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ABSTRACT PhD THESIS

**Monasticism in the Byzantine territories in the
eleventh century. Case study: Saint Lazarus of Mount
Galesion**

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KEYWORDS

Monasticism, Byzantine Empire, Church, eleventh century, institution, cenobitic monasticism, eremitic monasticism, lavra, *charistikariat*, *typikon*, Italo-Greek, Byzantine Italy, holiness, Saint Lazarus, pillar, Mount Galesion.

ABSTRACT

Today's Orthodox Christian monasticism is the heir of the Byzantine monasticism, and knowledge of the latter leads to an understanding of the former, as an organism with a life as its own and unchanged by the passage of time, but having links with the world continuously shaped by historical conditions. The eleventh century is the terminus of the evolution of the monastic institution and the initial moment of perpetuation of the characteristics of its institutional form to the present day.

In present there is no extensive and systematic work on the history of monasticism, similar to the Universal Church History, although monasticism has aroused the interest of researchers, representing at the same time a great source of information. The international bibliography includes many works and studies carried out from various perspectives and establishing certain geographical or temporal delimitations, depending on the objective pursued. In contrast, on this segment of Byzantine monasticism, Romanian literature is rather poorly represented.

This paper aims to discover and present the specific elements of this century, which became the defining mark of monasticism and the influences on the entire Byzantine society of that time and of today's Christian world.

The objectives set in order to obtain the overall picture, but also the details characteristic of Byzantine monasticism in the eleventh century, are:

- establishing the previous monastic institutional framework, which was the premises of the transformations of the eleventh century;
- territorial delimitation of the Byzantine Empire during this century;
- determining the place of monasticism within the Church, its relations with the imperial institution and society;
- description of monastic life in its forms, of monks from a human perspective, of the monastic or lavriot environment from an organizational point of view, of the

contribution to the economy of the Empire, art, liturgical life, theology and documentary background;

-verifying the applicability of the conclusions found to the *life* of Saint Lazarus on Mount Galesion.

The motivation for choosing this theme is to extend and deepen the study started by my own dissertation thesis sustained at the end of master's degree studies, referring to the *Life of St. Lazarus Galesiot*, emblematic saint for Byzantine monasticism of the eleventh century. *The Life of St. Lazarus Galesiot* is an extensive document, which provides not only information on St. Lazarus and his monasteries, and monastic life in the eleventh century, but also brings to the foreplan some issues that are difficult to understand, unless placed in the larger context of monasticism of this century. The decryption of these problems led to the need to broaden the scope of study to monasticism throughout the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century.

Structure of the work

The thesis is structured in four chapters, opened by the chapter *Introduction* and concluded by the chapter *Conclusions*.

The first chapter produces a *Brief History of Monasticism*, on the background of chronological evolution, but with strong emphasis on the trajectory of monasticism's institutional development. As a particular form of asceticism, monasticism has shown itself to be the pinnacle of Christian life excellence. Involving large numbers of people and as an active part of the Church, institutionalization was inevitable. The chapter aims to discover the characteristics of an institution, which were fully manifested in the case of monasticism as it transformed: the establishment of rules, the occupation of a physical space and the fulfillment of functions within society, the interaction at institutional level with the other important institutions of the Empire, the Church and the emperor.

The regulation of monastic life was made from the beginning of the practice of this form of asceticism, whether it was in cenobitic, lavriot or eremitic type, which appeared simultaneously. The rules, established out of the necessity of coexistence together, had local specificity, extending through influences at the level of ethno-geographical areas, expressing in the essence the principle of willingly embracing poverty, virginity and obedience. From the same institutional perspective, monasticism played important roles such as: Christianization, economic developer,

servant of the Holy Places, providing spiritual, social and even political assistance. Within the Church, monasticism was the measure of orthodox faith in disagreements caused by heresies, which affirmed its institutional-spiritual authority. Monasticism took on the role of spiritual leader within the Church when the clerical body submitted to the earthly emperor rather than to the Heavenly One, as was the case of iconoclasm.

The conclusion summarizes the presentation of the monastic institution at the dawn of the eleventh century, following its evolution over the previous centuries, preparing the ground for the last stage of the institutional evolution of monasticism, assigning its political role and reconfiguring its place within the Church.

The first subchapters of the second chapter, *Monasticism in the Byzantine Territories in the Eleventh Century*, explore monasticism's institutional relations with the Church and the imperial circle, specific to the eleventh century.

Subchapter *II.1. Monasticism and imperial power* give a description of the connection of emperors with monasticism, which became profound in the eleventh century, when domestic imperial policy had direct consequences over monastic life and vice versa. The erection of monasteries by emperors in this century experiences an unprecedented increase compared to previous centuries. The imperial monasteries erected were particularly beautiful and endowed, enjoying imperial patronage that was taken over by successors of each emperor. An imperial monastery retained its status beyond the temporary reign of its founder. But the emperors' connections with the monks were not limited by the institutional framework, it was passing into the personal realm, and culminated in a special affinity of the emperor with the monastic robe. The emperors chose spiritual parents from among the monks, whose ascetic example they followed in the very comfort of the imperial palace. In the eleventh century, in the imperial consciousness, the model of the Christ the Emperor is more alive than ever. Emperor Basil II led a discreet ascetic life, assuming he became a monk after the defeat of the Bulgarians. But most of the emperors who followed, Michael VI, Michael VII, Nicephorus Botaniates entered monasteries as monks. The entire Komnenos family, with Emperor Alexios I as their model, had a special affinity for monastic life, founding monasteries and making entry into monastic body, a common practice for members of the imperial family.

II.2. Monasticism – the active part of the Church is the subchapter that shows that the role and place of monasticism, as anchor of the right faith, has remained the same, bringing an important theological and liturgical contribution. However, there

were disagreements between some of the clergy and monks, for various reasons: the practice of *charistikariat*, the dispute over spiritual authority and monastic spiritual fatherhood, the attempt to generalize the cenobitic life style for all monks. Thus, the idea of returning to the initial state of affairs, of the old times, appeared, not only in Byzantine clerical and intellectual circles, but also in the discourse of some monks. This has led among historians to a debate on the existence and meaning of a reform of monasticism in the eleventh century. The reforming reasons of each side were totally divergent, which demonstrates the subjective character of the idea of reform and its lack of usefulness.

Although the reasons for making changes were diverse, they have one thing in common, namely holiness. So close to the Byzantines through the living saints who lived among them and with a richness of a thousand-year history, holiness was still an enigma. In eleventh century, holiness has been as sought after as it has been denied. The essence of monasticism is fleeing from the world, the ascetism. The association of monks with holiness born from asceticism often led to challenges the monks' holiness and their spiritual authority. The Church corrected these errors by placing the saints of the eleventh century alongside those of previous centuries. The subject of opposition between spiritual authority specific to holy monks and institutional authority specific to Church hierarchy has been dealt with in part *II.2.4. Spiritual authority vs. institutional authority*.

Subchapter *II.2.1. Monastic theology* shows the theological contribution of monasticism to the eleventh century theology, which was brought by the theology and mystical living of Saint Simeon the New Theologian. They bring to attention the importance of personal effort, the virtues acquired through it and the cooperation with Divine Grace. The uncreated light made known by St. Simeon the New Theologian raised the Byzantines knowledge of God to a higher level, preparing Christianity for the last stage, hesychasm. Monasticism thus presented concrete, accessible ways to attain deification through the living example and guidance offered by monks as spiritual fathers.

Subchapter *II.2.2. The contribution of monasticism to liturgical life* indicates the importance that monasticism had in the evolution of Byzantine worship. The historical conditions of the seventh century, through population movements under Persian and Arab pressures from the Holy Land to the center of the Empire, especially

Constantinople, contributed to the penetration of Jerusalem liturgical practices into Constantinopolitan churches and monasteries. Monasticism was the vector of this liturgical exchange, and the monasteries the ideal environment for achieving the synthesis of the Byzantine Rite by merging the traditions specific of the two capitals of the Empire, political – Constantinople and spiritual – Jerusalem.

A lesser-known topic is that of *charistikariat*'s public policy, presented in subchapter *II.2.5. Charistikariat, the practice of entrusting monasteries, specific of the eleventh century*. The assignment of monasteries to lay people for administration and better functioning quickly degenerated into abuses, the monastic possessions being affected and the monastery being considered as a good and free source of income. The assignment of monasteries by the local bishops, in whose spiritual care the monasteries were located, led to the emergence and establishment of the status of independence and autonomy of the monasteries from the local hierarchy. This generated a conflict between the founders of the monasteries and the bishops, apparently incomprehensible, because the cause was not overtly expressed, as was the case of Saint Lazarus of Mount Galesion.

An important place in the second chapter is occupied, as is natural, by the subchapter on specific of life monastic of the eleventh century. The forms of monastic life are presented: cenobitic monasticism, hermitage and Byzantine lavra, with all their characteristics and close connection between them, supported by examples of the *lives* of known saints of this century. The Byzantine lavra has in its center a hermit around whom the community of his disciples was organized in the form of a monastery. The Byzantine lavra is also cenobitic monastery which has attached several hermits who can return and leave the monastery as they want to. Eremitic and cenobitic monasticism are placed in contradiction in this century by the people outside of the monastery, whether secular or clerical. Those who were not monks emphasized the importance of cenobitic monasticism, because it was the easiest form of control. For monks, the transition from one form of toil to another was natural, representing the winding path of spiritual perfection. This reveals a fluidity and variety of monastic life forms resulting from their combination, which has been artificially classified and simplifying for study in eremitism, cenobitic monasticism, and lavra.

The cenobitic monasticism is closely related to the monastery, the living place of the monks, with a specific structure and having additionally other various

functions. Specific to the architecture of the monastery is the church located in the center, next to the refectory, surrounded by monks' cells. There are other kind of buildings too, but not common for all monasteries. In this century, the endowment of monasteries and their good administration brought economic benefits to the Empire, in addition to spiritual ones, which were not neglected. In the protection and welfare of the Empire, emperors relied as much on the prayers of monks as on the army.

Another subchapter is dedicated to *monastic typika*, closely related to the notion of independence of monasteries, a distinctive note of this century. *Monastic typika* belong to a broad category of documents, ecclesiastical and secular as well. From the monastic documents category, a series of documents such as founding documents of monasteries or testaments – *diatheke, hypotyposis, thesmos, hypomnema* – were generically called *typika*. In the eleventh century there are a large number of such documents, the 10 *typika* representing an important research fund for historians.

Subchapter *II.4. Two skhemata, a single monasticism*, presents the attribution of monastic robes according to the two traditions, Constantinopolitan and Jerusalem, and their synthesis, similar to that which led to the completion of the Byzantine rite.

The topics were argued with examples from the lives of saints who were born, lived, or passed away in the eleventh century. For Byzantine Italy, these temporal limits were exceeded, presenting all the saints prior to this century, beginning in the ninth century, for the novelty of information, hitherto nonexistent in works in the Romanian language.

The conclusions of this subchapter present the considerations of reform ideas from the perspectives of each category involved in monastic life. A reform of monasticism in the true sense of the word did not take place in this century, nor was it necessary. From the external point of view of monasticism, the desired changes were, in fact, the correction of the negative effects produced by the actions applied by the laity or the church hierarchy. From the perspective of the holy monks, change had to happen on the spiritual level. The spiritual fire of the Byzantine Christians of the eleventh century, from which the monks came as well, did not seem to burn as intensely as those of the first centuries. The return to living in Christ, with the ardor characteristic of the beginning, with the awareness of responsibility strengthened by the constant danger of persecution, is valid for all centuries, not just for the eleventh century.

Chapter III, *The Great Monastic Centers of Byzantine Territories in the Eleventh Century*, presents an inventory of monasteries. For this, it was necessary first to determine the borders of the Byzantine Empire, which have undergone by marked changes in this century. The well-known dynasties of the Macedonians and Komnenos politically marked the beginning and the end of the eleventh century. The Imperial policy was determined not only by laws but also by the personality of the emperor. The constant characteristic of foreign policy remains that of securing the borders of the Empire, assailed without respite by migrating tribes. The greater or lesser attention that the emperors gave to these attacks led to shaping the borders of the Empire. If year 1025 was a new apogee of the Empire from a territorial point of view, year 1071 marked the beginning of the decline, with the defeat at Mantzikert and the loss of the southern Italian territories to the Normans. Domestic policy was often determined by foreign policy through the need to secure armed resources, which implied maintaining economic, social, and religious balance. Internal social forces were as strong as external ones, the political balance being fragile due to frequent changes of emperors and lack of continuity and vision, popular or armed faction uprisings or personal interests of political figures with a very strong character. Even though it was a tumultuous century, the economy of the Empire gained its momentum based on the initiatives of small producers and craftsmen. Supported by economy, Byzantine cultural heritage has enriched itself in all fields: art, education and literature.

Once the territorial boundaries were established, we divided the Byzantine territory, for ease of research, into several areas: Constantinople with its neighboring areas, Asia Minor and the European area of the Empire, made up of Greece, Thrace and Macedonia. For each area, we have listed on the one hand the monasteries established in this century and their type. On the other hand, we also added the monasteries that were founded in previous centuries, but still existed in this century, to get a complete picture.

A subchapter was devoted to monasticism in the Byzantine territories of South Italy. In order to understand its nature, it was necessary to make a history of the Byzantine presence in the Peninsula. Also, the existence of a multiethnic population, resulting in the existence of Latin monasticism, provoked a comparative analysis. This analysis, together with the results of research on monasticism throughout the Byzantine Empire, led to the conclusion that monasticism in the Peninsula has,

despite geographical isolation, absolutely all the characteristics of Byzantine monasticism. Hence the important role of keeper of the Orthodox tradition, identified later, in the next centuries, as the Eastern-Byzantine tradition.

Chapter IV is the *Case Study: Saint Lazarus of Mount Galesion*, one of the representative saints for the eleventh century, but less known in Romania. The study is based on *the life* of Saint Lazarus, a document with a special value for the study of monasticism, due to its complexity, but also due to the realistic way of presenting the monastic life. In *the life* of the saint are found all specific aspects of this century. The problems which led the reader in the confusion have been answered by the extensive study conducted in the previous chapters, verifying all the discoveries made.

The chapter is divided into 6 subchapters. Subchapter *IV.1. The Life of Saint Lazarus* presents the versions of the document and a comparative analysis. The multiple versions brought a lot of information, but also led to inconsistencies in establishing the chronology of St. Lazarus' life. Correlating the data provided by the author with the historical landmarks of the century, we obtained this chronology presented in subchapter *IV.2. Timeline of the life of Saint Lazarus*. Subchapter *IV.3. The monasteries founded by Saint Lazarus* exhibit the activity as founder and abbot of Saint Lazarus. The saint founded and led several monasteries throughout his life, but those on Mount Galesion were the most important to him. His desire to make Mount Galesion a holy mountain is peculiar to the founding holy monks of all times. Such an important goal faced various difficulties, but they did not arise because of the austere conditions offered by the arid and stony mountain or by material deprivation, but because of the relationship with the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Ephesus.

Because Saint Lazarus is emblematic for this century, we have presented the characteristics in this regard in subchapter *IV.4. Saint Lazarus – representative saint of the eleventh century*. Equally important is his human and ascetic side, which we have described in subchapter *IV.5. Saint Lazarus – man and ascetic*. Despite the bad predictions of the church hierarchy at Ephesus, the monasteries on Mount Galesion and its reputation survived another century and a half after Saint Lazarus' death. The Turkish invasion forced the movement of the community from Mount Galesion to Constantinople in 1304. Here, the celebration of saint's cult continued to develop, still being mentioned at the beginning of the fifteenth century in the travel notes of the Russian pilgrim Zosima. All these aspects are set out in subchapter *IV.6. Mount Galesion in the following centuries*.

Richard Greenfield's translation of *the life* of St. Lazarus from Greek into English as part of the Dumbarton Oaks Library project was an important motivating impetus for engaging in the present thesis. Thus, I had full access to information on the rich chronology of the saint's life, the monasteries of Mount Galesion, the way of foundation and functioning, the internal and external relations of the monasteries. *The life* is, at the same time, an exposition of human life, with its ups and downs, always facing salvation, a model to follow, still valid in the third millennium.

The eleventh century is an important one for Byzantine society and monasticism that cannot be separated from it. Monasticism was a reality not only accepted, but even desired by Byzantines from all levels of social life. As a partner in socio-political dialogue, monasticism contributed to the material and spiritual well-being of the Byzantine Empire. The position of monasticism, even it seemed privileged, especially because of the involvement of the emperor and his family, was contested. The emergence of various problems, arising from the variety of way of looking at and understanding life, led to the idea of a return to the state of affairs of the beginnings, not only in Byzantine clerical and intellectual circles, but also in the discourse of some monks. This has led historians to debate the existence and meaning of a reform of monasticism in the eleventh century. The reforming rationales of each side were totally divergent, which demonstrates the subjective character of the idea of reform and its lack of usefulness.

The striking elements of monasticism established in this century have been preserved and transmitted to this day. One of them is the Byzantine lavra, the hybrid variant between monastery and *kellia*, turning into the most used form of monastic organization. Another important element is the new status of independence and autonomy of the monasteries, all along with the legalization document, the *typikon*. The relationships with other institutions and with society as a whole, which have been established in this century, are an important part of monasticism, the changes that occurred in the following centuries being only an expression of adaptability to the historical and social conditions in continuous transformation. The election of the patriarch as primate of the Church only from among monks is the mark of this century, and through it, the relationship of the Church with secular institutions becoming also the relationship of monasticism with them. Eleventh century monasticism enriched the theological field through the theology of light by St. Simeon the New Theologian. In the field of liturgical life too, monasticism was the most

important vehicle for transmitting and synthesizing liturgical practices between Constantinople and Jerusalem. Last but not least, it was Byzantine monasticism that retained the place of Orthodoxy in Catholic Italy, once upon a time Byzantine.

Without claiming completeness, I consider this work to be a good starting point for compiling a complete history of monasticism in the Byzantine territories in the eleventh century. I believe that it would be equally useful to produce similar works on the history of Byzantine monasticism for each century, which would facilitate a comparative analysis between centuries, in order to obtain an overview of the institutional evolution of Orthodox monasticism.