

MEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

The fourth path is devoted to taking a critical look at the contributions to gender equality that were made by men who are represented in the collections

While gender equality exists, at least by law, in many countries, in reality it has not been achieved anywhere to date. Equalisation has many goals: for example, to eliminate discrimination, to stop violence against women and girls, and to make possible equitable access to education and health care. Studies have shown that overcoming inequality is less relevant, on average, to men than it is to women.

In order to illuminate the theme of gender equality in the context of this exhibition from the broadest possible scientific perspective, this route considers the question: Are there men in the Bode Museum – reflected in the works of art, as commissioners, artists, or patrons – who, in retrospect, championed gender equality or supported women in their milieu? Among the many personalities represented in the Bode Museum, there were only a few that show this behaviour. This may be because of the research theme itself, since this question has never been specifically posed about the holdings of the Sculpture Collection and Museum of Byzantine Art. It may also be due to the fact that archaeological and art historical research has long been dominated by men, and even female researchers have been influenced by this masculine environment.

A further reason could be that we have been living for thousands of years in societies with patriarchal structures in which the status of a man above that of a woman is taken as natural; it is just in the past comparatively few decades that this attitude has been intensively questioned and a re-thinking is being demanded. This old concept of roles manifests itself in the figures of men in the Bode Museum. It is hardly surprising that people who were raised in these societies, and who from the very beginning were taught that these patriarchal and androcentric structures were the norm, would accept them as such without thinking and reflect them in their words and deeds. That is no excuse for misogynistic (sexist) deeds and mentalities, but we must always take into account the social, cultural, and narrative context in any discussion of the role of men. In the final analysis, it is a societal task to grapple with the stories by and about men, to learn from them, and to be more mindful of how they are passed on.

What child has never heard about the greatest of all Greek heroes, Hercules (Greek: Herakles), his unbelievable strength, and the twelve labours that he accomplished in the service of King Eurystheus? The Florentine bronze sculpture shows him as the victor over the Hydra, a serpent-like, multi-headed monster; killing it was his second labour (fig. 4-1). Hercules is shown as an idealised nude, his right leg positioned on the Hydra in a triumphant position; with one arm akimbo and leaning on his club with his other arm, he looks into the distance as if already awaiting his next adventure. In the late 1990s, Hercules regained popularity, especially among children and teenagers, when Disney came out with the popular animated film and comic book series *Hercules* in which the hero's boyhood and early adventures were thematised, although the story is merely based on the mythological tale. However, what is related only rarely or without comment, and in children's books and movies usually omitted entirely, is that Hercules harassed and raped women and murdered some of his own children. Those killings were the reason that he had to enter into the service of King Eurystheus and complete the twelve labours in the first place. Our contemporary society passes on the image of a masculine hero – the model for masculine strength and courage – without dealing with his inhuman behaviour. And Hercules is far from the only example of male figures, be they from Greco-Roman mythology, from biblical stories or actual history, who are known for their mostly positive deeds but at the same time cruelly tortured, oppressed, or killed women or people in general.

When one is ready to scrutinise the traditional images and come to grips with, if possible, all the aspects of the legendary life stories or real biographies of male figures, it is also possible, conversely, to discover actions, thoughts, and demands of men who take a stand against misogynistic behaviours that may seem obvious from our modern viewpoint but were not at the time these men lived.

4-1

In the style of Giambologna [1529–1608]

Hercules slaying the Hydra, 17th c.?

Terracotta, 87 × 48 × 43 cm

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4-2

Peter Vischer the Younger [1487–1528]

Orpheus and Eurydice, ca. 1516

Bronze, 16,2 × 11,2 × 0,5 cm

Inv. Nr. 1464 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

It can be frequently observed that their demands for equality are not a consistent through-line of their lives; that is, words or deeds of theirs that are considered misogynistic have been passed on. Perhaps this was also due to the societal pressure on men to conform to the patriarchal norms and conventions. And only in extremely rare cases can we differentiate between their

private and public actions. In addition, we must be aware that deeds and words that contributed to gender equality were not particularly desired or propagated in a patriarchally dominated system. Therefore we must assume that in art and literature, which were dominated and financed by the male elites, there was no interest in communicating and passing on the image of a equitable society.

In the Greek and Roman era, Classical myths offered frameworks for meaning that were supposed to legitimise clichés about roles and were used to clarify societal positions of men and women. While in Greco-Roman mythology there is a series of gods and heroes who faced dangers for a woman or whose love for a woman was allegorical, only very rarely did they view these women as equals. One example is the myth of Orpheus and his wife, the nymph Eurydice. After she died of a snake bite while fleeing from a rapist, her husband dared to enter the underworld, where he planned to use his singing and lyre playing to move the god of the underworld, Pluto (Greek: Hades), to give him back his wife. His request was granted – but under the condition, set out by Pluto and his wife Proserpina (Greek: Persephone), that he

should ascend to the world of the living ahead of Eurydice and not look back for her. However, because during his ascent he did not hear the footsteps of his wife as she ran behind him, out of concern he looked behind him, and she disappeared back into the underworld. The Nuremberg sculptor and medallist Peter Vischer the Younger (1487–1528) visualised the ascent in a bronze plaque (fig. 4-2). On the right-hand side, a naked Orpheus, playing a vielle or violin, strides forward, but he has turned his head back towards Eurydice. She has already stopped, and her posture and the cloth fluttering towards the right both indicate that she is turning to the left, toward the flames that refer to the underworld to which she must return. With her head still turned



4-3

Italy

Meleager, 16th c.

Bronze, Ø 9,1 cm

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toward Orpheus, she seems to be casting a final glance at her husband. The Latin inscription on the upper edge of the plaque explains the content of the image. Even though Orpheus' courage in freeing his wife from the underworld should be acknowledged, the previous attempted rape of Eurydice portrays not only a frequent fate of women in mythology, it also naturally serves as a point of departure for the positive presentation of Orpheus.

In mythological tales, women are mostly in the service of men to satisfy their carnal lust or to secure a dynasty, or they are a means to power, for example to gain sovereignty over a region by marrying them. Equality between man and wife was perhaps conceivable in individual cases but would not have been socially acceptable. This is exemplified by the story of Meleager and Atalante. In the Greek kingdom of Calydon, a wild boar was rampaging. It had been sent as a punishment by the goddess Diana (Greek: Artemis) because the king had forgotten to make a sacrifice to her. The king's son, Meleager, sent for the bravest hunters, and the most famous heroes of all Greece came. Atalante, a virgin

huntress, also answered the call and set off on the hunt for the boar with the male heroes. She was the first to wound the animal, which Meleager praised in appreciation, but this triggered jealousy among the men, because she was a woman. Then Meleager mortally wounded the boar. A bronze medallion in the Bode Museum, which was probably based on an ancient model, shows Meleager on horseback as he is about to strike the boar with his sword (fig. 4-3). Only afterwards did the weapons of the other hunting participants strike the boar. Meleager presented Atalante with the animal's pelt as a trophy and the associated honour for the first strike. However, this wounded the honour of the other hunters, and finally two of Meleager's uncles took the trophy away from her and threatened her. Meleager, furious at this injustice, confronted them and ended up killing them. Meleager thus took a stand multiple times for the recognition of Atalante's achievements as well as for

her physical integrity when she was discriminated against by a group of men, representing the elite of Greece, because of her gender. The story of Atalante's success and Meleager's intercession was passed down by several Classical authors, which speaks for its popularity. In one of the most detailed and well-known versions, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Meleager was rumoured to have advocated for Atalante because he had fallen in love with her. While for the most part this does not change anything about his actions, it does imply a subtle undercurrent in the narrative, since normally romantic feelings are considered typically feminine. By relating the atypical behaviour of the man due to his romantic feelings, the narrator discredits the attempt at equality as not typically masculine and therefore something abnormal.

In the Bible, the female and male figures reflect an androcentric gender ideology. »Androcentrism« refers to a natural orientation towards a male concept of life in which the man – in contrast to the woman – is considered the norm and is placed at the centre of thought. A story that runs contrary to this traditional representation and explicitly conveys its social criticism is that of Susanna. In the story as it is related in the Old Testament book of Daniel (Daniel 13:1-64) or as an Apocrypha to the Book of Daniel, two judges – in other words, eminent older men whose designation as judges indicates legal activities as well as representation and leadership of the people – observe a married, pious woman in a park. In order to have their way with her,



they accost her and threaten that if she does not submit to them, they will bring her to court for alleged adultery. But Susanna is not intimidated by them and cries for help. The two judges carry out their threat, bring her before the court, and claim that they saw Susanna having sex with a man in the park. Because of the reputation of both judges, nobody in the community doubts the testimony, and Susanna is sentenced to death. However, Daniel, a prophet of God, calls on the community to allow Susanna a fair trial. Through the impartial questioning of witnesses, Daniel proves Susanna's innocence.

Certainly this story is a representative demonstration of how women of that era were at the mercy of all kinds of capricious misogyny and were basically defenceless. But it can also be read as an objection to androcentric and misogynistic stereotypes, which repeatedly ascribe to women an intellectual and moral inferiority as well as a potential for sexual seduction. Since Susanna is not the seducer, the two men cannot control their lust, and their demands endanger the sexual integrity of the women in their community. The narrative of Susanna thus clearly underscores the danger of sexual assault by men and openly criticises their own elite who unscrupulously misuse their power.

In view of this historical interpretation, it is hard to stomach the fact that since the Renaissance, this theme has been seized upon to create a voyeuristic moment that was never described in the original versions of the story. According to one written version, Susanna supposedly not only was taking a walk in her husband's gardens when the two men espied her, but wanted to take a bath. But there is no evidence that she was already unclothed when the men tried to rape her. Instead, the mode of presentation that was passed down, as demonstrated in this relief by the Augsburg artist Victor Kayser (ca. 1502–1552/53) from around 1530, reflects the wish of the artists and their clients to show an erotic and implicitly violent act (fig. 4-4). But on the surface, the scene is disguised under the fig-leaf of a biblical scene that is supposed to convey the moral and devout integrity of a woman.

The surviving written sources of the life of Jesus, among which are the New Testament scriptures and those that were not included in the biblical canon and are known as the Apocrypha, were most likely written by men, even though they are often based on oral lore that was also passed down by women. These authors were familiar

with the patriarchal structures and values and did not, or did not necessarily want to, question them, which is why the social context must be taken into account when reading these texts as well. When in the following sections the focus is on Jesus, his foster father Joseph, his great uncle Zacharias and Zacharias' son John, as well as Jesus' disciple Paul, it must be taken into account that they, as well as the women in the stories, were Jews. The roots of the proto-Christian egalitarianism that can be recognised in early Christian writings are found in Judaism.

The *Protoevangelium of James*, which is an apocryphal writing from the 2nd century AD that was not included in the New Testament canon but was widely distributed in early Christian communities in the Mediterranean, describes the life story of Mary, the Jewish mother of Jesus. According to this, Mary spent her childhood in the temple and was raised and educated by the priests. At the age of twelve, that is, around the age of the onset of puberty, she was forced out of the temple and given into the custody of Joseph, a widower who already had children from his first marriage. Whether Mary and Joseph were married before the birth of Christ, is a scholarly point of controversy; they are often considered to be betrothed. A Netherlandish sculpture group from the late 15th century shows the affirmation of the betrothal in the presence of a high priest who, while in fact would have been Jewish, was portrayed here in the vestments of a Christian bishop (fig. 4-5). The age difference between Joseph and Mary is clearly recognisable. From a present-day perspective and in a figurative sense, one could even call the constellation of the widowed single father and Mary, who is pregnant with a child that is not his, a patchwork family.

At first, Joseph is in a state of despair when he returns from a long trip to find the 16-year-old Mary is pregnant. He doubts her story about a virgin birth and fears the community's reaction. A divine inspiration, which came to him in a dream, gave him the courage to support her and not to cast her out. He stands by her when they are accused of pre-marital sex, supports her during the birth, and finally saves Jesus from an almost certain death by fleeing with them to Egypt – a point we will return to later.

4-4

Victor Kayser [ca. 1502–1552/53]

Susanna and the Elders, ca. 1530

Solnhofen Limestone, 44,9 × 29 × 3,6 cm

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4-5

The Northern Netherlands

Marriage of the Virgin, ca. 1495

Oak wood, 56 × 53 cm

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In the canonical scriptures and the later artistic portrayals, Joseph plays a mostly passive role and can be easily overlooked, as in this depiction of the birth of Christ where he seems to have slept through the actual event

(fig 4-6). And yet he is the one who sought out the midwife who is seen kneeling on the ground. His slumber probably refers to the subsequent narrative, according to which a divinely inspired dream revealed to him that King Herod would try to murder Jesus and that he, Mary, and the child should flee.

Certainly Joseph does not fit the image of a man of that era when he does not disown Mary, even though she is pregnant with a child that is not his. In Judaism, adultery, which also includes the sexual relations of



someone who is engaged, could be punished by death; however, in reality, it was primarily dealt with by divorce or the dissolution of the engagement. At any rate, though, it was a scandal. That Joseph's role was marginalised in the art, although in later written sources he is sometimes referred to as a paradigm of virtue, could also be related to a desire that his behaviour not be considered as the norm for everyday lives; only in this divinely ordained, exception situation was it acceptable for a man to stand by his possibly unfaithful wife. Joseph's role as Jesus' foster father, who did not disown the illegitimate child or his wife but instead protected and lived with them, was difficult to reconcile with the real-life conventions that had been a part of the societies of that era for centuries. And it is also possible that too much emphasis on the person of Joseph and his complicated paternal relationship, which in the end was understood to be

4-6

Upper Rhine (Alsace)

The birth of Christ, ca. 1420

Walnut wood, polychromed, 76,5 × 68 × 26,5 cm

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adoptive, would have hampered the establishment of the ecclesiastical dogma of the virgin birth and the divinity of Christ.

Joseph had to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus because King Herod, fearing the prophesised new-born king of the Jews who would usurp him, had all the (male) newly born children in Bethlehem up to age two killed. While from a historical perspective this infanticide is probably



4-7

Western Roman Empire

**Relief panel with scenes of Christ (Detail),
ca. 430**

Ivory, 20 × 8,1 × 0,8 cm

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a fictitious event, the event known as the Massacre of the Innocents has been reproduced in art since the 5th century AD, as demonstrated in this ivory plaque showing King Herod on the right, ordering the assassination of babies and small children (fig. 4-7). The soldier in the middle is using all his might to hurl a naked baby to the ground, where a dead infant already lies. The despondent mother on the left is unable to thwart the attack and has to watch the brutal murder of her child.

Mary's cousin Elisabeth bore her son John around the same time as Mary gave birth. According to Herod's decree, John was also supposed to be killed. Following the *Protoevangelium of James*, fearing for her son's life, Elisabeth fled to the mountains with John and hid there. Since the men sent by Herod were not able to find the child, they asked Elisabeth's husband, Zacharias, where the two were hiding. Zacharias was a temple priest and claimed not to know where his son was. He was interrogated a second time when he was threatened with death unless he revealed their hiding place. Despite the threats and fully cognisant of what the consequences of his silence would be for him, he protected his wife and child. The next day he was found murdered in the temple. His son became a prophetic itinerant preacher and is known today as John the Baptist, since he baptised Jesus in the River Jordan. A Florentine clay sculpture from the early 16th century shows him as a young and slightly gaunt man who is wearing a robe made of

camel hair (fig. 4-8). This image conforms to the ascetic description of him in the *Gospel of Mark*, according to which he lived in the desert and subsisted on locusts and wild honey. John and Jesus had fathers who risked their lives for them and their wives. The fact that their fathers put their own lives behind those of their families must have left its mark on both youths.

Not only Jesus' foster father was an unusual figure. The genealogy of Jesus, which is presented in the *Gospel of Matthew* above all to stress his descent from God's chosen people of Israel, also names five women in particular: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Except for Mary, none of them was Jewish; rather, they were foreigners and Gentiles, and as widows without sons, prostitutes, or adulteresses, they made their way outside of patriarchally ordered family structures and had to struggle to carve out a dignified life for themselves. Perhaps it was his knowledge of precisely these women in his family that made Jesus devote himself especially to those people that the law placed at a disadvantage. Hygiene regulations (see also pp. 33–35) and class distinctions did not scare him away.

Jesus' impartiality is reflected, for example, in the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. She is a widow who openly lived in a relationship with a man not her husband. She was the first to whom he confided that he was the Messiah. He took her seriously as a conversational partner and talked with her about the religious conflicts between the Samaritans and the Jews. The meeting between the Samaritan woman and Jesus at the well, where he asked her for water and they conversed for a long time, is portrayed in a polychromed ivory relief from the early 16th century (fig. 4-9). Using a rope winch, the Samaritan, standing to the left of the well, scoops water into a jug. The face-to-face dialog of the two main players occupies the centre of the scene, while Jesus' disciples return from the city of Sychar from the right side. The Latin inscription on the well refers to the account of the story in the *Gospel of John*. The Samaritan woman was the first in her village to proclaim about the Messiah, whereby the inhabitants invited Jesus to stay. Another story relates how Jesus prevented the stoning of a woman, who was supposed to be sentenced to death for adultery, with the well-known saying, »Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.« Thus did Jesus denounce the false morality that was frequently applied to the disadvantage of women. That the woman was subsequently left unpunished is an impressive demonstration that none of the men present was able to free himself from the charge of adultery, and that at least in this instance, they recognised their cruel and deadly double standard.

Jesus not only helped women, he also quite deliberately takes on a passive role. He listened to women, spoke to



4-8

Baccio da Montelupo [1469–1523 ?]

John the Baptist, ca. 1500

Terracotta, 51,3 × 21 × 24 cm

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and discussed with them, and learned from them. And he did so in public, not in the sheltered context of the home, between married couples or family members, but instead in a way that others could listen to the dialog and the statements of the women. Besides the Samaritan woman, Mary from Magdala (Mary Magdalene) is probably the most well-known example (for more on Mary from Magdala, see also pp. 35–36). In the *Gospel of Mary* and other gnostic-inspired texts that were not accepted into the Christian canon, Mary from Magdala is described as a disciple and discussion partner of



4-9

Lower Rhine

Christ and the Samaritan woman, early 16th c.

Ivory, painted and gilded, 11,4 × 8,1 × 1,2 cm

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Jesus, a close companion, an intermediary for revelations and a teacher. One of these writings, the *Pistis Sophia*, even makes her, along with other women, a member of The Twelve, which is a term for the twelve apostles that Christ chose from among his disciples. In the *Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke*, these twelve men are mentioned by name, and while even the evangelists sometimes cite

different names, they are all men. Already in the early Christian era it is an exclusively male Twelve, which is demonstrated whenever Christ is portrayed as a teacher in discussion with the apostles. This can be seen in the Great Berlin Pyxis, a vessel from the time around 400 AD in which communion wafers might have been stored (fig. 4-10). Its design suggests that it was exclusively men who were specifically chosen by Christ for the promulgation of his teachings and thus it excludes women as interlocutors and teachers.

In early Christian congregations (1st–2nd centuries AD) we can see how egalitarian ideas collided with patriarchal traditions and how the social position of women was rife with contradictions. The concept of equality permeates the first Christian communities and it was exactly this turmoil, where hierarchical structures had not yet been set in stone, that offered women, for a short period, opportunities, rights, and possibilities. These observations become apparent in descriptions, appearing in the

canonical and non-canonical scriptures of the New Testament and in early Christianity, that nevertheless can be controversially interpreted and that, time and again, raise new research questions. The body of text by the Apostle Paul is, to this day, one of the most important sources of the role of women in early Christianity. Paul was a follower of Jesus and after Christ's death assumes a key role in Christianity. Even though we only know from a document that became part of the Apocrypha what Paul supposedly once looked like, he has been portrayed from the beginning with a full beard and receding hairline, as in a sculpture from around 1330/40 AD that was probably made in Paris (fig. 4-11). He is wearing a long belted robe with a



4-10

Italy [Rome?] or Constantinople

Great Berlin Pyxis, ca. 400

Ivory with iron clamps, H 12,2 cm, Ø 14,5 cm

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4-11

Northern France

Apostle Paul, ca. 1330/40

Limestone, 141 × 45 × 26 cm

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cloak and his mouth is slightly open, which might refer to his role as a missionary. Paul travelled through the eastern Mediterranean region and founded several Christian communities, keeping in touch with them through his letters. The oldest surviving early Christian writings, known as the Epistles of Paul, form a

large portion of the later New Testament. It is estimated that a fourth of all of Paul's colleagues who are named in the New Testament were women and naturally were given positions of authority. Examples are the purple dye merchant Lydia of Philippi (Acts 16:14, 40), Phoebe of Cenchreae (Romans 16:1-2), Nympha in Laodicea (Colossians 4:15-17), and the married couples Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16: 3f) and Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7).

Within the text of the Pauline corpus, the representation of the position of women and the relationship between woman and man is controversial. On the one hand there is a patriarchally structured society that considers the ranking of man above woman as a given and does not question it – in fact, the society demands it (1 Corinthians 11:3, »But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.« [RSV]. See also 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 or 1 Timothy 2:11-15). On the other hand, within Christianity a new societal form, based on equality and Christian love, is created, which among other things demands women's equality (Galatians 3:28, »There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.« [RSV]) Paul also represents this way of thinking, when the topic is the fellowship of man and woman and the origins of both genders from God (1 Corinthians 11:11-12, »Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹²for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.« [RSV]). Therefore we can see egalitarian transformation processes in early Christianity that stand in direct conflict with the patriarchal structures and norms that are anchored in the minds of the church members. Treating women in the patriarchy as equals, ascribing to them wisdom and leadership – these were in no way obvious, and they demonstrate the egalitarian beliefs of Paul and the people around him.

However, that women were denied these leadership positions and offices in the following centuries, that these circumstances are used even today as justification for, among other things, denying women ordination in the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Churches, these are also grounded in linguistic usage. The New Testament, which was written in Greek, uses terms for believers and functionaries in the generic masculine case, as it is (still) generally done in German. But in the interpretation and translation of the texts, there are significant distinctions. Thus terms like »believers«, »righteous«, and »saints« are inclusively interpreted; in other words, masculine and feminine persons are considered. On the other hand, functional terms like »functionaries«, »leadership positions«, and »positions of

power» are exclusively construed as masculine. The translations thus frequently suggest gender-related differences in the meanings of the respective terms that, it can be safely said, were not implied in the original texts. The use of the generic masculine case reflects the androcentric language usage of a patriarchally structured societal form and can very well lead to discrimination against, and oppression of, women.

The story of Emperor Justinian I (ca. 482–565 AD; ruled from 527–565 AD) and his wife, Empress Theodora (ca. 500–548 AD), both of whom are portrayed in the small outer medallions on the upper edge of a diptych (fig. 1-4), is an unusual example of what kinds of societal boundaries can be overcome when people in positions of power want to bring about change. Despite all the criticisms from the aristocracy, he urged the reigning emperor Justin I. (ca. 450–527) in 525 to abolish the law forbidding marriage between senators and former actresses so that he could marry Theodora. It was reported that she was supposedly an actress – a professional characterisation that in those days was linked to prostitution. Justinian must have trusted Theodora and prized her judicious reasoning in the extreme, since she seems at times to have influenced governmental affairs and to have developed a talent for advising, influencing, or eliminating powerful people. She also devoted herself to socially controversial projects and, unlike her husband, protected the followers of the Monophysite denomination. Monophysitism, or Miaphysitism, teaches that Christ has only a single, divine nature, in contrast to the dual-nature dogma (Dyophysitism), which says that Christ combines the divine and the human. After Theodora's death in 548 AD, Justinian did not re-marry, even though he and Theodora did not have any children who could inherit the power of state. Until his death 17 years later, Justinian honoured his wife, visited her grave in the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople while on official duties, and took oaths in her name. The accounts of their lives, even if they are probably more propaganda than faithful biographies, suggest Justinian's deep respect, trust, and love for Theodora – even though the feelings of historical personages cannot be objectively reconstructed. As impressive as this story of this imperial couple's love and life might be, it should nevertheless not be forgotten that the wives of emperors did not possess any individual liberties. Only a few of them were able – thanks to the goodwill of their husbands – to carve out more freedom for themselves in their clearly defined, gender-specific role as empress than others could (for more about Justinian and Theodora, see p. 13).

Male artists as well could grant their female family members freedom in their workshops. The bust of the grieving Virgin Mary (lat. Mater Dolorosa) is attributed

to the famous Spanish Baroque artist Pedro Roldán (1624–1699) (fig. 4-12). In his workshop, his three daughters – Luisa, María, and Francisca Roldán – worked as sculptors as well as polychromers and gilders. This was not unusual at that time, since there is plentiful evidence of the existence of female painters, engravers, and sculptors. However, the number of Spanish works from the Renaissance and the Baroque era that can be identified with women are few. This state of affairs applies not only to Spain but reflects the situation throughout Europe. Women could not belong to guilds, and because they were not allowed to sign contracts and invoices and could not lead a workshop on their own, only in rare cases can their names be linked to works of art or commissions. Luisa Roldán (1652–1706) found a way around this situation through her marriage to the artist Luis Antonio de los Arcos. With him – a man who could officially sign contracts – and his brother she established a workshop in which she could reach her full artistic potential and thus become the first recorded female sculptor in Spain and the first and only female sculptor at the Spanish royal court. Through her position as court sculptor (*Escultora de Cámara*) to Charles II (1661–1700) and later to Philip V (1683–1746), Luisa Roldán became highly esteemed. This also meant that details about her life and works had already found their way into books in the 18th and 19th centuries, so her initial entry into art historical research studies was not from a gender perspective.

Even if women were able to fully express their artistic natures in the workshops of their fathers or husbands, it should not be forgotten that women were continually subject to societal strains and constraints. Girls were not given the same quality of education as boys. That had consequences for their vocational professionalisation, for example when girls were taught arithmetic but not geometry, the latter being important for perspective compositions in painting. A high percentage of female artists stopped working after they got married and had children, since housekeeping and raising children were often not compatible with professional activity: a predicament that is still relevant in society today. When women were widowed, they had to renegotiate their economic and administrative relationships to people and public institutions.

The workshop of Pedro Roldán is a quintessential example of the importance of cooperative artistic work by both genders in workshops from the Middle Ages up to the present time. Conversely, art historians and museums must deal with the question of whether it makes sense to ascribe the authorship of works to those who were able to sign contracts and invoices or who were the creative heads of the workshops and established their style, when that style had been



4-12

Attributed to Pedro Roldán [1624-1699]

Mater Dolorosa, 1670/75

Poplar wood, polychromed, glass,

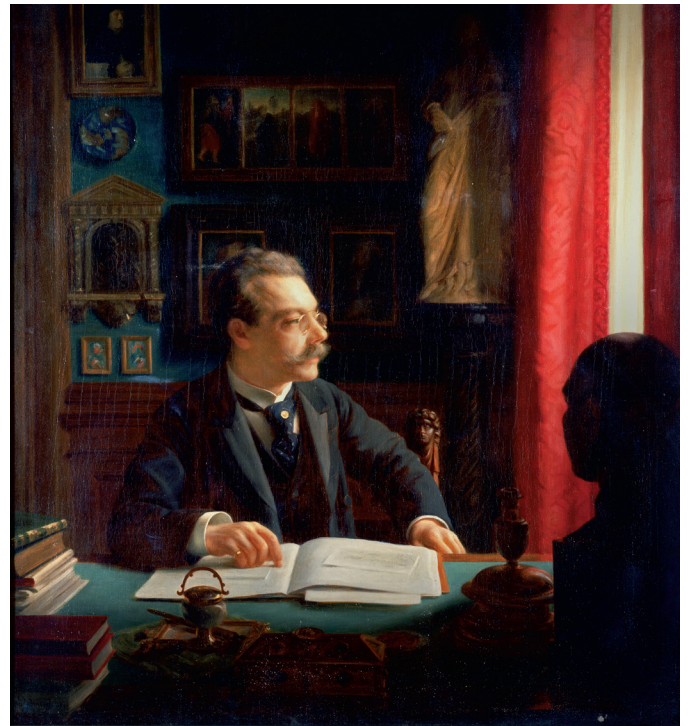
33 × 28,5 × 18,3 cm

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defined by the contributions of multiple artists. Or to put it another way: how much of the artistic creativity of Luisa, María, or Francisca Roldán might conceivably be imbedded in the Mater Dolorosa that was created in their father's workshop?

The greatest patron of the Berlin Museums, James Simon (1851–1932), has been honoured since 2019 in the Bode Museum in a special way through the reinstalled James Simon Cabinet, which also serves to remind us of the injustice done to his memory during the Nazi era because he was Jewish. The 1901 painting by Willi Döring, which hangs in the James Simon Cabinet, shows James Simon at his desk in his study inside his villa at Tiergartenstraße 15a in Berlin (fig. 4-13). But James Simon is not only known for his generous and diverse contributions to the Berlin Museums, but also equally for his extraordinary engagement for social projects. With his wife Agnes Simon (née Reichenheim, 1851–1921), James Simon had three children: Helene (1880–1965), Heinrich (1885–1946), and Marie Luise (1886–1900), the latter being born with Down syndrome (trisomy 21) and dying early at age 14. It is assumed that the Simon family's particular commitment to sick and socially disadvantaged children was influenced by their personal circumstances. As a result, James Simon became a co-founder of the »Shelter for Girls«, started by Emilie Mosse, in which poor, fatherless girls were cared for, nourished, and educated so that their mothers could go off to work. He was active in the »Society for the Protection of Children from Abuse and Exploitation« and financed, together with the Berlin banker Franz von Mendelssohn, the construction of the house »Child Protection« in Zehlendorf, where neglected and abused children found refuge and education. These are only a few examples of the numerous interdenominational public welfare societies, commissions, and boards of trustees in which James Simon was involved, alongside those in which he also advocated for Jewish issues in myriad ways. As one of the most successful businessmen of his era, he used the resources at his disposal to correct societal deficits, which benefited, among others, countless children, especially in Berlin.

The list of male figures in the Sculpture Collection and Museum of Byzantine Art who in varying forms and intensities championed a world of gender equality is not completed, but further research into this issue is required. In 2015, the demand for gender equality, as one of the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was unanimously approved by the United Nations (UN) member states. Whether or how far these goals will be realised in the remaining nine years depends on the ambitions of our societies. The prospects for a dignified life for future generations are a matter for debate.



4-13

Willi Döring [1850–1915]

**James Simon [1851–1932]
at his study desk, 1901**

Oil on canvas, 97,3 × 86 cm

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