CONFERENCE REPORTS

Notes on "The Age of Theodora"
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A one-day symposium was held on Saturday, October 7, 2000 to inaugurate the long-term loan of the Metropolitan Museum's replica of the mosaic representing The Empress Theodora and her retinue to Connecticut College. Joseph D. Alchermes (Department of Art History, Connecticut College) arranged the loan, organized the conference and submitted these summaries of presentations at the conference.

1. "The Empress's New Clothes: Domestic Art and the Cult of the Virgin in Early Byzantium"

Henry Maguire, Johns Hopkins University

[1] The speaker began with an observation regarding the unusually elaborate chlamys (court costume) worn by Theodora in the mosaic portrait. Two figures of Magi and part of a third appear bearing gifts in procession on the hem of the chlamys, but their destination is ambiguous: is the viewer to imagine that their goal, Mary and the infant Christ, is obscured in the folds on the left of the hem, or should the goal of the Magi's procession be seen in the figure of Christ, seated atop a celestial orb in the main apse mosaic, high above the portraits of Theodora and Justinian? Why has the Magi's visit to Mary and her newborn child been represented on the Empress's garment?

[2] A considerable body of clothing decorated with scenes from scripture survives; the Adoration of the Magi is a frequently represented episode. A tunic in the British Museum, for example, has patch decorations that repeat the Adoration six times. Numerous Late Antique textiles have similar patches, detached from garments, with comparable imagery. This material has typically attracted little attention from specialists in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods; Averil Cameron noted the frequency with which the Magi appear, particularly on jewelry and other items of personal adornment, and posited the emergence of a "private" cult of the Virgin. Maguire proposes to widen the scope of the

investigation to include textiles and related material and to pose the following questions:

1. Did the special veneration of the Virgin originate in imperial contexts and was then imitated at lower social levels, or was it originally a popular movement that was coopted by the powerful?
2. What evidence is there for the popularity of Marian imagery in the homes of ordinary people?
3. Is the wearing of Virgin images gender-specific?
4. Especially when they are parts of garments, how go these images function? Why, as in the case of the British Museum tunic, is the same scene repeated? How did such images work for the wearer?

[3] Before the later sixth century, Marian images on textiles and jewelry are rare. Inscriptions on objects decorated in this way provide partial answers to some of the questions posed above. A pectoral from Egypt, now in Berlin, has this invocation: "Lord, protect her who wears this." A gold medallion created c. 600 in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection has this prophylactic text: "Christ, our God, help us." This inscription appears on late Justinianic silver armbands, objects humbler in format and material: "Theotokos, help Anna, grace."

[4] Maguire turned to sixth- and seventh-century marriage rings in various collections (including the British Museum, Dumbarton Oaks, and Palermo): on the bezel appear Christ and Mary crowning the married couple; among the scenes on the octagonal hoops is the Adoration of the Magi. Inscriptions name both persons in the couple.

[5] A remarkable silk fragment with the Adoration and other Marian images in the Abegg Stiftung received brief analysis. Maguire accepted the early date (c. 400 or early fifth century) proposed for the silk on the basis of features such as the angel represented without wings and the personification in the bath scene, not paralleled in later instances of this imagery. The early dating of the fragment would make it contemporary with the criticism directed c. 400 by Bishop Asterius of Amaseia against the use of biblical imagery in such contexts. Such early figured cloth is exceptional; Maguire mentioned Malik's research on the substantial body of Joseph imagery on textiles, dated to the early seventh

century by comparison of their decorative motifs to the ornaments on dated silverware.

[6] Virgin imagery (and sacred figures in general) on clothing, Maguire observed, are not the norm in the sixth century. Such figures do appear in public church contexts, as Paul the Silentiary's description of the altar silks in H. Sophia makes clear. The cyclical imagery of the marriage rings is anticipated in the cathedral textiles. More broadly speaking, the Virgin is invoked in public, monumental works before her appearance in private, domestic contexts. Many fifth- and sixth-century church decorations can be cited in support of this: the apse of the Soros church in the Blachernai monastery (Constantinople), Theoderic's palace church in Ravenna, and the basilica of Eufrasius at Pore. The first manifestations of special veneration of the Virgin, therefore, are in church art, which is imitated in apparel and other objects made for the elite, and only later in clothing and jewelry made for the less exalted.

[7] Jewelry and clothing decorations made for those of lower social levels provide negative evidence for the popularity of the Virgin cult among ordinary people. To judge from the armbands (mid-sixth to mid-seventh century) studied by Vikan, there is little special interest: only one of eighteen has a Virgin scene, while there are six images of other saints (including Menas, a soldier saint, and unspecified others in the orant pose), and ten images of the Holy Rider, a figure with Christian and magical associations. Imagery on the marriage rings encourages a similar conclusion: of the twenty rings considered by Vikan, just two (in Dumbarton Oaks and the British Museum), have both Christ and the Virgin. These two, moreover, are exceptionally elaborate and should be placed in the category of jewelry made for the elite. Analysis of the iconography of tapestry weave patches made for attachment to clothing confirms these observations: those with scenes involving Mary are few, far outnumbered by episodes from the life of Joseph. In short, images of Mary were rarely used on garments and other objects of personal adornment made for ordinary people in the period before Iconoclasm.

[8] Indications of several sorts shed light on the matter of whether Virgin imagery was gender-specific; the evidence, however, is far from unanimous. A contemporary author describes the Emperor Justin II as praying to God, while his wife, the Empress Sophia,

prays to an icon of Mary. An epigram by the seventh-century author George of Pisidia, on the other hand, emphasizes that the veneration of the Virgin was performed by men and woman alike. Inscriptions on objects connected with the household suggest that patterns shift over time. Inscriptions from the Early Christian period name women, while men are mentioned after Iconoclasm. The statistical sample, however, on which this observation is based is not at all secure. In the days of Asterius, both men and women wore clothing decorated with New Testament (including presumably Marian) imagery. In the mosaics of S. Vitale, only the empress is attired in figurally decorated garb. An inscription on a medical amulet invokes the Virgin, to secure assistance with an eye problem experienced by a man. It seems most prudent to say that Mary imagery in these early examples is a woman's predilection, but is clearly also created for men. In the period after Iconoclasm, however, objects bearing her image feature invocations that regard men as often as they do women.

[9] Most pre-iconoclastic Virgin imagery shows her in Gospel episodes rather than in an iconic portrait. The scenes that appear most frequently on jewelry and clothing are those associated with Christ's birth, beginning with the Annunciation, which is accompanied by the inscription "charis," one of the words spoken by the angel which also has associations of healing. Although it is not an official feast, the Visitation is also a popular episode. Its function is "analogic" and directed toward women: both Elizabeth and Mary represent examples of successful pregnancy. The Nativity, another frequently represented episode, is also possibly analogic in intent. In Early Christian and Byzantine magical charms, Christ in the crib also has special healing powers. The Adoration of the Magi is another commonly depicted event: they appear as the archetypal travelers, protective of the wayfaring wearer of the image. They are also emblematic of those who offer prayer: frankincense, one of their gifts, is interpreted as prayer offered to God. The serial sequence of these episodes is significant: incantations prescribe the order in which the events are to be invoked in order to secure divine assistance. Through the period of Iconoclasm, narrative images of the Virgin, valued for their protective power, were preferred and iconic representations were less common.

[10] In the seventh century and later, Mary appears more frequently on common objects, but even then representations of her are outnumbered by other images. For example, there are few "portraits" of her on the seventh-century tapestry weaves, while there are many female personifications. In this as in other respects, art connected with the ordinary household is more "conservative" and clings to traditional, pre-Christian patterns of decoration longer than in works made for public contexts. Here again, the "trickle-down" theory regarding movement of Virgin imagery finds support.

2. "Literary Culture under Justinian"

Claudia Rapp, University of California at Los Angeles

[11] Claudia Rapp introduced the subject of sixth-century literary activity with two qualifying observations: first, that in this period, literary patronage typically "bubbled up" through the administrative and social hierarchy *toward* the emperor rather than "trickled down" from him; second, some of the sixth-century authors that devote the most attention to Justinian actually did not write under him, but during the reigns of his successors Justin II and Maurice.

[12] She set the stage for discussion of literary practice and patronage by outlining the essentials regarding books in the Late Imperial world. Books were produced, copied, and circulated in limited number. There are exceptions, such as Agathias, who supposed a fairly wide circulation of his work and that of Paul the Silentiary. Often the author emphasizes a relation to a literary forbear by pointing out that he is extending or completing the work of another.

[13] Constantinople was the capital of literary production and trade. Commercial book stalls stood near H. Sophia, in a location convenient to the *basilike stoa*, the center for legal activity in city. This proximity acquires special significance with the observation that lawyers were a sizable and very active group of *literati*, among whom erudite literary undertakings and conversations were common.

[14] Literary creation and book production flourished in sixth-century Constantinople. At this time, monasteries began to produce manuscripts for the market. The output of the imperial

chancery must have been considerable, affecting the script and writing style of educated persons in the capital and throughout the Empire. Scribes employed in the chancery worked privately as well as in the emperor's service. Only a tiny fraction of the documents produced in the sixth century have survived: about twenty papyri and the same number of parchments can be dated to Justinian's time.

[15] It is well known that in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, reading was typically a communal activity. In this period, writing too often had an oral component; that is, much of what today is considered written literature was first composed as religious and secular oratory. Stenographers recorded the words of the homilies delivered by Constantinople's patriarch, John Chrysostom. This same pattern obtains in the sixth century both for the hymns composed by Romanos Melodos and for the panegyric, delivered by Corippus, in honor of the Emperor Justin II. Arator's metric paraphrase of the *Acts of the Apostles* in Vergilian hexameters has notes that tell much about its original sixth-century audience: it was first presented in the presbyterium of St. Peter's (on the Vatican hill), and part was read aloud at the presentation. A full reading, performed later at the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, attracted a large and varied public: the clergy and Roman nobility, as well as many others who were less learned and much lower in status.

[16] In the Late Empire, probably about 10% of the population was literate. The ranks of the illiterate could include exalted persons, such as the Emperor Justin I, Justinian's uncle and predecessor. In Antiquity, the concept of literacy as outlined by Harris covered a range of capabilities. At the lower end of the range are the ability to sign one's name and the functional, "vocational" literacy that would permit a tradesperson to keep accounts. At the other extreme was the truly cultivated person. The relatively few true *literati* use a rarefied language fully appreciated only within this category, a "caste marker" to use Heather's term. Many of these *literati* had (or hoped for) positions in the civil service; about 500 C.E., there were roughly 3,000 jobs in the eastern and western imperial administrations. Turnover rates were high, since many had limited (just one-year) terms. In this way there were considerable possibilities for making useful contacts and acquiring the luster of association through an imperial office. The word *scholastikos*, roughly the equivalent of "lawyer" or "barrister," is often used to

designate those in such positions. Some *literati* instead had positions in the ecclesiastical administration.

[17] Much is known about sixth-century authors from the biographical information included in the prefaces to their works. It is clear that most of these authors are not of the same social class as the members of the truly wealthy, often old families for whom they wrote. Writing was a vehicle of social mobility that affected the genre and content of the literary product. Encomiastic offerings in particular were meant to tug at the purse strings of the person honored and to encourage a generous response.

[18] The example of Corippus is instructive in that it illustrates some of the processes of advancement. The first of his two panegyrics was composed in honor of Justinian's general, John Troglita, after the Vandalic victory. It brought its author success; he moved from Carthage to Constantinople, where he seems to have held some imperial position under Justin II. In his second panegyric, he appeals in the first preface to the emperor himself, Justin II; in the second preface to the same work, the quaestor Anastasius is invoked as an intercessor before the emperor.

[19] John Lydus was also fortunate to have a high-level patron in Constantinople, Zoticus, who offered him a position. John wrote an encomium and was handsomely rewarded with a *nomisma* for each verse! After writing an encomium for the court, he was commissioned to write a history of the war with Persia. The advancement of authors such as Corippus and John depended on a combination of factors: education, aristocratic patronage, receiving an imperial position, access to the emperor. Their contemporary, Agathias, was less fortunate. After instruction in rhetoric at Alexandria, he studied law in the capital but had to work hard as a sort of legal clerk in the *basilike stoa* to maintain himself. His works attest a large number of poems written by Constantinopolitan *literati*, many of them composed by *scholastikoi*, a tightly-knit intellectual group.

[20] In a few cases it was possible to make a breakthrough to imperial patronage without first serving an aristocratic patron. This was the case with Menander Protector, whose good luck it was to receive the unmediated favor of the Emperor Maurice. Menander was one of the "continuators" of the works of earlier *literati*, in fact the third of a series. Procopius' efforts were carried on by Agathias, and his endeavors in turn by Menander.

[21] Procopius himself was born to a family of noble landowners based in Caesarea and came to a position in the administration, but not a sedentary post in Constantinople; he served as aide to the general Belisarius, to whom he dedicated the *Wars*. After the *Wars*, he turned his attention to the *Buildings*, clearly aimed at Justinian. The later work reads like a panegyric: was it written in the hope of reward or to "atone for" his earlier connection with Belisarius, who had come under fire? The *Secret History* turns the other two works of panegyric on their heads. Procopius himself says that he composed it as a complete record for posterity, but there is no *contemporary* audience indicated. Was it written as a private joke, or perhaps to let off steam? In any case, there can be little doubt that it was created without the encouragement of a patron.

[22] Other literary works produced without the active support of patrons in the capital (and elsewhere) were typically on religious subjects. At the same time, writers laboring in the provinces also created secular literary works, for example, Procopius of Gaza and his *ekphraseis*. But the capital, with its patrons and imperial administration, was a powerful magnet that attracted those with literary inclinations and ambitions. Here authors wrote for grandees in the court, with their products providing tools both for recognizing and bonding with one another and for advancement through levels of aristocratic patronage; the ultimate goal was the favor and support of the emperor himself.

3. "Imperial Theology and Church Unity: Justinian and Theodora in the Christological Crises of the Sixth Century"

Sidney Griffith, Catholic University of America

[23] For a millennium and a half, Theodora has been a key figure in the Eastern Church, as the speaker prefers to designate the church body more often called Syrian Monophysite, Jacobite or Nestorian: in fact, she is venerated as a saint. The presence of the Metropolitan Museum's copy of the Theodora panel reminded him that it is this image, the Ravenna mosaic, that has been adapted to create the icon of Theodora used in modern times.

[24] The formation of the Eastern Christian denominations today called Melchites, Jacobites, Nestorians, and so on, is ongoing as late as the eighth century, but continuous threads link them, fully formed, with the period and policies of Justinian and Theodora.

The speaker decried as anachronistic and polemic the use of terms like Monophysite, Jacobite, and Nestorian to describe sixth-century persons and positions. He identified the main factions that opposed the Chalcedonian ("orthodox") majority in the religious controversies of the sixth century in relation to their leaders: the followers of Severus of Antioch (later, "Jacobites") and those who accepted the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia (later, "Nestorians"). The analysis focused on two related matters: the relation between the imperial couple and the sixth-century group that is the predecessor of the Jacobites and imperial policies with regard to the Church of the East ("Nestorian").

[25] "Monophysite" is a disparaging term that took shape in an eighth-century Melchite context (John Damascene). Severus of Antioch was a fully Greek figure, but his works are preserved only in seventh-century Syriac translations. Eighth-century Melchite authors hostile to his writings coined the name "Jacobite" (derived from Jacob Baradaeus, one of Severus's followers) in disparagement of his thought. Severus was the most important intellectual opponent of Justinian.

[26] Justinian saw himself as the defender of the faith. Theodora and he undertook to bring back to the fold the followers of Severus, who were especially numerous in the monasteries of Palestine, Syria, and throughout the non-Greek east. In 532, Theodora organized a encounter in the Palace of Hormisdas (a dĭpendance of the imperial palace) in Constantinople between Chalcedonian bishops and their opponents who followed Severus. The meeting is especially well-documented, with two accounts surviving in Syriac translations of the Greek versions in which they were originally compiled. Controversy erupted over the question of rehabilitating the memories of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and Ibas. Severus' followers viewed them as "proto-" or "crypto-" Nestorian, while the Chalcedonian party was outraged by the fact that the "Severans" had outlawed the three even though the authorities in Constantinople had not so much as censured them.

[27] Theodora made arrangements to bring Severus to the capital from Egypt. Anthimus was put on the patriarchal throne and in 535 Severus made the trip to Constantinople. At this point, pressure was exerted by Rome; Pope Agapitus (535–6) was already present in Constantinople, where he had been sent by the Gothic

king of Italy to ask for the withdrawal of Belisarius and the imperial army that had invaded Italy. The pope emphasized that sentiment in the west strongly favored the decision of Chalcedon and opposed Severus. Agapitus' opposition had two significant consequences: it brought about the dethronement of Anthimus and left Justinian rethinking his lax position on construing the decision of Chalcedon.

[28] At this point, the followers of Severus began to seek ordinations at the hands of bishops favorable to them, giving rise to problems of canon law. With Justinian's blessing, Theodora arranged the ordination in Constantinople of two bishops who could then ordain Severan candidates; one of them was Jacob Baradaeus. As dual hierarchies took shape, of course a real schism developed. Griffith emphasized that the activism of the imperial couple in all this aimed at sponsoring and maintaining conversation among opposed groups and at accommodating the viewpoints of those who hesitated to accept the Chalcedonian position.

[29] Justinian pursued a similar approach with regard to the adherents (mainly in Persia) of the Church of the East, a group thought by the emperor to be "Nestorian;" rather than to call them Nestorians, it is more accurate to say that Theodore of Mopsuestia is their theological source. There is much evidence for extensive contact among church leaders and travel from Persia to the imperial court. In 532, Mar Abba visited Theodora, evidence of her outreach generally to non-Chalcedonian groups, not only to "Jacobites/monophysites." Much later, Justinian heard the case made by theologians of the School of Nisibis. In the meanwhile, the "orthodox" position in Constantinople had hardened: at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, Theodore of Mopsuestia was condemned and Theodoret partly condemned, as was Ibas (to a lesser degree). Griffith underscored the fact, however, that throughout his long reign, the emperor did everything possible to keep the channels of communication open and accommodate the views of those who did not accept the decision of Chalcedon.

4. "The Gifts of Women"

Gillian Clark, University of Bristol

[30] The notion of "welfare" in the ancient world through the fourth and fifth centuries clearly differs from the patterns that are typical

of the sixth century and later. Patlagean first observed that in the later period, the recipients of welfare (the "poor") were defined in terms of need and not social status; in the earlier Empire, the upper classes (nobiliores) made donations to the lower classes (humiliores) regardless of economic need. A redefinition of "good works" accompanies this shift, as "euergetism," the providing of civic amenities and subsidies to urban residents regardless of need is replaced by programs of charity for the poor. Herrin's unpublished study, "From Bread and Circuses to Soup" charts the path of this transformation of values and activities.

[31] Clark commented briefly on the Theodora panel, noting first the exceptional position of the empress's image in the sanctuary, the part of the church which women were not permitted to enter. Apart from the remarkable location of the mosaic, the image of Theodora conforms in other respects to sixth-century protocol and behavioral norms: in a portrait that is pendant to her her husband's, she is represented against a backdrop that is clearly outside the sanctuary, "protected" by attendants. The portraits of the imperial couple making gifts to the church are all the more noteworthy in that Justinian and Theodora did not fund the church; in fact, they never visited Ravenna. The church of S. Vitale was a donation of the Ravennate banker, Julianus Argentarius.

[32] In the mosaics, Theodore (and her husband) bear gifts of liturgical vessels, pious offerings that benefitted the entire congregation. What specifically did the empress and other female patrons do for the poor? The lavish gold and gem-studded chalice carried by Theodora is obviously an object of great value for its sacred associations and also for its costly materials, easily transformed into liquid assets. Justinianic law, however, expressly forbids churches to dispose of sacred furnishings except to ransom prisoners or in case of surplus. Clark wondered whether we should suppose that Theodora actually had a say in the donation of the chalice.

[33] Other high-ranking women are remembered as prominent benefactresses. Clark contrasted with the Empress Theodora her earlier contemporary, Anicia Juliana. Unlike Theodora, Anicia Juliana was high-born. In further contrast to Theodora, Anicia Juliana was also well-educated; she may have written the hexameters inscribed in H. Polyeuktos, the large, elaborate domed basilica that she founded in the 520s. Donation of the church

situates her within the tradition of civic euergetism. Her ancestor, the Augusta Galla Placidia similarly benefitted the residents of the western capital, Ravenna, with churches and other monumental structures. The decoration of one of Galla's churches emphasized her imperial lineage with a series of portraits of members of the Theodosian house. One portrait of Anicia Juliana survives, in a manuscript made for presentation to her ca. 512 and linked with her gift of a church to the residents of Honoratiae near Constantinople. She appears with a variety of personifications that celebrate her virtues and accomplishments: Magnanimity, Prudence, Gratitude of the Arts, and Desire for Wisdom and Arts.

[34] The tradition of such benefaction by Christian empresses goes back to the early fourth-century donations of the Augusta Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. The patterns of what has been called her "matronage" are clearly related to pre-Christian civic euergetism; she also distinguished herself by giving to the poor. From the later fourth and fifth centuries on, there appear many cases of women who bankrupt themselves and their families with spectacular acts of renunciation and largess to the poor. Interestingly, in the late fourth century, the emphasis is on the noblewoman who renounces her wealth and not the poor who benefit from its redistribution; by the sixth century, the emphasis is reversed.

[35] Patrons (and "matrons") in the Late Empire fund the construction and operation of various categories of buildings intended to improve the lot of the needy, for example, hospitals and hostels. In Classical Antiquity, nursing care had not been gendered; in the Early Christian world, however, women dedicated to a life of Christian service tended the sick.

[36] Theodora herself is documented as the patron of churches; she and Justinian also founded a monastery as a haven for reformed prostitutes. The royal couple called it *Metanoia*, usually translated as "Repentance," but more correctly as "New Start"—its fortress walls offered its inhabitants refuge. Two accounts of its foundation are preserved in the writings of Procopius: the favorable, flattering estimate in his *Buildings* and the scurrilous, negative assessment in the *Secret History*. In her extensive writings on women in the Early Christian period, E.A. Clark has maintained that there is little "bedrock" in the ancient texts that describe the interests and activities of women—all is rhetoric, empty and meaningless.

G. Clark agrees on the dominance of rhetoric, but draws from this the opposite conclusion: these texts offer much insight, because this rhetoric tells the Early Christian audience precisely what it wants to hear. An excellent illustration of a major shift in values is provided by the story of Irene: this dignitary's wife who collapses from doing so many good works is proposed as an ideal worthy of imitation. She can be contrasted with the ideal women that appear in classical authors such as Plutarch, to be admired for the bold resistance that they show to tyrants.

[37] Clark briefly returned to take up several additional matters related to the imperial monastery of *Metanoia*. In the Late Roman world, prostitutes, along with actors, dancers and musicians, were considered similarly disreputable and of low legal status. Justinian, acting apparently in self-interest, changed the law to allow prostitutes to marry. His legislation, in fact, offers a good deal of information regarding prostitution in early Constantinople.

[38] In conclusion, Clark broadened her analysis of Justinianic legislation on the organization of charity to draw several conclusions:

1. In the sixth century, imperial support of the poor was taken for granted, while in the earlier empire, it was not an imperial concern;
2. poverty is defined by need, not by status , as was earlier the case;
3. imperial structures and systems (also adopted and imitated by nobles) created hospitals, orphanages, hostels and other public services.

These laws reflect directly the changed conditions and mentality of the sixth century; no such legislation existed in the Theodosian Code, compiled just a century earlier.