

ABSTRACTS

1. The Icon of Virgin Mary through the centuries



Virgin Mary was and still is the dearest figure of the church in the region of Epirus. She is a mediator, a miracle-working power, a symbol of female uplift, a comforter and a healer. But above all, for the people of Epirus, Virgin Mary is the Mother who hears their desires and acts as a mediator between them and Her son, and their greatest ally in times of war and major crises.

Her face, projected on numerous depictions, in some cases rare or unique ones, in local or foreign styles, is a constant receiver of the prayers and entreaties of the faithful. It is Her name that is heard the most from the lips of people, the one that is bounteously given to their children, and the one that is sung the most in fetes and celebrations held in her honour and organised by the people of Epirus.

The numerous paths of faith lead the steps of people of Epirus to places devoted to Her: stately monasteries, parish churches and humble chapels, built throughout Epirus, even at the most hard to reach places, provide proof of the measureless love and trust of people to Her face and their need to contact Her.

2. The woman of Epirus and her social status from antiquity to modern times

The figure of Epirus woman, shaped by the tragic aspects of the region and its history, has experienced, to the greatest extent, love, nostos (homecoming or nostalgia), death; she has survived and nurtured her own world, the world of Epirus women.

The virtues of loyalty and love, patience and respect, the full commitment to her family and her significant social role are all traits that are attributed to the woman of Epirus from ancient times to today. However, the role of the mother, the proud and doleful mother who devotes her whole self to her children, is the one that truly defines her and lends her prestige and splendour. Indeed, sometimes she seems to have been born precisely for this reason: to make a family and protect it under any circumstances.



Women-symbols that were worshiped everywhere in ancient Epirus; queens and everyday women of the glorious but turbulent years of Byzantine Epirus; noblewomen and heroines of Souli, of Zalongo, of Pindus; contemporary women from Epirus; all sharing the same zeal, the same faithfulness, the same passion, the same will to fight.

3. The woman of Epirus of domestic and non-domestic tasks

Although somehow confined due to the patriarchal society of Epirus, local women are characterized by their unique perhaps ability to engage in every kind of task and constitute a considerable element of the life of family, of the community and generally the local society from ancient to present times.

Loom and distaff were inseparable companions of Epirus women from antiquity. Weaving, spinning and embroidery in order to cover domestic needs were their main concerns at home. As time goes by, these tasks begin to gain a bread winning value due to the new conditions and the needs shaped by the new historic-social-political-economic status, while at the same time the fields of action of Epirus women expand to non-domestic tasks openly, leaving behind deep-seated prejudices. In Byzantine years, agriculture and animal husbandry become perhaps the most important non-domestic fields of action for women, in which they jointly take part in all the tasks that ensure the survival of their families with men and substitute them deservedly during their absence in battlefields.



Today, women of Epirus, largely keeping the qualitative characteristics of their ancestors, follow the trends of times and evolve by participating in new fields of action, always using their dynamism as their primary weapon.