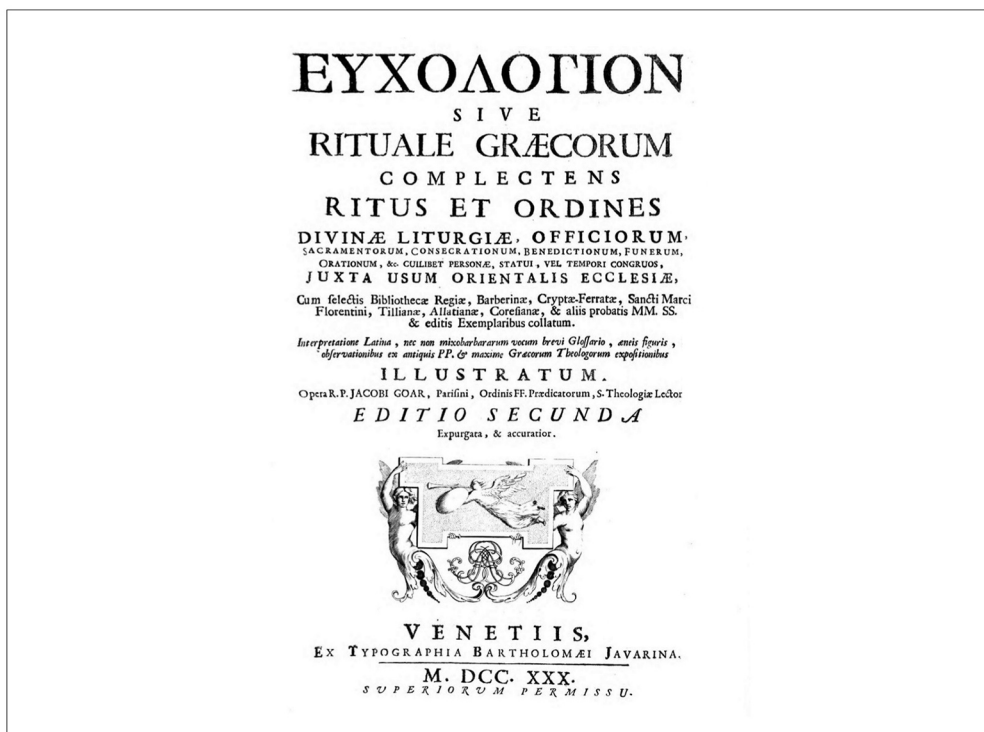




OEAI FELLOWS LECTURE SERIES

CHILDBIRTH IN BYZANTINE PRAYERBOOKS

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The Euchologion, the Byzantine prayerbook to be used by the clergy, contained, besides Eucharistic liturgies and other services (baptism, marriage, burial, monastic tonsure etc.), also shorter prayers that addressed various concerns in the lives of women, men and children. These range from blessings for food and agricultural activities to purification of contaminated food containers, travel, ritual brotherhood, adoption, childbirth, etc. Already the earliest surviving Euchologion, codex Vaticanus Barberini 336 (end of 8th c.) transmits pre-baptismal initiation prayers for a newborn. From the 10th c. Euchologia add prayers for the mother, marking the resuming of her ritual purity on the fortieth day after birth. However, other birth-related concerns, for which the Byzantines often sought divine protection by means which were only sometimes sanctioned by the church, are largely left out of the scope of the Euchologia: difficulty to conceive, pregnancy risks, dystocia, perinatal morbidity, lactation problems. It is only from the 14th-15th century onwards that new childbed prayers are added. These address also issues such as the health of mother and child, and the household and its social network. The lecture will explore the development of the childbed prayers in the context of the Euchologion and beyond.