^{cxviii}	Ninth century ^{cxci}	18 ^{cc}	53 ^{cci}	Yes
Thomais of Lesbos	Female	c.1050 ^{ccii}	c.909-913 – 947-951 ^{cciii}	24 ^{cciv} 38 ^{ccv}	N/A	Yes

Eleventh century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Ages included
Elias of Helioupolis	Male	Eleventh century ^{ccvi}	Died c.779 ^{ccvii}	12 ^{ccviii} 20 ^{ccix}	10 ^{ccx}	Yes
Lazaros of Mount Galesion	Male	Eleventh century ^{ccxi}	7/8 November 966/7 - 1053 ^{ccxii}	6 ^{ccxiii} 18 ^{ccxiv} 86 ^{ccxv}	9 ^{ccxvi} 12 ^{ccxvii} 14 ^{ccxviii} 26 ^{ccxix} 32 ^{ccxx} 38 ^{ccxxi}	Yes
Mary the Younger	Female	Eleventh century ^{ccxxii}	c.875 - 903 ^{ccxxiii}	<u>Orestes</u> 5 ^{ccxxiv} <u>Vaanes</u> 20 ^{ccxxv}	N/A	Not Mary's ^{ccxxvi}

Nikon	Male	c.1042 ^{ccxxvii}	c.930 – end of century ^{ccxxviii}	N/A	N/A	No
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Twelfth century

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Ages included
Athanasios of Athos (<i>Vita B</i>)	Male	Early twelfth century ^{ccxxix}	Died c.1000 ^{ccxxx}	N/A	N/A	No
Niketas of Medikion	Male	Early twelfth century ^{ccxxxi}	Died. 3 rd April 824 ^{ccxxxii}	8 days ^{ccxxxiii} 18 ^{ccxxxiv}	38 ^{ccxxxv}	Yes

Surrounding centuries

Saint	Gender	Vita composed	Date lived	Stated ages	Inferred ages	Ages included
Abba Aaron	Male	Fourth century ^{ccxxxvi}	Fourth century ^{ccxxxvii}	N/A	N/A	No
Leontios, Patriarch of Jerusalem	Male	c.1203 ^{ccxxxviii}	c.1110-May 1185 ^{ccxxxix}	N/A ^{ccxli}	N/A	No
Symeon Stylites the Younger (Syriac)	Male	Fifth century ^{ccxli}	Died c.459 ^{ccxlii}	N/A	N/A	No

ⁱ Pummer 2002, 305.

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- ⁱⁱ There is some dispute as to whether he lived in the fifth or sixth century. Kislinger, who argued that he lived in the sixth century, has been challenged by both Brock and Harvey and Miller more recently. See: Brock and Harvey 1996, 27-9; Kislinger 1986, 84; Miller 2003, 94.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 273).
- ^{iv} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 274).
- ^v Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 244 (Eng. trans. 274).
- ^{vi} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 246 (Eng. trans. 276).
- ^{vii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abraam.*, 247 (Eng. trans. 277).
- ^{viii} Pummer 2002, 305.
- ^{ix} Price 1991, 247.
- ^x Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 224 (Eng. trans. 247).
- ^{xi} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 226 (Eng. trans. 249).
- ^{xii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 227 (Eng. trans. 250).
- ^{xiii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 231 (Eng. trans. 255).
- ^{xiv} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 234 (Eng. trans. 258).
- ^{xv} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 225 (Eng. trans. 248).
- ^{xvi} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 226 (Eng. trans. 249).
- ^{xvii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 227 (Eng. trans. 250).
- ^{xviii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Cyr.*, 229 (Eng. trans. 252).
- ^{xix} Dahlman 2007, 65.
- ^{xx} Dahlman 2007, 66.
- ^{xxi} *V. Danie. Sketis*, 152 (Eng. trans. 153).
- ^{xxii} *V. Danie. Sketis*, 168 (Eng. trans. 169).
- ^{xxiii} *V. Danie. Sketis*, 168 (Eng. trans. 169).
- ^{xxiv} Pummer 2002, 305.
- ^{xxv} O'Neill 2010, 304.
- ^{xxvi} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 6).
- ^{xxvii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 13 (Eng. trans. 9).
- ^{xxviii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 26 (Eng. trans. 22).
- ^{xxix} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 32 (Eng. trans. 28).
- ^{xxx} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 40 (Eng. trans. 37).
- ^{xxxi} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 49 (Eng. trans. 46).
- ^{xxxii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 48).
- ^{xxxiii} Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.*, 54 (Eng. trans. 51).

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- xxxiv *V. Euth. Grea.*, 60 (Eng. trans. 57).
xxxv *Cyr. Scyth. V. Euth.*, 10 (Eng. trans. 6).
xxxvi *Cyr. Scyth. V. Euth.*, 15 (Eng. trans. 11).
xxxvii Pummer 2002, 305.
xxxviii Madigan and Osiek 2005, 30.
xxxix *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 203 (Eng. trans. 222).
xl *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 202 (Eng. trans. 221).
xli *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 209 (Eng. trans. 228).
xlii *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 233).
xliiii *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 233).
xliv *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 203 (Eng. trans. 222).
xlv *Cyr. Scyth. V. Ioh. Hes.*, 209 (Eng. trans. 228) ; 212 (Eng. trans. 232).
xlvi Featherstone and Mango 1996, 15.
xlvii Featherstone and Mango 1996, 13.
xlviii *V. Matr. A.*, 791 (Eng. trans. 20).
xlix *V. Matr. A.*, 813 (Eng. trans. 64).
l Sevcenko 1984, 11.
li Sevcenko 1984, 11.
lii *V. Nichol. Sion*, 22 (Eng. trans. 23).
liii *V. Nichol. Sion*, 32 (Eng. trans. 33).
liv Pummer 2002, 305.
lv Patrich 1995, 37.
lvi *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 87 (Eng. trans. 95).
lvii *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 89 (Eng. trans. 98).
lviii *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 93 (Eng. trans. 102).
lix *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 95 (Eng. trans. 104).
lx *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 98 (Eng. trans. 107).
lxi *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 99 (Eng. trans. 108).
lxii *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 103 (Eng. trans. 112).
lxiii *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 110 (Eng. trans. 119).
lxiv *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 116 (Eng. trans. 125).
lxv *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 139 (Eng. trans. 149).
lxvi *Cyr. Scyth. V. Sabae*, 160 (Eng. trans. 170).

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- lxvii Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 162 (Eng. trans. 172).
lxviii Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 165 (Eng. trans. 175).
lxix Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sabae*, 184 (Eng. trans. 192).
lxx Vivian 1996, 37.
lxxi Vivian 1996, 37.
lxxii *V. Synk. Palestine*, 300 (Eng. trans. 51).
lxxiii *V. Synk. Palestine*, 300 (Eng. trans. 51).
lxxiv Pummer 2002, 305.
lxxv Price 1991, 262; Podskalsky 2000, 311.
lxxvi Pummer 2002, 305.
lxxvii Butler 1998, 85.
lxxviii Paul of Elusa, *V. Theog.*, 113 (Eng. trans. 160): Although Cyril of Scythopolis did not include ages in Theognios' *vita*, Paul of Elusa did include ages in his eulogy, stating the ages of 50 and 97.
lxxix Vivian 1996, 53: while the composition date is regularly cited as 631 (or 634 in some instances) Daniel Reynolds is currently researching whether this might be inaccurate. Pers. comm. Reynolds (03/12/11): 'As for George of Choziba, the main concern is the dating of the text. It is often said to be a 7th century original, but the manuscript (Paris Greek 323) is 10th century.'
lxxx Vivian 1996, 53.
lxxxi *V. Georg. Chozib.*, 103 (Eng. trans. 76).
lxxxii Dawes 1948, 197.
lxxxiii Bunson and Bunson 2003, 567.
lxxxiv Leontios, *V. Jean l'Aumôn.*, 22 (Eng. trans. 215).
lxxxv Kouli 1996, 66.
lxxxvi Kouli 1996, 67.
lxxxvii *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3712 (Eng. trans. 80); Kouli 1996, 67.
lxxxviii *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3700 (Eng. trans. 72).
lxxxix *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3725 (Eng. trans. 92).
xc *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3712 (Eng. trans. 81); Kouli 1996, 67.
xci *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3716 (Eng. trans. 85); Kouli 1996, 67.
xcii *V. Mary of Egypt*, 3724 (Eng. trans. 90); Kouli 1996, 67.
xciii Krueger 1996, 5.
xciv Krueger 1996, 7.
xcv Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134).
xcvi Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134).

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- xcvii Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 124 (Eng. trans. 134).
xcviii Leontios, *V. Syme. Holy Fool*, 141 (Eng. trans. 148).
xcix Kaegi 1995, 212.
c Kaegi 1995, 212.
ci *V. Theod. Syk.*, 89 (Eng. trans. 5).
cii *V. Theod. Syk.*, 89 (Eng. trans. 5).
ciii *V. Theod. Syk.*, 91 (Eng. trans. 7); 93(Eng. trans. 9).
civ *V. Theod. Syk.*, 97 (Eng. trans. 13).
cv *V. Theod. Syk.*, 102 (Eng. trans. 19).
cvi *V. Theod. Syk.*, 105 (Eng. trans. 22).
cvii *V. Theod. Syk.*, 105 (Eng. trans. 22).
cviii Abrahamse and Domingo Forasté 1998, 147; Kazhdan 1993, 188.
cix Abrahamse and Domingo Forasté 1998, 144.
cx Abrahamse and Domingo Forasté 1998, 144.
cxii Abrahamse and Domingo Forasté 1998, 144.
cxiii *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 214 (Eng. trans. 154).
cxiiii *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 215 (Eng. trans. 156).
cxv *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 217 (Eng. trans. 159).
cxvi *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 218 (Eng. trans. 160).
cxvii *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 222 (Eng. trans. 166).
cxviii *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 162).
cxix *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 219 (Eng. trans. 162).
cxx *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 231 (Eng. trans. 187); Abrahamse and Domingo-Forasté 1998, 144; 187: they dispute the chronology and place his exile in 820.
cxxi *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 252 (Eng. trans. 229).
cxxii *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 258 (Eng. trans. 240).
cxxiii *V. Davidis Sym. et Georg.*, 217 (Eng. trans. 159).
cxxiv Mango and Efthymiades 1997, 18.
cxxv Mango and Efthymiades 1997, 18.
cxxvi Sullivan 1998, 247.
cxxvii Sullivan 1998, 243.
cxxviii *V. Ioannicii*, 403 (Eng. trans. 344).
cxxix Treadgold 1982, 243.

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- ^{cxxx} Treadgold 1982, 237.
- ^{cxxxi} Cunningham 1991, 5.
- ^{cxxxii} Cunningham 1991, xiv.
- ^{cxxxiii} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 46 (Eng. trans. 47).
- ^{cxxxiv} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 51).
- ^{cxxxv} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 54 (Eng. trans. 55).
- ^{cxxxvi} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 118 (Eng. trans. 119).
- ^{cxxxvii} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).
- ^{cxxxviii} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 110 (Eng. trans. 111).
- ^{cxxxix} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).
- ^{cxl} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 112 (Eng. trans. 113).
- ^{cxli} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 50 (Eng. trans. 51).
- ^{cxlii} *V. Mich. Synk.*, 52 (Eng. trans. 53).
- ^{cxliii} Fischer 1998, 33.
- ^{cxliv} Fischer 1998, 25.
- ^{cxlv} Fischer 1998, 25: estimated that he died around the age of 70.
- ^{cxlvi} Rydén 2002, 19: explains that Niketas' date of 901 is inaccurate and the inaccurate chronology provided is because 'twenty years should be understood as a round number...'
- ^{cxlvii} Rydén 2002, 45; 19.
- ^{cxlviii} Rydén 2002, 22: estimates that Philaretos (based on the chronology provided) was 86 when the bride show took place for his granddaughter and 90 when he died.
- ^{cxlix} Talbot 1998, 9.
- ^{cl} Talbot 1998, 9.
- ^{cli} Efthymiades 1998, 38.
- ^{clii} Efthymiades 1998, 7.
- ^{cliii} Vinson 1998, 353.
- ^{cliv} Vinson 1998, 355.
- ^{clv} Vinson 1998, 353: suggests that Theodora married at age 15 and died at age 52.
- ^{clvi} Talbot 1996c, 160.
- ^{clvii} Talbot 1996c, 159.
- ^{clviii} *V. Theod. Thess.*, 74 (Eng. trans. 167); Talbot 1996c, 167: stated that this is an unusually early age to be betrothed.
- ^{clix} *V. Theod. Thess.*, 104 (Eng. trans. 180); Talbot 1996c, 159.
- ^{clx} *V. Theod. Thess.*, 139 (Eng. trans. 195).

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- clxi *V. Theod. Thess.*, 140 (Eng. trans. 196).
clxii *V. Theod. Thess.*, 150 (Eng. trans. 200).
clxiii *V. Theod. Thess.*, 150 (Eng. trans. 200).
clxiv *V. Theod. Thess.*, 104 (Eng. trans. 180); Talbot 1996c, 180: States that this is an unusually early age to be tonsured.
clxv *V. Theod. Thess.*, 140 (Eng. trans. 196).
clxvi *V. Theod. Thess.*, 140 (Eng. trans. 196).
clxvii *V. Theod. Thess.*, 139 (Eng. trans. 195).
clxviii Constatas 1998, 21-2.
clxix Constatas 1998, 21-2.
clxx *SynaxCP*, 600 (Eng. trans. 24).
clxxi *SynaxCP*, 600 (Eng. trans. 23).
clxxii Talbot 1998, 13.
clxxiii Talbot 1998, 13.
clxxiv Sherry 1996, 138.
clxxv Sherry 1996, 139.
clxxvi *V. Ath. Aegi.*, 212 (Eng. trans. 142).
clxxvii It might be significant that a number of the people Athanasia healed were children and were attributed ages, including: female, 12 years (193, Eng. trans. 155); male, 8 years (193, Eng. trans. 155); male, 12 years (194, Eng. trans. 156).
clxxviii
clxxix Chevallier Caseau 2009, 142.
clxxx *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 171 (Eng. trans. 2).
clxxxi *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 172 (Eng. trans. 3).
clxxxii *V. Euthyme le Jeune*, 200 (Eng. trans. 16).
clxxxiii Rosenqvist 1986, xxviii.
clxxxiv Rosenqvist 1986, xxviii.
clxxxv *V. Iren. Chrysobalant.*, 112 (Eng. trans. 111).
clxxxvi Connors and Connors 1994, ix.
clxxxvii Connors and Connors 1994, ix.
clxxxviii *V. Luk. Steir.*, 140 (Eng. trans. 141).
clxxxix *V. Luk. Steir.*, 140 (Eng. trans. 141).
cx *V. Luk. Steir.*, 142 (Eng. trans. 143).
cxci *V. Luk. Steir.*, 142 (Eng. trans. 143).
cxcii *V. Luk. Steir.*, 142 (Eng. trans. 143).

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- cxci *V. Luk. Steir.*, 142 (Eng. trans. 143).
cxci *V. Luk. Steir.*, 142 (Eng. trans. 143).
cxci *Constas* 1998, 1.
cxci *Constas* 1998, 1.
cxci *SyntaxCP*, 829 (Eng. trans. 5).
cxci *Hero* 1996, 95.
cxci *Hero* 1996, 95.
cc *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 231 (Eng. trans. 111); *Hero* 1996, 95.
cci *V. Theok. Lesbos*, 232 (Eng. trans. 112); *Hero* 1996, 95.
ccii *Halsall* 1996, 291.
ccii *Halsall* 1996, 291.
cciv *V. Thoma. Lesbos*, 236 (Eng. trans. 302); *Halsall* 1996, 302: stated this is unusually late to marry.
ccv *V. Thoma. Lesbos*, 239 (Eng. trans. 316); *Halsall* 1996, 291.
ccvi *McGrath* 2003, 85.
ccvii *McGrath* 2003, 88.
ccviii *V. Elias Helio.*, 45 (Eng. trans. 94).
ccix *V. Elias Helio.*, 47 (Eng. trans. 96).
ccx *V. Elias Helio.*, 45 (Eng. trans. 94).
ccxi *Greenfield* 2000, 3.
ccxii *Greenfield* 2000, 6.
ccxiii *V. Laz. Gal.*, 509 (Eng. trans. 79).
ccxiv *V. Laz. Gal.*, 560 (Eng. trans. 264).
ccxv *V. Laz. Gal.*, 580 (Eng. trans. 364).
ccxvi *V. Laz. Gal.*, 509 (Eng. trans. 79).
ccxvii *V. Laz. Gal.*, 510 (Eng. trans. 80).
ccxviii *V. Laz. Gal.*, 510 (Eng. trans. 81).
ccxix *V. Laz. Gal.*, 513 (Eng. trans. 92).
ccxx *V. Laz. Gal.*, 514 (Eng. trans. 96).
ccxxi *V. Laz. Gal.*, 560 (Eng. trans. 264).
ccxxii *Laiou* 1996, 242.
ccxxiii *Laiou* 1996, 239-41.
ccxxiv *V. Mary Youn.*, 693 (Eng. trans. 258).
ccxxv *V. Mary. Youn.*, 694 (Eng. trans. 261).

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- ^{ccxxvi} Laiou 1996, 241: suggests the following Life Course for Mary: Born c.875; married age 12 or 13; first son born at 18; second son at 20; twins born at 27; died age 28.
- ^{ccxxvii} Sullivan 1987, 1.
- ^{ccxxviii} Sullivan 1987, 1.
- ^{ccxxix} Stephenson 1982, 1.
- ^{ccxxx} Stephenson 1982, 1.
- ^{ccxxxi} Pers. comm. Rosenqvist 09/09/2009.
- ^{ccxxxii} Butler 1866, Vol. IV: 34.
- ^{ccxxxiii} Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 3).
- ^{ccxxxiv} Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 19 (Eng. trans. 5).
- ^{ccxxxv} Theost. *V. Niket. Medikion*, 30 (Eng. trans. 9).
- ^{ccxxxvi} Vivian 1996, 5.
- ^{ccxxxvii} Vivian 1996, 5.
- ^{ccxxxviii} Tsougarakis 1993, 17.
- ^{ccxxxix} Tsougarakis 1993, 190.
- ^{ccxl} Tsougarakis 1993, 2: estimates that Leontios was 15 when his father died.
- ^{ccxli} Lent 1915, 43.
- ^{ccxlii} Lent 1915, 43; Doran 1992, 17.

APPENDIX C: TRANSLATION OF EPITAPHS

Sixth Century

Corinthia – 524¹

Male, age 24

[----- ζήσας ἔ]τη κδ'
[μν(νι) Σεπτεμβρίω... ιν]δ(ικτιῶνος) γ', ἡμ(έρα ς',
[ὑπατία φλ(αβίου) Ἰουστ]ίνου τὸ β'
[κ(αι) φλ(αβίου) Ὀπιλίωνος το]ῦ λαμ(προτάτου) ¶ κ(αι) τοῦ
[-----] τοῦ εὐλ[αβ] (εστάτου) αναγν(ώστου)

Having lived 24 years

[Having died in] the month of September, indiction 3, day 6, in the 2nd consulship of Justin

and Flavius Opilion the most brilliant [cross] and of...

...The most pious reader...

Italy – 530²

Female, age almost 2 years

¶ Ἐνθάδε κίτε ἐν | εἰρήνῃ Μαρία. | ἔζησεν ἔτη [μί]|κρόπρος β' [-]. ¶ ἐτελιώθη
μ[ηνι] | Λώου ? κς' ὑπ[ατί]α Φφλλ. Ὀ[ρέστου] | καὶ Λαμπαδίου λαμπρ(οτάτων)

Here Maria lies in peace

She lived almost 2 years. [The grave] was finished in the 26th of the month Loos (19th July) in the consulship of Flavius

Orestes and Flavius Lampadios the most splendid ones

Aphrodisias – 543³

Female, age 18

a.

Ιβασιλεύοντος Ἰουστινιανοῦ
2ιν-
3δ(ικτιῶνος)
4ζ'
5μη(νὸς)
6α'
7 ο

¹ SEG XXXI, No. 288, 68.

² SEG XL, No. 861, 268.

³ Insaph, 15.362.

8[· ? ·]
9

b.

Ἰένθάδε τὴν ἱερὰν κεφαλὴν γαῖα καλύπτει |
2κούρης ἧ τὸ πάροιθεν ἐπώνυμον | οὔνομα κεῖτο· |
3μήτιος εὐφήμοιο καὶ οὐκ ἐ(5)τέρ' ἔπλετο φήμης |
4εὐφύεος πινυτοῖσιν ἐφ' ἔργμασιν αἰὲν εὐῶσα· |
5ἀλλὰ θεῶν μακάρων Εὐφημία | ἐς χορὸν ἦκοις. |
6() ἐπλήρωσεν τὸν βίον Εὐφημία | ἐτῶν ιη' ἰνδ(ικτίωνος) [ζ' · ·] μ η(νὸς)
α'

a. In the reign of Justinian, in the seventh indiction, in the first month [· ? ·]

b. Here earth covers the sacred head of a girl who, before, had an appropriate name. She was of well-famed skill and similarly of a seemly reputation, being always well-inclined to prudent acts. But, Euphemia, may you have come to the choir of the blessed gods. Euphemia completed her life being 18 years, in the [seventh] indiction [· ? ·] the first month

Lusitania – 544⁴

Male, age 21

✠ Ἐνθα κατα-
κτε Εὐτύχ-
ες ἀναγνόσ-
τες Λιβισιντε-
οὺς υἱὸς Ζωσί-
μου Εἰσιδωρ-
ίτου. ἔξεσεν
ἡτη κα', ἔρα
φπβ' ✠

[cross] Here lies down
Eutyches the anagnostes
The Olissponean
Son of Zosimos of the Eisdorean
He lived 21 years
In the year 582 [cross]

Palaestina – 7th October 547⁵

⁴ SEG XLI, No. 894., 295.

⁵ SEG XXXIV, No. 1468, 406.

Female, age 20

✠ Ἀνεπάε ἡ μακαρία Φιλαδηλιφία ἐτῶν εἴκοσι ἐν μηνὶ ἡ Ὑπερβερετέου κ' κατὰ Ἄραβας ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ἰα' | ἔτους τῆς Ἐλευθεροπολιτον τμη' ✠

The blessed Philadelphia rested, [being] 20 years, in the month of Hypervereteos of the Arabs, Indiction 11, in the year 348 of Eleutheropolis

Aprodisias - 551⁶

Female, age 29

1 ✠ ἐτελιώθη κ(αὶ) ἀνεπάη ὁ μακ[άριος] ὁ κη(δεσπής)
2 μου Ἀρ(ιστολόαος [ἰ]νδ(ικτιῶνος) α', μη(νός) β', ἰδ' ἡμέ(ρα) [πρῶ]τη *cross*
3 *cross* ἀνεπάη δὲ κ(αὶ) ἡ τρισεύμοιρος ἡ μακαρ(ία)
4 ἡ γεναμέ(νη) κυρὰ τῶν ὧδε, ἡ κηδεστρία μου
5 Θεοδωρήτα ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) δ', μη(νός) δ', ἰγ' ἡμέ(ρα) ἕκτη *cross*
6 *cross* ἐτέχθη ἡ κυρὰ Φιλοσοφία ἡ θυγάτηρ
7 μὲν Ἀριστολάου κ(αὶ) Θεοδωρήτας τῶν μα-
8 καρ(ίων), γαμε(τή) δὲ γεναμέ(νη) γνησία ἐμοῦ Ἰωάννου
9 Φιλαδέλφου, ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ἰε', μη(νός) δ', ε', ὑπ(ατείας) Ρουστικίου, καὶ
10 ἔζησεν, ἐξεβίου {ου} ἄχρι ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ἰδ' μη(νός) ζ', κ', ἡμέ(ρα)
11 τετράδι, βασιλίας τοῦ θ[ι]οτά(του) κ(αὶ) εὐσεβε(στάτου) ἡμῶν
12 δεσπό(του) Φλαουίου) Ἰουστινια[ν]οῦ ἔτους κε', μ(ε)τ(ὰ) ὑπ(ατείαν)
Φλαουίου) Βασι(λίου)
13 ἔτους ἰ'. χρῆ οὖν εἶδένε τοὺς ζῶντας ὡς
14 ἔζησεν ἡ μακαρί[α] Φιλοσοφία τὰ πά(ντα) ἔτη
15 κθ' μῆ(νας) β', ἡ[μέ(ρας)] ἰε'. δεχ[έ]σθω οὖν αὐτῶ(ν) τὰ ψυχία
16 [ὁ Θ(εός), κ(αὶ)] ἐῶ[να] ταῖς ψυχε σαυτῶν
17 ν. χαρίσε ✠

[cross] [The grave] was finished and the blessed Aristolaos, my father-in-law, rested in the indiction 1, month 2, day 14, a [?Sun]day (or [?Fri]day.)

The thrice fortunate, the blessed, the lady who has born these here, my mother-in-law, Theodoreta, also rested in indiction 4, month 4, day 13, a Friday.

The lady Philosophia, the daughter of Aristolaos and Theodoreta of blessed memory, who became acknowledged wife to me, Joannes Philadelphos, was born in indiction 15, month 4, day 5, in the consulate of Rusticius and lived her full span until indiction 14, month 7, day 20, a Wednesday, year 25 of the reign of our most sacred and pious master Flavius Justinian, and year 10 after the consulate of Flavius Basilios. The living thus should know that Philosophia, of blessed memory, lived in all 29 years, 2 months, [?15] days. So may [God] receive their souls, [and] grant eternity to their souls.

⁶ Insaph, No. 13.309.

Palaestina – 582⁷

Male, age 26

✠ ατητήθη ὁ μακάριος ασισέος Στεφ(άνου) | ἐν
μηνί α νήμου | δεκάτη ινδ(ικτιῶνος) ιε' τοῦ ||
ἐ'τους υοζ', ἐτῶν ἦν | ὡς κζ' μικροῦ προς. |
Χ(ριστ)ε̅ ὁ θε(εὸ)ς, ἀνάπαυσον | αὐτον

The blessed Kasiseos son of Stephanos was laid in the month June indiction 15 of the year 477 (582), being almost 27 years
Our God, Christ, give him rest

Bithynia – 585⁸

Male, age 58

αλος ἦλθετ-
Ε παροδίτε.
Ἐνθα κατάκ-
ητε Ἀλέξαν-
δρος ἀγναφ-
άριος, ἐπίκλη-
ν Σακκάς, υἱῶ-
ς Ζοτικοῦ, χωρίου αδ-
ιας, ἐν τῷ ἐμπορίῳ
Στροβήλου πραγμα-
τευσάμενος, τελ-
ευτᾷ ἐτῶν πεντίντα ὠκτ[ώ]
μηνί Εἰανουαρίου ι', εἰν-
δ(ικτιῶνος) γ', Βασιλίας Μαυρι[κ]-
ίου ἔτους γ'. αλος ἀπέλ-
θε[τε παροδ]ίτε

Welcome
passer-by.
Here lies
Alexandros
An agnafarios, surnamed
Sakkas, son of
Zotikos, from the village of Kadia
worked in business in the emporium of
Strobilos, died at 58,
On the 10th of January

⁷ SEG XXXI, No. 1431, 375.

⁸ SEG XXVIII, No. 1056, 300.

Being indiction 3, the third year of the Emperor Maurice
Leave in peace
passer-by!

Palaestina – 23rd April 588⁹

Male, age 5 months and 7 [days]

✠ Ἐνθάδε κεῖται ὁ μακάριος θεόδωρος | Γερμανοῦ ἀναπα|εις μην(νι) Ἀπριλλίου κγ'. ||
κατὰ δὲ Ἄραβας Ἀρτε|μισίου γ',
ἡμέρ(αν) ζ' ὥραν β', | ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ζ', ἔτους κατὰ |
Ἐλευθερ(οπολιτας) θπτ', ζήσας | ἔτη ε' μῆνας ζ'. Ἀνάθε||-|
Μα δὲ ἔστω ἀπο του | π(ατ)ρ(ὸ)ς κ(αι) τοῦ Υἱοῦ κ(αι) τοῦ
Ἁγίου ν (εὐματο)ς πᾶς ἀνύ|γων τὸ μνήμα τοῦ|το ἐπειδὴ
γέμει ✠

[cross] Here lies the blessed Theodoros son of Germanos.
Who rested in the 23rd of the month April
[or], according to the Arabic [calendar],
at the 3rd of month Artemisios,
the sixth day (Friday) , the 2nd hour (probably 7.00 in the morning), indiction 6, the year
389 (588) of Eleutheropolis,
Having lived 5 years, 7 months.
Anathema (damnation)
from the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit
to everyone that opens the grave because it (or he) is full. [cross]

Egypt¹⁰

Male, age 10

Τὸν μακαρίου
Υἱοῦ ἐβιω(σεν)
, Χοῖκ η' ἰνδι(κτιόνο)ς

The blessed Ythos
Lived 10 [years],
[Died]....., indiction 8.

Italy¹¹

Female, age 2 years, ? months, 2 days

⁹ SEG XXXIV, No. 1469, 406.

¹⁰ SEG XLIII No. 1127, 414.

¹¹ SEG XXXI, No. 886, 221.

[Ε]νθάδε κίτε Μικκίνα | [έν] πίστει, ζήσασα ἔτη | δύο
[μῆν(ας)... ἡμ(έρας)] β'

Here lies Mikkina. Trusting in [God].
Having lived 2 years, [...] months, 2 [days].

Egypt¹²

Male, age 22

Μνημῖον θεοδώρου
δούλ(ου) θ(εο)ῦ υιοῦ Δημη-
τρίου υνοπολ(ιτου) ἀγάμ(ου)
ς' ἰνδ(ικτίωνος) α χῶν ις' (ἐτῶν) κβ' ... Εὐψύχ[ι]

Memorial of Theodoros
Servant of God
Son of Demetrios from Kynopolis
[Left] unmarried
6 indiction, at the 16th of Pachon, being 22 years... with good courage

Italy¹³

Male, age 28

✠ Ἐν[θ]άδε κ[ατ]άκειται Ἰωάννης ὁ τῆς || ἐν μακαρία τὴν | μνήμην
στρατευόμ(ενος) δεσποτ[ι]κὸς π[ι]νκέρν||ης τ[ῶ] γ[έν]η Ἰβερὸς [υ]ῖος
Ἀλανί[ου] και Σαλόμ[ε]ς τελευτήσας ἐτῶν || εἴκοσι ὀκτώ

[cross] Here lies down Joannes, of blessed memory,
Who served as a leading pinkernes
Being an Iberian by birth
Son of Alanios and of Salome
Died having [lived] 28 years

Arabia¹⁴

Male, age 98

Θεμ[ι]ος Β[α]δα[ρ]ου ἐτ(ῶν) 9η'

¹² SEG XXX, No. 1748, 495.

¹³ SEG XLV, No 1485, 397.

¹⁴ SEG XXXI, No. 1470, 383.

Themios son of Badaros, having 98 years

Seventh Century

Bithynia – 600¹⁵

Male, age 20

✠ Ἐνθά-
δε κατ-
ἀκτι(ε) ὁ
τῆς μα-
καρίας μνήμης
Λονγίνου ὑποδ-
άκον υἱὸς θεο-
Δόρου δι(ακόνου) ἐτελιό-
Θι μινὶ Ἰ-
Αν(ουαριῶ) κα'
ἔτον κ'
ιν(δικτιῶνος) δ'

[cross] Here lies down
Longinos, of blessed memory,
A subdeacon and
Son of the deacon
Theodoros
The grave was finished on 21st of January
[Longinos] being 20 years
Indiction 4

Arabia – 611¹⁶

Female, age 9

✠ Ἐνθάδε κῆται Εὐδοξία Σεργίου ζήσασ|| ἔτι θ',
τελευτήσας ἐν μηνὶ | Γορπ(ιαίω) τοῦ ἔτ(ου)σ φε'

[cross] Here lies Eudoxia of Sergios
Lived 9 years
Died in the month Gorpaios (September) of the year 506 (of the province of Arabia = 611)

Palaestina – 612¹⁷

¹⁵ SEG XXVIII, No. 1057, 300.

¹⁶ SEG XXXIX, No. 1669, 526.

Male, age 52

✠ Ἐνθάδε κατακεῖται | ὁ μακάριος Ἀβραάμιος | υἱὸς
Ἰωάννου τοῦ βικαρίου | διατρίψας ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ ||
Πέντα και δύο ἐ-τη και εἰς τοὺς | ἀναφραστοὺς Βίου μετέ | -
Στη {τη}μη(νι) Δύστρου θ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιε' | ✠ ἔτους φς' ✠

[cross] Here lies the blessed Abraamios, son of the vicarious Joannes
Having lived in this life
Fifty-two years and departed to the ineffable ones of life
On Dustros (March) 9
Indiction 15
Year 506 (612)

Arabia – 633¹⁸

Male, age 2

✠ Ἐνθάδε κί|τε Μηνᾶς Ἰω|άννου ζ(ήσας) ἔτη | Β', τελ(ευτήσας)
μη(νι) Δε|σ(ίου) ιβ' τοῦ ἔτ(ους) | φκη', ινδ(ικτιῶνος) ζ' ✠

[cross] Here lies Menas of Joannes, lived 2 years
Died on the 12th of Desios (December) of the year 528 (633), indiction 7

Italy.¹⁹

2 Male, 1 Female, having 100 (collectively?)

Οὐράνις, | Ἄννα, | θομᾶς, | Εἰσταβάρι||ς ἐνθάδε {ι} καῖτε. | ἑκατὸν ἔτα

Here lies Ouranis, Anna and the stabularius Thomas, having [lived] a hundred years

Italy²⁰

Male, age 53

Ἐνθάδε κατάκειται ὁ δοῦλ(ος)
Τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ Σέργιος ὁ ἐν ἐνδ(οξοτά)τη μνήμη
Γενάμενος, ἀπὸ ἐπαρχων και

¹⁷ SEG XXXI, No. 1435, 373.

¹⁸ SEG XXXIX, No. 1668, 526.

¹⁹ SEG XL, No. 849, 264.

²⁰ SEG XIII, No. 469, 114.

Δοῦξ, ζήσας χρόνους υγ'. Ἐτελι-
όθη μ(ηνι) ' συνίω κγ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) δ'.
Ὁ ἀναγινώσκον εὐξήται
ὑπὲρ ἔμου διὰ τὸν (ὑριο)ν.

Here lies the servant of God Sergios,
Who became of a glorious remembrance,
Former eparch and dux (commander),
Having lived 53 years
[The grave] was completed in the 23rd of July
Indiction 4
He who reads [this] may pray for me to the Lord

Paleastina²¹

Male, age 85

✠ Ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ ὁ (θ)εῖος
δοῦλος τοῦ θεοῦ Ἀναστάσιος
πρεσβ(ύτερος) ἐν μ(ηνι) Δύστρω δ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) βι'
ζήσας ἔτη πε' καὶ εἰδὼν [νι]-
οὺς υἱῶν. ἔδωκεν [τὸ πν(εῦμ)α]
τῷ θ(ε)ῷ καὶ α [.....]

B. ✠ ἀνεπ(άη)

.....

Slept in Christ

The holy servant of God Anastasios the priest (or elder),
[Died] in the month of Dustros (March) 4, indiction 12
Having lived for 85 years and seen the sons of his sons (grandsons)
He gave his spirit to God and...

B. [cross] He died...

Sicily²²

Males, aged 12, 10 and 8

Τύμβ(ος) ἐν θ(ε)ῷ κειμένων ἐνθαδε ἐν ἀναπαύ-
σει. ὠνσταντινου ζήσαντος ἐ'τη ιβ', Μελλώ-
σου ζήσαντος ἐ'τη ι', κ(αι) Νικήτα ζήσαντος ἐ'τη η'.
Τούτων μνήσθητι, (ὑρι)ε, ἐν τῇ Βασιλείᾳ σου.
ἐτελειωθησαν μ(ηνι) Δεκεμβριῶ κζ',

²¹ SEG XXXVI, No. 1329, 407.

²² SEG XLII, No. 869, 249.

ινδ(ικτιῶνος) ἐ'κτησ

Tomb for the rest of those that are laid here in God
Konstantinos having lived 12 years
Mellosos having lived 10 years and
Niketas having lived 8 years
May you remember these, Lord, in your kingdom.
They died in the month of December 27
Indiction 6

Thrace²³

Male, age 50

✠ Ἐνθάδε κα|τάκι(ε) | Ηστοτζας | φεδερᾶ||τος, ἀνιρ Δόδου. | τελευτᾶ μη-
(vi) Ἰου|νίου, ινδ(ικτιῶνος) η', ἐτο]ν| ν'✠

[cross] Here lies down Estotzas, a foederatus, husband of Dodo
Died in the month of June, indiction 8, being 50 years old [cross]

Undated Christian Epitaphs

Egypt²⁴

Female, age 23

ἡ κατὰ τὴν ἁγίαν πίστιν | ἀξιομακάριστος παρθέ|νος Ρίλλα ἢ τὸν
Θ(εὸ)ν φοβηθεῖ|σα και σεμνὸν ἦθος διάγουσα || εἴκουσι δὲ και τρία ἔτη
Επλήρω|σεν ἐν βίῳ. ἐν ἣ γὰρ εἰσῆλθεν | εἰς κόσμον, ἐν αὐτῇ και
Διεξῆλ|θεν. Ζωὴν δὲ ἐὼνιον κληρονο|μήσασα, ἀμαράντινον στέ||φανον
ἔλαβεν ✠

Rilla, worthy of being blessed, a virgin according to the holy faith
She who was afraid of God and lived a solemn guise, completed 23 years in life.
Because she entered the world with this faith and with this she exited.
Having inherited eternal life
She received an unfaded wreath [cross]

Egypt²⁵

Female, age 7

²³ SEG XLV, No. 850, 215.

²⁴ SEG XLI, No. 1671, 555.

²⁵ SEG XLI, No. 1678, 556.

Εἷς Θε(εὸς) [ὁ] Βοη|θον Τκοτι [...]ο[.] ἐ|τον ζ. α ὦφι Β', | δ' ινδικνινος.

One is the God that helps Tkotis (?) who was 7 years old on the 2nd of Paof, indiction 4

Bithynia²⁶

ἀγαθῆ τύχη
Θεῶ ρι ἔττω ὑ-
πὲρ εὐκαρπίας καὶ
σωτηρίας ουβαι-
τηνῶν καὶ τοῦ δεσ-
πότου ἑαυτοῦ Ζω-
σᾶς Ζοίλου τὸν βω-
μὸν ἀνέστησεν κα-
τασπείας τὰ ρι ἑ-
τηα πρῶτος ἔ-
τους ι' Ἀν[τωνεῖ-]
νου αἴσαρος

With the good luck of God,
[Here lies] Priettus
For the prosperity and salvation of the Kouvaitenes
And of his Lord Zosas Zoilos
He raised the altar in the 10th year of Caesar Antony

²⁶ SEG XXXVI, No. 1157, 348.

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