

Take no care for the morrow! The rejection of landed property in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine monasticism

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In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Byzantium saw the rise of an influential monastic reform movement, which found its expression in rules and saints' lives. In these texts the question of worldly possessions was repeatedly broached. The authors challenged the hitherto common practice of allowing monks some private property and insisted that in their monasteries nobody should own money or other goods. Yet when it came to communal property the situation was starkly different. Most reformers accepted the traditional view that monasteries should be endowed with land in order to meet the material needs of the communities, and if anything were even more acquisitive than their forebears. There was, however, a small group of monastic founders, which challenged this consensus. They insisted that their monasteries should not accept donations of land because such behaviour went against Christ's demand not to take thought for the morrow and displayed a lack of trust in divine providence. This article presents the surviving evidence and seeks to explain how communities without landed property ensured their survival.

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One of the richest sources of evidence at the disposal of Byzantinists are legal documents that have survived in the archives of Mt Athos and Patmos. These documents give an insight into the ways in which monastic communities acquired, managed and defended their landed property. Reading them one gets the impression that the behaviour of abbots did not differ substantially from that of secular landowners. Both were keen to maximise profits.¹ This, however, is not the whole story. When we turn to hagiographical texts we

1 There exists a rich secondary literature on this topic. See A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge 1989); M. Kaplan, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VI au XI siècle. Propriété et exploitation du sol* (Paris 1992); R. Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge 1995); and especially K. Smyrlis, *La fortune des grands monastères byzantins, fin du X^e-milieu du XIV^e siècle* (Paris 2006). There can be no doubt that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries the vast majority of monasteries sought to acquire more and more land. This article does not discuss this development since it does not seek to present a comprehensive study of monasteries during the eleventh and twelfth centuries but focuses exclusively on the monastic communities that went against the trend.

encounter a radically different approach to worldly possessions. In the ninth-century *Life* of Theophanes the Confessor by patriarch Methodios we read:

Once when there was a famine he himself opened the hand and before it the heart, as if his monastery belonged to each of those who came. The treasurer, then, came to him and said: 'I reckon, Father, that the provision of corn for the whole year will not even last to the middle of the year since it is used up through the exceptional outgoings.' He, however, said to him magnanimously: 'Why are you so dejected, child? And why do you doubt the succour of the benefactor? Go, measure the corn that you have, and you will perhaps find that the gifts of God are beyond measure. For grace, which makes all wide, is not straightened, nor is examined the house through which we are all saved.' Then the brother and overseer went and measured the wheat, and he found that the produce was safe as it had been when it was stored four months earlier, since the expenditure of three months was not reckoned even though much had been expended.²

This episode highlights possible tensions between the steward who manages the resources of the monastery and the abbot as the community's spiritual leader. The steward acts like a secular landowner. He worries that the monks will go hungry if the grain supply is squandered in such a reckless fashion. The abbot rejects such prudence and puts his trust in God's providence. His stance is vindicated when God interferes directly in the affairs of the monastery through multiplication of the grain supply. Contemporary audiences would thus have come to the conclusion that the steward's behaviour was wrong because it did not take into account the properly religious dimension of the monastery. To modern scholars who discount the miraculous this may seem no more than a pious fiction, which does nothing to change hard economic facts. However, when we look at other hagiographical texts we can see that the miracle is not without grounding in reality. In the tenth-century *Life* of Paul of Latros we read the following story: The saint wished to celebrate the Sunday after Easter especially lavishly but the steward of the monastery, Luke, who was charged with the preparations, realised that

2 Patriarch Methodios, *Life of Theophanes of Agros*, 31, ed. V. V. Latyšev, *Methodii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Vita S. Theophanis Confessoris*, Zapiski rossijskoj akademii nauk, viii. ser. po istoriko-filologičeskomu otdeleniju, 13.4 (Petrograd 1918) 20, 4-15: Καί ποτε λιμοῦ γενομένου ἦνοιγεν αὐτὸς τὴν χεῖρα καὶ πρὸ ταύτης τὰ σπλάγχνα, ὡς οἰκεῖον ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἐρχομένων τὴν αὐτοῦ μονὴν καταγώγιον. λέγει οὖν αὐτῷ προσελθὼν ὁ ταμίης· 'Λογίζομαι, ὦ πάτερ, ὡς οὐδ' εἰς μέσον τοῦ ἔτους ἡ πανεγγρόνιος ἐτοίμασία τοῦ σίτου ἀρκέσει ἡμῖν, τῷ πλήθει τῆς ἐξόδου ἐκλείπουσα.' ὁ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν μεγαλόψυχα· 'Εἰς τί μικρόθυμος, ὦ τέκνον, γεγένησαι; καὶ ἵνα τί διστάξεις πρὸς τὴν τοῦ εὐεργέτου ἀντίληψιν; ὕπαγε, μέτρησον τὸν σίτον ὃν κέκτησαι, καὶ εὔροις τάχα τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ δωρεῶν τὸ ἀμέτρητον. οὐ γὰρ στενοῦται χάρις ἢ πάντας πλατύνουσα, οὐδ' ἐρευνᾶται οἶκος δι' οὗ πάντες σωζόμεθα.' ἀπελθὼν οὖν καὶ ἀριθμήσας τὸ πυροβόλιον ὁ ἀδελφὸς καὶ ἐπίτροπος, εὔρεν ὡς πρὸ τοῦ τετραμήνου ἦγον καθὼς τεθησαύριστο σῶον ὑπάρχον τὸ γέννημα, μὴ λογισθέντος τοῦ τριμεροῦς χρόνου ἐκείνου εἰς δαπάνην αὐτοῖς ὅλως, κἂν δαψιλῶς δεδαπάνηται.

the stores of the monastery were empty. Luke then asked the monk Symeon to speak to the saint who lived in a hermitage outside the monastic compound:

He (sc. Symeon) went up, apprised (sc. the saint of the situation), and emphatically stated that the scarcity of foodstuffs made it impossible to call many people and to prepare a more splendid banquet. When he saw that the saint was annoyed about this and scolded their lack of belief and trust, he did not tarry at all but went down quickly and told Luke everything, saying: 'Be concerned to do what is customary in the church. In the morning the saint will come down and do as he sees fit'. Day had not yet broken when God's miraculous acts were performed. For immediately there came from Miletos two mules, which carried burdens of wine and cheese and eggs and fish and the finest bread, presents of pious men who lived in the vicinity. Half an hour had passed when other gifts came that were of the same kind as the previous ones and were offered in the same manner. The one who gave them was the bishop of Amazon, and not only he but his clerics gave again the same things in the same manner. Besides the inhabitants of the surrounding areas brought the same things. And all this was brought together on the same day and almost even at the same hour, as if through one command and signal, provided without sowing and ploughing as the saying goes.³

Here we find the same tension between the abbot and the steward. However, the conflict is resolved not through a miracle but through the timely arrival of provisions. The reader is given to understand that this, too, is a miracle. God has caused laypeople to think of the needs of the monastery at the very point when the economic situation is most precarious. Here we are in the presence of a viable economic model, which one might call charismatic economy. The abbot behaves inconsiderately and thus shows to laypeople that he heeds Christ's admonition to put all trust in him and not to take thought for the morrow. This raises the spiritual status of the community, which then attracts even more gifts.

3 *Life of Paul of Latros*, 29, ed. H. Delehay, *Monumenta Latrensia Hagiographica*, in *Milet. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen seit dem Jahre 1899*, III.1, *Der Latmos*, ed. Th. Wiegand (Berlin 1913), 122, 16-123, 15: Καὶ ὃς ἀνήλθε μὲν καὶ ἐγνώρισε, καὶ ὡς ἡ τῶν τροφῶν σπάνις πλειόνων κλήσιν καὶ τράπεζαν φαειροτέραν ἀπαγορεύει ἐνστατικῶς εἶρηκε. χαλεπήναντα δὲ τὸν ἅγιον πρὸς ταῦτα ἰδὼν, καὶ μικροψυχίαν αὐτοῖς ὀνειδίσαντα καὶ ἀπιστίαν, οὐδαμῶς ἐπέσχευεν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν λαύραν ὀξύτατα κατελθὼν ἀπαγγέλλει τῷ Λουκᾷ ἅπαντα, ἐπειπὼν· 'Σοὶ ἐπιμελὲς γενέσθω τὰ νενομισμένα πράξαι τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ἔωθεν δὲ ὁ ὄσιος κατελθὼν, ὃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ πάντως ποιήσει.' οὕτω ἡμέρα σαφῆς ἦν, καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ θαυμάσια ἐτελεῖτο. Δύο γὰρ εὐθὺς ἐκ Μιλήτου ἡμίονοι κατελάμβανον, οἷς ἀγώγιμα ἦν οἴνος τε καὶ τυρὸς καὶ ψῶμα καὶ ψωμοὶ καθαρῶτατοι, δωρήματα ταῦτα φιλοθέων ἀνδρῶν ἐκ γειτόνων οἰκοῦντων. ὥρας παρήλθε τὸ ἡμισυ, καὶ πάλιν ἕτεροι δωρεὰ παρήσαν ταῖς προλαβούσαις ὁμοίως ἔχουσαι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς εἶδεσι δεξιούμεναι. ὁ δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα παρεσχηκῶς, ὁ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος ἐπίσκοπος ἦν· οὐκ ἐκεῖνος δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ τοῦδε κληρικοὶ ἐδωροῦντο πάλιν καὶ αὐτοὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ὁμοίως. πρὸς τούτοις καὶ οἱ τῶν περὶ χωρίων οἰκίτορες προσήγον τὰ παραπλήσια· καὶ ἅπαντα ταῦτα τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας, μικροῦ δὲ καὶ ὥρας συνεφορεῖτο, καθάπερ ἐξ ἐπιτάγματος ἐνὸς καὶ συνθήματος, ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα τὸ ἀδόκονον κεχορηγημένα.

This model, however, had one major drawback. It was reliant on the presence of a saintly figure. This can be seen clearly from *Vita B* of Athanasios the Athonite, which dates to the eleventh century. The hagiographer informs us that Athanasios deserted the Lavra and went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This had grave consequences for the community. The monks had nothing to eat because the stream of donations dried up. Matters only changed when Athanasios decided to return:

Those who lived near the Lavra and those of the neighbours who had unadulterated respect for and trust in the father rejoiced likewise and praised God when they heard that the father had returned, and they showed their joy in deeds. For they went to see him and to be blessed by him not with empty hands. No, one brought corn, another wine, and yet another something that was necessary. Indeed, each one brought that which he knew the brethren lacked, for they had not even a morsel of bread apart from the leaven that they had then, as Paul of Larissa, a venerable man and an honoured old disciple of the father, explained who had seen and knew it all.⁴

The similarity of this account with the episode in the *Life* of Paul of Latros is striking. Here, too, provisions arrive when the need is greatest. This similarity is even more pronounced in Athanasios' other *life*, the *Vita A*. There the following speech is put into the mouth of the monk Paul of Larissa:

'One could see', he said, 'ships coming from everywhere as if through a signal as if the good things were flowing from springs, one group brought corn, another wine and yet another something else that was edible, and all of them different things that were necessary, all of them on their own initiative and by their own volition.'⁵

The phrase 'as if through a signal', ὡς ἐκ συνθήματος, used by the author of *Vita A* has a direct counterpart in the *Life* of Paul of Latros where we read 'as if through one command and signal', καθάπερ ἐξ ἐπιτάγματος ἑνός καὶ συνθήματος. There can be no doubt that this resemblance is deliberate. It can be argued that the hagiographers of Athanasios changed a traditional *topos* in order to highlight the fact that a charismatic economy where reckless spending attracts more gifts is only possible as long as the saintly

4 *Vita B* of Athanasios the Athonite, 33, ed. J. Noret, *Vitae duae antiquae sancti Athanasii Athonitae* (Turnhout-Leuven 1982) 164–5, 35–46: Οἱ δὲ γειτνιάζοντες τῇ λαύρᾳ καὶ ὅσοι τῶν πλησιοχώρων σέβας εἶχον καὶ πίστιν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εὐλκρινῆ, ὁμοίως καὶ οὗτοι ἔχαιρον καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν Θεὸν ἀκούσαντες τὸν πατέρα ἐπανακάμψαντα, καὶ τὴν χαρὰν ἐξ ἔργων ἐδείκνυον· ἤρχοντο γὰρ ἰδεῖν τοῦτον καὶ εὐλογηθῆναι παρ' αὐτοῦ οὐ κεναῖς ταῖς χερσίν, ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν σίτον ἔφερον, ὁ δὲ οἶνον, ἄλλος δὲ τι τῶν ἀναγκαίων, ἐκεῖνα δὲ πάντως ἕκαστος ἄπερ ἦδει ἐπιλείπειν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς· οὐδὲ γὰρ κἂν γοῦν τεμάχιον εἶχον ἄρτου εἰ μὴ τὴν ζύμην, ἣν εἶχον τότε, ὡς ἐξηγεῖτο ὁ Λαρισσαῖος Παῦλος, ἀνὴρ εὐλαβῆς τε καὶ τίμιος καὶ ἀρχαῖος ὢν τοῦ πατρὸς μαθητῆς καὶ πάντα ἰδὼν καὶ εἰδώς.

5 Athanasios of Panagios, *Vita A* of Athanasios the Athonite, 101, ed. Noret, 48. 24–28: "Ἦν οὖν ὄραν ὡς ἐκ συνθήματος", ἐκεῖνος ἔλεγε, "τὰ πλοῖα πάντοθεν ὡς ἐκ πηγῶν ἐπέρρει τὰ ἀγαθὰ· οἱ μὲν γὰρ σίτον, οἱ δὲ οἶνον, οἱ δὲ ἄλλο τι τῶν ἐδωδῖμων καὶ ἄλλος ἄλλο τι τῶν ἐπιτηδείων εἰσέφερον, πάντες αὐτόκλητοι, αὐτεπάγγελτοι πάντες."

founder is present. From the *Lives* we learn that Athanasios had started acquiring landed property in order to secure the economic viability of the Lavra and that this strategy had incurred the criticism of the hermits of Mt Athos who accused him of turning the monastery into a secular estate.⁶ The account of Athanasios' return would thus have signalled to contemporary audiences that the hermits' position was unrealistic and that the acquisition of landed property was inevitable.

The tenth to twelfth centuries were indeed a time when monastic communities gained considerable economic clout by building up networks of estates.⁷ This does not mean, however, that all monasteries conformed to this pattern. At this point we need to turn to the monastery of Petra in Constantinople. In the year 1200 it was visited by the Russian pilgrim Anthony of Novgorod who had the following to say about it:

There is a monastery, when one goes to the Blachernae, of St John the Baptist. They let out (read: let in) the people on the feast day and on the Great Day three times a year and they feed all. And they never let the nuns (read: monks) out of the monastery. The nuns (read: monks) are two hundred, and they have no fields, but are fed through divine grace and through the mercy and prayers of John.⁸

This is clearly another instance of the economic model that I have described before. The monks have no landed property and they give away all they have. However, in contrast with the Latros monastery the Petra monastery had already been in existence for more than a century when Anthony visited it. Moreover, the way of life described by Anthony had already been instituted at the time of the monastery's foundation.⁹ This is evident from the *Testament* of the founder abbot John, which dates to the early twelfth century.¹⁰ John

6 *Vita B* of Athanasios the Athonite, 36, ed. Noret, 168-9.

7 See Smyrlis, *Fortune des grands monastères*, esp. 245: 'Les monastères ont sans cesse cherché à accroître leurs biens fonciers.' Smyrlis acknowledges the fact that some monasteries did not acquire landed property but emphasises that they were few in number. This does, however, not mean that they are not worth studying. While their impact on the Byzantine economy may have been minimal they are of great importance for understanding the Byzantine discourse about how monastic life should be conducted.

8 Anthony of Nowgorod, *Book of the Pilgrim*, ed. Chr. M. Loparev, 'Kniga Palomnik. Skazanie mest svjatyh vo Caregrade Antonija arhiepiskopa Novgorodskago v 1200 godu', *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik* 17.3 (1899), 27: И есть же манастирь, къ Лахѣрнѣи идучи, святаго Иоана Крестителя; і ту выпускають людей на праздникъ и на великъ день 3-жъ годъ до года і кормятъ всѣхъ; а черницъ не испущають изъ монастыра никогда же; черницъ же есть двѣстѣ; а сель не держать, но божею благодатию и пощаниемъ і молитвами Иоана питаеми суть. The text is problematic. It should read 'let in' rather than 'let out', and 'monks' instead of 'nuns'. See B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient* (Geneva 1889) 104.

9 Strictly speaking, the Petra monastery was not a new foundation but a re-foundation, see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin, I, Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique, 3, Les églises et les monastères*, 2nd edition (Paris 1969) 435-43. However, the specific type of monasticism that is the subject of this article was only introduced under abbot John the Faster in the late eleventh century. 10 John the Faster, *Testament for Petra*, ed. G. Turco, 'La diatheke del fondatore del monastero di S. Giovanni Prodromo in Petra e l'Ambr. E 9 Sup.', *Aevum* 75/2 (2001) 327-80, esp. 354-5, 168-172. The *terminus post quem* for the text in its present form is the death of Nicholas Grammatikos in 1111 since he is referred to as being deceased, cf. Turco, 'La diatheke', 342.

decrees that his monks should have no private property.¹¹ Such stipulations are found in other monastic rules of the time.¹² They reflect the growing influence of the coenobitic ideology in eleventh-century Constantinople. This, however, is not John's last word on the topic. Unlike his colleagues he also rejects communal property:

But nor do I want the monastery to acquire something else, apart from what I myself leave behind, neither pack animals nor oxen nor sheep nor any other animal apart from horses because of the most essential and unquestionable need of the mill, nor a field, nor tilled land, nor any kind of possession.¹³

This stance is justified in a long digression in which the monks are reminded of Jesus' teachings:

But let us say, what is necessary before all things and with all things, and about which one must above all assure your love in Christ, remembering the words that the Lord spoke at the beginning: 'Do not acquire gold or silver, and do not worry what you will eat or what you will drink, or what you will wear, but seek first of all the kingdom of God.' And that he said to everybody what he said to the Apostles is evident and unambiguous, and he orders the youth who had fulfilled virtually all commandments to sell his possessions and give them to the poor, and to advance towards perfection and to make himself poor, being rather in need of alms than (sc. in a position) to give them.¹⁴

11 John the Faster, *Testament for Petra*, ed. Turco, 354-355, 168-172.

12 See for example, Evergetis *Typikon*, 22, ed. P. Gautier, 'Le typikon de la Théotokos Évergétis', *Revue des études byzantines* 40 (1982) 1-101, esp. 65, 899-901; and Petritiotissa *Typikon*, 4, ed. P. Gautier, 'Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos', *Revue des études byzantines* 42 (1984) 5-145, esp. 49, 492-98. The Petritiotissa *Typikon* reproduces in this instance the text of its model, the Panagios *Typikon*. See D. Krausmüller, 'On contents and structure of the Panagiou *Typikon*: a contribution to the early history of 'extended' monastic rules', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 106 (2013) 39-64.

13 John the Faster, *Testament for Petra*, ed. Turco, 355, 179-183: Ἄλλ' οὐδὲ τὴν μονὴν ἕτερόν τι ἐπικτήσασθαι βούλομαι, παρ' ὃ νῦν αὐτὸς ἀφίημι· μὴ ὑποζύγια, μὴ βόας, μὴ πρόβατα, μὴ ἄλλο τι ζῶον ἐκτὸς ἀλόγων διὰ τὴν τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἀναγκαιοτάτην καὶ ἀπαραίτητον χρεῖαν τοῦ μυλῶνος, μὴ ἀγρόν, μὴ γεώργιον, μὴ κτήμα τὸ οἰοιοῦν. See the comments in Turco, 'La *diatheke*', 343-344. This aspect of John's monastic vision was known even before Turco's edition from a summary of the saint's life by the fourteenth-century patriarch Kallistos, see H. Gelzer, 'Kallistos' Enkomion auf Johannes Nesteutes', *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 29 (1886) 59-89.

14 John the Faster, *Testament for Petra*, ed. Turco, 353-54, 126-136: Ὁ δὲ πρὸ πάντων δέον εἶναι καὶ μετὰ πάντων, καὶ περὶ οὗ μάλιστα τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀγάπην ὑμῶν ἐξασφαλίσασθαι χρὴ, λέγωμεν δὴ τῶν δεσποτικῶν ἀρχίθην ἐπιμνησθέντες ῥημάτων· Μὴ κτήσησθε, φησί, χρυσὸν ἢ ἄργυρον, καὶ μὴ μερμνήσητε τί φάγητε ἢ τί πίητε, ἢ τί περιβάλησθε, ἀλλὰ ζητεῖτε πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ· ὅτι δὲ ἅ μὲν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις εἶρηκε, πᾶσιν εἶρηκε, φανερόν καὶ ἀναμφίλεκτόν ἐστι· κάκεινον τὸν νεανίσκον τὸν πάσας σχεδὸν τὰς ἐντολάς ἐργασάμενον πωλήσει τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ δοῦναι πτωχοῖς κελεύει, καὶ πρὸς τὴν τελειότητα ἐλθεῖν τε καὶ ἑαυτὸν πτωχὸν καταστήσει, ἐλεημοσύνης δὲ μᾶλλον δεόμενον, ἢ παρέχειν.

It is evident that John took Christ's advice to trust in God's providence much more seriously than had been the case until then.¹⁵ This does, of course, raise the question: how could the community survive? On this point John has not much to say. He adds only one brief statement:

But if one of those who love Christ will offer something, you should sell it and see to it that the needs of the brethren are met completely, and what is then left over you should distribute among our brothers in God, the poor.¹⁶

If this had been the only source of income we would need to conclude that the monks of Petra had succeeded in keeping a high spiritual profile even after the death of their saintly founder. Their refusal to acquire landed property would then have raised their prestige to such a degree that laypeople continued to shower gifts on them. This, however, may not have been the whole story. At this point we need to turn to a contemporary of John of Petra, the abbot Meletios of Myoupolis in central Greece. Meletios had the good fortune to find two hagiographers, Theodore Prodromos and Nicholas of Methone, who lived in the middle of the twelfth century.¹⁷ Theodore gives a detailed account of how Meletios organised the community. He first avers that Meletios did not tolerate private possessions and then continues:

And I have not yet informed you about what is even more marvellous. For having been entrusted with the stewardship for such a numerous people, for which barely a great number of wheat-bearing plains, for which barely a great number of threshing floors would have provided a nourishment that was sufficient, he did not bear to buy either a pair of oxen or a field, for the parable frightened him, lest he himself for this reason be excluded from the divine wedding. But when many people each day consecrated their possessions to God and to Meletios, he accepted the intention of the men but did not take their gifts

15 See Smyrlis, *Fortune des grands monastères*, esp. 245, who acknowledges that John of Petra did not wish to acquire landed property but does not see this decision as part of a broader trend. Instead he explains it with John's 'admiration des principes monastiques traditionnels'.

16 John the Faster, *Testament for Petra*, ed. Turco, 355, 179-183: ἄλλ' εἰ τις τῶν φιλοχρίστων παρέξει, τοῦτο διαπιπράσαντας ὅμας ποιῆσαι τὴν τῶν ἀδελφῶν χρεῖαν ἀνελλιπῆ, καὶ τὰ τέως καταλειφθέντα τοῖς ἐν Θεῷ ἀδελφοῖς ἡμῶν διανεῖμαι τοῖς πένησι.

17 V. Vasilievskij, Nikola episkopa Mefonskogo i Feodora Prodroma pisatelej XII stoletija Meletija Novogo, *Pravoslavnij Palestinskij Sbornik* 6 (1886). On the authors see M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni (1081-1261)* (Cambridge 1995) 373. See also the comments in Turco, 'La diatheke', 343-44.

as well. For he kept saying that it is better to trust in the Lord than in a human being, and referring to the nourishment of the birds, which requires neither sowing nor ploughing, he added that we are more worthy than sparrows.¹⁸

The similarity between this passage and the *Testament* of John of Petra is striking. Meletios, too, interprets Christ's teaching not to take care for the morrow in a very literal manner. He concludes from it that monastic communities should not acquire any landed property. This leaves no doubt that we are in the presence of a broader trend. Meletios' other hagiographer, Nicholas of Methone, adds further details to this picture. He recounts an encounter between Meletios and his monks. The monks voice their fears that the community would disperse after the saint's death and Meletios criticises them for their lack of faith.¹⁹ The monk's fears were only too real as can be seen from the case of Athanasios' Lavra. Nicholas, however, hastens to assure his audience that the saint's belief in divine providence was justified:

For behold, thirty-six years have passed since the falling asleep of the Father, and (sc. there are) nigh on three hundred men, who possess not the smallest plot of land, apart from that which contains their living quarters and the vegetable garden, all of them without business, without possession, without a care for the things that are needed for the comfort and care of the body, turned to none of the things that are present and fleeting, having completely transported their minds solely to that which lasts forever, recognising that inaccessible and harsh mountain alone as their city and village and fatherland, having bidden farewell to every other place, and having once and for all renounced the whole world, having as complete sustenance and sufficient livelihood, to say it with the Apostle, food and coverings that are sufficient for the needs of the body.²⁰

18 Theodore Prodromos, *Life of Meletios*, ed. Vasilievskij, 49, 4-16: Καὶ τό γε θαυμασιώτερον οὐπω ὑμῖν ἐγνωρίσαμεν· τοσοῦτου γάρ οἰκονομίαν λαοῦ πιστευθεῖς, ᾧ μόγις μὲν ἂν τόσα καὶ τόσα πυροφόρα πεδία, μόγις δὲ τόσα καὶ τόσα κλίματος ἀλωαί, τὴν ἀποτροφὴν αὐτάρκη διεχορήγησαν· οὔτε ζεῦγος βοῶν, οὔτε ἀγρὸν ἠνέσχετο πρίασθαι· ἐφόβει γὰρ αὐτὸν ἡ παραβολή· μήπου καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ ταῦτα τοῦ θείου γάμου ἔκπτωτος γένηται. ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλῶν ὁσημέραι Θεῶ καὶ Μελετίῳ καθιερούντων τὰ ἑαυτῶν, ὁ δὲ τοὺς ἄνδρας τῆς μὲν προθέσεως ἀπεδέχετο, τὰς δ' ἔτι δόσεις οὐ παρεδέχετο· ἀγαθὸν γὰρ πεποιθέναι ἐπὶ Κύριον ἢ ἐπ' ἄνθρωπον ἔλεγε, καὶ τὴν ἀσπαρτον τῶν πτηνῶν καὶ ἀνήροτον τροφὴν προτιθεῖς· πολλῶ στρουθίων, ἐπήγεν, ἡμεῖς διαφέρομεν.

19 Nicholas of Methone, *Life of Meletios*, ed. Vasilievskij, 20.18-21.8.

20 Nicholas of Methone, *Life of Meletios*, ed. Vasilievskij, 21, 15-28: Ἴδου γὰρ τριάκοντα πρὸς τοῖς ἕξ καὶ πρὸς παρέδραμον ἔτη μετὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς κοίμησιν, καὶ ἄνδρες ἐγγύς που τῶν τριακοσίων, γῆς οὐδὲ τοῦ βραχυτάτου κύριοι μέρους, πλὴν ὄσσην αὐτοῖς ἡ κατοκία καὶ τὸ λαχανοκήπιον περιεῖληφεν, ἀπράγμονες πάντες, ἀκτήμονες, ἀφρόντιδες τῶν ὅσα πρὸς σώματος θεραπείαν καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν, πρὸς οὐδὲν τῶν παρόντων καὶ παριόντων ἐπεστραμμένοι, ὅλον πρὸς μόνα τὰ μέλλοντα καὶ εἰς αἰεὶ διαμένοντα τὸν νοῦν μεταθέμενοι, τὸ δύσβατον καὶ τραχινὸν ὄρος ἐκεῖνο καὶ μόνον καὶ πόλιν καὶ κώμην καὶ πατρίδα γινώσκοντες, ἐτέρῳ δὲ τόπῳ παντὶ χαίρειν εἰπόντες, καὶ ἀπλῶς τῷ παντὶ κόσμῳ καθάπαξ ἀποταξάμενοι, ζωσιν ἀνευδεῖ καὶ αὐτάρκη ζωὴν, ἔχοντες, ἀποστολικῶς φάναι, διατροφὰς καὶ σκεπάσματα, τὰ τὴν σωματικὴν χρεῖαν ἀρκούντως ἀποπληροῦντα.

This constitutes another parallel with the Petra monastery, which also thrived for more than a hundred years despite the fact that it did not acquire landed property.²¹ At this point we must again ask: what ensured the economic viability of these communities? As we have seen the *Testament* of John of Petra made mention of donations of food by laypeople. Nicholas, too, gives the impression that the monks of Myoupolis had no other source of income. In Nicholas' case, however, we know that he was somewhat economical with the truth. This becomes evident when we return to the account of Theodore Prodromos. There we read:

But from the one who at that time held the worldly sceptre – it was the most pious Alexios – who admired him for his virtue and gave many things and additionally gave countless things, and promised to give much more than that, the righteous one accepted to take annually only four hundred and twenty-two gold coins from the tax collectors of Attica, whereas the rest he sent away, saying that he did not need more things.²²

This passage leaves no doubt that the monastery had a substantial source of income, which was delivered at regular intervals. This economic model finds an even clearer expression in the story of another monastery, that of Kataskepe outside Constantinople, which was the foundation of the emperor Manuel I. The historian Niketas Choniates has the following to say about it:

For knowing that to have possessions and again to busy oneself with many things separates from quietude those who have chosen the eremitic life-style and leads away from the godly life, which is the profession that is special to them, he did not set aside for the monastery a possession nor indeed fields and vineyards but measured out the whole diet of the monks from the imperial treasury and procured it from there.²³

21 Indeed, if we are to believe patriarch Kallistos, the Petra monastery managed without landed property even in the Palaiologan period. See Kallistos, *Encomium of John the Faster*, ed. Gelzer, 87, 32-88, 14. One wonders how this system could have survived the Latin occupation of Constantinople.

22 Theodore Prodromos, *Life of Meletios*, ed. Vasilievskij, 4, 16-23: Παρὰ δὲ τοῦ τὰ κοσμικὰ τηνικαῦτα σκηπτρα διέποντος, Ἀλέξιος δὲ ἦν ὁ θεοσεβέστατος, ἀγασαμένου τοῦτον τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ πολλὰ μὲν διδόντος, μυρία δὲ προσδιδόντος, πολλῶ δὲ πλείω τούτων ὑπισχομένου, τετρακοσίους πρὸς τοῖς εἴκοσι καὶ δύο μόνους χρυσίνους ὁ δίκαιος παρὰ τῶν τῆς Ἀττικῆς δασμολόγων ἐτησίως λαμβάνειν ἠνέσχετο· τὰ δ' ἄλλα, μὴ πλειόνων χρεῖαν ἔχειν εἰπὼν, ἀπεπέμψατο.

23 Nicetas Choniates, *Manuel*, 7, ed. J.-L. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (Berlin 1975) 207. 3-7: Εἰδὼς γὰρ τὸ κτηματικούς εἶναι καὶ τυρβάζεσθαι πάλιν περὶ πολλὰ τοὺς τὸν ἐρημικὸν βίον ἀνελομένους τῆς ἡσυχίας αὐτοὺς μεθιστᾶν καὶ τοῦ κατὰ θεὸν ζῆν ἀπάγον, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ οἰκεῖον αὐτοῖς ἐπάγγελμα, οὐδὲν κτησείδιον ἀπετάμετο, οὔτε μὴν ἀγροὺς καὶ ἀμπελῶνας τῷ φροντιστηρίῳ ἐπέταξε, πᾶσαν δὲ τοῖς μονασταῖς δίαταν ἐκ τῶν βασιλικῶν χρυσῶνων ἐπιμετρήσας ἐκείθεν αὐτὴν ἐβράβευεν.

Here we can see very clearly that the economic viability of the monastery was ensured through regular payments from the fisc.²⁴ Given that Alexios made a similar arrangement for Myoupolis we can hypothesise that the Petra monastery was funded in the same manner. Indeed, otherwise one would not understand the claim of Eustathios of Thessalonike that the monastery's stores contained great quantities of foodstuffs of the highest quality, which even met the standards of the imperial household.²⁵

Funding of monasteries through regular payments from the imperial fisc was not an innovation of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It was a widespread custom even in the tenth century as can be seen from the *Typikon* of Athanasios the Athonite. There the future emperor Nikephoros Phokas is praised as a particularly generous benefactor of monastic communities:

Moved, then, by this divine zeal, he built many monasteries on Mt Kyminas and settled monks in them, and provided them with ample means to meet the essential needs, and strengthened them and put them on a firm basis on the one hand through his own resources, and on the other hand through his intercessions with the emperors of the time, offering them annual stipends through the payment and gift of fixed sums from the fisc.²⁶

Yet this did not stop the same monasteries from acquiring landed property as well. One of the reasons for such behaviour was that grants from the fisc were entirely dependent on the whim of emperors. Lavra was fortunate enough to attract grants not only from

24 This text has already been repeatedly discussed. See P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge 1993) 119: 'He (sc. Manuel I.) also founded, at Kataskepe ... a monastery supported by state subsidies rather than endowments. Whether or not there was more to this policy than its ostensible aim of setting a good example of monastic reform, it is clear that he was concerned to prevent the proliferation of endowed urban monasteries, and in this deliberately went against his predecessors and most of his relatives.' However, Magdalino does not discuss the earlier evidence for this particular type of monastic institution. See also Angold, *Church and Society*, 355, who speaks of 'Manuel Comnenus's effort to raise the standard of monasticism through the foundation of the monastery of St Michael Kataskepenos' and thus gives the impression that the emperor himself created a new trend. The same point is made in Angold, *Church and Society*, 288: 'The life of the saint (sc. Meletios) was made to conform to Manuel Comnenus's ideas about monasticism.' This suggests that the passages about the monastery's lack of possessions were a fiction created in order to support the emperor's monastic vision. The evidence from the Petra monastery shows that such an interpretation is untenable. Smyrlis only mentions Kataskepe in a footnote, see Smyrlis, *Fortune des grands monastères*, 161, note 430.

25 See Angold, *Church and Society*, 353.

26 Athanasios the Athonite, *Typikon* for Lavra, ed. Ph. Meyer, *Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster* (Leipzig 1894) 102.19-25: Τούτω οὖν τῷ θεῷ ζήλω κινούμενος ἀσκητήρια συνεχῆ κατὰ τὸ τοῦ Κυμινᾶ ὄρος δειμάμενος μοναχοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐγκατάκεισε, καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀναγκαίων χρεῖαν ἀφθόνως ἐπεχορήγησε, πῆ μὲν οἴκοθεν, διὰ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ περιουσίας, πῆ δὲ διὰ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς κατὰ καιροὺς βασιλεύοντας μεσιτείας αὐτοῦ συνεπίσχυσέ τε καὶ συνεκρότησε, ῥόγας ἐπετείου παρεχόμενος αὐτοῖς, σολεμίων ὀρθώσεσσι τε καὶ δόσεσιν αὐτοὺς προθυμώτατα δεξιούμενος.

Nikephoros Phokas but also from his successors John Tzimiskes and Basil II.²⁷ This, however, was not always the case. Vatopedi had been granted an annual stipend of eighty gold coins by Constantine Monomachos. This stipend was halved by Isaac Komnenos and then again raised to seventy-two gold coins by Alexios Komnenos. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the monks asked to exchange the stipend for an exemption from the taxes payable for some of their estates.²⁸

The monasteries on which this article focuses were clearly prepared to take a gamble that such misfortune would not befall them. Most likely the abbots counted on the fact that they had not turned into typical secular landowners but maintained the spiritual high ground. The custom of the monks of Petra to throw open the gates of the monastery and feed large crowds at regular intervals may have been part of this strategy.

At this point we can summarise our findings. Around the year 1100 two abbots decided to break with immemorial custom and reject not only private but also communal property. This new monastic vision proved so successful that it influenced the secular elite. Not only did the emperor Manuel I found a monastery that conformed to the new ideal but two members of his circle, Nicholas of Methone and Theodore Prodromos, decided to write biographies of a monastic founder who had subscribed to it. All this leaves little doubt that the movement was broader and we can safely assume that the evidence we possess is only a fraction of what originally existed.

Given the critical stance of Meletios of Myoupolis and John of Petra towards landed property one would expect some debate between the group of reformers and monks who clung to the traditional position that communities could acquire property as long as their members did not possess anything of their own. That such a debate did indeed take place can be seen from a non-Constantinopolitan source, the writings of the monk Nikon of the Black Mountain who in the second half of the eleventh century lived in the region of Antioch.²⁹ In the rule for his monastic foundation Nikon forbids the acquisition of landed property and then makes the following statement:

As for what is said about Father Gelasios in the *Paterikon* and what is similar to it, since it relates to specific circumstances and is the result of a special dispensation, if it is appropriate at all, it is appropriate not for us but for others, who even now are similar to him and for whose manners it is appropriate, as only God knows and as it pleases his goodness. Yet let us consider for now this, too, about Father Gelasios, what dispassion in such

27 Athanasios the Athonite, *Typikon* for Lavra, ed. Meyer, 114, 33-115, 4; Athanasios of Panagios, *Vita A of Athanasios*, 116-117, ed. Noret, 56.

28 The evidence is discussed in R. Morris, 'Monastic exemptions in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1995) 200-16, esp. 214. See also See Smyrlis, *Fortune des grands monastères*, 160-61.

29 On Nikon see I. Doens, 'Nicon de la Montagne Noire', *Byzantion* 24 (1954) 131-140.

matters he had attained when that old fellow-ascetic of his said: ‘Your thoughts are more bound to your needle than the thoughts of Gelasios to his estates.’³⁰

From this passage we can conclude not only that Nikon held the same views as John and Meletios but also that he met with opposition from other monastic milieus. His adversaries turned to Late Antique monastic literature such as the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in order to justify their stance. Their favourite proof text seems to have been the story of the fifth-century Palestinian abbot Gelasios.³¹ The author of this story averred that Gelasios was less tied to his monastery’s property than hermits to their meagre possessions and that he was therefore not corrupted by them. This argument was so effective that Nikon felt the need to respond to it. He declared that the story about Gelasios had no binding force and that one should therefore not use it to justify landed property.

Conclusion

Hagiographical texts from the ninth and tenth centuries repeatedly make the point that the leaders of monastic communities should not act like secular landowners who seek to maximise profits but rather strive to fulfil Christ’s demand not to take care for the morrow because God would then provide for them. Such behaviour was not only godly; it also made economic sense. Abbots recklessly squandered their monasteries’ resources, which impressed laypeople so much that they responded with gifts of food and clothing. A large part of these gifts was then again given away to the poor, which elicited even more gift giving. This was evidently a viable economic model, which made the acquisition of landed property and means of production unnecessary. It had only one disadvantage: it relied on the presence of a charismatic figure. Once the saintly founder died, the gifts tended to dry up. If a monastery had not by then acquired landed property the community would disperse because it could no longer feed itself. The acquisition of landed property reached a new height in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when monasteries on Mt Athos and elsewhere built up networks of estates. However, this does not mean that it was uncontroversial. Here the monastic reform movement, which unfolded in the same years, played a crucial role. Most reformers were content with forbidding private property in monastic communities. However, a vocal minority was prepared to

30 Ch. Hannick, P. Plank, C. Lutzka and T. I. Afanas’eva (eds), *Das Taktikon des Nikon vom Schwarzen Berge. Griechischer Text und kirchenslavische Übersetzung des 14. Jahrhunderts*, I-II (Freiburg i. Br. 2014) I, 118.12-19: Τοῦ γὰρ ἀββᾶ Γελασίου τὸ εἰς τὸ Πατερικὸν καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτου μερικὰ ὄντα καὶ οἰκονομικά, ἐὰν καὶ ὄλως ἀρμόζου, οὐχ ἡμῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλοις ἀρμόζου, τοὺς ὁμοίους αὐτῶ τέως καὶ οἷς τρόποις ἀρμόζει, καθὼς μόνος ὁ Θεὸς οἶδε καὶ εὐαρεστεῖται αὐτοῦ ἢ ἀγαθότης. καὶ ὅμως σκοπήσωμεν καὶ τοῦτο τέως τοῦ ἀββᾶ Γελασίου, εἰς ποίαν ἦτον εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀπροσπάθειαν ἐν τῷ εἰπεῖν ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀρχαῖον αὐτοῦ συνασκητήν, ὅτι ‘Δέδεται μᾶλλον ὁ λογισμὸς σου εἰς τὴν ραφίδα, ἢ ὁ λογισμὸς Γελασίου εἰς τὰ χωρία.’ See also R. Allison, ‘Black Mountain: Regulations of Nikon of the Black Mountain’, 20, in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders’ Typika and Testaments*, ed. J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero and G. Constable (Washington, D.C. 2000) III, 377–424.

31 Gelasios, 5, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Migne, *Patrologia graeca* LXV, 152AB.

go much further. Around the year 1100 two founders, John, the abbot of the Petra monastery in Constantinople, and Meletios, the abbot of the monastery of Myoupolis in central Greece, rejected communal property as well because they considered it to be irreconcilable with Christ's demand not to take care for the morrow. Significantly, the two communities survived for more than a century after their founders' death. Most sources give the impression that they relied entirely on gift giving from private individuals. However, it seems likely that they also received regular payments from the fisc. This was not a new phenomenon. Monasteries had always benefitted from such payments. However, they had also acquired landed property because imperial largesse was a rather insecure source of revenue. A new emperor could change the arrangements made by his predecessor and reduce the stipend or stop it altogether. The monks of Petra and Myoupolis sought to prevent this from happening by impressing emperors with their high spiritual profile. They not only refused to acquire land but also gave away their possessions at regular intervals, thus prolonging the initial charismatic phase of monastic communities. This model was so successful that it even influenced the secular elite, which had traditionally endowed their monastic foundations with substantial landed property. The emperor Manuel I founded a monastery that was exclusively funded through payments from the fisc, and two men belonging to his circle, Nicholas of Methone and Theodore Prodromos, wrote hagiographical texts in which they praised Meletios as an exemplary abbot. The oeuvre of Nikon of the Black Mountain suggests that the new ideal even had an impact on traditionalists who felt the need to justify the hitherto uncontroversial practice of acquiring landed property through recourse to proof texts from the Late Antique period.