A SAINT OR A PROSTITUTE? THE POSITION OF THE WOMAN IN DANCE DURING THE BYZANTINE ERA

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ABSTRACT

Dance is an activity, which, ever since the Antiquity, has never ceased to be performed in the Hellenic space. This fact gives a broad margin for the study of dance through many different approaches. From all the periods, the darkest but also the most controversial one is the Byzantine period. In this period, in a male-dominated Byzantine society, "women have been placed by law on the margin of public life" and "have been intentionally set away from the circles of the church. Only a few empresses and noblewomen made their presence felt". The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the position and the role of the woman in dance and dance occasions during the Byzantine period. In particular, it will examine whether women danced, what they danced to and the way they did it during the Byzantine period, and how this was seen and addressed by the society and the Official Church. Data collection was based on secondary sources and, in particular, on the principles of the bibliographic and historical archival research. In conlusion, women in Byzantium skillfully "danced" around the antithetical relationship "a saint or a prostitute", and this balance is achieved through their dance.

KEYWORDS: history, Byzantine period, women's dances, dipole categories

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the existing sciences is the science of History. But what does history mean? History is the science which deals with the investigation and the interpretation of the historic events (Papyros Larousse, 2014:294) or the (mainly) written narration of important events related to nations, persons, countries or some periods of the life of the people (Tegopoulos-Fytrakis, 1990:329), or the systematic study of the past mainly focused on the human activity till the present era (https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ιστορία). Every human activity is part of this history, thus dance, as such, is in itself a part of the history. Dance, as Kraus mentions (1980) evolves in time but also exists within space (p. 25). Therefore, dance, while existing within space, continues within time, remaining still or changing, according to the demands, the needs, the beliefs, and the desires of each community always in connection with other factors (including geographical, political, or financial factors).

The wider Hellenic space presents a rich historical and multifaceted material, offering a vast field for researchers in order to study the history through various prisms. Dance is an activity, which, ever since the Antiquity, has never ceased to be performed in the Hellenic space. This fact gives a broad margin

for the study of dance through many different approaches. Historically, dance has been usually approached and studied either by historical period (ancient, byzantine, contemporary), or by type of dance and its evolution in time. From all the periods, the darkest but also the most controversial one is the Byzantine period (330 AD – 1453 AD), which coincides it time with the European Middle Age (476 AD – 1492 AD), the latter also being a "dark" and controversial period as regards dance and dance events, marked by condemns on behalf of the Catholic Church, dances of Death (Danses Macabres, 14th and 15th century), witching dances and dancing mania (13th and 14th century) (Kraus: 1980).

Therefore, during that period, dance took another shift across Europe, and in particular in the Byzantine Empire, under the stringent control on behalf of the Official Church, but also due to the wider influence of Christianism, with perceptible consequences as regards dance events in Byzantium, including both dances per se and their performance. Within this wider context, dance performance never ceased, albeit it evolved and took different shapes. In a clearly male-dominated Byzantine society, "women have been placed by law on the margin of public life" and "have been intentionally set away from the circles of the church. Only a few empresses and noblewomen made their presence felt" (Lymperi, 2016:35). In such a society, what would the women's position be?

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the position and the role of the woman in dance and dance occasions during the Byzantine period. In particular, it will examine whether women danced, what they danced to and the way they did it during the Byzantine period, and how this was seen and addressed by the society and the Official Church. Data collection was based on secondary sources and, in particular, on the principles of the bibliographic and historical archival research (Adshead & Layson, 1994; Thomas & Nelson 2002). For the purposes of data presentation and interpretation, one of the scientific historical approaches of Adshead & Layson, (1994) was used, which refers to focusing the dance study on a specific period, where (Table 1) "it is possible (for the researcher) to work in detail and to pay attention to single events and their relation to the time-span of the selected area" (p. 6).

Table 1: The isolated period of history (Adshead & Layson, 1994;6)
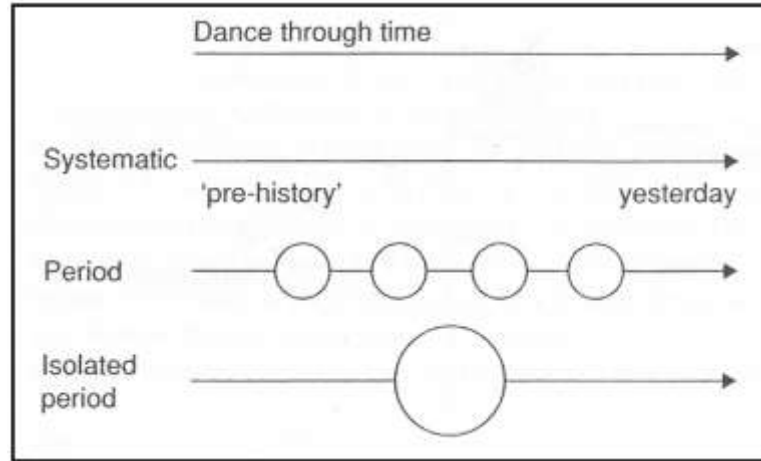
The women's position in Byzantium

Dance is not detached from the overall social tissue; on the contrary, one derives from or affects the other. Therefore, it would be useful to make a reference to the position of the women in Byzantium in general before proceeding to the dance-specific analysis, in order to give a more comprehensive image on the social status of women.

Admittedly, the women's position, although it had not been studied until recently on a scientific level, nowadays, however, it has started to emerge as a study subject and take shape through various studies (Herrin, 2000,2013; Megalommati, 2017; Lymperi, 2016; Lung, 2017; Politi, 2013; Stivasari, 2017). In the past, very few was known about women and their positions in the Byzantine Empire; however, recent studies have come to shed light on the matter.

In general, the women's position and its precise definition is based on three strands, which shaped the women's social status, and they can sum up to the following:

1) Christianism. According to Lymperi (2016), "it would be unconceivable to describe the women's position in the Byzantine society without stressing the particular contribution of the Christian clergy in the configuration of the public and private life of Byzantine people" (p. 34).
2) The Byzantine Law
3) The influence and contributions from eastern cultures.

These three strands have been crucial for the determination of the women's position in Byzantium. As Stivasari (2017) tellingly remarks, "the Byzantine society was influenced by the lessons of the Church Fathers, the teaching of which has decisively influenced the opinion-shaping of the Byzantines regarding the women's position" (p. 26) as well as, in general, "strict legislation, social stereotypes

and consolidated views of the religion regarding women have contributed to the perpetuation of that stagnant situation" (Lymperi, 2016: 38).

In general terms

> the Byzantine society, attached to the values promoted by the religious hierocracy, was explicitly male-dominated, with women having been placed by law on the margin of public life and intentionally set away from the circles of the Church. Only a few empresses and noblewomen made their presence felt. (Lymperi, 2016:35)

and, in addition

> Christianism […] accepted her nasty facet. The Byzantine law, which derived from Roman law […] was quite strict, as it limited women's status under the paternal power (*patria potestas*) which she had provisionally escaped. The influence exercised by eastern cultures along with their patriarchal social structure was imparted as immaterial legacy to the Byzantines. (Lymperi, 2016: 35-36)

This context is complemented by the component of the Muslim influences coming from the East

> this fear of the female potential and the determination to keep women under control is typical of medieval societies. In the late-seventh century Byzantium it may also have been strengthened by Christian awareness of Muslim attitudes and the stringent Islamic regulation of women […]. The negative side is most clearly represented by the church in canons such as these. But ecclesiastical condemnation was balanced by a genuine appreciation of individual Byzantine mothers, wives, and daughters expressed by their male relatives. Despite occasionally exaggerated praise, distorted by rhetorical concerns, individual writers express a positive attitude toward women, once they were enclosed within family life. There they might perpetuate the ideal of Christian service, loving their husbands and their children as instructed. (Herrin, 2013:127-128)

From the above, we can conclude that the women's position was clearly downgraded in comparison with men, with women receiving a negative treatment. Since the day a woman would be born, even the very birth of her would not be treated as a positive circumstance for the society

> The birth of a girl during the Byzantine times was not a happy event, since she would not perpetuate the family name, on one hand, and much care would be needed, on the other hand, on behalf of her parents, who would have to protect her when she would reach the marriage age and provide for her dowry. It is telling that during the Byzantine times, and even today in some cases, the term "children" would only refer to boys. (Lymperi, 2016:36)

The goal of their life was one and only: reproduction and raising their children to adult life. As aptly stressed by Herring (2013), "[…] all girls were normally obliged to follow their physical role and become mothers, who in turn prepared their own children for adult life […]" (p. 82). As a consequence of the above life goal, the woman would act in a spouse-centred or son-centred manner

> other, less famous, women do not even merit a name in these historical works, being mentioned only through their relationship to a male character […] the men answer when they are called by their names, but the women "utter the names of the men to whom they were married in life". […] Here a common Byzantine practice of congratulating the mother for the achievements of her sons. (Lung, 2017: 12)

In fact, being a woman in the Byzantine period was something like a sin. The only existing redemption would be giving birth to her offspring. Lymperi (2017) remarks accordingly

> in his "Encomium for his mother", Michael Psellos (1018-1096) writes about the matriarchal structure of his family, expressing the general appreciation that the Byzantines showed for mothers, since the obligation to give offspring contributed to the continuance of the empire and offered them redemption before the eyes of the male gender for their iniquity of belonging to the female gender. (p. 37)

Women had to respect and honour their husband to such an extent that

> it was explicitly forbidden for them to take part in public events (although this would be infringed most of the times) in order not to be exposed to the eyes of the men. For the same reason, women avoided being present at the reception space even of their own home when friends or strangers would pay a visit to their husbands. (Lymperi, 2016:37-38)

The above is complemented by the study carried out by Stivasari (2017), which corroborates by saying that

> those perceptions shaped and defined the women's position in the Byzantine society, by restricting her presence inside the home and delimiting her contact with the opposite gender. When they would get out of their houses, women should behave in a way that would not provoke men, walk modestly, look down, have their face covered and be accompanied by handmaidens. Certainly, said restrictions did not only apply for women of middle and lower social classes, but they were extended to all classes. They would even apply for empresses and women of the aristocracy. (p. 26)

As regards their education and their participation in the decision-making, that would be from insufficient to inexistent. In particular, Lymperi (2016) remarks that "[…] it is a fact that the education

for the average Byzantine women was a luxury and only those who belonged to the upper social classes or the aristocracy […] benefitted from the privilege of access to higher education […]" (p. 47). As regards the exercise of power, Stivasari (2017) supports that "[…] Byzantine literature strongly opposes to the exercise of power by women, since the latter were considered to be inadequate and deficient in doing so because of their nature and their weak character […]" (p. 27).

The abovementioned studies allow us to draw a conclusion on the position of the women during the Byzantine period. Was that actually the case though? Was it always like that or is there another facet of their position and role? Despite the above analysed strands (Church, Byzantine law and influence from the East), the image of the woman in the Byzantine era does not seem to be that consolidated. Over the centuries (with 11th century being a landmark for the women's position in Byzantium), but also in accordance with their social and economic status, there is a change of stance towards the female gender. First of all, women would be the ones to preserve the religion and the tradition, perpetuating them from generation to generation. Thus,

> women become co-architects of the triumph of religious images, as they argue the case using the essentially conservative and traditional instruments of survival: faith in the holy persons to save, cure, heal and protect. Through their determination, they help both to ensure the persistence of Byzantine religious art and the popular devotion to icons, as well as to perpetuate traditions of the feminine exercise of imperial power. In turn, it can be argued, this defining characteristic of the eastern empire assists in its survival for a further five hundred years. (Herrin, 2000:35)

During the Byzantine period, there were women who not only occupied higher ranks but even became empresses, and their name went down in history. Actually, the latter constitutes in itself a novelty, since:

> Byzantium is one the few medieval societies that allowed the extensive exercise of power by women, sometimes in their own name […] male political authority was shown to be possible, and some women took an active part in public life. Even in Byzantine society, however, the women mentioned in the histories and chronicles were those who successfully escaped the gynaecaeum, the majority who did not were forgotten by history. (Lung, 2017: 14)

Therefore, in Byzantium, "there were women inside the imperial court who played an important role, as they overcame those ideological bars, escaping from the restrictive dominant ideology, and exercising their freedom of speech and action" (Stivasari, 2017:26-27). Such examples were the empresses Theodora, Pulcheria, Irene, Zoe:

> there were indeed many women victims, but men, too, were victimized. Historians also depicted powerful, successful women, such as the empress Theodora, and positive role models for the chroniclers, such as Pulcheria, whose piety and obstinate devotion to virginity were

venerated. The ideal woman, from our historians' point of view, may be inferred from a passage in which Procopius deplores Justinian's choice of Theodora as a wife. (Lung, 2017: 13)

as well as

[and] in the eighth and ninth centuries Irene and Theodora proved able to reverse the reforming policy of the iconoclast dynasty of Leo III, exploiting circumstances to manipulate court tensions and divisions, and even to resist the policies of their husbands. (Herrin, 2013:185)

In addition to the following "special reference is made to the born-to-the-purple empresses Zoe and Theodora who ruled as male leaders, which was considered to be unheard of in the West until late Middle Age" (Lymperi, 2016: 35).

In particular, historians and researchers cite that ever since the 11th century, as above mentioned, women of the Byzantine aristocracy had access to education and to the highest ranks, which led to social changes during that period and "ever since the 11th century, and particularly in the Palaiologan period, women, especially those belonging to the aristocracy, were not only actively involved in the social process, but they also had an equal position with men of their class" (Politi, 2013:9).

The above is corroborated by Stivasari (2017), who supports that

during the 11th century, the presence of powerful women from the aristocratic family in the political life was significant and often crucial. The 11th century, known as the "century of the empresses", as it has been named, constitutes one of the most fruitful periods for the study of the role of women in the political life and government of the empire. (pp. 27-28)

This trend continued to persist in the next centuries, where women seemed to receive education and play an important role in their era:

most women of the Byzantine elite were literate already from the 12th century and mostly from the 13th century till approximately the mid-14th century. At this point, it is worth pointing out that being literate means being able to write and read. Certainly, we should also stress the existence of greatly educated women with theological and secular knowledge, such as Anna Komnini, Eirini Sevastokratorissa, Theodora Komnini Raoulaina and Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina. The surge in the percentage of literate women reached its peak during the 14th century, according to statistic data of the Monastery of the Great Lavra, as a result of social ferments and a change in the perceptions on the role of the women in the Byzantine society of the late era. (Politi, 2013: 8)

Last, it is worth mentioning that women could manage their finances and had the right to own land. In particular,

> during the Palaiologan period, women (married or widows most often) could manage or even undertake themselves the management of their assets or dowry and give it to monasteries or dispense as they wished. The assets usually consisted of houses, land plots, cash or jewelry. Their financial role was even more apparent through the involvement of the women of the Byzantine elite in the trade and sale of handcraft items, especially if they were nuns. They also engaged in important activities as shop and land leasers, as money borrowers or dealing with personal companies and state funds. (Politi, 2013: 9-10)

From the above one can conclude that the women's position was defined by men; women take their position in connection with men:

> women are always represented in connection to men; even famous ones are initially identified in relation to a male […]. women as reflections of men is women's close dependence on their husbands' social destiny, an idea stated in Byzantine law and clearly expressed in Justinian's Code: "the wife rises with her husband and shares his distinction" […] present women as always following the destiny of their husbands, either ascending or descending the social hierarchy. (Lung, 2017: 12)

The Church, the structure of the Byzantine society as well as the existing stereotypes were key factors in the shaping of the women's position:

> The Byzantine family, influenced by the lessons of the Church Fathers and the Christianity in general, did not actually encourage women's education. According to the stereotypes of that period, women, as Eve's descendants, were prone to sin, weak and biologically inferior as compared to men. Almost the same perception was passed on to the Byzantines by the Ancient Greeks, which considered women to be a necessary evil, but they also stressed their major contribution within the family life. The triptych of marriage, birth giving and parenting was the dominant model for women in the Middle Age. Therefore, when historians address the issue of women's education and other activities during the Palaiologan period, they tend to limit their research within the aristocracy circles. (Politi, 2013:7)

Eventually, the women's position would change and occupy a different place within the society, as

> It seems that the status of women in the Byzantine world improve gradually and after a long process. Although initially similar to practices of Roman law, influences from church law led Byzantine civil law to soften the extremely conservative legislation that severely limited the political rights of women; this is seen in particular through marriage legislation. The church

thus was able, in its own enactments and through its influence on civil law, to enforce its position on women in marriage. However, it is still unclear whether the favorable treatment of women in marriage by Byzantine law corresponded to actual social changes that improved the real position of women in Middle Byzantine times. (Megalommati, 2017:28)

The female gender, according to the official religion, was in a bipolar contrast. According to Lymperi (2016) "Christianism was wavering between nocive Eva and pure Mary in order to define the position of the woman gender" (p. 36), which entails an "ambivalence between the Byzantine society as regards Byzantine women, as perfectly reflected in the frequently cited contrast between Virgin Mary and Eve" (Stivasari, 2017: 26).

The above is complemented by Herrin's contribution (2013):

> Within the Byzantine Christian tradition, women could be seen as paragons of virtue, virgins, saintly mothers, and holy widows. But as prostitutes, licentious young girls who would seduce married men and monks, or ordinary women who simply enjoyed dancing in public, jumping over bonfires or cross-dressing, they represented what the church understood as a definite threat to its social control and order. Hence the double-edged appreciation of women in Byzantium. (pp. 127-128)

The women's position in dance during the Byzantine period

If we take a look at the literature related to dance during the Byzantine period, we will find a vast series of reference works. If we attempt to classify them, the bibliographic overview would then be divided in three strands: the first strand refers to the dance occasions, namely when dances were danced in Byzantium (Easter, wedding ceremonies, commemorations of Saints, fests and feast, theatre, statue-raising events, etc.), for which there is rich reference material (Antzaka-Vei, 2004; Antzaka-Vei & Loutzaki, 1999; Blagojević, 2012; Herrin, 2000; Koukoules, 1938; Moutzali, 2004; Touliatos-Miles, 2004; Tsekoura, 2004; Tyrovola, 1988/89, 2003a, 2003b; Voutsa, 2004). The second strands concerns dance terminology used in the Byzantine period, such as "chorovato" (χοροβατώ, dance in a chorus), "choros" (χορός, dance), "orchoumai" (ορχούμαι, dance in group), "orchestes" (ορχηστής, dancing-master), "orchema" (όρχημα, dancing) (Antzaka-Vei, 2004; Koukoules, 1938; Tyrovola, 1988/89, 2003a, 2003b; Voutsa, 2004). The third strand refers to the types of dances performed in Byzantium, namely the circle dance, the syrtos dance, the geranos dance, the pyrichios dance, etc. (Antzaka-Vei, 2004; Antzaka-Vei & Loutzaki, 1999; Blagojević, 2012; Koukoules, 1938; Moutzali, 2004, Parcharidou-Anagnostou, 2004; Touliatos-Miles, 2004; Tsekoura, 2004; Tyrovola, 2003a, 2003b; Voutsa, 2004). The fourth strand relates to the movements and patterns of the dancers, namely references on how dancers danced at that period (Antzaka-Vei, 2004; Antzaka-Vei & Loutzaki, 1999; Blagojević, 2012, Koukoules, 1938, Touliatos-Miles, 2004; Tyrovola, 2003a, 2003b). The fifth strand concerns the dance chants (Koukoules, 1938; Touliatos-Miles, 2004; Tyrovola, 2003a, 2003b) and the sixth strand relates to music and sound (Solomou, 2020).

The studies on the position and the role of women belong to a wider framework of studies related to dance in the Byzantine era in general (Antzaka-Vei, 2004, Antzaka-Vei & Loutzaki, 1999; Blagojević, 2012; Herrin, 2013; Koukoules, 1938; Markopoulos, 1983; Moutzali, 2004; Parcharidou-Anagnostou, 2004; Touliatos-Miles, 2004; Tsekoura, 2004; Tyrovola, 2003a, 2003b; Voutsa, 2004). Their generic reference to the dance in the Byzantine period contains important and useful extracts which allow us to study the position and the role of the women in said period. The present paper comes to collect, classify and delve into the subject in order to extract any conclusions, dedicated texts or extracts which may relate to the position and the role of women in dance during the Byzantine period.

The above is indicative of how the women's position in reflected in depictions and murals in Byzantine monuments. Let us now take a look at the secondary sources, which refer to the women's role and position in dance in the Byzantine period. Secondary sources are documents or studies which refer to the dance in Byzantium. It seems that the Church was hostile against any dance activity and dance in general (Antzaka-Vei & Loutzaki, 1999, Blagojević, 2012; Koukoules, 1938; Moutzali, 2004; Touliatos-Miles, 2004; Tyrovola, 1988/89, 2003a, 2003b; Voutsa, 2004), which was passed on to the popular common sense through the argument that "John the Baptist (Prodromos) lost his head because of Salome's dance" (Koukoules, 1938:219).

This did only extrapolate to dance per se but also the way women dancers were treated in dance. Women, who were considered to be inferior compared to men and immoral within the Byzantine society, as seen above, received the same treatment in the dance occasions, as "the stance of the society, the clergy and the Church against mimes and mimades (female mimes) was in general negative. Church circles considered mimades to be essentially and always prostitutes" (Moutzali, 2004: 22)

Voutsa (2004) mentions that "[…] John Chrystostom […] presents us the nature of those dancers by saying 'let us examine the dance of the women who prostitute themselves and of the homosexual young men […]' (p. 44). From dance derive the sins and "[…] having fun was not bad, and if virgins and women do not dance, then who will dance, he responds, because the evil that dance brings, as indifferent as it might seem, is far from insignificant […] (Koukoules, 1938:221). Gregory the Theologian "[…] talked about 'flutes and dances of prostitutional orgiastic movements' […]" (Koukoules, 1938:221) and Koukoules (1938) further comments in detail:

> The Canon 62 of the Ecumenical Council refers to public dances of women, "the improper ones and which are calculated to wreak great harm or injury", whereas Balsamon talks about improper dances being performed sometime around March. The follow-up of the above is what is further noted in the later Nomocanon, according to which anyone who dances and sings should be removed from the society" (p. 222). In the second Ecumenical Council, reference is made to those who eat with the accompaniment of satanic songs, guitars and prostitutional swaying (pp. 221, 228-229). Exactly as it happened who those who introduced mimes, dancers

and women prostitutes in the symposia, who were said to invite demons and the devil, and they fill the houses with thousands of wars (it is known that those are the causes of jealousy, adultery, prostitution and many many evils. (Touliatos-Miles, 2004:31)

Saint Basilius "accused women, who, according to testimonies, started dancing and converted holy places into the laboratory of their own debauchery" (p. 222).

Women were immoral when they danced and represented a threat for the male population:

> But as prostitutes, licentious young girls who would seduce married men and monks, or ordinary women who simply enjoyed dancing in public, jumping over bonfires or cross-dressing, they represented what the church understood as a definite threat to its social control and order. (Herrin, 2013:127)

Was it always like this though? At second glance, one can discover that in the imperial courts and in the rich men feasts, dance was a necessary element, since "they had dinners in magnificent palaces, talked, got to know each other better, drank and danced there (dancing with a hint of mockery on the table" (Blagojević, 2012:89). Many emperors and empresses "in order to please their guests during their lush banquets they invited male and female dancers, musicians" (Moutzali, 2004:22) or "mimics, acrobats, actors, dancers that had various programs appeared in the breaks during 8 races (at the Hippodrome)" (Blagojević, 2012:90). In fact, "it happened that one dancer became a Byzantine empress. It was Theodora" (Blagojević, 2012:89), whereas

> Prokopios […], referring to the life of Theodora before meeting Justinian and before becoming an empress, "[…] from the beginning she had become a courtesan, which was earlier considered to be mundane. For she was neither an auletrides (flute-girl) nor a chanteuse, and that in no case had she been trained in the art of dance […]". (Voutsa, 2004:44)

There are also other references on Theodora:

We will praise queen Theodora, even one might think that we deride her, that person being ready to praise for the sake of ambition and not to make any good. For this present praise is not for her satisfaction, since those anthems are posthumous, neither do words please if they have the one being pleased as its auditor, in order to gain his gratitude, receive in reward and have laudable narrations. When Theodora dances, she is glorified in dance and she is bathed in the light of the utmost divinity, whereas the other arranges his life with things that bring him back to life and calls for piety. (Markopoulos, 1983:257)

Apart from Theodora, however, there are other testimonies on the opinion of emperors as regards dance

Julian the Apostate (Flavius Claudius Julianus) during his short reign restored classical dance with its idolatrous customs. […] Supports dancers and the art of dancing claiming that dancing has some beneficial features for the spirit and that the rhythm of the steps moves the body in the same way as the celestial bodies move. (Blagojević, 2012:88)

There comes emperor Theodosius I (379-395), who "by his law not only accepted women in the theatre (on the stage), but also protected them believing that their work was beneficial for the whole society" (Blagojević, 2012:88).

Therefore, there is another stance observed towards dance, which comes from the clerical part of the Byzantine society, the rich and even the imperial court

dance was present as a phenomenon on many different levels: in private and public life, during the annual cycle of festivities and during the lifetime of an individual. As for the private level, aristocrats used to invite dancers to their feasts to entertain their guests. So, places for dancing could be private (private houses) and public (the Hippodrome, the Emperor's palace, open spaces). (Blagojević, 2012:90)

At the same time,

there is an opposite position expressed in the same period through the laws which protect the orchestrides (female dancers), recognizing their great value for the state and pursuing their participation in official ceremonies. The further we move from the Antiquity, the lesser the negative references appear in written texts. Although the orchestrides and the auletrides continue to evoke depravity, however their dances accompany religious feasts and weddings and that is gradually being accepted. (Voutsa, 2004:48)

From the above source it seems that women did dance in some dance occasions. But what type of occasions? According to historical sources, women in Byzantium danced in the following occasions

events connected to women's dance in Byzantium are the following: theatre plays and entertainment occasions, official ceremonies to honor the emperor in the Hippodrome, but also in the Great Palace, wedding ceremonies and feasts during which popular sacred dances were performed by the flock, usually in the church courtyard but also inside the temples. (Voutsa, 2004:48)

As regards the occasion of symposiums, as cited above, Koukoules (1938) stresses that

Byzantines dance in symposia as well, with rich men inviting expert male and female dancers to participate […]. During the symposia, male or female dancers or even guests would dance within the symposium hall, whereas dance inside the place was performed in the Triklinos of Justinian (imperial reception hall). (pp. 228-229, 230)

They also danced during Easter period "but also during the Easter period many dances were performed, based in fact on women's testimonies, as Saint Basil states, and afterwards, during the 14th century, also Nikiforos Grigoras" (Koukoules, 1938: 277). Furthermore "every season had its own holiday. Spring arrival was welcomed by many outdoor dancing celebrations. There were women's dances at Easter, nocturnal satirical dances in disguise on the Kalends, dances by itinerant bands of young men on the Roussalia" (Blagojević, 2012:90).

However, the Church was once again hostile towards Easter dances as testified by sources:

> Saint Basil, referring to the women dancing, said they contaminate the air "with their prostitutional songs" and Agathias mentions "dances who related to songs", while the national discourse refers to the element of pleasure-seeking inherent to dance, as well as the foreign melody. (Koukoules, 1938:248)

As regards weddings, it is said that "men and women during weddings" (Koukoules, 1938:228) and "throughout the night, groups of people with cymbals and drums were feasting and dancers made steps by noisily tapping both feet, whereas groups of women would dance songs related to marriage" (Voutsa, 2004: 46).

Moreover, women also danced in local feasts, in "and entertainment occasions" (Koukoules, 1938: 251), the way how "Ancient Cretans did in weddings and feasts in honor of their gods and heroes […], which implied the existence of continuity from ancient to modern byzantine dance occasions" (Koukoules, 1938:249). In particular, Touliatos-Miles (2004) informs us that

> the feast of Saint Agatha during the 11th century was a feast dedicated to and organized by women who worked in the textile sector, the only honorable female profession at the time. The feast included public dances and songs on the streets by women […]. During the dance, women would hold hands as they turned from a side to another. The fact that women were allowed to dance on the streets during that feast, celebrating the female dimension, implies that even honorable women were allowed to dance publicly during the 11th century. (p. 35)

Finally, apart from the feasts, women danced in several spaces for the entertainment and amusement of the spectators, as "it was known that the taverns of the bigger cities also offered entertainment programmes with brass or percussion instruments and men and women would dance there and would rhythmically clap their hands" (Touliatos-Miles, 2004:35).

But how did they dance? Under which pattern? As Tsekoura stresses (2004)

> this dance pattern is included in the circular female dances which were usually performed, along with some mixed ones, towards the end of the Byzantine period, which essentially constitute a further evolution of the individual female dance of the previous centuries. In fact, the depictions of women dancing initially follow the standard of the ancient classic art; however, after the 11th century, a new type seems to prevail. It is the type of the woman who

now wears the clothing of that period and is depicted to be participating in the activities of the contemporary society. (Tsekoura, 2004: 6-7)

The above is corroborated by Blagojević (2012), who states that "the most common dances in Byzantine were circle dances. That was related to ancient cult customs" (p. 89) and Koukoules (1938), who mentions what Saint Basil wrote "about women who dance and young men gathering around the dance circle" (p. 235). Koukoules also states that "ancient female dancers, while dancing, held a fluttering veil with both hands, creating a semicircle over their heads" (p. 243) and "making turns along with the tune" (p. 249).

Finally, in order to make a connection once again with the dances in Ancient Greece,

> women (in dirges) held hands, as it used to occur in ancient circular dances, and, as their bodies were swaying, they gave the impression of dancing […] standing right outside the church and singing their dirges or shaping a circle, as a circular dance, and singing the dirges. (Touliatos-Miles, 2004:32)

In fact, that circular pattern, which has been performed since the Antiquity, still survives, through the circular dance of the couple on the wedding day

> however, one orthodox theologian, Fr. John Meyendorff, writes: "The hymn begins in fact by a call to execute a ritual khorodia, well known both to the Jews of the Old Testament (David danced before the Ark of the Covenant, II Samuel 6:14) and to the ancient Greeks; and the triple circular procession of the bridal pair led by the priest around the sacramental table can be seen as a proper and respectful form of 'liturgical dancing'". However, in the typicon of the Orthodox Church the instruction that the bride and groom and the priest should dance is nowhere to be found. They are taken three times in a circle as a symbol of the Holy Trinity. It is the latent function of the going in a circle, hidden for laymen. (Blagojević, 2012:91)

Moreover, there is information on the way women danced, but also on the way there were dressed and the things they held in their hands. Women would make vivid movements in their dances, "with female dancers doing that move sometimes during the female dances, by lifting their legs more that they were supposed to" (Koukoules, 1938: 246), while "they made those vivid movements that were forbidden by modesty" (Koukoules, 1938:220). However, the rule was that they should do modest moves, in order for the dance to be accepted by the rigid society of Byzantium. In particular

> modest women in the Byzantine period had to have their head covered, as well as a part of their face, and also their arms and chest; how was it possible then for those strict men to tolerate that dance, during which the ones who danced, urged by the rush, would uncover their head and their breasts, doing such vivid movements forbidden by modesty? (Koukoules, 1938:220)

Last, it is said that "Digenis Akritas's spouse danced on a small mat made from a precious fabric" (Touliatos-Miles, 2004:35). Byzantine dancers "would hold handkerchiefs" (Koukoules, 1938:234) and "the sleeves of their dresses were so tight that they gave their impression they were stuck to their

arms, whereas the dresses were long and sometimes with a long tail and with golden embroidery" (Koukoules, 1938:251). Moreover, "they wear a a veil" (Koukoules, 1938: 244) and

> their head was naked, like the women of the theatre. The special feature of male and female dancers was that they wore, from the elbow and below, long sleeves which could be rolled up, which sometime seemed to be the extension of the veil waving in circles above their heads. (Koukoules, 1938:251)

In fact, while dancing, "the dresses of professional male and female dancers, as well as those of common men and women, would blow like a balloon" (Koukoules, 1938: 251). A comparison is also drawn, as, according to Koukoules (1938),

> modest women wore long dresses, a cover around their head and, when they danced, they had to pay special attention in order to prevent their hair from waving and their tunic from dragging on the ground, as well as not to uncover their skin or their face […], while female dancers wore, during the earlier years, light blue tunics with a belt below the chest, which created many folds. (p. 251)

As regards the participation in the dance, "Byzantines considered that dance was a female thing/event and the participation of men was believed to be unmanly and improper" (Voutsa, 2004:44). In particular,

Saint Basil wrote about women who danced and young men gathering around the circle of their dance, Theodore the Studite about dances of women with the presence of men, the Canon 62 of the Ecumenical Council as regards public dances of women, Patriarch Photius as regards the dances of unmarried women, the medieval literary oeuvres as regards dances of nice women and the Canon 51 of the Ecumenical Council as regards men dances. (Koukoules, 1938: 235)

However, not only female dances are found, as "there were dances danced only by men or only by women, and also those danced by men and women together" (Blagojević, 2012:89). In particular, there are sources referring to mixed dances, where men and women danced together

> however, it is common for men and women to dance together; Gregory the Theologian said that it was not proper for men and women to dance together, whereas such mixed dances are also referred to by Saint Basil, which were held in Cappadocia during the symposia, as cited in literary texts. (Koukoules, 1938: 235)

Michael Apostolius remembers that back at his time, there was another way to sing in Creta during the dances, which included the participation both of men and women; namely, he mentions that "women started singing and then, consequently, men would repeat the song while dancing" (Koukoules, 1938: 249).

With the passing of the years, a change is being observed as regards women's participation in dancing. Thus, "due to the swift in the social status of women in the Byzantine society, the artists of the 14th and the 15th century were exclusively male" (Touliatos-Miles, 2004:31).

Last, dance in Byzantium was observed in two different contexts. The first context, as seen from the above sources, is the one of entertainment, that is to say, dance is performed for entertainment purposes. Aside from its entertaining context, dance could also be found within another context, the professional one. However, professional-level dancers did not belong to the upper social classes. In particular, "during the early Byzantine era, orchestes and orchestrides (male and female dancers), musicians, actors, auletrides, male and female mimes were professionals of dance and were rewarded for their musical-dance performances in public" (Moutzali, 2004:22) as well as

> except for the ordinary people that amused themselves by dancing, there were also professional dancers. Together with actors, dancers were on the lowest scale of the society. They could not partake of the Holy Mysteries of the Church and in that way they remained idolatrous. It was widely accepted that dancers, actors and musicians belonged to the same social level as prostitutes because of their free sexual relationships. (Blagojević, 2012:89)

Within this professional context, Byzantines had controversial views as regards female dancers. A distinction was made between professional theatre dancers, which were not particularly appraised and respected, and professional female dancers who danced in official ceremonies and enjoyed universal appraisal and respect. In particular,

> a distinction should be made between professional orchestrides of the theatre, on one hand, who used to dance revealing parts of their bodies and having their head uncovered, a form of dance criticized by ecclesiastical authors as immodest, prostitutional and thymelical, and professional dancers, on the other hand, who danced in official ceremonies, including in the Great Palace, and enjoyed greater appraisal than their peers. (Voutsa, 2004:45-46)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above, numerous and useful conclusions can be drawn as regards dance in the Byzantine period, and more specifically on the women's position within dance and dance practices during the Byzantine era. First of all, it is obvious from the sources that dance was present in every customary and dance practice in Byzantium. Byzantines did dance, despite the prohibitions imposed by the Official Church, which considered that dance was a sinful and immoral thing which seduced men, but also prohibitions imposed by the official imperial court. Women were not only present in all dance events (feasts, weddings, celebrations, Easter period), but they also had a strong presence in some circumstances, insofar as in some feasts only women would dance exclusively (e.g. Saint Agatha feast).

As a continuation of the ancient Greek dance tradition, women danced in circles, both open (semicircle) and closed, in entertainment spaces but also outside sacred spaces, like the church. This

practice has survived up to the present time in modern Greece, where several circular dances are observed, or, furthermore, many cases are recorded in which even women have danced until recently or still dance in the church yard (Dimopoulos, 2011, 2017; Dimopoulos et.al. 2017a, 2017b). Byzantium has perpetuated the ancient dance tradition through the dance practices of women, adapted it to the new religious and social circumstances and passed in on to modern Greece.

Byzantium has been the connecting link between ancient and modern Greece, and the guardians of that strong link have been women, through their dance practices. As Touliatos-Miles (2004) accurately observes "Byzantine dances are important because they provide an overview of the ethnomusicological evolution of the transition from Antiquity to the modern Greek folk dances, where the elements and the traditions of those dances were transmitted through the years" (p. 36) and the person in charge for this transition was the woman, as it shown from the above. This is also demonstrated by the fact that there are male, female but also mixed dances during the Byzantine era. This means that, on one hand, there is a pluralism of dance patterns, and, on the other hand, it demonstrates the powerful position of women within dance. This element has survived till the present time, with the presence of exclusively female dances (Dimopoulos, 2011, 2017; Dimopoulos et.al. 2017a, 2017b).
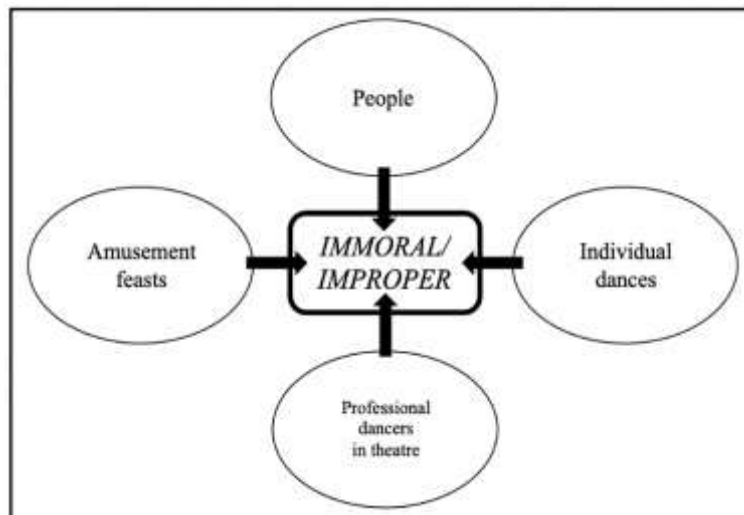
However, apart from the above, the women's position in Byzantium is found in the bipolar axis of the moral/immoral or humble/improper, as it was considered that "woman's dance was a way to control the presence of a woman in society and her active sexual power over men" (Blagojević, 2012:89). This dipole encompasses the following broad categories: church/imperial court, the people, religious feasts/amusement feast, individual dance/group dance, professional female dancers in formal ceremonies/professional female dancers in theatre. In summary, the category of the moral and the humble is surrounded by the following concepts (Table 2):

**Table 2: The "elements" that compose a moral/humble dance in Byzantium**
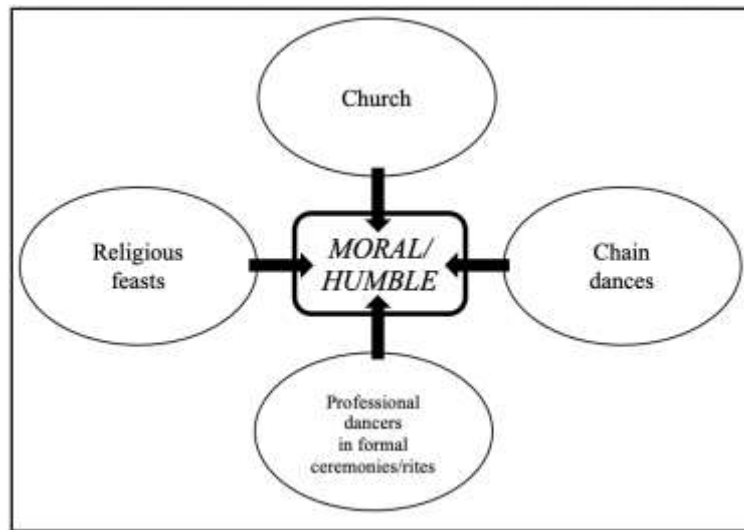
On the other hand, the category of the immoral/improper is composed of the following concepts (Table 3):

Table 3: The "elements" that compose an immoral/improper dance in Byzantium

According to the above, the women's position can be found in both categories. From the analysis and the interpretation of historical sources, it can be concluded that women danced in feasts but also in ceremonies/rites, which situates them in both poles of the axis, oscillating between the moral and the immoral, the humble and the improper (Table 4):

Table 4: The woman's place in dance in Byzantium.
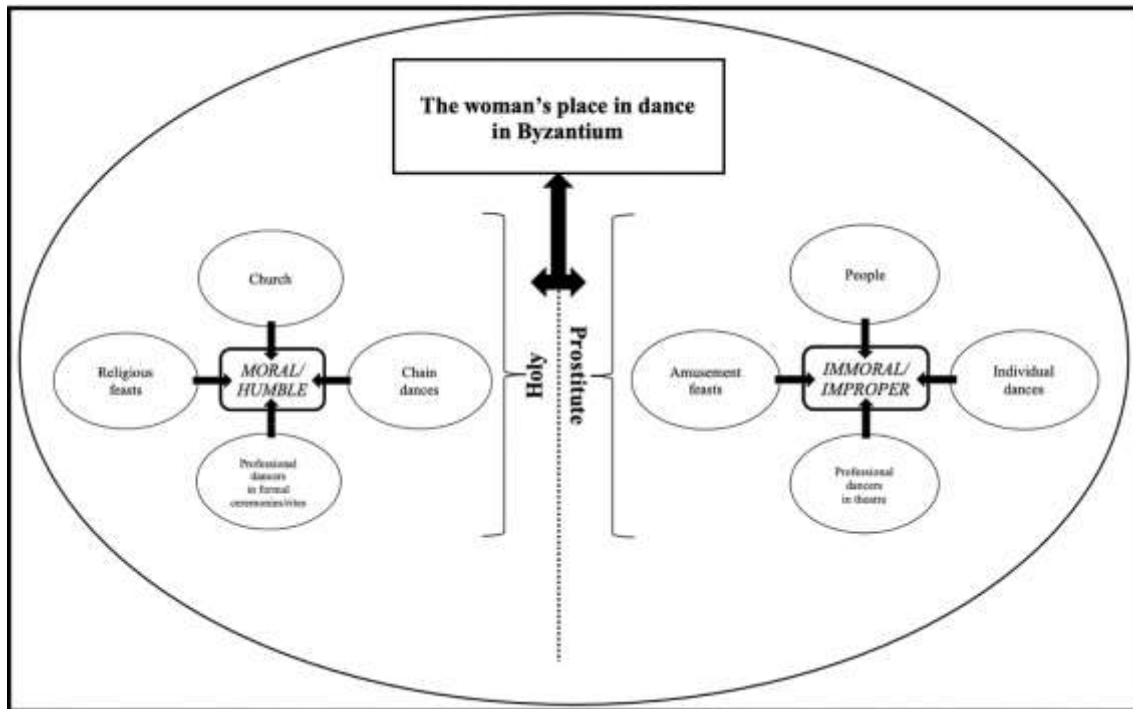
From the above summary table (Table 4) it can be concluded that women in Byzantium participated both in "modest" and "immoral" dance practices. She could be found in all categories, though oscillating between the sacred and the unholy.

Given the strict patriarchal structure of the society and the stance of the official Church, women in Byzantium "danced" on a tightrope between the holy and the sinful, the moral and the immoral, the sacred and the prostitutional. And all this during the same period, under the same circumstances and under the shadow of the Church, the Byzantine law and the oriental influences that shaped the Byzantine Empire. It was a subtle yet steady balance at the same time; within this strict model of the Byzantine Empire, the woman was a holy mother and a reproductive vehicle at the same time, a Virgin Mary and an insidious Eve, a saint and a prostitute. In Byzantium, women "seduced" men and the whole Byzantine society with their "prostitutional" and provocative movements, but they also were honourable dancers who received universal respect and appraisal when they expressed the needs of the Church and took part in its sacred ceremonies.

In conclusion, women in dance events of Byzantium were the ones that kept and preserved the ancient dance patterns, and then passed then onto the next generations through dancing. Female dancers during the Byzantine era had several different facets depending on the social treatment they received. A saint or a prostitute, depending on the circumstances, the conditions, the reasons, the ways of dancing, but also the people for which they danced. Women in Byzantium skillfully "danced" around this antithetical relationship, and the balance achieved through their dance made it possible to preserve,

create and deliver a new dance tradition, which was shaped under the abovementioned terms and conditions.

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