



**The Land of the Virgin: An ethnographic study  
of monastic life in two monasteries of Mount  
Athos**

By Michelangelo Paganopoulos

Goldsmiths College, University of London

PhD Thesis

**I hereby certify that, except when explicit attribution is made, the  
work presented in the thesis is entirely my own.**

### *Abstract*

This thesis is an ethnographic account of contemporary monastic life in two monasteries of Mount Athos, the ‘Garden of the Virgin Mary’ (*o kipos tis Parthenou*). Athos is an autonomous Christian Orthodox monastic republic of twenty monasteries with only male monks, situated in northern Greece. The material is based on fieldwork carried out between 2002 and 2004 in the monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou. By focusing on Christian monastic life, the thesis aims to contribute to the opening of a cultural and historical study of Christianity. It covers a number of themes, beginning with how the notion of ‘virginity’ (*parthenia*) informs ideas about the landscape and the daily life of the monks, as well as providing a central point of reference in the process of striving to become a monk in Vatopaidi. This is explored through a detailed account of practices of faith, such as ordinations, prayer, and confessions, focusing on the Vatopaidian notion of the ‘economy of passions’. Through this, the thesis considers the personal and communal regimes of life and prayer, obedience and labour in the monastery. Further, the thesis explores the organization of time and space in Vatopaidi, drawing on ideas about tradition and the unchanging quality of time in the monastery, and of the importance of private and collective practices. Finally, the thesis compares the social life and values of Vatopaidi to its rival neighbour Esfigmenou, which represents a contrasting and competing view of monastic life. The most salient differences over ‘matters of faith’ (*themata pisteos*) are a contrasting relationship to the landscape, different sets of priorities and understanding of the aims and nature of monastic life, and a contestation of the same tradition based on a different way of counting time. Externally, Esfigmenou has a very different attitude to Vatopaidi towards recent changes on the Mount, such as its attitude to the importation of technology, the rise of religious tourism, and impact of EU funding. It maintains an extremist political agenda within the Orthodox world, and consequently, a different set of motivations for becoming a monk in this particular monastery. Here too, the contrast between internal and external is fundamental to the identity of Esfigmenou, even though it is approached as an explicit criticism of Vatopaidi. Interestingly however, both monasteries find themselves entangled in conflict-ridden relationships with the Greek state. In this way, the material investigates how the external vocation of each monastery is connected to their respective internal regimes; the material also examines the agency of the monks and their impact in public life, as well as, the heterogeneity in the understanding of the aims and priorities of Athonian monastic life.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First of all I wish to thank the monks of the monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou for putting up with my staying, and for letting me participate in their lives. I particularly wish to thank my informants for their generosity and patience. I also wish to thank Professor George Mantzarides of the Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki, Greece, for helping me with his important statistical work.

I also wish to thank my supervisors, professors Olivia Harris and Victoria Goddard, the reader Alice Forbess and James for their incisive feedback, the students at Goldsmiths for their interest, as well as, Professors Brian Morris, Keith Hart, and Pat Caplan, for their teaching and moral support.

But Above all, I am more than thankful to my exceptional family: Leila, Areti, Pablo, and Roman-Alexander, as well as, to my inspirational grandparents, my tough parents, and those close friends who have been through this with me, graciously offering their support from the very beginning to the very end.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>9-34</b>
1. The Land of the Virgin	9-13
2. Economy and Movement	13-15
3. Demographic changes in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	16-18
4. Fieldwork	18-28
5. Methodological Issues	28-34
<b>Chapter 2: Towards a Cultural and Historical Anthropology of Christian Monasticism</b>	<b>35-65</b>
1. The rite of passage of monastic life	35-40
2. The virgin body	41-44
3. Virginité and economy	44-48
4. Ethnographies on ascetic and monastic living	48-52
5. Foucault's monastic body	52-54
6. The question of tradition	54-57
7. The question of meaning	57-59
8. The question of history	60-64
9. Conclusion	64-65
<b>Chapter 3: The Tradition of Virginité in Vatopaidi</b>	<b>66-98</b>
1. Introduction	66
2. The Foundation of Vatopaidi	67-70
3. Mary as the Owner	71-73
4. Motherhood	73-76
5. <i>Avaton</i>	76-79
6. Provision	80-83
7. Contested Tradition	83-88
8. Nostalgia	88-94
9. Mary as Healer	94-97
10. Conclusion	97-98
<b>Chapter 4: Monastic Life as a Rite of Passage</b>	<b>99-143</b>
1. Introduction	99-101
2. Charisma	101-108
3. The Journey to Vatopaidi	109-115
4. The Calling	116-120
5. Abandoning Worldly Degrees	120-121
6. The Desert Ordeal	122-125
7. The Revival of Psalmody	125-129
8. The Rite of Tonsure ( <i>Koura</i> )	130-137
9. The Rite of the <i>Angelic Schema</i>	137-139
10. Exit to God	139-141
11. Conclusion	141-143
<b>Chapter 5: Private and Collective Practices of Faith</b>	<b>144-176</b>
1. Introduction	144
2. Praying in the Cell	144-147
3. Night Struggles: At War with the Flesh	147-149
4. Controlling the Body: the prohibition of touch	149-152
5. Night Vigil	152-162
6. Confession	162-167
7. Holy Communion	167-170
8. Refectory	170-175
9. Conclusion	176

<b>Chapter 6: The Communal Life of Vatopaidi</b>	<b>177-201</b>
1. Introduction	177-178
2. ‘Economy of Passions’	178-182
3. ‘Blind Obedience’	182-187
4. Double Hierarchy	188-194
5. Monks Outside the Community	194-198
6. August Tensions	198-201
7. Conclusion	201
<b>Chapter 7: The Organization of Time and Space (Internal Economy)</b>	<b>202-228</b>
1. Introduction	202
2. ‘Liturgical’ and ‘Worldly Hours’	202-206
3. Fasting and Feasting Days	206-210
4. Top Floor: The Council of Elders	210-218
5. Ground Floor	219-223
6. Agrarian Activities	223-227
7. Conclusion	228
<b>Chapter 8: Virginitv on Sale (External Economy)</b>	<b>229-253</b>
1. Introduction	229
2. Guesthouse	230-235
3. Confessing the “world”	236-239
4. The holy girdle of the Virgin Mary	239-241
5. Virginitv on Sale	242-246
6. The Issue of <i>Metochia</i>	246-250
7. Conclusion	251-253
<b>Chapter 9: Esfigmenou’s Alternative Model of Monastic Life</b>	<b>254-288</b>
1. Introduction	254
2. My journey to Esfigmenou	254-264
3. Night Struggles	264-267
4. Daily Struggles	267-273
5. The Issue of the Calendar	273-279
6. Prophecies of Global Warming	280-283
7. ‘Under Siege’	283-291
10. Conclusion	292-293
<b>Chapter 10: Thesis Conclusion</b>	<b>294-298</b>
<b><i>Appendices</i></b>	<b>299-338</b>
<b><i>Glossary</i></b>	<b>339-354</b>
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	<b>355-363</b>

## Table of Figures

*Front Cover:* ‘Assistance from Above’ photograph taken by Kostas Argyris 2001

<i>Figure 1a:</i> Map of Chalkidiki and the Athos peninsula	9
<i>Figure 1b:</i> Postcard from Mount Athos: ‘The Garden of the Holy Mother’	9
<i>Figure 1c:</i> KARYES: PROTATON	19
<i>Figure 2a:</i> Icon portraying the <i>Ladder of St Climacus</i>	36
<i>Figure 2b:</i> Rites of passage of monastic life	43
<i>Figure 3a:</i> Picture of Vatopaidi from the sea	67
<i>Figure 3b:</i> Picture of Vatopaidi from above	68
<i>Figure 3c:</i> Map of <i>catholicon</i> of Vatopaidi	68
<i>Figure 3d:</i> Icon of <i>Vematarissa</i>	71
<i>Figure 3e:</i> Picture of <i>catholicon</i> of Vatopaidi	72
<i>Figure 3f:</i> Icon of <i>Our Lady Paramythia</i>	74
<i>Figure 3g:</i> Icon of <i>Our Lady Antiphonitra</i>	76
<i>Figure 3h:</i> Icon of <i>Our Lady Elaiovrytissa</i>	80
<i>Figure 3i:</i> Icon of <i>Our Lady Esfagmeni</i>	84
<i>Figure 3j:</i> Icon of <i>Our Lady Pyrovolithissa</i>	91
<i>Figure 3k:</i> Icon of <i>Our Lady Vsetsaritsa</i>	95
<i>Figure 3l:</i> Postcard from Mount Athos: ‘The Garden of the Holy Mother’	98
<i>Figure 4a:</i> Joseph the Hesychast’s <i>typikon</i>	105
<i>Figure 4b:</i> Cover of Joseph’s book <i>Elder Joseph the Hesychast</i>	107
<i>Figure 4c:</i> Family Tree of Josephaeoi	107
<i>Figure 4d:</i> Picture of New Skete	108
<i>Figure 4e:</i> Picture of the second <i>companionship</i> of Joseph the Hesychast	108
<i>Figure 4f:</i> Joseph the Vatopaidian’s Journey to Vatopaidi	111
<i>Figure 4g:</i> Picture of Abbot Ephraim of Vatopaidi with Ephraim Katounakiotis	113
<i>Figure 4h:</i> The smiling corpse of Joseph the Vatopaidian (-1/7/1921-1/7/2009)	115
<i>Figure 4i:</i> Picture of <i>chorostasia</i> on the veneration the Holy Girdle in 2010	127
<i>Figure 4j:</i> Picture from the celebration of the Holy Girdle in 2010	128
<i>Figure 4k:</i> CDs on sale	129
<i>Figure 4l:</i> Picture of tonsure of novice in Vatopaidi	133
<i>Figure 4m:</i> Pictures of the ‘ <i>Angelic Schema</i> ’	138
<i>Figure 4n:</i> Ascription on the ‘ <i>Angelic Schema</i> ’	138
<i>Figure 4o:</i> Picture of skulls of dead monks kept in the bone store	143

<i>Figure 5a:</i> Picture of Vatopaidi's <i>catholicon</i> from outside	153
<i>Figure 5b:</i> Picture of <i>ekklesiarches</i> sounding the <i>talanton</i> , and monks praying	153
<i>Figure 5c:</i> Picture of Vatopaidi's <i>catholicon</i> from inside	153
<i>Figure 5d:</i> Map of <i>catholicon</i>	154
<i>Figure 5e:</i> Diagram of the rite of passage of frequent confession	163
<i>Figure 5f:</i> Picture of <i>catholicon</i> (left) – refectory (right) – Bell Tower (centre)	170
<i>Figure 5g:</i> <i>Chorostasia</i> : Exit from refectory	173
<i>Figure 6a:</i> Vatopaidi's refectory on fasting and non-fasting days	189
<i>Figure 6b:</i> the 'Holy Trinity' of Vatopaidi's double hierarchical system	193
<i>Figure 6c:</i> A picture of the <i>catholicon</i> of Vatopaidi	194
<i>Figure 7a:</i> Timetable of Private and Collective Prayer	203
<i>Figure 7b:</i> Days' Cycle	205
<i>Figure 7c:</i> Picture of Vatopaidian choir	207
<i>Figure 7d:</i> Chapels and liturgies on days of abstinence	210
<i>Figure 7e:</i> MAP of Vatopaidi	211
<i>Figure 7f:</i> Vatopaidi's three floors	212
<i>Figure 7g:</i> Hierarchy in practice	212
<i>Figure 7h:</i> Picture of vineyard	225
<i>Figure 8a:</i> Internal view of Vatopaidi from <i>archontariki</i>	230
<i>Figure 8b:</i> The holy girdle of the Virgin Mary	240
<i>Figure 8b:</i> Division of three floors in terms of sacred/ profane activities	243
<i>Figure 8d:</i> Vatopaidian Internet Advert	245
<i>Figure 8e:</i> Women breaking the <i>Avaton</i>	248
<i>Figure 8f:</i> Public protests over 4,500 sq. kilometres of disputed land	248
<i>Figure 8g:</i> Picture of Vatopaidi's Abbot Ephraim outside the Greek Parliament	250
<i>Figure 9a:</i> The three flags of Esfigmenou	256
<i>Figure 9b:</i> Esfigmenou: 'Orthodoxy or Death'	256
<i>Figure 9c:</i> Refectory of Esfigmenou	268
<i>Figure 9d:</i> Picture of injured monk taken in an ambulance	285
<i>Figure 9e:</i> Picture of monk evicted from Esfigmenou	291
<i>Figure Appendix 3.1:</i> 'Companionships' to Vatopaidi	308
<i>Figure Appendix 3.2:</i> Table of novices and education	308
<i>Figure Appendix 3.3:</i> Table of priest-monks and education	308
<i>Figure Appendix 3.4:</i> <i>Chorostasia</i> : order of receiving Holy Communion	309
<i>Figure Appendix 3.5:</i> Weekly Timetable: Winter/Summer solstice	310
<i>Figure Appendix 3.6:</i> The Liturgical and Agricultural Annual Circle	312
<i>Figure Appendix 5:</i> Eviction Notice of monk of Esfigmenou	324
<i>Figure Appendix 6:</i> Chronology	337-338

# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

## PART I: THE PLACE

### 1. The Land of the Virgin



Figure 1a: Map of Chalkidiki and the Athos peninsula



Figure 1b: Postcard from Mount Athos: 'The Garden of the Holy Mother'

Athos is a physically isolated peninsula with the appearance of a disfigured finger pointing to the south, edged by a mountain that rises impressively above the seawater 2,033 metres high. An ancient myth says that during the battle of the Gods and the Giants, one of the rival Giants, Athos, threw a gigantic rock at Zeus' brother Poseidon. The rock landed in the Aegean forming the mountain. The peninsula is more than 50km long, and 8 to 19km in width. It is covered by a wild green forest from the north to the south, leading toward the impressive rocky mountain that breaks the waves of the north Aegean. Most of the 'worldly' visitors (*kosmikoi*) that I talked to on Athos said that they visited the Mount because of its 'virgin' reputation, and because of its reputation as the 'Garden of the Virgin Mary' (*o kipos tis Parthenou*), left 'untouched' and 'unchanged for more than a thousand years' [personal communication with monks and visitors].

The physical and geographic isolation of the peninsula and the wilderness of the landscape have contributed to this tradition of virginity. The thick forest functions as the natural border between Athos and the secular world. It is almost impossible to cross because of torrents that flow through deep ravines and streams, before leading to the most beautiful sand beaches. The exceptional landscape is covered with a wild forest that is buzzing with life, stretching from the north to the south toward the impressive rocky mountain rising 2,033 metres above sea level. The different levels in height are home to a large variety of plants, insects, and animals, which form several ecosystems that overlap each other (Dafis 1997). At the southern parts of the peninsula, there are no asphalt roads or electrical wires, only rocky paths. The northern parts are more developed with roads and modern infrastructure built in and around the secular village of Karyes, the administrative capital of the monastic republic situated at the centre of the peninsula.

The monks see themselves living a 'blessed life', in total harmony with the natural environment, in a 'symbiosis' [personal communication with Vatopaidian priest-monk 1/10/2002]. They do not consume any meat because they considered it to be morally associated with desire. They eat only the things produced in the fields: tomatoes, figs, cucumbers, olives, green peppers, and nuts; they also produce wine, *tsipouro* (similar to ouzo), candles, and honey among other products, which they sell to the secular market. Fish is on the dinner table every Sunday after mass. The daily program is coordinated

in relation to the sunset, which is the time for prayer, and sunrise, which is the time for work. The year is scheduled in relation to an annual liturgical and agrarian calendar, divided in winter and summer solstices: during the winter, monks spend more time inside their cells praying, or in the church praying collectively; in the spring, when the days are warmer and longer, they spend more time working in the fields for the coming winter. This cyclical and repetitive conception of time is accompanied by the annual religious calendar, starting on the first day of January, which consists of long periods of abstinence that culminate in the Twelve Great Feasts. Each week is further divided in fasting and non-fasting ('oil') days, while everyday celebrates a different saint(s). In this way, their diet, hard daily work, and the repetitive spiritual 'exercise' (*askesis*), are responsible for a long and healthy way of life; a 'virgin life' (*partheniki zoe*). Their diet, hard daily work, and daily night exercises (*askesis*), are responsible for a long and healthy life (many monks live for almost a hundred years). Few doctors serve only in the village of Karyes, and they have very limited in equipment and medicine. Despite this, monks rarely die young because of an illness<sup>1</sup>, although serious injuries and emergencies do occur<sup>2</sup>.

The commercial image of the monks in their black cassocks and long beards, holding rosaries and silently praying to the sky, which is so often reproduced in historical books as well as tourist brochures about Athos. Such literature may represent the monks as a natural part of the Athonian forest, because their presence is naturalized and homogenized through the tradition of virginity that surrounds the peninsula. In this way, the monastic republic self-proclaims its unchanged sacredness and 'spiritual life' (*pneumatiki zoe*) inside the monasteries; in sharp opposition to the 'materialist world' (*illistikos kosmos*) outside its sacred borders, a 'world' (*kosmos*) of sin, conflict, self-interest, and constant change. Central in this separation of Athos from the 'world'

---

<sup>1</sup> The British newspaper *The Independent* recently wrote in an article entitled 'Austere Lives of Mount Athos Monks Shown to Cut Cancer Risk' (8/12/2007)<sup>1</sup> the diet of the monks, which 'alternates between olive oil and non olive oil days, and plenty of plant proteins' (article quotes Dr Haris Aidonopoulos) is crucial in understanding the healthy life of the monks: Since 1994, 1,500 monks have been tested for cancer, and only 'a minute proportion' had it, and even more importantly, none of the monks developed serious types of the illness, such as lung or bowel cancer! 'Prostrate cancer –one of the biggest killers of British men- only affected 11 monks during the 13-year period'.

<sup>2</sup> The *Holy Committee* of Karyes has bought two helicopters, one based near Karyes, covering the northern area of the peninsula, and the other built next to the monastery of Meghisti Lavra near the southern cliffs, to cover for any emergencies and other medical needs particularly of the older monks.

(*kosmos*) is the rule of *Avaton* ('No Pass'): the prohibition of females (women and cattle) from entering ('touching the land') the peninsula. The tradition says that when Mary and St John travelled to meet Lazarus a storm forced them to look for a shelter at the site where today the Georgian monastery of Iviron stands. Because of Mary's rescue at the shores of the Athonite peninsula, Athos has been named as the 'garden of *Theotokos*' (the 'mother of god') and allegedly no woman has crossed into this holy territory ever since<sup>3</sup>. According to archival research, the rule was introduced in response to several economic disputes between monasteries, as well as the secular town of Ierissos, over the use of cattle in the fields situated between the monastery of Kolovos and Ierissos (Papachrysanthou 1992: 127-9, 139-57, and Paganopoulos 2007: 123-5). The monastery charged a high price to rent the land for cattle, while other nearby monastic settlements also had their own claims over the land (*Ibid*: 139-57). The emperor resolved these disputes in a letter addressed to a single authority of Athos, the Council of Elders, thus, he anticipated the recognition of the monastic republic as independent a hundred years earlier than its foundation. The border resolved such disputes by mapping the land of each monastery and drawing the border between Athos and the 'worldly world' (*kosmikos k/cosmos*).

## 2. Economy and Movement

Since pre-Christian times, the peninsula has been associated with mysticism, and ancient Thracian temples are still buried under the monasteries. Archival research reveals hermetic life on the Mount began as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century the first monastic settlements were built. Tradition states that the founder of these early monasteries was Constantine, the first Christianised emperor in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Their foundation is economically and politically associated with the removal of power from Rome to Constantinople, or Istanbul, as it is known nowadays. But Constantine had never founded any monasteries in Athos, or even in Constantinople (Papachrysanthou

---

<sup>3</sup> However, only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there have been six trespasses by women: in 1948, rebel women of the 'Democratic Army' looked for a shelter; in 1954, in two incidences a woman journalist and a Byzantine historian illegally entered for research purposes; in 1969, five tourists, and in 1989 a German couple, also entered for a swim; and more recently, in 2006 seven women climbed over the fence in front of the Greek media in protest against the claims of four monasteries over estates in mainland Greece (*metochia*, monastic properties outside Athos). Such incidences not only undermine the eternal tradition of virginity, but also reveal the historical involvement and tensions between the monasteries and the 'world' (see chapters 8 and 9).

1992: 32). In fact, the early ascetics lived in settlements alone, or in small groups of monks called *lavres* (meaning ‘the heart of the fire’, *see* glossary). With the ratification of the *Avaton* in 942-3AD more organized types of monastic life were further introduced in ‘Royal’ monasteries (‘B(V)asilices’) built on existing monastic settlements with funding from the great ‘City’ of Constantinople (Papachrysanthou 1992: 162-172). In 963AD, St. Athanasius the Athonite introduced St Basil’s *coenobitic* (communal) mode of life with the foundation of the first Royal monastery of Meghisti Lavra, funded by his childhood friend Emperor Fokas (reigned 963-969). A year later, Athanasius wrote the first *Typikon* of Meghisti Lavra, the book containing the rules of conduct and liturgical calendar (also known as *tragus* (‘goat’) because it was written on a goat’s skin). The *Typikon* established the new borders between Athos and the secular villages, on the basis of the prohibition that included both farmers women, and female cattle: there would be no more disputes, as the land situated inside would remain virgin from cattle and farming, in the same way the monks have to retain their virginity throughout their life (Papachrysanthou 1992: 253-68)<sup>4</sup>. In this way, the *Avaton* associated the economic disputes over the land with celibacy. On the other hand, the emperor also established two boats connecting Athos to the Byzantine capital Constantinople, which financed and politically supported the newly founded Royal monasteries (*see* glossary) in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Royal monasteries, St. Athanasius introduced the communal, or *coenobitic*, way of life. However, the hermits felt threatened by St. Athanasius and his new young monks ‘of the big city’, meaning Constantinople (Papachrysanthou 1992:147, 254-5, and Gillet 1987: 65). Under pressure, Athanasius was ready to abandon Athos, when the Virgin Mary appeared to him introducing herself as the ‘builder’ (*ecodomos*) of Meghisti Lavra (meaning the ‘great *lavra*’), encouraging him to complete his work. After Athanasius’s accidental death in 1004 in Meghisti Lavra, Mary re-appeared to the first Abbot of Meghisti Lavra, re-introducing herself as the ‘*economos*’, meaning the

---

<sup>4</sup> Despite the new border, the conflicts between the local population and the monks continued throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because of the increasing competition between monastic groups and local villages, a second *Typikon* had to be drawn issued by the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus in June 1045 (Papachrysanthou 1992: 279). The text devotes long passages to the problem of the over-population of the peninsula by monks and the ecological destruction arising from the deforestation of the land (as it is still the case nowadays at the central and southern areas of the peninsula). It also makes references to the monks who broke the rules of the first *Typikon* by letting local animals to feed from the ‘virgin’ land of Athos touching the ‘cosmopolitan’ land of Ierissos (Papachrysanthou 1992: 273-6, and Mikragiannanitos 1999: 45).

‘stewardess’ of the monastery (Paganopoulos 2006). Following her second apparition, the role of *ekonomos* was established with a double duty shared by the priest-monks. This double duty included: organizing the cleaning and preparation of the church and chapels for the night liturgies, and paying the lay workers in the evening for their daily work in the monastery. This miracle introduced the notion of ‘economy’ in *coenobitic* life as the ‘law’ (*nomos*) of the ‘house’ (*ecos*). The notion had a double meaning: It meant both the internal self-sustainability and independence of each monastery; and also the financial, political, and military support given to the Royal monasteries by powerful ‘cosmopolitans’ (meaning ‘world [*kosmos*] citizens [*politiss*]’).

In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the monastic republic counted ‘tens of thousands’ of monks, as more than 200 Royal monasteries were founded<sup>5</sup> with funding from secular traders, emperors, and kings from all over the Christian world who brought with them animals, donations, land endorsements, ornaments and gold, and other gifts (Papachrysanthou 1992: 226-32)<sup>6</sup>. Six more *Typika* followed the first, with the last three drawn after 1453 and the fall of Constantinople, consequently there is no Imperial ratification of these documents. As a result of the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire, the connection of the Athonian monasteries to the cosmopolitan City was interrupted. Furthermore, in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the heavy taxation imposed by the Ottomans, as well as the continuous random pirate attacks, inclined the monks to change their way of life from *coenobitic* to *idiorythmic* (1506AD). By dispersing in isolated cells, individual monks could use their private property as means to hide treasures from the eyes of the taxman. But the *idiorrhythmic* way of life resulted to the dissolution of communal life and consequently, of the economy of the monasteries, returning them to the semi-hermetic state of the early Christian settlements.

Following the inclusion of Athos into the Greek border of 1912, the monasteries were obliged to return to the *coenobitic* life, as per chapter 5, article 85 of the Athonian Charter of 1926 (*Katastatikos Hartis* 1979: 63-64). The Charter on the one hand, guaranteed the economic and political autonomy of the republic from Greece, while on

---

<sup>5</sup> There was even an Italian monastery of Amalfi, which was later destroyed by the Crusaders (Mikrayannanitos 2001: 50, Sidiropoulos 2000: 42-3).

<sup>6</sup> Among the donators, was Maro, the Christian daughter of George Vrancovic (Serbian King, 1427-1456), who gave to the monastery of St Pavlos 1,000 dukes, two fields, and the presents the three Kings gave to Jesus, which until that time were kept in Constantinople (Mikrayannanitos 1999: 204). She was also the mother of Mohamed II (1451-1481), the sultan who successfully took Constantinople in 1453.

the other encouraged for the reorganization of the twenty surviving monasteries into functional economic units (i.e. ‘economy’ here means the ‘law [*nomos*] of the house [*ecos*]’ and is directly related to ‘ecology’, Paganopoulos 2009: 364). This return to the ideals and practices of *coenobitic* life was seen as a recovery of a lost, ‘spiritual’ past, as a kind of spiritual resurrection by the Greek monks. In my discussions with them, they drew symbolic parallels with the Greek revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire. This resurrection took place on the basis of a romantic ‘longing for an age before the state’ (Herzfeld 1997:22), a ‘structural nostalgia’ of a golden Byzantine Empire, illustrating the Hellenic nationalist ideal for a ‘Byzantine universalism’ (Tzanelli 2008:141-150). As I shall show in the thesis, Athos came to symbolize the Greek Orthodox ‘spirit’ of the resurrection of an entire nation.

Following the Treaty of Surrender of 10 August 1920, which was ratified by the Lausanne Convention on 24 July 1923, Athos regained its constitutional autonomy, under the spiritual protection of the ‘Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople’ in Istanbul, and the political protection of the Greek ministry of Foreign Affairs. The independent status of the Republic places it in a paradoxical position, as it is situated within the Greek borders but is also independent of Greece. This presented internal complications about the monasteries’ relationship to the Greek state, namely that the status of non-Greek monks living on Athos is unclear. Despite article 6 of the Athonian constitution of 1926 declaring ‘all monks living on Athos, regardless their ethnicity gain the Greek citizenship’ (*Katastatikos Hartis* 1979: 33)<sup>7</sup>, non-Greek monks represent different Orthodox traditions from that of the Greeks, which in the past have led into conflicts over matters of faith, resulting in rapid demographic changes.

In the context of the birth of the nation states, a national title was given to each monastery: seventeen of the twenty monasteries are called Greek, and three more are called Bulgarian, Russian, and Serbian. Furthermore, from the twelve *sketes* (monastic villages, *see* glossary) on the Mount, eight are thought to be Greek, and there are also

---

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Athonian constitution automatically grants Greek citizenship to those who decide to become monks, and according to this we are all Greeks here (with a cunning smile). If someone thinks he can take advantage of the system, he is mistaken, because if he not heard the calling he cannot stay here more than a few weeks. To put it simply you can’t take it because you will not have enough faith to follow our program. As far as I know, never has a monk of Athos returned to the ‘cosmopolitan’ life after accepting the Calling. Deception on Athos cannot last more than a week!’ [Vatopaidi’s secretary 5/5/03]

two Romanian, plus one Serbian and one Bulgarian. However, the national title given to monasteries and their settlements neither reflects their multi-ethnic populations nor their multicultural traditions. Rather, it reveals the entanglement of each monastery beyond its borders, through cosmopolitan networks of worldly power, such as Constantinople, Rome, Moscow, and nowadays, Brussels. This also leads us to external politics affecting the monasteries, such as the unclear status of the monastic property in Greece (*metochia*) that was given to the monks by Byzantine and Ottoman rulings, but which is today contested by local councils in mainland Greece; and also matters of funding that raise questions over the influence of the EU in Athonian life.

### 3. Demographic changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The internal issue regarding the nationalization of the monasteries in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is illustrated by the rapid demographic changes that took place in Vatopaidi, and its satellite *skete* of St Andrew, or as it is better known the ‘Russian *Serrai*’. The Russian *skete*, together with the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon became the centre of a Russian movement of monks called ‘Glorifiers of the Name’ (see also glossary). The priest-monk Anthony Bulatovich and the ordinary monk Hilarion of Caucasus wrote a book entitled *In the Mountains of Caucasus*, published in Russian in 1909. They developed a doctrine in which only the name of ‘Jesus’ in the Jesus Prayer was thought to contain the essence of God. But Greeks saw the ‘Glorifiers of the Name’ as heretics, and complained to the *Holy Committee* of Karyes, the central executive authority of Athos dominated by Greeks, and to the ‘Ecumenical Patriarchate’ in Istanbul<sup>8</sup>. In 1912-3, and under pressure from the Patriarchate, the Russian Tsar sent a steamship to Athos to return about 200 ‘rebel monks’ back to

---

<sup>8</sup> Fr Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) of the Orthodox Institution of Theology in Paris wrote of the division at the time: ‘For the moment two different approaches exist. The first group, who call themselves ‘glorifiers of God’s name’, adopt a realist attitude towards the significance of the name in general. They believe that the name of God invoked in prayer already contains God’s presence (Fr John Kronstadt and others). The second group prefers a more rationalist and nominalist point of view: the name of God is regarded as a human, instrumental means of expressing the soul’s thought about God and its striving towards Him (sic). Those who practice the Jesus Prayer, and mystics in general, uphold the first opinion, along with certain theologians and members of the hierarchy. The second point of view is characteristic of the school of Orthodox theology that reflects the influence of European rationalism’ (cited in Gillet 1987: 85). Here, Greek Orthodox theology is identified as a carrier of ‘European rationalism’, from a Russian traditionalist point of view. The conflict over the doctrine of the Name of Jesus was part of a wider struggle between monks of two national churches. Both Greeks and Russians claim the same Byzantine tradition, as they both identify with the ‘East’ as the pure monastic tradition, against a polluted ‘Western’ Christianity.

Russia. In 1915, another 621 monks were deported, and two years later a further 212 (Sidiropoulos 2000: 106-107), essentially ending the Russian movement on Athos.

Sidiropoulos (*Ibid*) argued that underneath the theological conflict between the Holy Committee of Mount Athos dominated by Greeks and the Russian ‘Glorifiers of the Name’, there was a general anxiety of Greek monks about the increasing numbers of Russian monks. In 1903 the number of Russians (3,496) was greater than the Greeks (3,276). Furthermore, the Russian monks had formed alliances with Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian kings and monks, who supported them financially (Kadas 1984:133-7). The few Russian monks who managed to stay were dispersed in isolated cells across the Mount. They were called *Celliotes* (from the word ‘cell’) because of their struggle for independence from the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul, and for following their own liturgical program<sup>9</sup>. After WWII, they too were expelled, accused of being ‘communists’. An old Greek monk of Esfigmenou told me that following the Greek Civil War between ‘communists’ and ‘fascists’ from 1946 to 1952, a rumour of a ‘communist uprising’ spread that Athos was ‘occupied’ by an army of ‘Russian and Bulgarian communist monks armed with rifles and knives’ [monk of Esfigmenou 12/2/03]. The impact of this political conflict resulted to a third wave of expulsion of non-Greek, ‘communist’ monks: by 1943 the number of monks decreased from 6,345 in 1913 to 2,878 (Mantzaridis 1980:191). By 1958, most Russian and other non-Greek settlements were left deserted. Even today, in Greek monasteries such as Vatopaidi, Russian monks refer with bitterness to the events before and after WWII. According to a Russian young monk that I met in Vatopaidi, ‘the Russians were kicked out of *Serrai*’ [personal communication 4/5/03]. The young monk told me that there was also a new novice from Oddysos (Russia). He said he was looking forward to visiting the *skete*, but

---

<sup>9</sup> The antagonism between Russian and Greek monks goes way back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the time when Greece was also born out of three revolutions against the Ottoman Empire. According to tradition, in 1754-5, a Greek zealot monk called Neophytes of the ‘desert’ of Kausokalyvia (died around 1760) made a complaint about the monks of the *skete* of St Anna, because they were offering the *kolliva*, the sweet almonds in remembrances of the dead, on a Sunday morning after the Divine Liturgy, instead of a Saturday according to tradition. The monks of St Anna explained that they did so, because they were rebuilding their church, and they were working on Saturday evenings, and for that reason they could not hold the liturgy. But Neophytes took the matter to the Patriarchate in Istanbul; accusing St Anna of Latin influences (Mikrayannanos 1999:109-10). Russian monks were generally called *Celliotes* (from the word ‘cell’) because of their independence from the Greek Patriarchate; while Greek traditionalist monks are often called *Kollivades*, because they were associated with the zealot dogmatism of Neophytes’ complaint to receive the sweet almonds in remembrances of the dead only on Saturdays.

had not been there yet ‘because the abbot was still organizing things’ and it was not ready for visitors.

The last Russian monk of the ‘Russian *Serrai*’ died in 1971, which was also the year of the lowest recorded number of monks (1,145 monks, in Mantzaridis 1975:339, and 1981: 380). The *skete* was revived in 1992 by the new Vatopaidian brotherhood, with funding from the EU. The new Vatopaidians requested the Holy Committee to move there fifteen Greek Cypriots to renovate it, since it is Vatopaidian property. The Vatopaidians revived the Greek Athoniada School, which was the most prominent ‘hidden school’ during the Greek revolutions against the Ottomans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, contributing to the ideal of preserving the Greek identity on the basis of Greek language and Christian religion<sup>10</sup>. The School was originally built near Vatopaidi in 1749, with students such as the ‘great teacher of the nation’ Eugenius Voulgaris, the influential Patriarch of Alexandria Cyprianos Cyprios, the Greek national hero Regas Ferraios, and St Kosmas the Aetolian (Mikrayannanitos 2001: 89-105). It was burned down in 1822 by the Ottoman army, an event commemorated by the icon of Mary as *Pyrovolithissa* (‘Shot At’, see chapter 3). Almost two hundred years later, the School was rebuilt in the ‘Russian *Serrai*’ in 1992, by the Greek Cypriot brotherhood of the new Vatopaidians. Today, the Vatopaidian *skete* of St Andrew is ‘Russian’ by name only, as it is the home of about thirty monks, all from Greek Cyprus. As I discuss in the next chapter in relation to the nationalist character of celebrations of the Virgin Mary, the mostly Cypriot Vatopaidians are still affected by the war and the division that has taken place in their native island (see next chapter, section 3.8).

#### 4. Impact of the ‘world’ (*kosmos*)

At the centre of the peninsula is the secular village of Karyes, where the central authorities of Athos, the *Iera Synodos* (Holy Committee) and *Iera Epistasia* (Holy Supervision), have their headquarters at the *protaton* (the ‘first building’). The Holy Committee consists of representatives of the monasteries with administrative, legislative, and executive responsibilities. It is headed by the *protos* (the ‘first monk’), who is elected every five years. The *Protaton* (figure 1c) is built close to the church

---

<sup>10</sup> Friedman argues that ‘the nationalization of Eastern Orthodoxy was the only possible basis for a Greek identity in the Ottoman system, one which opposed itself as much to Western Catholicism as to Islam, if not more so’ (1994: 119).

dedicated to the ‘Sleep of the Mother of God’ (celebrated on August 15) with its world-famous icon of *Axion Esti*. The capital village is a very noisy place, with buses and vans used as taxis queuing to pick up the secular visitors, most of them pilgrims, who travel in packs from one monastery to another via Karyes. It also has shops with canned food, a police station, a council house, a post, a pharmacy, telephones, a small hospital, and the houses where the representatives of the monasteries stay, called *kontakia*.



Figure 1c: KARYES: PROTATON (From <http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Athos>)

Visitors arrive in Karyes from all over the world via Dafni, a natural harbour at the western side of the peninsula where Greek police check the passports and permits of each visitor who wishes to enter the Mount. When leaving the Mount, bags are searched in case visitors stole something from the monasteries, though very rarely an icon has gone missing. Two boats, one running from the western side from the village of Ouranoupolis (‘Sky-City’), and the other from the eastern side from the ancient town of Ierissos, carry visitors. They make the trip three times a week. They also import petrol, medicine, technical equipment, and the mail. Each visitor is allowed to stay for two nights only in a monastery. According to the people who worked at the port of Ouranoupolis, the reason for the short stay is to respect the life and tradition of the monks, who should remain as isolated as possible from the secular world. But the rule also helps the monks to make an annual profit, since the shorter a visitor stays in a

monastery the more visitors the monastery accommodates a year, and hence, the more money it makes from their donations, *tamata* (gifts called ‘promises’), and entry fees.

Since 1971, there has been noted an increase in the number of monks (Mantzaridis 1981: 380), reaching 1,200 monks in 1990 (Mantzaridis 1995: 200), to almost 2,500 at the time of my fieldwork (2002-2004). In the last two decades many monasteries doubled and tripled their populations. In 1986, Vatopaidi counted 53 monks, but today its population has more than doubled. In 1986, there were 38 monks counted in the neighbouring monastery of Esfigmenou, but since 1990, there has also been an equally significant increase to their number (Mantzaridis 1997: 172, and Alpentzos 2002: 232-5). Today, with about 130 monks each, the neighbouring monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou are the largest brotherhoods on Athos<sup>11</sup>.

In my trips, I met monks and visitors from all over the world: Greeks, Russians, Serbians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Albanians, Georgians, Ukrainians, Ethiopians, Kenyans, Armenians, Americans, Australians, and Europeans, such as French, Irish, Germans, and Swiss. The EU has also recognized the autonomy of the monastic republic declaring it a world-heritage site. Such a site is a place with a strong ‘sense of identity and community... with a sense of cultural confidence and connectedness between the local and the global’ (Throsby 2001: 84). The monasteries have been included within the EU projects for preserving and restoring European heritage, such as the ‘European Heritage Laboratories Action’ of 1998 that funded the restoration of precious icons and frescos in several monasteries in co-operation with the Greek Archaeological Services.

The monastic republic is thus a transnational sacred place with a religious purpose: pilgrimage. In particular, the number of male visitors who want to pay their respects to the Garden of the Virgin Mary has reached more than fifty thousand per year (*Macedonia* Greek newspaper, 28/8/2005, p.31) and the waiting time for a visit can last up to two months. I refer to visitors in the sense that they are pilgrims, as access is restricted to Orthodox Christians –unless non-Orthodox visitors have successfully

---

<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons for this increase was the end of communism in 1990, as also recorded by Forbess (2005) in her account of Romanian Orthodox monasticism. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the European communist governments, thousands of young men from ex-communist Eastern states found themselves unemployed.

requested a special permission for research, or other purposes-. Inevitably, the monasteries had to adjust the rules of their daily life to accommodate all the worldly visitors. According to the monks, visitors are allowed to stay only for a few nights at a time, so that they do not interrupt the ‘spiritual life’ of the monastery [Vatopaidian monk 28/9/02]. However, the shorter the visitors’ stay in one monastery, the more visitors each monastery gets every year, and the bigger the income for the monasteries<sup>12</sup>.

Inevitably, external changes had an impact both on the way of life inside the monasteries, and in relation to their conduct and vocation outside the Republic’s borders. For instance, the ‘virgin’ landscape is not as ‘unchanged’ as it is presented to visitor-pilgrims. It has been transformed several times in the past, mainly because of the great fires of 1580, 1622, 1891 (Elseos and Papaghiannis 1994: 48), and most recently, in August 1990, and February 2004. Furthermore, Elseos and Papaghiannis have identified as the main ecological problem the desertification of the land caused by the exploitation of the forest by extensive logging (*Ibid*: 51-4). They also observe that the introduction of telecommunications, water pipes, machines, and electrical generators into the peninsula ‘threaten the calmness, form and function of the environment... The pollution of the space from concrete and liquid waste could be out of control’ (*Ibid*: 43, *my translation*). Transformation of the landscape has caused internal anxieties about recent changes, such as the exploitation of the land, the sharp rise of religious tourism, and the importation of new technologies, such as heavy machinery, electric generators, and the internet, that undermine the separation from the ‘world’.

In recent years, the monasteries have become small co-operations run by *Athonian families* (see also glossary). Young monks have introduced new telecommunication technologies, which keep a direct contact with the ‘world’, have published numerous

---

<sup>12</sup> In respect to the tradition of virginity, and to Mary’s invisible presence, no monk or visitor is allowed to bare any part of their body during the boiling summers, not even their arms or legs, so that they do not insult by polluting the landscape with their nakedness. Swimming is strictly forbidden, and if a visitor is not inside a monastery by sunset, when the main gate is shut, he is left to spend the night in the forest until dawn, when the gate opens. The use of mobile phones is forbidden in the monastery, and the visitors have to follow the program of the monks, and always remain at the spaces designed for their accommodation (guest-house, church, and refectory) separately from the monks. Furthermore, they are not allowed to take any photographs, unless they have the permission of the abbot. Visitors rarely break the rules, and if they do they are black listed by the central authority at the village of Karyes. Because this is thought to be the garden of Mary, it is also thought to be naive to think that anyone can break the rules of the land and remain unpunished.

books about the teachings of their elders, and have engaged in the global religious market of the ‘occult economies’ (Comaroffs 2000: 310) by selling copies of miraculous icons, recorded prophecies about the end of the world, books about the life of spiritual fathers, and other products such as honey, wine, and rosaries. Such products may be distributed through the Internet, or through a network of churches and religious shops that retail worldwide. For instance, there were almost 23,000 sites under the request for ‘Sacred products of Mount Athos’ in my last search of *Google* [May 2007]. A pilgrim consumer can buy ‘holy’ products from commercial sites such as ‘Monastery Products on Line’ at [www.monasteryproducts.org](http://www.monasteryproducts.org), or even virtually visit the Church of Vatopaidi at [www.ouranoupoli.com/athos](http://www.ouranoupoli.com/athos). This enthusiastic engagement of some monasteries with the virtual world of the internet, as well as their economic activities inside Athos (such as the exportation of wood and the importation of visitors) raise serious moral questions, because such developments both contradict and undermine the ideal separation of Athos from the secular world.

External politics also affect the monasteries in the context of the monasteries’ relationship to the Greek state; in particular, disputes with the Greek mainland state (and also with other countries) over the proprietorship of monastic property (*metochia*) – proprietorship that was given during Byzantine and Ottoman administrations (*see* chapter 8). EU funding represents another problem in relation to the prohibition of women from the peninsula. For the monks, the prohibition is a matter of tradition and identity, as the rule highlights their disconnection from the secular ‘world’. But while most monasteries continue receiving funding, they protested against discussions that took place in 2002 and 2003 about the constitutional rights of women to enter all European sites, since they pay taxes to their government and indirectly to the EU, which funds the Athonian monasteries. The problem is not resolved. Women are still not allowed to enter, despite the funding that most monasteries continue to receive. Yet, the internal presence of visitors, and the external conduct of the monasteries within and against the Greek state creates a tension between monasteries and ‘cosmopolitan’ institutions. The presence of visitors also causes moral dilemmas, such as monks’ involvement in public life, an involvement that can contradict the moral value of virginity that separates the spiritual world of Athos from the ‘worldly world’ (*kosmikos kosmos*).

In Orthodoxy the ‘two worlds’ remain separate yet connected, but unequal and asymmetric, for while the laity by a positive effort can transcend the limitations of their flaws through fasting and piety [...] the monastics have chosen the ‘elevated’ path, and an increasing involvement in the ‘world of the flesh’ must be negatively evaluated (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991:16-17)

Inevitably, the way of dealing with such contemporary issues, such as the rise of religious tourism, the issues of funding and properties of the monasteries outside Athos, as well as the impact of new technologies both on the landscape and the Athonian way of life, have divided the monastic republic in terms of how the monks should re-adjust their lives. On the one side are those monks who have enthusiastically grasped the opportunities that the ‘world’ offers, funding and technology to name a few, and on the other, those monks who denounce those changes, seeing them as polluting to the ‘sacred tradition’ (*iera paradosis*). This presents us with the essence in the paradox of monastic life: the moral contradictions between the ideal, as expressed in the value of virginity that separates the monastic from the secular ‘world’, and the reality in the practice of economy in which the spiritual and material realms are complementary and interdependent to each other.

## 5. Fieldwork

I chose to do my fieldwork in two neighbouring, but rival monasteries (Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou) because they represent the two extreme regimes monks employ to deal with recent changes on Athos: on the one hand, the Vatopaidians call the monks of Esfigmenou the ‘fundamentalists’ because of the latter’s ultra-Orthodox life and political activism, while the monks of Esfigmenou call their neighbours ‘traitors’ to their ‘true faith’ because of the Vatopaidians enthusiastic adoption of new technologies, acceptance of EU funding, and financial involvement in Greece [from personal communication with monks of both monasteries]. Accordingly, the monasteries represented contrasting environments: Vatopaidi is the best example of the recent revival of monastic life on Athos, as in the last twenty years it became the richest and most powerful institution on the peninsula; by contrast, the neighbouring Esfigmenou has the reputation of being the ‘last tower of zealot monks’ and of being ‘the poorest monastery on Athos’ [from personal communication with visitors]. At the time when I was inside the monastery conducting my research, the monastery was blockaded by police, which made the conditions of the monastery even harder. According to the

eviction note issued to the brotherhood of Esfigmenou in February 2003, the embargo was imposed by the Holy Committee and the Patriarchate in Istanbul because of the zealots' refusal to participate in the Holy Committee, and because of their extremist beliefs and political activism outside Athos that divided the internal peace of the peninsula.

I visited the two monasteries ten times between 2002 and 2004<sup>13</sup>. Each visit lasted from a few weeks to a few months, and I spent in total a little more than eight months inside the monasteries. The reason for me going in and out of Athos was personal, as in both monasteries I felt a strong effort by the monks to make me one of them, and so after a while I had to come out in order to release the pressure on me. In my first trip to Vatopaidi, the guest-master asked me: 'What are you doing here? My poor child, don't you have any clothes to wear?' By this cryptic consideration, he meant two things: what was I actually doing there and why did I want to stay for long periods, and if I considered wearing new clothes, that is, the monastic cap? I clarified that I was there for a research on contemporary monastic life. The priest-monk then replied: 'It is not important why you think you are here. *You are here*, and that's important, that's God's will. You are here not because of what you think, but because God brought you' [29/9/02]. Over time, I was also encouraged to wear the monastic robe and black cap, worn by the novices. So, despite my clearly stated intentions, the monks of both institutions rather saw me as a potential monk. This had both positive and negative effects on me, on the one hand giving me access to areas which are restricted to monks and friends of the monks only, while on the other, raising ethical questions about my own conduct in each monastery.

In each monastery there were different things requested by the monks for me to be allowed to stay for long periods. In Vatopaidi, where I spent most of my time, I was immediately asked to confess to a priest-monk who became my 'spiritual father' (*pneumatikos pateras*), and to whom I confessed every two nights. I was also immediately allowed to receive the Holy Communion with the rest of the brotherhood, but it was left to my discretion. During the day, I was assigned to work under the

---

13 Trip 1: 19/2/2002 Vatopaidi, Trip 2: 29/11/2002 Esfigmenou, Trip 3: 5/1 2003 Esfigmenou, Trip 4: 25/2/2003 Esfigmenou, Trip 5: 25/3/2003 Vatopaidi, Trip 6: 6/6/2003 Esfigmenou (jumping fence because of embargo), Trip 7: 2/8/2003 Vatopaidi, Trip 8: 12/9/2003 Vatopaidi, Trips 9-10: August 2004 Vatopaidi, Esfigmenou

supervision of another priest-monk, helping at the guest-house (*archontariki*), washing the dishes, clearing tables, washing the visitors' bed-sheets, or helping with other jobs, such as sweeping the floors of the chapels, cutting the burned wax from the candles to be used again in liturgies, or helping with the packaging of hand-made products, such as rosaries, crosses, and 'blessed' ribbons, to be exported in the Orthodox market. My double supervision, during the nights in my confessions to my spiritual father, and during the day in my daily work under the supervision of the priest-monk acting as the guest-master, inevitably put me in a position of learning, as if I was a Vatopaidian novice. This helped me to experience and to gain much information about the spirituality of monastic practices and the values of Vatopaidian life on a day-to-day practical basis.

Vatopaidi was a highly organized environment, where life was co-ordinated according to a strict daily program. It was also too busy, so that I could not even get the time to write down my fieldwork notes. Over the months, my ambivalent presence became increasingly annoying to the monks, and they started seeing me with suspicion. One evening, the priest-monk who was supervising me at work, asked me: 'My child, what are you writing and writing all the time? Are you spying on us?' Despite my clear intentions to investigate monastic life, my relationship with the Vatopaidians was never clear. I started feeling my personal world becoming property of the monastery, especially because of my frequent confessions to my spiritual father. I started feeling suffocated, and eventually I stopped talking to monks or taking notes. In the moral context of communal life, my research exemplified self-interest, and my ambiguous behaviour made me feel guilty of hypocrisy. My confessions were increasingly difficult as it became apparent that I did not have what my spiritual father had asked me to have in my very first confession: an *aim*, because I was not ready to join the monastery. In retrospect, I realized that my fieldwork was an introduction to this spiritual family, putting me in a kind of personal ordeal, which had to be resolved: either I was to be reborn as a monk, or I had to realize that it was time to go. In the end, I was obliged to take the latter decision, because it became obvious to me that the Vatopaidians thought I had stayed long enough.

In between time in Vatopaidi, I also walked five kilometres to the north to the neighbouring monastery of Esfigmenou. The monks in this monastery received me in a

very different manner, revealing a unique understanding of monastic life. I was not required to confess, as these monks believed that frequent confession and Holy Communion are a ‘characteristic of the Latin Church’ [Esfigmenou guest-master 11/11/02]. Instead, it was required of me to cut my long hair otherwise they would deny me access. But my hair was not the only compromise I had to make. In respect to the value of hospitality, the Abbot did not allow the monks to ask favours from visitors. Instead, he insisted that no matter how long secular visitors stayed in the monastery, they should not help the monks, but only pray. This made me feel uncomfortable. In Vatopaidi, I thought I could pay back the Vatopaidians for their hospitality, by offering my help with the *archontariki* and other tasks, but here my help was unwanted. While in Vatopaidi I worked every day, actively getting involved in the monastery under the supervision of a priest-monk, and getting educated in matters of obedience and humility; in Esfigmenou, all I had to do was pray. Sometimes, my willingness to work even created problems. While the deacons were responding positively to my requests to help at the *archontariki* with the washing, the *archontaris* priest-monk ordered me to stay away from the kitchen.

As already mentioned above, in February 2002 Esfigmenou was placed under embargo by the Athonian authorities, which led to the exclusion of all supplies and visitors. During the embargo police were present, waiting to arrest the ‘occupiers’: the abbot and elders of the monastery (Holy Committee’s eviction note 2002: 5). Although the monks insisted staying and supporting their cause in numbers, many visitors, including myself, wished to get out at some point. Although the situation would be considered an excellent chance of recording the extremes of monastic life on the Mount, I think that the social life of Esfigmenou became too affected by the events outside the monastery, and did not offer a clear picture of revival as it did in Vatopaidi. The political turbulence took over the life of the monastery, and by comparison, the life of Vatopaidi was a much more stable and transparent example for understanding the uses of traditional practices and structures in the recent economic revival of the monastery. For this reason, despite spending equal time in both monasteries, the material of this thesis focuses on Vatopaidi, in order to show how this development took place from the inside world of the monastery, while looking at Esfigmenou’s alternative way of life as an extremist critique of the rigid structures of Vatopaidian life, while highlighting the

heterogeneity and involvement of the monasteries within and against the ‘cosmopolitan world’, and each other.

The comparison of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou will reveal their different ways of engaging with the same ‘world’ the monks morally and practically denounce in their daily lives. It will also reveal a different set of strategies, moral priorities, and a contrasting vocation: for the Vatopaidians the ideal of virginity offers the *means* to achieve salvation (through practices of faith, ordinations, and orderly values, such as obedience, humility, and privacy); for the monks of Esfigmenou virginity is the *ends*, embodied in their value of ‘self-martyrdom’ (*autothysia*), a public cry of ‘true faith’ (*alithini pistis*). In respect to the contrasting ways the two monasteries relate to the secular world, Loizos argued that ‘on Mount Athos... there is a range of monasteries representing varieties of Orthodoxy. In some the physical regime for the subjugation of the body is much stricter, and the degree of opposition to the secular world much sharper. So we may expect to find that even among monks, masculinities are plural rather than singular, divergent rather than convergent’ (Loizos 1994: 76). These masculinities are tested in recent changes that directly affect the ‘sacred tradition’ (*iera paradoseis*) shared by the monasteries, such as the introduction of electricity, heating, and the internet, the impact of the rise of religious tourism, ecological considerations such as deforestation, and other internal matters described as ‘matters of faith’ (*themata pisteos*), and summarized by the political conflict over the symbolism given to the ‘old’ (*palaio*) Julian calendar and the ‘new’ (*neo*) Gregorian calendar that divides Athos into ‘New Calendarist’ (*Neoimerologites*) and ‘Old Calendarist’ (*Paleoimerologites*) monks. These conflicts extend to property disputes in the Greek state, the matter of funding and influence of the EU law on monastic life and political issues, including the rise of nationalism and fundamentalism particularly among the Greek population of the peninsula.

In other words, there is a connection between the internal regime of each monastery and its relation to a ‘worldly world’ (*kosmikos kosmos*) out there. The comparison of the collective life and values of the two monasteries will detail the above point: the Vatopaidians lead a strictly ordered way of life that emphasizes the separation of spiritual from administrative duties. In daily life they demonstrate the values of ‘obedience, virginity, and poverty’ [Vatopaidian priest-monk 29/9/02] with the aim to

achieve *apatheia* (meaning to be ‘without passions’), a detachment from the material surroundings. By contrast, the monks of Esfigmenou demonstrate a passionate way of life, which emphasizes public manifestations of faith such as exorcisms, as spectacles that reveal the struggle of monastic life. The different aspects of monastic life is emphasised by their contrasting attitude towards central monastic values, such as that of *filoponia* (meaning to be ‘a friend of pain’): while for the Vatopaidians it is the *means* in achieving salvation, for the monks of Esfigmenou it is the *ends*.

## 6. Methodological Issues

The ethnographic material that I gathered during these visits derives from living and participating in various aspects of monastic life, as well as talking at length to both monks and visitors about their personal motivations, secular pasts, miracles and personal experiences. I also paid particular attention both to miraculous icons, relics, legends and prophecies, which are rooted in the Orthodox tradition and are still playing an important role in the daily life of the monasteries. The material is presented with a glossary (at the back of the thesis) of exclusively Greek Athonian terms, which are italicised. At the back there is also an appendix, in reference to the text, with a selection of some of the data I gathered that I find particularly illuminating, including extracts from interviews (also offered in footnotes) on the personal past, miraculous stories, and personal experiences of monastic life, as well as other information such as chronological timetables, ranking tables, and so on.

At the field I used participant observation as the means of experiencing a limited example of monastic life, and I also recorded, in Greek, conversations and interviews with monks and visitors collected in a notebook on the spot. These I translated into English in the evenings, if I had the time and energy. Although in the beginning I did not have an aim or focus for my research, gradually I came to explore the Athonian concepts of ‘virginity’ and ‘economy’, the former imagined as the eternal ideal, while the latter as the practical compromise towards the ideal in everyday life. In the field, I took the position of the learner. I tried to talk to as many people as I could, all kinds of monks and visitors from all over the world. Although much of the material comes from Greek monks, my main informant in Vatopaidi was from France, and in Esfigmenou from Albania. I travelled to the Greek *sketes* (monastic villages) of St. Anna and Young

St Anna, to the Romanian *skete* of St Prodomos, as well as, to the monastery of Meghisti Lavra where I spend another fortnight, the huts of Katounakia and Athoniada School near Karyes, and the Vatopaidian *sketes* of St Andrew *Serrai*, and St Demetrius. Furthermore, I did not limit my research to Athos, but also actively looked at the involvement of the monasteries in north Greece, even joining the meetings of the ultra-extremist Christian Orthodox political party of St Basilios (ELKIS) whose activities were blessed by the abbot of Esfigmenou.

I also looked at the monks' own vocation via the internet, their publications of magazines, books, and pamphlets about the life and tradition of their monasteries, and other public data which showed how the monks use new technologies and politics to advance their 'sacred tradition'. In particular the internet offers an arena of conflict and contestation between monks of rival monasteries, ethnicity, or social background. This proved to be very useful in understanding the vocation of each monastery within and against the 'world' out there. This material collected from native resources is juxtaposed to archival research, such as the exemplary research of Papachrysanthou (1992), and statistically based research (Mantzaridis 1995, 1997, 2005) and Sidiropoulos (2000), among others. These data will help to contextualize the personal experiences and histories as narrated to me by the monks, about the greater historical changes and how these changes have formed and affect everyday life. In turn, this will reveal the agency and contemporary strategies of the monks within the historical contexts that they have constructed for themselves, through which they paradoxically engage with the material world that is morally and practically denounced in their everyday life.

My conduct as a learner presented me with various methodological and ethical issues of representation of the material, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, in relation to the general issue of the gap between theory and practice. Here, I wish to argue that the issues of historicity and interpretation of data coming from the field is further related to the ethical issue of anonymity. On Mount Athos there are twenty autonomous monasteries with their own respective traditions and histories. In this heterogeneous context, anonymity falls in the trap of exoticism (*a* Christian monastery

of a magical place)<sup>14</sup>, as each institution has a name that must be respected. In this moral context, the anonymity of a place is entangled with issues of a-historicity and exoticism of religious communities, as a critical take on the Anthropology of the Mediterranean will show (*see* next chapter). Anonymity tends to deny the agency of monks, putting them in ‘eternal’ and anonymous contexts, while displacing them historically. Furthermore, since the monasteries have joined the world of the internet and the new media, anyone can ‘visit’ Athos through their computer screens, and even light up a candle online at <http://www.Vatopaidi.com> [22/3/06]. Part of the material also derives from what the monks write on the internet, as the virtual world has become a space of contestation of ‘matters of true faith’ (*themata alithinis pisteos*) between opposing groups of monks and monasteries, which contest the same tradition. The elders of both monasteries I visited have been exposed in the public light, because of well-publicized financial and political misgivings within and against the Greek state. Unlike the stereotype of the anonymous monk, the Greek newspapers named (and some of them shamed) the elder monks who represented the monasteries in Greek public life. While the anonymity of the monks is necessary, the anonymity of the monasteries would not only contradict the attitude of the elders of the two monasteries that I visited, but worst of all, denies the agency and active role of the monastic institutions in public life.

This leads me to the third and final issue about fieldwork: how to contextualize personal experience first on paper, and second, within a neutral theoretical framework. I found it particularly difficult to contextualize all my experiences and encounters in the field within the word limit of the thesis. The monks often repeated the same advice, and this constant repetition affected me on the field, but I could not show how it affected me on paper because it is incumbent upon me to clarify the material and avoid repetitions. Furthermore, the experience of being there has no real ethnographic value on paper, if not interpreted within a historical and sociological framework. In this sense, there were things that I felt and experienced which words cannot describe, things outside myself (as in Durkheim’s concept of ‘society’, Jung’s concept of the ‘collective

---

<sup>14</sup> Here, I wish to highlight that the anonymity of a village, while situating it perfectly on a map is a bit naive. For instance, Herzfeld’s (1985) monograph of the Cretan village of ‘Glendiotes’, aimed to protect the informants by keeping the village anonymous, because of its content on animal theft. However, the actual position of the village on the map makes it very easy for anyone interested to recognize in close proximity the village he was writing about.

unconscious', and Dilthey's concept of the 'historical consciousness', all of which are seen as being external from the individual existence, *a priori* manifestations of the feeling of 'numinous' (Otto 1950: 8-11). On the other hand, the constant repetition of the same words and dogmas by the monks, in various different and often contradictory contexts, made it difficult to crystallize their views (as in Bloch's criticism of the non-communicative ideological power of ritual language, 1974: 55-81). In this respect, the material has to be considered as an approximate effort to describe my experiences and understanding of the elementary structures of monastic life on Athos, its historical context, and the complementary relationship between the monasteries' internal regimes and their respective external vocations.

## 7. Chapters

The general aim of the thesis is to investigate the paradox of monastic life contained in the dichotomy of material and spiritual worlds, as expressed in the Athonian value of virginity, and as practiced according to the value of economy. As the central organizing principles of the material, I will be exploring the Athonian concepts of virginity (as the ideal) and relating this to the central organizing principle of economy (the practical compromise in the process of achieving this ideal). I will do this to investigate their contrasting, but also complementary relationship, in three different settings: first, on a personal level in which cleansing rites of passage, such as both long-term ordinations and daily confessions, open the path towards a virgin self. These rites follow the general structure of Van Gennep's 'rite of passage' (1909): each individual monk is initially separated from the community to return from the *liminal* space (for example the chapel where confessions take place) as a cleansed member, who is then reunited with the brotherhood by receiving the Holy Communion.

On a second level, I investigate the value of virginity and practice of economy in relation to the internal economy of each monastery, in which economy refers to a particular way of thought ('economy of passions') as the personal means of daily conduct of each monk in relation to the community and the natural environment. I wish to show how on the moral basis of virginity, further divisions of space, time, hierarchy, labour, and activities, take place, during which the monks function as an organic body. Third, I wish to examine the external economies of the monasteries, by looking at how the value of virginity is used by the rival monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou, in

respect to their economic and political interests in public life. The aim is not only to describe the heterogeneous character of Orthodox monastic life on Athos, but also to offer a record of the rapid changes that took place in the last two decades on Athos, a records that will expose the entrepreneurial agency of the monks in the same ‘world’ they morally reject.

The aim of the thesis is to offer a historical and ethnographic record of change, comparing the rapid developments of the two rival monasteries in the last two decades. It further contributes to the discussion over a cultural opening for an anthropology of Christianity, focusing especially on Christian Orthodox monastic life, which is an underdeveloped field because of its familiarity and, yet, distance from secular life (*see* next chapter). It covers a number of themes, beginning with how virginity informs ideas about the landscape and the daily life of the monks, as well as providing a central point of reference in the process of striving to become a monk (chapter 3). The chapter focuses on the miraculous icons of Mary kept in Vatopaidi, in order to make an introduction to the collective ideals and values informing the Vatopaidian landscape, by emphasizing on the agency of sacred objects, style of narration, and reflexive interpretation.

The next chapter shifts the focus from the symbolic movement and agency of sacred objects, to the movement of both individual (charismatic) and groups of monks inside and outside Athos, as the means of repopulating the monasteries and spiritually reproducing the tradition of each Athonian family. Here, the homogeneous and eternal tradition, which I describe in chapter 3, is contrasted to the ephemeral history of Vatopaidi, marked by demographic changes and conflicts between monks of different ethnicities and political backgrounds. Behind the veil of virginity, the recent revival of Vatopaidi was based on the movement of charismatic monks outside Athos, monks who attracted new candidates to revive the social life of the monastery that had declined following two World Wars and the Greek Civil War (1944-9). The second part of the chapter further investigates this movement by looking at the personal histories of novices and monks and their journey to Vatopaidi. The chapter highlights some of the personal issues resulting from the separation of a young novice from his secular past and biological family, following the path of purification that aim to cleanse each novice from the ‘passions’ (*pathoi*) he brings from the secular world into the monastery.

Finally, the third part of the chapter looks at the rite of passage that incorporates each novice into a spiritual hierarchical system. The spiritual reproduction of the monks takes place in between two histories and traditions: on the one hand, the history of the monastery and on the other, the tradition of the Athonian family that dominates it. The two are experienced by each monk's personal perspective, and his experiences within the group, *on the way* to the monastery.

The fifth chapter explores the ritualistic relationship of the monastic self through a detailed account of private and collective practices of faith. It looks at how the monks manipulate time and space through rituals to create a *liminal* and cathartic environment in which each individual monk (and visitor) is first separated from the brotherhood, through confession, in order to be re-united at the moment he receives the Holy Communion at dawn. The succession of night and day that takes place during the Divine Liturgies creates a naturalized sense of catharsis based on the juxtaposition of darkness to light, which have a special meaning for each individual monk, as in the same way the monks consider to be reborn during their ordinations (previous chapter) they are also daily reborn through this cycle of repeated rituals that aim to keep the monastic self detached from the 'materialist world' (*illistikos kosmos*).

Through this, chapter 6 considers the personal and communal regimes of life and prayer, obedience and labour in the monastery. It focuses on the values of 'economy of passions' (*oikonomia pathon*) and 'blind obedience' (*tifli ypakoe*) as the means of connecting the conduct of each monk to the community. The double obligation given to each monk according to the value of obedience (on the one hand, the personal obedience to the elders each monk has to show, and on the other, the obedience shown to the daily routine of the impersonal monastery) extends to a double hierarchical system, which is divided according to liturgical tasks taking place mostly in the night, and working tasks taking place in the day. The chapter looks into how the monastery is thought to be a living body, of which each monk is a living part. However, it will also to monks who do not conform in the community, either because of their personal background, motivation, or ethnicity, which sometimes is manifested in antagonistic tensions between them. In sum, chapters 5 and 6 discuss the process of disconnection and re-connection of each monk to the holy whole, showing how the individual 'heart' of each monk is connected to the 'heart' of the community, called *lavra* (*see glossary*).

The double hierarchical structure is further contextualized within a double conception of time, both on an annual and on a daily basis, according to liturgical and working tasks. The latter, are further divided into internal activities, such as working in the fields or accommodating the visitors, and external activities, such as dealings with ‘cosmopolitan institutions’, renting and selling land and properties outside Athos, receiving EU funding, and so on. In this context, chapters 7 and 8 investigate how the notion of ‘*economia*’ links the house economy (chapter 7) in a complex and contradictory bound relationship with the ‘cosmopolitan world’ (chapter 8). The chapters will highlight both the internal impact of religious tourism to the daily routine of Vatopaidi, as well as its political and financial involvement of the monastery in Greek public life. The aim of the chapters is to highlight the moral contradictions rooted in the tradition of virginity by showing how the Vatopaidians have re-invented and continue to exploit virginity in the new world market of faith (as in Comaroffs 2000).

This ambiguous involvement of Vatopaidi in Greek public life will be further investigated in the final chapter of the thesis, by comparing its social structures and external vocation to that of their neighbour rival monastery of Esfigmenou. The zealot monks of Esfigmenou represent an alternative, and indeed, competing view of monastic life. The most salient differences over ‘matters of faith’ (*themata pisteos*) are a contrasting relationship to the landscape, different sets of priorities and understanding of the aims and ‘nature’ (*physis*) of monastic life, and a contestation of the Athonian tradition which is expressed in the different way of counting time. Interestingly however, both monasteries find themselves entangled in conflict-ridden relationships with the Greek state and the EU. Esfigmenou keeps an extremist political agenda in the Orthodox world, and consequently, a different set of motivations for becoming a monk in its particular monastery.

## Chapter 2

# Toward a cultural and historical anthropology of Christian Monasticism

### PART I: An Introduction to Monastic Life

#### 1. The rite of passage of monastic life

As discussed in the Introduction in respect to the physical isolation of Mount Athos that embraces the *Avaton* (that is, the prohibition of females in the peninsula), the ideal of virginity informs the entire landscape, portraying monastic life as ‘untouched for a thousand years’ [personal communication with monks and visitors]. The tempestuous sea surrounding the peninsula, the thick forest, and the rugged Mount whose southern cliffs break the waves of the sea, as well as the legends and miracles the ‘mother of god’ (*theotokos*), all contribute to the physical and moral separation of the ‘spiritual life’ (*pneumatiki zoe*) of the monasteries. The ‘materialist life/world’ (*ilistiki zoe/kosmos*) outside the Athonian borders seems to emphasise the Mount a ‘holy place’ (as in Ross 1991: 100), a sacred, spiritual, and separated realm, protected by the Virgin’s invisible presence supervising her ‘virgin garden’ (*parthenos kipos*) and ‘unchanged way of life for a thousand years’ [personal communication with monks and visitors]. The Mount offers the perfect place to escape from the ‘world’ (*kosmos*), and its ‘sacred’ condition illustrates Durkheim’s definition of monastic life:

Initiation is a long series of rites to introduce the young man into religious life. For the first time, he comes out of the purely profane world, where he has passed his childhood, and enters into the circle of sacred things [...] he is born again in a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are held to bring about the death and the rebirth, which are taken not merely in a symbolic sense but literally [...] The two worlds are conceived of not only as separate but also as hostile and jealous rivals [...] From thence comes monasticism, which artificially organizes a milieu that is apart from, outside of, and closed to the natural milieu where ordinary men live a secular life and that tends almost to be its antagonist [...] the only means of escaping profane life fully and finally is escaping life altogether (Durkheim 1995: 37)

In ‘escaping life altogether’, the Christian Orthodox monastic life offers a path to salvation, a rite of passage to heaven. Ancient texts, such as St Climacus’ *Ladder to*

*Paradise* (written in the 7<sup>th</sup> century), portray monastic life as a life-long rite of passage to heaven. The path to heaven is a dangerous one. The icon (*figure 2a*) inspired by the book, shows the monks trying to climb the ladder, striving to reach Christ. Some of them are taken by flying demons and are thrown into the mouth of the Beast lurking below them; others, who succeed, are pulled by Christ to a higher existence, which is depicted in the right top corner diagonally opposite to the monks.



*Figure 2a: Icon portraying the Ladder of St Climacus (private and anonymous copy)*

This dangerous journey begins with the ‘esoteric calling’ (*esoteriko kalesma*), the inner voice that makes a secular man escape ‘worldly life’ (*kosmiki zoe*) and become a monk. He then goes through a ‘testing’ period (*dokimasia*, ‘ordeal’) in an Athonian ‘desert’ (*erimos*, isolated monastic settlements) under harsh conditions and constant supervision, to cleanse himself of the sins and the memories of his secular past. After a period of six months to a year, the second part of his ordeal takes place in the monastery under the supervision of the abbot. The ordeal of the novices aims to cleanse them from their secular past in preparation for the afterlife. In the context of the moral separation of monastic from secular life in terms of purity and impurity, the ordeal is the transitory process that takes place in harsh conditions, through techniques of the body that aim to ‘exercise’ both body and soul (*askesis* the Greek root of the word *askesis* meaning ‘ascetic’). After a period of one to three years, depending on the novice’s progress, the abbot decides if and when the novice is ready to join the brotherhood. The successful completion of the ordeal is celebrated with the rite of tonsure (*koura*). During the rite, the novice’s ‘worldly self’ (*kosmikos eautos*) is thought to die, to be reborn again as a monk. The newest member of the brotherhood acquires a new name, clothing, and set of duties<sup>15</sup>. The symbolism of tonsure extends to monastic life itself, which is defined as a process of death:

(In monasteries) humans are not born. They only die. Life inside the monasteries is a preparation for Death. But preparing for Death, just like Death itself, is something full of Life (Mantzaridis 1990:211).

The rite has a double symbolic meaning: it is both a rite of aggregation, as the brotherhood collectively welcomes the new member of the community, while also marking the first stage of the greater passage to heaven. The moral obligation to the community, the self-sacrifice of the novice and oath of obedience to the central authority of the abbot made during the novice’s ordination will become the central motivating force in his daily conduct. He will join a spiritual family and hierarchical order ‘concerned with legitimacy, reaffirming the divisions and hierarchies that are indispensable to a system of authority’ (La Fontaine 1985: 17). Accordingly, after many years of monastic experience, the monk is ordained for a second time, receiving

---

<sup>15</sup> As La Fontaine has noted, the general characteristics of initiation rituals ‘...certain symbolic themes, such as an enactment of death and rebirth, are found in rituals which are not normally referred to as initiation (see Bloch and Parry 1982)’. In such rituals, ‘oaths and affirmations are also commonly found in initiation rituals’ (La Fontaine 1985: 15).

the *Angelic Schema* ('Angelic Patent'), as he is thought to have transformed into an "angel on earth" [following Matthew 19:10-12, 22:30, and Corinthians 7]. The final aggregation can only be found in paradise, where the ladder of monastic life leads to union 'within Christ' (*en Christo*). This final 'departure' (*anahorisis*, where the word 'anchorite' is rooted, *see* glossary), is celebrated with a third rite of passage, the funeral of the monk.

Bloch and Parry (1982) associated ritual death to fertility and reproduction as the means of reversing natural time (and in La Fontaine 1985: 15, and Loizos and Heady 1999: 11). The ordination of novices plays on the theme of dying *now*, complementing Leach's concept of 'sacred time' as the enactment of time 'played in reverse, death is converted into birth' (Leach 2004/1961, cited in Gell 2001: 32), and functions to 'deny the psychologically unpleasant reality of irreversible time' (Harris 1991: 152): in Christianity, social death is pre-requested in order to live in the afterlife: 'If you die before you die, you will not die after you die' (Athonian saying). In this context, the monasteries are conceptualized as both sacred and *liminal* spaces, based on a life of practices in-between life and death, and thought to be both eternal and transformative worlds. In this double sense of the sacred as a rite of passage, the moral renunciation of the material world does not result in its absolute rejection, but rather, it offers a spiritual and practical way of engaging with the material world by morally, emotionally, and materially disconnecting from it. This is a process of learning both about the world through the knowing of the self, as discussed for instance by Richards (1982/1956) and La Fontaine (1985), among others, in terms of experience of ordeals and initiations, as the means of connecting ideas about personhood and identity to the hierarchical and social structures that support them. Richards (1982), in her classic ethnography on initiation rituals among the Bemba women of Zambia, highlighted the importance of upbringing in Bemba children, focusing on the experience of learning a range of skills as well as the songs specific to the ritual of *chisungu*. In the introduction to Richards's book, La Fontaine stressed the educational character of ordeals which provide 'access to a secret knowledge that defines them as women', while 'simultaneously test the qualities of the candidates and provide an essential element of the whole experience which effects the change in them' (La Fontaine 1982: xxii, and also in the context of male initiation, *see* Newman and Boyd 1982: 282).

The access to knowledge and the boundary between the initiated and the uninitiated further reaffirm ‘the divisions and hierarchies that are indispensable to a system of authority. The rituals may also regulate access to assets more tangible than knowledge: the support of a large organization, control of property, the establishment of a household, fees for specialist services’ (La Fontaine 1985: 16, 17). Furthermore, the ritualized life and sacred liturgical calendar of the monasteries naturalize and rationalize divisions and categories of thought and action that apply to each monastic community’s internal and familiar world, as opposed to an external and foreign ‘world’ of the non-initiated (as also in Bourdieu 1977: 140, 164-5). In this way, rituals of initiation are complete matrixes of collective knowledge, forging ‘new identities, not only in societies but also of individuals (Porter Poole 1982: 149), while at the same time contributing to ‘the development of social solidarity and its role in maintaining the security and viability of the local group’ (Newman and Boyd 1982: 241). In these ethnographies, ritual performance is aesthetically defined in terms of its ‘design/ logic’ that carries both a social and a psychological value (as in Kapferer 1991: xiv). Kapferer’s (1983/1991) ethnography on exorcisms as healings in Sri Lanka, through a process of ‘objectification’ which ‘involves setting and interpreting the patient’s condition in relation to those typifications of the social order in which the patient and others daily participate’ (Kapferer 1991: 87). In this sociological context, it could be argued that this enacted process of objectification can be both ‘an arena of transformative, healing participation of both individuals and groups’ (Cannell 2007: 116), and used in ‘legitimizing convention, embodiment simultaneously mystifies the human agency required for the ongoing production and reproduction of convention’ (Lambek 1992: 257). In sum, rituals are not closed ideological systems (as in Bloch 1974, *see below*), but open systems of faith, in which ‘knowledge must be understood and explained in relation to representational moralities, which in turn relate to the type of public sphere and cultural traditions of a community’ (Jovchelovitch 2007: 3).

For Douglas, ‘the physical body is a microcosm of society [...] polarized conceptually against the social body’ (1996: 77): the former referring to moral rules of thought and conduct, prohibitions, dress code, and other habitus that constitute the persona (as in Mauss 1985: 1-25 on the evolution of the ‘persona’); while the later, to objective structures (divisions of time, space, labour, hierarchy) that dialectically contextualize these social experiences in the moral terms of purity. In this sense, ‘the two bodies are

the self and society' (Douglas 1996: 87). This echoes Durkheim's ideas of a double personality and consciousness: 'one that we share in common with our group in its entirety, which is consequently not ourselves, but society living and acting within us; the other that, on the contrary, represents us alone in what is personal and distinctive about us, what makes us an individual' (Durkheim 1984: 84). For Durkheim, on the other hand, the key concept that practically and morally re-connects the individual to society is solidarity<sup>16</sup>. He argued: 'To act morally is to act in terms of the collective interest [...] Egoism has been universally classified among the amoral traits... If there is such a thing as morality, it must necessarily link man to goals that go beyond the circle of individual interests' (1973: 59 and 65, and in Tambiah 1990: 50). This Christian view of morality is directly relevant to Athos. In the words of the Vatopaidian monks, their monastery is a living 'human body' of which each member of the brotherhood is an active part: 'If a vein is blocked and stops working then the body gets a heart-attack' [speech of abbot of Vatopaidi about the importance of obedience in the refectory, 3/4/03]. Each monk's conduct is morally connected to the social order of the community, on the basis of the separation of persons from things: by representing the 'monastery' as a living entity, separated from the existence of each individual monk, the internal world of the monk is kept separated from the external world of the community, which is also, through rites and experiences of passage such as ordinations and confessions), conceived as separated from the worldly world outside the monastery. These three categories of existence (self, community, and world) are then re-united through the daily life of each monastery, under *its* naturalized communal rules, practices, timetables, and hierarchy.

## 2. The Virgin Body

The path of purification aims to transform each monk in imitation to the image of God (*kath' eikona kai kath' omoiosin*), whose embodiment on Earth is visualised in the ideal *imago dei* of the virgin Christ (*eikona*, 'image' in Greek/ *imago Dei* in Latin)<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> 'At the very moment when solidarity exerts its effect, our personality, it may be said by definition, disappears, for we are no longer ourselves, but a collective being' (Durkheim 1984: 84).

<sup>17</sup> In their cleansing path to salvation, the monks have to eliminate the 'passions of the self' (*pathoi eautou*), that is, personal emotions, obsessions, and desires of both the flesh and the mind, which are associated with the Devil and the Antichrist. In this context, Christ offers a model of imitation, while the Antichrist its shadow counterpart. Carl G. Jung similarly illustrated these two contrasting perceptions of who we think we should be (Christ), and who we deny we are (Antichrist), in the images of the former as

Christ is thought to be the ‘first monk’ by the Athonites. In this sense, Christ offers the ideal monastic persona (*see also* Mauss on the Christian ‘moral persona’ 1985: 19-20) based on the value of self-sacrifice as the means of defining Orthodox monastic life. According to the monks, the memories and emotions they have of their secular past, family and friends, reveal a kind of self-interest or ‘self-love’ (Mantzaridis 1997: 24), as opposed to the value of self-sacrifice exemplified by the crucifixion of Christ. Their abandonment of all their properties and individual freedoms for a strict communal life in a cell manifests abandonment of their secular ego. The ego can be understood as ‘worldly’ memories and desires of the flesh, the ‘passions’ (*pathoi*) of both mind and body, which need to be cleansed through communal life, to achieve ‘enlightenment’ (*‘epifotisis’*) that leads to salvation.

The enlightened mind is the person who struggles without passions [*apatheia*], in order to achieve a life of an angel on earth. The virginity of a monk is not only external, as some think. Above all, it is internal, a matter of the heart. The obedient subordinate, with his acceptance and deed of service [*thelima*, ‘the Elder’s will’], and within the love of the Church, gradually comes to cleanse his heart, which is the right path toward a virgin life. The monk who leads a virgin life tastes the life of the angels (Ephraim, abbot of Vatopaidi 2001: 56, *my translation*)

The ideal of virginity is not a sexual condition: most monks are sexual virgins but many are not and some had been previously married with children outside Athos. Here virginity is a system of faith based on communal values, such as ‘blind obedience’ (*tifli ypakoe*) and ‘economy of passions’ (*oikonomia pathon*); a system of faith based on the virginity of the landscape, a landscape kept virginal by the prohibiting of all females from the peninsula (*Avaton*). Thus, virginity refers to the striving of the monks to abolish their sexual urges and memories of their secular pasts. It further naturalizes the way of life in each monastery as a ‘virgin’ way of life, in the images of the landscape, and through it of the cosmos: the body of the virgin mother, both representing and containing the whole (Douglas 1996: 87). Their path to purification is illustrated by Douglas’s (1996/1970) revision of to argue that: ‘there can be no such thing as natural behaviour [...] Nothing is more essentially transmitted by a social process of learning than sexual behaviour, and this of course is closely related to morality’ (Douglas 1996:

---

‘the archetype of the self’, embodying ideals of self-sacrifice, struggle, and justice, being ‘as good as perfect ... the perfect man who is crucified’ (Jung 1968b: 69), in juxtaposition to his counterpart, the devil inside us who we project onto others. Accordingly, the ‘Antichrist’ is the shadow to the archetype of ‘Christ’ with ‘an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality’ (*Ibid*: 8-11), which on Mount Athos, as I discuss in the ethnography, are associated with demonic behaviour, uncontrolled sexuality, neurosis, greed, and deception.

69). In ascetic Christianity in particular, ‘masculinity has been identified with reason’ (Caplan 1996: 8), and desire is seen as a ‘dangerous force which pre-existed the individual, wracking his feeble body with fantasies and distractions which threatened his individuality and sanity’ (Weeks *Ibid*: 32-33). Seidler (*Ibid*: 82-112) looked into the rationality of Christian celibacy, which associates uncontrolled sexual urges to animality and madness, and views women as emotional, therefore ‘a threat to the very existence of “men of reason”’ (*Ibid*: 87). In the thesis, I investigate how the monks perceive the threat females pose to their ‘virgin way of life’, especially in relation to the stereotype of the ‘cunningness of women’, which represents female nature as emotional and dependant, in juxtaposition to the masculine ideal of independence (as in Seidler 1996: 92), exemplified in Athos by the rule of the *Avaton*.

In daily life, each monk, emptied of his worldly past, continues the work of keeping temptation and memory at bay through private prayer, confession, sleep deprivation, and fasting, and with collective liturgies and the reception of the Holy Communion. These practices incorporate him into the daily cycle of the collective (*coenobitic*) way of life, which is based on nightly prayer and daily work. Private and collective rituals and other daily ‘techniques of the body’ (Mauss 2006/1936: 77-95) aim to cultivate the monastic self by testing the physical and mental limits of each monk. Confessions in particular, which in Vatopaidi took place separately from the rest of the brotherhood, in a small dark chapel, or fasting alone in the cell for a certain period, are repeated ‘habitudes’ (as in Mauss 2006: 80) meaning that underneath their private or collective daily performance lies a connection of each monk to a Durkheimian holy whole: the sacred community<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, from the prohibition of the *Avaton*, which makes the

---

<sup>18</sup> I use the term ‘community’ here in the Durkheimian sense of the ‘sacred’, in which ‘God is only a figurative expression of the society’ (Durkheim quoted in Morris 1987: 119, and also see Lukes 1977: 471, Bell 1997: 24). Both concepts of ‘God’ and ‘Society’ are thought to be *a priori*, meaning that they are independent external forces that pre-exist the individual being. Durkheim’s ideas of a ‘collective consciousness’ echo in many respects Jung’s ideas of an external ‘collective unconscious’. For both Jung and Durkheim ‘religion’ was a matter of personal *experience*, a way to connect the individual to this wider collective, through the luminous experiential concept of “numinous” (Rudolf Otto, 1958: 5-11). In this phenomenological context, the individual is conceived as separated from ‘society’, only to be re-united through collective praxis into a sacred ‘community’. Jung described the sublime religious experience of dreams as ‘the influence of an invisible presence causing a peculiar alteration of consciousness’ (1969: 4). In discussing Durkheim and Jung, I follow Rappaport’s (1999) reading of Durkheim. Rappaport underlined that the Durkheimian categories of thought ‘are located at such level, the meta-level constituting it cannot be other than unconscious’ (1999: 172). There is thus a dialectic relationship between collective consciousness and unconsciousness, in what constitutes the idea of ‘god’ as ‘society’.

peninsula a ‘sacred’ space, further rules of conduct and prohibitions are established, which are part of the daily routine, and co-ordinated according to the four seasons (as in Durkheim 1995: 37-38, and 209-211), making monastic life feel as if it is a ‘natural’ part of the monastic persona.

<i>Figure 2b:</i> Rites of passage of monastic life			
<i>Stage</i>	<i>Separation from</i>	<i>Liminality</i>	<i>Aggregation in Catholicon</i>
Novice	Secular ‘world’: Calling	Desert: ordeal	Tonsure
Monk	Secular past: Tonsure	Monastery: virgin life	Departure: funeral
Rites of passage of daily cycle			
	Monastery: communal life	Cell: evening private prayer	Divine Liturgy
	Catholicon: Brotherhood	Chapel: Confession	Holy Communion
	Passions: Desire, greed	Fasting period/cell	Feasting/ refectory

In respect to the value of virginity, Goddard in her study on the symbolism attached to motherhood in Naples, writes that ‘women are bearers, or perhaps *the* bearers of group identity’, and are part of ‘the process of demarcation of group boundaries’ (1996b: 173). In the anthropology of the Mediterranean, and in relation to the values of honour and shame, ‘women’ were, and still are, seen as ‘boundary markers and the carriers of group identity [...] their “integrity” should be safeguarded’, as their sexuality represents ‘the privacy and intimacy of the group’ (*Ibid*: 180-181, and in Caplan 1996: 14-15). On Athos, the masculine ideal of the Virgin Mother symbolizes the virgin monastic body, despite many monks not being sexual virgins. It becomes the moral emblem of the entire Athonian society, raising further questions about the significance of sexuality on Athos. Caplan argued that ‘sexuality, like gender, is socially constructed’ (1996: 10), and organized into what Rubin described as a ‘sex-gender system’ that is, ‘a set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity’ (1975: 159). In this context, sexuality is perceived as ‘an integral part of identity on both a personal and a social level’, thus, revealing ‘a different relationship between gender identity and sexuality, since the former is assigned on the basis of biological sex, not sexual behaviour’ (Caplan 1996: 20-22). Caplan (1996: 271-295) discussed the Hindu notion of *brahmacharya* as self-restraint in relation to Gandhi’s ideas of celibacy and non-violence. She showed how celibacy, fasting, social deprivation and silence form an ascetic type of asexual practice, which aims to conserve and control (rather than completely eliminate) sexual behaviour. This echoes the Athonian concept of ‘economy of passions’ (*oikonomia pathon*) that I will be investigating in the thesis, in which the aim is to control the emotions and urges of

the self, rather than eliminate them, through continuous prayer accompanied by frequent confessions, fasting, and other cathartic practices, which constitute a monastic technology of the self, called *hesychasm* ('silence').

### 3. Virginité and Economy

According to the ideal of virginité, the rites of passages separate the spiritual and egalitarian way of life inside the monasteries that aims to cultivate the monastic self, from the material needs of each monastery. The world outside Athos is perceived as threatening to penetrate the virgin world of the monasteries, and through it, the virginité of monastic life and body. As Goddard writes in respect to the value of virginité in the anthropology of the Mediterranean:

An underlying thread in most of the approaches mentioned is the understanding of the code of honour and the related importance of female virginité in terms of the protection of and competition for resources. The code is represented as an agency of self-defence against encroachment *from the outside* or as a result of conquest (Goddard 1996b: 171, *my emphasis*)

On Athos, a positive value of virginité is that it symbolizes the productivity of the land, as Mary's providence guarantees the self-sufficiency of the monasteries according to the ideal of the providing mother. In protecting their way of life and monastic selves, the monks divide their activities into liturgical that take place in the night, aiming to cultivate each monk towards the ideal of *theosis* (divination), and working activities that take place in the day, based on the division of labour depending on each monk's skills. The division of liturgical and working activities is further supported by a double hierarchical system described by Sarris (2000: 8-9) who draws attention to: 'an informal spiritual hierarchy which exists parallel to other more institutionalised forms of rank'. The former is led by the priest-monks who are responsible for the internal liturgical life that takes place in the night; the latter is headed by the council of elders, which is responsible both for organizing daily work and keeping order inside the monastery, and for administrative, financial, legal, and other external matters.

Furthermore, some monasteries, such as Vatopaidi, use two calendars for counting time: the 'old' Julian calendar (*palaio imerologio*) for the liturgical life of the

monastery that takes place in the night according to canonical hours of the Divine Liturgy; and the ‘new’ Gregorian calendar (*neo imerologio*) of ‘worldly hours’ (*kosmikes ores*) of the day, for their external dealings with ‘cosmopolitan’ institutions of the ‘world’ (*kosmika kentra*). These further divisions accommodate not only the internal needs of the brotherhood, but also the external vocation of the monastery as an Orthodox institution. Alpentzos (2002) discussed the involvement of monasteries in Greek public life by approaching them as educational institutions. He divided the monks’ activities into ‘inside the wall activities regarding several people who arrive as potential monks, pilgrims, or visitors, researchers, traders’, and ‘outside the wall activities of the monasteries regarding the missionary work inside and beyond the Greek state’ (2002: 14-15, *my translation* from Greek).

The construction of time in terms of spiritual and material, internal and external, activities is accompanied by a double set of opposite moral values, which highlight the contradictory character of Christian monastic life: on the one hand, inside the monasteries the life of the brotherhoods is based on collective notions of self-sacrifice, poverty, ecology as symbiosis, the importance of egalitarianism in the brotherhood, and so on, externally, each monastic institution shows a competitive, and at times, greedy and hostile opposition within and against the Orthodox world, revealing an institutionalized ‘unrestricted quest of gain’ (Weber below). In this context, the Athonian monasteries illustrate Weber’s definition of the ‘economic impulse’ of ‘traditional brotherhoods’ as such:

Originally, two opposite attitudes toward the pursuit of gain exist in combination. Internally, there is attachment to tradition and to the pietistic relations to fellow members of tribe, clan, and house-community, with the exclusion of the unrestricted quest of gain within the circle of those bound together by religious ties; externally, there is absolutely unrestricted play of the gain spirit in economic relations, every foreigner being an enemy in relation to whom ethical restrictions apply; that is, the ethics of internal and external relations are categorically distinct (Weber 2003: 356)

In the monastic context, Weber’s distinction of internal and external economic impulses of traditional economies is not far from Durkheim’s separation of the sacred and the profane; the former’s definition of traditional economies echoes the latter’s separation of the sacred from the profane realm; both refer to ‘religious ties’ which are utilized by a set of customs, rules, and symbols into a unified moral system. On Athos, the notion of the ‘sacred tradition’ (*iera paradoseis*) incorporates ideas of the sacred, the internal,

the private and the traditional. These are associated with the ‘spirituality’ (*pneumatikotita*) of monastic life, and perceived as foreign to the external (modern) world. In this sense, tradition in itself is perceived as private, internal, static, and sacred; in opposition to an external world of amorality, self-interest, relentless change, and antagonism.

The conceptually rigid separation of private (such as the life inside the monasteries) from public (the monasteries’ external conduct) worlds resembles the separation of gendered spaces, a concern of early anthropological studies of the Mediterranean in relation to the arbitrary value of ‘honour and shame’. In these studies, the private world (traditionally identified with the *inside* of the house) was associated with womanhood, and particularly motherhood. This was in sharp contrast to a male public space, which was associated with the political and financial world outside the household economy. In this context, Dubisch, among others, argued that the early emphasis on honour was ‘male-centred’ (1991: 33), strictly placing women in the confinement at home. However, she also noted that ‘the division between private and public is behaviourally demarcated’, but at the same time, ‘complementary and connected’ (*Ibid*: 11-12). Pavlides and Hesser (1986: 68-96) further challenged the private and public dichotomy, proposing instead a more accurate description of ‘formal’ (public) and ‘informal’ (private) categories of action (1986: 72). Salamone and Stanton (1986: 97-120) observed that the two realms are ‘complementary’ in household economies and not ‘essentially hierarchical’ (*Ibid*: 103). Other ethnographers from contemporary Greece further challenged the rigid concept the separation of gendered spaces by identifying gender-atypical spaces such as the ‘male’ coffee shop (Cowan 1991: 180-202) and the ‘female’ convent (Iossifides 1991:135-155). Such revisions of the gendered divisions of space offered ‘a major organizing principle that shapes the reproduction of culture, and consequently, the transformation of cultural practices’ (Gailey 1998: 205), challenging the rigid distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’, revealing instead an overlapping relationship between what is thought to be ‘private’ and what is thought to be ‘public’.

For Bourdieu, the dichotomy between internal and external worlds is not only the means of preservation of what is considered to be private, but also the means of agency. In his ethnography from Kabylia in Algeria (1977), he highlighted honour as ‘an instrument of power’ which controls the *tempo* and frequency of the exchange (as in

Bourdieu 1977: 6-9, 15, and in Stewart 1991: 81). Furthermore, the ‘symbolic capital’ that is exchanged between the monastic and secular worlds accumulates to ‘includes not only the land and instruments of production but also their kin and clientele [...] the network of alliances [...] relationships, to be kept up and regularly maintained, representing a heritage of commitment and debts of honour (Bourdieu *Ibid*: 178). Thus, although virginity and economy appear to be kept separately on a moral and ideological basis, in daily practice the two values are complementary to each other, constituting a collective strategy with a particular practical ‘economic logic’ (as in Bourdieu 1977: 96-114). In this context:

Although under capitalism, sexuality and the economy *appear* to have become separate from each other, yet the links between them are innumerable, and both spheres remain significant in the production and reproduction of social reality (Padgug 1979: 16, cited in Caplan 1996: 19).

This gap between what monks think (virginity) from what they do in everyday life (economy) reveals the ideological implication of the value of virginity. Bourdieu (1977: 164-5) and Bloch (2002: 432-445), among others, discussed the ideological implication of structural separations of the ‘system of ideas [...] from the reality of life’, which is based on ‘the existence of this social system of ideas that a disconnection occurs between ideas and reality, rank and power. Once this disconnection has occurred [...] the system of ideas in some matters gain a life of its own[...] evolving within its own mystical rationality and creating further disconnections with the base’ (Bloch 2002: 444). The mystical rationality of virginity in Athos establishes both its disconnection and connection to the world outside its sacred borders. The thesis investigates this paradox of Athonian life, by looking at the adjustments the monks had to make because of the rapid rise of religious tourism, and the changes in the traditional value of hospitality, which has evolved in the last four decades into one of the main sources of income. In Vatopaidi, the visitors are kept in separate wings from the monastic cells, obliged to follow the strict rules of conduct, and prohibited from accessing most sacred and private spaces of the monastery, because of they tend to interrupt the monastic rhythm, liturgies, and way of life of the monks. They are ‘foreigners’ (in Weber’s terms above): non-virgins, who can pollute particularly the younger monks with thoughts and words. In this context, the monks use rites of passages as the means to keep the sacred space of the monastery clean from the passions and bad habits the visitors carry with

them inside the monastery. In return, the spiritual and material exchanges taking place between monks and visitors, on the basis of the spirituality of the place, make a profit for the monastic institution, while expanding its vocation and influence in the cosmopolitan world outside. By comparing the conduct and way of engaging with the worldly world of the two neighbouring and rival monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou, the thesis will show two completely opposite ways of materializing the paradoxical, ‘spiritual’ condition of monastic life, as separated from a world of which it is part.

#### 4. Ethnographies on Ascetic and Monastic Living

In his ethnography on Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, Carrithers (1983) portrayed monastic life as a process of self-liberation through a path to purification (the *Visuddhimagga*). According to Carrithers’ research, personal reformation that takes place as a testing period in the forest<sup>19</sup>. A general motive for becoming a hermit in the forest was ‘economic deprivation’: ‘[...] they left the world because of disillusionment [...] in this view, renunciation is the height of moral purity, an estate unequivocally more exalted than any other’ (1983: 13-15, 23). Carrithers was careful to say that ‘the monks do invariably base themselves on orthodox models, and these models are indeed ancient, but they are by no means unitary’ (1983: 8). Here the praxis in the cleansing process of personal reformation is defined as in-between the ideal (‘ancient orthodoxy’) and the real (‘orthopraxy’), contextualizing the various cleansing practices as alternative ways of liberation from worldly ties.

The Buddhist path to salvation has many phenomenological similarities to Christian monasticism (although in a very different context, since Christianity promises heaven and Buddhism focuses ‘around the doctrine of rebirth’, Morris 2006: 70). Still, both Christian and Buddhist forms of asceticism are pragmatic in the sense that they prepare the body at the present time for a transformation in an afterlife (either Christian heaven, or as rebirth on earth: *karma*). Furthermore, the asceticism in both religions is seen as a way of self-liberation. For instance, Ortner’s (1989) ethnography of Sherpa Buddhism in Nepal, portrayed Buddhist monastic life as a form of liberation from existing

---

<sup>19</sup> The ‘path to purification’ denotes movement from the material world inwards the self, without however meaning that the monks are separated from the same world they morally and practically denounce (see for example his chapter on ‘Asceticism in the Streets’ 2003: 155-174).

hegemonic social constraints; first by enabling a ‘transformation of social status’ of the monk to a ‘higher’ level, and second, by operating outside the existing social order allowing the monks to be critical of the status quo; they may be critical because they are independent, not having to work for a wage (1989: 175-201). In this way Ortner formulated a historiography of the changes in Sherpa monastic life, aiming to show ‘how people can be both created and creators, products and producers, symbols and agents, of that world’ (1989: 3).

In a more recent context, Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) observed changes in the values and practices of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, within the process of rapid urbanization and changes in economic structures: as people became poorer, and collective rites unaffordable, and as life became alienating in the big city, it was inevitable that practices also became more individual (i.e. ‘Protestant’), rather than ceremonial and collective. The writers applied Weber’s concept of rationalization<sup>20</sup>, whereby, a young man turns into an ascetic as a way of ‘comprehending it (the meaning of the world) in the rational form of renunciation, in order to reach the state of grace [...] through his rational actions in this world he is personally executing the will of god’ (Weber 1968: 280, ‘grace’ is translated in Greek as ‘*charis*’, root to the word ‘charismatic’)<sup>21</sup>.

In the Christian context of salvation, the breaking away from secular bonds was seen as self-liberation. In Verdon’s (1988: 488-505) history of ideas about virginity and chastity in the fourth century and their contribution to the formation of European kinship systems, Verdon argued that monastic life offered the means to escape from forced marriages within their kin, and thus, the message of chastity was a ‘liberating message’, as the women ‘had at least a Church to rely upon, to oppose their kin and affines’ (1988: 504). In exchange, the Church acquired more property from young girls

---

<sup>20</sup> Here by ‘rationalization’ I refer to ‘the increasing systematization of religious ideas and concepts, the growth of *ethical rationalism*, and the progressive decline of ritual and “magical” elements in religion” (Morris 1987: 69, *my emphasis*)

<sup>21</sup> Weber defined ascetics as ‘men of vocation’ (1968: 279) because they hear the voice of god. In the Christian sense, the ascetic ‘calling’ is not a choice; it is the Holy Spirit that invites them to become monks: an inner voice they cannot resist (*see* chapter 4). Here by ‘rationalization’ I refer to ‘the increasing systematization of religious ideas and concepts, the growth of *ethical rationalism*, and the progressive decline of ritual and “magical” elements in religion” (Morris 1987: 69, *my emphasis*), and particularly to the institutionalization of ascetic life on the Mount into Royal monasteries (*see* also Introduction, and Papachrysanthou 1992).

and widows. Thus the liberation of the women from their secular past and families has economic implications regarding monastic life.

The importance of movement in the spiritual reproduction of brotherhoods, and its economic implications, was one of the themes highlighted by Forbess (2005) in her research on Romanian nuns. Forbess re-adopted the concept of ‘charisma’ as the ability to creatively stand *in between* innovation and tradition (a ‘charisma’ as defined by Feuchtwang and Ming 2001), and [...] the ability to *travel* (‘hitchhiking nuns’ and ‘charismatic super-monks’) and ‘to mobilise resources outside the convent’ (2005: 152), which highlights the interdependence between the internal world of the convents and the external conduct of ‘charismatic’ nuns and monks. In this context, the term responds to Weber’s definition of ‘charisma’ as a kind of ‘entrepreneurial calling’ (as in Goldman’s reading of Weberian ‘charisma’, 1991:30). In their travels inside and outside Athos, charismatic monks attract more young into monastic life, while also ‘mobilis[ing] resources outside’ the monasteries (Forbess 2005: 152).

Marina Iossifides (1990 and 1991) also explored the life of convents as a way of escaping from the structures of Greek family life, which placed women within the private sphere. Iossifides followed du Boulay’s monograph of the Greek village Ambeli (1974, 1984: 533-556) in which she disputed that the bonding of kinships needs a biological basis. Instead, in the convent, the association of ideas, and the traditional symbolisms of the Greek Church, are sufficient for kinship. Non-biological kinship can also be shown to form socially, such as the *koumparia* (‘best men’)<sup>22</sup>. Iossifides also argued that: ‘In the village this kinship (“true kinship”) is created by blood, whereas in the convent it is held to be spiritual unity. Spiritual fathers, it will be recalled, are better, more truly fathers, than secular fathers could be’ (Iossifides 1991: 154). As Iossifides has shown, ‘spiritual relationships’ are not limited in the convent but expand outside, revealing the interdependence between the internal regime of the monastic institutions and public life. For Iossifides, the ‘spiritual kinship’ and traditions of the nuns depend on the material world outside the monasteries as ‘the nuns have contact with and knowledge of the world beyond their convent walls. By looking at the life of

---

<sup>22</sup> Another form of non-biological kinship is male friendship, as discussed for example by Papataxiarchis in terms of male bonding: ‘as a sentimental alternative to maternal love and the amity of kinship, distinguishing its egalitarian and ‘anti-economic’ (informal) character ‘from economic and political exchange and its dependence from kinship’ (1991: 158).

convents, Iossifides highlighted the effect of the increase of religious tourism in Orthodox monasteries, in the context of the transformation of the economy of the monasteries from agricultural (associated with the ‘local economy’) to a ‘capitalist global economy’ (*Ibid*: 136, 137).

On Athos, in the absence of women and biological forms of reproduction, charismatic monks have to travel outside monastic borders to the ‘world’, in order to gather groups of novices; these novices follow the elder into Athos to repopulate or increase the population of monastic settlements. This results in changes taking place in the internal life of the monasteries, as the young ones bring with them their knowledge, skills, and experiences from the ‘world’ into the traditional monastic setting, consequently resulting to change in ideas and practices. Furthermore, in their trips outside Athos, monks represent the monastic institutions in negotiations and dealings with external ‘cosmopolitan’ institutions and influential individuals, as well as form the vocation of each monastery in the Orthodox world.

These approaches to monastic life cast a light on Durkheim’s definition of monasticism as a ‘sacred’ way of life (*see* quote above 1995: 37). Durkheim argued: ‘*To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use*’ (Durkheim 1995: 38, *my emphasis*). By portraying monasticism as an ‘escape’, Durkheim implies movement rather than a static and rigid separation of the ‘sacred’ land from the ‘profane’ world (as also shown by Turner’s application of his Durkheimian notion of ‘communitas’, the unifying movement of pilgrimage, 1974). Accordingly, the ‘sacred’ monastic life comes in contact with the secular ‘world’ from which new monks arrive, bringing with them new forms of knowledge and technologies, thus, making ‘the communication between the two worlds’ possible (as in Durkheim, *Ibid*). The perception of a static, eternal, and ‘sacred’ way of life (the ideal) manifested as the concept of ‘sacred tradition’ (*iera paradoseis*) and the value of virginity that support its ideal and moral disconnection as an engendered space (from which females are prohibited) contradicts the material and historical reality of the movement of monks inside and outside Athos: The monastery has a material dependence on the population and economies of the ‘cosmopolitan world’; the monastery also exerts its own affect on public life outside Athos. In the

thesis, I shall show how biological means of reproduction are replaced by spiritual ones based on the monks' movement inside and outside the borders of Athos. By looking at both the esoteric, personal, and spiritual movement of each monk in his journey to heaven, in complementary relation to the historical movement of individuals, and how groups of monks carry with them changes into the monasteries, my aim is to portray monastic life as a form of liberation, rather than submission to a spiritual authority. My further aim is to investigate *how* traditional monastic values are applied and changed (in terms of aims, moral priorities, and adoption) in everyday life, and in connection to the 'materialist world' (*illistikos kosmos*), from which they are conceptually disconnected.

## 5. Foucault's monastic body

The symbolic wholeness of the virgin mother exemplifies the masculine ideal of motherhood as portrayed in the figure of the Virgin Mother (Schneider 1971: 1-24, du Boulay 1986: 139-169, and Goddard 1994: 63-4, and 1996b: 189-191, among others). It illustrates the greater contradiction of Christian monastic life such as the separation of the material from the heavenly world; the body from the soul. The symbolism of Mary as a virgin refers to her ideal and divine sexuality; the symbolism of her as a mother represents her as the historical personality who gave birth to Jesus, thus, to her material and mortal existence. The ideal of monastic virginity in itself supports 'a contradiction between ideal and reality' (Caplan 1996: 20), which is accordingly manifested as a paradox of the virgin and/or spiritual body:

'[...] monasteries and convents cannot legitimately reproduce their memberships physically, only "spiritually", the latter is inevitably a condition dependent upon the very flesh it seeks to transcend' (Loizos 1994: 76).

The thesis investigates this paradox in the ideal of a virgin monastic body, manifested as the striving of the monks towards the social condition of virginity, the means for their personal salvation. This journey takes place within particular monastic institutions, or 'social purity organizations', in which 'the seeking of a "true identity"... becomes an imposition... not so much about who we really are, what our sex dictates. They are about what we want to be and could be' (Weeks 1996: 37, 47). In this sense, the virgin monastic body is a docile body, a disciplined body 'that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved [...] the object of control' (Foucault 1991: 136, 137).

Foucault discussed the monastic self in terms of ‘Christian interiority’: the subject of ‘attention, concern, decipherment, verbalization, confession, self-accusation, struggle against temptation, renunciation, spiritual combat’ (1992: 63, and as the ‘refusal of the self’ 1999: 173). Foucault particularly focused on confession to investigate the process of ‘subjectification’: ‘how a religious “subject” is constituted’ (Carrette 2000: 39). He compiled ‘a genealogy of those discourses, through which [...] subjects have been incited to speak or confess the truth of their sexuality’ (Radstone 2007: 41). Foucault investigated the ‘truth’ of the values of *enkrateia* and *sophrosene*, associated with both ‘moderation’ and self-mastery (from the word *en-kratos*, meaning ‘within the state’, 1992: 63-67). In this context, he defined ‘Christianity’ as ‘a moderate morality between asceticism and civil society’ (1999: 126). From a Foucaultian perspective, following Mauss’s notion of ‘techniques of the body’ (Mauss 2006/1935), monastic *askesis* (‘exercise’ referring to practices of faith) can be understood as constituting a technology of the self, offering:

‘[...] matrixes of practical reason [...] which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’ (Foucault 1988: 18).

In his extensive work on Foucault and religion, Carrette (1999, 2000) distinguished three periods in Foucault’s work: the first a spiritual corporeality, the second technologies of the self, and the third a political spirituality. Carrette argued that Foucault’s early focus on spiritual corporeality opened the path towards the study of gendered spirituality, which extended from the study of ‘sexed-bodies’ to the study of ‘sexed souls’ and ‘sexed doctrines’ (*Ibid*: 127). This effort was interrupted by his turn towards the technologies of the self, as exemplified by his focus on confession as a form of self-knowledge purely in the utilitarian terms of the technologies of the self. In respect to his historical material on confession, his archive method was highly selective. Further, the practice of confession was understood as a form of verbalising an identity, which, on the one hand, diminished the importance of silence during confessions as ‘a specific form for experiencing a relationship with others’, and on the other, failed to show how Christianity was a silencing power (Carrette 1999: 40, and 2000: 37).

According to Carrette, the third part of Foucault's work turned towards Christianity in an effort to show how body-knowledge is constituted and used as an ideal of Christian salvation. He expressed this in his notion of the 'government of the soul and lives': 'how one must be spiritually ruled and led on this earth in order to achieve eternal salvation' (Foucault 1991/1978: 87-88, cited in Carrette 1999: 1-2, and also Rose 1989). However, Carrette argues that 'Foucault had attempted to suspend the "spiritual" by prioritizing "the relations of power" against the "relations of meaning", but [...] this failed to establish the interconnection between the two' (Carrette 2000: 136). Carrette's criticism is evident in Foucault's emphasis on discipline, for instance, as the means of dissociating power from the body (Foucault 1991: 138). In sum, Carrette argues that Foucault's early promising concept of spiritual corporeality was left underdeveloped, particularly the history of Christian theology and its meaning. The monastic body described in Foucault's material is limited to showing 'how the regimes of "truth" and "power" operating in monastic life are implemented inside a political-theological ordering of the spirit and the flesh' (Carrette 2000: 40). These limitations include his not investigating the 'religious rationale behind the time-space location of the body (theology/ belief) and [his neglecting] the theological underpinnings of salvation.' (*Ibid.*: 111).

## 6. The Question of Tradition

Carrette's questions over the absence of content in the practices investigated by Foucault, particularly about Christianity, echoes Robbin's recent questions over the general distinction anthropologists make between form and content to overemphasize form above content. In reference to Comaroffs' work on missionaries in South Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1991, 1997), Robbins argued that: 'by defining Christianity as content [...] the Comaroffs decidedly direct attention away from it [...] in terms of which Christianity can never be cultural' (Robbins 2007: 8). The general lack of attention to the impact of Christian thought in daily life in terms of its meaning, which was observed by several writers (Robbins 2003: 192, Cannell 2006: 8, and Coleman 2008: 41, among others) is further illustrated by the general lack of ethnographies coming from Christian monasteries. The latter were also conceived as separated but also familiar worlds, perceived as if they are institutions unchanged by time:

Ethnographies have said little about monastic life, partly, we suspect, because the convents and monasteries are removed from the communities they study. The institution's absence" from village life, owing its physical distance from it, has meant that its conceptual importance has gone relatively unremarked (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991:16)

The absence of ethnographies focusing on both Christianity, and Christian monasteries, is especially evident in the area of the Mediterranean in which 'village communities' were presented as if they were separated from the real world. Isolation is a pre-condition of ideals of purity. Du Boulay in her ethnography of a Greek 'mountain village' noted that the structure of her book 'represents on the whole a static pattern which is based on respect of traditional knowledge and an unquestionable acceptance' (1974: 257). Consequently, any changes in the structures of the 'traditional' communities were seen as 'a threat to the security of traditional thinking': 'all the pressures and attractions of the modern world have combined to undermine the villager at what is now his weakest point –his lack of understanding why' (*Ibid*). Such a conclusion inevitably raises questions of agency, historicity, and moral dilemmas regarding the changes taking place in 'village life', such as the introduction of new technologies, telecommunications, imports and exports, tourism, and so on: 'Any *rigid* rural/urban split is a presupposition that ignores the history of the Mediterranean' (Seremetakis 1991: 6, *my emphasis*)<sup>23</sup>; and similarly: 'dichotomies of the traditional/modern kind encourage a static view of tradition' (as in Kapferer 1991: xv).

However, as Kapferer (1991) and Seremetakis (1991) have shown in their respective ethnographies: *in practice*, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity does not exist, because it is our invention. This is evident, for instance, in the public performance of rituals, such as songs of lamentation, as they were studied in Greece by Danforth and Tsiaras (1982), Caraveli-Chames (1980, 1982), and Seremetakis (1991),

---

<sup>23</sup> In the past, there was an effort to theorize the area of the Mediterranean, focusing on the values of 'honour and shame' (Campbell 1964, Peristiany 1966 and 1976, Pitt-Rivers 1966, Davis 1977, Boissevain 1979, Herzfeld 1980, Gilmore 1987, Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1996, among others). Honour and shame, which I argue are strongly associated with the value of virginity in terms of the honour of the family (as also implied in Goddard 1996a), became '*the* moral values of Mediterranean society', suggesting 'a pervasive archaism' (Herzfeld 1987: 11). It was a 'massive generalization' (Herzfeld 1980: 349) falsely implying a 'supposedly homogeneous Mediterranean moral system' (1987: 69). The homogeneity given to the field implied that the honour code is itself static, although subsequent studies showed variety and change in its conception and application. Still, this early emphasis on a specific element of 'culture' tended to reproduce notions of 'a people without history' (as in Campbell 1964: 6). Thus, such a homogenizing approach to the area was inevitably found wanting as an a-political, superficial, and above all, a-historical approach (Goddard 1996a: 171-172).

respectively. While Danforth's (1982) ethnography, and Tsiaras's photographic material that accompanied it, focused exclusively on funerals, Caraveli-Chames (1980, 1982) expanded on lamentation at home, in the fields, in the company of other women and alone. In this way, she approached the traditional practices of lamentation as 'an avenue for social commentary on the larger world', and a form of 'social protest [...] against the practices of official Christianity' (*Ibid.*: 191). Seremetakis (1991) further developed Caraveli's theory, arguing that the practice of mourning among the women of Mani in southern Greece, offers 'an arena of contestation[...] a space where heterogeneous and antagonistic cultural codes and social interests meet and tangle' (Seremetakis 1991: 15).

The thesis will show how the 'sacred tradition' (*iera paradoseis*) is an open arena for innovation and competition, taking even the form of rivalry between the two neighbouring monasteries I visited. It is used as a 'pliable entity, inevitably subject to interpretation and contestation and a vehicle for claims and counter-claims regarding power and authority' (Goddard 2000: 7). This definition of 'tradition' includes the present 'history' of the monastery, as narrated by the monks who live in it; and it is a matter of agency and power, because of its flexibility and ever-changing nature. Local 'histories' are fused with 'tradition', and vice versa, in a dialectic relationship, which leaves them open to various interpretations. In this sense, Stewart (1991) argued that the 'group style' ('*yphos*' in Greek) of narration of folklore stories about the devil in Apeiranthos on the island of Naxos are 'formed and recognized in relation to the styles of *other* groups' (1991: 122), inculcating 'a sense of participation and belonging' (*Ibid.*: 125). The 'style' of narration reflectively reveals the principles of a collective identity, which is left open to contestation. Thus, the claim for 'tradition' is in itself a strategy of an emergent hegemonic position in reaction to rival groups or individuals.

## 7. The Question of Meaning

As mentioned above, both Carrette (2000) and Robbins (2007) observed the neglect in appreciating the effect of meaning and Christian thought. Robbins argued that this neglect is actively reproduced in ethnographies because of the disconnection of Christian tradition and its content from everyday life, and because of the cultural emphasis on diversity and particularity, which reveals an 'assumption of continuity' that is directly 'related to assumptions about the nature of time and belief that support

it' (2007: 6, 7). He used as an example the failure of anthropologists to appreciate the discontinuous concept of time in evangelical Christianity in terms of revelation and rupture; by their complete refusing to engage with it, and instead re-adopting it within a fixed and continuous evolutionary process (*Ibid*: 9-16)<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, this exclusion of the meaning of Christianity leads to a static reading of Christian culture, thought and values, as unchanged and separated from everyday praxis, while affirming, by refusing to deal with, the methodological gap between Christian belief and its anthropological interpretation<sup>25</sup>.

This question of meaning in rituals takes us back to Bloch's famous article on ritual language and movement (1974: 55-81), in which he rejected the meaning of rituals, arguing instead that because they are based on formalized texts and repetitious movement they constitute 'a form of social control' (1974/1989: 29). Bloch and Guggenheim (1981: 376-386) looked at Catholic baptism as a ritual that is 'denying the woman's ability to produce socially acceptable children', to legitimize the existing power structures on the basis of 'the common humiliation of mothers' and their replacement with the godparents (*Ibid*: 380-385)<sup>26</sup>. In other words, Bloch interpreted ritual praxis outside its cultural and historical context, looking at it as a rigid (and unchanged) vehicle of ideology.

Several writers have since criticized Bloch's approach to ritual as a rigid mechanism of ideology, arguing that he lacked a thoroughly investigation of the *experience* of the actual practice. In this context, Csordas (1987: 445-469), and Coleman (2008: 48) among others, noted that there are various *genres* of religious language encompassing

---

<sup>24</sup> His point echoes earlier questions regarding the anthropological interpretation of time, in terms of 'their time' as cyclical, cosmological, and sacred, and as disconnected from linear conceptions of 'our time', and in terms of time perceived as self-reflexion (Harris 1991: 152, 159, and Fabian 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Cannell traced this issue back to Durkheim's definition of the sacred in rigid terms: 'Since Durkheim, if not before, the attention of anthropologists has been directed as much to the supposed elementary forms of religious life as to the supposed underlying structures of kinship, and with a similar assumption: that by examining what was prior to and other than our own society, we would uncover simultaneously what is universal... while anthropology proceeded from the examination of "primitive" religions to the analysis of world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, the study of Christian areas of the world was, generally, considered the least urgent object of study (Cannell 2006: 8)

<sup>26</sup> '...by the need for a second birth created from the denial of the first, the authority of the power-holders is represented as beneficial and creative in the most fundamental way possible...the legitimation of domination, whether of gender or class, is anchored in the same symbolic use of sexual dimorphism...On the common humiliation of mothers are built the varied and many symbolic constructions of power' (Bloch and Guggenheim 1981: 385)

different sets of motives, metaphors, and flexibility concerning ritual performance, as well as its meaning and interpretation. In this context, ritual language is an open and contested text used both ‘in service to traditional authority and to use it in more liberating ways’ (Csordas 1987: 463). On the other hand, Tambiah also argued that ‘every field anthropologists knows that no one performance of a rite, however *rigidly* prescribed is exactly the same as another performance’ and is ‘always open to contextual meanings’ dependant on social and economic circumstances, personal motivations, as well as the way the words of a rite are recited and their meaning given to them by he who performs them (Tambiah 1985: 125).

Robbins (2007) proposes to return the emphasis on meaning in the context of Christian belief. In the past, several writers questioned whether the terms ‘religion’ and ‘belief’ can be applied to non Judeo-Christian cultures (Ruel 1982: 9-31, and Tambiah 1990: 3 and 87). Robbins proposes to look into the ‘belief in’ something; in other words to engage with the content of the belief in itself in order to appreciate it, by keeping a certain distance from it (2007: 14-16). His thesis was supported by a collection of essays edited by Engelke and Tomlison (2006) which reflected upon ‘meaning as process and potential. Meaning is a sociocultural product emergent in practice, a consequence of boundary-drawing that is generated in diverse, consequential, and often unpredictable ways’ (2006: 26). These issues raised by both Keane (1997) and Coleman (2008), among others, relate to fieldwork and interpretation, in particular the ethnographer’s participation, experience, and translation in and of the field. Keane highlighted ‘the tensions between transcendence and the pragmatic present (1997: 66), which, for Coleman, ‘pose questions about the anthropology of religion as a cultural practice’ (2008: 53).

Both Keane and Coleman referred to Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic model of thought as a kind of conversation between various actors, with the purpose of examining the relation between text and context (author and animator/narrator). Keane pointed to the processes of ‘entextualization’ and ‘contextualization’: the former referring to the extraction of a discourse from its original context, while the latter refers to the contextualization of a text within a particular ideological setting. He argued that by investigating the relation between text and context, the anthropologist will be able to raise ‘questions about religious authority and ritual efficacy’ (1997: 62). On the other

hand, Coleman drew three ways of presenting fieldwork material: first, by referring to the ‘detached, ironic’ style of writing of Gellner, who incorporates three voices (religious fundamentalist, rationalist fundamentalist, and relativist) into a ‘trialogue’ (Coleman 2008: 44-46); second, in relation to Warner’s passionate style of writing, which is based on ‘ambivalent participation’ where he took the role of a ‘kind of secular confessor’ (Warner 1988: 74, cited in Coleman 2008: 50); and third, Coleman compared Harding’s (1987) and Crapanzano’s (2000) respective ways of dealing with ‘ambivalent intersections between ethnographic and evangelical voices’ (2008: 46).

Harding’s interviews with a Baptist pastor illustrate the distance she manages to create from her own experiences in the field: ‘Harding’s [method] is listening in a way that enables her to keep hold of a sense of that distance’ (*Ibid*: 51). In this sense, the ethnographer’s observations are based on her experiences, from which she disconnects in order to be able to reflect upon them. In other words, Harding’s method reveals a way of understanding Christianity in terms of self-reflection (*see also* Robbins 2003: 192-3 and 2008: 9, among others) which, however, presumes and demands a certain distance taken by the ethnographer from his/her conduct and experiences during fieldwork as a kind of a double self (the academic on paper/ the native in the field)<sup>27</sup>.

## 8. The Question of History

The question of how to translate the experience of language and meaning of material gathered from the field is counterpoised by the question of its interpretation. Robbins’s vision for a cultural anthropology of Christianity (2001, 2003, and 2007) focused almost exclusively on millenarian movements, while later collections focused on Christianity’s false prophets and failed prophecies (Engelke and Tomlison 2006)<sup>28</sup>.

---

<sup>27</sup> In respect to my ethnographic conduct in the two monasteries I visited, *see* Introduction. Only to clarify here that generally I conducted myself in similar terms to Harding. First of all, although I might be officially Orthodox Christian according to my Greek id, in reality I do not consider myself one, and this could not be hidden by the eyes of the monks, who eventually got tired of my presence and asked me to leave (*see* Introduction). Second, I was also able to reflect on my notes, which were written on the spot in Greek, but I translated them into English in the evenings in my room. The writing of my experiences in my native Greek language, and its translation into English the following evening, enabled me to keep the distance I had to, in order to enable myself to see through the experiences of each day.

<sup>28</sup> Following Robbins, a number of monographs and collections were published towards a ‘cultural anthropology of Christianity’, such as ‘The Anthropology of Christianity Series’ (University of California press) which began in 2007 and continues producing monographs on ‘global Christianity’, such as in Hann and Hermann 2010 on ‘Eastern Christianity’, and Fedele and Blanes 2011 on ways to go beyond the Cartesian ‘natural dualism’ between body and soul, among others. Furthermore, a number of

Barker (2007: 19) and Harris (*Ibid*: 22), among others, highlighted Robbins's tendency to speak exclusively about evangelical Christianity, when he refers to 'Christianity' in his texts. Harris added:

Further, to propose a particular feature of Christianity as a heuristic for establishing whether a culture is Christian or not incurs all the well-known problems of imposing theological definitions upon popular practice. I don't think that Robbins's suggestion of the hope for salvation will do (Harris 2007: 22)

Harris implies that Robbins's turn to the meaning of content by looking at Christianity in cultural terms presents us with issues of historicity, which is a point that I will return to below especially about how to interpret the past in terms of its 'history' and 'tradition'. For now, I wish to give attention to Robbins's call for *a* cultural anthropology of Christianity (often referring to a post-Calvinist, evangelical type of Christianity) that could suggest a rather evangelical understanding of *all* Christian practices in similar terms. However, Coleman for instance, is not 'willing to accept the view that by looking at evangelicalism and related ideologies', he is 'thereby looking at the extreme margins of Christianity' (2008: 53). Cannell added to this:

If we stop presupposing that Christianity changes everything forever, we may be able to see the experiences of Christianity, in all their diversity, complexity, and singularity, for what they are (Cannell 2006: 45)

To make her point, Cannell (2005: 335-356) investigated the genealogy and links between kinship and the pre-mortal ancestors among Mormon Christians in North America. Focusing on practices such as polygamy and the experience of weeping during the reading of the Mormon Scriptures, Cannell described a 'heterodox' type of Christianity which contradicts ascetic depictions of Christianity (in terms of celibacy and economy); this can be seen as an extension of Parry's (1986: 453-473) earlier assertion that Christianity is an 'ethicised salvation religion' which 'encourages the separation of persons from things'. Cannell's material disputes both ascetic and transcendental interpretations of 'Christianity' by showing a type which fails: 'to supply such apparent essentials as a radical separation between body and spirit [...] between spirituality and kinship' (2005: 352). This separation was further scrutinized in collections of essays that expanded the field of the anthropology of Christianity towards

---

essays were also cited as influential towards an 'anthropology of Christianity', including Ruel (1982), Harding (1987), Csordas (1994 and 2002), and Cannell (2005 and 2006), among others.

other types of Christianity such as Orthodox Christianity that constituted a collective effort to break through the Cartesian ‘natural dualism’ between body and soul (such as Hann and Goltz 2010, and Fedele and Blanes 2011).

As referred to above, Harris (2007: 22), among others, was critical of Robbins’s focus on Christianized ideals of salvation; a criticism that is a by-product of the greater criticism of Tambiah (1990) and Asad (1993), among others, of the cultural approach of Geertz (1975) to religion as a ‘cultural phenomenon’. This criticism raises concerns about both a-historicity and ethnocentrism in the presentation of ethnographic material collected from the field. For example, Robbins’s (2001) material of the Urapmin, in Papua New Guinea, in which he presents them as ‘everyday millenarians’, diminishes the influence and tensions of colonization in that area, and unquestionably accepts the Joshua Project missionary as central in the Urapmin world. In this context:

[...] the real problem lies not with fieldwork or participant observation (or with rural studies as opposed to urban studies) but with how to relate the micro-events of ethnographic observation (wherever they are located) to the wider social and historical contexts in which they occur, and importantly, of which they are also an integral part’ (Just 2000: 25)

The problem is that ‘history’ in itself is the product of a hegemonic discourse. As Harris has noted: the ‘implications of different ways of knowing the past’, and of the ‘assumptions involved in attributing identity’ challenged the ‘concentrated knowledge concerning the past is a function of politico-religious power and authority’ (Harris 1995: 105). In this context, ‘history’ is a type of ‘social memory’ in which ‘potentially conflicting narratives coexist with no attempt to create a unified or continuous version’ (*Ibid.*: 108, and 119). Karakasidou (1997) discussed the political controversy over the name ‘Macedonia’ to show how identities are contested within the gap in-between historical and personal memory. In exploring this gap she collected a series of oral histories and archive material that showed the rich variety of understanding the past on a local level, and the hegemonic discourse on a national level.

In Greece, Colland (1989) investigated the various interpretations of the past as social memories in six villages of Evritania, mainland Greece; in particular how the past is experienced in the present in each village, on the basis of a personal identity. Similarly, Herzfeld (1985 and 1991) and Sutton (2000) looked respectively at present manifestations of perceptions of the past at the local level of the Greek islands of Crete

and Kalymnos in an effort to understand the rationality behind the re-construction of past ideals that associate nationalism with masculinity. In his writings, Herzfeld in particular highlighted the tensions, contradictions and discontinuities in the Greek nationalist narrative within ‘a continual tension between self-representation and self-knowledge’ (Herzfeld 1987: 41). He illustrated this through his concept of ‘cultural intimacy’ (1997: 3)<sup>29</sup>, in terms of subversive action (such as animal theft, 1985) and the hegemonic conception of history, particularly by describing the importance of folklore stories as the means of contesting the ‘generalization’ and ‘repression of history’ (1987: 43-44). Thus, similar to Robbins’s (2007) criticism about how to perceive and interpret the time and belief of the informants, Herzfeld argues that the academic ‘history’ is also biased. He believes it is based on an imagined continuity, which filters the actual discontinuities of folklore stories coming from the field by discrediting them.

According to Herzfeld, this tension between local and national narratives of the past is expressed in rituals, which he perceives as enacted ‘social dramas’ (1987: 33-42, following Turner 1974). These are, as he explains elsewhere: ‘a grand theatre, as when the actions of public figures feed on glorious pasts or central religious myths’, linking ‘everyday interaction with the grand dramas of official pomp and historiography’, by ‘embedding the present social life in the experiences of the past (Herzfeld 1997: 24, 25). In this sense, some rituals are enactments of a golden past that form the collective consciousness of a group. These collective acts that fuse nationalist with religious and mythological elements, announce its mythical elements on the basis of ‘a romantic longing for an idealized past’ (Boissevain 1994: 51). On Athos, this ideal is expressed in the form of ‘Byzantine universalism’ (Tzanelli 2008:141-150), the ‘longing for an age before the state’ in Herzfeld’s terms (1997:22), which ‘automatically imply a continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1f, and 5-8), linked to the forging of an ‘identity’ (Friedman 1994: 121-3, and also Herzfeld 1987: 1-27<sup>30</sup>).

---

<sup>29</sup> Herzfeld defined ‘cultural intimacy’ as: ‘the recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that one considered a source of embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality’ (1997:3). He illustrated the concept by juxtaposing two antithetical, but also complementary, conceptions of Greek identity: first, as ‘*Hellenes*’, a reference to the European idealism of ancient Greece (*see* also Tzanelli on the debts of philhellenism, 2008:129-141), and second, as ‘*Romii*’, a reference to the Greco-Christians of the Ottoman years (Herzfeld 1997:14-16).

<sup>30</sup> Herzfeld (1987) stereotypically described Greeks as ‘aboriginal Europeans’, describing Greek identity as the ‘ambiguous suspension between the exotic and the familiar, between the historically formulated symbolic poles of the European and the oriental’ that is common both to Greek identity and to issues regarding the exoticism and a-historicity of anthropology (1987: 4)

The methodological issue here is how to interpret the past as narrated by informants, especially in relation to the present. Ortner (1989) highlighted this issue in her research: ‘a history of Sherpa religion [...] Sherpa history *is* a history of their religion’ (1989: 8)<sup>31</sup>. Ortner admits that it was ‘relief to informants, who felt their own present personas were not under scrutiny. For the first time I was spontaneously praised for what I was doing’, and wonders if her questions were: ‘somewhat Sherpaized –that I stopped even conceiving to ask-’ (*Ibid*). I was also confronted with this problem during my fieldwork, as most of the monks I talked to did not know the exact ‘history’ of their monastery, and many accounts were inaccurate and contradictory. Instead, informants represented to me a series of selected events narrated in a particular style, which illustrated their conception of ‘history’ through what they considered to be key features of the monastery. When I did try to connect their narratives to Vatopaidi’s and Esfigmenou’s current political circumstances, the monks of both monasteries were uncomfortable and became suspicious of me, especially because they knew that I was also often travelling to their rival neighbouring monastery. Furthermore, although over two years I visited Vatopaidi numerous times, I unaware at the time that the abbot and the elders were already embroiled in financial and political disputes with the Greek state<sup>32</sup>. In this antagonistic context, the various interpretations of the same ‘history’ and ‘tradition’ become weapons in the hands of each brotherhood, forming collective strategies with both financial and political ends, which will be the focus of the final chapters of the thesis.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ortner’s historiography came in response to Bourdieu’s (1977) methodological question regarding ‘objective structures’, such as time and honour, which are ‘themselves products of historical practices... constantly reproduced and transformed by historical practices whose productive principle is itself the product of the structures which it consequently tends to reproduce’ (Bourdieu 1977: 83). The reproduction of the ‘objective structures’ of a status quo on academic papers ‘only reinforce the structures by providing them a particular form of “rationalization”’ (1977: 20). The methodological question Bourdieu raised was, thus, how not to reproduce the rationality of ‘the field of doxa of that which is taken for granted’ (as in Bourdieu 1977: 166, and 17). Ortner (1989) suggested that Bourdieu’s theory lacked consideration of the ‘historical’ contexts in which ‘objective structures’ are formulated, arguing instead: ‘[...]it is only in historical contexts that one can see the relationship between practice and structure fully played out (Ortner 1989: 12).

<sup>32</sup> The dispute, which is discussed in chapter 8, regarded properties and land (*metochia*) belonging to the monastery in Greece, and the elders saw me as a possible spy (*see Appendix 1: ‘My Journey to Vatopaidi’*).

## 9. Conclusion

In sum, this thesis focuses on Christian orthodox monastic life as practiced on Mount Athos in an attempt to expand the fieldwork of the cultural anthropology of Christianity towards an anthropology of Christian monastic life. The debates relating to both the recent anthropology of Christianity and the past anthropology of the Mediterranean are emerged in the field, in respect to the Athonian values of *virginity* and *economy*, which although they are conceptually opposite, *in practice* they complement each other. These concepts show the paradox of monastic life: its moral disconnection from the material world upon which it depends. This paradox can be traced back to Durkheim's definition of monastic life as an 'escape from the world' (1995: 37). In unravelling this paradox, the thesis will show how the notion of economy refers to the daily striving and practical compromises the monks need to make between the ideal of virginity (separation of the ideal virgin body from the material world) and the economic material realities of everyday life, which connects them to this moment of history. In this context, I will investigate the values of virginity and economy on three levels: first, on a personal level, by looking at how each monastery interprets and practices the value of virginity, in relation to the virgin body; second, in terms of the internal 'law (*nomos*) of the house (*ecos*)', the rules of conduct and timetables and the particular morality that accompanies them; and third, in terms of the financial and political status of each monastic institution in the Orthodox world, and against each other.

Taking on board the implications of the literature reviewed in this chapter, I approach Athos as a transnational and heterogeneous space, which is ever-moving and ever-changing, and which functions as an out-of-this-world 'sacred' portal towards purification for various agents, such as charismatic monks, ordinary monks, visitors, novices, secular traders, politicians, and clergy. The thesis emphasizes movement in the definition of monastic life as an escape from the world. This is in terms of the changes that took place on Athos in the past, revealing a history of constant movement and crossing of borders that are considered to be holy by both monks and visitors, and also in respect to the current relationships sustained by the monasteries in the secular world.

In this way, the thesis offers a historiography of monastic life in the tradition of Ortner (1989), through which I further wish to investigate the *current* political strategies that instigate movement and change in the first place. These contrast with the timeless

spiritual practices of detachment as the means of claiming spiritual authority. In the final two chapters, the comparison of Vatopaidi and their rival monks of Esfigmenou, shows the contrasting set of values and moral priorities, and very different ways of connecting to the 'cosmopolitan world'. The tensions between connection and disconnection is important because the monks systematically and strategically disconnect from the material world as the means of re-connecting with it in moralized terms: first on a personal level, second in relation to the revival of the *coenobitic* (communal) way of life in the Athonian monasteries, and third in respect to each monastic institution's external vocation in the Christian (neo)-Orthodox world. The comparative study of two monastic institutions aims to contribute to further opening up the field of the anthropology of Christianity towards a fuller understanding of Christian monastic life, and Orthodox monastic life on Athos in particular.

## Chapter 3: The Tradition of Virginity in Vatopaidi

### 3.1 Introduction

The physical isolation of the peninsula and the rule of *Avaton*, the prohibition of all females from entering the sacred land (as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the tradition of virginity), are supported by the tradition of the Mary as the ‘owner of the ‘virgin garden’ [from personal communication with monks]. This tradition is substantiated by a number of miraculous icons and oral stories associated with Mary. Her icons and miraculous stories make her presence felt in the everyday life of the monks, defining Athos as a ‘holy place’ (as in Ross 1991: 100) separated from the ‘world’, in accordance with Durkheim’s definition of monastic life in terms of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ (1995: 37). In this chapter, I will discuss the miraculous icons of Mary<sup>33</sup> in the context of the rule of the *Avaton* and the masculine ideal of self-sufficiency. By emphasizing the agency of these sacred objects, and their reproductive as well as prohibitive powers, through the miraculous stories associated with them, I wish to make an introduction to the collective ideals and values informing the Vatopaidian landscape. The material draws on two kinds of sources: a selection of oral narratives gathered at fieldwork; a selection of documents coming from various sources published by the monks (the internet, the monastery’s *Pilgrim’s Guide*, books, and Vatopaidi’s monthly magazine *Pemptousia*, among other sources). During fieldwork, most of the monks I talked to did not know the exact history of their monastery, and many accounts were inaccurate, while others contradicted each other. Instead, the stories of the icons reveal the monks’ collective conceptions of motherhood and love. Furthermore, they show how they connect to the Vatopaidian past, and how they use it at the present time in expressing their unique identity and vocation on Athos.

---

<sup>33</sup> The images of the icons are reproduced from the Internet. They can be found in many sites selling copies of miraculous icons, as well as sites about the history of Vatopaidi such as [last visit 1/12/2010] <http://www.ortodoxia.it/immagini/M.%20ATHOS/icone/index.htm>  
<http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/miraculous-icons-holy-relics-of-the-holy-monastery-of-vatopedi>  
<http://www.mountathos.gr>  
<http://www.holytrinitystore.com/virgin-vatopedi-la-c1-3.html>  
<http://russianicon.blogspot.com/2006/04/virgin-of-vatopedi-monastery-on-mt.html>

## PART I: A MORAL LANDSCAPE

### 3.2 The Foundation of Vatopaidi

---



*Figure 3a: Vatopaidi seen from its harbour*



Figure 3b: Vatopaidi from above

Taken from [http://www.pravoslavieto.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide\\_vatopedi.htm](http://www.pravoslavieto.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide_vatopedi.htm)

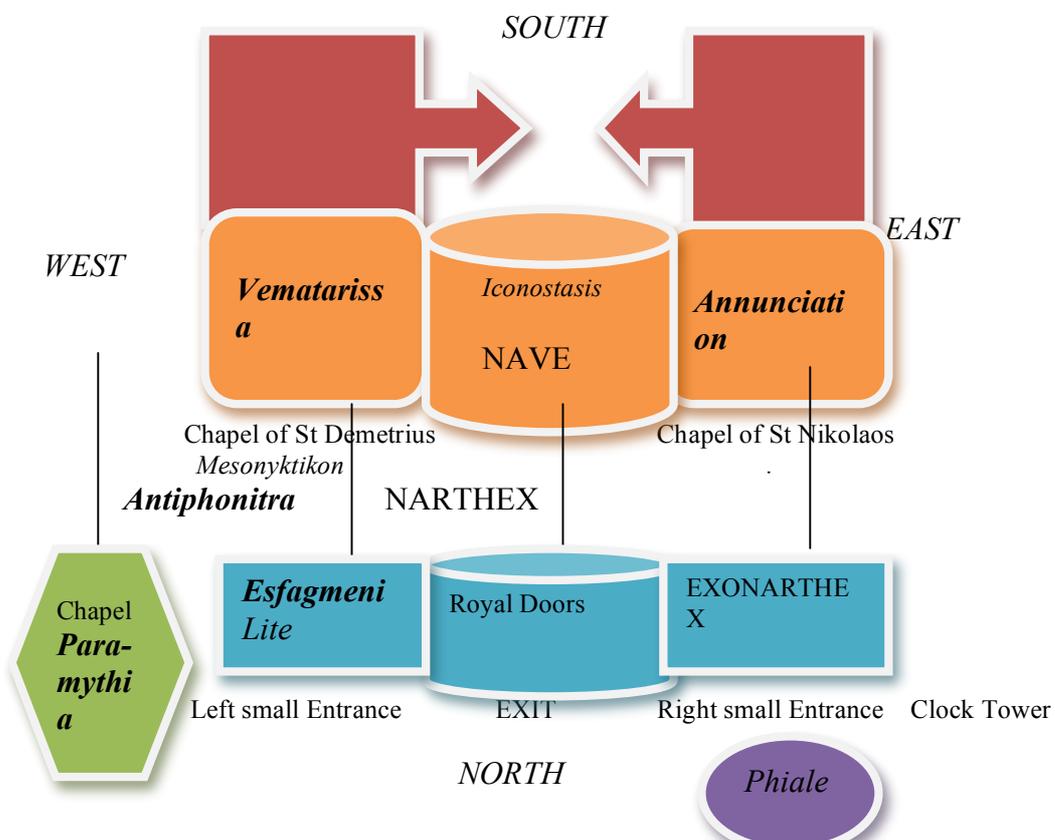


Figure 3c: The catholicon dedicated to the 'Annunciation of Mary

Tradition states that the Roman Emperor Constantine (272-337AC, emperor 306-337AC) was the founder of Vatopaidi, though there is no historical evidence that he had actually founded any monasteries (Papachrysanthou 1992: 32). According to the same tradition, the original monastic settlement was destroyed by Julian the Apostate (331/2-363AD, emperor 361-363AD) and was re-built by Theodosius I (347-395AC, emperor 379-395AC) as a gift for the miraculous rescue of his baby son Arcadius from a shipwreck, a miracle that echoes the legend of Mary's rescue of a shipwreck at the shores of the peninsula (*see* Introduction for a discussion of how this miracle is related to the tradition of virginity). Arcadius was miraculously found by a few sailors, asleep in a basket (like Moses) near a bush by a small river that runs next to the monastery (Kadas 1984: 43, Melinos 2001: 24, 28 among others). In honour of the miracle, the emperor called the monastery 'Vatopaidi', meaning the child (*paidi*) of the bush (*vato*). But the name can also translate as the 'open path' (*vato*) for the 'child' (*paidi*).

Theodosius laid the foundations of Vatopaidi as a thanksgiving for the rescue of his son, and dedicated its *catholicon* to the 'Annunciation of Mary, the day archangel Gabriel informed Mary of her divine pregnancy: 'Here, God and Human become one thanks to the Virgin Mary, who carried the Divine power of the Holy Spirit inside her, despite being sterile, and brought it into nature to become one within us' [personal communication with priest-monk 22/9/02]. As a gift the emperor also gave to Vatopaidi the 'holy girdle of the Virgin Mary' (*figure 3c*) on which 'Christ laid his head', as the monks say tenderly. The girdle is kept in a chapel dedicated to it, which is reserved for visitors and it is situated in front of the guest-house (*archontariki*)<sup>34</sup>. The girdle has a major moral significance to each monk. It is a 'symbol of prudence (*sofrosini*) and virginity (*parthenia*)' (Abbot of Vatopaidi 2001: 24) encompassing all Mary's qualities as a mother: protective, forgiving, and providing. Furthermore, it symbolically protects the 'virginity' of the landscape, which 'has remained the same for a thousand years' [personal communication with priest-monk 19/2/02], and which extends to the 'virgin way of life' (*parthena zoe*) as a moral life based on the exclusion of the presence of women, according to the prohibition of all females from the peninsula (i.e., the rule of *Avaton*, 'no pass'). In this sense, the girdle is a 'dominant symbol' (as in Turner 1967:

---

<sup>34</sup> See more on celebrations and uses of the Girdle in chapter 8, section II: 'Virginity Revisited'

30-1), the sacred object connected to the very foundation of Vatopaidi and directly related to the tradition of virginity.

The monastery and its *catholicon* are celebrated on March 25<sup>th</sup>; because of its close association to Mary, its annual calendar is marked the four ‘great feasts’ in Mary’s honour: her ‘Nativity’ (September 8<sup>th</sup>), her ‘Presentation in the Temple’ (November 21<sup>st</sup>), her ‘Annunciation’ (March 25<sup>th</sup>), and her ‘sleep’ (‘Dormition’, August 15<sup>th</sup>). According to the records, the monastery was built between 972- 985AC, and the *catholicon* (main Church, *figure 3c*) built between 972-978AC with the sponsorship of three traders from the city of Andrianoupolis: Nikolas, Athanasius, and Antonius, who were also disciples of the founder of *coenobitic* life, St. Athanasius the Athonite (Kadas 1984: 43, and Mikrayannanitos 2001: 147, among others). They became its patron saints, bringing with them 9, 000 gold pieces; at that time more secular traders and rich men became involved in Athos, bringing with them donations, land, animals, presents, and gifts of land and estate outside Athos (Papachrysanthou 1992: 226-32). The damage from the attack was followed by a dispute with the neighbouring monastery of Philotheou over a piece of land situated in between the two monasteries. In 1002, the Vatopaidians protested to the ‘First Monk’ Nicephoros over the dispute, which was resolved in the second *Typikon* of Emperor Monomachus (June 1045), granting Vatopaidi the disputed land plus a solemnion, which was an annual allowance of 80 gold coins that lasted until the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, under the patronage of the imperial family of Komnenoi, the population of Vatopaidi increased to 800 monks. According to tradition, as stated in Vatopaidi’s *Pilgrim’s Guide*, published by the monks and sold to visitors at the monastery’s shop: ‘In the years that followed, by acquiring a large number of *metochia* [property estates outside Athos] Vatopaidi began to expand both within and outside the bounds of Athos’ (*Pilgrim’s Guide* 1993: 11). Since then, it is considered to be the second most powerful monastery on Athos, after St. Athanasius’ Meghisti Lavra founded in 963AD, and has always enjoyed a special and close relationship to cosmopolitan institutions in the City (Constantinople) and beyond. The icons are thus nostalgic remnants of those lost, ‘golden’, Byzantine days.

---

### 3.3 Mary as the Owner: *Vematarissa* ('Marching Woman') or *Ktitorissa* ('Owner/ Builder')

In memory of the foundation of Vatopaidi, Vatopaidian monks painted the icon of *Vematarissa* ('Marching Woman'), or *Ktitorissa* ('Owner/ Builder': *figure 3d* below). The double name of the icon refers to its double significance for the community. The first name refers to her as the mother who shows to the monks how to take the 'first step' towards monastic life [personal communication with priest-monk in the role of *vemataris* ('step-man', sacristan) 22/9/2002].



*Fig. 3d:* Icon of *Vematarissa* also known as *Evangelistria* and *Ktitorissa* (14<sup>th</sup> cent) From: <http://www.mountathos.gr/active.aspx?mode=en;0bc0e16a-bb01-422b-9e36-e3fb872c7cf6>; Last Visit: 3/2011

---

Through the ancient, golden frames of the icons, she watches her monks (and visitors) like a mother who watches over her children. Her direct supervision welcomes self-reflection and confession to each participant of the liturgies<sup>35</sup>. On the first Sunday of every month, the Vatopaidians bless the waters of the monastery, parading it with the Holy Cross to the circular marble *phiale* ('bottle', 'bath') of the monastery, which was built in 1810 outside the *catholicon* (figure 3e). This has a symbolic significance, as the water springing from *phiale* is used in baptisms.



Fig. 3e: Picture of the *catholicon* of Vatopaidi with its *phiale* at the right side of the picture (taken by B. Mavridis, G. Lambros)

The second name of the icon *Ktitorissa* refers to her as the 'owner' and 'builder' of the monastery in response to the pirate attacks that stigmatized its foundation. According to the *prosmonarios*, the icon narrates the story of a siege by Arab pirates, during which a monk called Sabbas hid in the well of the monastery a piece of wood allegedly taken from the Holy Cross of St Constantine, and an icon of Mary. On top of them, he placed a burning candle. Miraculously, the story goes, seventy years later a new generation of monks found the icon and the Holy Cross with the candle *still* burning. In memory of this miracle the icon is celebrated together with the piece of the Holy Cross on the 'great feast' in honour of the 'Elevation of the Holy Cross' (September 14<sup>th</sup>). On the morning between September 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, at around 5:00am, the Vatopaidians

<sup>35</sup> This echoes the concept of *darshan* in Hindu iconography as a: '...two-way affair. The gaze directed by the god towards the worshipper confers his blessing; conversely, the worshipper reaches out and touches god. The result is union with the god, a merging of consciousness according to the devotionalist interpretation' (Gell 1998: 117).

presented in the centre of the *nave* of the *catholicon*, the piece of wood from the Holy Cross, which they kept in a wooden box, together with the icon. The congregation then venerated the two items. First in line was the abbot, who prostrated three times and then kissed the holy wood. He was opening the path, holding the *dikirotrikera*, a ‘set of two and three candles’, which is a very powerful item of light that symbolizes the double nature of Christ (double candlestick) and the Holy Trinity (triple candlestick). It was absorbing to witness the powerful abbot, falling on his knees in front of a piece of wood, as holy totem. The moment was so electrifying that the faces of the silent visitors and monks were looking in awe. In imitation of his example, the rest of the brotherhood followed: first the abbots of other monasteries who participated in the vigil, followed by the monastery’s priest-monks, elders, priest-deacons, ordinary monks, novices and, at the back, the secular visitors. It was through such an intense experience at these highly significant moments in the calendar that the congregation celebrated its communal life, united around the Holy Cross.

The Vatopaidians believe that Jesus is their brother, whose example of self-sacrifice they imitate, while Mary is their mother, making her relationship to each monk personal: ‘Mary is *here*, living with us’ a young *prosmonarios* told me [personal communication, 30/9/02]. The monks who worked in the post of the *prosmonarios*, meaning the ‘waiting-man’, keeps the candle in front of Mary’s icons permanently lit; the ‘eternal light’ burning. This small light signifies Mary’s constant presence among the monks, which is expressed in the story of *Ktitorissa* by her miraculous intervention. Accordingly, for the Vatopaidians the monastery does not belong to them; they are only passing by: ‘Vatopaidi belongs to Mary, the *ktitorissa*; it is her ‘property’ (*ktima*)’ [*ibid*]. For this reason, the monks are obliged to follow the rules of the monastery, as a kind of reciprocation: she takes care of their living, and they are obliged to follow her rule. Accordingly, the entire landscape, including the monastic building with its collective way of life, is thought to be her ‘virgin garden’, in which young men are reborn into monks through a ‘virgin way of life’.

### **3.4 Motherhood: *Paramythia* (‘Fairy-Teller’)**

In the absence of women, Mary represents the male ideal of motherhood that embodies the antithetical qualities of being both virgin and mother, and privileges forgiveness,

provision, and protection. Her omnipresence is illustrated by the icon of *Paramythia*, which portrays Mary as the ‘Fairy-teller’ (see figure 3f).



Fig. 3f: *Paramythia* (‘Comforter’, 14<sup>th</sup> century) from <http://www.mountathos.gr/active.aspx?mode=en{1cd9d117-cfde-4050-948a-df212f28fdb2}> Last Visit: March 2011

The icon is kept in a dedicated chapel that is located above the main church. Every Friday the Divine Liturgy is performed in the chapel in her honour. The *vemataris* (‘step-man’), the priest-monk in the role of the sacristan who exhibited the holy relics of the monastery to visitors after the end of vespers, associated the icon to two different incidences separated by exactly by 513 years: the first took place on 21 January 807AC, and the second on 21 January 1320, during a period when Frankish and Catalan pirate attacks had left the monastery almost deserted (Kadas 1984:14). The *vemataris* told me

that on the day of ‘the attack’, pirates hid in the bushes to ambush the monks. Two of them, pretending to be traders, knocked on the main gate, but before the porter opened he heard the voice of Mary coming from the icon saying: ‘Do not open the gates today. Go to the walls and drive away the pirates’. At that moment the baby Jesus tried to cover Mary’s mouth, and said: ‘No Mother! Let them be punished as they deserve!’ But Mary pulled His little hand away, repeating two more times her warning to the monks’ [9/10/02]. The sacristan said that originally the icon portrayed Mary and Jesus in their conventional postures; however, it began moving and changing form after it was painted, until it froze in its present unusual posture. In the picture, Mary’s dismissal movement overrides the authority of Christ, highlighting her authority as a mother (that even surpasses God’s power). The story of the icon expresses the male ideal of motherhood as the all-forgiving, endlessly producing, and eternally providing force of nature, because even despite their sins and judgement, she forgave and warned them about the coming danger. Mary is a contradictory figure being both a virgin *and* a mother:

---

‘The Love of Mary is Incomplete, Expressionless, and Disdainful. Just like herself, her Love is *Sterile*. Despite being (sterile) she gave flesh to the Holy Spirit, and in the same way we ask her to empty out Hearts from the Passions that torture us, and to fulfil our sterile souls with the Holy Spirit. Just like she brought the Holy Spirit in Nature (*physis*), in the same way the faithful must follow their true nature’ [From the speech of the abbot in the refectory on the ‘Nativity of Mary’, 22/9/03].

---

Mary, being both a virgin and a mother, embodies the paradox of Athos: on the one hand, her ‘untouched’ body informs the landscape as ‘virgin’, but on the other, she is also a providential mother to the monks in the same way the landscape provides food and shelter: her a-sexuality echoes the paradox of monastic life in terms of virginity (spiritual disconnection from the material world) and economy (dependence on the material world). As already discussed in Literature Review (chapter 2), the womanhood as expressed in the masculine ideal of motherhood is based on the placing of notions of purity and pollution (Douglas 1984/ 1966) on the female body as the means of demarcating boundaries from a ‘world’ outside the private world, to which mothers are associated (Goddard 1996a: 171-181, and Caplan 1996: 14-15, among others). This separation was expressed in the stories above, regarding external threats such as pirates,

Catalan, and Ottoman armies, and above all, females, who are perceived as threatening the purity of the Orthodox tradition.

### 3.5 *Avaton*: Our Lady Antiphonitra ('Counter-Voice')



Fig. 3g: Icon of *Our Lady Antiphonitra* (14<sup>th</sup> century) From <http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/miraculous-icons-holy-relics-of-the-holy-monastery-of-vatopedi/> Last Visit March 2011

The rule of the *Avaton*, the prohibition of females in the peninsula, is illustrated by the stories surrounding the icon of 'Our Lady *Antiphonitra*' ('Counter-Voice', figure 3g) kept in the *mesonyktikon* of the *catholicon*, a dark corridor between the *lite* and the

*nave*, where the monks hold the Midnight Office (*see* map in *figure 3c* above)<sup>36</sup>.

According to the deacon acting in the role of *prosmonarios*, the icon is associated with the legend of the pilgrimage of the Serbian princess, Placidia. When she visited the monastery, she heard Mary's voice coming from the icon and ordering: 'Stay where you are and walk no further. How dare you, a woman, come to this place?' This story has allegedly been repeated in modern times when a female Greek journalist, dressed as a man was warned away by the same voice. The monks often tell this story in response to visitors' questions over the *Avaton*.

In the icon, Mary's virgin body is portrayed fully covered and modest according to the ideal monastic body as an ascetic one, whose 'interiority' is based on 'confession, self-accusation, struggle against temptation, renunciation' (Foucault 1992: 63). On Athos, the appropriable body is also thought to be male, modestly and fully covered, emotionless, and miraculously able to reproduce itself on a daily basis through the repetitive, spiritual, and daily program. The intervention of her constant presence through the icons naturalizes the 'virginity' of the land, by imposing a moral code of behaviour, dress, rules and prohibitions. Because this is the land of Mary, the monks must adhere to the code of modesty. They must be fully dressed at all times, covered by the long-sleeved *rassa* even during the boiling summers. Swimming is forbidden, as this 'virgin land' is not for pleasure but for prayer. There are no mirrors in the monks' cells to avoid self-indulgence.

In this moral way, the icon defines the boundaries between the monastic and secular worlds, both in a geographical and a moral way, first in the negative (prohibitive terms) of virginity protecting the purity of the land and the monks inside the monastery from external threats, and second, positively in terms of providing the gifts of her landscape that support the self-sufficiency and autonomy of the monastery (*see* icon of *Elaiovrytissa* below). In this context, only the presence of women is perceived as a threat to the 'natural order' (*fysiki takseis*) of the 'virgin' landscape:

---

<sup>36</sup> Although the marble floor of the *catholicon* dated from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the *catholicon* and most of the monastic buildings were built during the 'golden' period of the Palaeologus Dynasty (1261-1453). The legend has it that in 1312, Emperor Andronicus II Paleologous (1259-1332AC, Emperor 1282-1328AC) was enlightened after spending a night in the monastery's *catholicon* (main church, *see* *figure 3b*), and decided to finance, restore, and expand the buildings of the monastery, particularly the main church and chapels (*Pilgrim's Guide* 1993: 31). At the eastern entrance of the church, where he had spent the night, the Emperor built the *lite*, meaning the room with the 'light' (candles).

---

‘We were sitting at the balcony of the *skete*, staring at the sea, when a boat full of naked women came in front of our shore. They were jumping in the water, swimming and laughing. It was Satan’s hand. But then, a black beast, a gigantic black shark appeared, and went after them. The women, screaming, climbed on their boat and left frightened’ [personal communication with old monk 7/5/03]

Females are here categorized as ‘matter out of place’, an *external* threat to the untouched life of the monks, morally threatening the purity of the monastic virgin body, as in Douglas’ (1966, 1996) suggestion that the body is a microcosm of social and moral values (*see* also previous chapter). According to the rule of *Avaton*, females ‘naturally’ do not belong in the ‘virgin’ land, as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966: 50), they are seem as contrasting with the purity of the Virgin Mary. By breaking the rule of the land and swimming naked as in the story above, the women contradicted their exclusion imposed by the *Avaton*, polluting with their presence the purity of the land. In this way, the rule of the *Avaton* satisfies the masculine ideal of independence (Seidler 1996: 97), which is embodied within the moral dogma of the above story.

Seidler, following Foucault, defined ascetic life as a ‘spiritual struggle... to separate the will from the libido’ (1996: 89, 90), in order to satisfy the masculine ideal of independence, which is threatened by the emotional attachment ‘women’ supposedly represent: ‘a threat to the very existence of ‘men of reason’’ (*Ibid*: 97). The sense of independence is ‘built upon the systematic denial of what is thought to be ‘feminine qualities’ (*Ibid*: 99), emotional ties and irrational uncontrollable passions, in the same way Mary’s presence denies entrance to the real mothers of the monks, including the emotional attachment ‘women’ supposedly represent (either as mothers, lovers, or wives). For the monks, the non-virgin ‘women’ share the same characteristic with the devil: deception. In their stories, men are represented as to be equally dependent to their mothers as to their wives. The monks associated such emotional dependence to women to female ‘cunningness’<sup>37</sup>:

‘There was a man who was worried about the health of his wife. She was coughing all the time, complaining when he had to go to work. She cried and cried, and asked him not to go to work, but to stay with her in the house and take care of her. But because he had to go to work, he felt guilty about leaving her all alone and did not

---

<sup>37</sup> *See* also Stewart (1991: 62-63) on the association of cunningness to the Devil in the Greek Orthodox context.

know what to do. Our Father (Abbot) told him not to worry. He told him one day to pretend that he is leaving the house, but actually stay behind and watch how his wife acts when he is not at home. And so he did; to his surprise, she was fine! She switched on the radio, dancing and laughing to her friends on the phone about him. And then, he realized how stupid he was to feel guilty about her' [priest-monk 20/8/2003]

In the above story, the wife is represented as deceitful, with a devilish, emotional, and over-excessive character, which manipulates her innocent husband: 'A cunning woman is one who schemes behind her husband's back' (Stewart 1991: 73). The husband conveniently belongs to the public sphere as he has to go to work in order bring an income to the house, the 'rational' thing expected from a Christian husband. By contrast, his wife acts irrationally, as if she wants to keep him in *her* house, despite the need for him to go to work. This division of labour in terms of gender, and equally, stereotypical ways of thinking, inform the private and public spheres of the domestic household, illustrating Goddard's point that: 'women who are not the reproducers of the group are at the same time, in a patrilineal society, outsiders. So women are themselves potentially dangerous for they *are* the margins of group, being within and yet not of the group, being outsiders to the group and yet crucial for its survival' (*Ibid*: 190). Because 'women' are considered to be the essence of a group, 'it is therefore thought to be important to separate them ('women') from the impersonal, profit-oriented relations of capitalist production' (1996a: 185-6), by placing them in the private sphere of 'home'. These stereotypes are found in, if not rooted to, Mount Athos, where the masculine ideal of 'women' categorizes them as the *external* source of two excessive 'passions' (*pathoi*): 'need (*chreia*) and desire (*epithumia*)' (Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 31)<sup>38</sup>. The irrational and passionate love of the wife for her husband in the above story highlights this danger 'women' represent, as she does not allow him to go to work, according to the 'law' (*nomos*) of the 'house' (*ecos*: economy).

---

<sup>38</sup> In chapters 5 and 6 I will be looking at the 'testing' (*dokimasia*, 'ordeal') of the novices in their transition from the 'world' to the monastery, and the esoteric transformation through a cleansing process of emptying the self from such emotional ties, which are associated with 'passions' that each novice brings with him from the 'world' into the monastery. Such dirt is cleansed through practices of faith (chapter 6).

### 3.6 Provision: *Elaiovrytissa* ('Oil Fountain/ Source of Oil and Mercy')



Fig. 3h: *Elaiovrytissa* (14<sup>th</sup> century)

From <http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/miraculous-icons-holy-relics-of-the-holy-monastery-of-vatopedi/> Last Visit March 2011

The rule of the *Avaton* and the masculine ideal of self-sufficiency have a negative and a positive aspect: I already discussed the negative one in relation to the prohibition of females on the holy land in relation to the icon of *Antiphonitra*. On the other hand, the positive aspect highlights the productivity of the land, portraying Mary as its eternal provider to the monks, re-assuring them of their independency from the 'world'. The quality of Mary as the providing mother is illustrated by the icon portraying her as *Elaiovrytissa* ('oil fountain' figure h). The priest-monk in the role of the *docheiaris* ('bottle-man'), who is responsible for storing the oil and wine, narrated to me the miracle associated with the icon:

‘It was the time when our monastery had a shortage of olive oil. The monk who was responsible for the oil supplies, St. Gennadius, decided to make economy with the oil in order to make it last. But the cook complained to the abbot, and the latter asked Gennadius to put his trust in the providence of *Theotokos* (Mother of God). Gennadius went back to the oil store and saw the tank miraculously running over with oil! This icon, my child, is miraculous. The oil together with faith can heal all illnesses, from depression to cancer’ [personal communication with *docheiaris*, 3/4/2003]

Olive oil is the most important natural product associated both with liturgical practice and everyday life. In Greek, the olive tree is called ‘*elia*’ and the oil ‘*elaiolado*’. *Elia* comes from the word *elaios*, which means ‘mercy’. Following this association, olive oil is used in cleansing rituals such as prayers, confessions, ordinations, and to make candles for the night liturgies. It is also used in medicine as a healing remedy to disinfect wounds. Furthermore, it is the main ingredient in hand-made soaps, with a characteristic deep brown color, and the basic ingredient for cooking on the non-fasting days of the week, dividing it into oil days (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday) and water days (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) when only boiled food is served<sup>39</sup>. The emphasis on the virgin quality of the oil mirrors the quality of the landscape, and in this context olive oil is used in daily life to cleanse both body and soul.

The icon is kept in a chapel built in 1627, which is attached to the monastery’s olive oil and wine store. The chapel is built on cold stone to preserve the dark and moist atmosphere for the wine and oil kept in barrels. On a wall a hand-written sign states: ‘If you are a group of 2-3 monks take oil once a month, if you are 6-7 monks take oil twice a month’. This refers to the organization of Vatopaidian sources according to ten groups of monks led by the ten priest-monks of the monastery, each of which required a specific amount of oil for their private rituals. The *docheiaris* kept a note-book of how much oil each group of monks used every week and every month, in order to distribute it in an ‘economic manner’<sup>40</sup>, equally to each group’ [*docheiaris* 3/4/2003]. On fasting days he offered a small *parakklisis* (prayer and thanksgiving) in front of the icon, with the participation of the three oldest monks of the monastery. During the small service

---

<sup>39</sup> The weekly program is coordinated in terms of fasting and non-fasting days, forming a collective rhythm for the community (see chapter 7). In this way, the oil helps to keep the purity of ‘virgin way of life’ by serving the masculine ideal of self-sufficiency and sense of independence (see Seidler 1996: 97).

<sup>40</sup> I use the term *economy* here as the ‘law [*nomos*] of the house [*ecos*]’, meaning in respect to the internal organization of the monastery.

they thanked the Virgin for ‘guaranteeing that the source of oil will never stop flowing even at difficult times allowing us to pray in peace’ [*docheiaris: ibid*]. On the first Friday after Easter the icon is taken to the *catholicon* to be celebrated with a night vigil and a feast the next morning. This annual celebration is a collective thanksgiving to Mary and through her, to the natural environment as a whole, as the spirit of Virgin Mary is the land itself<sup>41</sup>.

The harvesting of olives is a collective task that takes place from September to early November. Although all monks shared two-day shifts every week at the fields, the task is mainly left to paid workers and volunteer visitors. In October 2003, together with ten monks, five visitors, and about 15 Romanian workers, I participated in the harvest, supervised by a priest-monk who coordinated groups of four. He instructed not to stop reciting the words of the Jesus Prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me the Sinner’. The repetition of the words gave us a collective rhythm. We used long sticks to hit the branches, thrashing the tree. Then we collected the olives from the nets, which were set on the ground, and put the fruit in sacks. After a monk tied the sacks, we carried them into a van, which took them to the stone olive mill. In the olive-press, the monks first cleaned the olives by removing dirt and insects, before placing them in between two heavy, round millstones. Then three deacons began the process of pressing and filtering it using water that helps to separate the light oil from heavier chunks of material. The quality, that is, the ‘virginity’ of the olive oil produced is important, and depends on the process of production. First, according to the monks, the oil must be hand-made. Filtering (*malaxation* process, mixing) must be carried out as carefully and as fast as possible, to reduce exposure to heat, light, and air. Second, the tree from which the fruit comes must not have been infected with the insect disease (*dakos*) that arrives in August. The infested trees must be sprayed and this affects the quality of the fruit. The quality of the oil is very high, especially the one used for blessings. The remainder is

---

<sup>41</sup> The olive oil itself is celebrated a night vigil in honour of St Panteleimon (July 28<sup>th</sup>), whose miraculous head and icon they keep in the sanctuary. St Panteleimon (his name comes from *elaios* meaning both ‘oil’ and ‘mercy’/‘All-compassionate, all-merciful’) is the martyr saint associated with the miraculous healing of blind men with olive oil. He is celebrated with a night vigil and a feast between August 9 and 10. On the morning of his celebration, the monks paraded his icon to the Chapel of St Panteleimon, which was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Russian Vatopaidians at the southern wall of the monastery. The order of the parade of the icon from the *Catholicon* to the chapel of St Panteleimon illustrated the spiritual order of the monastery: it was led by the monks with the *Angelic Schema*, the Elders and Priests who opened the way for the four priest-deacons carrying the icon on their shoulders, closely followed by the Abbot. This group was followed by the ordinary monks who walked with the rest of the deacons and novices, and at the very end of the procession the visitors.

bottled and labeled as ‘organic’ to be sold in the monastery’s shop, or exported to mainland Greece.

In sum, the icon *Elaiovrytissa* and its story, the agricultural and liturgical activities that surround it, and the use of oil in all aspects of daily life, form a complete system of faith and knowledge based on self-sufficiency. Its cleansing power is directly connected to the virginity of the landscape, becoming the means of both spiritual purification and bodily washing, healing, and feeding. In this way, the oil is a cathartic liquid confluent of the internal spiritual world of each participant of the liturgies and his material body, in the same way oil is used both in baptisms and in cooking. The positive aspects of the icon highlight the productivity of the land, and the ritual associated with the icon is a thanksgiving to Mary for the oil, the most important gift to the monks, covering all aspects of their life. On the other hand, the negative interdiction is to be found in the idea of self-sufficiency itself, as the miracle confirms the economical independence and separation of the monastery from the ‘world’. However, the exportation of olive oil from Athos contradicts this ideal, revealing a positive link between the monastery and the Greek market in which the monks are actively involved making a profit for the monastery. On the negative side, questions are raised about the deforestation of the land for the plantation of new olive trees, and for the exportation of wood, that undermine the ideal of a virgin land (Eleseos and Papaghiannis 1994: 51-54).

## **PART II: CONTESTED TRADITION**

### **3.7 *Esfagmeni* (Mary as ‘Slaughtered’, 14<sup>th</sup> century)**

The above Vatopaidian narratives regarding the miracles of Mary illustrate their personal connection to the landscape in terms of order and purity. However, the Vatopaidian tradition does not belong exclusively to Vatopaidi or to its monks, who are only thought to be passing by, as the narrative relating to the icon of *Ktitorissa* (section 3.2 above) denotes. They belong to Vatopaidi (not *vice versa*) and Vatopaidi belongs to the Virgin Mary. This means that her ownership of the landscape, including the monasteries, and the relation of the monks to it, are open to interpretation. Athos is a place of pilgrimage, but also a place of contestation between different groups of monks

of different monasteries, political ideology, and ethnicity who are related in various, if not antagonistic, ways to the tradition of the landscape<sup>42</sup>. Below, I look at two contrasting interpretations between the rival neighbouring monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou, regarding the same miracles related to the Vatopaidian icon of *Esfagmeni* ('Slaughtered' Mary), to examine how the *yphos* ('style' and 'manner') of narration in each monastery reveals a contrasting relationship to the 'sacred tradition' ('*iera paradoseis*') of the landscape.



Fig. 3i: *Esfagmeni* (14<sup>th</sup> century)

From <http://www.mountathos.gr/active.aspx?mode=en;b7d75022-f762-4fb6-b77c-6ebfbe826416>,  
March 2011

<sup>42</sup> For example, Sallnow (1981: 163-182) critically re-evaluated the Turner's notion of 'communitas' (1974) by highlighting the financial competition between rival Christian groups in his ethnography of pilgrimage in the Andes. Mart Bax took this further by underlying political and nationalist divisions in the Dutch Catholic Church (1983: 167-177), and regarding the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in former Yugoslavia (1990: 63-75).

### *Version of Vatopaidi*

‘Our tradition states that one of the deacons of our *Catholicon* used to arrive at the meal late every day, because of his heavy duties. One day, when he asked for food he was refused because of his lateness. The deacon returned angry to the church in indignation. He said to the icon ‘How long do I have to go on serving you while you do not care even that I have to eat?’ saying that, he took a knife and plunged it into the face of the blessed Virgin. Blood began to run and he fell to the floor like a madman. He was blinded. He remained in that state for three years sitting at the stall opposite the icon, where he wept and implored for forgiveness. After three years the blessed Virgin appeared to the Abbot saying that she had forgiven the reckless deacon and that he is going to be cured from his illness except his hand, which would be condemned at the second coming of the Lord. When the monk died, according to the customs of the Holy Mountain for the disinterring of his remains, the fathers found that although the rest of his body had decomposed his right hand had remained intact and was completely black. Another story says that a priest visiting the monastery questioned the truth of the miracle, putting his finger on the point where the icon had be damaged. Blood ran and he fell down dead before walking out of the *Catholicon*. We used to keep the hand of the sacristan in the *Catholicon*, but it is badly damaged, mainly because of Russian pilgrims who thought that it was a sacred relic and were given pieces of it’ [*Vemataris* of Vatopaidi 9/10/02]

### *Version of Esfigmenou*

‘The miracle takes place many years back in time; a Vatopaidian deacon who is the *ecclesiarch* (‘sacristan’) of the *catholicon* of the monastery is often late arriving in the refectory for his meal because of carelessness and idleness. One day because he is late the cook refuses to give him food. Hungry and possessed by demons because of the confusion that had taken hold of him, he rushes out of the refectory straight into the *catholicon*. His evil thoughts confuse his mind, pushing him for vengeance: with uncontrollable anger he asks the icon of Virgin Mary ‘until when will I serve you Mother of God?’ and with the knife which he uses to clean the candle-stick; he stabs the left side of Virgin Mary’s face. From the wound that the stab miraculously made blood started spilling, as if it were a spring, and the face of the Mother of God became so pale, a colour that only the dying people have. The icon-killer falls paralysed and starts to tremble like the brother-killer Cain. The brotherhood of Vatopaidi gathers to witness the deacon losing his eyesight and his mind, while the blood from holy Mary’s wound is still fresh. (He pauses). Three years have already passed since the miracle and the killer is still blind and insane, continuing to tremble. After the three years the mother of our Lord, who is the blessing of and for all repentant, appears as a vision to the Abbot assuring him that because of the brotherhood’s prayers the killer-deacon is forgiven, except the sacrilegious hand that wounded our Ever Virgin, because his bloody hand will never be forgiven; instead, it is going to be judged during the Second Coming. The next morning the deacon appears perfectly healthy, asking for remorse by collapsing in front of Mary’s the stabbed icon. Virgin Mary does not leave him disconsolate. Three nights before the deacon’s death, she appears declaring to him the remission of his crime, but also adding that his sacrilegious hand will be tried during the dreadful Second Coming. Three years after the deacon’s death, when according to our tradition the bones of the dead monk must be exhumed and kept in the church, a

horrifying sight appears in front of the eyes of the fathers! While the bones of the deacon appear to be clean from flesh, having the mark of God's mercy, the sacrilegious hand has remained intact for the Second Coming, and is still presented to the pilgrims in remembrance of the fact. One day, a pilgrim who wrongly believed that this hand was kept because of its sanctity cut a piece out of it with his teeth, in order to keep it. At that moment the hand broke to pieces but the fingers and the palm remained dismal and black as a tar. Some years ago a foreign priest because of an accident touched the wound while kissing the holy icon. Dried blood fell on him and he died surrendering his soul to the hands of the mysterious in his decisions God' [vematarris of Esfigmenou 18/11/02]

In the above two versions the plot and narrative structure of the story is the same, divided in three parts: a first section sets up the monk's blasphemy and transgression against the icon of Mary, who intervenes in the second section to restore 'natural order'. The story concludes with the miraculous episodes that took place years after the first miracle, including the dangerous power of the cursed hand of the monk after his death. In this way, the story describes the monk's anger that led him to commit an act of sacrilege, then remorse and self-pity, and salvation through Mary's cathartic and divine forgiveness (positive interdiction). This forgiveness, however, is accompanied by the eternal punishment of the sinful body part (i.e. the hand) in the after-life (negative interdiction). Furthermore, the story morally establishes the rule of Mary as a 'natural' part of the landscape, in which sin is categorized as 'un-natural' (*para-fysin*) and order as a 'natural' (*fysis*) part of the landscape [discussions with priest-monk October 2002]. 'Nature' in this context is strongly associated with social order and transgression and moral pollution to disorder (as in Douglas 1984/1966).

But despite the common underlying structure of the story, the way it was narrated to me differed from one monastery to the other: the Vatopaidian priest-monk used the past tense, validating the miracle in his words as a 'historical fact', thus keeping the tradition of the icon separated from the present time. He spoke in a distant manner, avoiding passionate engagement with the story, according to the daily conduct of a monk in terms of *apatheia* ('without passions'). He kept the description of the miracle short avoiding using dramatic language. Rather, his detached, balanced and transparent style reflected his higher (secular) education. Furthermore, the structure of his narration focused equally on each of the three parts of the narrative, highlighting the kindness and merciful nature (*agape*, 'love') of Mary for this particular monastery.

In this way, the Vatopaidian version gave a moral lesson to the listener about passions, here anger and irrationality. However, these feelings were presented as less extraordinary, as they are thought to be ‘passions’ that could happen to anyone because of the weakness of human nature, and thus they only need to be controlled. The Vatopaidian priest-monk sympathized with his sinful brother, revealing an intimate connection to his ancestor: in the Vatopaidian version, the deacon was late because of his ‘heavy duties’. The restoration of order meant that the deacon had to be separated from his/the sinful hand, whose mummification represented the ‘un-natural’ (*para-fysin*) nature of sin.

By contrast, the Esfigmenou account was vividly told to me in the present tense, as if it was still happening *now*. The monk described the miracle as an immediate event, only using a past tense to refer to the later miracles related to the icon. He represented the miracle in a passionate and dramatic manner, which highlighted the motive of repentance and redemption through a violent process of divine punishment. For the monk of Esfigmenou, the Vatopaidian monk is late not because of ‘heavy duties’, but because of ‘his carelessness and idleness’. He has ‘evil thoughts’ that push him ‘towards vengeance’; he is confused because he is demonised. The monk spoke fast, using Biblical references and strongly evocative expressions, such as ‘icon-killer’, ‘fresh blood’, ‘bones and flesh’, ‘black as a tar’, and ‘the bones of the deacon appear to be clean from flesh, having the mark of God’s mercy’. The structural asymmetry of his narration put emphasis on punishment and the fear of God. This use of passionate language elicits a more emotive representation while also emphasizing the eternally present influence of God.

The style of narration by the Vatopaidian monk was ordered and impassionate, and emphasized on Mary’s forgiveness; by contrast the Esfigmenou’s passionate version focused on punishment, revealing a quite different understanding of the nature of monastic life: in Vatopaidi ‘faith’, as expressed in their understanding of the morality invested in the natural environment. It is a matter of order, and often expressed in forgiveness. By contrast, in Esfigmenou the concepts of ‘faith’ (*pistis*) and ‘nature’ (*fysis*) are judgemental and wrathful. This difference over this ‘matter of faith’ is well expressed by the contrasting styles of narration (*yphos*) of the same miracle, which in turn, illustrates how the tradition of Mary is not static or homogeneous but open to

interpretation according to the values and vocation of each monastery: Vatopaidi is thought to be the most ‘modernized’ and richest monastery on Athos, while Esfigmenou is famous for being the ‘last tower of zealots’ and poorest institution of the Mount, as well as an international centre of ultra-Orthodoxy<sup>43</sup>.

### PART III: NOSTALGIA

#### 3.8 *Pyrovolithissa* (Mary as ‘Shot At’, 18<sup>th</sup> century)

Vatopaidi is celebrated on March 25<sup>th</sup>, when the monks celebrate the ‘Annunciation of Mary’ to which their monastery and its *catholicon* (main church) are dedicated, and when the Greeks commemorate the beginning of the Greek Revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire. The monks held a night vigil which included the veneration of the most precious item of the monastery, the girdle of the Virgin Mary (*see* next chapter), followed by a feast based on fish and calamari, and then a public speech by the abbot expressing the importance of the day for the Vatopaidians:

‘Today is a double celebration; on the one hand (we celebrate) the Annunciation of the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), and on the other, the beginning of the Greek Revolution in defence (*dia na aminesthe*) of our sacred tradition (*iera paradosis*). This is a day of hope. Just as Gabriel announced to the Virgin Maria that she will be the Mother of God, who with His sacrifice will change the world, in the same way our Greek nation was born with the sacrifice of our hundreds dead martyrs, fighting the struggle of liberation against the Ottoman armies’ [Abbot’s speech on the day, 25/3/03]

Here, the symbolism of Mary as a mother to the monks offers them a Greek identity as she is thought to be the landlord of both Athos and Cyprus. In the contemporary context of the divided Cyprus, the motherland for most of the Vatopaidian monks, the Annunciation gives them ‘hope’. This allows them to express their nationalist sentiments, such as the Abbot’s vision of a united Greek Cyprus, in which the coming of Christ was symbolically associated with the ‘liberation’ of the island from the ‘Ottoman burden’: ‘The war in Cyprus is for our faith, our country, our national

---

<sup>43</sup>Since February 2003, Esfigmenou is under embargo imposed by the Athonian authorities (the *Holy Committee* of Karyes and the ‘Ecumenical Patriarchate’ in Istanbul) and the Greek police acting on their behalf, because of the political activism of its monks outside Athos with extreme right-wing Orthodox parties, such as the Greek ELKIS and St Basil. I will expand on the differences over ‘matters of faith’ between Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou in chapters 8 and 9, regarding the external vocations of each monastery in relation to their internal regimes.

identity; exactly as it was 200 years ago when we were fighting the Ottomans', he continued saying. The abbot of Vatopaidi is an orphan of the war in Cyprus between Christian and Muslim Cypriots; his father was killed when he was 16 years old. Following the death of his father, he then met the charismatic monk Joseph the Vatopaidian who brought him into Athos (*see* next chapter on charisma and *companionships*). In his speech, he cleverly portrayed the monks in the image of Jesus, emphasizing the value of sacrifice, which here is associated with their nationalist struggle. In his words, nowadays, the Turkish army in Cyprus has replaced the 'Ottoman armies' of the past, in the monks' 'struggle' for Greek Orthodox identity. In the second part of his speech, the abbot also referred to 'strange monks' who 'divide the Holy Mount with their external influence'. He was referring to the rival monks of the neighbouring monastery of Esfigmenou, who, as discussed above, are famous for their ultra-Orthodox politics, and whose views have isolated them from the rest of the Athonian community. In both contexts, the Virgin Mary protects the Vatopaidians from such *external* threats to their national and monastic identities, the former coming from outside Athos (Turkey) and the latter from inside (Esfigmenou).

Following the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, the monastery's connection to the Byzantine capital was abruptly interrupted. In the difficult economic times that followed, the Vatopaidians did not hesitate to ask for financial and political help from the much hated 'Latin West', such as from King of Spain who supported the monks against the Catalans, William Marquis of Monferrato, and the Grand Captain of the republic of Venice. The European Royals offered financial and military help to defend the monastery from further raids and lootings. The Vatopaidians proudly write in their *Pilgrim's Guide*: 'Pope Eugenius, moreover, in a letter of 1439 urged Roman Catholics to visit the monastery and support it financially' (1993:15). By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the monks began introducing a new way of life called *idiorhythmic* (translated as 'private rhythm', and meaning 'self-governance'), which replaced the *coenobitic* (communal). The new *idiorhythmic* mode dissolved communal life by allowing each monk, or a small group of monks, to have their own timetable and to own private property. The last monastery to change was Vatopaidi in 1556. The new mode enabled the Vatopaidians to hide their treasures from the eyes of the Ottoman taxmen. But the dismantling of the economies of the monasteries also meant that officially the monks interrupted their connection to the capital, leaving the monasteries in a desperate economic state.

According to Greek Cypriot monks of Vatopaidi, during the time of ‘Ottoman slavery’, the ‘Hellenic spirit’ survived in ‘hidden schools’, such as monasteries, which contributed to the preservation of the Hellenic language and Orthodox religion (*Pilgrim’s Guide* 1993:18-9, and from personal communication with monks)<sup>44</sup>. The most famous of these schools is the Vatopaidian Athoniada School founded in 1748 near Vatopaidi. Despite the ‘crippling taxation’ by the Ottoman authorities, the School became a ‘spiritual’ source for Greek nationalism, with students such as the ‘Great Teacher of the Nation’ Eugenius Voulgaris, the influential Patriarch of Alexandria Cyprianos Cyprios, the Greek national hero Regas Ferraos, and St Kosmas the Aetolian, among others, all of whom sacrificed their lives for the ‘preservation’ of the Hellenic identity on the basis of the Greek language and Christian customs (*see also* Herzfeld 1987, and Friedman 1994:121-3).

The icon that directly relates to the birth of the Greek nation is *Pyrovolithissa* (Mary as ‘Shot At’, *figure 3j*) painted in 1858 in commemoration of the participation of the monastery in the Greek War of Independence of 1821. The icon is placed above the northern (main) gate of the monastery in a glass-cased box for protection against external threats, such as the Ottoman army. Most of the Vatopaidians are from Greek Cyprus, and they are not only proud of their connection to Mary but also of their predecessors’ active participation in the war, hiding ammunition for the rebel forces that resulted in the hanging of members of the brotherhood.

---

<sup>44</sup> The intellectual tradition of Vatopaidi is substantiated by more 1,700 manuscripts and 40,000 printed books, which are kept in the Library of Vatopaidi, situated at its north-eastern Tower (*see also* Mikrayannanos 1999: 150). These are divided into ‘liturgical’, and ‘cosmic’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ books. The first category includes the original copy of the Divine Liturgy by St Chrysostom, whose ear is kept in a golden box and venerated on big celebrations, and the *Typiko* of the monastery (meaning ‘formalities’), dating back to 1346AC. The *Typiko* is the liturgical book of conduct, with the celebrations and activities for each day of the year. It is divided into 12 months, according to the 12 star signs, beginning with Libra in September. Other sacred texts include the *Paschal Books*, the *Epistle Book* with letters of the Apostles, the *Book of Blessings*, a collection of psalms of saints for every ‘Month’ (*Menaion*), and a book with their lives for every day (*Synaxarion*), and music scores, such as the *Psalter* with 150 psalms, the *Heirmologion* used at Vespers and Matins, and the *Octoechos* which is the book with the ‘eight tones’ of Byzantine music, as every two weeks the monks change a tone for the Divine Liturgy. On the other hand, ‘cosmopolitan’ documents include *chrysobulls*, Ottoman *firmans*, patriarchal, *sigillia*, wax bulls, and a copy of the Athonian constitution. It also has precious historical documents called *historemena*, the *Geography of Ptolemy* that contains 42 coloured maps of Europe, North Africa, and Asia, books on astrology, and other royal gifts to the monastery including the ‘largest Romanian archive (approximately 14,000 documents) on Athos’ (*Pilgrim’s Guide* 1993: 45).



*Fig.3j: Pyrovolithissa (19th century) Last visit: March 2011*

From <http://www.mountathos.gr/active.aspx?mode=en{17f92fa2-300e-4689-64144ddc72d0}>

b92b-

The icon relates to an incident that allegedly took place in the monastery in 1822, when it was under occupation by the Ottoman army. The nephew of the Ottoman commander was foolishly playing with his gun, and accidentally shot the icon on the right hand of Mary. A few days later, he went mad and hanged himself from an olive tree opposite

the main Gate of the monastery. According to the *prosmonarios*, his angry uncle demanded reprisals, but his soldiers asked him: ‘Can’t you see the sacrilege of your nephew’s deed?’ This story has a positive and a negative aspect (like the rest of the icons above): from a positive perspective, the sacred icon unified both Christians and Muslims because they both ‘feared’ the one ‘true God’ (illustrating the ‘sacred’ as a force of unity in Durkheim, 1912). As a Vatopaidian monk once told me: ‘The Ottomans respected and feared the true God; it was the (attacks of) Catalans and (later) Bolsheviks that tried to destroyed our monastery’ [30/9/02]. The negative aspect of the miracle comes with the suicide of the young soldier, as a punishment for his transgression and ill-discipline, which symbolically echoes the loss of the Ottoman army to the Greek rebels as a kind of ‘divine punishment’ (here, the ‘sacred’ is a source of contestation).

In this context, the above icon functions as ‘historical evidence’ of the linearity from ancient Greece to Byzantium, and of a ‘hidden’ Greek school in the Ottoman years to the Greek state. The tradition of Vatopaidi is thus used by the Greek Cypriot Vatopaidians to form a collective nostalgia (as in Harris 1995: 105-123, and Sutton 2000, among others) on the basis of a lost Byzantine past and the golden years of the Paleologus Dynasty (1261-1453)<sup>45</sup>, during which the Vatopaidians produced a great number of important artworks, including six out of the eight miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary<sup>46</sup>. This collective nostalgia of a golden and imagined past constitutes a

---

<sup>45</sup> During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, under the patronage of the Imperial Family of *Komnenoi*, the population of Vatopaidi increased to 800 monks: ‘In the years that followed, by acquiring a large number of *metochia* [property estates outside Athos] Vatopaidi began to expand both within and outside the borders of Athos’ (*Pilgrim’s Guide*). In 1347, the Emperor John VI Cantacuzene (1347-1354) strengthened the political and financial connections to Constantinople, by donating to Vatopaidi the monastery of *Psychosostria* (‘Soul-saver’) situated in the Byzantine capital. During the ‘golden’ period of the Palaeologus Dynasty (1261-1453) the Vatopaidians restored and expanded the buildings of the monastery. The tradition states that Emperor Andronicus II Paleologous was enlightened after spending a night in the monastery’s *Catholicon* (main church). He decided to finance, restore, and expand the buildings of the monastery, and particularly its church and chapels. In 1312, the frescos were painted in the *nave* of the church, and a *lite* was built (meaning the room with the ‘Light’, candles) at the eastern entrance of the church where he had spent the night (*see* Map of *Catholicon* in *Appendix*). Although there have been further restorations and changes in the church (the *nave* was rebuilt in 1567, and the *exonarthex*, that is, the outer area was decorated from 1426 onwards to the more recent fresco painted in 1843), the *Catholicon* has kept its original marble floor dating back to the time of St Athanasius.

<sup>46</sup> In the Library, above the refectory of Vatopaidi, the monks have preserved the oldest fresco found on the Mount, dating from the fourth quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the embrace of Apostles Paul and Peter. The Vatopaidians have also preserved from the same period the moveable icons of the head of Mark the Evangelist, kept in the icon-store. The Vatopaidians have also preserved a number of world-famous icons painted in the *Komnenoi* and post-*Komnenoi* period (13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), such as the icon of *Mary of Vemothyrou*, which pictures Mary knitting while turning her body posture towards the right side of the

collective consciousness for the current Vatopaidian brotherhood, which is expressed in social nationalist dramas, such as the speech of the abbot on the day of the ‘Annunciation of Mary’ in which he highlighted ‘hope’, in reference to his native Cyprus and the division of the island. The abbot’s speech illustrates Turner’s concept of ‘social drama’ (1974) in ‘embedding the present social life in the experiences of the past (Herzfeld 1997: 25). In this context, ‘tradition’ is not a static concept, as the tradition of virginity implies, but rather invented and re-invented at the present moment on the basis of social cohesion and a collective identity to ‘automatically imply a continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1f, and 5-8)<sup>47</sup>. In this sense, ‘history’ in itself is imagined: a collective memory of a glorious past, illustrated by the double role of Mary as the ‘mother of God’ (*Theotokos*) on the one hand, and the mother of the Hellenic nation on the other. She is the spiritual mother who protects the purity of the monks thus guaranteeing their linearity with the past, on the basis of a ‘spiritual’ kind of purity.

In her comparative study of Greek and Turkish nationalism in Cyprus (2002), Rebecca Bryant highlighted the importance in the Greek nationalist narrative of ‘metaphors of soul and spirit to represent their kinship with the land’ (2002:511). She suggests that while the Turkish Cypriots emphasize the importance of ‘blood’ to understand their past, their Greek counterparts emphasize the Hellenic ‘spirit’ (Bryant 2002:521), whose purity is symbolized in its entirety by the *protective* nature and, above all, the virginity of the ‘mother of god’. Therefore, in the context of the division of Cyprus, the claim for ‘spirituality’ is the hegemonic means of an emergent Greek tradition. Central to the

---

frame, in one of the few pictures that portray her submission to God, Mary as the *Guide (Odigitria)*, Christ the *Pantokrator* (‘Lord of Everything’), the *Crucifixion*, and a portrayal of *St Dimitrios*, all dating back to the fourth quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (*The Treasures of Mount Athos* 1997: 60-78). The monks believe that most of the icons and the frescos in the *Catholicon* (‘main church’) of the monastery, which date from 1312, were painted by the most famous Orthodox iconographer, Panselenus. These icons and frescos portray the human passions of Mary and Jesus in a calm and distant manner, as their faces are not only realistic, but also without a tension contextualized within highly balanced frameworks which reveal the rhythmical measuring of each frame. In the second half of the Palaeologus Dynasty during the reign of the *Kantakouzenoi*, Vatopaidi produced another series of priceless icons, such as the moveable icons of Christ the *Pantokrator*, St John the Forerunner, Archangel Gabriel, St John the *Theologist*, and the *Synaxis* of Angels, painted around 1400.

<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Sutton (2000), among others, looked at statuses as representations of ‘history’ on the local level of the Greek island of Kalymnos, in order to understand the ‘rationality’ behind the construction of histories at the present time. In this sense, social memory in itself is a collective fiction, negotiated and re-negotiated in everyday life (see also Chapter 2: Literature Review).

Greek Cypriot nationalist narrative is the figure of the Virgin Mary, symbolizing the monks' 'affinal relationship with the Divine' (Iossifides 1991:150, and cited in Bryant 2002:515), as both Cyprus and Vatopaidi are closely associated with the Virgin Mary<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, the recent 'history' of Vatopaidi, as it was narrated to me by the Greek Vatopaidians below, in reference to the icons of Mary, should be seen within the greater Greek nationalist ideal of a continuity from ancient Greece to Byzantium, and through the Ottoman years of the 'hidden' Greek schools to the modern Greek state. In this conception of 'history' as an imagined collective memory of a glorious past, Mary is as much the 'mother of God' (*Theotokos*) as the mother of the Hellenic nation.

### **3.9 Mary as the Russian Healer: *Svetsaritsa* ('Queen of All', 19<sup>th</sup> century)**

Despite the above Greek nationalist narrative, during the Ottoman years Russian Tsars, and princes from Serbia, Moldavia and Wallachia, (*see also* Forbess 2004: 363-379) were heavily involved in Vatopaidi. They donated large pieces of land and properties in Russia and Romania (*metochia*) where they also constructed five monasteries and four *Sketes*. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russian monks had bought Vatopaidi from the Moldavians who had dominated the monastery in the previous two centuries. They financed the restoration of Vatopaidi, rebuilding the 24 chapels inside and outside the monastery, such as the two very important chapels of St Nikolaos (1780) and St Demetrius (1782), which are situated at the right and left of the *catholicon*, where confessions take place (*see figure 3b*). They also rebuilt Vatopaidi's two abandoned *sketes*, which were originally founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century: St Demetrius restored between 1729 and 1796, and St Andrew, or 'Russian Serrai' as it is better known, which was restored between 1841 and 1849 by the Vatopaidian monks Vessarion and Varsanoufios with the financial and political support of the Russian Patriarch Anthimos III (Mikrayannanitos 2001: 152).

---

<sup>48</sup> As it is known, since the ancient times, Cyprus is also thought to be the island of Aphrodite, whose undressed figure has been replaced by the ascetic and fully-dressed figure of Mary. This transformation of conceptions of womanhood from ancient Greece to Christianity echoes Foucault's comparative writings on the Greek ideal of the perfect and naked body, and the morality of the ascetic body of Christian monks that replaced it, focusing on the changes in the moral (Aristotelian) values of *enkrateia* and *sophrosyni* (Foucault 1992: 35-93).



Fig. 3k: *Vsetsaritsa* (19<sup>th</sup> cent)

From <http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/miraculous-icons-holy-relics-of-the-holy-monastery-of-vatopedi/> Last Visit March 2011

During this golden period of *Serrai*, the monks painted the icon of *Svetsaritsa* (in Greek *Pantanassa*, ‘Queen of All’, *figure 3k*) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The icon was painted in the Russian style, dividing the frame into a strict horizontal/vertical shape of a cross. A bed shaped in the form of a temple divides the picture horizontally into a lower, and an upper part. The top of the icon represents heaven, with the two archangels standing at the right and left side of Mary. She sits on the horizontal line of the bed, which is the Temple of Jerusalem, while her feet are touching the ground, the earth. Her figure

divides the frame vertically. She looks directly at the viewer, as if she is inviting him (sic) to her heavenly kingdom, where she is ‘Queen of all’, as the name of the icon denotes.

The celebration of the icon takes place on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. It is kept in the new *metochi* (property/ estate of the monastery outside Athos) of St. Nikolaos, built in a field at the prestigious Porto Lagos, Chalkidiki, Greece. Although nowadays, Vatopaidi is populated by a majority of Greek Cypriots, the vocation of the icon is still strong in Russia, especially after the fall of communism. The Cypriot Vatopaidians organizes public pilgrimages to the icon in its homeland in Moscow, where they transfer it in cooperation with the Russian Patriarch. In these pilgrimages, the Vatopaidians make money through the *tamata* (‘promises’), golden or silver ornaments of body parts that the faithful donate in exchange for a healing miracle. The icon is world-famous for its miraculous powers, particularly for curing breast cancer in women, and has even ‘resurrected a dead child in Moscow’ (Ephraim, abbot of Vatopaidi 2001:37-38). One Vatopaidian priest-monk explained to me:

‘I know many women with cancer, who were miraculously cured while praying to the icon. First, they had to hold the icon on their chest, and then, after saying the Jesus Prayer aloud, they felt a heat on their ailing body part. This is a sign of healing. Some even saw her appear next to them. And there is a story that the icon has resurrected a dead child in Russia. He was on his deathbed, breathing his last breath, when we sent another copy of the icon to put at his table. Suddenly, the nurse saw a bright ray of light coming out of the icon, aiming at the heart of the child! Five minutes later, the child was up on his feet, asking for food’ [3/10/2002].

On the basis of rumours spread about numerous miraculous healings outside Athos, rumours of particular effects on women’s breast cancer, the entrepreneurial monks of Vatopaidi reproduce copies of the miraculous icon and export them using the internet on sites such as <http://russian-crafts.com/russian-saints-icons/pantanassa.html> [last visit 1/12/10]. The copies of the miraculous icon are reproduced in the Vatopaidian ‘Laboratories’ (*ergastiria*), which were moved in 1992 to the ‘Russian *Serrai*’ by the Greek Cypriot brotherhood with funding coming from the EU under the ‘European Heritage Laboratories’ action<sup>49</sup>. The Laboratories are workshops where they restore old treasures, such as the icon above, using the latest technologies, such as ultraviolet and digital photography, x-rays and computer analysis. The Vatopaidians work in co-

---

<sup>49</sup> From the *Official Journal of the European Communities* 23/3/1999, ‘Written Question E-0181/99’

operation with the Greek Archaeological Service and the ‘Computer Vision and Image Processing Group’ of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. In this way, they work within a network that expands beyond the borders of Athos (Vatopaidi- Thessaloniki – Brussels –Moscow).

### 3.10 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to offer a general introduction to the tradition of Vatopaidi, as expressed by miracles associated with the eight miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary. These stories represent Mary in the ideal of a virgin mother, which in itself informs the entire landscape, including the monasteries. She is as much omnipresent as eternal, protecting her land and her monks from external threats, such as pirates, non-Christian armies and, above all, women on the moral basis of a ‘virgin way of life’ (*parthenia*). Her contradictory sexuality, being both a virgin and a mother, denotes the moral disengagement of the spirit from the body, supporting a ‘spiritual way of life’ (*pneumatiki zoe*) inside the monasteries which is morally separated from the ‘materialist world’ (*illistikos kosmos*) of self-interest outside. Her miraculous icons have their own voice: her voice. Her forgiving nature, provision and protective omnipresence make her the ideal masculine mother: the sacred source/totem that unifies monks (and visitors) under her protective wing against external enemies that threaten the virginity of her landscape. Since this tradition is thought to be as much omnipresent as eternal, it is used as a kind of matrix in which young men are incorporated into monks.

However, the comparison of the styles of narration describing the icon of Mary the ‘slaughtered’ showed that the tradition of virginity is open to interpretation. Furthermore, the contrasting painting styles between the Greek icon of *Pyrovolithissa* and the Russian icon of *Svetsaritsa* remind us of Stewart’s argument that a ‘group style’ (*yphos* in Greek) gives both ‘a sense of belonging’, as illustrated by the moral and geographic borders imposed by the tradition of virginity, and is ‘formed and recognized in relation to the styles of *other* groups’ (Stewart 1991: 122, 125). In this context, ‘tradition’ in itself is a ‘pliable entity’ (Goddard 2000: 7), open to ‘contestation’ (as in Seremetakis 1992), and also ‘reinvention’ (as in Comaroffs 2000). The group that possesses tradition can claim authority and dominate other monks of rival monasteries,

different ethnicities, or personal interest (*see* also Literature Review: section 5). The next chapter will illustrate *how* the claim for ‘spirituality’ became the means of contestation and domination of an emergent Greek Cypriot tradition in Vatopaidi, in relation to the movement of ‘charismatic monks’.

---

*Figure 31: Anonymous post-card*



## Chapter 4: Monastic Life as a Rite of Passage

### 4.1 Introduction

In the tradition of virginity (see chapter III with particular reference to the discussion of icons of Mary in Vatopaidi) and in the absence of women and biological reproduction, the monks have to replace sexual reproduction with spiritual forms of reproduction, based on *movement* inside and outside Athos. In this context, Iossifides discussed the ‘spiritual kinship’ between nuns in terms of their ‘contact with and knowledge of the world beyond their convent walls’ (1991: 137). This chapter will be looking into the contact between the secular and monastic world, focusing on two kinds of *movement*: The first part of his chapter will examine movement as a matter of agency and change, focusing on the influence of travelling ‘charismatic’ monks (*charismatikoi*), who travelled inside and outside Athos to attract young men into Athos to repopulate the abandoned monasteries and their settlements following WWII (see Introduction section 3: ‘Demographic Changes’). This section draws from the Weberian concept of ‘charisma’, distinguishing two types of ‘charismatic monks’: those who revived the ‘spirituality’ (*pneumatikotita*) of monastic life by re-introducing the *coenobitic* (communal) way of life in sketes (monastic villages) and abandoned settlements, and their disciples, who, like charismatic priests, institutionalized the *coenobitic* way of life in monasteries. This section will illustrate this by looking at the impact of the *charis* of Joseph the Hesychast (‘Silencer’) and his disciple Joseph the Vatopaidian, in light of the recent revival of the family of Josephaeoi in Vatopaidi. It will focus on the turbulent journey of the current brotherhood of Vatopaidians from the ‘world’ to Vatopaidi, in ‘companionships’ (*synodeies*) of monks who accompanied and followed the charismatic Joseph the Vatopaidian into Athos, where they were incorporated into the Athonian family of Josephaeoi. The charisma of Joseph the Hesychast had a *double* aspect: internally, it manifested as a vision to re-organize communal life on the basis of the values and daily programme inspired by the family tradition of Josephaeoi; externally, he revealed an ‘entrepreneurial calling’ (as in Goldman’s reading of Weberian ‘charisma’, 1991:30) in his ability to gather both human ‘companionships’ (*synodeies*) and material resources, and to supervise the creation of more convents and monasteries outside Athos. Respectively, each monastery has a *double* history: the

‘eternal’ tradition of each monastery (*see* previous chapter), and the story of the family of monks who dominate it at the present time.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the esoteric *and* geographic journey the novices have to make before entering the sacred ground of the monastery, and their transition from the secular world to the sacred community of Vatopaidi. This section focuses on their personal struggle to detach from their secular past, following their decision to obey to the inner voice of the ‘esoteric calling’ (*esoteriko kalesma*) that leads them to abandon their biological families, secular friends, education, and career opportunities, to be incorporated into a new, spiritual family, through rites of passage. In the third and final part of the chapter, I will look at two rites of ordination and the funeral as markers in the transition from temporal to eternal time, from earth to heaven. These rites incorporate each monk within an informal and spiritual hierarchy, which divides the brotherhood into three groups of monks (novices, monks, elders) according to their age and monastic experiences on the Mount. These rites contextualize the fluidity in the movement of monks within the static institution of the monastery.

In this context, the personal history of each monk is directly connected to the history of his respective ‘spiritual family’ (*pneumatiki oikogeneia*), as each individual monk is fused within the history of his Athonian family *on the way* to a monastery. By ‘history’ I do not mean the academic record but rather a historiography of experience that shows the changes that took place in Vatopaidi in the last twenty years. Accordingly, here monastic life is defined as a life-long pilgrimage during which ‘communitas’<sup>50</sup> are uniformed in the form of (‘companionships’). In narrating the story of the family of the Josephaeoi and their journey to Vatopaidi, and relating these to the personal stories of members of the ‘companionship’ of new monks that arrived there in the late 1980s, I will use three kinds of sources: extracts from interviews and discussions with monks narrating their personal journey from the ‘world’ to Vatopaidi; extracts from books,

---

<sup>50</sup> ‘Communitas’ refers to the formation of *liminal* group during a pilgrimage, which are united under the common journey towards the sacred source (1991/1969, and 1974, and in Morris 1987: 257). *See* Sallnow (1981 and 1987) and Mart Bax (1983: 167-177, and 1990: 63-75) among others, as a criticism of the Durkheimian concept, in relation to Christian pilgrimages, and the political and financial competition between shrines and groups of faithful. However, it is worth noting that Turner did note that conflict is the other side of the same coin, that of cohesion. In other words, he does not imply that ‘communitas’ can *only* be morally and experientially unifying, but rather that they own a unifying force, the ‘sacred’ in Durkheim’s terms, on the basis of which divisions, conflicts, and change, also occur in relation to external (‘structured’) institutions (as opposed to the ‘anti-structural’ character of ‘communitas’ (Turner 1974: 45-46).

magazines, internet sites, and other publications of the monastery; and finally, material collected from participant observation and my personal experience of monastic life which will illustrate contemporary practical applications of the teachings of Josephaeoi in everyday life.

## PART I: CHARISMA

### 4.2 The Charisma of Joseph the Hesychast

In contrast to the general perception of monasticism as static and unchanging, monastic life is formed *on the way*. Following the rule of *Avaton*, monks have to replace sexual reproduction with spiritual forms of reproduction. In practice, this materialization of spiritual reproduction largely depends on the movement of charismatic monks (*charismatikoi monahoi*, from the Greek word *charis* meaning ‘grace’, ‘spirit’, ‘happiness’, ‘elegance’, and ‘virtue’) who travel outside Athos to attract and recruit new members by generating ‘companionships’ of novices (*synodeies*), often from the same geographic area, who accompany the elder and follow him into a monastery or a settlement where they are incorporated into an Athonian family (see also Sidiropoulos (2000: 145-155)). Each family takes its name either from the charismatic monk thought to be the founding ‘spiritual father’ (*pneumatikos pateras*) of the family or from the geographic area where he had spent either his early years as a young novice. After many years of travelling the charismatic elder retires to a hermitage for the remainder of his life, living as an old hermit (at this stage he is also called *anchorite*, meaning ‘departurer’). Before ending his journeys inside and outside Athos, he also appoints the first abbot(s) of the monastery(ies) and settlements he and his ‘companionships’ have repopulated and renovated. Subsequent abbots are elected by the entire brotherhood. In this way, charismatic monks open the path for younger would-be monks to move towards salvation that takes place according to the tradition of each monastery on the one hand, and, on the other, the tradition of the family into which they are incorporated.

Iossifides (1990 and 1991) explored this forms of ‘spiritual kinship’ between nuns to challenge biological conceptions of kinship. She reported the strong bond between non-biological sisters as the means to organize communal life between nuns according to ‘spiritual’ ties. On Athos the basic element of this spiritual structure is the relationship

between father and son, which theologically echoes the relationship of God to Jesus. This relationship takes on different forms, depending on the context, such as elder (*gerontas*) and deacon (*diakos*), teacher and disciple, abbot and monk, monk and visitor. For a monk to reach his ultimate goal and become an ‘angel on earth’ [as in Matthew 19:10-12, 22:30; and Corinthians 7], he first has to serve his father as a deacon. During this period he is called *epotaktikos*, meaning ‘under order’ until the death of his ‘spiritual father’, which then allows him to have his own deacons. Thus, these ‘spiritual relationships’ have the characteristic of an ‘an on-going open-ended flow of spiritual life’ (du Boulay 1984:545), which was instigated by the movement of travelling monks from Athos to the secular world’ and back into Athos with more recruits.

Most of the monks in Vatopaidi belong to the family of Josephaeoi. They have been traditionally associated with Vatopaidi, since the time of the emperor John VI Cantacuzene (1292-1383AD, emperor 1347-1354AC). In 1347, the emperor strengthened the political and financial connections of Vatopaidi to Constantinople by donating the monastery of *Psychosostria* (‘soul-saver’), which was situated in the Byzantine capital (Mikrayannanitos 2001:148). He retired in Vatopaidi years later, and changed his name to Joseph. He was the original founder of the monastic family of Josephaeoi, or Joasaphaeoi as the family name is also known [personal communication with secretary of Vatopaidi 1/5/03]. Under the tradition of Josephaeoi, and with the financial and political support of the Palaeologus Dynasty (1261-1453), Vatopaidi produced a great number of artworks, including six out of the eight miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary<sup>51</sup>, while also developing the arts of psalmody, wood-carving, and

---

51 Vatopaidi has the oldest preserved fresco on the Mount, the embrace of Apostles Paul and Peter, dating from the fourth quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The frescos in the *catholicon* (main church) are thought to have been painted by Panselenus, the world-famous Orthodox iconographer. Although there have been further restorations and changes in the church (the *nave* was rebuilt in 1567, and the *exonarthex*, that is, the outer area was decorated from 1426 onwards to the more recent fresco painted in 1843), the *catholicon* has kept its original marble floor dating back to the time of St Athanasius. The Vatopaidians have also preserved a number of world-famous icons painted in the Komnenoi and post-Komnenoi period (13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), which are kept in the monastery’s icon-store, including the moveable icon of the head of Mark the Evangelist, the icon of *Mary of Vemothyrou*, which pictures Mary knitting while turning her body posture towards the right side of the frame, in one of the few pictures that portray her submission to God, Mary as the *Guide (Hodegetria)*, Christ the *Pantokrator* (‘Lord of Everything’), the *Crucifixion*, and a portrayal of *St Dimitrios (The Treasures of Mount Athos 1997: 60-78)*. In 1788 they were placed on the *iconostasis* (icons stand), the wooden wall that separates the *nave* from the sanctuary in the *Catholicon*, the main church. In the second half of the Palaeologus Dynasty during the rein of the *Kantakouzenoi* (15<sup>th</sup> century) Vatopaidi produced another series of priceless icons, such as the moveable

hagiography (*see* chapter 3, and section 4.8 below). But during the Ottoman years and the dissolution of *coenobitic* life, the linearity of the tradition of the Josephaeoi, as well as their connections to other families, became almost extinct, and that was arguably because there was no common economy and no organized life to accommodate such networks, as the monasteries introduced the *idiorythmic* life as a way of avoiding paying tax to the Ottoman government.

Following the geographic inclusion of Athos to Greece in 1912, and in the context of the expulsion of a great number of non-Greek monks that followed (*see* opening section above), Greek charismatic monks revived deserted monastic settlements by re-introducing the *coenobitic* life and increasing their population with more Greek monks. The obligatory return of all the monasteries to the *coenobitic* rule, supported by the Athonian constitution of 1926, also meant that family traditions were also revived. The revival of the Josephaeoi in the 20<sup>th</sup> century began with Joseph the Hesychast (1898-1959), or Joseph the ‘cave dweller’ as he was also known. Joseph’s secular name was Fragkiskos, and he was born in the Greek island of Paros in 1898. He was ordained a monk in 1925 by the famous Ephraim the ‘barrel-maker’ of the family of Logginoi, at the huts of Katounakia near Karyes.

According to his Greek disciples, Joseph was a young man who was searching for a spiritual way of life. But at the time there was no organized environment where he could develop ‘spiritually’, as the monks were ‘simple people’ and ‘there was no inheritance of the cleansing prayer’. Instead, they were ‘good at making things with their hands’ such as rosaries, icons and wine, to sell ‘for their living, but they were lacking *theory*’ (Filotheitis 2008: 28-29). By ‘theory’ the monks refer to the ‘mystical theory’ of the *Hesychast* movement of monks of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, the effort ‘to see God’ (*theo-ory/o*). The *Hesychast* movement (‘Silencers’) was originally led by the Vatopaidian monk St Gregorios Palamas, who emphasized on the rhythmical repetition of the words of the Jesus Prayer, accompanied by monotonous movements of the body (Ware 1987: 53-64, Gillet 1987:60, and Meyendorff 1974:33-4). Following the Fall of Constantinople and the interruption of the political and financial connection of the Royal monasteries to Constantinople and Thessalonica, the Greek version of the prayer

---

icons of Christ the *Pantokrator*, St John the Forerunner, Archangel Gabriel, St John the *Theologist*, and the *Synaxis* of Angels.

was abandoned, while new Russian, Romanian, and Serbian versions of the prayer continued to thrive, which culminated to the rise of the ‘Glorifiers of the Name’ in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian movement of monks who asked for their independence from the Greek (by now) dominated Holy Committee and the ‘Ecumenical Patriarchate’ in Istanbul (*see* Introduction, pages 16-18). The inclusion of Athos in the Greek border of 1912, and the subsequent replacement of Russian and other Slavic monks with Greek ones that took place throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was based on a ‘spiritual’ revival of the Greek version of the prayer of Gregorius Palamas (who was ordained into a monk in Vatopaidi in 1315AD, but also became the abbot of Esfigmenou in 1336). This revival was instigated by Joseph the Hesychast, who wrote of his first experiences on the Mount: ‘I was inconsolable, because I was longing so ardently to find what I had set out for, in search for God; and not only was I not finding it but people were not even being helpful’<sup>52</sup>. This ‘lack of theory’, made the young Joseph travel across the peninsula in search of the mystical and practical knowledge of prayer.

Joseph’s life was based on the natural rhythm of the four seasons, combining both isolated periods during the winter, and more socializing and travelling in the summer. He and his close friend Arsenios spent their winters on the mountain at the hermitage of St Basil where they followed the rule of the famous hermit Daniel. There they learnt to practice *metanoies* (‘regrets’, prostrations as repentance), which consisted of rhythmically breathing and reciting the words of the Jesus prayer while ‘standing up for 7-8 hours, with absolute concentration, humility, and repentance, and making more than 3,500 prostrations to keep the body warm because of the cold’ (Filotheitis 2008:67). In the summer, he and Arsenios travelled to various settlements inside and outside Athos, particularly at the huts of Katounakia, near Karyes, in the ‘companionship’ of elder Daniel, Ephraim of Syros the ‘barrel maker’, and father Nicephoros. He also travelled outside Athos, where he revived abandoned monastic settlements in Greece and the Greek islands, such as a convent in Zernovo Dramas in 1930, which was rebuilt to accommodate refugee nuns from Smyrna (Filotheitis 2008: 97). It is important to note here that while contact with all females is forbidden on the Mount according to the rule of the *Avaton*, travelling monks did come into contact with, and helped nuns and

---

<sup>52</sup> Extract from Joseph the Hesychast’s biography entitled *Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, which was translated and published in English by his disciple Joseph the Vatopaidi in 1999, at [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joseph\\_the\\_Hesychast](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joseph_the_Hesychast) [last visit 10/3/2011]

convents, outside Athos, even becoming their ‘spiritual fathers’ and confessing them. The prohibition refers to the land and the internal life of the monasteries, not to their contacts outside Athos, which is vital as it allows the charismatic monk to act outside the moral constraints of the sacred land imposed by the tradition of virginity.

During his journeys, Joseph formed two ‘companionships’ of seven monks each: the first lasted from 1938 to 1947 at the huts of St. Basil and the Skete of the ‘Young St Anna’, and the second was formed in 1947 at the ‘Young St Anna’ and moved to the New Skete, where it lasted until Joseph’s death in 1959<sup>53</sup>. According to testimonies from his disciples, Joseph’s *charis* had a ‘supernatural’ quality (as in Weber 1968:19). He often received ‘information’ from god, anticipating future events. He could watch over his disciples at all times, even though he was not physically near them (Filotheitis 2008: 244-252). In the sketes, he introduced his *typiko* (‘formalities’), the book with the rules of daily conduct and liturgical timetables. The *typiko*, written in 1938, was divided in terms of night-long private and collective prayers and daily hard work (see *figure 4a*).

<i>Figure 4a</i> Joseph the Hesychast’s program Sketes of St Basil, Young Anna, and New Skete (1938-1953)	
Sunset:	Waking up with Coffee
	Vesper with Rosary
	Personal Canon
Midnight:	Private night vigil in cell with the use of rosary
	Confession and Matins in a chapel
Dawn:	Divine Liturgy Holy Communion
Morning:	Lunch, work, and rest until vesper

According to Joseph’s disciples, daily life in the Sketes was based on the moral values of ‘obedience, virginity, and poverty’, which nowadays, govern the communal life of eight Athonian monasteries, including Vatopaidi<sup>54</sup>. It was written following the

<sup>53</sup> Sketes, huts, hermitages, and cells, are all monastic settlements, called ‘deserts’ in reference to the early asceticism of the desert of Palestine and Egypt in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (see glossary).

<sup>54</sup> ‘Our *typiko* at the desert of the Little St Anna required: waking up from sleeping at sunset for the night vigil. As we woke up, we only had a coffee, in order to help us with the night vigil. Elder Joseph imposed the coffee before the night vigil, unless someone could not drink coffee (because of his health). For the weaker brothers he allowed a small sweet gift (*kerasma*), in order to give them strength. After the coffee, we all received the blessing of our elder. And each one of us silently, without a word, departed to his cell’ (Filotheitis 2008: 267-8)

writings of the *Filokalia* ('Love of Beauty', see glossary), the manual with practical instructions on communal life, emphasizing the importance of the Jesus Prayer, frequent confession, and Holy Communion. According to his disciples, Joseph particularly emphasized the importance of drinking coffee in the evening before the vesper to stay 'vigilant' throughout the night for the Divine Liturgy (Filotheitis 2008: 268). The day was followed by hard work in the fields and strict obedience to the daily program (*Ibid*: 232-244). By placing the Jesus Prayer at the centre of the daily routine of his monks, and instituting a collective programme, he led 'the way for contemporary monastic life to continue experiencing the cleansing work and Hesychast life, which are the essence of orthodox spiritual life' (Ephraim abbot of Vatopaidi 2001:12). For this he earned the name 'Hesychast' ('Silencer'), which refers to the *Hesychast* movement of monks in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which was led by St Gregorios Palamas, who was ordained into a monk in Vatopaidi in 1315.

Joseph's life has been recorded in detail by his disciples in books (as in Joseph the Vatopaidian and Ephraim of Katounakia 2002, and Ephraim Filotheitis 2008, see figure 4b) and in the new media<sup>55</sup>, while older monks never hesitate to tell a story or two about him to curious visitors inside the monasteries. The new media have amplified Joseph's *charis* by offering an outlet for the vocation of his charisma beyond the borders of Athos; this has led to the inspiration of new generations of men taking the journey to Athos. For the Vatopaidians, Joseph's *charis* is still manifested by the odour of his relics, which the Vatopaidians keep in the monastery's sanctuary: 'all these years his bones have never stopped smelling of flowers' [priest-monk 1/10/02]. The spreading of his *charis* is materially illustrated by his mutilated body: the Vatopaidians keep a hand and other small parts of his body in the monastery's sanctuary, while his skull is kept across the Atlantic in the monastery of St Antony in Arizona - although the Hesychast had never actually been in the US during his lifetime.

---

<sup>55</sup> ([http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joseph\\_the\\_Hesychast](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joseph_the_Hesychast), in *Facebook*, or at the monastery's site <http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/miraculous-icons-holy-relics-of-the-holy-monastery-of-vatopedi>, [http://www.pravoslavieto.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide\\_vatopedi.htm](http://www.pravoslavieto.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide_vatopedi.htm) [last visit 10/3/2011])

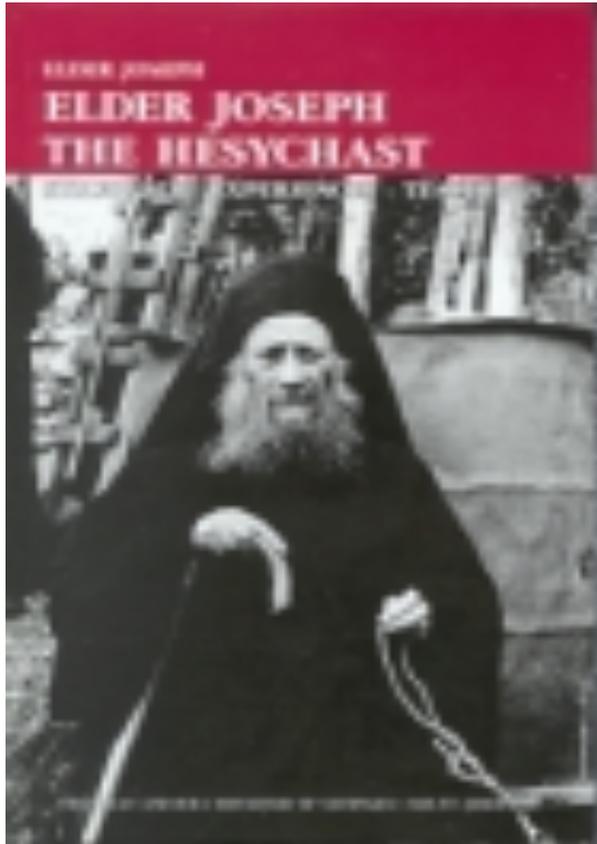


Figure 4b: Cover of one of the numerous books with Joseph’s life, published by Vatopaidi publications. His life was recorded by his disciples, and then published by their disciples.

### 4.3 The Journey to Vatopaidi

<i>Figure 4c</i>	<i>Family Tree of Josephaeoi</i>
Spiritual Father: Ephraim of Syros, the ‘Barrel-Maker’ and Nicephoros: Huts of Katounakia and St Basil	
<b>PATRON: JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST (1898-1959) ordained in 1925: Katounakia</b>	
First <i>Companionship</i> : St Basil (1925-1938), <i>Skete of the Young St Anna</i> (1938-1947) : introduced new <i>typiko</i>	
Second <i>Companionship</i> : <i>Skete of the Young St Anna</i> (1947-1953), New Skete (1953-1959)	

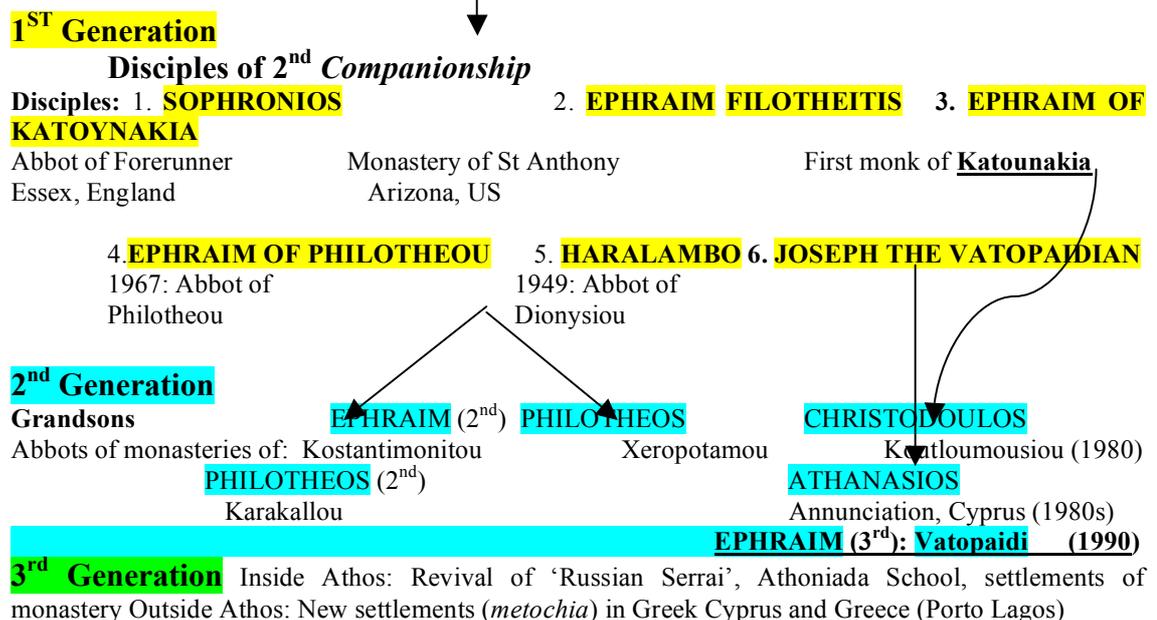




Figure 4d:

*New Skete*



*Fig 4e: Joseph the Hesychast, or 'Cave Dweller' (1898- 1959) and his second companionship: Ephraim of Katounakia seated in the front row, next to Haralambos of Dionysiou, and Joseph the Vatopaidian standing right behind them [Picture taken in the 1960s, from Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 51]*

### 4.3 The Journey to Vatopaidi

The influence of Joseph's *charis* was even greater after his death, as the members of his second *companionship* at the New Skete expanded the network of the Josephaeoi by reviving eight monasteries and a number of settlements, inside and outside Athos, in Cyprus (see figure 4c), Greece, Romania, Russia, Serbia, England (Sophronios of the monastery of St Prodomos, 'Forerunner', in Essex), and even in the US (Ephraim Filotheitis of the monastery of St Antonius, Arizona, US). One of the disciples of Joseph the Hesychast was the younger Joseph, who was ordained in 1953 in the New Skete in the Hesychast's second 'companionship'. After the death of the Hesychast in 1959, in imitation of his father's life, the young Joseph also began travelling inside and outside Athos reviving new monasteries and convents in his native Cyprus, such as the monasteries Machaira, Timios Stavros ('Holy Cross'), and Evangelismos of Theotokos ('Annunciation of the Mother of God'). Similar to his father's trips, the young Joseph's trips also gathered two 'companionships', each one with fifteen monks. His first 'companionship' took over the monastery of Koutloumousiou and re-founded its *coenobitic* rule in 1980, and the second moved to Vatopaidi in 1987, and three years later turned it from *idiorythmic* to *coenobitic*. For his efforts, the young Joseph became known as 'the Vatopaidian'.

In my discussions with Vatopaidian priest-monks and elders, those who first arrived at Vatopaidi in 1986 in the Joseph's second *companionship* of fifteen monks, told me that their odyssey to the monastery began in the 1970s. It was a long and turbulent one, marked by several conflicts with monks of other groups, which initiated further movement, until finally they managed to find a place to stay permanently. Some of the members had also travelled with Joseph's first 'companionship' that took over the monastery of Koutloumousiou in 1980. One of them was the secretary of Vatopaidi, who explained to me that after Joseph took over the patronage of Koutloumousiou, he appointed one of his disciples as its first abbot. But the new abbot was 'irresponsible and selfish' and acted in terms of 'self-interest' [personal communication 5/5/03]. But Joseph could not replace him because according to the Athonian constitution's article 5, the abbot keeps the position for life. So, Joseph decided to ignore the provocations of his former disciple and current abbot of Koutloumousiou and move on with his second

‘companionship’ of seven monks to smaller settlements, such as the New Skete in 1983, and to the House of Evangelismos in Cyprus a year later. From 1983 to 1986, Joseph repeatedly visited Cyprus to increase his ‘companionship’ from seven to fifteen monks. It was during this period, that the priest-monk had met him for the first time as a seventeen year old studying in a religious school in Cyprus with three other would-be Vatopaidian priest-monks. The four of them were ‘magnetized by his energy’ and his words gave them an ‘aim in life’ persuading them to follow him into Athos<sup>56</sup>.

In Cyprus there were more tensions, this time between Joseph’s *companionship* and the local Church, suspicious of his influence over young Cypriot men. These tensions were well recorded in the Greek media throughout the 1990s, particularly regarding the scandal involving one of the members of his ‘companionship’, a monk called Athanasius, who was allegedly ‘sleeping with a male prostitute’. ‘In the trial of Athanasius, the judge asked the male prostitute to point to Athanasius, but he (the witness) was such a liar that he pointed to one of our lawyers’. Athanasius eventually became the Bishop of Limassol and a strong candidate to become the next Archimandrite of the Church of Cyprus. His controversial figure divided the Cypriot Church, but for the Vatopaidians his struggle is an example of patience as well as hard will. Athanasius increased Vatopaidi’s influence in Cyprus, and he often visited Vatopaidi to see his former brothers, ‘at least five times a year’ [personal communication with secretary of Vatopaidi 10/5/03].

Another member of Joseph’s second ‘companionship’ who joined him during the 1980s was a French priest-monk, who could speak in perfect Greek. Back in 1984, as a student of studying Theology in Paris, he travelled to Essex and met the famous Father Sophronios of the monastery of the Forerunner, Essex, which is a property of Vatopaidi (*metochi*) in England. Sophronios, a ‘spiritual brother’ to Joseph (as they were both disciples of Joseph the Hesychast), introduced the French man to Joseph the Vatopaidian: ‘When I first met him, I fell in love with all my heart at first sight. Such was his charisma; so, I decided to join his companionship’ [French priest-monk 3/10/02]<sup>57</sup>. By 1986, following their rejection by the then Orthodox authorities in Cyprus, Joseph moved back to Athos to ‘desert’ of Kapsala (the ‘Burning Huts’) near

---

<sup>56</sup> Read entire interview of priest-monk in *Appendix 2.1*

<sup>57</sup> Read entire interview of priest-monk in *Appendix 2.2*

Karyes, and after six months to the New Skete (which was originally founded in 1947 by Joseph the Hesychast, and it was the place where Joseph the Vatopaidian was ordained in 1953). But in the New Skete there were more tensions because of the limited food, water and space, resulting in a confrontation with a group of zealot monks of the family of Matthaioi (Matthew) already living there. The zealot monks of the families of Matthaioi and Kartsonaioi (some of whom also live in the neighbouring Esfigmenou) disliked the mild ('economic', *see* below) manner of the Josephaei. Even nowadays, zealot monks criticize the Vatopaidians for the *coenobitic* way of life based on frequent confession and Holy Communion, which they believe to be an imported 'Latin' custom that pollutes their 'true faith'<sup>58</sup>.

---

*Figure 4f: Joseph the Vatopaidian's Journey to Vatopaidi*

- (a) Joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> *companionship* of Joseph the Hesychast in 1947 at the Skete of the Young St Anna
  - (b) Ordained in 1953 at the New Skete in the *companionship* of Joseph the Hesychast
  - (c) Travelled between monasteries and the Skete, and to his homeland Cyprus
  - (d) The taking over of the monastery of Koutloumousiou between 1976-1982, Joseph appointed its Abbot his disciple Christodoulos, while his *Companionship* included the famous monk Athanasius of Cyprus, and Ephraim the would-be Abbot of Vatopaidi
  - (e) The return of his first *companionship* from Koutloumousiou to the New Skete in 1983 because of a conflict with his disciple Abbot Christodoulos
  - (f) 1984: First *companionship* at the House of Evangelismos of 7 monks, including Athanasius (would-be Archimandrite of Cyprus), Ephraim (would-be Abbot of Vatopaidi), Haralambos (died in 1996)
  - (g) The creation of a second *companionship* of fifteen monks during his trips between 1983 and 1986 to the monastery of Timios Stavros ('Honoured Cross') in his native Greek Cyprus, and back into Athos, at the *House* (cell) of Evangelismos and the 'desert' of Kapsala ('Burning Hut') near Karyes
  - (h) 1986: Second *companionship* to the New Skete
  - (i) The second *companionship's* move to Vatopaidi in 1987, and changed its way of life from *idiorythmic* to *coenobitic* in 1990
  - (j) Finally, Joseph the 'Vatopaidian' retires in an isolated cell in the forest nearby, while his family continues expanding both inside and outside Athos
  - (k) In my account, since the arrival of Joseph to Vatopaidi, there have been seven *companionships* of monks who followed one of his disciples, mainly from Greek Cyprus
- 

In the winter of 1986, after a difficult transitional period between the House of Evangelismos and the 'desert of Kapsala'<sup>59</sup>, Joseph was finally given permission by the Holy Committee to move to Vatopaidi. At the time the number of monks in the *idiorythmic* Vatopaidi was fifty-three (Mantzaridis, 1997:172). According to the priest-monk: 'When we first arrived here (in Vatopaidi) in 1987 we found the monastery in ruins. The monks wouldn't pray together, wouldn't prepare their meals, and wouldn't

---

<sup>58</sup> *See* more on the new zealot movement in the monastery of Esfigmenou in final chapter 9

<sup>59</sup> The *House of Evangelismos* and *Kapsala* are situated near Karyes, and today they are used by the Vatopaidians for the 'ordeal' (*dokimasia*) of some of their novices, before they are allowed to join the brotherhood in the monastery (*see* next chapter).

take care of the monastery. They didn't even bother to go to the Sunday Mass, such was their spiritual downfall' [3/10/ 02]. The priest-monk continued claiming that the monks before the arrival of Joseph were living 'dirty and hungry'. But despite the poor conditions of their life, when Joseph's 'companionship' arrived, they only found 'five monks' waiting for them: 'most of them flew away, because they were used to *idiorythmic* life that gave them absolute freedom in their doings, and they could not bear the strictness of *coenobitic* life of our holy father (Joseph)' [secretary of Vatopaidi 10/5/03]. However, according to testimonials from zealot monks of the family of Matthew, who lived there before the arrival of Joseph, claim that they were 'violently kicked out, and some of them even murdered, and their bodies were thrown from cliffs into the sea'. One monk even claimed that he witnessed the future abbot of Vatopaidi, Ephraim, 'transforming into the devil while praying in the monastery's main church' [Greek newspaper *Eleutherotypia* 26/9/2008].

Following the exodus of most Vatopaidians who lived in the monastery before 1986, the old brotherhood was replaced with an influx of Greek Cypriot monks. One of the members of Joseph's 'companionship' at the time told me: 'when we first came here we found the monastery in ruins. The monks wouldn't pray together, wouldn't prepare their meals, and wouldn't take care of the monastery. They didn't even bother to go to the Sunday Mass' [discussion with priest-monk 3/10/02]<sup>60</sup>. Joseph immediately re-introduced the *coenobitic* life of Joseph the Hesychast, applying it very rigidly and with an emphasis on the daily program as the means of re-organizing the spiritual life of Vatopaidi. After he got permission from the Holy Committee of Karyes to turn Vatopaidi back into a *coenobitic* community in 1989, the change officially took place a year later (7/8/1990). On April 18<sup>th</sup> 1991, the new brotherhood of the monastery issued its *Internal Regulation*, which was signed by patron Joseph the Vatopaidian, abbot Ephraim, and five elders (of which two have since died and been replaced), and ratified by the *Holy Epistasia* of Karyes (*see* glossary). It laid down the rules of the *coenobitic* life, and the annual tasks shared by elders and priest-monks, as well as the duties of ordinary monks. Joseph appointed his disciple Ephraim as the first abbot and six more members of his 'companionship' as members of the first 'council of elders' (*gerontia*), the administrative and executive authority of the new Vatopaidi.

---

<sup>60</sup> Read entire interview in *Appendix 2.2*

*Figure 4g:* An intimate picture of Ephraim of Katounakia, who was a spiritual brother of Joseph the Vatopaidian, with his 'nephew' Abbot Ephraim of Vatopaidi, staring into his eyes, entitled 'Paternal

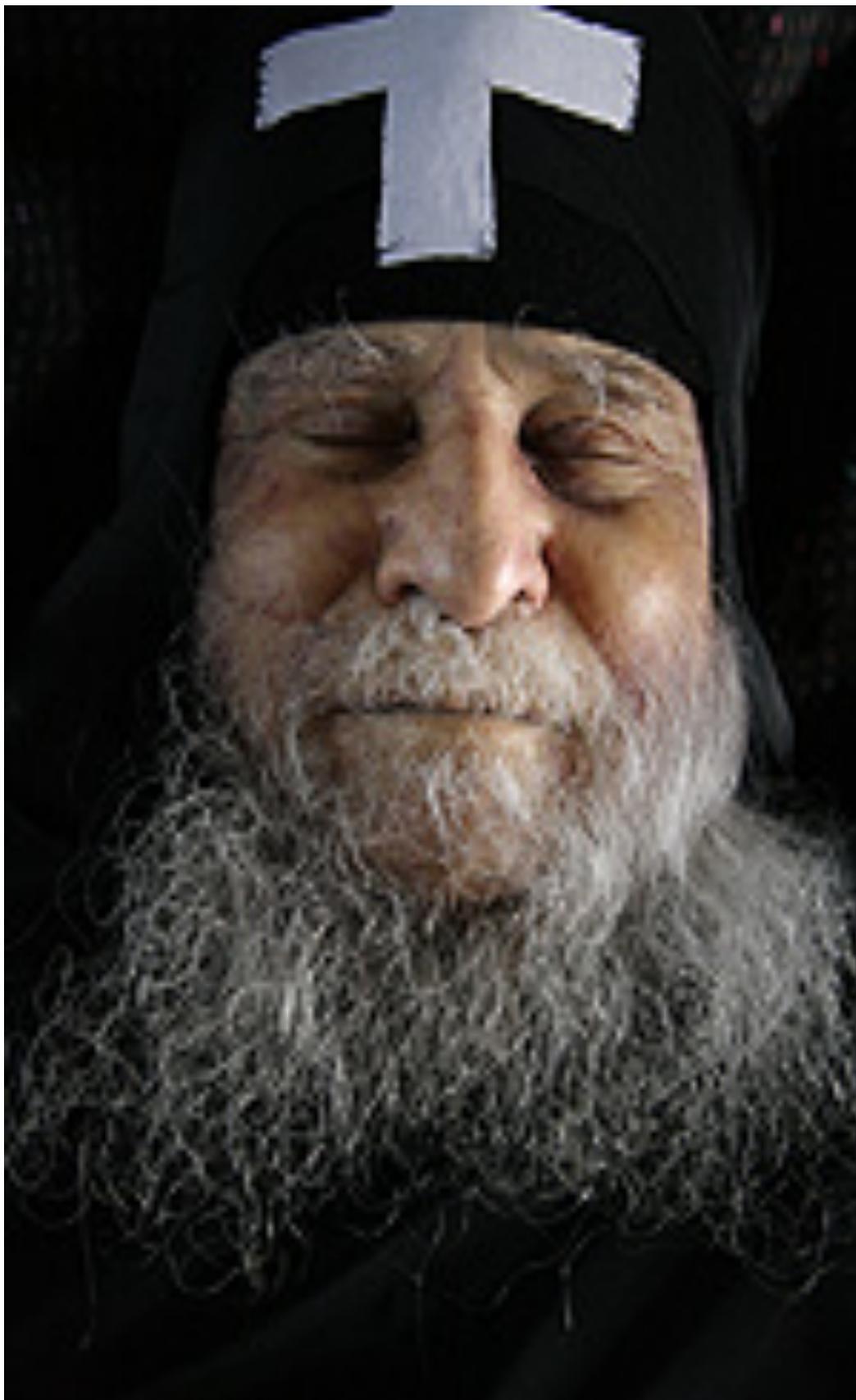
Tenderness'. [Picture taken from Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 86]

In the last two decades Vatopaidi's population rapidly increased from 53 monks in 1986 (Mantzaridis<sup>61</sup> 1997: 172, and Alpentzos 2002: 232-5) to 90 at the time of my fieldwork (2002-3), and nowadays to almost 130 monks (2010-11). In 1990, the number of monks was 48, but two years later, following a second companionship of monks arriving from Greek Cyprus it increased to 73, including sixteen monks aged between 20 and 35, and eighteen monks around 40 years-old (Sidiropoulos 2000:155). A third wave of young monks followed in 1996, and a fourth companionship in 2000 and 2002. By 2003, more than 90 monks lived in Vatopaidi, and about 40 in its settlements. In response to the increasing number of monks, the Vatopaidians had to change their *Internal Regulations* to accommodate the needs of the brotherhood. On June 30<sup>th</sup> 1995, because of the second big wave of more than 30 young monks, the abbot increased the number of the elders in the council from 6 to 8 (change of articles 12, 13, and 15 from Vatopaidi's *Internal Regulation*). In 2000, in response to the third wave, the abbot decided to unofficially increase the elders to nine in order to deal with the monastery's increasing population and rapid increase of secular visitors [personal communication with secretary, 6/8/03].

After Joseph the Vatopaidian appointed Ephraim to be the first abbot of the new Vatopaidi in 1990, he retired to an isolated cell in the forest taking only two deacons with him, as far as possible from the noise of the monasteries, with the visitors and their mobile phones, the crane machines and the lay workers to contemplate and practice the *hesychasm* ('silence'). He only visited Vatopaidi in a jeep every Sunday for the liturgy and the meal, where he stayed until late in the evening before he retreated again to his solitude. On Sunday evenings, following dinner, the entire brotherhood gathered at the meeting room (*synodikon*) to hear his teachings, ask for his advice, and receive his blessing. Young monks had also installed an internal telecommunication system that connected his hut directly to the Abbot's Office (*Hegoumeneion*) and the Council of Elders (*gerontia*). On July 1<sup>st</sup> 2009, on his birthday, Joseph the Vatopaidian died in his isolated cell in the forest. The deacons who found him say that he began smiling after his death. They even took pictures of the smiling corpse and posted them on the internet and *Facebook*.

---

<sup>61</sup> The following statistics were presented in the *Orthodox Forum Conference* (Munich 1995). Professor Mantzaridis (Department of Theology and Sociology, University of Thessaloniki, Greece) kindly gave them to me. I sincerely thank him for all his support.



*Figure 4h:* The smiling corpse of Joseph the Vatopaidian (-1/7/1921-1/7/2009) From: <http://www.impantokratoros.gr/8D2A12EF.en.aspx>

## PART II: ORDEAL

### 4.4 The ‘Calling’ (*esoteriko kalesma*)

‘I’ve been a novice for one and a half months now. I am from Pafos. I studied Law at the University of Komotini (north Greece) for three years, but I dropped the degree to become a monk. If you are from the outside you cannot and will never understand this internal calling (*esoteriko kalesma*). I first came here the previous Easter, before my university exams of June. I stayed for a couple of weeks. I had decided to leave for Komotini on a Saturday. But then my spiritual Father told me to stay for one more day for the Sunday celebration. I did, and that Sunday I heard the calling inside me, and realized that I did not want to leave Vatopaidi. I decided to imprison myself in this stable, and somehow I am sure that this is the right decision. You see, before I couldn’t understand the meaning of going to the Church, the meaning of Christmas and Easter, the importance of the Sunday liturgy. Do you understand what it means to hear the inner calling (*esoteriko kalesma*) of God and choose to leave behind you all the freedoms, in order to imprison yourself in this stable at your own will? It cannot be explained, simply because it is an order from the Holy Spirit. I came for a week, and I stayed for life. And that’s that; *you can never understand why someone comes here for a week and stays for life*’ [Discussion with a novice, 31/7/2003]

The Vatopaidian monks describe their personal decision to join this particular monastery as an ‘internal calling’ (*esoteriko kalesma*). The novice I talked to above distinguished himself from me, the secular visitor, by telling me that I ‘cannot and will never be able understand the calling’ because it has nothing to do with social sciences. Numbers and statistics can not fully explain<sup>62</sup> this esoteric force. The monks say that the decision to join Vatopaidi was ‘the will (*charis*)<sup>63</sup> of the Holy Spirit’, not theirs. Thus, it cannot be explained with secular logic, but only with the rationality of God. Many monks put this sentiment into words by referring to the calling as a kind of liberation from an ‘aimless’ secular past: ‘I was and I wasn’t there, my (secular) life did not have a meaning, an aim. I realized that without the *charis* of Jesus I would never

---

<sup>62</sup> In an Athonian parable, narrated to me by an old monk of Vatopaidi [26/4/03], a secular visitor was trying to open the door of the cell of an elder monk, but despite his hard effort he could not open it. The elder then asked him to try to open the door the *other* way, which he did, and the door swiftly opened. The parable reveals the gap between ‘worldly’ rationality and the rationality of monastic life, as the latter is *an-other* way of life. At the field one day I was lost in the forest, until I found the deserted Vatopaidian *Skete of St Dimitrios*. I sat down there thirsty, when I saw an old monk walking by. I asked him for some water, and he pointed to me that I was sitting on the top of a fountain that was covered with a wooden plate: ‘You have been sitting on it all this time, but you could not see it’ he told me [10/10/02]. The metaphor the old monk made was that one must open himself to the *rationality of God*, in order to access the ‘system of secret knowledge’ (as in Newman and Boyd 1982: 282) of monastic life.

<sup>63</sup> *Charis*, which is the root to the word ‘charismatic’ means in Greek ‘grace’, ‘elegance’, and ‘happiness’: See glossary

have an aim in my life. That is what monastic life gives: it gives you an *aim* to come closer to God. And that is why I decided to become a monk' [Cypriot priest-monk 8/10/02]. Many monks I talked to said that they were 'saved' after joining Vatopaidi from a secular past of sin. This sentiments are expressed in a number of stories of would-be saint individuals, who lost their way and miraculously found themselves at the shores of the peninsula, as in the legend of Mary and John's shipwreck on the way to meet Lazarus, when they took shelter at the site where today the Georgian monastery of Iviron stands. One afternoon, a Vatopaidian monk kicked a visitor out of the guestroom because his eyes were red and he suspected him of smoking hashish. He then told me:

Disillusion with secular life is a common motive among monks of different backgrounds, which can be summed up by a Greek monk: 'I vividly remember a Saturday night, ten years ago, when some friends of mine took me to a nightclub. I got bored and dizzy. "What is this rubbish, what a waste of time" I thought to myself and the next morning I came here to find peace'. Many monks told me that they were 'saved' from a secular past of sin. The Greek monk told me of an accident with his motorbike that left him in a coma, an incident that changed his life: 'It was a miracle that I came out of it (the coma) a few months later. My mother told me I was crazy. But she could not understand the will of the Mother of God that made me come here' [20/4/2003]<sup>64</sup>. Such sentiments are expressed in a number of traditional stories of charismatic monks and saints who lost their way and miraculously found themselves at the shores of the peninsula, following the legend of Mary, who was also rescued from a shipwreck at the coast of the Georgian monastery of Iviron (*see* Introduction). The decision to abandon an 'aimless life' however is often seen by the biological family and friends of the monks, particularly their mothers, as 'crazy'. But for the monks, it is the 'world' outside Athos that is irrational and 'confusing', not their decision to abandon it:

---

<sup>64</sup> 'They think that I don't know, they think that I've never been there, because I am a monk. But the reason that I am here in the first place is because of these things, drugs, alcohol, and prostitutes. Do you think that when I was a child I was a good kid, like the Cypriots (monks are)? This mark (on his face) is from a motorbike. The accident wasn't my fault, but I fell into a coma, because I hit my head. It was a miracle that I came out of it a few months later. It was the will of the Mother of God, in order to make me come here. She taught me that you have to respect yourself, and the others next to you, at all times. If you ride a motorbike, or a woman, it is always the same thing: you must respect yourself, your body, heart and soul, at all times no matter what you are doing. When you sin you only hurt yourself. I vividly remember a Saturday night, ten years ago, when some friends of mine took me to a nightclub. I got bored and dizzy: 'What is this rubbish, what a waste of time' I thought to myself. The next morning I came here to find peace' [Greek monk 20/4/2003]

‘monastic life gives an aim to life’, in opposition to the monks’ ‘aimless’ secular past [priest-monk 22/9/02].

The calling usually happens at a young age, but sometimes it can also happen at an older age, such as in the exceptional case of an 82-year old Cypriot novice that I met in Vatopaidi, who six months prior to our conversation had joined his first cousin, an older monk at the Huts of Katounakia, before moving to Vatopaidi to ‘die peacefully’, in his words. Normally, the Vatopaidians do not accept novices over 35 years-old, but an exception was made for him because of his large fortune, which he donated to the monastery. But his decision angered his secular family, as they felt that he had abandoned them: ‘My family got really angry, they don’t even want to talk to me’ [10/5/03]. Their anger was partially because he excluded the members of his biological family from his will. The Vatopaidian elders used the traditional rule of poverty, which states that no monk is allowed to have any private property, according to *articles 33 and 39* of the *Internal Regulations* of the monastery, in order to claim the wealth of the old novice in exchange for allowing him to spend his final years there.

In my discussions with younger monks and novices, they particularly referred to their mothers when they talked about their secular past. In their accounts, it was clear that the ‘calling’ had a shocking effect to them. The biological father of one of the younger monks told me regarding the emotional impact of the decision of his son to become a monk: ‘His mother is still upset. Sometimes in the summer she takes the boat, and the Abbot allows him in one of Vatopaidi’s boats, so that she can see him for a bit. They spend a few hours together (on the boat) and that’s it’ [1/5/03]. His mother made the effort to visit him on the boat (so that she does not walk on the ‘virgin’ land on which women are not allowed), to see him just for a few hours every now and then, under the constant supervision of an elder. Another priest-monk told me that sometimes the Devil took the form of their mothers in their dreams to tempt them and make them feel guilty for abandoning ‘cosmopolitan’ life<sup>65</sup>.

---

<sup>65</sup> In the words of a Vatopaidian monk: ‘sometimes in the evenings we remember our mothers and feel sorry for them. But it is the devil that sends such memories to torture and confuse us. The memory of our parents is a source of negative energy. We must be indifferent towards such sentiments, for the devil is cunning and deceiving. He can take the form of our (biological) mother to confuse us, and the only way to keep the door of our Heart shut is by praying at all times, even in our sleep’ [6/11/02]

The priest-monk warned of the danger of the ‘passionate love’, describing it as a kind of self-obsession, a ‘sick love’ in his words. The earthly mother-love is therefore seen as deceiving, based on passionate ties that bring feelings of guilt, particularly to untrained novices, which is an excessive emotion thought to be carried from the ‘world’ into the monastery. Because the biological mothers of the monks are not virgin – as Mary, their spiritual mother, is – the passionate love for them is associated with sexual reproduction and to emotional attachment to the material world from which the monks strive to escape. Particularly the bond to the biological mother is thought to be a weakness that the Devil uses to ‘darken’ a monk’s ‘heart’ [discussion with priest-monk 8/5/03]. For this reason, the novices are placed under a strict regime of prayer, work, and confession, and supervised by an elder at all times, in helping them to ‘keep their mind concentrated on God’ and to avoid such negative ‘thoughts’ (*logismoi*) [see chapter 6]. Through this cathartic process ‘the longing for your family lasts for three years. Then you just forget about it; I haven’t talked to my mother for 20 years’ [middle-aged monk 22/4/03].

The above examples reveal the emotional impact of separation from the biological family. Monastic life demands self-sacrifice, both from the would-be monk and from his biological family. In this moral context, the monks say that they imitate Christ, who is thought to be the ‘first monk’<sup>66</sup>. Following his example (Matthew 12:47-9), they have to denounce their secular family and friends; they must struggle against their feelings for, and of, their secular family. In this context, the path to salvation is not an easy one; it is a path of ‘war’, beginning with the denunciation and emotional detachment from the biological family, which is the first step in the process of separation of each would-be monk from his secular past. The aim is to achieve a monastic persona in the ideal image and imitation of the archetype of Christ, the ‘first monk’ as they call him, whose

---

<sup>66</sup> In the words of a Vatopaidian priest-monk: ‘Christ came to bring War, in order to make Peace. When a young man asked Him what did he have to do to find peace, Christ told him to abandon everything he kept, and follow Him. And when His Mother and sister came to visit Him, He said: ‘I have no mother and siblings; I only have one father, God’. Christ was in everything a virgin; he did not have a family or a country. Our greatest enemy is our family, and by this I mean the exaggerated love we feel for them that do not allow us to be free. The first step of liberation has to be a violent struggle, to put the knife deep to cut through the bone. It is painful, but with the help of the prayer it is a struggle that you can win. When I told my mother that I am going to Athos she cried, and she told me that my father had three cardiac arrests because of me. But as my beloved Elder used to say, it takes three years until you can completely take your mind off your parents. And that’s how long it took. Today my mother tells me on the phone ‘I wish all my sons had become monks like you’, because through me she also found Jesus. And Jesus never abandons a monk, but gives His blessing to his family for ten generations’ [10/4/03]

life and image (*eikona*, ‘image’ in Greek/ *imago Dei* in Latin) the monks imitate both in their choice to become monks (*calling* as self-sacrifice). Just like Christ sacrificed his personal life for the common good, including the love for the physical side of his mother, monks sacrifice their emotional attachment to their secular families by entering into the ‘spiritual family’ (*pneumatiki oikogeneia*) of the Athonian families (Iossifides 1990 and 1991). In this context, as a number of ethnographies discussed in the past (Stewart 1991: 80, *see also* Campbell 1964: 35, du Boulay 1974: 57), the Athonian families are reconstructed on the archetypal image of family-structure in which god as the father, Mary the mother, and the abbot of the monastery the representative father-figure of God on earth.

#### 4.5 Abandoning Worldly Degrees

The father of a young deacon, whom I often met in Vatopaidi because of his frequent visits, was particularly bitter about his son’s decision to abandon his secular education<sup>67</sup>. In our discussions he told me that despite his initial reservations he felt that he had to support his son’s decision, and so he sometimes worked as a lay worker, helping with the restoration of Vatopaidi. His son had shown an inclination towards monastic life, reading books about the lives of saints since childhood. He also mentioned that one of his son’s motivations was to avoid the national service – although it is worth noting that the vast majority of Greek Cypriot Vatopaidians in particular, have all done their military service before becoming monks<sup>68</sup>. The young deacon ‘used to be an excellent student, the best in his class, with degrees in English and French’ at the prominent School of Economics in Athens. His father was keen to convey that they were a working class family, which originally came from Menidi, a working-class area of Athens. He had worked hard as a crane driver for his son to study

---

<sup>67</sup> In his words: ‘My son has a great mind. But after he finished university, he did not want to go to the army, and he decided to come to the Abbot Ephraim. That was three years ago. It was his first ever trip outside Athens, he had never been anywhere else. He came for a week, but he never returned. I knew that this would happen to him, because since he was a child he was always reading religious books. It was already obvious what he would become. At the beginning I was not happy about it, but now I visit him five times a year, though the Abbot only allows us to speak to each other one hour a day, not longer.’ [Biological father of a young monk, 1/4/03]

<sup>68</sup> In this sense, the Cypriot monks’ journey began even before the calling, as they first did their secular duty for their country, before moving to their sacred duties as monks. This can be seen as another interconnection between the secular and the monastic life, as the personal journey from the military to the monastery.

at university. This was *his* personal sacrifice: to work hard for his children to get a decent education and a better life. But his son, to whom he and his wife invested everything, decided to abandon the gifts of his parents and follow the steps of Christ.

According to a number of statistical researches (such as Mantzaridis 2005: 2, and Sidiropoulos 2000: 154-5), Vatopaidi's rapid development in the last twenty years was based on an influx of young and well-educated monks who brought with them their knowledge and skills from the secular world. In the monastery their skills are used for the community, *not* for their own personal interest. On this moral basis, many monks that I met in the field had higher education, but not a degree to show for it. From the monks' perspective the abandonment of secular education is a collective matter of equality and egalitarianism<sup>69</sup>. If the abbot encouraged the novices to graduate, he would divide the brotherhood into those with university degrees and those without. Of the thirteen novices at the time I was there, eleven had studied in a higher education establishment attaining degrees in medicine (2), physics (2), law (2), and theology (5). Eight of them were Cypriots had arrived together in a *companionship* led by one of Joseph the Vatopaidian's disciples, but none of them was allowed to graduate. On the other hand, six out of the ten priest-monks had also dropped their degrees in theology before joining Vatopaidi. Five of them knew each other since they were teenagers, as they had studied together at a religious school in Pafos before moving to Thessaloniki to study theology at the Aristotle University. They dropped their degrees in 1986 to follow Joseph the Vatopaidian at the House of Evangelismos, before moving to Vatopaidi six months later. Since then, they have progressed to the higher status of priesthood, but only one of them managed to get his university degree, while the others continued making the effort to get their degrees, despite the abbot's reservations<sup>70</sup>.

---

69 Social stratification: 'Equality' here should be understood in terms of social stratification, such as Dumont's approach to the Hindu caste system, where 'equality and hierarchy are not... opposed to each other' (1972: 306), but rather complement each other. The idea is that all the novices are the same, but they also have to go through the same hierarchical procedure which demands their obedience to their Elders.

<sup>70</sup> In the words of a Cypriot priest-monk: 'We continued taking a few exams here and there, in 1990, '91, '95, '99, and even last year. Sometimes, the examiners come to our monastery for the paper. On other occasions we used to travel to Thessaloniki for oral exams separately from the rest of the class at the houses of the professors. I have only four subjects left and six new ones which are easy to pass, so I think that some point in the future I will be able to graduate' [personal communication with old monk 9/10/02].

#### 4.6 The ‘Desert’ (*Erimos*) Ordeal (*Dokimasia*)

One spring morning in 2003, three non-Orthodox researchers (a Chinese and two American sociologists) visited the monastery, but they were not welcomed. Instead, following a lunch at the refectory, the abbot made an angry speech against the humanist approaches to monastic life:

‘These communist atheists believe that the centre of our lives should be man and not God. Sociology is such a disgraceful so-called science. Jesus was the founder of monasticism. His disciples, who were all illiterate and imperfect, were saved because they imitated him. What do you need universities for? Why do you need to study theology, for example, when you will do best if you follow the life of Jesus?’ [Abbot 29/4/03]

For the abbot, the essence of monastic life is a matter of experience that ‘worldly’ studies fail to grasp, in the same way seculars cannot understand the calling. He first came to Athos when he was only 16 years old. He had never studied in a ‘cosmopolitan’ institution and did not recognize university degrees as his ‘spiritual father’ Joseph the Vatopaidian discouraged his monks from graduating, arguing that ‘studying is time-consuming’ and instead emphasized the practice of prayer [priest-monk 3/5/03].

‘The only true university is the desert, the sketes and huts where monks are born. These are the universities of life. All these social systems that you are studying are meaningless. They cannot describe the truth in life. Here life is esoteric, it is based on a thousand year old tradition, and has kept the same program, and the same spiritual means in achieving it’ [Abbot’s speech in the refectory 29/4/03]

After a novice hears the calling, he must first ask the permission of the abbot to be ‘tested’ as a novice (*dokimos*, the root of ‘deacon’). If the abbot accepts him, he is given a simple black dress and a hat, a rosary of 100 knots/prayers and a note-book to write down his sins so that he does not forget them during his confessions. Everything he owned is taken according to the rule of poverty as private property does not exist in the *coenobitic* system. His ‘ordeal’ (*dokimasia*) lasts for a period of six months to three years, depending on his progress. It is divided in two parts, according to two levels of ‘repentance’: the first is called ‘cathartic’ because it aims to cleanse the self of the would-be monk from the sins and memories of his secular past that he carries with him into Athos. It is marked by the individual’s guilt for his sins, a feeling that is later replaced with a feeling of ‘self-pity’ [priest-monk 10/5/03]. The second period of his

ordeal is called the period of ‘enlightenment’, referring to the realization of the sin, and the cathartic tears of redemption. According to the monks, ‘these tears are not of sadness and guilt, but of happiness’. They are cleansing tears liberating the novice from his sinful past. When the novice finally ‘stops crying for his sins, then he starts entering in a *logical* and legitimate way in the real state of *repentance*’ (Joseph the Vatopaidian 1995:19, *my trans.*). This inner rite of passage of gradual change from inside, while based on a cleansing number of practices of faith, transforms the novice into a monk not only on a superficial, external level, but his way of thinking, according to the collective ‘logic’ of the brotherhood. The entire ordeal aims to ‘liberate and cleanse ourselves from the passions we carry with us in here from the world’ [priest-monk 8/8/2003]<sup>71</sup>, the memory of ‘worldly’ sins, emotional ties, and bad habits:

‘Only a life *empty* of passions is free from the pain of human passion that brings suffering. Human passions are not logical; they are *un-natural* (*para-fysin*, ‘against nature’) resulting to internal pain. Why would a logical human being wish to be hurt? For the soul to blossom it has to be in order, obedient and eager’  
[Priest-monk 6/10/02]

The emptying process begins in the ‘desert’ (*erimos*, *see* glossary), a term referring to monastic settlements such as cells, huts, or houses, where life is *idiorythmic* and consequently, more private and family-oriented. These settlements consist of small independent groups of two up to ten monks called *lavres* (*see* glossary). They are financially independent and may monks make their living by selling and hand-made objects (rosaries, crosses, etc) to visitors. In these monastic settlements the elders followed the *typiko* (daily programme, *see* glossary) of the Hesychast, based on prayer and work<sup>72</sup>. During this first stage, the novice is kept isolated in his cell and any contact with his biological family is strictly forbidden so that it does not emotionally ‘confuse’ the novice. This harsh way of life, under the constant supervision by the elder, serves to ‘test’ (*dokimasia*) each novice (*dokimos*) towards *filoponia*, meaning to be a ‘friend of pain’ [personal communication with priest-monks]. The latter, refers to a set of practices, such as strict fasting with dry food and limited water (*xerofagia*), hard work,

---

<sup>71</sup> It is a process of purification from the secular past of each novice, similar to Carrithers’s description of becoming a hermit in Sri Lanka, through an organized process of ‘self-cultivation’ (1983: 247-265) within a ‘path of purification’ (Ibid: 46-66).

<sup>72</sup> The Vatopaidians follow the *typiko* of Joseph the Hesychast, which he introduced in 1938 at the hermitage of *St Basil* and at the Skete of Young Anna (*see* section 4.1).

sleep deprivation, sleeping on wood, prostrations, and constant praying using the rosary (100 knots). The novices sleep on a hard mattress, called *sakkos*, confess every two nights and have to show ‘the tears (sponge), silence, humility, night vigilance, bravery, coldness’ (the first stage of being without passions), ‘tiredness, torment, exhaustion, shattering, naivety, fellowship, mildness, simple faith without questioning, distance from parents, effortless effort, simplicity, and purposeful’ poverty’ (Alpentzos 2002:151).

According to the monks, the aim of the ordeal is to reach the state where the novice begins to cry with cathartic ‘tears of happiness’ (*dakrya charas*) that signify the transition of the monk to a higher spiritual level. These are not painful, or emotionally excessive but, rather, ‘pure’ (*agna*) and crystal clear, revealing an esoteric change ‘coming from the heart’, not the eyes<sup>73</sup>. The ‘pure tears’ (*agna dakrya*) signify the successful ‘enlightenment’ (*epifotisis*) of the novice by the Holy Spirit and the completion of his ‘testing’ period [personal communication with priest-monk 3/5/03]. He is then moved into the second part of his training, which is shorter in length and takes place inside Vatopaidi under the supervision of the abbot. While in the ‘desert’ he is cleansed from his sins, in the monastery he is gradually incorporated into the daily routine of Vatopaidi on the basis of the value of ‘blind obedience’ (*tifli ypakoe*), the monolith of Vatopaidian life.

However, as I shall show in later chapters, the denunciation of worldly degrees contradicts the everyday reality of the monastery; for instance, the annual administrative duties and daily tasks are distributed among the brotherhood in a hierarchical way according to their skills, knowledge, and secular background of each monk. Because younger monks were more experienced in computing and public relations, they worked on the top floor of the monastery in the comfortable computer rooms next to the abbot’s office (*Hegoumeneion*). Their skills and education put them in a higher position than older monks of lower education but higher spiritual status;

---

<sup>73</sup> ‘There is no abstract meaning in repentance. The right way to repent has to come from the heart, and has to be sincere. It means three things: first, the novice submits his faith to God’; second, he shows sympathy and love for his fellow humans; and third, learns to be humble towards himself with true humility. True repentance comes with endless tears of happiness from the Heart, not the eyes that can deceive. Our grandfather (Joseph) the Hesychast used to make the ground mud from his tears. But these tears are not passionate and emotional. They must also come from the Heart, not just the eyes. The prayer protects the purity in our hearts, making the tears sincere. And when these tears become tears of happiness, then the monk rediscovers the Divine Grace. These are the gifts of confession and prayer’ [priest-monk 9/10/02]

they worked on the ground floor. Because older monks are generally of lower education than younger ones, and in spite of their higher spirituality and experiences of monastic life, they were dependent on the hi-tech knowledge of the younger ones, and this dependence sometimes undermined the value of obedience as it allowed space for the youngsters to be disobedient<sup>74</sup>.

#### 4.7 The Revival of Psalmody

As already discussed, Vatopaidi has a double history: on the one hand, the tradition of Vatopaidi (chapter 3), while on the other, the history of the Josephaeoi. The two separated histories were practically connected through the collective experience of the journey to Vatopaidi, which was both esoteric and geographic. Psalmody is one of the practices that directly connect the tradition of Vatopaidi to the tradition of the Josephaeoi. In Vatopaidi, the practice dates back to the composers John and Gregory Koukouzelis of the ‘golden’ period of the Palaeologus Dynasty (1261-1453). The notation system of the music scores goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Vatopaidian monks Joseph Domesticos Koukouzelis, Arsenios the Younger, and Joseph the New Koukouzelis. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the famous hymnographer Neophytes Kafsokalyviotis, who died around 1760, taught at the Vatopaidian Athoniada School with the financial support of the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tradition continued with Joseph of the monastery of Dionysiou, who was the ‘spiritual father’ to a Vatopaidian monk called Nikolaos, famous for his voice. The tradition returned to Vatopaidi in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the monk Romanos (1889-1966), who took his name from the most famous composer of Byzantine chants: St Romanos the Melodian. In 1944, he became the head of the *idiorythmic* Vatopaidi. After his death in 1966, his disciple Ignatius (1913-1994) took his place, until the change of the monastery into *coenobitic* in 1990. During the liturgies, Ignatius symbolically took the seat of his teacher Romanos, heading the right side of the choir. All these ancestral names have a strong symbolic meaning and they are given to new monks during their ordinations, particularly the ones with talent in singing (see ordination below). The symbolism of the name carried by a monk obliges him to imitate the life of his predecessors with the same name, thus, continuing the tradition of the family beyond the limits of time and space (*see* also next chapter on rite of tonsure).

---

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 6 on obedience and disobedience, and chapter 8 on moral dilemmas regarding the introduction of new media technologies in the monastery.

For the Vatopaidians, the act of singing is a ‘spiritual revelation’<sup>75</sup>. Every noon, as a reward for my morning work, the verger took me and the novice I was working with to the empty church to sing thanksgiving hymns to Mary. He was keen on my voice, and even suggested that I might become a member of the choir one day. The notation of the Byzantine music texts consisted of notes called ‘spirits’ (*pneumata*) written in black ink, and ‘body/hand gestures’ (*neumata*) which are signs denoting the movement of the hands of the priest who conducts the song; these are written in red ink. The music scores were laid out in three voices. I sang the top voice, which is also called ‘spirits’ (*pneumata*) and constitutes the melody. The novice sang the middle part, called ‘bodies’ (*somata*), which consists of single-tone movements keeping the rhythm. The verger sang the lower voice, called ‘substances’ (*hypostases*), producing a hypnotic unifying sound, which dynamically directs the movement of the whole piece by ‘holding’ (*kratema*) the tonal mode. The symbolic connection of the three voices is associated with the nature of the Holy Trinity or ‘One Being, Three Substances’. As we were singing the songs to Mary, I felt all the tiredness floating away from my body, and my heart beating stronger. It felt like an elevation. ‘Did you feel that, did you see the Mother of God?’ the father excitedly asked me after we had finished. This personal connection to Mary, first through the tradition of Vatopaidi, and second through the tradition of the family of Josephaeoi increased their sense of belonging: first belonging to the landscape and the monastic building which is thought to be its natural part; second, belonging to the tradition of Vatopaidi in particular; and third, being members of the family of Josephaeoi by following the *typiko* and the communal values of Joseph the Hesychast.

This collective sense of belonging is expressed in ‘great feasts’, which in Vatopaidi are centralized around the most sacred item of the monastery: the girdle of the Virgin Mary, which attracts thousands of visitors every year. In 2003, On the day of the celebration of the belt (August 31<sup>st</sup> with the ‘old’ Julian calendar, Friday evening 12/9 to Saturday morning 13/9 with the Gregorian calendar) there were more than 400

---

75 I felt that my experience echoed the *chisungu* songs of the Bemba women in Richards’s ethnography of women’s initiation rituals, in which singing gave access to the ‘secret knowledge’ of the community (Richards 1995: 126). It was not only a matter of singing, or a matter of repeating ancient, meaningless, ‘formal’ words (as in Bloch 1974), but a matter of *experiencing* the elevation I felt through singing. This gave me a very limited access to the greater knowledge of the monks, which has to be experienced - rather than described on a paper.

guests, including monks of other Athonian families, and abbots of other monasteries, as well as secular visitors and clergy. In the picture below (*figure 4i*), taken from the celebration of the girdle recently in 2010, we can see at the right side of the choir the families of Danieleoi and Thomades, and monks from the New Skete. These two families were very close to the Vatopaidian family of the Josephaeoi that took over the monastery in 1990. At the left side of the temple monks of the monasteries of Vatopaidi and Karakalou sang, led by Father Spyridon, the spiritual patron of the family of Gerasimaioi.



*Figure 4i:* Pictures of the *chorostasia* of the abbots in their white *rassa* venerating the Holy Girdle in 2010 From: <http://www.romfea.gr/component/content/article/13/5817-2010-09-12-21-45-08>

The second picture (*figure 4j*) shows the peak of the vigil with the veneration of the belt that took place in a hierarchical order called ‘in *chorostasia*’ (‘choir stand’): first was the abbot, closely followed by the specially invited clergy, including abbots of other monasteries, and archimandrites from Churches outside Athos all wearing the white rassa. They were followed by the chaplains, the chanters, the *typikaris* and the *kanonarchis* of the liturgy, then the rest of elders and priest-monks, followed by priest-deacons, monks, and at the back secular visitors. In imitation of the abbot, they all prostrated and crossed their foreheads three times, before kissing the belt.



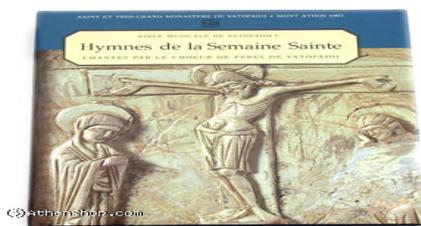
Figure 4j: Picture from the celebration of the Holy Girdle in 2010 at <http://www.romfea.gr/component/content/article/13/5817-2010-09-12-21-45-08>

The girdle is thus a sacred totem, *the* ‘dominant symbol’ (as in Turner 1967: 30-32) of virginity, bringing together people from both inside and outside Athos. This pilgrimage however is not spontaneous (as in Turner’s definition of ‘communitas’, 1974), but rather takes place according to a particular time and celebration following the Orthodox calendar, and in a hierarchical and structured way, as illustrated by the veneration of the item (called ‘in *chorostasia*’, meaning ‘choir standing’). The way in which the veneration and the choir were formed on that day revealed the internal network of Athonian families of monks, who share information, knowledge, and skills between their members, for example by sending younger monks to spend time among other Athonian families to which their family is related. In turn, the Vatopaidians also participate in celebrations of other monasteries, exchanging knowledge, forming new alliances, and exchanging gifts.

Furthermore, the world-famous reputation of the Vatopaidian choir is nowadays exploited by the production and distribution of tens of CDs with recorded liturgies and psalms every year, exported worldwide via the internet and a network of shops and churches in Orthodox countries (*see figure 4k* next page). In this way, the ‘spirit’ of Josephaeoi is mechanically reproduced and virtually exported in a new world market of

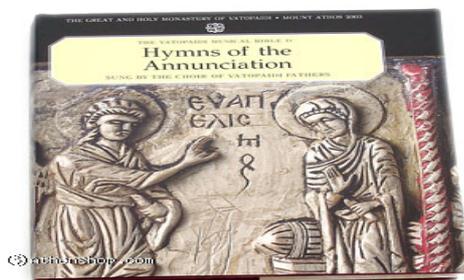
Orthodox faithful. The new media offer the means for ‘fashioning new techniques to preserve older values by retooling culturally familiar signs and practices’ (Comaroffs 2000: 317). With the rise of the electronically connected market, the concept of ‘tradition’ itself has certainly been re-invented in places such as monasteries, since the monks have to adjust their monastic life according to the realities of the contemporary world. In this context, the tradition of virginity is not static, but open to new uses and interpretations, becoming the means of forging an identity *within and against* a ‘world’ out there.

Figure 4k: CDs on sale



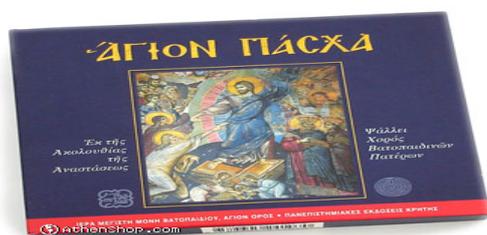
Hymn of Holy Week  
Sung by the choir  
of Vatopaidi Father  
English, Greek, and France text  
including text and musical of hymns  
70'25 total play

Size: 14.5× 17× 1.5 cm  
or 5.7× 6.7× 0.6 inch  
Weight: 275 gr (0.606 lb)



Hymn of the Annunciation - 2 CDRoms  
Sung by the choir  
of Vatopaidi Father  
English, Greek, and France text  
including text and musical of hymns  
68.32 + 65.44 total play

Size: 14.5× 17× 2 cm  
or 5.7× 6.7× 0.8 inch  
Weight: 364 gr (0.803 lb)



Easter Sunday  
Sung by the choir of Vatopaidi Father  
English, and Greek text  
including text and musical of hymns  
78.50 total play

Size: 14.5× 13× 2 cm  
or 5.7× 5.1× 0.8 inch  
Weight: 310 gr (0.684 lb)



**Availability:** Out of stock.



Paraklesis of our Lady Paramythia  
 Sung by the choir of Vatopaidi Father  
 English, and Greek text  
 including text and musical of hymns  
 total play: 68.50

Size: 14.5× 13× 2 cm  
 or 5.7× 5.1× 0.8 inch

## PART III: RITES OF PASSAGE

### 4.8 The Rite of Tonsure (*Koura*)

Initiation is a long series of rites to introduce the young man into religious life. For the first time, he comes out of the purely profane world, where he has passed his childhood, and enters into the circle of sacred things [...] he is born again in a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are held to bring about the death and the rebirth, which are taken not merely in a symbolic sense but literally [...] The two worlds are conceived of not only as separate but also as hostile and jealous rivals [...] From thence comes monasticism, which artificially organizes a milieu that is apart from, outside of, and closed to the natural milieu where ordinary men live a secular life and that tends almost to be its antagonist. From thence as well comes mystic asceticism, which seeks to uproot all that may remain of man's attachment to the world. Finally, from thence comes all [sic] forms of religious suicide, the crowing logical step of this asceticism, since the only means of escaping profane life fully and finally is escaping life altogether (Durkheim 1995: 37)

In 'escaping life altogether', the Christian Orthodox monastic life offers a life-long rite of passage to heaven, as portrayed by ancient texts, such as St Climacus' *Ladder to Paradise*, written in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The monks see communal life as a way to cleanse and liberate the self from the 'worldly passions' (*kosmika pathoi*) thought to be carried into the pure space of the monastery with them from the secular world. The first stage of the catharsis from the passions of the flesh usually takes place in an Athonian 'desert' (*erimos*, referring to isolated monastic settlements) through a 'testing' period (*dokimasia*, 'ordeal') under harsh conditions and constant supervision. After a period of six months to a year, the second part of the ordeal takes place in the monastery under the supervision of the abbot. In the context of the moral separation of monastic from secular life, the ordeal is the transitory process that takes place in harsh conditions, through techniques of the body that aim to 'exercise' body and soul (*askesis* the Greek root of the word *askesis* meaning 'ascetic'). After a period of one to three years, depending on the novice's progress, the abbot decides if and when the novice is ready to join the brotherhood. The successful completion of the ordeal is celebrated with the

rite of tonsure (*koura*). This is both a rite of aggregation, as the brotherhood collectively welcomes him, and a rite of separation, as it confirms his successful separation from his secular past, and the beginning of his monastic life that leads him to heaven.

According to the *Paschalion* (the movable calendar of the ‘book of Easter’) the ordinations take place on the weekend before, or the week after, the beginning of the Great Lent (*Sarakosti*, meaning ‘forty days’), which is the strict period of abstinence preceding the Resurrection of Christ. On a sunny Saturday (March 29<sup>th</sup> 2003), four days after the celebration of the monastery on March 25<sup>th</sup> (‘Annunciation of the Mother of God’), I witnessed the ordination of four novices in Vatopaidi. Because of the celebration the monastery was fully booked with more than 400 pilgrim-visitors arriving that morning. From outside, the monastic complex stood in between the buzzing forest and the calm sea, glistening in the bright spring sun, as if it was a natural part of the environment; the centre of ‘God’s creation’ (*theou ktisis*). Inside, the monks had recently painted and decorated the wall of the *exonarthex* (outer area) of the main church (*catholicon*) with blossoming flowers. The bright weather and the blue skies of spring, with all its smells and early dawns, gave a feeling of rebirth and renewal. The time of the ordinations complemented the rite as a kind of rebirth; it was as though nature were a part of the rebirth. The novices’ anticipated a new life being reborn as monks in imitation of Christ (*Christos* meaning ‘anointed’); whereas, on a collective level, the monastery anticipated the forthcoming Easter, the greatest celebration of the calendar.

Following lunch, happy-looking monks waiting outside the refectory encouraged the visitors to hurry back into the church. The first of the four young men waiting to be ordained was H from Southern Greece. Before joining Vatopaidi, H studied physics at the University of Thessalonica, but at the insistence of the abbot, he dropped his ‘cosmopolitan’ degree in the final year in order to move to the ‘desert’ of Kapsala, which is one of the ‘testing’ grounds near the village of Karyes. He stayed there for a year under the supervision of a Vatopaidian elder before moving to Vatopaidi for another year under the supervision of the abbot. While learning the secrets and practices of the family of Josephaeoi, he only wore a black cap and a black robe, which were blessed by the Abbot. Inside the church, the choir welcomed monks and visitors

by singing the most elegant hymns. In the nave, to the right of the *iconostasis* (tableau with icons in front of the sanctuary) four young novices were waiting to be tonsured. They were dressed in white underclothing and white socks, looking slightly embarrassed for being ‘undressed’ in the most sacred space of the monastery. The white colour signified a kind of innocent weakness, which I was told symbolized the innocence of the newborn child. Next to them stood the priest-monk who would conduct the ceremony, and the abbot eagerly waiting for the rite to begin. The latter took the role of the sponsor, a kind of godfather, meaning that he was taking responsibility for the young monks’ future.

But in contrast to the long process of ‘testing’, the ordination took place suddenly. The abbot took H by the hand to the pulpit below the Great Chandelier of the church. He then prostrated towards the four points of the horizon, as a public acknowledgment of his new ‘spiritual family’ (*pneumatiki oikogeneia*): first towards the priest-monk who was holding the Holy Cross of Christ, which denotes monastic life as being that of self-sacrifice, in imitation of Christ the ‘first monk’; second towards the icon of the Virgin Mary portrayed as the *Vematarissa* (meaning ‘Marching Woman’), which symbolically guides him to take the first step of monastic life; third, towards the icon of the *Annunciation of the Virgin Mary* to which the monastery is dedicated, his new home; and finally, the novice kneeled before the abbot, the representative of God and the father figure to the community, who returned the gesture with his blessing. Then the priest crossed the novice’s forehead, ears, nose, and chest, three times, using the sanctified, perfumed *Myron* (see glossary). As an exegesis:

‘First, the priest marks with olive oil the one who accepts the chrism on the forehead with the Holy Cross. This is to take away the shame. Then he marks his ears, in order to be able to hear god’s gospel. After the ears, the priest puts *Myron* on the nose so that he (the one who accepts the chrism) can sense and smell the presence of the Holy Spirit. And finally, the priest puts *Myron* on his chest, in order to walk the path of life without fear of the devil’s traps’ [Vatopaidian priest-monk, 29/3/2003]

The rite consisted of a formal conversation between the abbot, the priest-monk, and the novice, based on a written series of questions and answers, which confirmed his new status as a monk, while publicly declaring his obedience to the abbot and to God. After the symbolic cleansing of his ‘worldly’ past, the priest-monk began the ritual with the line ‘Open the ears of your Heart brother’, followed by a formal conversation between the abbot, the priest-monk and the novice, based on a written series of

questions and answers, which confirmed his new status as a monk and publicly established the ‘Rock of his Faith’ to God. The abbot then asked him for his obedience to which the novice loudly answered: ‘Yes!’ with a big smile on his face. Then the priest gave a prayer for the well-being of the new monk.



Figure 41: Ordination of novice/ blessing by abbot Ephraim under the gaze of Joseph the Vatopaidian/ Image taken from Melinos 2001: 87)

During the prayer over the novice’s head, the abbot asked for God’s help for this monk toward a ‘life after death’ (*meta-thanaton zoe*), as the old ‘worldly self’ (*kosmikos eautos*) is declared dead. This refers to the symbolic death of the novice in which he loses everything he owned while he was ‘*kosmikos*’ (meaning ‘worldly’): family and friends, education and property. According to the rule of poverty, the only thing he is

allowed to carry from now on is a notebook to write down his sins so that he will not forget them during his confessions to the Abbot. In this way, the old ‘worldly’ self is dead, and a new monk is thought to be spiritually reborn. The ‘death’ of a monk also refers to his aspirations towards the afterlife (as also in La Fontaine 1985: 15, and Bloch and Parry 1982). Bloch and Parry (1982) associated ritual death to fertility and reproduction, as the means of reversing natural time (and in La Fontaine 1985: 15, and Loizos and Heady 1999: 11). The ordination of novices plays on the theme of dying *now*, illustrating Leach’s concept of ‘sacred time’ as the enactment of time ‘played in reverse, death is converted into birth’ (Leach cited in Gell 2001: 32), functioning to ‘deny the psychologically unpleasant reality of irreversible time’ (Harris 1991: 152). The social death of the ‘worldly’ persona of the would-be monk also contains his aspirations toward the afterlife (as also in La Fontaine 1985: 15, and Bloch and Parry 1982). The monks have a saying: ‘If you die before you die, you will not die when you die’. In respect to this, Mantzaridis wrote: ‘(In monasteries) humans are not born. They only die. And the life of the monasteries is a preparation for death. But preparing for death, just like death itself, is something full of life’ (1990:211). Accordingly, the new monk’s cell in the monastery is thought to be his ‘tomb’<sup>76</sup>.

All this suggests that monastic life is a kind of self-sacrifice in a modern world of self-interest<sup>77</sup>. Through such sacrifice, the symbolic death of the novice and his rebirth into a monk has a cathartic character, as the new monk, cleansed of his ‘worldly’ sins, becomes a ‘natural’ part of the monastic landscape; at the same time he is categorized as between life and death, un-dead, in a *liminal* state of existence, which is monastic life in itself. This symbolic suicide of the ‘worldly’ persona is expressed within the context of tonsure. During the ritual, the abbot, the priest-monk and the novice passed over the scissors to each other three times, while the choir was singing three blessings ‘*Kyrie Eleeison*’, symbolising the Holy Trinity. Then the abbot gave his final blessing to the scissors, and the priest used them to cut a lock of hair from the kneeling novice. With the blessing of the scissors, the abbot renamed H ‘Romanos’ and the entire community responded as one, shouting his new name three times.

---

<sup>76</sup> ‘...certain symbolic themes, such as an enactment of death and rebirth, are found in rituals which are not normally referred to as initiation (see Bloch and Parry 1982)’ (in La Fontaine 1985: 15)

<sup>77</sup> See Parry (1986) on the complementary relationship of Christianity and capitalism through the notions of ‘salvation’ and ‘self-interest’ (pp 466-9), in imitation to Jesus’ sacrifice for the common good

The new name given to the novice has a particular value and meaning. H was known in Vatopaidi for his beautiful voice and musical talent. He might have been a physicist in the past, but he told me he always wished to be a musician. His knowledge of harmony, composition and Byzantine scores made him a strong candidate to become a priest-monk one day. Joining the monastery's world-famous choir was a chance for him to get away from science and become a musician, following his calling towards Byzantine music. In this sense, monastic life liberated him from the constraints of 'cosmopolitan' life because it allowed him to join the vast musical tradition of Vatopaidi. His new name 'Romanos' referred to the most famous composer of Vatopaidi, St Romanos the Melodist (14<sup>th</sup> Century, *see* also next chapter on revival of psalmody). A priest-monk explained: 'When a man is baptized into a monk it is a second birth, as he stops replying to his old cosmopolitan name, and only answers to his new (monastic) name, because his new family and siblings are Christ and his brothers' [28/3/03].

At the abbot's announcement of H's new name, the whole church was filled with feelings of happiness, loud voices, and smiling faces; the monks welcomed their new brother, tenderly hugging him. The verger rushed in to bring the new black cassock to the priest, who then passed it to the abbot, in order to give his blessing before kindly handing it to the newborn Romanos. Two of his new brothers joyfully played with the old cap, as if they were children. Interestingly, Sarris made the same observation in his account of a tonsure: 'they [the other monks] make a habit of teasing him for his new looks, and take pleasure in watching him excessively meticulous about his turn out' (Sarris 2000: 133). The ritual, including the reaction of the participants to the tonsure, was clearly a matter of performance, which the participants fully enjoyed.

Then the abbot gave Romanos his new black over-garment called *rassa*, the black cloth that symbolizes his mourning for a life after death and confirms his new position, being a *rassophoros* (meaning a person who 'carries' the black *rassa*). The black *rassa* had long wide sleeves that reached down to Romanos's thin ankles, and his old cap was replaced by a new *kalymmafki*, a black cylindrical hat, with a long veil called *kamelos*. The distinctive colour of the monastic clothes and ornaments is black, symbolizing mourning. The monks mourn the end of their 'worldly life' (*kosmiki zoe*), while some monks also say that they mourn the Fall of Constantinople. Through their mourning they engage in a life after death, following the death of the 'worldly' persona and their

second baptism as monks with a new name and set of duties<sup>78</sup>. The belt the monks wear is made of leather from the skin of a dead animal ‘to remind ourselves of the death of flesh’ [priest-monk 29/3/2002].

But not everyone in the church looked happy. Witnessing the transformation of H to Romanos were his biological father and uncle, both of whom looked upset. The latter was standing on his own in a dark corner of the church with a desperate look in his eyes, crying. During and after the rite the newly born Romanos did not once turn to look back at his biological father. H was dead. Instead, the white dressed Romanos disappeared like a dissolving light among the black cassocks of his new brotherhood, the family of Josephaeoi, to be the first to receive the Holy Communion. At the refectory, he and the other three new monks sat next to their new father (the abbot) without turning even once to look at their biological fathers, who were sitting separately with the visitors near the entrance.

The public acceptance of monastic life during the rite of tonsure is a kind of cathartic exorcism of the secular past through a spiritual rebirth, a type of a second ‘social baptism’ in Bloch’s and Guggenheim’s terms<sup>79</sup> that replaces that act of biological birth - in the same way H’s biological father was replaced by the father figure of the abbot. In this sense, individual and secular birth is replaced by the collective monastic birth: the first refers to emotional ties that are personal, particularly the attachment to the mothers that the novices have to cut before joining the brotherhood; while the latter to spiritual and ‘passionless’ (*apatheia*) ties to the collective, with its hierarchy and social life. Thus, the spiritual bond corresponds to Durkheim’s notion of the ‘sacred’ as a force of unification, since it brings together men from different backgrounds,

---

78 The cathartic symbolism of the new clothes became clear to me after a period of staying in Vatopaidi. One day, my own ‘cosmopolitan’ clothes got dirty, and I asked a deacon where to wash them. He said: ‘What you are wearing is dirty. I’ll bring you some clean clothes’, and offered me a black shirt and the monastic cap (October 2002). Accordingly, La Fontaine looking at rituals of initiation argued: ‘The adoption of new styles of dress or of wearing the hair, distinctive behaviour or restrictions, are all ways of committing the individual to his or her new role, but in this case publicly, rather than privately among fellow-initiates’ (La Fontaine 1985: 16)

79 In their article on Catholic baptism, Guggenheim and Bloch argued that ‘baptism is a ritual denying the woman’s ability to produce socially acceptable children’ (1981:380), and that the second birth (baptism) is considered to be more important than the natural birth, in terms of the social status of the child. According to Bloch and Guggenheim natural birth is thought to be dirty: ‘...by the need for a second birth created from the denial of the first, the authority of the power-holders is represented as beneficial and creative in the most fundamental way possible...the legitimation of domination, whether of gender or class, is anchored in the same symbolic use of sexual dimorphism...On the common humiliation of mothers are built the varied and many symbolic constructions of power. (1981: 385)

sometimes with nothing in common, but who are all united under the egalitarian ideal of ‘spiritual Family’ (*pneumatiki oikogeneia*). Athos is above all a place of pilgrimage where ‘communitas’ are formed (as in Turner 1974) either as companionships of monks, or as a tourist attraction. Furthermore, tonsures, similar to confessions which I will be discussing in the next chapter, marks the absolute separation of each monk from his secular past, and the death of his old social self, name, and identity. He is then reborn as an equal member of the impersonal and collective brotherhood. In turn, the new monk is obliged to follow the instructions of his new ‘father’, the abbot, and be obedient to his authority. In this sense, the rite is a double act of ‘acceptance’ in Rappaport’s terms (1999:119-23): on the one hand, the acceptance of the young monk to follow the monastic life, and on the other, his acceptance by the community as a whole.

#### 4.9 The Rite of the *Angelic Schema*

‘Initiation defines boundaries: between members of a group and outsiders, between different statuses and between contrasted ideas. The rites also involve ideas of hierarchical order, for the initiates are not only transformed but gain status. At its simplest there is a single distinction between initiates and uninitiated, but many rites serve to reveal further gradations of status to which individuals may aspire’ (La Fontaine 1985: 16)

On the same day of the novices’ tonsure, the Vatopaidians held the second rite of ordination involving advanced monks. It was the rite of the *Angelic Schema* (‘Angelic Patent’), or *Megaloschema* (‘Great Scheme/ Patent’). According to my discussions with monks, this patent signified the high degree of asceticism required for a monk to become ‘an angel on earth’. The rite signified the transformation of the monk from the first stage of being a *rassophoros* (because he wore the *rassa* given to him during his tonsure, its black colour symbolizing a stage of mourning), to the second level of monastic life, that of *stavrophoros*, meaning ‘bearer of (*phoros*) the Cross (*stavros*)’, which symbolizes the developed spiritual powers of the monk (*see figure 4m* below).

The *Angelic Schema* is a black stole embroidered in white and red threads bears the symbols of the Holy Cross: a lance and a sponge (an allusion to the Biblical story of the soldier who tested the body of Jesus on the cross to see if he was dead), and below them a human skull, the ‘Death’s Head’ in the monks’ poetic terminology (*see figure 4n*). The vest symbolizes the ‘angelic’ powers of the monk who is wearing it. The writing on the clothing manifests the spiritual progress of the older monks who wear it, both

protecting them from evil and publicly demonstrating their spiritual power in the name of the archangels. It also grants them the responsibility to help their younger brothers and secular pilgrims by showing them the ‘light of Christ’, to guide them in their striving to reach God.



Figure 4m: The ‘Angelic Patent’ From:

[http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=picture+of+Angelic+Schema&hl=en&client=firefox-](http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=picture+of+Angelic+Schema&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=DSH&rls=com.google:en-)

[GB:official&prmd=ivns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=Sk8ATofrBorAhAfWt82sDQ&ved=0CCIQsAQ&biw=1417&bih=723](http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=picture+of+Angelic+Schema&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=DSH&rls=com.google:en-GB:official&prmd=ivns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=Sk8ATofrBorAhAfWt82sDQ&ved=0CCIQsAQ&biw=1417&bih=723) [Last visit 21/6/2011]

<i>Figure 4n:Ascription on the Angelic Schema [explained by priest-monk 8/5/03]</i>		
MICHAEL	the symbol of the Cross]	GABRIEL
<i>‘At this Patent Demons tremble/ Under the contemplation of God’s divine miracle’</i>		
JESUS	[the symbols of the sponge and lance]	CHRIST
<i>‘Christ offers joy to Christians/ The light of Christ shines upon Nature’</i>		
VICTOR [symbol of skull: Death’s Head]		
<i>‘Paradise is the Place for the Skull of Adam’</i>		

The same evening following the ordinations of the four novices, after the vesper, the entire congregation waited for two Cypriot monks to receive the *Angelic Schema*. They were standing to the right of the sanctuary. One was in his early 40s, while the other looked older. The rite followed a similar path to the morning’s tonsures, but unlike the noisy morning this rite had a sober character. During the ordination set of clothing consists of these sacred items: first the *zostiko* (undergarment belt signifying the power of faith); the *Angelic Schema*, itself an ornament that I describe below; then the *polystavri*, a cloth in the shape of a cross; the belt, the cassock, shoes, the *kalymmafki*

(hat), the *epanokalimafkon* (top hood), and the *Mandias* (cowl). After reading the following passage from the Divine Liturgy: ‘These of you who are baptised into Christ’, the priest gave to the monks their new weapons for protection from evil: a wooden Cross to wear on his chest, a rosary for praying, a small piece of fabric on which the Cross of Calvary is knitted (called *paramandias*), and the *mandias* which is a hoodless woollen black cloak, placed under the monastic habit to wear only in the church while praying to the Virgin Mary. Finally, the abbot gave them a lighted candle to symbolize the power of the Holy Spirit in them.

#### 4.10 Exit to God

Monastic life is completed in union with God after the physical death of the monk. Because of their healthy life style, the monks do not indulge in excesses, and often die very old (most monks die when over ninety years old). Sleep deprivation and abstinence from food, as well as constant work, guarantee a long life, unless an accident befalls them. According to the secretary of Vatopaidi [5/5/03]: when the brotherhood discovers the corpse of a monk, they do not wash it but use a sponge of warm water to clean the forehead, the chest, the hands, the knees, and the feet in a crosswise direction. Then the deacons of the dead monk dress the corpse with clean white socks, long pants, a vest, the *Angelic Schema*, and the *polystavri*, and place a rosary in his hands. Then they tie the body with a white bandage, using his cap and old hood to cover his face in the shape of a cross. Finally, they put him a new belt and shoes. They then place the corpse on a bed made of straw, symbolizing the poverty of monastic life. On the bed, the monks cover the corpse with his cassock from head to toes, on which they sew three crosses using a red thread over the head, chest, and feet. The monk is ready to ‘depart’. Only the faces of deceased Abbots remain uncovered, as they represent the monastery in public life. By contrast, the covered face of ordinary monks reveals their homogeneous belonging, their anonymity.

The funeral of an ordinary monk takes place in the *lite* (the area with the candles in between the nave and the *exonarthex*, see below map of *catholicon*, figure 5d). Priest-monks are buried with their stoles on (*‘petrachilli’*). If the monk has died in a profane space, such as a hospital outside Athos, the priest-monk recites the ‘Thrice Holy’ three times and silently continues while accompanying the corpse back to Athos. After the

preparation of the corpse the monks place on the chest of the dead man the icon of the Saint related to him by name and ‘virtue’ (according to his given name in his ordination). Then the service starts and the whole brotherhood gathers together carrying lighted candles. The monks specifically sit separately from the visitors, as the latter are not allowed near the corpse.

Then the body is carried to the cemetery in a sober mood<sup>80</sup>. Two acolytes led the parade carrying lighted *lanterns* (moveable candles) and censers, as light symbolizes the victory of Jesus over the darkness of death through his resurrection. Conversely, the monks hope to be resurrected in Christ’s second coming. The deacons carried the corpse, followed by the choir, priest-monks, and the rest of the brotherhood. At the very back are the visitors. Seculars are not allowed to approach the corpse, or attend the funeral. Their access is also restricted outside the cemetery, because they are thought to carry all their sins from the ‘world’ that could pollute the final cathartic act in the life of a monk, his spiritual exit to paradise.

On the way to the cemetery, the monks make frequent stops for the priest-monk to make a prayer; a deacon using the censers (*thymiato*) clears the way for the corpse to exit the monastery’s gate, which faces the north west. In the cemetery, the monks gently place the body in the ground, which is blessed by the priest who throws oil from the ‘Lamp of Jesus’. The monks recite ten rosaries and sing the ‘Thrice Holy’ for a final time. The abbot then delivers a speech on the virtues of the departed monk during his life in the monastery. After the monk’s burial the brotherhood commemorates him for forty days (to symbolize the days of Jesus in the Desert) at the ‘great entrance’, during the preparation of the Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy. If he were an Abbot the commemoration can last up to a year.

The dead monk remains buried for three years, which is the same ‘testing’ period that a novice needed to go through first in the ‘desert’, and then in the monastery, in order to be ordained into a monk. After this period, the Vatopaidians exhume the bones and throw them in the bone storage, a hut situated next to the cemetery. The Vatopaidians believe that after three years the colour of the skull reveals the ‘*charis*’ of each monk: if the skull has a yellow colour, they believe that it shows the high spirituality of the

---

<sup>80</sup> During my fieldwork I witnessed one funeral at the monastery of Esfigmenou, *see* chapter 9

monk; if it is white, the monk had less ‘charisma’ during his life [priest-monk 12/8/03]. The yellow colour is associated with the long hours of praying with a candle. Furthermore, while the brotherhood remains anonymous, the names of the previous members of the Vatopaidian ‘council of elders’ (*gerontia*) are carved on the front of the skull. Even in the afterlife, the spiritual hierarchy between anonymous deacons serving eponymous elders continues for an eternity...

#### 4.12 Conclusion

This chapter looked into monastic life as a life-long rite of passage into an earthly existence to life after death, marked by three rites of passages: the ordination of tonsure, the ‘Angelic Patent’, and the funeral of a monk that signifies his grand exit to Heaven. Accordingly, the rites place each monk within an informal and spiritual hierarchy, which is marked by a dress code that distinguishes between inexperienced and experienced monks, as well as sets of duties and particular rules of conduct emphasizing *diaconema* (‘service’, where the word ‘deacon’ is rooted) with the general obligation for the younger monks to be obedient and helpful to older ones (*see next chapter*). This journey to Vatopaidi is physical, geographical, historical, as well as spiritual; a path of purification that first begins with the ‘calling’, goes through the cleansing period of the ‘desert’ to the monastery, and then continues from the ordination of the novice to a monk until his exit to heaven. This path was first opened by the charisma of Joseph the Hesychast who, on the one hand, revived the ‘spirituality’ of monastic life by returning the emphasis on Jesus prayer and re-introducing communal life, and on the other, through his frequent travels inside and outside Athos not only revived the population of monastic settlements, but also re-opened the trail of communication between the ‘world’ and Athos on which the economy of monasteries depends. His disciples *followed the same path* in imitation of the example and charisma of Joseph. One of them, Joseph the Vatopaidian opened the path that led to Vatopaidi.

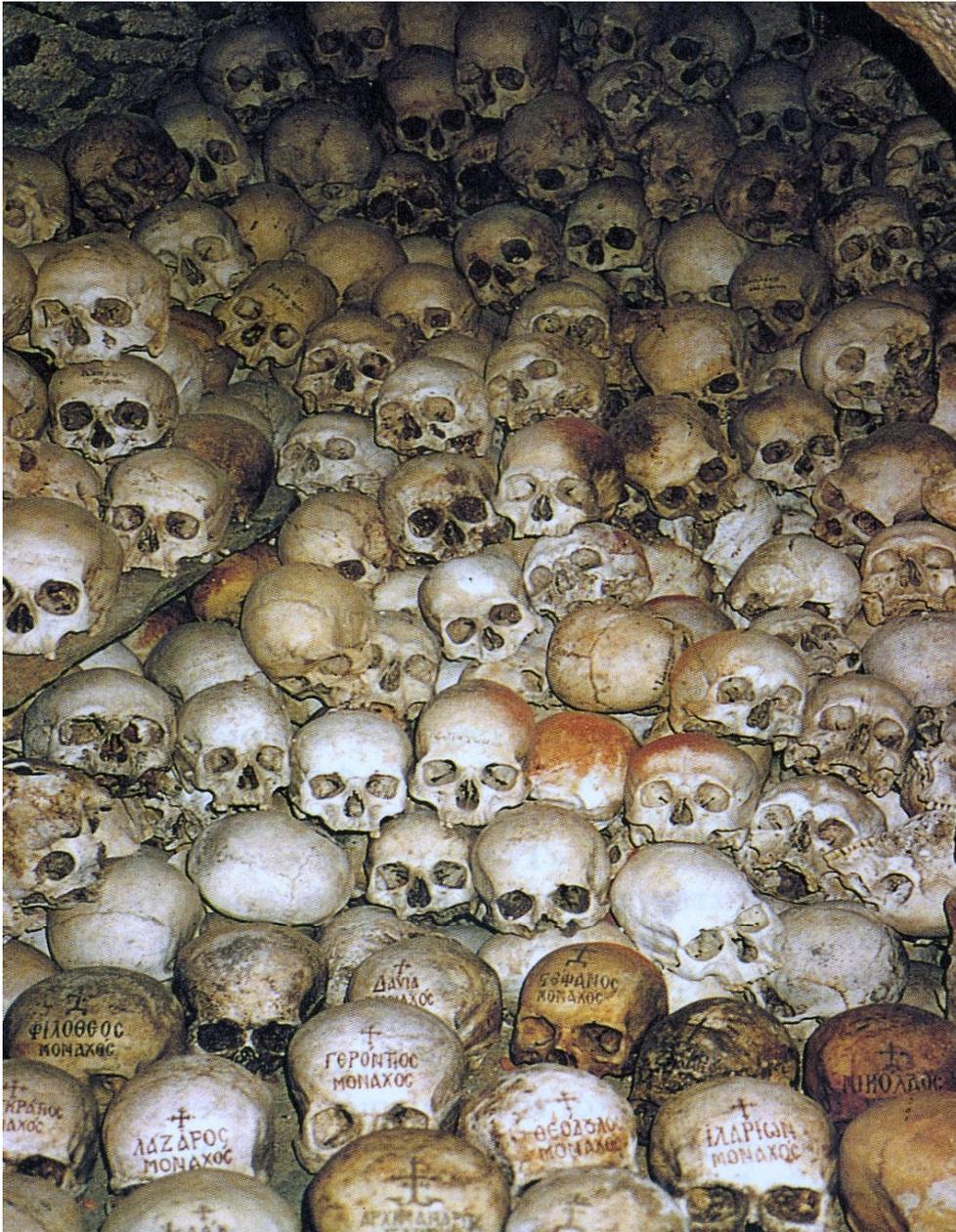
In this context, I spoke of a double Vatopaidian ‘history’: on the one hand, the ephemeral story of the revival of the family of Josephaeoi, and on the other, the eternal tradition of the monastery itself which is conceived separately from human activity. In the monastery, the history of the brotherhood based on movement and migration, *on the*

way to a monastery, is fused with the static history of the monastery itself based on its tradition. In this context of historicity, although the ‘spiritual’ return to *coenobitic* life, on the basis of a Greek form of the ‘pure’ prayer revived by the charisma of Joseph the Hesychast and his disciples, portrays a ‘return’ to the golden Byzantine days of the Palaeologus Dynasty, underneath it lays a history of expulsions of non-Greek monks accused of being ‘communists’ (see also Introduction, pages 16-18) and their replacement with Greek ones who repopulated abandoned monastic settlements, forming a new Greek emergent tradition. In this sense, the claim for ‘spirituality’ became a strategy of domination of the Greek over non-Greek monks. In looking at constructions of the past in Cyprus, Bryant highlighted the importance of the purity of the Hellenic ‘spirit’ (2002: 521) in creating a ‘historical’ linearity with the nostalgia of a lost past. On Athos this nostalgia is materialized as a return to a golden and ‘Greek’ Byzantium, to which the family of Josephaeoi ‘returned’.

On a personal level, the passage to Heaven is also a personal striving and self-sacrifice of the secular past of each novice in order to return to the pure state before the Fall of Adam and Eve. Accordingly, the rites of passages reverse natural time with ‘sacred time’ which when ‘played in reverse, death is converted into birth’ (Leach2004: 124-136). Leach argued that the circular repetition of ‘sacred time’ plays on the theme of dying *now* to live in the afterlife. In this context, the monastery is a *liminal* space based on a life of practices in-between life and death, which manipulate the sense of ‘sacred time’. Ritual time is time in reverse: the journeys of Joseph the Hesychast inside and outside the monastic self, in his turn inwards to seek for the lost Greek ‘spirituality’ of Gregorius Palamas, based by his interpretation on the ‘pure prayer’ and communal life, ‘as it was a thousand years ago’.

In this context, the monasteries are conceptualized as being both sacred and *liminal* spaces, based on a life understood in a *liminal* state of existence that illustrates Turner’s concept of ‘liminality’ (1967: 93-98) as the marginal state of being, in between life and death, Paradise and Hell, outside the social constraints of the world. Further, this throws a different light on Durkheim’s concept of the ‘sacred’, highlighting the functional interdependence of the two ‘worlds’ to each other: ‘To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no

use' (Durkheim 1995: 38). On Athos, the movement of would-be monks to a monastery is both esoteric and geographic, illustrating Turner's concept of 'communitas': 'anti-structured' groups formed spontaneously on the way to a shrine (1974: 45-46). On Athos, similar groups of young men are then structured within each monastery's hierarchy, social organization, and particular tradition through the institution's rites of passage. In this sense, the 'Monastery', imagined in-between the ideal and the real world, is an evolving and heterogeneous arena, in which each individual strives toward and against collective ideals of the monastic self. The next chapter will show how through repeated practices of faith, such as confessions and Holy Communion, this journey is materialized on a daily basis, until the monk reaches Christ in heaven.



*Figure 40:*

Picture of skulls of former monks with their names curved on, kept in the Vatopaidi's bone store (Melinos 2002)

## **Chapter 5: Private and Collective Practices of Faith**

### **5.1 Introduction**

‘We are here on the Mount to pray for our faith, our families, and the world. Outside there is too much noise and confusion to pray. God spoke to 600,000 people in the desert of Sinai, but only Moses could hear Him because he was clean enough to hear Him. How would I be able to pray in such a world outside? My prayer wouldn’t be pure, because I would be pretending to pray, like one of those 600,000 who were in a deep sleep, and could not hear the calling of God. If I lived in the city, I would have done more bad than good on those that I would pray for, because how can I arrogantly ask for the helping hand of God without knowing the Truth? This holy

land is a gift of the Mother of God to us to pray' [personal communication with an old monk in Esfigmenou 9/11/02]

In my discussions with monks, my first question was always the typical one: 'Why did you decide to become a monk?' The answers varied, revealing various personal motives for monastic life. But the common element in all answers was that of prayer. The monks underline the importance of prayer in their lives as the way for them, to devote themselves to god, and to 'pray for the world'. The Jesus Prayer, the repetition of the words 'Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me the Sinner', can only take place on the holy land of Athos, because the Virgin Mary protects the borders of this virgin land, retaining the separation of the pure way of life inside Athos from the 'materialist world' (*ilistikos kosmos*) of self-interest outside. Having argued in the previous chapter that the monastery represents a *liminal* space between the secular world and the world of God, here I outline the practices and temporalities that prepare for life after death. These practises enable the monks to overcome temptation and sin so that they might work their way towards fulfilling the expectations required for acceptance by the divine.

## PART I: PRAYER

### 5.2 Praying in the cell

As already discussed in the previous chapter, the Vatopaidians use Joseph the Hesychast's instructions on how to pray, based on his revival of *hesychasm* ('silence'), the 14<sup>th</sup> century doctrine by St Gregorius Palamas who was ordained in Vatopaidi in 1316. They also use a number of manuals dating as back as *The Ladder to Paradise* written in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which define monastic life in terms of the Jesus prayer, which was first introduced in the early hermetic life of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the deserts of Palestine and Egypt<sup>81</sup>. According to my discussions with priest-monks, the repetition of

---

<sup>81</sup> The texts are divided in two traditions: the early ones belong to the hermetic tradition of the Deserts of Palestine and Egypt, which were written before the foundation of the Republic of Mount Athos in 969 by Athanasius the Athonite, and the ones written after the 10th century, coming from the 'cosmopolitan' capitol of the Byzantine Empire Constantinople, which institutionalized monasticism into Royal monasteries. In the first tradition, they use the writings of St Macarius of Egypt, Evagrius of Pontus (died in 399), and the Ladder to Paradise by St John Climacus written in 7th century. In the second tradition belong the writings of St Symeon the Theologian (949-1022), St Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) who brought the Jesus prayer from Sinai to Athos in the 13th century, St Gregory Palamas, Father of the *Hesychast* movement who institutionalized the Jesus Prayer as the main practice on Athos in the 14th century (*Palamism*). He had become a monk in Vatopaidi in 1316 -before becoming the Abbot of Esfigmenou in 1335-. During the Ottoman times, because the *coenobitic* life was dissolved, the prayer as institutionalized within the movement of Hesychasm was gradually lost. It was revived in the 18th

the words and movement aims to reach the ‘divine light inside the eye of the heart’, by accelerating breathing in relation to the rhythm of the repeated words, in order to create the internal space in which ‘true repentance’ (*eilikrinis metanoia*) can be achieved. This state of semi-trance is called *apatheia* (‘*apathy*, without passions’). The dissociation and detachment from the surrounding environment that the repetition of the words and movement impose, make praying an act of self-reflection, as each monk is separated from the ‘world’, *in order to pray for it*, including the memories of his secular past, family and friends, and everything he has left behind.

Accordingly, each stage of monastic life requires a particular way of reciting the words of the Jesus Prayer. On a first level, the young novices have to recite the prayer loudly at all times under the supervision of the elders, in the church, at work, at the refectory, or privately in their cells: ‘The aim is to achieve economy of thoughts and actions, during long periods of sincere confession’ [priest-monk 8/8/03]. After their ordination as monks, they have to recite the prayer ‘with their mind’. At this second level the prayer is also called ‘noetic’, as it is thought to protect the mind from negative thoughts called ‘*logismoi*’, the ‘dangerous thoughts’ manifested externally as ‘passions’ (*pathoi*) that each monk carries with him from the ‘world’ into the monastery. For this reason, at this second stage of monastic life the monks are also called *neptikoi*, meaning ‘washers’ and/or ‘cleansed’. After many years of continuously reciting the prayer, it is thought that a monk learns to control his heartbeat according to the rhythm of the prayer’s words: ‘His heartbeat becomes the heartbeat of the monastery’ [priest-monk 29/9/02], as he becomes the living embodiment of this organic community. In this way, the whispering sounds of the words of the pure prayer become the ‘natural’ sound of the peninsula, the sound that ideally separates this spiritual and peaceful world inside the monastery from the materialist and noisy world outside Athos.

Every evening, after sunset the monastery was empty, as each monk went to his cell to privately perform his ‘private canon’. It consisted of a number of prayers used in conjunction with the rosary to be rehearsed three times; these were accompanied by a number of prostrations as instructed by the abbot during their frequent confessions to him (every two nights). In Vatopaidi, both personal acts are inseparable, and form part

---

century with the publication of the *Filokalia* (18th century, ‘Love of Beauty’, see glossary), and the re-introduction of the prayer and hesychasm by Joseph the Hesychast in the 20th century.

of the process of repentance, the cleansing path which each monk takes following his separation from his secular past (*see* previous chapter). In the darkness of the cell, each monk repeated the words of The Jesus Prayer as a technique of *self-reflection*. By repeating the words, the monks are able to contemplate both the sins of their secular past, and their present life inside the monastery. In theological *theory*<sup>82</sup>, darkness is associated with the interior world of each monk. Each monk's 'heart', and the 'heart' of the community called *lavra* (*see* glossary) have to remain 'awake' and 'vigilant' throughout the night to 'see God' (*the-oro*). Central in this process is the instruction to 'keep the mind concentrated on God at all times, even when asleep' [priest-monk 1/10/02].

### 5.3 Night Struggles: At War with the Flesh

'In the night we are visited by demons, passions that torture the human soul. That is why we pray *alone* in our cells and in the church: first to protect ourselves from such attacks, second to resist to the temptations of the mind, and through confession and the Holy Communion to cleanse ourselves for the next day. At dawn we are resurrected with Jesus to begin the day's work' [priest-monk 24/4/03]

Athos is a place of struggle between divine and demonic forces, fighting inside each monk. The monks believe that when they sleep in the evening the Devil is stronger as he comes in their dreams, tempting them, causing them guilt by taking the form of their biological mothers whom they left behind, or the form of the 'porno demon' (*pornodaimonas*) that brings desire. In the field, I gathered a number of stories about charismatic monks who were attacked 'because the Devil envied their *charis*' [personal communication with old monk 19/4/03]. The Devil chooses the most virtuous monks, because they are the ones who 'are not taken yet'. In one of these stories the Devil tries to break into the hut of Joseph the Vatopaidian. But 'he kept his door shut' holding the cross and repeating the words of the Jesus prayer that protected him. The underlying theme of such stories<sup>83</sup> is that the Devil is an external force to the internal life of a

---

<sup>82</sup> By 'Theory' here, I am referring to the Athonian use of the word, not the academic one. In Greek, *theo-oro* literally means to 'See the God' and refers to the mystical interpretations of the practice of hesychasm and prayer, dating back to St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), the 'spiritual father' of the Hesychast movement of monks on Athos, who institutionalized the 'pure prayer' as a way of life (*see* also Lossky 1957, Meyendorff 1974, Ware 1976 and 1987, Gillet 1987, and Crisbasan 1998, among others).

<sup>83</sup> In another story, a Buddhist monk came to Athos, in order to engage in a war of faith with the world-famous hermit Father Paisios. The Buddhist monk performed a 'magical trick', by opening and closing

monk, taking different forms in dreams and memories. He is also deceitful as he ‘can even take the form of the Virgin Mary’. Therefore the monks, in imitation of the charismatic monks, must keep their ‘door’ shut from the ‘world’. In this sense, praying is the activity that defines them as monks, from the Greek word ‘*monahos*’, which literary means ‘alone’<sup>84</sup>.

In imitation of the charismatic monks, the monks inside the Vatopaidi did not sleep in the night, but began the daily cycle with a strong cup of black coffee in the evening to keep them vigilant during the evening and night activities. The Vatopaidians feared of the ‘porno demon’: a hideous female with an attractive female body and the face of a monster, long black nails and a black tongue, and pig hair at its back ‘that can cut through the flesh’ [old monk 4/10/02]. It arrives in dreams to bring a violent struggle that can last for a long time, even after the novice is ordained as a monk. An old monk told me that even Joseph the Vatopaidian’s war on flesh lasted for more than seven years<sup>85</sup>.

---

the door of the hut of Paisios using only his mind. But when Paisios began praying, the Buddhist monk could not perform his trick anymore, and a month later he abandoned the Buddhist order to become an Orthodox monk on Athos [old monk 1/5/03].

<sup>84</sup> In *The Ladder to Paradise*, the main manual of monastic life dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, St John Climacus refers for the first time to the ‘pure prayer’ as ‘hesychasm’ from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning ‘silence’, ‘stillness’, and ‘solitude’. Accordingly, John Climacus warns the monk not to forget his door open and let the world in. He defines a ‘Hesychast’ as: ‘One who says: ‘I sleep, but my heart watches’ (Cant. 5:2). **Close your cell door to your body, the door of your lips to words, the interior door to spirits.** A poor man who is obedient is better than a distracted Hesychast... Solitude to worship the uninterrupted service of God. May the name of Jesus be united with your breath; then you will understand the value of solitude (Step 27) [St John Climacus *The Ladder of Paradise*, translated by Moore, L. (1959)]. Other definitions of a ‘monk’ in respect to prayer: ‘You must consider your senses as the door to a house. Through the senses all images of things enter into the heart, and through the senses, the innumerable multitude of lusts pour into it... through our sealing with the blood of Christ’ (Cyril of Alexandria quoted in the *Filokalia* 2006, paragraph [96]) ; and ‘A monk is a man who separated from all and who is in harmony with all. A monk is a man who considers himself one with all men because he seems constantly to see himself in every man. Just as sight is the most worthy of the senses, so also is prayer the most divine of the virtues’ (Evagrius of Pontus in Meyendorff, 1974: 22-3)

<sup>85</sup> ‘One night, when Joseph the Vatopaidian was still a young monk, he was alone in his cell in the forest, when suddenly the door of his cell opened. He didn’t see anyone coming in, but felt someone entering. Because he was an experienced ascetic, he did not turn his head to see (who had entered the room) but continued the blessing (prayer) with more concentration than before. Suddenly he felt a hand stimulating him underneath with hedonism, and turned his head to witness the porno-demon, as the elder fathers describe him, dark, with a wounded head, and a disgusting stench. Joseph not only did not get scared, by grabbed the Holy Cross and jumped to catch and break the demon into pieces. The demon disappeared in smoke’ [personal communication with older Vatopaidian monk 28/9/2003]

In 2003, I met a 17 year old student of the Vatopaidian Athoniada School at the *skete* of St Andrew (*Serrai*). He had been a student there for six years, since he was 11, and he was graduating that year. Although ordinations are forbidden under the age of 25, the Athoniada School is categorized as a secular institution with students from a very young age. They visited Vatopaidi every Sunday for the Sunday liturgy. But despite studying in Athos from an early age, he did not wish to become a monk. Instead, he wanted to work at Karyes, the administrative centre of the monastic republic. Because of his rejection of monastic life, his position in Vatopaidi was awkward, often seen as a very rebellious and pretentious character. In our discussions, he often contradicted Vatopaidian values. He was very open about going out to coffee shops and smoking. His favourite band was *Iron Maiden* whose songs include *The Number of the Beast*. He even admitted to me of taking a swim at the beautiful sandy beaches with his mates, something that is strictly forbidden according to the rule of the virginity which states that at no times may a monk or a visitor expose any part of his body. The long beards covering the neck, and the mourning black colour of the rassa, represent the ‘virginity’ of the monastic body, as well as being a matter of respect to the Virgin Mary, the owner of the Mount. But despite the threat of expulsion from the Mount, he did not even mind talking about breaking the rules. I felt that he had enough of staying in Athos.

According to hostile gossip at the washing machines, his worst sin was that he often masturbated in his cell. But despite the repetition of his sin ‘on an almost daily basis’ [gossip at the washine machines], his spiritual father, a priest-monk of Vatopaidi, was willing to forgive the youngster<sup>86</sup>. The patience of the priest-monk demonstrated the Vatopaidian value of ‘economy’ towards the youngsters, meaning not to be excessive in their discipline, which forms part of the educational character of Vatopaidian life. His spiritual father gave him a personal canon of prostrations and prayers with the rosary to

---

<sup>86</sup> An oral story narrates of the passion of a young monk who masturbated ‘every night for ten years’. But ‘everyday he was asking for forgiveness swearing to God that if He forgives him, he will never repeat the same sin again, but without ever keeping his promise’. The story continues that one day the sinner had a vision of the Devil protesting to God, asking why He accepted such as ‘liar, because he was not only continuing masturbating, but he was also making false promises, which he would never keep. Then God with a thunderous voice said: ‘Disgusting Dragon! Isn’t it enough for you to swallow the whole world, you also want to grab someone who is fallen on his knees asking me for forgiveness?’ Joseph the Vatopaidian’s patience with his sinner disciples, demonstrates the Vatopaidian value of ‘economy’, as while his Father the charismatic Joseph the Hesychast was very strict regarding sexuality, asking to ‘take the wood and hit yourself’, in order to stop sexual desire (Ephraim Filotheitis 2008: 49), his disciple and the new Vatopaidians were milder in ‘treating’ the ‘passion’, as they accepted that the new generations are more open about their sexuality, so it was harder for them to overcome temptation.

keep him up in the evening so that he did not succumb to sleep. Furthermore, he was not allowed to go near the icons, or enter the *nave* of the church, as he had to stay at the *exonarthex*, the outer area of the church reserved for visitors. Most importantly, he was not allowed to receive the Holy Communion until he had managed to cleanse himself from the sins he was carrying, ‘evident’ on his bed sheets when he visited Vatopaidi.

#### **5.4 Controlling the Body: the prohibition of touch**

In the context of collective life, masturbation is an act of self-pleasure that breaks the sacred rule of the virginity. It demonstrates a ‘love of the self’ (*filautia*) in opposition to love of God, exemplified by, and within, the communal values of Vatopaidi.

Consequently, masturbation is thought to be both an uncontrolled excessive and selfish act; conversely celibacy, as opposed to masturbation, has its own logic, which is projected onto the natural environment itself. For instance, according to the tradition of the *Avaton*, monks are not allowed to keep any female cattle and other female domestic animals, except: horses used at the mills, donkeys used to carry things, and cats kept in the garden as a natural weapon against pests, rats, snakes and scorpions. Furthermore, the timetable of the cats is exactly the same as that of the monks: the cats eat when the monks eat, they gather outside the Church when the monks are inside praying during the liturgies, and when the monks sleep or stay inside their cells the cats also rest in at the backyard of the garden. Even more strangely, most of the cats have black fur similar to the black colour of the monastic cap that symbolizes the constant mourning of the monk. In other words, monks and cats are ‘dressed’ the same, naturalizing the prominent black colour of the monasteries, a relationship that the Vatopaidians describe as a ‘symbiosis of man and nature’: ‘Look at the cats. They mate only to reproduce because this is how God wanted it. He (god) didn’t want them to mate for pleasure’ [priest-monk 6/10/02].

Cats exemplify the naturalized ‘fact’ that sexual activity should never be carried out because of desire, or for pleasure, but only for productivity. This is another demonstration of the Vatopaidian value of economy (*see* chapter 6) as the practical compromise towards the impossibility of ‘virginity’: while cats, like the other animals and insects of the peninsula, do indeed reproduce themselves sexually, this act is accommodated within the logic of economy. Sex for pleasure is excessive and therefore

sinful, but animals reproduce without having sexual pleasure. Accordingly, for Christians ‘sex before marriage is against the nature of things (*para fysin*). There is no logic in it; there is no meaning in it. What Adam and Eve did was irrational (*para- logo*), out of the order of logic (*logiki taksis*)’ [priest-monk 6/10/02]. In response to the wicked tricks of the Devil, the human has to defend his/her nature to reach God. The word ‘confused’ used above in describing the humans’ entrapment in the Devil’s will suggests that *physis* is strongly associated with order, while sin is seen as an act against God’s ‘logical order’ (*physiki taksis*) that causes social disorder.

As already mentioned, the virginity of the place does not allow anyone to bare any parts of their body as everyone has to wear long-sleeved cloths and grow a beard if he wishes to stay on Athos for longer periods. The practical reason for this is to avoid *touching* others, or yourself. The Vatopaidians need to be constantly aware of such immoral pollution. One morning I was petting the cats in the monastery’s garden. The moment I touched my favorite black cat I heard the angry voice of young monk, shouting: ‘Don’t touch the damn cats! They’re dirty!’ Later that week, the priest-monk who was supervising me at work told me in a didactic tone that I should never touch the cats because they are polluted:

‘Animals do not have a soul. They are part of God’s *ktisis* (creation/building). Humans have the freedom to choose their path, animals do not. As Osios Selouanos writes the humans must *never show any passions* toward animals because they are dirty. When Jesus exorcised the demon from the possessed, the demon was transferred to the pigs. The Christian must love Creation as a whole and not in parts. Because if you love the animals, there is the danger that you are going to love the (things which were) created and not the Creator’

The monks have to avoid touching the cats in case they develop a personal attachment to them, which could lead to passions such as desire and self-indulgence. To teach me about not touching the cats, another monk along with a number of novices working at the kitchen the next morning began kicking the little kittens in the air, laughing. I thought the monk was abusive and crazy. ‘Is this the mild manner of the Vatopaidians?’ I bitterly wondered. But later I came to realize that in this cruel public way, the whole community was trying to make me understand my hypocritical position in their eyes, as they are the ones who take care of the cats, and although man and cat depend on each other, the monks have to keep away and *never* touch them (in the same way they keep

away from visitors), in order not to feel empathy and passionate love for the animal. In the same way they cannot touch themselves or others, as they have to be fully dressed.

The morality underlying the dressing code is echoed by the virgin landscape, and the rule of *Avaton* that prohibits sexual reproduction, which separates Athos from the material world. The prohibition of touch is, in other words, the practical application of the ideal of *apatheia* ('no passions', see 'economy of passions' below). An old monk advised me one evening: 'you should always keep your thoughts toward the sky, toward Heaven. The birds fly high, and from up there they watch a tiny world, made of small walls, and squares with buildings, and tiny people who move like ants. Power, money, fame, and fortune, all seem so small from up there... That's how people should see the world; that is the real world' [personal communication with old monk 5/5/03]. In the same way, the monks stay detached from the worldly world they also do not touch their naked bodies. In this sense, the monastic and 'virgin' body of the monk becomes the social microcosm of the entire Athonian society (as in Douglas's reading of the body (Caplan 1996: 14).

In sum, the prohibition of touch is an aspect of learning to control the body, both in terms of thought and in terms of the physical senses. The value of *filoponia*, to be a 'friend of pain', echoes Foucault's definition of monastic life in terms of 'confession, self-accusation, struggle against temptation, renunciation, spiritual combat' (1992: 63) in a moral and esoteric struggle against the memory of flesh. The 'Porno Demon' is a mythological expression of this 'logic', as it is *the thought of a naked woman that is a sin in itself*; the act of masturbation is only a symptom that reveals the selfishness behind the thought: 'It is not the act, but only the thought of the act that is sinful in itself' [Vatopaidian priest-monk 12/402]. In this context, Seidler argued that in monasteries 'sexuality is often defined in terms of desire rather than activity' (1996: 92). Similarly, in the same collection of essays, Weeks argued that in 'social purity organizations... desire was a dangerous force which pre-existed the individual, wracking his feeble body with fantasies and distractions which threatened his individuality and sanity' (Weeks 1996: 36). Sexuality is identified with 'animality' (Seidler 1996: 87) that must be controlled as the means of achieving self-knowledge: 'Just as emotions and feelings are treated as mental phenomena, so are sexual desires... The body is to be feared because it threatens to disturb and upset the kind of control so

closely identified with masculinity' (*Ibid*: 91). Masculinity is conceived as independent from the emotional or lustful ties 'women' represent, as mothers or lovers respectively (*see* chapters 3.4-3.5, and 4.2 in respect to the figure of Mary and male independence).

## **PART II: NIGHT VIGIL**

### **5.5 The Night Vigil**

Vatopaidi's annual calendar is marked by four great feasts in Mary's honour: her 'Nativity' (September 8<sup>th</sup>), her 'Presentation in the Temple' (November 21<sup>st</sup>), her 'Annunciation' (March 25<sup>th</sup>), and finally her 'sleep' ('Dormition', August 15<sup>th</sup>). On the eve of such great celebrations, the Vatopaidians hold uninterrupted night vigils that begin with the great vesper at sunset, and continue uninterrupted with the Midnight Office, the Matins, the Divine Liturgy, until dawn and the Holy Communion. During these vigils, the Vatopaidians publicly exhibited, along with other holy relics, the most precious items of their monastery: the miraculous icon of Mary as the *Vematarissa* ('Marching Woman'), and the holiest item of the monastery – the girdle of Mary. Following the night pilgrimage to Mary and her holy items, icons and girdle, the brotherhood and visitors moved to the refectory for a 'great feast' of fish cooked in the oven, served with wine. The meal concluded with a public speech by the abbot regarding the spiritual importance of the day for both monks and secular visitors. Below, I describe the night vigil in honour of the celebration of the 'Nativity of Mary', to highlight its symbolic importance to the community: each monk and visitor moves through the esoteric darkness of the evening, through the collective prayers in the night, to sunrise. Dawn symbolizes a collective resurrection of the sacred community, unified at the Holy Communion.



Figure 5a and 5b: *Catholicicon* ('main church') dedicated to the Annunciation of the 'Mother of God': north entrance. Pictures of *ekklesiarches* sounding the *talanton* calling for vesper, and monks praying privately in the garden, using the rosary to count knots/prayers

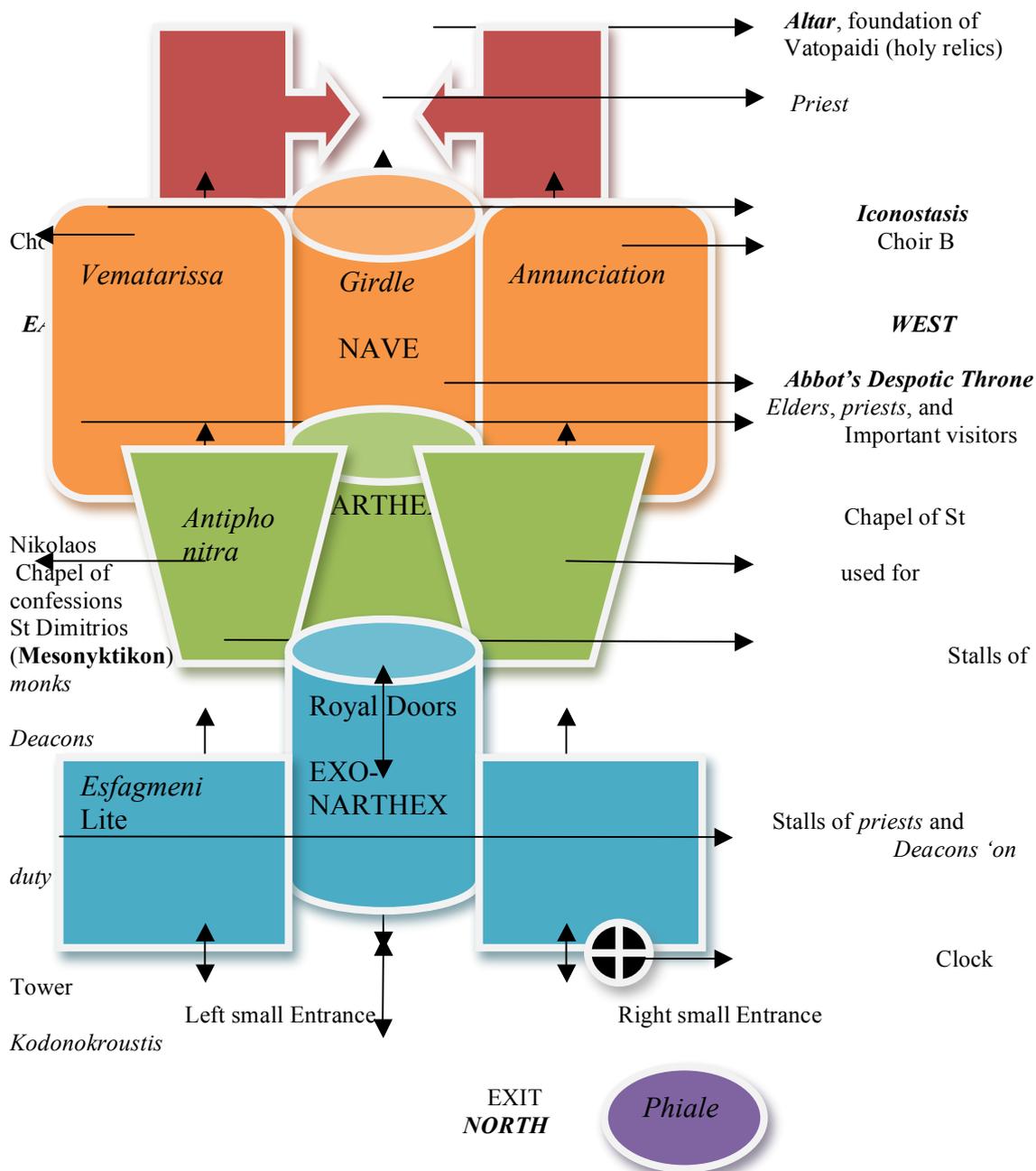


Fig 5c: *Catholicicon* of Vatopaidi, <http://www.ouranoupoli.com/athos/church.html> [last visit 18/2/2011]

Figure 5d: Map of *catholicicon* of Vatopaidi: Dedicated to the *Annunciation of Mary*

**SOUTH**





Colour	Space	Performing Role	Hierarchy
Red	Sanctuary with altar	Priest conducting the liturgy	
Orange	Nave	Double Choir, <i>Ekklesiarches</i> , <i>Kanonarchis</i> , <i>Prosmonarios</i> <i>Prosfonaris</i> , <i>Reader</i> (see glossary)	Abbot's
Green	Narthex		Stalls of monks
Blue	Exonarthex		Stalls reserved for deacons on duty, and visitors
Purple	Phiale		The blessing of the church takes place monthly

**Night Vigil in honour of the ‘Nativity of the Mother of God’: 8/9 with the ‘old’ Julian calendar<sup>87</sup>, took place on Saturday evening 21/9/2002- Sunday morning 22/9/02 with the Gregorian calendar**

**Great Vesper (*Megas esperinos*)**

The night vigil began before sunset, with the priest-monk in the role of *ecclesiarches* (‘master of the church’) banging a wooden cymbal (*symantron*, meaning ‘sign/ marker’) three times every fifteen minutes before sunset. In this way, he marked three *talanta* (‘point markers’) which called monks and visitors to the *catholicon* (main church) for the ‘great vesper’ to begin<sup>88</sup>. The monks entered from the left side of the church, prostrating and kissing each one of the holy icons of Mary<sup>89</sup>, starting from the *exonarthex* (‘outer area’) and the *lite* (area lit with candles) where the icon of ‘Esfagmeni’ (‘Slaughtered’), then through the corridor of the *mesonyktikon* with the icon of ‘Antiphonitra’ (‘Counter-Voice’) leftwards into the *narthex*, and then turn rightwards into the *nave* (see map in *fig. 5d* above). They moved in the shape of a cross, following the corridors, towards the *nave*’s *iconostasis*<sup>90</sup> (‘icon-stand’) the wooden wall that separates the *nave* from the altar. After kissing all the icons, they crossed their foreheads three times and kneeled three times in front of the icons of the ‘Annunciation of the Virgin’ and ‘Our Lady *Vematarissa*’ (‘Marching Woman’) which were placed prominently in the middle of the *nave*.

---

<sup>87</sup> Athos follows the ‘old’ Roman Julian calendar, 13 days behind the Gregorian (‘Papic’) Calendar

<sup>88</sup> On non-celebratory days, the *ecclesiarches* bangs the cymbal after dinner and the ‘after-dinner’ prayers to Mary (‘*Compline*’) to call the monks to their cells for private prayer, and before the Matins in the morning to call the monks to the church for collective prayers, but on great vespers, because of the uninterrupted night vigil that follows, the *ecclesiarches* sounds the *talanta* only once at sunset for the all-night long liturgies to begin.

<sup>89</sup> This section continues from chapter 3, in which I discuss the symbolic value of each of the eight miraculous of Mary (See chapter 3 for description and tradition of icons referred in the text).

<sup>90</sup> The *iconostasis* was made of oak by Russian monks in 1788. There are a number of priceless icons hanging on it, dating back to the Komnenoi and post-Komnenoi period (13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), such as the icon of *Mary of Vemothyrou*, which pictures Mary knitting while turning her body posture towards the right side of the frame, in one of the few pictures that portray her submission to God, Mary as the *Hodegetria* (‘Guide’), Christ the *Pantokrator* (‘Lord of Everything’), the *Crucifixion*, *St Peter and Paul*, and a portrayal of *St Demetrius*

The first part of the vesper took place at the *exonarthex* of the church, beginning with the blessing<sup>91</sup> of the priest-monk acting in the role of priest of the liturgy. Following the blessing, the congregation moved into the *narthex* and the *nave* in hierarchical order (called ‘in *chorostasia*’, ‘chorus standing/ order’): the abbot presided over the service holding his pastoral staff, and wearing a heavy golden cross called the ‘pectoral cross’, which manifests his absolute authority over the congregation. He was followed by other abbots and archimandrites who were all wearing white vests, then by the priest-monks, the elders, the monks, the novices, and, at the back, secular visitors. After the abbot sat in the ‘despotic throne’, (which was placed in the centre of the *nave* and facing the temple and the altar), elders and older monks took their stalls at the right side of the *nave*. The priest-monks, deacons, and monks who were members of the choir were divided in two groups at the right and the left of the *nave*. Monks on duty and deacons sat at the right and the left side of the entrance to the *nave*. Ordinary monks and novices sat in the second area, the *narthex*. The outer area of the church, the *exonarthex*, was reserved for visitors (*see* map of *catholicon* in *figure 5d* above).

The vesper began with the choir singing the ‘Psalm of Creation’ (no103), followed by the opening ‘Great Litany’, sung by the priest. In the sound of the choir’s ‘first *kathisma*’ (‘Seat’, *see* glossary), monks and visitors stood up in front of their stalls, placing their arms on the seats’ wooden armrests. The *kathisma* was divided into three sections (called *stases*, ‘stops’) of five psalms each, during which the participants made three deep prostrations five times (75 prostrations). The *ekklesiarches* then prostrated in front of the abbot to receive his blessing, and sounded the *sideraki* (‘little iron bar’) to call for collective concentration. The participants slightly bowed their heads in absolute silence. He then opened the *Royal Doors* between the *lite* and the *nave* to let the priest enter into the nave singing his blessings (*eulogeiton*). The priest was accompanied by the *ekklesiarches* carrying a censer (*thymiato*), a silver vessel hanging from a chain with twelve bells symbolizing the twelve Apostles, which contains strongly scented incense that form the ‘divine perfume’ (*thymiama*). They moved through the corridors, offering the blessing to each one of the participants in a hierarchical manner, starting from the monks with the *Angelic Schema* sitting in the *nave*, then to the monks and

---

<sup>91</sup> (‘Glory to the holy, consubstantial, life-creating, and undivided Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages...’ Normally, the blessing is given at the beginning of the Matins.

novices sitting in the *narthex*, and finally to visitors and the monks on duty placed at the outer area of the *exonarthex*. In the sound of the psalm ‘Gladsome Light’ (*Phos Hilarion*), the *eklesiarches* lit all the candles. Candles have a special symbolic meaning for the monks as they represent the two natures of both Jesus and the Virgin Mary: ‘The burning wick illustrates the divine nature of Jesus, while the melted wax his human body’ [priest-monk 22/9/03]. The ritual continued with a reading recited by the *reader* (*anagnostis*, see glossary), the *prokeimenon* (‘introductory text’) of the day, which is an introductory text to the celebration.

The peak of the vesper was a small procession of the moveable icon of *Vematarissa* (‘Marching Woman’) called *litia*. The abbot walked in front carrying the Holy Cross in his right hand and the icon in his left armpit, accompanied by the *eklesiarches* and a deacon holding the censer. They moved from the *nave* outwards to the *narthex* and the *exonarthex*, standing in front of each one of the participants. The latter, on their knees, first kissed the cross, then the icon, before receiving the abbot’s blessing. During the procession, the choir chanted the *sticheron* (‘verse’) of the day in honour to Mary. The chant asked for her protection and hope for a life in paradise. It was succeeded by the Lord’s Prayer and the *Trisagion* (‘Holy Thrice’) recited by the deacon in the role of the reader, during which monks and visitors, bowed their heads, and crossed their foreheads three times.

The vesper concluded with the *apolytikion* (hymn) in honour of Mary, during which two priest-deacons brought in the centre of the *nave* a table containing five loaves of bread in a basket (*artophorion*, meaning ‘the vessel that carries the bread’), a plate of wheat, and two vessels with ‘virgin’ olive oil and red wine. The bread was covered with a seal called *Panagiari*, meaning ‘the seal of the Holy Mary’, because Mary protects it, keeping it pure from dirt. The table was prepared the previous noon by the *eklesiarches* for the rite of *artoklassia* (meaning ‘dividing the bread’). The abbot symbolically took one of the five loaves of bread and cut it in two, separating the bread to be used as ‘divine offering’ (*theia prosphora*) for the Holy Communion and the Divine Eucharist the next morning, from the bread offered to all participants at the end of the liturgies as *antidoron* (meaning ‘instead of gift’); the latter offering included those who did not wish to receive the Holy Communion. Normally, the participants receive the *antidoron* at dawn at the end of the Divine Liturgy. But in night vigils, the

*antidoron* is offered the previous evening at the end of the vesper as the means to ‘last through the night’ [monk 20/9/02], especially since it was Friday, a fasting day, and there was no dinner served the previous evening. The monks even avoided drinking water as they were preparing to receive the Holy Communion the following morning.

At the end of the rite, the abbot made a thanksgiving prayer to Christ for the ‘loaves, wheat, wine and oil’. He held each one of the items of the table, and crossed them with his right hand; the prayer was accompanied by the blessings of the choir (‘blessed be the name of the Lord’, Psalm 33). In this way, the community thanked God for Mary’s natural products that keep the self-sustainability and, thus, ideal of independence of the monastery from the ‘world’ out there. According to the tradition of Athos as the ‘garden of the Virgin Mary’, the bread, oil, and wine, the material basics of monastic life in other words, are all thought to be Mary’s gifts to the monks: the wheat is associated with the resurrection of nature in the spring, and the ‘crashing of Jesus’, referring to His sacrifice, for the sins of humanity; the wine gives strength and forgiveness; and the oil is associated with hard work and the liturgical life<sup>92</sup>.

### **Midnight Office (*Mesonyktikon*)**

At midnight the ‘Great Vesper’ continued with the Midnight Office. The ritual took place in the *mesonyktikon* of the *catholicon*, which is a dark corridor connecting the *lite* with the *narthex*, where the icon of Mary as the *Antiphonitra* (‘Counter-Voice’) is permanently placed (*see map fig. 5d*). The monks moved choreographically with elegance (in Greek *charis*, root of the word ‘charismatic’). In the darkness of the *mesonyktikon*, facing the icon of *Antiphonitra*, they sung three devotional songs (*troparia*) to Mary. The congregation then moved back into the main church where they took their stalls in a hierarchical manner (abbot and elders in the *nave*, monks in the *nave* and *narthex*, and visitors and those on duty in the *exonarthex*, *see map above*).

---

<sup>92</sup> ‘The wheat grows in the winter, feeding on the human misery of the snow that covers the fields. In springtime we cut it with sickles, step on it and put it in the milestones to thresh it, and then knead it and put it in the oven. After it is cooked, we cut the loaf with a knife, and thresh it again with our teeth in our mouths. And that is how it gives us strength. On the other hand we cut the grapes off the vineyard, and then step on them, squeezing them in order to take their juice. The wine gives also strength because it takes responsibility away. If you make a mistake while you are drunk you say ‘it is not my fault but of the wine’. Finally, the oil needs hard work to be produced. First we pick up the olives with our bare hands, and then take it at the olive press. After lots of hard work, we can use the oil both to cook and to light up the candles in the church. For the oil gives us compassion and courage in life’ [priest-monk 4/10/2002]

The choir was then divided in two groups, each one headed by a priest-monk, sitting opposite and facing each other. Two deacons on duty placed the icon of Mary as the ‘Vematarissa’ (‘Marching Woman’) on a stall at the right side of the *nave*, opposite to the icon of the ‘Annunciation’ at the left side of the *nave*. In between, in front of the entrance of the altar, they placed on a table the silver box containing the three pieces of camel hair, which (allegedly) belonged to Mary’s Girdle (*see* also chapter 8).

The priest then began reading from Mathew’s Gospel ‘The Wise and Foolish Virgins’ (25: 1-13), which tells the story of the five virgins who were prepared to get married, and five who were not. This text highlights the main liturgical function of both the vesper and the Midnight Office: preparation for the coming celebration. Then the priest and the reader recited a number of prayers, including the Holy Trinity and the Lord’s Prayer, which were repeated by the entire congregation, before everyone was united under the words of Psalm 50, ‘Lord have Mercy on Me’, which is a collective form of the Jesus Prayer (‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me’). The liturgy continued with a number of songs (*troparia*) in honour of Mary, and a special prayer to St Eustratius that is read every Saturday.

### **Matins (*Orthos*, ‘Stand’)**

The hypnotic and trance-like effect of the Midnight Office culminates with the hymn *Epakousai* (‘O Lord, open Thou my lips/ Listen to us’) during which the monks believe that the Holy Spirit descends into their ‘hearts’ to bring the ‘holy light’ (*iero fos*). The mystical atmosphere of the Midnight Office is then interrupted by the vibrant sound of the *Talanto*, the wooden cymbal placed outside the main entrance of the church, waking up the monks from their collective trance, and the visitors from their beds, to begin the daily Matins (*Orthos*). The morning rites started with the *exapsalmos*, a group of six psalms sung by the choir, during which the *ekklesiarches* with the help of three deacons, opened the *Royal Doors* by pulling down a carpet that separates the spaces of the *nave* from the *narthex* inside the church during the Midnight Office. Then they also pulled down from the ceiling the great chandelier (including the set *drakontia*) using ropes. After the *ekklesiarches* and the deacons lit up the candles of the great chandelier, they pulled it up to the top of the roof.

In the mist of smoke created by the censers, the (second) ‘great litany’ began with psalm 117 ‘God is the Lord’. It was followed by a *Theotokion*, a song in honour of Mary according to the *Octoechos*, the book with the eight Byzantine tones sung throughout the year. It signalled the beginning of the veneration of the two icons and Mary’s Holy Girdle, placed in the middle of the *nave*. The veneration took place in strict hierarchical order (*chorostasia*): first the abbot, then the specially invited clergy, then each one of the members of the choir while the others continued singing, then the *typikaris* and *kanonarchis* of the liturgy followed by the priest-monks, elders, monks, novices, and at the back the 400 secular visitors. It was truly humbling to see the powerful abbot falling on his knees to prostrate in front of each icon, crossing his forehead with the three fingers of his right hand three times, before returning to his seat. His head was slightly leaning forwards, a public expression of his humility. The rest of the congregation imitated his example and humble body posture.

At the choir’s sound of the *Polyeleon* (Psalms 134 and 135), which means ‘chandelier’, the *ekklesiarches* and the three deacons began swinging the chandelier in the air, round and round, moving the light around the church, and giving life to the icons and the frescos of the saints, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary; the icons and frescoes began trembling in the twilight, as if they were alive. The strong smoke from the censer induced the participants to a trance-like state, which was combined with the continuous hypnotic chanting based on the Byzantine *isotone*, the uninterrupted basic note that transcends the melody, creating a hypnotic collective feeling of eternal continuity. Dizzy from the repetitive sound of the choir and the moving shadows of the trembling candles, I felt I was losing the ground from under my feet, having lost all sense of time and space, *taken*, along with the rest of the congregation, by the Holy Spirit who responded to the collective calls of the liturgy.

After performing the *Polyeleon*, the ‘Little Litany’ began with the song of ‘Decrees’ (*anavathmoi*). It continued with the choir singing the second *Kathisma* of the night (Psalm 118: ‘At midnight I arose to give thanks unto’) <sup>93</sup> during which the entire congregation performed another 75 prostrations followed by the hymn for ‘Obedience’ (*Ypakoe*). Then a dialogue began between the reader and the priest. First, the reader

---

<sup>93</sup> On weekdays, Psalm 118 is sung at the beginning of the Midnight Office, while during the Matins the monks sing the Ninth *Kathisma* (Psalms 64-69). But on Saturdays Psalm 118 is sung as a *Kathisma* during the Matins, replacing Psalms 64-69 [personal communication with priest-monks].

recited the *prokeimenon* ('introductory text') of the Matins, to which the priest responded by reading the Gospel of the day, and then the reader replied with the *stichera* of the day, the 'verses' in honour of the 'Nativity of Mary'. At the sound of Psalm 50, 'Lord Have Mercy on Me', the sacrament of confession started taking place in a separate small room inside the *nave* at the right side of the altar, where the abbot received the confessions of all the monks who had queued outside the small entrance covered by a red curtain, and waited for their turn. Meanwhile, in the chapel of St Nikolaos, at the right side of the *exonarthex*, the priest-monks on duty received the confessions of secular visitors (*see* separate section on 'Confession' below).

The confessions continued until dawn with the canon, which consisted of nine odes to Mary. The double choir was coordinated by the *kanonarchis* who, like a maestro, recited the phrases to be sung by the two groups in antiphony. At the sound of the *canon* of the day, the congregation formed a hierarchical line (elders, priest-deacons, monks, novices, and visitors) to begin the final veneration of Mary's icons and girdle. The veneration of the three holy items lasted until dawn, even after the *exapostilarion*, the group of hymns sung by the choir to 'dismiss' (*exapostelo*) the brotherhood. This was followed by the praises of the day, the 'Great Doxology', made by the priest first and repeated by the entire brotherhood, and the 'Dismissal' that contained a summary of the entire 'great vesper'. The rite concluded with the *encomion*, the praise of God 'for eternity' (*eis polla eti*) made by the priest. Around 4:00am, most visitors went back to their rooms to get some rest because in a few hours the Divine Liturgy would begin at dawn. The abbot, the priest, the deacons on duty, and the choir were also dismissed, and the church began feeling empty. To my surprise, at sunrise I realized that in fact all this time the church was full with monks hiding in its dark corners, bowing their heads, collectively and silently whispering alone in darkness the words of the Jesus prayer until the First Hour of the Divine Liturgy before dawn.

According to the monks, during this time of praying in darkness by themselves, they have to fight tiredness. One older monk even described to me how every night 'little devils' tried to shut his eyelids and make him fall asleep. But 'with the power of the prayer' he said that he managed to stay 'vigilant' [6/5/03]. Many visitors however did fall asleep on their stalls during the night liturgies, only to be rudely awakened by one of the *archontaris* ('host-master'). The weapon against tiredness is constant prayer,

especially during the night liturgy, when they have to keep all their senses internally ‘awake’: ‘The people who sat in darkness saw a great light’ (Isaiah 9:2 and Matthew 4:16). The Vatopaidians say that lighted candles helped them ‘to keep the path (to the Light) clear from the darkness’ [personal communication with priest-monk 9/10/02]. Another monk described the obligation of the monks to pray every night, ‘just like the fishermen struggle every night to catch the fish with their nets and their lamps that make light’ [8/5/03]. ‘Light’ has symbolic significance as it refers to the divine light Moses witnessed on Mount Tabor. The monks interpret the Divine Liturgy in terms of the surrounding ‘darkness that will be defeated by the coming Light, the Light of Jesus’ [6/5/03].

### PART III: CONFESSION AND COMMUNION

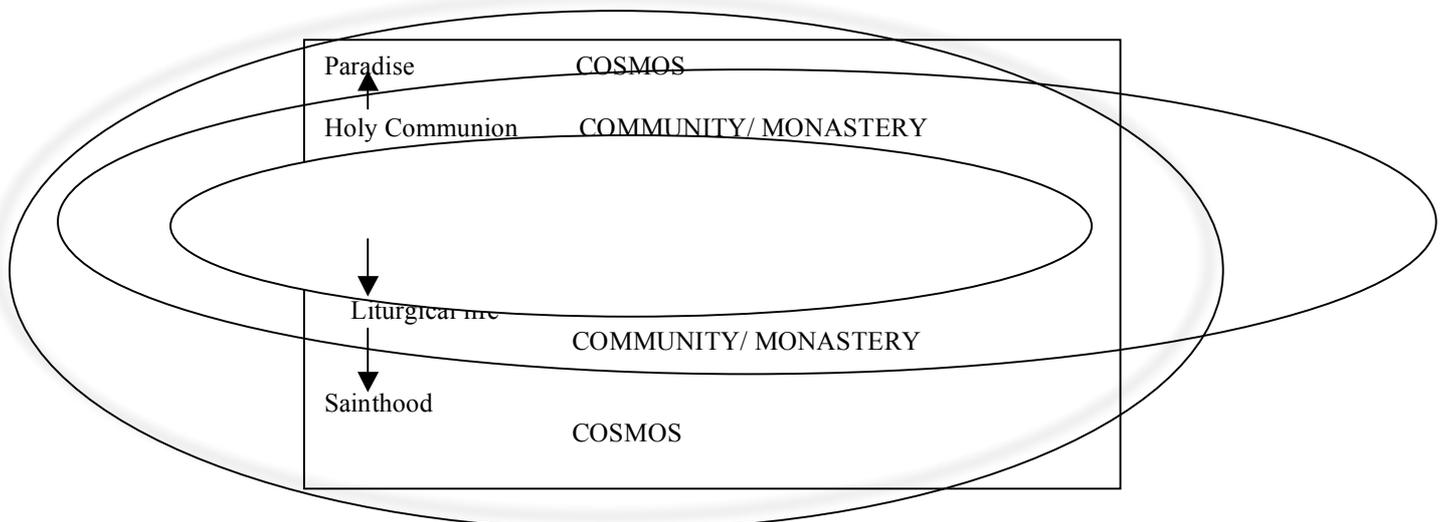
#### 5.6 Confession

During the Matins the abbot, acting in the role of the ‘spiritual father’ of the community, received the confessions of the entire brotherhood in a separate room at the right side of the altar behind the temple with the icons (*iconostasis*, see fig. 5d). At the same time, the priest-monks who were not on duty received the confessions of visitors in the chapel St Nikolaos, at the rite side of the *exonarthex*. My confessions took place in the *liminal* space of the chapel St Nikolaos: ancient, damp, and dark, only lit by a single candle, and filled with smoke of burning incense. The flickering light made the mosaic of Saint Nicolas, moving in the shadows, seem to some times stare at me, at other times disappeared in darkness. Suddenly, the figure of the priest-monk came out of the dark corner opposite me. He had been sitting there all along, checking on me while I was waiting in the room. I felt nervous. The priest-monk recited a prayer, and put his hand on my head and we both kneeled. Then we sat on the two stalls confronting each other in the darkness to begin my confession. The priest-monk asked me to try to remember even the sins I committed as a baby. At the end of my confession he crossed my forehead three times with blessed olive oil (*read* extracts from diary: ‘My Journey to Vatopaidi’ in *Appendix 1*).

In the *liminal* space of the dark room where confessions takes place, the monk remains ‘structurally invisible’ (as in Turner 1967: 94-95) as he is separated from the collective during the liturgy, in order to open up his heart to the abbot. Without any reservations,

he is allowed to say things that are forbidden, outside the normal constraints and established moral values. In this way, each monk cleanses himself from the sinful thoughts that take place in the night, and sinful deeds that place during the day, in order to receive the Holy Communion. At dawn, they received the Holy Communion (aggregation)<sup>94</sup>, seen in a cathartic way as the coming light that dissolves the darkness of the night. The Vatopaidians usually confess once a week unless a monk is in a process of repenting from a grave sin, which means that he has to confess every two nights. Confession functions on both ephemeral and eternal time, as the means of cleansing from deeds of the day, as well as the means of achieving salvation through life-long repentance.

*Figure 5e: Diagram of the Rite of Passage of frequent Confession*



The first circle symbolizes the first step toward Heaven, a path to purification ('repentance') that begins with frequent confessions. The second circle has to do with the cathartic effect of confession in creating the *moral persona* (as in Mauss 1985, and 2006) according to the ideal image of Christ. Monastic life is thought to be a life of 'repentance', a path to purification in which the repetition of frequent confessions are essential. Confession is a collective 'technique of the body' (Mauss 2006: 77-95) for separating the 'self' from what is thought to be 'dirty' in Douglas's terms (1984/1966), 'sinful', 'un-natural', and 'out of order'. The outer circle shows confession within this greater life-long 'rite of passage', the journey of each monk to heaven.

<sup>94</sup> It is important to stress here, as I did above regarding the term 'initiation', that the Orthodox monks do not associate confession to the Holy Communion—as they do in the Catholic Church—. In Vatopaidi, while confession is obligatory and takes place every two nights for the younger monks, once a week for the older ones, but also depending on the sins of each monk, the reception of the Holy Communion is not obligatory, but left to each monk's discretion. As stated above, in looking at confession as a rite of passage, I am referring to the structure of the practice, rather than its theological definition.

Similar to prayer, the practice is based on self-examination offering a means to ‘*know thyself*’<sup>95</sup> through a cleansing process of ‘self-search’ (*automempsia*), and ‘to see inside the self’ (*endoskopisi*), in order to ‘remember even the sins he committed even when he was a baby’, and to achieve ‘true repentance’ (*eilikrinis metanoia*):

‘The aim of confession is to restore the mind back to its original base, from which it was disconnected because of the passions of the heart, in the same way Adam and Eve fell from Grace. If the mind stands steadily on its base, and if it makes the right use of concepts, then the person is able to make the right use of things. If the mind is not stable, then it becomes excessive and abuses things, and that is the beginning of Falling from the *natural* state of Grace’ [priest-monk 1/10/02]<sup>96</sup>

To bring the mind back to its ‘natural’ state, the rite manipulates time on two levels: the present moment during the confession and the long-term consequences for the monk. My confessions felt as if they lasted for an eternity, out-of-time and within the *liminal* space of the dark room. One day, I was listening to an old monk of Vatopaidi talking to visitors about prophecies and the end of time. But then, a younger monk passing-by the guest-house overheard him and immediately dismissed the discussion saying: ‘There are many prophecies about cataclysms but there is no point in looking at them. *The point is what you do here, on earth*’ [Vatopaidi 7/10/02]. As I have already argued in the previous chapter, the monastery is a *liminal* space, based on a life of practices in-between life and death, which manipulate the sense of ‘sacred time’ (Leach 2004: 124-136). Confessions manipulate time by stretching and reversing it; a self-reflective process that aims to return to the pure state before the Fall of Adam and Eve. In this context, confession offers the means to return from the ‘self’ (and self-interest) to the ideal ‘Christian persona’ (as in Mauss 1985: 1-25). Second, it is important to highlight here that confession does not offer instant cleansing. Confession, prayer, sleep

---

<sup>95</sup> This term echoes the inscription of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: ‘Know thyself/ Nothing in Excess/ Make a pledge and mischief is nigh’. Foucault in the *History of Sexuality* highlighted this historical transition and changes from the ancient Greek ideal of the naked Body to the Christian ascetic body, focusing on *Enkrateia* (‘to hold on’, to moderate, 1992: 25-93), as the means to ‘know yourself’ through ‘technologies of the self’ (1988: 16-49, which can be read at <http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en.html>).

<sup>96</sup> ‘The origin and cause of thoughts lies in the splitting up, by man’s transgression, of his single and simple memory, which has thus lost the memory of God... memory, can be cured by a constant memory of God consolidated by the action of the prayer (p.48)... Watch with care and intelligence, lover of God. When, while you work, you see within or without you a light or a flame, or an image -of Christ for example, or of an angel, or of someone else- does not accept it lest you suffer harm. And do not create fantasies, nor play attention to those that create them’ (St Gregory of Sinai, (Eds) Kaloubovsky and Palmer, 1951: 48, 90)

deprivation and fasting, are cathartic techniques of the body that constitute a long process that can last for days, weeks, or even months and years, depending on the gravity of the sin, the strength of the addiction, or the seriousness a bad choice:

‘The monks are also human, and they are punished according to the Internal Regulation, sometimes by exile, sometimes by isolation, and sometimes with a spiritual punishment, depending on the sin. If we break the rules, the Abbot gives us a number of prostrations to do privately in our cell. Still legs, bend the hands first, bend the legs, touch your forehead on the ground, stand up, cross yourself and say ‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me’. The number of prostrations depends on the sin’ [discussion with secretary of monastery 5/5/03]

For instance, during my fieldwork [April 2003] I met a young monk was known for his smoking problem; it was evidenced by his yellow, nicotine stained fingers. According to rumours, he used to smoke in the evening in his cell. Because of his bad habit, he was not allowed near the icons of Mary until he stopped smoking. His ‘passion’ has two aspects: first it was matter of the natural order of Mary’s landscape that forbids smoking and second, a matter of personal health. On the one hand, in the same way the Vatopaidians connect the rule of celibacy to the virginity of the landscape, here smoking is a passion that is out of the ‘natural’ order of the place; and on the other, in the long-term the young monk’s passion for cigarettes could cause cancer and kill him. This illustrates a rational and moral way of thinking that connects the physical cause of the illness to the monk’s disrespect for his body, the ‘temple of god’. In practice, the private canon is flexible, combined with confession, fasting, and sleep deprivation, were the means to restore the order both inside his body, and in the monastery according to the rules of the virgin landscape.

The connection of confession to the ‘natural’ (moral) law of monastic life, that emphasizes repentance as the central motivation behind human activities, is highlighted by the cathartic use of olive oil in confessions. At the end of a confession olive oil is used ‘first on the chest for the healing of the soul and body; then on the ears, in order to hear the voice of god and the Gospel; then on the legs for the path in life; and finally on the hands which are poetically created by god for your deeds in life’ [priest-monk 20/9/02]. Oil cleanses the body from the sins of the past, protects the faithful at the present, and confirms the separation of the blessed and cleansed person from the ones

who have not yet confessed<sup>97</sup>. In this path of purification the bodily organs gain moral qualities: ‘Like we wash our hands before we eat, with confession we wash the mind for the dirt can pollute our heart... Soul and Body (Greek phrase ‘*psehe kai somati*’) are inter-connected. If someone looks and feels ill, the illness is actually rooted in his dark Heart; it is not an illness of the skin. This is only a symptom. The root of the illness is something that tortures him deep inside. Such a man is always sad, full of negative energy, always hiding something, guilty of something’ [priest-monk 28/03/03]<sup>98</sup>.

According to article 24 of the Vatopaidian *Internal Regulations*, incidences of disorder are divided into ‘small offences’, and criminal activity. The first are more common, and they are cleansed by: a) ‘a number of repentances and prayer with the rosary (private canon) b) collective prayer with rosary while eating at the refectory c) fasting’. If the abbot finds it necessary he may forbid the monk to participate in the Holy Communion for a period of time, until he is cleansed through frequent confession. If the sinner is a priest or a priest-deacon, he is forbidden to participate in any liturgies until redeemed; if he is an elder of the *gerontia* (‘Council of elders’), he is forbidden to participate in the council’s meetings for three months. Legal offences can result to the expulsion of the monk in another monastery, or even outside Athos. More serious offences include theft, conspiracy, or physically attacking another brother: ‘some monks break the law, as sometimes they steal things. If the sin is a serious one against the law, then we have to call the police to deal with the monk’ [secretary of monastery 5/5/03]. However, the

---

<sup>97</sup> The saint of oil (*ladi*), which in Greek also means ‘mercy’ (*elaios*), is St Panteleimon who was known for his healing miracles. On the day of his celebration that took place on the Sunday morning of July 10 after a long night vigil, the abbot gave a public speech in the refectory, in which he compared the communal life to a ‘living organism’, which is similar to the olive tree itself: ‘it needs hard work, prayer, attention, obedience to produce the fruit. Then we pick it up and crash it, just like Jesus crashed Himself for our sins’. The crashing of the olives was a metaphor for the crashing of the self, as the means of conducting and representing the self in terms of *apatheia* (‘no passion’). This can only happen through ‘sincere confession’ (‘*eilikrinis metanoia*’) in which the visitor or monk open their hearts to the spiritual Father.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Everything that comes in the mouth, and goes in the belly, comes out in the toilet. But also everything that comes out of the mouth, thoughts of murder and fornication, can pollute the heart. Like we wash our hands before we eat, with confession we wash the mind for the dirt can pollute our hearts... a healthy face is a happy one, without negative energies. But a dark face reveals guilt, betraying the sins that darken the heart... Soul and Body (Greek phrase ‘*psyche kai somati*’) are inter-connected. If someone looks and feels ill, the illness is actually rooted to his dark Heart; it is not an illness of the skin. This is only a symptom. The root of the illness is something that tortures him deep inside. Such a man is always sad, full of negative energy, always hiding something, guilty of something. His dark face reveals his dark Heart... his soul is sick... He needs to return to God. You see a healthy man; you can recognize him by his healthy face, his bright smile, his clean heart’ [priest-monk 28/3/2003]

council rarely involves the police regarding matters of their own brotherhood, which are dealt with internally (as in a family), and executed by the abbot who decides the time the monk will have to spend in seclusion and the number of prostrations (*metanoies*, ‘repentances’) he will have to perform in the evening in his cell.

In sum, confession is used both to restore the internal order of each monk in relation to the external order of the community. Notions of pollution and purity contextualize the threat to the ‘virgin’ monastic body as external to the original purity of the human body – an extension of the Original Sin and Fall of Adam and Eve. In this context, confession is used to return to the pure state, the *pure garden*, from where Adam and Eve fell. In theological context, confession is the means of restoring the ‘natural’ order of the body ‘back to its original base’ [from above of monk above 1/10/02]. The olive oil is used to make such interconnection, not only cathartically when used in rituals, but also in everyday life to cleanse both body (it is made into brown soap, and also a disinfecting remedy) and soul (as used in confessions, ordinations, and blessings). In this context, it is also the means through which the abbot can exercise his absolute authority and constantly supervise the body and soul of his ‘spiritual children’ (*pneumatika tekna*) both on a personal level (confession as a kind of self-management of each monk) and in respect to the order of the entire community.

## 5.7 Holy Communion

Before dawn, after the veneration of the holy items of Mary, the Divine Liturgy (*Theia Liturgia*) began with the lighting of all the candles of the ‘Great Chandelier’. The bright atmosphere sharply contrasted to the mystical darkness of the Midnight Office and the limelight of the Matins. The Divine Liturgy of St Chrysostome, whose ear is kept in the monastery’s relics, began with the reading of the First and Third Hours by the priest, in front of the closed red curtains that mark the entrance of the sanctuary. The double choir sang three *antiphona* (‘counter-voices’), accompanied by further passages with the life and martyrdom of the saint remembered, read by the reader. Then the priest read the Sixth and Ninth Hours, before the ecclesiarches sounded the *sideraki* (‘little iron bar’) to mark the ‘little entrance’.

As the choir sang three devotional songs to the Virgin, the priest opened the red curtain of the Royal Doors of the altar, allowing the priest to enter into the *nave* singing his

blessings. At that moment the monks removed their hoods and step down from their stalls. Monks and visitors gently bowed their heads. The priest then moved outwards, starting from the right (north) side of the sanctuary. He was carrying the *Evangelio* ('Gospel'), a thick book covered in gold and silver, that dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The reflection of the gold cover of the book shone on in the light of the candles, magnetizing the eyes of the participants. The priest placed the golden *Evangelio* on a stall in the middle of the *nave*, and theatrically opened it for everyone to listen. It was read out in absolute silence. Nothing could be heard but the Biblical passage about the visit of Gabriel to Mary and her annunciation.

After reading the passage from the *Evangelio*, the choir sung the beautiful 'Hymn of Cherubim' to mark the 'great entrance': The *kanonarchis* rang a little bell for the Holy Communion to be prepared inside the sanctuary, a space called *prothesis* (meaning 'sacrifice', altar', and 'intention'). The abbot entered the altar with the *prosforaris*, who is the deacon who helps to prepare the *prosfora* ('offering', sacrifice), the bread and wine that will be transformed into the Holy Flesh (bread) and Blood. He then rang a small bell to mark the beginning of the offering as monks and visitors waited in a hierarchical order (*chorostasia*: first in line were the chaplains, the chanters, the *typikaris*, the *kanonarchis*, and then the rest of the priest-monks, elders, priest-deacons, monks, novices, visitors) to receive the Holy Communion from the hand of the 'father' abbot. At dawn, while the brotherhood received the Holy Communion, the gate of the monastery opened up to the 'world' out there, as daytime is the time for collective work for the monastery. The closing and opening of the gate, at sunset and sunrise respectively, thus has a symbolic significance: the former signifies the work that is done through practices of separation and detachment during the canonical hours, while the latter signifies that work that needs to be done for the self-sufficiency of the monastery following the worldly hours.

Unlike other monasteries, such as their neighbouring Esfigmenou where confessions take place only if it is necessary and the Holy Communion only once a week (*see* chapter 9), in Vatopaidi the monks receive the Holy Communion as often as three times a week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday)<sup>99</sup>. When a monk who has made a mistake

---

<sup>99</sup> From the *Filokalia*: 'Many say that sins are forgiven through Holy Communion. Others are opposed to this and say that they are not forgiven through Holy Communion, but only through the Mystery of Confession. We, however, say that both are necessary: preparation through confession and the fulfilment

feels cleansed enough through the process of repentance (which consists of constant prayer, strict fasting (*xerofagia*), sleep deprivation, and a number of prostrations and prayers with the rosary during the hours of his personal ‘canon’ in his cell) only then he can re-join the community. The completion of this cathartic period that takes place privately, mostly in isolation in the cell, is then celebrated with the confession of the monk to the abbot, and by public acceptance of the Holy Communion as the rite of aggregation and reunification with the rest of the brotherhood. Conversely, if someone, for whatever reason, decided to stop receiving the Holy Communion on his own will, he would publicly cut himself off the community. As in Catholic types of monastic life, Vatopaidi’s model of monastic life is therefore based on the notion of brotherhood and the socialization of the monks in everyday life. This socialization has to be frequently confirmed through the Holy Communion:

‘Only sinners are *akoinonitoi* (‘anti-social/ without Communion’): those who are eaten inside by the guilt of their sins. By contrast, in Paradise everyone is happy. That’s why the monk must not carry anything with him but the Holy Communion; this is the gift of god’ [refectory speech of abbot of Vatopaidi 12/5/03]

However, the frequent confession and Holy Communion is criticized by monks of other groups or monasteries, such as the zealots of the neighbouring monastery of Esfigmenou. They believe that the frequent Holy Communion and confession taught by the Vatopaidian elders are ‘a characteristic of the Latin Church’ and were imported by the new Vatopaidians ‘to corrupt the pure tradition of Athos’ [guest-master Esfigmenou 2/12/02]<sup>100</sup>. In response to such criticisms, the Vatopaidians were eager to note that for them confessions and Holy Communion ‘are separate matters’, since although they are obliged to confess to the abbot, they are not obliged to receive the Holy Communion,

---

of our rule (canon), and the sacred reception of Holy Communion. [60]...If we do not commune frequently, it is impossible for us not to become subject of passions (for we keep ourselves pure through our preparation for Communion). Frequent Communion will become for us a companionship unto eternal life [paragraph 98]... After one receives Communion, he thinks about the dread and heavenly Mysteries of which he partook, and so he takes heed to himself so as not to dishonour that grace. He fears his thoughts (*logismoi*), shrinks away from them, and, as much as is possible, abstains from every evil. When he begins to think about the fact that he will be receiving Communion again in just a few days, he doubles his efforts to watch over himself. He adds zeal to zeal, self-control to self-control, vigilance to vigilance, labours upon labours, and he struggles as much as possible. This is because he is pressed on two sides: on one side, because just a short while ago he received Communion, and on the other, because he will receive again in a short while’ [paragraph 118].

<sup>100</sup> Central in the dispute is the use of *Filokalia* with instructions of the Jesus Prayer and the organization of the daily program according to frequent confession and Holy Communion, which is ‘considered a Latin custom’ (Gillet 1987: 65). See also Chapter 9: Contested Tradition by Esfigmenou.

but it is left to each monk's discretion. 'It is a personal matter of how one feels' [priest-monk 5/5/03]. Here again, we see a separation of the person in the *obligation* to confess and submit to the patrimonial authority of the abbot, in contrast to the impersonal relationship of each monk to what is perceived as an egalitarian community, as each monk is not obliged to receive the Holy Communion – if he thinks it is not appropriate for a certain of period of time. In other words, how *frequently* each monk receives the Holy Communion, and how he relates as a personal to the impersonal community, is entirely left up to him. In this context, the *typikon* of each monastery, the book with the liturgical calendar and rules of conduct, is not a matter of subordination to the elders and the rules of the monastery, but rather a matrix that accommodates all the individual monks with their personal problems and 'passions', in order to 'liberate' and unify them under a communal program headed by the Holy Communion (Archimandrite Vasileios and Mantzaridis 1997: 11)<sup>101</sup>.

## 5.8 Refectory



Figure 5f: Catholicon (left) –

Bell Tower (centre)

refectory (right) –

<sup>101</sup> 'A *typikon*... reveals what is in us, and what is beyond: freedom, the provision of space, and unity; how to achieve fulfilment with all the Saints, and how each person is recognised as self-sufficient, summing up everything in himself' the free space for self-expression, according to each monk's capabilities (Archimandrite Vasileios and Mantzaridis 1997: 11, *see also* communal concept of 'economy' as self-management in previous chapter).

The refectory of Vatopaidi is built opposite the main church (*see figure 5f* above). The close proximity of the two facing doors of the two buildings helps in making the Divine Liturgy (the celebration of a particular saint or event) to continue uninterrupted in the refectory. As a monk exclaimed ‘first we feed the Heart with the Holy Spirit, and then we feed the belly to gain some strength to go through the day’ [12/4/03]. After feeding the soul, the monks feed the body, but without forgetting that hunger is thought to be a passion, connected to greed and lust, and so, the strict hierarchical order, as manifested by the division of space and roles inside the church, is still kept in the refectory. In the refectory, the reader of the day read passages from the life and miracles of the saint or saints celebrated on the particular day, while monks and visitors ate silently. In this way, eating in the refectory was a double way of feeding, eating on the one hand food to strengthen the body for the daily tasks, and eating on the other the spiritual food offered in the moral examples of the saints celebrated that day. After eating, there was time for work and some rest, before they returned to the church for the next vesper and the liturgy, and through confession to cleanse from the sins of the day. In this cyclical way, the Vatopaidian life has its own circular logic: a repetitive spiral passage from inside the self (night prayers) through the body (refectory) to the material world (work), and back inside the self to reflect on it through confession (*see* also chapter 5).

The meals began with the abbot sounding a small golden bell. Talking was forbidden while eating, as everybody was obliged to silently listen to the reader (*anagnostis*), a young deacon who read from the *Meneon* (meaning ‘monthly’). This is a book of verses, called *stichera*, with the lives and martyrdom of the saints celebrated on each particular day. Many days, particularly on great celebrations and after the ‘great feasts’, the abbot gave an additional speech in relation to the importance of the day, often highlighting the values of obedience, humility, and self-sacrifice, as moral examples to be imitated in everyday life. The reader read throughout the meal, and stopped only at the sound of the abbot’s bell, which signals the end of eating. On Sundays and celebrations, the abbot used a golden bell, but for the rest of the week he used a small iron triangle<sup>102</sup>. If the abbot felt that some members of the brotherhood or visitors were being greedy, especially after long periods of abstinence, he only allowed the

---

<sup>102</sup> When the abbot was absent (as he was sometimes engaged in meetings and conferences outside the borders of the Republic) the elder (*pro-hegoumenos*, ‘second-before-the-abbot’) who replaced him tapped a wooden cymbal to indicate the end of the meal.

brotherhood to eat only for a few minutes, before ringing his bell to stop them from continuing. This was a collective lesson for their impatience: ‘The monks must never forget that eating is not for pleasure, but a necessary weakness’ [priest-monk 12/5/03].

According to the rule of *Avaton*, no cattle is allowed in the peninsula, and respectively, the consumption of meat is not allowed at any time on Athos, as flesh is associated with materialist desire. In this sense, flesh is thought to be ‘polluted’, traditionally associated with the personal desires of the body (uncontrolled hunger, an excessive emotion that echoes sexual desire). On non-fasting days the monks ate twice, in the morning after the liturgy and in the evening after the vesper, while on fasting days they ate only once in the morning. Furthermore, on non-fasting days they used lots of olive oil in their cooking, while on fasting days the meals were boiled in water. The monks were always careful to wash the olives from any insects. The meals were accompanied by bread and wine, the flesh and blood of Jesus, this time used to materially support the monastic body. They included imported rice cooked with boiled leeks and greens, or lentils, or imported pasta (cooked in tomato sauce in non-fasting days) and accompanied by bread, vegetables (olives, broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, celery, onions, green salad, tomatoes, beans, lettuces, courgettes, cabbage, aubergines, cauliflowers, beetroot, potato salad, oregano, parsley, and garlic) and seasonal fruits (grapes, figs, berries, and mushrooms in autumn; apples, pears, oranges, and chestnuts in the winter; melons, berries, and imported kiwi in the spring and summer). For a sweet they usually offered *tahini* (sesame paste).

On Tuesdays, the meals were served with cheese, because it was ‘the day of *Tyrofagos*’, meaning the ‘cheese eater’ day. Because cattle are not allowed on the Mount, Vatopaidi has land and farms in Chalkidiki, northern Greece, called *metochia*, a term referring to all properties outside Athos. In the farms the monks keep cattle, taking care of the animals and working with lay workers storing and making cheese. The abbot had sent two monks with experience in farming to take care of the animals and make cheese. The two monks had the role of *tyrokomos* (‘cheese-maker’), and every month they brought to the monastery the cheese carried from the harbour of the village Ierissos with the boat to Vatopaidi. On Sundays, the meals were based on bloodless

creatures, fish, octopus<sup>103</sup>, or calamari, served in homemade tomato or aubergine sauce, and accompanied by potato stew with chickpea patties cooked in the oven. The Sunday meals were served with fruits, wine, and baklava or halva, sweets made from almond. Fishing is a particularly sacred activity, associated with the disciples of Jesus. Athos is famous for its rich deep waters of the surrounding north Aegean sea, and fishing is the oldest traditional activity of monks. The monk responsible for the nets, the condition of the boats, and for the harbor (recording who comes in and out) is the Elder in the role of the *arsanaris* ('harbour-man') helped by a group of five deacons and a few lay workers with experience in fishing, and in taking care of the boats

At the end of the meal, the Abbot exited first, holding his *crozier* (the stick of authority) followed by the *trapezaris* ('table-man'), the monk responsible for the refectory, and the priest-monk 'on duty' (*efimerios*). They were then followed by a more loose order of elders and priest-monks, then the priest-deacons, ordinary monks, novices, and, at the back, secular visitors. As the monks left the refectory for their duties, the abbot gave them his blessing one by one. At the back of the refectory sat the deacons on duty who cooked and served the meal took a deep bow asking for forgiveness for any errors and omissions, and demonstrating their humility.

<i>Figure 5g: Chorostasia: Exit from Refectory/ Trapezaris 'Table-Man' opens the gate for:</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> Abbot with <i>prohegoumenoi</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Elders and Priests
3 <sup>rd</sup> Monks with <i>Angelic Schema</i>
4 <sup>th</sup> Monks without <i>Angelic Schema</i>
5 <sup>th</sup> Novices
6 <sup>th</sup> Visitors
7 <sup>th</sup> Deacons on duty followed by <i>Trapezaris</i> who closes the door

Particular importance was paid to the crumbs of bread left on the tables after the meal, as bread is associated with the body of Christ. The cook and the deacons picked up each

<sup>103</sup> There are particular techniques of catching octopuses with the hand, at dawn, which is the time they come out from their underwater nests to feed. There are two ways of catching them: either by waiting at the shore for the moment they come out, and simply grab them with the hands, as if picking a gift from the sea. The other way is a bit trickier. The octopuses hide in underwater holes, but if a monk does find a hole with an octopus in, the trick is to lay a white stone in front of the hole. The octopus cannot resist to the bright white colour of the stone, and so it comes out on its own to hug the white stone. Then the monks again easily pick them out of the water. Another thing the two monks taught me one morning [1/5/03] was to be 'economical', meaning to be careful not to pick young octopuses, because they are too small to be eaten. It was a matter of economy, as the young octopuses will grow, and then it will be the right and fair time to pick them. The trick is to remember the area in the seawater, where the monk first saw a young octopus, in order to pick it six months later, when it will have grown to full size. Athos is famous for its octopus cooked in wine, and its octopus salad.

crumb with their fingers and put them in a small red basket so that they would not be thrown away on the floor, or even worse in the rubbish. If a crumb should fall on the floor, the monk or visitor has to pick it up and immediately swallow it, while reciting the words of the Jesus prayer. One day I dropped some crumbs on the floor. A Romanian novice saw me, but did not say anything. After the meal finished, however, on my way out, he stopped and asked me discretely to stay and help with the cleaning of the tables as a small way to make up from my error.

The younger monks often joked about fasting. For instance, it was rumoured that an overweight monk was secretly eating in his cell. After six months passed, during the period of the Lent, I heard the overweight monk saying to his close companionship, another Greek monk: ‘Father, how many kilos do you think I lost in the last five months? I promise you that until the resurrection of Christ [the Easter that year was on 27/4] I will lose even more kilos to look like a model ready for my cat-walk’ [26/3/03]. The slight irony in the monk’s comment revealed that abstinence is much more than a diet. It is a process, accompanied by sleep deprivation and constant prayer with rosary and deep prostrations in isolation, aiming to ‘detoxify the self from the toxins in the body and the mind’ [priest-monk 8/4/03]. In this context, fasting is part of the greater cleansing process that continues from the transition from the ‘desert’ to the monastery (see chapters 2 and 4) in the moral context of purification (as in Douglas terms of ‘purity’ and eating 1966/1988: 32-3, and Carrithers’s terms of ‘path of purification 46-66, among others). In combination with prayer, confession, and Holy Communion, fasting constitutes ‘techniques of the body’ (Mauss 1935/2006: 77-95), towards the ascetic self (Foucault 1984/1992: 72-7).

Particularly on days of winter abstinence, Vatopaidi looked empty as most of the monks spent their time alone in their cell. The periods of abstinence were described to me as periods of ‘mourning’ and ‘inner search’ (*endoskopisi*), because the monks dedicated more time in their spiritual activities, and less to their occupations. These can be seen as ‘liminal’ periods, in the sense that fasting keeps the body and mind under constant control, according to a collective program and the rules of the brotherhood,

forming a ‘communitas’ in Turner’s terms (1974, and Buitelaar 1992<sup>104</sup>): an esoteric pilgrimage that ends the period of abstinence with a great celebration.

‘Fasting is not only the means to master and control the body, but also to control anger and emotions. It is necessary in doing economy, because if you stop fasting, then adultery and thievery follow. But if you really want to fast in the proper way, you must avoid all passions once and for all.’ [Priest-monk 5/4/03]

Fasting is thus a ‘technique of the body’ (as in Mauss 2006: 77-83/ 1935), offering the cathartic way of keeping the body and mind under constant control, according to a collective program and the rules of the brotherhood. Furthermore, the repetitive cycle of periods of abstinence during the year, and fasting days during the week, make it a ‘natural’ habitude in the monks’ life. The non-consumption of food is connected to ideals of purity (as in Douglas 1966), designed to ‘empty’ the body and mind from personal ‘passions’ in the economic terms of *enkrateia* (‘moderation’, Foucault 1992: 63-65), which together with sleep deprivation, prayer with the rosary and hard work, offers a collective ‘technology of the self’ (Foucault 1988: 16-49) designed to keep body and mind under constant control. The moral connection of the esoteric self to the physical body extends to the order of the community, as fasting is also the means for restoring social order. At the corner of the refectory, there were always a few monks who did not eat, but instead kept whispering for forgiveness from Christ while reciting the words of the Jesus prayer with the help of a long rosary. One day I asked a priest-monk who and what were these monks doing, and why they were not eating. He replied that these monks had ‘lost their path’, and they found it *through* the community. It is important to highlight here that the long rosaries kept next to the back entrance of the refectory did not belong to any particular monk, but to the collective. In Vatopaidi, where private prayer and confession govern everyday life, praying *with the rosary* (something they only do in their cells in the evening) in front of the others is a mild (i.e. ‘economic’) form of catharsis: ‘God loves humiliation’ as the priest-monk told me [14/5/03]<sup>105</sup>. However, ‘this is not a punishment, but a way to learn humility’ as another priest-monk told me [15/9/03].

---

<sup>104</sup>For instance, Marjo Buitelaar’s ethnography *on Fasting and Feasting in Morocco: Women’s Participation in Ramadan* (1992 Oxford: Berg) examined fasting as ‘duty’ and a matter of identity to Muslim women (1992: 78-96). In particular, the ‘communita’ of Ramadan marks the ‘liminal’ period of transformation, in which fasting is the means of purifying the self (*Ibid*: 102-134, and 159-176) through ‘a cycle of celebrations’ (*Ibid*: 135-158).

<sup>105</sup> ‘They lost their path and needed some help to find it again with fasting and prayer. The rosaries that they are using to pray are more than 200 years old. We keep them hanging next to the door (of the

## 5.9 Conclusion

The ritual life of the monastery makes it a *liminal* space, in which monastic life is based on the repletion of *liminal* practices that place it in-between life and death. The monk, emptied of the past (chapter 4) continues the work of keeping temptation and memory at bay on a day-to-day basis. Similar to the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries of Attica, or Turner's writings on *liminality* (1967: 93-111), the spiritual essence of monastic life takes place in the night in a kind of dark tunnel inside the chapels and the church. The succession of the darkness of the night and the light of the sunrise at the end of the Divine Liturgy creates a cyclical rhythm that is repeated daily. Night vigils, confessions, and fasting, provide particularly testing and important opportunities for this on the basis of a double daily rhythm of prayer and work. Fasting provides particularly testing and important opportunities for this, aiming to *empty* the self from 'passions' through the order of collective life, to *fulfil* it with a range of daily tasks, in connection to Mary and her nature gifted to the monks. Confession and the sunrise have an emotional and cathartic impact, as with the night all passions are gone with it. By this, each individual can return from confession into the church as cleansed, and receive the Holy Communion with the rest of the brotherhood at sunrise. In this sense, every sunrise symbolizes the resurrection of Christ within the self and the community, by first separating and then reuniting the two through the course of the night.

---

refectory). In the old days it was harder, as the Fathers used to sit on their knees either in the centre of the refectory for all the monks to see, or in the centre of the nave during the liturgy, because god loves public humiliation. This is not a punishment, but the monk's way to prove his real love to god' [Secretary of monastery 14/5/03]

## Chapter 6: The Communal Life of Vatopaidi

### 6.1 Introduction

The re-introduction of the *coenobitic* life in the *sketes* and the monasteries was accompanied by the re-organization of their ‘economy’ (*oikonomia*) into the ‘law’ (*nomos*) of the house (*ecos*)’ (see chapter 4: ‘The Family of Josephaeoi’). In respect to the internal organization of the community, Joseph the Hesychast re-introduced the concept of economy, originally introduced by St. Athanasius the Athonite with the introduction of St Basil’s *coenobitic* rule on the Mount in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, as a mild (‘economic’, *eksoikonomo*) way of managing younger monks. Although Joseph lived as a hermit, his disciples were not used to the hardships of monastic life. Because most of them grew up in urban environments, he had to be patient and mild with their training, as he did not wish to scare them away from monastic life. The concept of ‘economy’ functioned as a kind of personal management by the elder monks towards the youngsters, depending on their stamina, in order to make monastic life less demanding, and more attractive and accessible to them (Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 33, and Filotheitis 2008: 262)<sup>106</sup>.

In this context, economy refers to the non-excessive attitude to life, including towards the other monks and the environment in the ‘spiritual’ sense of Weber's analysis of early Christian asceticism as the ‘spirit of capitalism’ (1905), in which he sketched the ‘spirit of capitalism’ in terms of evolving from the ascetic morality of not being excessive<sup>107</sup>. In the context of communal life, the ‘economy’ every monk has to show

---

<sup>106</sup> For instance, Ephraim Filotheitis, who was one of the young ‘weaker’ monks at the time, remembers that Arsenios, after a day of hard work, allowed him to eat the remaining of fish from the previous day, while telling him: ‘Little boy, now that the Elder (Joseph) is not looking, eat the leftovers. Be obedient and eat it! I will say to the Elder that I am doing economy (*eksoikonomo*) with you’ I am the oil-Elder!’ (Arsenius in Filotheitis 2008: 262). Joseph the Vatopaidian, one of Joseph’s disciples, and founder of the new Vatopaidi in 1990, explained: ‘...The introduction of the spirit of ‘economy’ in our era is not breaking the rules by rejecting our Father’s Canon, but it is the result of the decline of the physical powers of today’s man... Me, and my brothers of my age, were able to stand the pains of monastic life (*filoponia*, meaning ‘friend of pain’) without effort, but with patience. However, our disciples were unable to follow, and that was not because they betrayed their will. Although they had the will to make an effort towards zealot life, they had to compromise because of their physical weaknesses’ (Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 33).

<sup>107</sup> This notion of ‘economy’ as a non-excessive attitude echoes the ‘spirit’ in Weber's analysis of early Christian asceticism in terms of the ‘spirit of capitalism’ (1905). In Hamilton's edition of criticisms of Weber (1991), Razzel argued that the ‘spirit of capitalism’ is ‘nothing but a more secularized version of

in his daily conduct is strongly associated with the running of the community according to the *coenobitic* model of life. This definition of ‘economy’ as the ‘law’ of the ‘house’ precedes *ecology* (the ‘logic’/ ‘speech of the ‘house’), echoing the symbiotic relationship the monks have with the natural environment that supports their self-sufficiency. In the same way they respect the ‘Garden of Mary’ with rules of conduct, dressing code, and prohibitions, they also have to respect their brothers, and to be obedient to their elders and the daily program according to the *coenobitic* model of life, based on praying in the night and working in the day. According to the rule of poverty, the monks share everything, from duties to food, as they are not allowed to have any private property but a small notebook to write their sins down, so that they do not forget any of them during their confessions to the abbot.

The collective life of Vatopaidi is based on three central values (originally introduced in the *typiko* of Joseph the Hesychast): ‘obedience, virginity, and poverty (humility)’ [personal communication with Vatopaidian monks]. These were institutionalized into a collective program by Joseph the Vatopaidian. These personal values are therefore collective, as it is the love for the impersonal monastery, in opposition to the ‘self-love’ that serves self-interest and egoism. As I shall show below, the communal values of obedience, humility, and poverty are manifested in economic terms, both in relation to the natural environment, and regarding their conduct amongst the brotherhood, revealing the ‘rational substance’ (as in Mauss 1985: 19-20) of the Vatopaidian persona, which is mild and detached in character.

## **Part I: The Values of Josephaeoi**

### **6.2 ‘Economy of Passions’**

The monks believe that the sins torturing the soul are manifested by ‘irrational’ (*paralogos*, ‘against logic’) behaviour, which is emotionally excessive, and at times can be neurotic, paranoid, and angry. In this context, the value, as introduced by the

---

the protestant ethic which develops over time through the process of rationalization’ (1991:134). However, Razzel surpassed Weber’s two historical chapters on the roots of capitalism regarding the early Christian ascetics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AC (Chapter IV ‘The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism’, and Chapter V ‘Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism’), in which I feel ‘spirit’ means a non-excessive attitude towards life, and which can be seen in Vatopaidi today. This does not mean that Orthodox monastic life becomes ‘Protestant’, rather, that the roots of Protestantism are in ascetic life (as argued by Weber 2003/ 1930).

Hesychast, has its own rationality, according to the times: the non-excessive attitude is the means of teaching in a moderate way to untrained novices; it is also the means to ecologically connect and live in the peninsula through agricultural activities that must be economic toward the natural environment and not allow its exploitation, according to recent ecological considerations (Eleseos and Papagiannis 1994: 51-54). The balanced relationship between the forest and humans is not only a matter of faith (according to the ideal of virginity, chapter 3), but also a practical matter of ‘symbiosis’ (sustainability) between the monks and ‘the natural order of God’s Building’ [personal communication with priest-monk 1/10/02]. The priest-monk who supervised me at work told me that ‘everything is a connected to energies, from the natural environment to ourselves’. He explained that there are positive and negative energies, which unify or divide respectively:

‘Nature carries the *charis* of God. The monk who carries the *charis* is not afraid of the snake or the scorpion, because they will not hurt him. It is a matter of energy. Everything in nature has energy<sup>108</sup>... a man with a bad energy cannot hide it. Only his presence brings anxiety, tension; but (on the other hand) everyone wants to talk to a man with good energy’ [discussion with priest-monk, 7/5/03].

In this context, the social order of the monastery is projected on the natural order of the landscape, naturalizing ‘economy’ as the way through which each monk returns to the ‘virgin’ state of being, signifying a nostalgic return to nature through the monastery which is conceived as a ‘natural’ part of the ‘virgin’ landscape. Prayer and work ‘keep the mind concentrated to god at all times’ [discussions with monks] aiming to control mind and body, in order to achieve the ‘natural’ state of *apatheia* (being ‘without passions’, impassionate):

‘God help the ones who get drunk *without* wine. The ones who let anger drive their soul mad, letting fear paralyse their intellect. The angry man is drunk with his passions. He cannot think, or see, what is in front of him. It is as if he is fighting in absolute darkness, grabbing anything that comes in front of him, and falling on everything that comes in his way. He does not know what he is saying, but he only makes fake promises, swears, hits, spits, threatens, and screams’ [priest-monk 5/5/03]

---

<sup>108</sup> The priest-monk explained: ‘I remember an American documentary I watched as a child in which some scientists discovered a machine that can record the different energies of the natural environment. They were investigating a murder, and I remember that while the grass had low levels of energy, the grass on which the murderer had stepped had extreme high volumes of energy, it was going wild. This scientific investigation proves the *charis* of God in all things, in the whole Creation’ [7/5/03].

The moderate attitude towards both younger monks and the natural environment reveals a particular way of thinking manifested in the practical value of ‘economy of passions’, the repetition of the words of the Jesus prayer throughout the day as the means of detaching from both internal memories or thoughts (*logismoi*) and the surrounding environment (including the worldly visitors), in order to achieve the mental state of *apatheia*. But although *apatheia* is an ideal state of mind that reflects on the moral values of the entire community, it is important to note that anger is not a sin per se, but an emotion that should be learned to control and use it for the benefit of the community. For instance, anger is also the necessary *means* for the elder monks to deal with matters of disorder and disobedience of younger monks. At times, an elder has to be angry if a novice disobeys him, in order to teach him the right order. If the time comes that an elder or a priest-monk has to get angry, this anger comes only from the lips, not the ‘heart’. In other words, it is not a ‘passion’. On the contrary, ‘it is on straight line with the advice be angry but do not sin’ (Ephraim Abbot of Vatopaidi 2001: 104, *my translation*). The priest-monk above exclaimed: ‘*Apatheia* is not our aim, but the *means* for saving our souls’ [5/5/03]. Thus, in Joseph’s teachings emotions are *not* completely denounced. Rather, each monk learns to control his emotions through the cleansing process of monastic life, and to use them in an ‘economical’ way for the benefit of the entire community.

My fieldwork in Vatopaidi was hard. During the day, I had to work under the supervision of the priest-monk on duty acting in the role of the verger (*economos*) of the monastery, while every two nights I had to confess to another priest-monk, who was appointed by the Abbot to be my ‘spiritual father’. In this way, during the day the verger supervised my body in terms of work, while in the night the confessor looked into my soul through confession. One of my daily jobs was to clean, with a knife, the burned wax from used candles, in order to be re-used at the liturgies. It was a repetitive job to do, and because of my clumsiness I often cut more wax off the candle than necessary. The verger however advised me to be patient, and cut the used candles properly, ‘because it is a matter of economy’. In learning to handle my hands in terms of economy of movement, I would then be able to respect the natural environment. He told me: ‘just like Jesus recycled His body, we recycle the wax’. But also through this symbolic act of ‘recycling’, the monks save candles to sell through a network of churches and religious shops in Orthodox countries, as candles, honey, and wine, are

the monastery's main agricultural exports. Because my wrists were hurting after only cleaning a few candles, the verger asked me to loudly repeat the words of the Jesus Prayer while cutting the burned wax off the candles, as a technique to develop rhythm in the movement of my hands, and in relation to my breathing. Indeed, after an hour of reciting the words I was automatically moving the knife on the wax, breathing according to the rhythm of the words of the prayer.

‘Do you see my child that now you don't have any stress? When you work, work hard, and keep saying the prayer ‘Lord Jesus Forgive me the Sinner’. In this way you won't lose your concentration. The prayer keeps your mind clear from negative thoughts. The devil puts stress in our hearts, in order to stop our spiritual development. For example, while our spiritual capabilities are, let's say up to 60% of what Christ was capable, we only use 5% of what we can actually offer, because stress takes our concentration away. It does not let us move our energy forward, but slowly eats us from inside, and that is why we need to pray all the time’ [priest-monk 8/5/03]

Repeating the words of the prayer would keep me out of trouble, and after a few hours, the words began coming automatically in my mouth, giving me a sense of rhythm that carried over my actions. For a very brief moment, I felt a mild sense of trance, a state which the monks call *apatheia*, meaning ‘without passions’, manifested by their mild faces and detached attitude in their daily conduct. If a ‘dangerous’ thought (*logismos*) passed my mind, for example the memory of my girlfriend, or feeling tired and angry because of the hard, repetitive, and unpaid work I was doing, I then had to tell about my thoughts in my frequent confessions to my spiritual father, who supervised my soul in the night. Accordingly, clearing the used candles from the wax had both a spiritual for me and a materialist value for the monastery: in learning to handle my hands in terms of economy of movement, I was learning about the ‘economy of passions’, but also, I was helping with the internal economy of the monastery as by recycling the old candles to be re-used for the liturgies, the monastery kept a bigger number of candles to export in the Greek market. In this way, the repetition of the words of the prayer, while I was clearing the burned wax of the candles, was the practical way through which I was enabled to connect to the greater rhythm of Vatopaidian daily life, even though I was an outsider, through the practical notion of ‘economy of passions’. Arguably, here, praying was a matter of representation of the self in everyday life strongly connected to the communal order (as in Goffman 2006/ 1959), as it emphasizes the importance of

repetitive working on the mind (words of prayer) and body (repetition of movement) to save the immortal soul<sup>109</sup>.

### 6.3 ‘Blind Obedience’

One summer day, I overheard a young monk known for his computer skills, claiming that his supervisor elder complained to the Abbot about him, saying that he was not taking care of him and his wishes. But according to the young monk, the elder did ‘not have a clue about work in an office’ and so he had to do the work of the elder and did not have time to clean his room and serve him at the same time. The next morning at the refectory the young monk was absent, and the abbot gave a speech to monks and visitors about obedience being ‘the most important in life’, and particularly the obedience to elder monks regardless of their wishes: ‘What good did it do to Judas to be a disciple of Christ, when he betrayed His will?’ he rhetorically asked. Following the meal, I heard that the previous night the abbot had asked for the young monk’s confession, and gave him a number of prostrations and prayers to practice alone in his cell for five days, ‘not as a punishment but as the free way for him to get rid of his arrogance’ [personal communication with priest-monk 1/4/03].

‘Arrogance and overwhelming self-confidence are the main characteristics of the Devil. The man who wants to get rid of these demonic energies from inside him has to imitate Jesus, who is calm, obedient, and humble in Heart. In essence, the *charis* [‘elegance’], calmness, and humility that we have to have in our life, are the characteristics of the Holy Spirit itself’ [abbot’s speech in refectory 1/4/03]

A few days later, in the main church during the Divine Liturgy, two groups of monks began arguing loudly over whose turn was it to work in the kitchen. The post meant that the group cooking would miss the Divine Liturgy, because it was not clear whose turn was it for the duty. They became so loud that the priest-monk in the role of the *ecclesiarches*, responsible for the order during the liturgies, removed them from the church outside, in order to resolve their argument. The abbot did not say anything during the liturgy, but the next morning said in his speech at the refectory:

‘Anger is like the anomalous stone, which when it mingles with the other perfect round stones, it causes disorder, but finally it falls out, excluded, and miserable. The

---

<sup>109</sup> On ‘the notion of salvation’ see Parry 1986: 469, and in respect to the ‘government of the soul’ Carrette 1999: 1-2, and ‘ethical work’ in Foucault 1992: 27, and in Rose 1989. See also chapter 2, section 5: ‘Foucault’s Monastic Body’

stone is hard. But that's the problem. It has to learn humility. That is why we all have to work together, follow the *typiko* (book of conduct), and never stop praying and working. In the same way, we never stop offering our daily service to the Elders (*deaconema*), we never abandon our duty to begin arguing with other monks, or wasting the time laughing amongst themselves like idiots' [3/4/03]

The abbot connected the behaviour and conduct of each individual monk to the community as a whole, describing the monastery as an organic body which is kept alive by the functioning of each of its internal organs. The 'heart' of each monk, connected to the Jesus Prayer, is also the 'heart' of the community (*see* definition of *lavra* in *glossary*). In the context of collective life, the emotion of anger is an excessive attitude that contradicts the humility the monks have to have in their daily conduct. It manifests a personal 'passion' against a fellow brother, and thus, self-interest as the motivational force behind such small conflicts and disorder, disrupting the 'natural order' of the community<sup>110</sup>. In the abbot's words, the monastery is a 'living body', which as if it is a living entity (echoing Durkheim's notions of 'society') demands the particular skills and knowledge that each monk brings from the 'world' to be used for the benefit of the entire community:

'Our monastery is like a human body, or a living tree. We all have to be obedient to our elders because they are our roots and brains. We all work together for the Heart of this monastery, our community. If a vein is blocked and stops working then the body gets a heart-attack. The same happens with our monastery. Everyone has a task, and if he fails it because of his laziness, or because of any other reason, then the whole body will collapse, in the same way if the liver fails then the heart stops, and then you die' [speech of abbot in refectory, 3/4/03]

The blood in the veins of this living community is 'blind obedience'. This refers to the obligation of younger monks to offer their 'services' (*deaconema*) to their elders, in exchange for their spiritual guidance to them. This obligation is based on the intimate paternal relationship between elders and deacons<sup>111</sup>. It is part of the spiritual exchanges that take place as part of the spiritual linearity between the older generations of monks with newcomers. The youngsters offer their services in exchange of the experience and advices of their elders. Accordingly, for the Vatopaidians obedience is the value that

---

<sup>110</sup> 'The passions that torture the human heart are the result of pride and selfishness. They are deceptions of the devil who works for the ego. So, it is a matter of choice: you can be either obedient to the devil, and to follow your passions and sin, or you can be obedient to our father (the abbot) who protects the natural order (*physiki taksis*) of our community (*coenobium*)' [priest-monk 3/10/2002].

<sup>111</sup> *See* also intimacy as 'the internal aspect' of lineage structure (Fortes 1970: 99).

defines monastic life: ‘Everybody has to serve in a *coenobitic* monastery before he can become a hermit. Only if the abbot decides that a monk is strong enough to live on his own, then he frees him from such obligations’ [personal communication with secretary of Vatopaidi 6/8/03]. On the moral basis of the value of ‘blind obedience’, the ‘inner world’ (*esoterikos kosmos*) of each monk is contextualized within the informal hierarchical system, consisting of novices, ordinary monks, and elder monks wearing the ‘Angelic Patent’ (*Angelic Schema* see chapter 4.6).

In practice, the Vatopaidians distinguish two kinds of obedience: ‘*Ypakoe*’, defined as ‘obedience to the elders’, and ‘*peitharxhia*’ defines as ‘obedience/ conformity to the rules’ (Archimandrite Vasileios and Mantzaridis 1997: 22). The obedience to the elders is thought to be a ‘personal’ and ‘sacred’ matter, which has to do with the cultivation of the esoteric world of each monk. It is thought to be a duty of the younger to elder monks, necessary in the spiritual exchanges between elder and deacon, as the more obedient is the younger monk to his elder, the more experiences he is open to gain. Following Joseph the Hesychast, the elders have a test in teaching blind obedience to novices: first they ask for a glass of water from the novice, but when the latter brings it the elder empties the glass on the floor. If the novice protests, the elder knows that he is too proud, and that he has not yet grasped the essence of obedience, in terms of first inwards to himself, and second, outwards towards the essence of communal life. If, on the other hand, he accepts the irrational action of his elder, and follows his will without questioning its rationality, then he shows signs of improvement, as he rejects his worldly ego for the will of his elder, demonstrating blind obedience, no matter how *irrational* it might sound<sup>112</sup>.

‘The obedience of the novice has to demonstrate a passive dependence to the will of his elder. The warmth zealotism of the beginner helps a lot in achieving the first stage of blind obedience. The beginner, still carrying his passions with him, lacks of spiritual freedom, and in his effort to liberate himself from the burden of his passions and inner demons exclusively depends to Christ. In practice, the elder takes the place of Christ, as he carries the burden of the novices’ sins through his

---

<sup>112</sup> In an Athonian parable, narrated to me by an old monk of Vatopaidi [26/4/03], a secular visitor was trying to open the door of the cell of an elder monk, but despite his hard effort he could not open it. The elder then asked him to try to open the door the *other* way, which he did, and the door swiftly opened. The parable reveals the gap between ‘worldly’ rationality and the rationality of monastic life, as the latter is *an-other* way of life, echoing the ‘irrational’ decision of someone to become a monk in the first place (see previous chapter).

confessions to him. That is why the subordinate has to follow the orders of his elder in detail, and never to examine or question his will' [priest-monk 5/5/03]

In this way, the novice surrenders his body and mind to the will of his father elder, who represents the will of god, rather than his own will -in the same way the calling is the will of the Holy Spirit, rather than the personal choice of someone to join a monastery (see 5.2). In this sense, the passive will of the novice towards the demands of his elder does not demonstrate hierarchy in terms of power, but rather illustrates the educational character of Vatopaidian life<sup>113</sup>. In demonstrating blind obedience, the novice that most of the days during my fieldwork I worked with in the guest-house, had never raised his voice, always keeping his words in minimum. As he was washing the dishes in the guest-house, his body posture imitated the body posture in the depiction of Jesus in icons, slightly bending forward. His face was always mild, but also distant and cold, emotionless. He never raised his head to look at me, but kept on washing the dishes while reciting the word of the Jesus prayer. His obedience revealed his humility<sup>114</sup>. In contrast to his attitude, one morning I saw a rich, Greek American visitor, and known donor to the monastery, sitting on the guesthouse's balcony, drunk with *raki* that the guest-master gladly offered him. Other visitors were not allowed to have more than two shots, but he was a special guest after all. His drunkenness was an excessive state that contrasted sharply with the focused state of the novice, whispering and repeating the words of the Jesus prayer 'Lord Jesus have Mercy on me the sinner' while washing the dishes. His monotonous sound and movement made time pass slowly, as if he was not there, or as if he had been there for an eternity.

After many years of 'blind obedience', the monks moves to the second stage of 'experienced obedience', which is 'a good habit, so that the spirit of humility will come

---

<sup>113</sup> 'Equality' here should be understood in terms of social stratification, such as Dumont's approach to the Hindu caste system, where 'equality and hierarchy are not... opposed to each other' (1972: 306), but rather complement each other. The idea is that all the novices are the same, but they also have to go through the same hierarchical procedure which demands their obedience to their Elders.

<sup>114</sup> I remember a winter evening in Vatopaidi, when a known elder monk passed by the guest-house, and one of the visitors, who was a frequent guest at the monastery and thought he was familiar with the monks, loudly said: 'There passes a wise man of god'. The old monk replied in a strict voice, as he was moving towards the door: 'Do you see any wise men in here?' The experience of the older monk helped him to avoid the temptation of self-indulgence represented by the visitor and to remain humble in representing himself to the room full of visitors. His reply meant that he was not wise, and that there were no wise men in the room anyway.

closer to the Heart and mind of the individual' [priest-monk 5/5/03]. In other words, over a period of many years, obedience becomes a habit, moving from its initial educational character towards becoming a matter of duty (*deaconema*, from which the word 'deacon' is rooted). This duty is what makes a monk, publicly demonstrating the concept of 'pure love': 'The experienced obedience, based on love, makes the subordinate look *into* himself for the will of his fellow brother' (Joseph the Vatopaidian 1998:115)<sup>115</sup>: 'The monk has to honestly love his *geronta* (elder), and always obey him. Obedience is love, and this is not emotional, neither comes as a passion, nor as a psychological need. This love is our obligation to the monastery' [abbot's speech at the refectory 7/8/03]. 'Love', here, has nothing to do with the passionate romantic notion of love, but rather, it is impassionate and asexual, expressed by the practice of celibacy (*see* next chapter: 'passionless love' and 'at war with the flesh'). This kind of love is a hard one, cultivated in the fields and on the body through hard work and constant prayer; it is an 'impassionate love' detached from the external environment, in the same way the monks look into each other's eyes without emotional engagement, but rather looking for honesty in daily conduct and contact<sup>116</sup>.

On the other hand, the teachings of Josephaeoi emphasize the obedience to the daily program. I remember one morning I was working with a Greek novice. We were taking the used bed sheets from the visitors' room because the coming week was another week of celebration, with more visitors coming for the 'Holy Transfiguration' (August 6). In one of the rooms I found some cherries and started eating them. I offered some to him but he declined taking a strict look: 'I will need confession all the time if I am in your company' he humorously said. 'These cherries are not blessed; neither is it time to eat them now'. In this context, the order of communal life depends on the conduct of each

---

<sup>115</sup> The Elder Ephraim of *Katounakia*, who was a brother of Joseph the Vatopaidian, and who trained many Vatopaidian novices at the 'desert' of *Katounakia*, used to say: 'I divide obedience into three aspects: First, I practice obedience in order not to be disobedient, since obedience is the dogma of spiritual life, as the example of our Saviour shows us. Second, I practice obedience to gain a payment for myself, which is better than the first but not perfect yet. Third, I practice obedience because of respect and love for the Elder who gives an order, and who is the mouth of Jesus. Our obedience to the Elder reflects to our Lord. This is the mystery of the Church, which is the extension of the Body of Jesus.' (Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 96)

<sup>116</sup> In this moral context, the monastery's *Internal Regulations* forbid 'friendships' inside the monastery, in order not to allow the creation of internal cliques that could divide the brotherhood into cliques (as per article 38). Accordingly, each monk has to be obedient to the collective program and social order. For instance, each monk has his own stall in the church and in the refectory, according to his status in the hierarchical system, and not to sit among 'friends' (*see* sections on refectory and night vigil).

monk, based on his impersonal presence and obedience to the daily program, which is the same for everyone regardless their rank. In this context, the obedience to the daily program is thought to be ‘impersonal’, operating ‘within secular bounds’, regarding the daily running of the monastery (Archimandrite Vasileios and Mantzaridis 1997: 22), and corresponding to a different set of daily relationships according to the working task each monk.

The two kinds of obedience, on the one hand, the personal obedience each monk has to have towards his elder, and on the other, the impersonal obedience to the daily program, illustrate a double set of social relationships that develops following the division of activities into spiritual (prayer) and working tasks. These are contextualized within a double social structure, on the basis of the moral separation of the body from the soul, which extends to the structural separation of spiritual exercises, taking place in the night and aiming to cultivate the monastic self, and daily work which is collective, supporting the monastery’s economy and the entire brotherhood. Blind obedience becomes thus the central value that practically connects the personal order of each monk to the impersonal community.

But in some special circumstances, the disobedience of youngsters to older monks is not seen in a negative way. ‘Sometimes the older fox has also to learn a few things about himself’ as an old monk once self-reflectively told me. For instance, I remember an incident that took place in the garden, following the night liturgy at the chapels and the fasting meal at the Refectory. It involved an older monk, who was responsible for the electricity in Vatopaidi -as he used to be an electrician in his secular past. The older monk was known for his light and humorous character, but also for being too proud of his humility. One spring morning in April 2003, following the meal at the refectory, we were talking in the garden, when a young monk began kissing his hand out of respect. But to demonstrate his humility, the older monk refused to give his hand to be kissed. But then, more young monks surrounded him, pretending that they were fighting over who is going to kiss his hand first. The older monk got upset about the young monks laughing at his proud humility. But a few seconds later he also smiled, realizing that the disobedience of the youngsters was the means to teach him not to be publicly so proud about his humility. The Vatopaidians say that humility is not a matter of being better

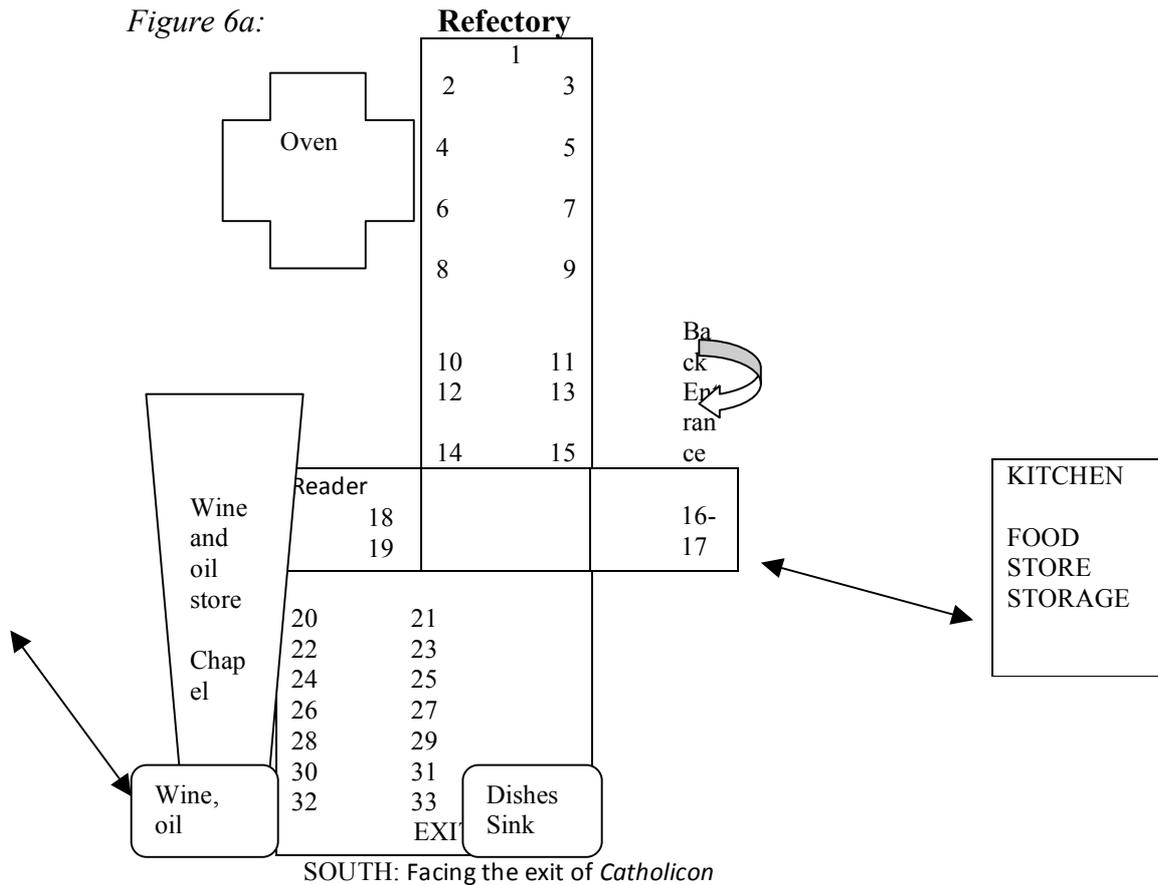
than others, but to be truly humble ‘inside the heart’: ‘It is the means not the ends’ a priest-monk told me that morning.

## PART II: HIERARCHY

### 6.4 Double Hierarchy

The two types of obedience that exist in the tradition of the Josephaeoi refer to a double set of social relationships developing between the monks: on the one hand, the obedience to the elder reveals the close and personal relationships based on spiritual ties, and on the other, the obedience to the daily program is based on an impersonal relationship between the monks and their institution, as well as, ‘cosmopolitan’ agents outside Athos, based on bureaucratic and administrative tasks. This double set of social relationships is contextualized in terms of a double hierarchy of ‘an informal spiritual hierarchy which exists parallel to other more institutionalised forms of rank’ (Sarris 2000: 8-9). The spiritual hierarchy is personal, as it refers to the religious and personal ties between ‘father’ and ‘son’, echoing the relationship of god to Jesus. It takes a number of different forms depending on the context it is adopted, such as between abbot and monk, elder and deacon, monk and visitor, forming a kind of ‘spiritual kinship’ (Iossifides 1991) on the basis of various forms of spiritual exchanges that take place inside the monastery, through practices of faith, which aim to develop each monk’s ‘inner world’ (*esoterikos cosmos*). On the other hand, the ‘formal’ hierarchy of the monastery is headed by the monastery’s council of elders (*gerontia*), which constitutes the administrative and executive authority of the monastery as a religious institution. The council is responsible for both internal and external administrative matters, such as, on the one hand, the annual division of labour inside the monastery and issues of disobedience and supervision of the monks (*see* section above), and on the other, financial and legal matters regarding the external vocation of the monastic institution in the Orthodox world. The ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ hierarchies were manifested by the way of sitting in the refectory, where elders, priest-monks, monks, novices, and visitors, took their seats according to their status in the internal hierarchy - and not among friends as friendships are forbidden, as per article 38 of *Internal Regulation*-. The Vatopaidians had also two ways of sitting, according to formal, great feasts, and important for the monastery celebrations, and informal, working days.

Figure 6a:



### Formal days (*Typikon*): Great feasts, celebrations, and all Sundays

#### 'Formal/ administrative' hierarchy

TABLE Number	STATUS
1 <sup>st</sup> Head Table:	Abbot and two <i>prohegoumenoi</i> ('before the Abbot') Elder Head of Treasury, and Priest-monk Head of Secretary and <i>economos</i> (the 'law of the house')
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Council of Elders (7)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Trapezaris</i> and deacons 'on duty'
4 <sup>th</sup>	Priest-monks (7) and priest-deacons (5)
5 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup>	58 Monks
16 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup>	13 Novices and 'tested' young men
18 <sup>th</sup>	EMPTY
19 <sup>th</sup> VIPs:	Very Important Visitors (Donators, Patriarchs, and other powerful 'friends' of the Monastery)
20 <sup>th</sup> -33 <sup>rd</sup>	Visitors

#### Informal days: 'Informal/ Spiritual' hierarchy

1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup>	EMPTY
4 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> (chapels)	58 Monks: each table headed by a priest-monk and an Elder
15 <sup>th</sup>	Deacons on duty
16 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup>	5 priest-deacons, 13 Novices, and 'tested' young men
18 <sup>th</sup>	Abbot
19 <sup>th</sup> Table:	VIPs: Very Important Visitors (Donators, Patriarchs, and other powerful 'friends' of the Monastery)
20 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup>	EMPTY
22 <sup>nd</sup> -33 <sup>rd</sup>	Visitors

On formal days, the abbot sat at the top table (*table no1*) with the two elders who were the executive administrators (*epitropoi*) of the monastery. At the second table sat the other seven members of the council of elders (*gerontia*), who held administrative and executive powers. At the opposite table (*no3*) sat the *trapezaris* ('table-man'), who was an older Greek Cypriot monk responsible for the refectory. He sat with the monks on duty, including the two cooks. At the fourth table sat seven priest-monks with five priest-deacons. Ordinary monks took the tables lower down the cross (*tables no5-15*), with the novices sitting near the back exit that is facing the north-east (*tables no16-17*). Secular visitors were kept separately from the brotherhood, and close to the main entrance that is facing south (*tables no20-33*). On formal days, there was also a separate table for important visitors, from Archimandrites to the Prince of Wales, who are known as 'friends of Vatopaidi'. Because of their special status and money, they sat close to the reader who read the passage of the day (*table no19*).

On informal days, the top table was empty. The act of eating continued directly from the chapels to the refectory, with the groups of monks headed by the priest-monk who performed the liturgy and the elder who supervised it the previous night. The abbot sat on his own in the centre of the cross (*table no18*), near the VIP visitors and the reader, supervising the entire brotherhood. Each of the other tables consisted of monks of three generations, elder ones wearing the 'Angelic Patent' (*Angelic Schema*, see next chapter), ordinary monks, and novices. Thus, on fasting days the monks sat with their nuclear family, illustrating the sub-divisions in the spiritual kinship of the monks, and revealing a parallel hierarchy to the administrative: an informal, personal, and 'spiritual' one (Sarris 2000: 8). The status of each monk was publicly stated, first by his clothing: the novice cap for the novices, the monastic clothes for the monks, and the *Angelic Schema* for the elder monks<sup>117</sup>; second, by his stall in the church and seat in the refectory; third, by his position in group movements, such as entering the church, exiting the refectory, or parading an icon, where the general order is elders, monks, novices, and visitors at the back.

The double sitting arrangement of the Vatopaidians illustrates the double hierarchical system of the monastery: the 'formal hierarchy' headed by the council of elders, and the

---

<sup>117</sup> By 'elders' I refer to the Council of elders, but by 'elder monks' I refer to the monks wearing the *Angelic Schema* (see also section on '*Angelic Schema*' in chapter 5).

‘informal hierarchy’ headed by the priest-monks with spiritual and liturgical responsibilities. While both posts, of being a member of the council of elders and of being a priest-monk, are permanent (as per article 12 of *Internal Regulations*), each post requires a different set of skills: the elders’ position does not depend on their spiritual status and experience of monastic life, but on their secular education and skills. ‘The elders have administrative powers. This is different from being a priest-monk. The elders are ordinary monks capable in management’ [novice 20/4/03]. Furthermore, to become a member of the council of elders a monk has to be elected. He must also have higher qualifications in secular studies, such as law, economics, and accounting, as well as, many years of monastic life. On the other hand, to become a priest-monk a monk has to be sexually virgin, with studies in theology and priesthood, and with many years of experience working as a priest-deacon (as per article 14 of *Internal Regulations*).

But despite the separation of the two posts in terms of administrative and spiritual responsibilities, which refer to two hierarchical sets of relationships developing during canonical and worldly hours, in practice, the two hierarchical systems overlap each other, forming a single hierarchy that is headed by the absolute authority of the abbot. In this context, while only priest-monks can be elected to abbots, only elders can have disciples and form ‘companionships’ in their trips outside Athos. This means that the priest-monks became monks following an elder, and were anointed to the post by the council of elders. But the elders (including the abbots) have to be elected to their post by the entire brotherhood, which is represented by the priest-monks who lead the monastery’s internal everyday life. In this way, the administrative and spiritual hierarchies as the elders depend on the priest-monks, and vice versa.

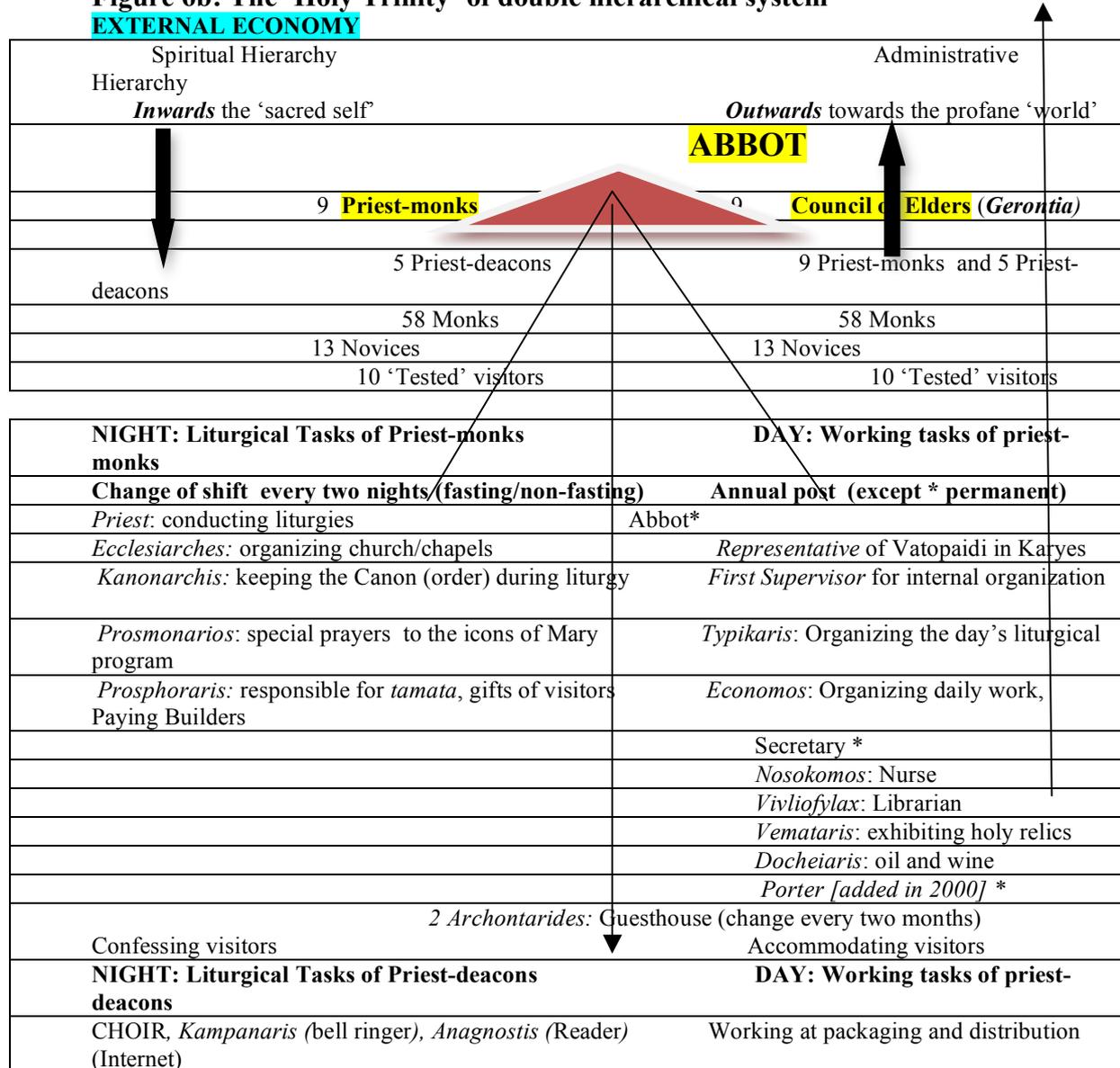
The head of the refectory on both formal and informal days was the abbot, the father figurehead of community, supervising his children while they ate, and even controlling the amount of food to be consumed with his golden bell. The abbot conjures both hierarchical systems by being the first priest-monk, regarding liturgical matters, and the head of the council of elders. He is both the head of the *Iera Synaxis* (‘Holy Assembly’ of all the elder monks wearing the *Angelic Schema*), and the head of the *Gerontia* (‘council of elders’) with executive and administrative powers. Accordingly, he had a double responsibility: on the one hand, he was the ‘spiritual father’ to all the monks, receiving their confessions over spiritual matters, as well as, taking the role of the first

priest by heading the celebrations and parade (*horostasia*) and performing the Sunday liturgy (informal hierarchy); and on the other, in the day he headed the *gerontia*, the monastery's council of ten elders, responsible for administrative and executive matters of the monastery (formal hierarchy).

For the monks, the position of the abbot is not authoritarian, but self-sacrificial<sup>118</sup>. The abbot 'imitates Christ', because he carries the sins and guilt of his monks from the confessions they offer to him, the burden of each monk, and consequently, of the entire community. He is seen also as someone who willingly sacrifices his time for prayer and self-reflection for the good of the community, having to deal with non-spiritual matters of the monastery as an institution. Furthermore, he has 'to give the best example to his brothers' (as per article 6 of *Internal Regulation*), as well as, to supervise the daily conduct of the monks in the monastery (article 20) and punish if necessary misbehaving monks in terms of advice (articles 7) or according to the rules (article 24). He also has to keep the keys of the Treasury (article 8), and to head the meetings with the council of elders every Thursday (articles 9 and 13). On the other hand, he is also responsible for all the financial exchanges taking place inside and outside the monastery (selling wood, or renting land to locals, and so on), as well as of its properties (*metochia*) inside and outside Athos (as per articles 16 and 19). As per article 5 of *Internal Regulations* his position is permanent, only to be replaced after his death. The first and current abbot of new Vatopaidi was appointed to this role by the patron Joseph the Vatopaidian in 1990, but according to the Internal Regulations future abbot will be elected by the entire brotherhood. In this way, the Vatopaidian organization of everyday life structurally forms a triangle (*see figures 6b and c* below), based on the spiritual authority of the priest-monks and the administrative authority of the council of elders. This double hierarchical structure of Vatopaidi, one moving inwards towards the monastic self, the other outwards toward the material world, symbolically echoes the Holy Trinity, which is an ancient symbol of power.

---

<sup>118</sup> 'A monk does not become a monk because of the monastery, but because of the father abbot, who we look into his eyes. We chose to follow him; and he is a father to us, responsible for our well being, he carries the Cross of martyrdom by willingly putting himself in front of the monastery to protect and take care of our brotherhood. His position shows to the rest of us his humility. He sacrifices himself for the good of the brotherhood, just like Jesus did. He carries all our sins from our confessions. We are his spiritual children, and our aim is to imitate the life of Jesus by following the orders of our abbot. This has to do with our life in the monastery, which is spiritual.' [secretary of Vatopaidi 6/8/03]

**Figure 6b: The ‘Holy Trinity’ of double hierarchical system<sup>119</sup>****INTERNAL ECONOMY**

<b>Tasks of Monks/ units of work</b>
<u>Kitchen and Refectory</u> : <i>Trapezaris</i> (table-man), <i>Mageiras</i> (Cook) 2 groups of monks (one permanent, the other changing shift every two weeks)
<u>Oven</u> : <i>Magkipas</i> (‘Oven-man’): shift changes between all groups of monks every two weeks
<u>Carpentry</u> : <i>Xilourgios</i> , <u>Blacksmith</u> : <i>Sidirourgios</i> , <u>silversmith</u> , <u>painting workshops</u> : permanent groups of monks
<u>Technical department</u> : electrician, tools, <u>Dentistry</u> : medicine/ 2 doctor monks, <u>Clock-maker</u>
<u>Guesthouse</u> : washing/ ironing machines, rooms of visitors, balcony: changes groups every two months
<u>Shop</u> : Printing, Stamping, Recording/Photography studios/ production-distribution: permanent group of monks
<u>Harbour and Garage</u> : <i>Arsanaris</i> (harbour-man’): permanent group of monks
<u>Fields</u> : <i>Kipouros</i> (Gardener) <i>Dasarchis</i> (Forest-keeper) <i>Ampelourgios</i> (Vine-dresser), Honey and wine makers, <i>Vordonaris</i> (stable), <i>Mylothros</i> (‘mill-man’) Watermills and Windmills: permanent groups of monks

<sup>119</sup> See also in Appendix sketch of complete ‘Monachologion’ (rank) from year 2002



*Figure 6c:* A picture of the *catholicon* of Vatopaidi, where we can clearly see the bright yellow triangle at the top of the main entrance, painted at the front of a radiating sun, a symbol of power and knowledge. The double hierarchical structure of Vatopaidi is equally formed in the shape of a triangle, a materialist reproduction of the *Holy Trinity* of Divine power (absolute authority of Abbot/ administrative authority of Elders, spiritual authority of priest-monks)

In sum, the double hierarchical structure contextualizes a double set of social relationships/ exchanges: an *internal economy*, which is based on the spiritual relationships developed through practices of faith, such as confession and Holy Communion, and which is headed by the priest-monks who run the internal ‘economy of the house’; and an *external economy*, referring to the financial, legal, administrative, and political dealings of the monastery as a religious institution with ‘cosmopolitan’ institutions outside Vatopaidi, and which is headed by the authority of the council of elders. The abbot is placed at the peak of the triangular system, converging both spiritual and administrative responsibilities, by being, on the one hand, the ‘father’ to the monks, and on the other, the representative of the monastery in the ‘world’ (*kosmos*) outside its walls.

### **6.5 Monks outside the community**

The strict communal program and collective sense of obligation to the community, does not apply, however, to everyone, but to the large majority. Neither all the monks stay in Vatopaidi, some of them leave and go to other monasteries because they cannot

conform to its order, nor all the monks belong to the family of Josephaeoi, as some of them arrived on their own outside *companionships*. With the arrival of the Josephaeoi in 1986-7 to Vatopaidi most of the monks that lived in Vatopaidi left, except five of them (*see* chapter 5). One of those monks was a Greek old monk that I first met in the forest when I got lost only to find the Vatopaidian Skete of St. Dimitrios by accident (October 2002). At the time, the Skete was an old building, covered in thorny bushes, and without a roof. Opposite there was a small hut with the old monk sitting on a wooden extension and talking on *his* mobile phone, from what I heard to his sister. He then approached me, and I asked for some water: ‘My poor child’, he replied: ‘you are sitting on it all this time but you cannot see it’, and pointed his figure underneath me, where I was sitting on the top of a fountain covered with a wooden tableau.

In the following months, I saw him a few times in the monastery. He was living by himself in the hut, and visited the monastery only on Sundays for the Divine Liturgy (same as Joseph the Vatopaidian who used to live in his own hut, *see* chapter 5). Generally, he looked uncomfortable among the other Vatopaidians, sitting during the Sunday liturgies at the outer area of the *exonarthex* of the church, with the secular visitors and monks on duty, and in the refectory often changing tables with different groups of monks. He explained to me that he did not belong to the family of Josephaeoi, but he was a zealot belonging to the family of Mathaioi. One day, I asked the secretary of Vatopaidi about him, and replied that ‘only if the abbot decides that a monk has the experience, and can live by his own means, only then he gives his permission’ for someone to leave Vatopaidi and live by himself or with another deacon in a hut in the forest or by the sea. The secretary highlighted that ‘obedience is the essence of monastic life, and all the monks have to learn this through their *deaconemata*’ (‘services’). The abbot’s decision to send the monk to live by himself at the monk’s request was a compromise because he did not wish to stay with the others, as he had lived in Vatopaidi before the arrival of Joseph. For this reason, the abbot ‘made economy’ (*eksoikonomo*), and decided to send him to supervise the rebuilding of the Skete (of St Dimitrios) [8/10/02]. At the Skete, the old monk supervised a group of Romanian and Albanian lay workers, which is still being renovated.

Another Vatopaidian monk who belonged to a different family from the Josephaeoi was an old Cypriot monk, who had arrived in Athos in 1971 at the New Skete, and who was

a close friend of the world famous hermit Father Paisios. At the New Skete he first met Joseph and his ‘companionship’ (*synodeia*), and decided to follow him to Vatopaidi in 1986, without however becoming a member of the Josephaeoi as he was already belonging to another family. He also cut as a lonely figure in the monastery, most of the days having nothing to do but hanging around at the guest-house telling stories to visitors about monastic life as it used to be (some of which are included in the thesis). While most of the Vatopaidians were young and well educated, this older generation of monks was not educated, and spoke and acted in a very different way from the majority. The old monk was keen on prophecies about the end of time, signs of an imminent second coming, visions and miracles, stories that I would have never heard from those who represent the monastery as an institution outside Athos. In this way, while the majority of Vatopaidians was familiar, on the one hand, with the history and tradition of the monastery (chapter 3), and on the other, with the recent history of the family of Josephaeoi and the two Josephs (chapter 5), this older monk was capable of narrating stories that connected his experiences with the experience of being a monk, at the time when there was not even electricity or water in the monasteries.

At the washing machines I met a Cretan monk, who had been a monk for eight years. Only recently he had arrived to Vatopaidi from the monastery of Meghisti Lavra, from where he was kicked out the year before for an alleged theft. He did not wish to talk about it, only to say that he was innocent. He did not like Vatopaidi, because he felt isolated, finding it particularly difficult to work with other monks, who already knew each other for many years. But still, the abbot’s mild attitude to stealing, demonstrating the value of economy, gave the monk a second chance, as long as he kept confessing and fasting, -and washing the ‘stained’ bed sheets of the hundreds of visitors every day, a job that no Cypriot did-. I also met one Romanian monk, who was a dentist in profession, but decided to leave Vatopaidi and go to the Romanian Skete of St Prodomos, even though ‘the abbot installed an entire dentistry and bought him tools’ [discussions with monks] built at the top floor of the monastery. The older monk was replaced by two younger Romanian monks, who initially came to Vatopaidi because of the older monk who left. They had also been students in dentistry, and so the abbot gave to them the responsible to store the medicine, examine patients, and distribute the medicine (heavily ill monks were to the hospital in Karyes if necessary). But similar to their supervisor who left that year at the time of my fieldwork, they were also

negotiating with the abbot about leaving and following him to the Skete of St. Prodromos.

Another pair of non-Cypriot monks that I met in Vatopaidi were two Russians: an older one who was also the carpenter of the monastery, wearing the *Angelic Schema*, and his deacon, a Russian young monk. Every morning, they were washing the dishes of hundreds of visitors in the dump of a dark room attached at the eastern side of the refectory. In the evenings, they prayed together in Russian, living a semi-separate life from the rest of the community. The Russian young monk had studied Theology in St Petersburg before he began his PhD in Athens, and so he could speak in perfect Greek (unlike his ‘spiritual father’ who could understand, but did not wish to speak in Greek. He decided to drop his degree and go to Vatopaidi, because he knew the older monk. But he was not happy in Vatopaidi, and complained about the ‘clique of Cypriots’, referring to the five Cypriot priest-deacons working at the top floor of the monastery, next to the abbot’s office. Although the young monk was as much qualified –if not more- as his Greek Cypriot brothers of the same age, his systematic subordination leaves a few questions about the egalitarian community, particularly regarding issues of ethnicity that indeed divided the brotherhood, despite its external homogeneity. As the young monk told me, he was hoping to go to St Andrew, where at Skete of the Russian *Serrai*, with another new monk from Odysseus that had just arrived in Vatopaidi (and whom I have never met) [4/5/03, also see Introduction: ‘Demographic Changes’].

Still, despite his complaints, he had to be obedient to the rule of the abbot: ‘I have to be obedient to his wish’, a Russian novice told me of his sacrifice to drop his post-graduate degree in Theology in Athens: ‘Our father (the abbot) does not want us to graduate, so that we are all equal. There are no cliques in here, because we are all children of the abbot’ [14/8/03]. The novice’s daily routine was a humble one, if not a cruel one, as he abandoned an academic career to wash the dishes of the hundreds of visitors after they ate in the refectory. But in the moral context of the monastic brotherhood as an egalitarian collective, the priest-monks that talked to all highlighted that ‘cosmopolitan’ degrees serve your personal motivations and self-interest, which contradict the values of communal life (see chapter 4.3, section: ‘Abandoning Worldly Degrees’).

In sum, both the older Greek monks, who belonged in the rival family of Mathaioi, and the Russian young monk, do not fit in the community, which represents a majority, but not the totality of monks. For this reason, the abbot used both values of economy and obedience to be able to deal with the two monks respectively: the older monk, who had lived in Vatopaidi before the abbot's arrival in 1986 in the *companionship* of Joseph, was given a separate hut and the agency to supervise the rebuilding of the Skete of St Dimitrius. In this middle ('economic') way, the abbot was able to self-manage the peculiarities of the monk, while avoiding to causing any tension, by allowing him to offer to the monastery his maximum, and offering him then post at St Dimitrios. On the other hand, the Russian young monk was a very different story, as he was not experienced or worn the *Angelic Schema*, and thus, the abbot was able to contain him by applying the value of blind obedience, and by keeping him away from the Greek Cypriot top floor of the monastery. Thus, economy in this context is the abbot's strategy, used in different ways in self-managing each individual monk, with his own peculiarities, in order to contain him within the strict hierarchical rules of the monastery. In most cases, however, the unique background of these individual monks results to their lower positioning comparison to the Cypriot monks arriving together to Vatopaidi in 'companionships', either because of a turbulent personal past, and partially because of their nationality, as the experience of taking the journey to Athos brings the members of the 'companionships' closer together, while excluding those monks who arrived by themselves. Finally, despite the ideal of egalitarianism amongst brothers, it was evident to me that the majority of monks working in the comfortable offices of the upper floor were Greek Cypriots, while at the ground floor were of various ethnicities.

## **6.6 August Tensions**

Joseph's 'companionship' (*synodeia*) that arrived in 1986-7 to Vatopaidi had fifteen members, thirteen Greek Cypriots, plus a French member and a Brazilian member. The French priest-monk in particular also cut as an isolated figure, though with lots of power, because he had been with Joseph the Vatopaidian from the very beginning of the formation of his second 'companionship' at the monastery of Koutloumoussiou, and it was known that Joseph had a particular soft spot for this disciple. This however, often put him in antagonism with the other Cypriot members of the 'companionship'. The tension came to the surface particularly on the busy holiday days on Christmas, Easter,

and during the summer break, when all the monks felt the pressure of the increasing number of visitors.

In August 2003, a number of complains ended up at the abbot's office on the top floor, mainly misunderstandings between monks of the same rank, particularly between the priest-monks and their deacons who share the responsibility of the guest-house. On the eve of the night vigil in honour of St. Panteleimon [9/8/2003], two groups of monks argued over who would undertake the hard work in the kitchen. According to the *typikon*, night vigils are the most sacred rituals. But in their eagerness to participate in the vigil, the young members of the rival groups forgot all about it, and began raising their voices during the early stages of the night vigil, arguing about whose turn was it to work in the kitchen the following morning. There was also a bitter and publicly known conflict between the French and a Cypriot priest-monk, when they worked together at the ground floor. The latter was frequently absent from his post at the guest-house, claiming that he was ill, and the former often publicly complained to me and other visitors about his brother's laziness. He took his complain to the abbot's office (always according to gossip amongst other monks). Their conflict even affected the priest-deacons working for them, who also made a number of complaints to the abbot about each other's contact and conduct during this period.

Following these incidences, on a Thursday morning after lunch, when most of the visitors went for their walk in the forest outside the monastery, the abbot informally, but publicly, talked to a group of monks outside the refectory, including the priest-monks that had the argument, and the groups of deacons involved in the kitchen. He returned to the communal values of the Josepheoi in restoring order:

'I had enough of monks ringing my bell every five minutes, complaining about the slightest incident. You are all brothers, you should realize that, and work together. And you should listen to others and to your elders. We never stop offering our daily service to the Elders (*deaconema*), and we never abandon it; and we never begin to talk with other monks and wasting our time arguing or laughing like idiots. If a monk gives only 20 levels of concentration from the 50 that he can actually give, he then loses the divine *charis*. If he is sloppy, he destroys the chain of order in our monastery. Nothing can be done. Because we are like a human body: if a vein stops working then the man will get a heart attack. Anger is like the anomalous stone, which when it mingles with the other perfect round stones it causes disorder. But in the end, it falls out, excluded, and miserable. The stone is rough. But that's the problem. It has to become perfect; you have to learn how to smooth it, learn

humility. The most important thing is to learn to listen and understand the others. This is true humility!' [Abbot's speech in refectory, 12/8/03]

Such tensions revealed gaps in the community, manifested as tensed emotions accompanying the internal competition between monks of the same rank, but of different background (the two priest-monks were not from the same place of origin: one joined the companionship of Joseph in 1984 travelling from Paris, the other arrived together with five other priest-monks in 1990 from Cyprus, all of them from the same religious school in Pafos, and the same university in Thessaloniki where they studied Theology. The non-Greek monk was known for his strictness, as well as humbleness and hard work at the ground floor of them monastery. Although he was a priest-monk he was not a member of the Council of Elders, as he never showed any ambition to rise up the administrative rank. Instead, he was working together on hard, physical tasks, with ordinary monks and lay workers. In our discussions he always highlighted the importance of humility, though gossip among some Cypriot monks, and frequent 'know-it-all' visitors, often described him as too proud.

Such personal conflicts, that raised the emotions against the 'economy of passions' that each brother has to exhibit at all times, were resolved with the confession of all the monks involved to the father-abbot, followed by a period of purification during which they have to remain isolated, in order to pray in their cells with the rosary, and to make a number of prostrations as instructed by the abbot. Throughout the two weeks of their conflict, the two priest-monks did not enter the *nave* of the church, but remained at the outer part of the *exonarthex* with the novices and visitors at the standing stalls. During lunch they did not touch their meal, but only continued praying the words of the Jesus prayer in public view of the rest of the brotherhood. Through their frequent confessions and their temporary exclusion from the rest of the brotherhood, the angered monks eventually managed to calm down their passions, and appeared ready to return to the community for the celebration of the 'Dormition of their Mother Mary'. During the 'great vesper' on the eve of the celebration I saw the French priest, with his face covered in his hood, holding the Bible in his left hand and a candle in his right, reading from it on his own, separately from the rest of the brotherhood. There were rumours that he was thinking of leaving Vatopaidi. Following the vesper, he approached me and made a cross on my forehead with his hand with some blessed oil: 'be blessed my child' he kindly said in response to my interest in him. I took the initiative to ask him if

he was leaving Vatopaidi: ‘Where am I going to go my child? I’ve been here for 17 years’ he replied with a smile. That dawn, after the cleansing confessions to the Father Abbot during the Matins, they all received the Holy Communion.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter looked into the practical application of ‘economy’ as the means of organizing the self in relation to the community, according to the Josephaeoi rules for ‘obedience, virginity, and poverty’. I tried to highlight the collective Vatopaidian logic of *detachment* in the tradition of the Josephaeoi through several practices, applied in ‘economic’ (mild) ways, as the ‘economy of passions’ (*oikonomia pathon*) towards the self, the others, and the natural environment (personal involvement of each monk), and ‘blind obedience’ (*tifli ypakoe*) as the rule that supports the communal moral values against the self-interest and personal background of each monk. Practices of faith, such as prayer and confession, and practical values such as ‘economy of passion’ and ‘blind obedience’ are used by the abbot as strategies, in order to either incorporate the more isolated monks into the community over time, or to let them live separately from the brotherhood in occupations that do not involve groups of monks.

The collective Vatopaidian aim is to retain an emotional distance from the passions of the secular self, including memories, desires, ambitions, self-indulgence, and pride, in order to become one within the impersonal community. Despite the emphasis on social harmony, some monks do not fit to the community, because of their unique background. Furthermore, tensions between monks of the same rank (that carry a sense of antagonism between them, although they would never admit it), as well as between their deacons, challenge the homogeneity of Vatopaidi’s social organization. These tensions came particularly to light during the summer, because of the amount of work that they have to put in the guesthouse. In this heterogeneous context, the monks’ various backgrounds, secular education, and personal skills, as well as character, are contextualized, hidden, within a homogenized, spiritual system, which is based on the *separation* of spiritual activities that take place in the night, from daily activities that take place in the day. The next two chapters will show how each set of activities and social relations are further contextualized within a double way of counting time.

## Chapter 7: The Organization of Time and Space (Internal economy)

### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the dual hierarchical organization of Vatopaidi, which is divided according to night prayers and daily work. Night activities focus on the taking care of the self, the monastic persona, while day time working activities focus on the community. Accordingly, through practices of faith such as prayer, confession, and fasting, the monks are able to separate themselves from the ‘Monastery’, a moral, symbolic, and impersonal entity represented by the abbot, and on a second level from the ‘material world’ outside, which is represented by their passions inside them. In other words, according to the monastic ideal there is a separation of the soul from the body/mind, in the sense that each person has to work on his body to save his soul. This chapter will further contextualize the two kinds of activities and social relationships, the personal realm of the spiritual from the impersonal realm of the monastery, in terms of time, space, and occupation.

### PART I: TIME

#### 7.2 ‘Liturgical’ and ‘Worldly’ hours

According to the teachings and programme of the Josephaeoi, the daily cycle in Vatopaidi is organized in respect to private and collective forms of praying, which are combined with other activities, such as working, resting, or eating during the day, or participating in the collective practices of faith during the night. Nightly and daily activities are separated by the sound of the wooden cymbal (*symantron*) in the evenings before the vesper and the mornings before the Matins. The *ekklesiarches* marks three *talanta* (‘point markers’) that called for the beginning of the ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ prayers, which took place throughout the night. The day began in the evening, at sunset, with the vesper, followed by dinner, and the ‘after-dinner’ thanksgiving to Mary (Compline). Then the main gates of the monastery were locked for the ‘evening prayers’ to begin. The monks dispersed to their cells to carry out their ‘private canon’, a set of prayers with rosary and prostrations as prescribed by the abbot during each monk’s confession. After some rest, they returned to the church for the collective ‘morning prayers’: the Midnight Office, Matins, and Divine Liturgy. At dawn they

received the Holy Communion, followed by a meal in the refectory, where the saints celebrated of the day are also commemorated while eating. Finally, they continued with their ‘noon prayers’ at work, then some rest, until the next vesper with introductory prayers of preparation for the following day.

*Figure 7a: Timetable of Private and Collective Prayer*

Type	Space	Liturgies
1. Evening prayers	Exonarthex (Church)	Collective: Vespers, Compline
▲	Preparation for next day	
	Cells	Private Canon/ Rest
2. Morning prayers	Church	Midnight Office, Matins
		Divine Liturgy
Refectory	Reading of saints lives while eating	
3. Noonday prayers	Fields, offices	Private Work / Jesus Prayer
Cells (Rest)		Private Canon/ Jesus Prayer
Evening prayers		Beginning of new ‘day’s cycle’...

‘Here, it is always midnight at sunset. Today for example it gets dark around 19:30. This means that now we have four and a half hours difference with the worldly time, so now that is midday (outside the monastery), here it is 16:30. In the winter, when it gets dark earlier, the difference between the Byzantine clock and the worldly clock can go up to eight hours. So when it is 16:00, it is midnight for us. In this way, (during the winter) we spend more time in our cells and the church. In the summer and autumn we work at the fields. We live in a symbiosis with nature, which is God’s creation, as we all are one’ [priest-monk 28/9/02]

At sunset the monastery’s gate shuts, as it is the time for prayer. Because of the early sunset in the winter, the vesper started as early as 15:00 in the afternoon (according to ‘worldly time’, *kosmiki ora*) and lasted for two hours. In the summer, it started as late as 20:00 in the evening, and lasted only for one hour, because of the late sunset. Time changed gradually from winter to summer, as the Vatopaidians re-adjusted their clock every two days, following the movement of the sun in the sky for the working days, and the movement of the moon for the ritual life that took place in the night. In this way, the movement of the sun and the moon co-ordinate the double realm of the monastery based on praying and confessing in the night, and working and resting in the day. The re-adjustment of the clock to physical sunset means that in the summer and autumn when the days are longer, the Vatopaidians work inside or nearby the monastery, and in the fields as it is the time of harvesting, pruning, and preparing the ground for new fruits, bushes, and trees. In the warm summer, the monks could travel to other monasteries or settlements. Vatopaidi was more crowded, because of the increasing number of visiting novices and monks from other settlements, particularly from the

Skete of St Andrew, and the monastery's settlements nearby Karyes. In the winter, they spent more time praying privately in the cells in the evenings, and collectively in the church at nights. Winter is thought to be a time for 'contemplation and self-reflection' [priest-monk 2/5/2003].

Although the 'Byzantine' (Roman) clock and Orthodox calendar above provides the underlying dynamic for life in the monastery and links it to the seasonal changes that take place across a year, the 'worldly' clock is not irrelevant. In Vatopaidi, the two forms of time-keeping complement one another. Traditional time-keeping, as described above is liturgical, and it is based on prayer. It is conceived as cyclical, beginning in the evening and continuing through until the next evening, through private and collective forms of prayer, including the Divine Liturgy, confession, and the Holy Communion. These take place in the night, according to the 12 'canonical hours' that begin with the vesper at sunset and end at dawn with the Holy Communion. These collective practices constitute the spiritual life of the monastery, which is personal –even within the collective context of the church- associated with prayer and exercising the inner soul (*askesis*: ascetic).

At dawn, the monastery's gate opens to the 'world', as in the day the monks work collectively for the benefit of the institution. It is the time for business. Accordingly, the night activities of the 12 'canonical hours' are succeeded by 12 'worldly hours' for the daytime activities. The 'worldly hours' are outgoing, as the monks worked for the material needs of the monastery in various positions: at the fields, at the guest-house accommodating the secular visitors, or at the top floor distributing the monastery's products from the computer rooms. For the daily activities, the Vatopaidians have adopted a revised version of the old Roman clock, based on the Daylight Saving Time system, which was globally introduced by William Willet in 1907. According to this re-adjustment, the summer solstice begins with the Orthodox calendar on January 1 and lasts until June 24 (the longest day of the year), while the winter solstice begins as early as June 25 and lasts until December 31 (which is thought to be the longest night of the year).

In the winter, the vesper and Matins last for two hours each, and the Divine Liturgy a total of eight hours, but in the summer, the vesper and Matins last only for an hour and the Divine Liturgy for six hours. In the winter, when the night is longer, each

‘canonical hour’ can extend up to 75 minutes, while in the summer, when the night is shorter, each canonical hour lasts for about 45 to 50 minutes. Equally, the ‘worldly’ hours of work in the monastery in the day are longer in the summer, when the days are longer allowing for up to six hours of work (five in the day and one in the evening), while in the winter when monastic life is more enclosed, work is limited to three hours (two in the day and one in the evening). Accordingly, the Vatopaidians also used two kinds of texts: sacred texts which they call ‘liturgical books’ used for the ritual life and kept in the monastery’s library, and ‘worldly’ records and documents of legal and financial content, kept in the secretary’s office.

<i>Figure 7b:</i>						
<b>DAILY CYCLE</b>						
Byzantine Clock	Activity	Space	Prayer	‘Cosmic’: Winter Summer		
				(1/12/02)	(1/8/03)	
Sunset: ‘Midnight’	Vesper	Church	Preparation	17:00	20:30	
						Dinner
	Refectory [on non-fasting days]		19:00	21:30		
	<i>Lite</i> of church	Thanksgiving to Mary	19:30	22:00		‘After-dinner’
	Evening occupations (psalmody or working at the top floor)				20:00	22:00
Private prayer	Personal Canon	Cell	praying with rosary	21:00	23:00	
	Rest	Cell		23:00	24:00	
<b>(CANONICAL HOURS: CHURCH)</b>						
Midnight	Midnight Office		‘Descent of Holy Spirit’	1:00	2:00	
1 <sup>st</sup> Hour	Matins		Confessions	2:00	3:00	
3 <sup>rd</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours	Divine Liturgy		‘Coming of Christ	4:00	4:00	
Dawn	9 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> Hour	Holy Communion	‘Resurrection’	7:30	6:30	
	Meal	Refectory	Life of Saints	9:00	8:00	
<b>WORKING HOURS (DST)</b>						
	Work	Monastery		10:00	9:00	
Midday	Rest	Cells		12:00	14:00	
Sunset: New cycle begins...	Vesper	Church	Preparation	17:00	18:00	

The adoption of the double counting of ‘hours’ extends to the use of two calendars: the canonical hours follow the ‘old’ (*palaio*) Roman Julian Calendar, which is thirteen days behind the secular Gregorian calendar. This means that for example, Christmas with the Gregorian calendar is on December 25<sup>th</sup>, on Athos it is celebrated thirteen days later, starting it at the sunset of January 6<sup>th</sup> and ending at dawn on January 7<sup>th</sup>. On the other hand, for the financial, legal, and political dealings with ‘cosmopolitan’ institutions outside Athos, they used the worldly calendar of Pope Gregory, for practical reasons, as secular timing is vital for Vatopaidi’s financial and political dealings with visitors and

the world outside [priest-monk 4/5/03]<sup>120</sup>. Despite the distinction between canonical and worldly hours, within the context of time perceived as a repetitive daily cycle, there is continuity from the night liturgies in the church and chapels to eating in the refectory, and from the refectory to daily work.

### 7.3 Fasting and Feasting Days

The change of the clock according to the sunset was accompanied by the changes in the psalms of the day that take place according to the *Octoechos* ('eight modes/sounds') which is the service book containing the canons and hymns used in the daily services. *Octoechos* is the most important liturgical book of collective psalmodies, in terms of organizing the annual liturgical cycle. It contains eight musical tones, each one to be sung during the liturgies for two weeks. Every two weeks the Vatopaidians change mode (8 tones sung for two weeks making a total period of 16 weeks), and hence, every year they go through the *Octoechos* three times (16 weeks for three cycles, bringing the total to 48 weeks). The six remaining weeks belong to the movable celebrations of Easter, which take place according to the other liturgical book, the *Paschalion*.

'Here we live in symbiosis with God's Building... There are no musical instruments in Byzantine music. Because God wants us to use our own instrument, the one He (sic) gave us, our voice, just like the birds' [priest-monk 1/10/2002]

The Vatopaidians perceive Byzantine music as the natural sound of the peninsula, expressed within the pure way of life. Any other kind of music performed with instruments is not to be heard in the monasteries. Through the traditional practice of psalmody the monks connect to nature, the 'god's building' (*ktisis*), while also expressing their gratitude to Mary for letting them stay in her garden, and for taking care of the internal economy of the monastery by offering her natural products: the honey and nuts, the olive oil and the wine, the water and the bread. Psalmody is one of the means of connecting to nature by thanking the Virgin Mary for her gifts, and a way of marking the passage of time, as each month, day, and hour, is accompanied by a particular hymn.

---

<sup>120</sup> In fact only the monasteries of Vatopaidi and St Panteleimon, which are thought to be 'modernized', use both the DST and Gregorian calendar along with the Roman way of counting time and the Julian calendar. The other 18 monasteries follow only the 'old' calendar, while dividing the entire day in 12 Canonical Hours. The way of counting time has become the biggest political issue dividing Athos, and it is at the heart of the rivalry between Vatopaidi and their neighbour 'zealot' monks of Esfigmenou. I will be investigating the matter in more detail in the following chapters both in relation to the impact of the 'world' in Vatopaidi (chapter 8), and in relation to their rivalry with Esfigmenou (chapter 9).



Figure 7c: Picture of choir in Esfigmenou, from magazine *Voanerges*

Each day of the Eastern Orthodox calendar celebrates one or more saints. It is divided into fixed and moveable celebrations of the ‘fixed’ and ‘Paschal’ (Easter) cycles. The ‘fixed’ consists of celebrations, periods of abstinence, and feasts, on fixed days, while the moveable depends on the date of Easter Sunday, which is calculated as the first Sunday after the full moon following March 21. The year is further divided by twelve ‘great feasts’, of which nine belong to the ‘fixed’ cycle, and three depend on the time of the Easter (*Paschal* circle of moveable calendar)<sup>121</sup>. These also include a fasting period of preparation called ‘fore-feast’ (with the exception of the three ‘great feasts’ of the *Paschal* circle which do not have ‘fore-feasts’, as they take place during and after the Great Lent), and an ‘after-feast’ period during which it is forbidden to fast, such as the week after Easter Sunday, the week following Pentecost, and the weeks following

---

<sup>121</sup> The 12 ‘great feasts’ are : 9 Fixed dates: Nativity of Mother of God (September 8), the Exaltation of the Cross (Sept 14), Entrance of the Mother of God in the Temple (Nov 21), Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Dec 25), Epiphany (Jan 6), Presentation of Our Lord Jesus as an infant in the Temple (Feb 2), Annunciation of the Mother of God (March 25), Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus (August 6), and Dormition of the Mother of God (Aug 15). 3 Moveable/ *Paschal* Circle: Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter), Ascension of Christ into Heaven (40 days after Easter), Pentecost, the enlightenment of the Apostles by the Holy Spirit (50 days after Easter)

the birth of Jesus (December 25) and Epiphany (January 7), during which the monks celebrate the birth and resurrection of Christ<sup>122</sup>.

In preparation for the twelve great feasts there are also four extended periods of abstinence, which divide the calendar in four seasons: the transition from winter to spring is marked by the Great Lent takes place in preparation for Easter. It lasts for forty days, until the celebration the Resurrection on Easter Sunday: a ‘period of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer’ [personal communication with priest-monk 8/4/03]. In the summer, the ‘Apostles’ Fast’ (variable) begins on the second Monday after the Pentecost, marking the period after the descent of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, in preparation for the ‘Great Feast of Peter and Paul’ on July 12<sup>th</sup>. It is followed by a two-week abstinence, beginning on August 1<sup>st</sup> and lasting until the celebration of the ‘Dormition of Theotokos’, or ‘sleep the Mother of God’ on August 15<sup>th</sup>, which is the second most important day in the Orthodox Calendar after Easter. It is followed by the ‘Elevation of the Holy Cross’ (September 14<sup>th</sup>) and ‘Presentation of the Mother of God’ (November 21<sup>st</sup>) in autumn. And finally, in the winter the ‘Nativity Fast’, which lasts for forty days until the celebration of Christmas Day.

During these extended fasts, most of the Vatopaidians ate only once a day (except for older monk with health problems who are allowed to eat twice to gain strength). In the morning after the Divine Liturgy, they ate some bread, olives, and a glass of water. Lent days are generally less strict, because of the long period (40 days) and ‘because today’s monks are not as tough as they used to be’, so the elders ‘do some economy’ (*eksoikonomoun*) with the youngsters, meaning they are not so demanding as they were used to, in order to make monastic life more accessible to the young generation used in the comforts of the city (*see* chapter 4, section on ‘economy’). Abstinence for Lent is interrupted by days such as Palm Sunday, when bloodless seafood is permitted, cuttlefish, octopus, and calamari, freshly caught by the monks. It was served with spaghetti or lentils, boiled in water (no olive oil used). These days aimed to ‘give strength to the monks during long (periods of) fasting’ [priest-monk 8/4/03].

Each week is further divided into fasting and non-fasting days, according to the symbolic meaning of each day: in the summer, fasting days were Monday (day of the

---

<sup>122</sup> *See* detailed account of activities, celebrations, fasting and feasting, in *Appendix*: ‘Liturgical and Agricultural annual program’

Angels), Wednesday (Betrayal of Christ), and Friday (Crucifixion), and in the winter Thursday (day of the Apostles) was also added. On the other hand, the non-fasting days of the week were Tuesday (the day of the Prophets), and Sunday (Resurrection), with Thursday (Apostles) added in the summer solstice. Some weeks Saturdays were fasting in remembrance of the dead, and other weeks they were feasting days, celebrating a saint. The priest-monk on duty (*efimerios*) performed in the *catholicon* the Divine Liturgy on non-fasting days, in the presence of the entire brotherhood and visitors. On Sundays, it was always performed by the abbot, in the presence of his ‘spiritual Father’, the charismatic Joseph the Vatopaidian, who used to arrive in a jeep with his two deacons from his isolated cell in the forest to participate with the rest of the brotherhood, and to give a public speech to them in the evening regarding spiritual matters. In this way, non-fasting days involved the entire Vatopaidian community. The Vatopaidians used St Chrysostom’s version of the liturgy, a saint who is closely linked to Vatopaidi and whose skull and hand are kept in the monastery’s treasury. The other three liturgies are of St James, St Basil, and the Liturgy of the ‘Persanctified Gifts’ used during for the *Paschal* Cycle of the Great Lent.

On fasting days, each of the seven priest-monks on duty took a group of ten to twelve monks (including an elder) to perform the Divine Liturgy in one of the monastery’s 31 chapels, separately from the visitors, who were kept in the Chapel of the Girdle of the Virgin Mary. In the winter, because there were not many visitors, the liturgies took place in seven chapels. In the summer, they used nine chapels to accommodate the greater number of participants, as it was the tourist season<sup>123</sup>. The chapels (*figure 7d* below) were very small in size (about 6X6 meters) that contributed to the intimate atmosphere. The liturgy consisted of the priest-monk conducting it, an elder supervising it, a double choir of monks and novices, and a deacon acting in the roles of *ekklesiarches*, with the responsibility to light up the candles and prepare the props used in the performance, and as a *kanonarchis*, with the responsibility to conduct the liturgy according to the daily Canon that contains the particular psalms of the day.

Fasting days had a more intimate character, because of the family atmosphere of the chapels, from which visitors were excluded. The seven groups of monks consisted of three generations: an elder and a priest-monk, who belonged to the ‘companionship’ of

---

<sup>123</sup> See *Appendix 3.5*: ‘Weekly Timetable’: Winter/Summer solstice’

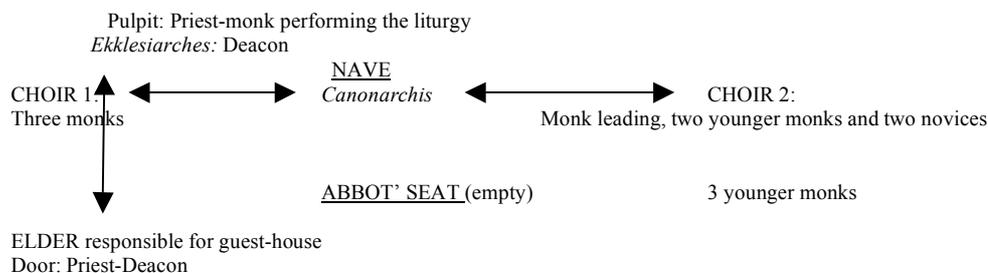
Joseph the Vatopaidian; ordinary monks, including members who had arrived together in the same ‘companionship’, some of whom were siblings; and novices who had arrived after 2000. The priest-monk was responsible for the spiritual activities of the group, and the elder was responsible for their daily task. In this way, the group prayed, ate, and worked together. By contrast, on non-fasting days the liturgy took place in the catholicon, with the entire brotherhood and under the watchful eye of the abbot, who, like a brain, united all the groups, the body parts, into a single organism, the community.

Figure 7d: Liturgies in chapels on days of abstinence

---

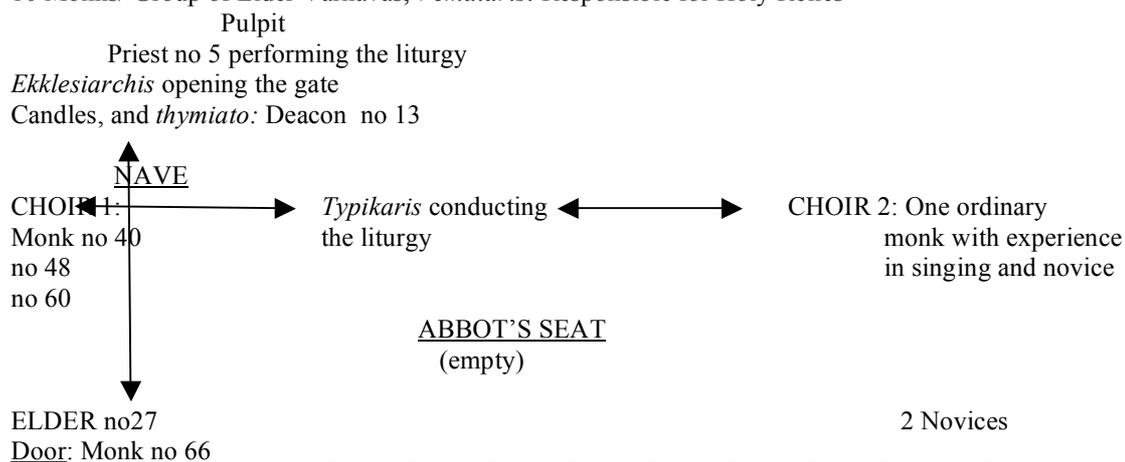
**Monday 11/8/03 at chapel of St George (below the guesthouse and above the wood storage)**

Group of 10 monks, which that term were responsible for the guest-house (*archontariki*), under the supervision of the elder responsible for running the *archontariki*, and the priest-monk heading the group



**Chapel of Paramythia. Friday 1/8/03 (14/8 with secular calendar)**

10 Monks/ Group of Elder Varnavas, *Vemataris*: Responsible for Holy Relics





**Figure 7f: The Three Floors of Vatopaidi**

<b>Top Floor: ELDERS</b>	Towards the profane world	↑
<u>Separate Cell</u> : Abbots' Cell looking from above the main gate, facing all four directions, both inside/outside		
<u>North wing</u> <i>Council of Elders</i> : Abbot's Office, cells of First Supervisor and two Administrators, Treasury, Accounting and Legal Office, <i>Synaxarion</i> (meeting room), Secretary's Office, Computer Rooms <i>Haghiographeion</i> : 2 painting workshops <i>Photographeion</i> : dark room for photography <i>Recording studio</i> , and <i>Immatiothiki/ Cassetothiki</i> : Storage of recorded tapes, cds.		
<u>South-East wing</u> Rooms of Elders, Priest-monks, and Priest deacons		
<u>North-West wing</u> Luxurious Rooms for VIP visitors		
<b>First Floor: PRIEST-MONKS</b>	In-between the sacred and profane	
<i>Archontariki</i> (Guest-House): Rooms of visitors and small refectory and balcony looking at the northern east Practice Rooms (Choir) Chapels		
<u>Separate Buildings</u> : Monks' Cells (south east) and dentistry (south west)		
<b>Ground Floor: MONKS</b>	Towards the sacred self	↓
Inside: <i>Catholicon</i> , Refectory, oven, kitchen, garden, food, wine, oil, and grain stores, olive press, carpentry, blacksmith and silversmith, two candle workshops, shop for visitors, fountains and well, small vineyard, storage room for wood and tools <i>Guest-house</i> : washing and ironing rooms and chapel of the Holy Girdle of Mary (for visitors only)		
Outside: <i>Arsanas</i> (harbour), cemetery, <i>Mechanostasia</i> (Machine Stationaries/ two electric generators), garage ('Car and machine Repair'), and storage rooms for tools, boats, and cars Lay-workers' huts Vineyard and other trees (field, landscape)		

**Figure 7g: Hierarchy in practice**

FORMAL HIERARCHY [RANK] ORDER OF <i>CHOROSTASIA</i>		INFORMAL HIERARCHY [AGE] [IN]
Joseph the Vatopaidian (died in 2009)	(no1)	Spiritual Patron
1. Abbot ( <i>hegoumenos</i> )	(no2)	Treasury
2. Counsellor ( <i>epitropos</i> )	(no22)	Treasury
3. Counsellor ( <i>epitropos</i> )	(no10)	Treasury
Top Subordinates ( <i>proistamenoï</i> )		
4. Administrator	(no20)	Replaced Abbot as the head of the council
5. Administrator	(no27)	Human and natural resources (labour)
Added in 1995		
6. Administrator	Priest-monk (no7)	Administrator
7. Administrator	Priest-monk (no9)	Legal office
8. Administrator	(no23)	Legal office
9. Secretary ( <i>grammateas</i> ) Priest C (no3): Responsible for: a) <i>Monachologion</i> with the names and rank of all monks b) <i>Dokimologion</i> with names and ranks of deacons c) Book of Income and Expenses d) Portfolio case for 'imported and exported official documents' e) Rough Diary with work of each day (article 26)		

↓

**Spiritual 'Informal' Hierarchy: PRMSTS: Circulating Tasks 'Winter'/'Summer' Solstice**

<i>Ritual and other Tasks inside Vatopaidi</i>	
Priests' tasks appointed by the Elders' Council annually, <b>on January 1<sup>st</sup> (article 17)</b>	
1. Abbot (permanent)	
2. Representative ( <i>antiprosopos</i> ): Represents the monks to the Council of Elders and outside Vatopaidi He is appointed on January 1 <sup>st</sup> (circulating role)	
3. First Supervisor on duty ( <i>Protepistatis</i> ): Distributing daily work. He is appointed on January 1 <sup>st</sup>	

4. <i>Economos</i> : The priest responsible for supervising the work inside the monastery and for paying the lay workers in the evening. He is appointed on January 1 <sup>st</sup> (circulating role)
5. Librarian ( <i>vivliothikarios</i> ): Responsible for ‘cosmic’ and liturgical books. He is appointed on Jan 1 <sup>st</sup>
6. Step-Man ( <i>vemataris</i> ): Responsible of relics and for exhibiting them every evening to visitors (Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> )
7. <i>Skevofylakas</i> (‘guard of the utensils’): Holding the keys from the Sanctuary’s safe with the holy relics and the sacred utensils, used during the liturgy and for the Holy Communion (Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> )
8. Nurse ( <i>Nosokomos and gerokomos</i> ): Responsible for well-being of older monks (January 1 <sup>st</sup> )
9. <i>Typikaris</i> : The monk who keeps the <i>typikon</i> of the monastery with the rules of daily conduct: ‘He has to be the first to give the right example to the rest of the brotherhood, to ensure order in the refectory, to be seated between Fathers and Brothers, and to educate them by example and through his own presence.’ [From Vatopaidi’s Internal Regulations, Art. 6, my translation].
10. Guest-master ( <i>Archontaris</i> ): The Elder responsible for the guest-house, supervising the priests and the priest-deacons. The priests change rota <b>every six months</b> (winter/summer solstice), as it is a time-consuming occupation
<i>Priests with administrative tasks but no liturgical authority</i>
11. Porter ( <i>pyloros</i> ): Keeps a record of who comes in and out Vatopaidi/ Checks ids (permanent) [Added in 2000, because of the increasing number of pilgrim visitors, though he is not thought to be an actual member of the 10 Priests, and that is why he is permanent]
12. <i>Economists of metochia</i> : The priest responsible for reporting for the work at the <i>metochia</i> , the properties/ estate <b>outside</b> Vatopaidi , and for paying the lay workers in the evening. He is appointed on January 1 <sup>st</sup> (circulating role)



### **Monks with the *Angelic Schema***

<b>Traditional Occupations for monks with the <i>Angelic Schema</i> (permanent)</b> <b><i>Read with Appendix: ‘Map of Monastery’</i></b>
<i>Arsanaris</i> (‘Harbour-man’): Responsible for the monastery’s harbour ( <i>arsanas</i> ), the condition of the monastery’s boats, and fishing. He is helped by a number of monks (three to six), as well laymen
<i>Trapezaris</i> (‘Table-man’): Responsible for the Refectory with the help of two groups of ten monks. One is permanent, the other rotates every two weeks
<i>Mageiras</i> (Cook): Older ordinary monk with the <i>Angelic Schema</i> responsible for cooking and washing, with the help of ten younger monks and novices.. <i>Magkipas</i> (‘Oven-man’): Head of the group of monks responsible for making the Bread. The process takes place during the night, when the liturgy also takes place, so that the Elder with the monks have to perform a small liturgy while baking in order not to totally miss the essence of the Divine Liturgy. By five o’clock in the morning, when they finish baking, they go to the church to receive the Holy Communion with bread that was made the previous night. The Oven is a very sacred place where visitors are forbidden to enter.
<i>Magkipas</i> (‘Oven-man’): Older ordinary monk with the <i>Angelic Schema</i> responsible for making the Bread and conducting the liturgy of <i>Artoklassia</i> (‘Dividing the bread’) with the help of three monks and two novices
<i>Docheiaris</i> (‘Storage-man’, or ‘Bottle-man’): Responsible for the food storage, including wine
<i>Xilourgos</i> (Carpenter, woodcutter): Monk working with monks and novices. Wood craft is a traditional practice considered as important as hagiography and hymnography
<i>Sidirourgos</i> (Blacksmith): Works together with five to ten monks and novices producing either patents to replace old parts of the monastic building, or stalls, icon frames etc. Also considered to be a traditional practice transferred from teacher to disciple
<i>Kipouros</i> (Gardener): Responsible for the garden inside the monastery
<i>Vordonaris or Hatlaris</i> (‘Whiplash-man’): Responsible for the stable with the horses
<i>Dasarchis</i> (‘Forest-keeper’): Responsible for protecting the forest surrounding the fields from fire. Also responsible for retaining its moral order according to tradition: monks and visitors walking in the forest have to be respectful to nature, and always be full-dressed in respect to the Virgin Mary, its ‘owner’
<i>Ampelourgos</i> (Vine-dresser): Responsible for cultivating the vine plants in the vineyard, situated outside the monastery. Two to four monks and novices help him to pick up the grapes. Despite the rapid changes in monastic life, the monks still use their hands and make wine with their feet while praying, strictly following the monastic tradition of making wine, as it is associated with the blood of Jesus



5 Priest-deacons
60 ordinary Monks
13 Novices

#### 7.4 Top Floor: The council of elders (*Gerontia*)

The general division of monks in three ranks according to the rites of ordination, tonsure and the *Angelic schema*, into elders (including both the spiritual authority of the priest-monks and the administrative authority of the council of elders), deacon monks (including both the priest-deacons and ordinary monks), and novices, corresponds to three kinds of activities, separated by the three floors of the monastic complex fortified behind the high medieval walls. The top floor, facing northern towards the Aegean Sea, is the closest space to the ‘world’, as it is the floor with the monastery’s offices, the secretary with the telephones, and the computer rooms connected to the internet. In contrast to the upper floor of comfortable and warm offices, with computers that virtually connect the monastery to the ‘world’ out there, the ground floor of the monastery is kept away from the ‘world’, as it is a sacred ground consisting of the most sacred buildings of the monastery: the *catholicon* and the refectory, the chapels, the *phiale*, the oven, and the garden with the vineyard. It also has workshops, stores, and utilities, associated with traditional practices with a sacred character (such as wood-curving, blacksmith and silversmith, fisherman, oil refinery, wine production, the making of bread, mills, and so on). Each monk’s working post is given to him according to his ‘worldly’ skills, knowledge, and expertise, but the entire working force is united under the programmes issued by the *gerontia* (‘council of elders’) of the upper floor. In between the ground and top floor is the *archontariki* (‘guesthouse’), where secular visitors (outsiders) come in contact with monks (insiders). In other words, it is the space in-between the two realms, the ground floor of the monks and the top floor of the administrators. This division of space reflects both the personal and esoteric world of each monk, as it echoes his tonsure, during which he is separated from his secular past and the ‘cosmopolitan world’, which is contained on the top floor, to live an impersonal and obedient life on the sacred ground floor of the monastery; his personal future. In this way, divisions of space and time reflect upon the divisions of the mind.

The monastic complex extended outside the monastery, towards the north. At the north-eastern side the *arsanas* ('harbour') is situated, which included the autonomous cell of the older monk in the role of *arsanaris* (the 'harbour-man'), storage rooms with tools and wood, two garages for jeeps and boats, a police station, the customs house, and the pier. At the north western side are situated Vatopaidi's fields and vineyard, and the huts for the lay workers, as well as public phone to be used by visitors, as the use of mobile phones was forbidden. All the cells, both the ones outside the monastery such as Joseph the Vatopaidian's in the forest, and of the *arsanaris* at the harbour, as well as the offices inside the monastery at the upper floor (the 'cells' of the monastery's treasury, the office of the 'first supervisor', and the *economio* for the steward, as well as the secretary's and abbot's offices, and the porter at the ground floor next to the main gate) were all connected internally with telephones, which made communication and co-operation between different units of work faster and easier. The most prominent cell was that of the abbot illustrating his absolute authority. It was a separate house, built right above the main gate, as if he could supervise both the life inside the monastery, and the work that needed to be done outside in the fields, as well as those arriving from the harbour. The position of his cell, in-between the inside and outside realms of Vatopaidi, confirmed his symbolic authority, by putting him in the position of the arch-mediator between the secular lay workers working outside the monastery, the visitors coming in and out of the monastery, and the monks.

The top floor of the central monastic building, facing the northern-eastern side of the peninsula consists of two buildings: the northern wing is the area of the council of elders (*gerontia*), including the 'abbot's office' (*hegoumeneion*), and the *synodeikon*, or *synaxari* ('meeting room'); the southern wing are the workshops for the traditional practices of hagiography and xylography, associated with the tradition of the family of Josephaeoi. There are also a photography and recording studio, and small 'laboratory', where young monks worked on the restoration of ancient icons, using the latest technology (x-rays and computer design), with the strong financial support of EU funding. The narrow corridor that connects the abbot's office to the workshops was decorated with a red carpet, and photographs on the walls of previous councils of elders, going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through the golden frames, the Vatopaidian ancestors were staring silently at the luxurious and noisy department, which consisted of several rooms recently equipped with computers, printers, scanners, telephones, and

central heating. It was a brightly lit and noisy space, with electric light, a number of computer rooms, and central heating that sharply contrasted to the limelight and peacefulness of the balcony every evening, under the monotonous sound of the psalms sung by the novices coming from the practice rooms, and disappearing in the moonlight. The sound mystically covered the double identity of the Vatopaidians: that of being ‘silencers’ (*hesychasm*), and at the same time, lively entrepreneurs.

The top floor in particular was always a busy area, especially in the mornings and evenings after the meals, with monks, lay workers, and visitors, coming in and out of noisy offices with computers and printers, carrying piles of papers, boxes with CDs, and other documents. The abbot’s office (*hegoumeneion*) and the secretary’s office (*grammateia*) were dealing with various matters, such as issuing visas to non-EU workers in co-operation with the Greek state. One evening, the corridor was blocked by a group of about thirty Albanian and Romanian workers waiting outside the shut door of the finances. The secretary complained that the Greek government was delaying the restoration of the monastery, by not ratifying the special status of the ‘illegal’ Albanian workers that were already working in the monastery. For the Vatopaidians this paper work only delayed the work that needed to be done regarding the restoration of the monastery and the budget they had<sup>124</sup>.

Another issue at the time of my fieldwork was the effort of the Greek Archaeological Department to excavate an ancient temple inside the chapel of St Nikolaos, which is part of the monastery’s *catholicon*. The Greek Archaeological Department rejected an application Vatopaidi made the previous year (2002) asking them to stop with the excavation. The site was covered with a white sheet, so that the visitors could not see what lied beneath the church: an ancient Greek temple. The Vatopaidians were adamant *not* to let the excavations continue, but because they received funding from the EU as a heritage site, they were obliged to allow the excavations to continue. ‘Like we care’ said one priest-deacon bitterly, while he was staring at an empty computer screen. ‘You have lots of work to do’ the secretary instantly replied to the young deacon’s negativity. He was facing a pile of papers: ‘In the night we pray, but in the day we have to work.

---

<sup>124</sup> In the words of the secretary: ‘Two policemen outside still wait for the ok from the government. But they haven’t sent their (workers’) papers yet, delaying our important work. Can you hear them (lay workers) outside (the office)? They wait to get a task to start on, but we cannot give them any, because the police are watching. Hopefully the matter will be resolved soon’ the secretary mildly but steadily replied [4/5/03].

There is no time to rest. Most monks prefer to work with their hands, but some of us have an inclination towards administrative matters. We are the ones who get the headaches!’ [secretary 6/8/03].

Such external issues were dealt by the council of elders throughout the year, starting on September 1<sup>st</sup>, the beginning of the working (secular) term. The council discussed these matters every Thursday evening in the *synodeikon* (meeting room). They also voted over financial and legal matters, as well as, matters of internal discipline. The council consisted of eight Greek Cypriot members, and a Greek and a Brazilian member, who had arrived together to Vatopaidi in 1987 with the first ‘companionship’ of Joseph the Vatopaidian of fifteen monks. The only member of the council who was not a member of Joseph’s companionship was the Greek monk, who was one of the five monks who chose to stay in Vatopaidi and wait for Joseph’s arrival (*see* chapter 4: ‘Journey to Vatopaidi’). He had arrived to the *idiorythmic* Vatopaidi in 1984. Although, according to the Athonian constitution signed in 1926, the members of the council of elders are elected by the entire brotherhood, because of their knowledge of law or economics<sup>125</sup>, in addition to these skills in Vatopaidi the majority of the elders also had experienced monastic life next to the patron Joseph the Vatopaidian, which was the source of their authority.

According to the *Internal Regulations*, for the meetings of the council of elders to take place there must be at least five members present. If there is a draw in voting, then the final decision belongs to the abbot (as per article 13). The elder in the permanent role of the secretary (*grammateas*) was responsible for recording in a rough diary the content of the meetings. He was also responsible for keeping the *Monachologion* with the names and rank of all monks, *Dokimologion* with names and ranks of deacons, the Book of Income and Expenses, and the Portfolio case for ‘imported and exported official documents’ (as per article 26). According to the secretary of the monastery, in the meetings, the elders discussed both internal and external matters. Regarding financial matters the council was responsible for exporting and importing goods, such as, logging and exporting wood, as well as, honey, wine, rosaries, copies of miraculous

---

<sup>125</sup> It is important to highlight that all the older monks wearing the *Angelic Schema* are considered to be ‘elders’ in the spiritual hierarchy and daily life, because of their age and experience. Here, by ‘elders’ I refer to the members of the council of elders, who are appointed to this role regardless their spiritual status in the internal hierarchy of the monastery, manifested by the order of the Holy Communion.

icons, crosses and candles, among other products, and importing grain, kiwi, spaghetti and rice, medicine, petrol, and tools, among other necessities (as per article 19).

The council was headed by the abbot and his two closest advisors, the *epitropoi* (executive administrators). The two executives were close to the abbot, as they had arrived together in the ‘companionship’ of Joseph, but they were not priest-monks, probably because they were not sexually virgin. They both wore the *Angelic Schema*, manifesting their extensive experience of monastic life, but it was their knowledge of economics and law respectively, as well as their close relationship to the abbot, that put them in this high position. The abbot and the two executives were responsible for bureaucratic, financial, and legal matters, regarding properties in Greece, funding from the EU, the taxation of monastic properties outside Athos, and other financial and legal issues (as per article 29 of *Internal Regulations*). They signed contracts and documents with the ‘official stamp’ of the monastery, and also kept two mobile phones, exclusively to be used for the monastery’s interests and ‘not for personal reasons’ [secretary 6/8/03]. The abbot, as the head of the council, frequently travelled outside Athos to conferences and meetings in Greece and the EU, representing the monastery in the media and in the secular world.

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, the council discussed the annual planning regarding the monastery’s external affairs, in relation to the work that needed to be done in the monastery, such as rebuilding and restoring it, issues of funding, and so on. Further, every June 1<sup>st</sup>, the council elected the ‘first supervisor’ (*Proteplastis*), the elder who would represent the monastery in the *Holy Epistasia* of Karyes (see glossary), and the ‘representative’ (*antiprosopos*), the elder who would represent the monastery in the *Holy Committee* of Karyes, responsible for the relationship of the monasteries with the Greek state, the EU, and the ‘Ecumenical patriarchate’ in Istanbul. For internal matters, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the council gave to each monk his annual post, according to his skills and knowledge. Some of the given roles were permanent, because the monks who worked on them had particular expertise (for example in wood curving, blacksmithing, cooking, fishing, medicine, or electricians, those who knew computer technologies and printing).

## 7.5 Ground Floor

According to the division of night and day in terms of ‘canonical’ and ‘worldly hours’, spiritual and administrative hierarchies, prayer and work, the tasks given to the priest-monks by the elders had also a double aspect: in the night they were liturgical, in the day executive. Every Saturday morning, the abbot’s office (*Hegoumeneion*) issued the weekly program of the night liturgies (from Monday to Sunday, ‘see Appendix: ‘Winter and Summer Weekly Programme’). It was posted by a deacon on the wall facing the *catholicon*. It appointed the priest-monks and priest-deacons on duty in the chapels, where the brotherhood dispersed on fasting days. It also appointed the priest-monk in the role of *ecclesiarches* (‘church-masters’), with responsibility to clean the chapels and the church, and to prepare the stage for the Divine Liturgy (props, candles in front of the icons, washing the floor from the melted wax from precious liturgies). The task rotated between the priest-monks every two days. On non-fasting days, all the priest-monks participated in the Divine Liturgy in the *catholicon* in the presence of the abbot.

The ten priest-monks were helped by five Greek Cypriot priest-deacons, who were promising young men with higher education in theology and computing. According to the division of night liturgies and daily tasks, the deacons also had a double set of tasks: on the one hand, they helped the priest-monks to perform the night liturgies, taking several ritual roles, such as that of *prosmonarios* (‘waiting-man’) who sung special thanksgiving hymns to the icons of Mary during the liturgies; the *prosfonarios* (‘sacrifice-man’) who was responsible for helping with the rite of *artoklassia*, the classification of the bread for the Holy Communion; and the *kampanaris* (‘bell-man’) who rang the bell on great celebrations, in the evening before the ‘great vesper’ calling monks and visitors to the church, and at dawn during the offering of the Holy Communion. On the other hand, during the day, they worked mainly at the upper floor, helping the elders with the production and distribution of the monastery’s products, such as CDs with the choir, copies of holy icons, hand-made rosaries and crosses, and honey, which were exported through the internet, the telephone, or sold in the shop situated next to the monastery’s main gate.

Following the ‘canonical hours’ and eating at the refectory, the ten priest-monks (including the abbot) led a group of eight to twelve younger monks, which also

included novices, volunteer visitors, and paid lay workers, to their daily tasks, while older monks went to rest for a few hours in their cells. The ten groups were divided from three and up to seven units of work, depending on the amount of work on the day. The main units was working in the fields, in the oven, in the kitchen, at the guesthouse, in the mills, or helping with the cleaning and restoration of chapels and other buildings. These jobs were shared by everyone. The working groups changed shift every fortnight depending on the season, accompanied by the change of Byzantine tone in the psalms sung by the choir during the night liturgies, following the *Octoechos*, the book of psalmodies divided by the eight Byzantine tones, which also changed every two weeks.

The priest-monk who organized labour on a day to day basis was the steward (*ekonomos*), with the responsibility to appoint the groups of monks and lay workers in terms of tasks (working in the fields, restoration of chapels, working in the kitchen and the guesthouse), as well as, to pay the lay workers every evening for the day's work. He was also responsible for the storing and distributing tools, and for the condition of the church and the chapels. These daily activities given to the *ekonomos*, were counterbalanced by the night responsibilities of the *typikaris* ('formalities-man'), who is the elder responsible for organizing the liturgical life and clock, according to the annual *typiko* ('formalities'), the book with the liturgies for each night of the year. The priest-monk in the role of *docheiaris* ('bottle-man') was responsible for storing and keeping the olive oil and wine, as well as, for distributing it to the chapels for the night liturgies (see chapter 3 in reference to icon of *Elaiovrytissa*). Another annual role given to a priest-monk was that of the *vivliothekarios* ('librarian') responsible for all the printed material of the monastery, including both liturgical and 'worldly' texts<sup>126</sup>. He was also responsible for the publications of the monastery, acting as a kind of editor for the Vatopaidian publication company. His role was counter-balanced by the elder in the

---

<sup>126</sup> The intellectual tradition of Vatopaidi is substantiated by a large number of manuscripts, of more than 1,700 manuscripts and 10,000 printed material regarding its history, tradition, and practices of faith (Mikrayannanitos 1999: 150). These are divided into 'liturgical' or 'sacred' books, and 'cosmic' or 'cosmopolitan'. The first category includes original copies in Greek of Liturgies, Blessings, Life of Saints, *typika*, the books of Ascetic life, *Menea* (meaning books of the month with further instructions on the ritual life), music books, and Bibles. A number of sacred texts are illuminated manuscripts, and are further divided in terms of their use. For instance, the illuminated texts that narrate the history and miracles of the monastery are not liturgical books, but they are called *historemena* (from the word 'history') and have a semi-sacred status. 'Cosmopolitan' books, on the other hand, include the *Geography of Ptolemy* containing 42 colour maps of Europe, North Africa, and Asia; books on astrology, the constitution, and calendars. In this context, the term 'cosmic' refers to the books imported from the outside world, revealing another level of the connection and interest of the monks of Vatopaidi for the world, science, history, and technology.

role of *vemataris* ('step-man'), with the responsibility of storing, cleaning, and exhibiting the holy relics of the monastery to visitors every evening after the vesper. Another pair of roles is that of the *archontaris* ('guest-master') and the *nosokomos* ('nurse'). The former refers to the taking care of the visitors according to the value of hospitality, while the latter, to the taking care of the oldest or ill members of the brotherhood according to the value of charity.

In addition to these seven roles/ units of work (plus that of the first priest-monk abbot, and the 'first supervisor' *proteplastis*) the council added a tenth priest-monk in 2000, due to the increasing number of monks and visitors, in the role of *pyloros*, or *portaris* ('porter'). He was responsible for registering the visitors and monks coming in and out of the monastery, checking their identity documents and passes, and recording their visit in his books. He also shut the gate in the evening, when it was time for prayer, and opened the gate at dawn, when it was time for business. Working together with the *pyloros* were the guest-master and the secretary who arranged for the visiting lists and accommodation of hundreds of visitors everyday. With the introduction of the internet, the traditional role of the *tachidromos* ('postman'), who was the monk responsible for the mail, has eclipsed, because contact with the 'world' outside is faster and better using electronic emails. Another role that has eclipsed is that of the *niktofilakas*: ('night watchman') responsible for guarding the gate after it is locked at sunset. With the introduction of two electric generators in 1990, the Vatopaidians installed instead an alarm system, which was switched on by the porter after he locked the gate in the evening.

In the day, work was divided in several units (*see Appendix* 'traditional units' of work), which can be categorized into permanent working posts requiring a particular skill, and temporary, rotating, collective occupations, in the fields, the monastery, or the kitchen. Permanent posts were given to older monks, who were wearing the *Angelic Schema*, but were *not* members of the council. They had particular technical expertises, such as, the *arsanaris* (harbour-man) who was responsible for fishing, a traditional occupation associated with the disciples of Christ. In the monastery, the *arsanaris* took care of the harbour (*arsanas*). This included the arrival at the *portarikion* ('port') of the boat from Ierissos three times a week (on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday) as well as for co-operating with the secular police that guarded the coast. Furthermore, he supervised the

work in the garage where five ordinary monks permanently worked as mechanics, restoring the monastery's jeeps and boats.

In the kitchen worked two groups of monks: a permanent group of five monks, including the *trapezaris* ('table-man') an older Cypriot monk responsible for running the refectory, the two *magkeipes* ('cooks') who were two middle-aged monks from northern Greece who were also cousins, and two *artopoi* (bakers); and a rotating group of ten monks that worked in the kitchen for two weeks, until it was replaced by the next group. In this way, all the ten groups of the ten priest-monks rotated to this difficult post, *even* the abbot as a manifestation of his humility<sup>127</sup>. Each group was further divided in two shifts of five monks each, a day shift during which the first pair of groups of monks prepared the fresh ingredients to be used for the cooking, and a night shift during which cooking and the baking of bread took place. By rotating on the post every two nights and every two weeks, all the monks were involved in kitchen, and were enabling their brothers who were permanent cooks to participate in the Divine Liturgy that took place in the night, at the same time with the cooking and baking. On particularly busy periods, as in August, when the number of visitors was high, it was not uncommon for the entire brotherhood to gather in the kitchen in order to wash and cut the vegetables, as they had to feed more than 400 extra mouths that arrived every day. Under pressure, however, there were sometimes misunderstandings between groups of monks regarding the post they were working. On the eve of the night vigil in honour of St. Panteleimon (9/8/2003), for instance, two groups of monks were arguing whose turn was it to be in the kitchen. In their eagerness to participate in the vigil, the younger members of the pair of groups forgot all about it, and began raising their voices during the early stages of the night vigil. The *ecclesiarches* ('church-master') immediately dragged them outside the church and restored order, by sending all of them to the kitchen.

Other permanent professions included the *mylothros* ('mill-man'), two *melissokomi* ('honey-makers') and a *keropios* ('candle maker'), as well as, the *xylourgos* ('wood

---

<sup>127</sup> 'Because the work in the kitchen is really hard, with all these dishes that need to be served and then washed twice a day we change shifts every two weeks. The problem is that cooking and preparing the tables takes place at the same time with the liturgy in the night, so those who work in the kitchen cannot go to church because of their duty. That is why we change every two weeks, so that everyone can enjoy the liturgy and serve their duty... In this way, we all get some time to pray' [Deacon in the kitchen, 8/8]

cutters'), and the *sidirourgos* (blacksmith and silversmith), which were occupations associated with the tradition of the family of Josephaeoi (*see* chapter 4). These posts were permanent because the expertise these monks offered to the monastery were irreplaceable. Under their supervision worked groups of younger monks with similar skills in less sacred roles, such as two electricians, several mechanics working in the garage and the harbour, and monks who were responsible for storing the tools and keeping the workshops in order. There were also two young dentists from Romania who worked as the 'doctors' of the monastery, responsible for storing the medicine and trying to help the older monks with their health problems. They worked under the supervision of the *nosokomos* ('nurse'), but left to the Romanian Skete of St Prodromos in 2002, and the monastery was still looking for a monk or monks with some knowledge in medicine to fill the post.

In sum, on the one hand, older monks wearing the *Angelic Schema* gained autonomous and permanent posts, because of their particular skill, which they either brought into Vatopaidi, or learned it in Vatopaidi by being deacons. On the other hand, *all* younger monks, including both ordinary monks and priest-deacons, were serving their older brothers and elders according to the value of 'blind obedience' (*see* chapter 5). The younger monks learned about the hardships of monastic life through collective work, in the fields, at the monastery's buildings, or in the kitchen. Those, however, who revealed a particular talent they were also promoted to permanent posts to work and learn the trade under the supervision of the older and more experienced monk, and to eventually replace him after his death, ensuring the continuity of the profession.

## 7.6 Agrarian Activities

The internal economy of the monastery was based on agriculture. Vatopaidi had fields inside and outside Athos, harvested by monks and paid lay workers. The Vatopaidian calendar combines agricultural with liturgical activities (*see Appendix* Timetable 5.2: 'Annual Liturgical and Agricultural calendar'). The peak of the calendar is Easter which celebrates the resurrection of the natural environment in association to the resurrection of Christ. Each month of the year is associated with particular activities in the fields that highlight the symbiosis of monastic life to the natural environment [personal communication with monks]. Work in the fields is interrupted by four extended periods of abstinence ('Great Lent' during the transition from winter to

spring, the ‘Apostles’ Fast’ during the transition from spring to summer, the abstinence of the ‘Dormition of Theotokos’ during the transition from summer to autumn, and the ‘Nativity Fast’ during the transition from autumn to winter) during which the monks did not work, but spent most of the day in their cells praying, as they are thought to be periods of ‘self-reflection’ (*endoskopisis*). These periods of abstinence ‘spiritually prepare’ the monks for the hard working periods that follow. The cycle of the annual calendar, based on the four seasons, creates a naturalized setting, and a collective rhythm of a succession of stasis and work, in which the monks and their way of life becomes a ‘natural’ part of the ‘virgin garden’.

Traditionally, the cycle of liturgical and agricultural activities is co-ordinated according to Vatopaidi’s *Typikon* (‘Formalities’), the book with the liturgical and agricultural calendar of psalms and activities for each day of the year, which dates back to 1346AC<sup>128</sup>. In the *Typikon*, the year is divided in 12 months that correspond to the 12 star-signs of the zodiac. Each month has a dedicated short text and a picture that portrays the activities taking place, according to the ancient zodiac circle: it begins in September/ October, which is the month of Libra. The picture portrays as a young man picking up grapes, as this is the month of harvesting the vine (as well as the olives). Harvesting continues to the month of Scorpio from October to November. Although in the text the picture portrays hunting activities, nowadays, hunting is forbidden, and so they continue with their harvesting<sup>129</sup>. But the *Typikon* also tells us that despite the tradition of virginity that does not allow the consumption of meat, there was indeed the time when the monks did hunt and eat meat. November and December belong to Sagittarius, portraying a picture of ploughing; Capricorn in January marks the time for pruning the trees; Aquarius in February marks the time of separating the oil and wine in pots; Pisces in February and March is the time for rest, before the time of fasting (Great Lent) and preparing for Easter in March and April of Aries, pictured as a warrior on a horse; Taurus in April portrays an Easter scene of a young boy holding flowers on his right hand and a sheep on his left arm signifying Easter the highest peak of the calendar; Gemini in May and Cancer in June celebrate the resurrection of nature,

---

<sup>128</sup> The text was written by John Argyros at the time the monastery went through expansion with the funding of Prokopios Hatzamis. The text was dedicated to the martyr Eugene the ‘Miracle-Maker’ of Trapezounta (Turkey) where it was possibly first published (*The Treasures of Mount Athos* 1997: 222).

<sup>129</sup> Hunting is only allowed for the lay workers, who live in huts outside the monasteries. Some of them gain the right to hunt instead of payment, but nowadays, there are also restrictions imposed by the EU.

portraying a young man holding flowers, which marks the time of agricultural activity; Leo in July is the time for harvesting the fruits and nuts, and Virgo in August, which is also thought to be the month of the Virgin Mary, is the time of compassion and charity, portraying a young woman approaching an old man. She is holding a pot of water on her right arm, and another item on the left hand, as if she is helping/serving him. In this way, the year is also divided in 12 months of labour, which accompany the liturgical calendar, as the two are fused within the circular, liturgical and agricultural, annual program. The fusion of liturgical and agricultural activities is illustrated by the importance of wine in the spiritual life of the monastery. The Vatopaidians have two vineyards, one situated at the fields nearby the monastery, and another situated inside the monastery's garden. The person responsible for taking care of them is an older monk, who is the *ampelourgos* ('vine-dresser').

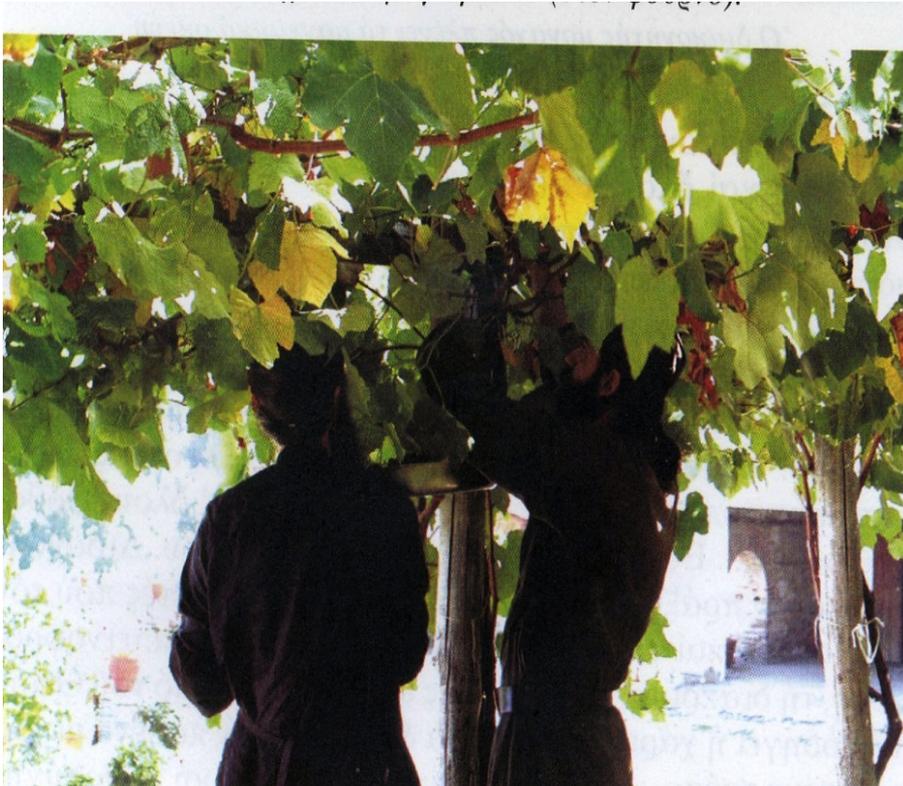


Figure 7h: At the vineyard inside the monastery. Picture taken from *Voanerges*

The fields have a chapel dedicated to St Tryfonas, the Orthodox saint of wine. Significantly, the saint is celebrated on the first Monday after the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, highlighting the affinity between Christ and nature. After a long night vigil celebrating the holiest day of the calendar, and a long meal accompanied with lots

of wine, the monks parade the icon outside the monastery to the vine fields, where they held a small litany and blessing with oil (*euheilaion*) as a thanks giving for a good harvest. The time of picking the grapes is in autumn, and as with other hard tasks, this is mainly left to lay workers, young novices, and unpaid volunteers, organized by the priest-monk, who is the *economos* ('steward'), responsible for the supervision and the payment of the workers. The grapes are put in gigantic wooden containers, where novices and younger monks crush them with their bare feet<sup>130</sup>. No paid workers or unpaid visitors are allowed to be involved in this procedure, or come in physical contact with the juice, some of which will be used in the Holy Communion.

As with the olive oil (*see* chapter 3: *Elaiovrytissa*) and the bread (*see* chapter 7: 'Night Vigil: 'great vesper'') the wine is then divided for sacred or profane use. The priest-monk in the role of the *docheiaris* ('bottle-man'), who was responsible for the storage and distribution of the oil and wine, separated the wine used for the Holy Communion, from the wine for drinking at the refectory, and the wine that was to be bottled and exported. On fasting days, he sent two deacons to bring 24 empty bottles to fill them with wine from two big bottles, in which it was kept. The deacons carried the bottles at the washing area of the monks, situated in the isolated southern wing underneath the monks' cells, and washed the bottles carefully from dirt and insects, using fresh water coming directly from the surrounding hills. Then the *docheiaris* began transferring the wine from one bottle to another through a thin metal net, used as a filter to clear it from dregs. This procedure was repeated until the wine was clear as crystal to be used for the daily liturgy. He filled like this ten bottles, seven half-full to be used in the chapels on the fasting day in a fortnight, and three full to be used in the Divine Liturgy for the Holy Communion the following morning. Then the deacons filled in the other bottles to be drunk in the refectory with the meal. The *docheiaris* then poured the dirty remains into a bottle with the label 'VINEGAR'. These leftovers will be used in cooking as vinegar, as according to their value of 'economy' nothing is wasted: the filtered wine will become the sacred Blood of Christ; the remains would be used for cooking. The

---

<sup>130</sup> 'From the vineyard we pick the grapes and then step on them, squeezing them in order to take their juice. The wine gives also strength because it takes responsibility away. If you make a mistake while you are drunk you say 'it is not my fault but of the wine'' [Priest-monk 6/10/02]

monks also bottle wine and *raki* for export through the internet and a network of shops in Cyprus and Greece, or sell it directly to the visitors in the monastery's shop<sup>131</sup>.

The monks were helped by a great number of lay workers, who did the hardest physical jobs. The priest-monk in the role of *economos* told me: 'the laymen are clean, honest people. They are like little fishes, and we (the monks) are like sharks. The little fishes eat the dirt from the skin of the shark, as it is their food. And the shark does not harm them, because they keep him clean.' [20/4/03]. The lay workers were accommodated outside the monastery, in huts situated between its northern main gate and the Vatopaidian fields. Most of them were from Albania and Romania, and many had arrived together in groups. They stayed for periods of six months to a few years, depending on their visa. Some of them arrived to this monastery in search for a better future, and a way to enter the EU (because of their so-called 'illegal' status)<sup>132</sup>. According to my discussions with them, the life in the huts was good. The huts were equipped with electricity and heating, and they were allowed to follow their own program, as they only had to participate in the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. The rest of the week, they woke up early to work with the monks in the fields, or inside the

---

<sup>131</sup> The monasteries produce both red and white varieties of world famous wine (*Merlot, Limnio, Cabernet, Xinomavro, Agioritiko, Moscato, Roditis*), on the commercial basis of the 'virginity' of the land and their traditional ways of picking the vine. Two big Geek wine companies work with the monasteries into Athos, the Mylopotamos, and the *Tsantalis* distilleries. Mylopotamos rents over 50 hectares of land inside Athos, while *Tsantalis* another 80. The contracts the companies made with the monks allow them to bring lay workers to do the job at the fields. Most of these workers are from Albania and Romania. There is a legend regarding the involvement of the *Tsantalis* Company into Athos saying that in 1971, the founder of the Wine Company, Evangelos Tsantalis, was lost in a storm, only to find refuge at the area of Chromitsa. There he saw an abandoned vineyard and asked the monks if they would let him use it to make wine for them and himself. This modern legend refers to the miraculous of the Virgin Mary at the shores of the peninsula, and to following legends of monks and saints who lost their way only to find refuge on Athos. But it further reveals the involvement and interests of 'cosmopolitan' companies into Athos, as part of the revival of monastic life on the Mount that began the same year of the legend in 1971, and which was based on the revival of the reciprocal relationship of the monasteries with the 'cosmopolitan' world.

<sup>132</sup> Such a worker was a Romanian layman 'Dimitris' who told me in excellent Greek: 'We are fine here, sometimes five of us sometimes fifteen, depending on the visas. There are also about ten Albanians and every night we take out the raki and have some good time at the hut outside the monastery. We sleep there, as the monks do not allow us in, but that's better, we prefer it this way... I came from Corinth. I left Romania after Ceausescu fell, and first I went to Germany, then Italy, and finally Greece. The Germans are racists because they think that all Romanians steal their cars. So I went to Corinth, but what for? There was even more police checking for ids, I couldn't even walk to buy cigarettes. I couldn't work, so I decided to go to (the monastery of) Xeropotamou. But there the monks treat me very badly, and were complaining all the time about my smoking habit.. Here they may not pay, but they treat us right, letting us free outside the monastery, and only making us go to the Church on Sundays. I've been here two year now, but I am planning to return to Greece for work' [8/10/02]

monastery, restoring its ancient buildings, using crane-machines and tractors -that generally interrupted the natural peacefulness of the environment. After the finished the daily work, they were allowed to fish and hunt and eat meat –despite the prohibitions of the rule of virginity-.

## 7.7 Conclusion

Complex intersections of calendars and timetables are defined according to the activity of each day, while the changes in the length of day and night, and in the activities associated with them, are related to living in harmony with god and nature. These are arranged following the sunset and the winter and summer solstices, which integrate the four seasons of the year into the liturgical program of fasts, feasts, and celebrations. In this cyclical understanding of time, everyday life *inside* Vatopaidi is faster and more outgoing in spring and summer, and more internally focused in the autumn and winter seasons. The peak of the annual calendar is Easter Sunday, which celebrates both the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the natural environment, the gift of Mary to the monks. Internal activities are organized according to three layers of time: daily, in terms of private and public forms of prayer; weekly, relating directly to the consumption or non consumption of food; and annually, in terms of agricultural and liturgical activities, which are divided by four extensive periods of abstinence. We have also seen how the activities reflect the order of the monastery, in particular the double hierarchical structure displayed in the distribution of space in the chapel and the refectory amongst the families of monks who gather at table during non-celebratory days. On the basis of the separation of the person from the impersonal monastery in terms of hierarchy (spiritual/ administrative, chapter 5) and time (‘canonical hours’/ ‘worldly hours’) according to prayer or work, the next chapter will further investigate the double economy of Vatopaidi, focusing on the points of conjunction between the internal economy and external vocation of the monastery, which bring on the surface the tensions between the ideal and the real, illustrating how *in practice* the two realms overlap each other.

## Chapter 8: Virginity on Sale (External economy)

### 8.1 Introduction

Alpentzos (2002) looked into the public role of Athonian monasteries as educational institutions in Greece, distinguishing between *inside* the wall activities regarding the activities of the monks in respect to visitors, researchers, clergy, politicians, and traders, and *outside* the wall activities, regarding ‘the missionary work inside and beyond the Greek state’ (Alpentzos 2002: 14-15, *my translation* from Greek). Internal activities refer to traditional practices and the liturgical life of the community (including the presence of religious tourism), and they are headed by the priest-monks. On the other hand, external activities refer to the financial and legal matters of the monastery as an institution, such as the *metochia*, land and estate properties that belong to Vatopaidi inside and outside Athos, for which responsible are the council of elders. In this context, we can speak of an *internal economy*, referring to the spiritual relationships, conduct, and status, of each monk in relation to the community, and an *external economy* referring to the financial and political vocation of the monastery in the Orthodox world. The latter, is further divided into importations and exportations, such as, on the one hand, the accommodation of hundreds of visitors every day, and on the other, the reproduction of copies of sacred products exported via the internet, or the renting of monastic properties outside Athos (*metochia*, external).

This chapter will show how *in practice* the two realms overlap each other in terms of *movement* (i.e. tourists coming in, products going out). The first part focuses on the impact of visitors in monastic life, and the compromises the Vatopaidians have to make to accommodate them. The second part discusses the *tamata* (‘promises’) as a source of income for Vatopaidi, and the re-invention of this tradition through the internet, focusing on the most sacred item of Vatopaidi, the Holy Girdle of Mary, a symbol of virginity as well as miraculous reproduction, in order to show how spirituality is materialized into such sacred products. Finally, the chapter will conclude discussing the moral dilemmas raised, first because of the impact of technology and the rising numbers of religious tourism in the internal life of Vatopaidi, and second regarding its external conduct and tensions between the monastery and the Greek state, as well as, against other monasteries, such as the neighbouring monastery of Esfigmenou.

## PART I: VISITORS

### 8.2 *Archontariki* (Guesthouse)



*Figure 8a*: Internal view from *archontariki*. At the left is the chapel of the Elaiovrytissa with the Oil and Wine Store attached, and at the right we can see the Chapel of the Holy Girdle of Mary in front of the building with the rooms of the visitors [Taken from Babis Tavridis and Giorgos Lambros internet site]

In the middle floor, in-between the informal realm of the ground floor and the formal administration of the upper floor, is situated the *archontariki* ('guesthouse'). In Vatopaidi, it consists of two buildings: the guest-house at the north-eastern wing, facing the Aegean Sea, and the recently renovated building with the rooms of the visitors at the south-western wing, facing the forest. The guesthouse was an old renovated building, where the priest-monk in the role of *archontaris* registered the new arrivals, instructed them of the rules of conduct, while his deacons welcomed them by offering Turkish delight and shot of *raki*, or coffee, and then showed them to their rooms. This part of the *archontariki* retained its warmth character, according to the traditional value of Athonian hospitality. It also had a beautiful balcony for the visitors, where they

could freely talk about politics and religion, or gossip while drinking coffee, and allowed to smoke cigarettes (something that is strictly forbidden in other monasteries such as the neighbouring Esfigmenou, *see* next chapter). There was also a second public phone for the visitors underneath the guesthouse, at the internal stairs that connected the ground floor to the chapel of St. George.

In contrast to the old building of the guesthouse at the north-eastern wing, the visitors' rooms situated at the western wing were recently rebuilt (from 1996 to 2000) with funding from the EU. Unlike a number of monasteries, including Esfigmenou, Vatopaidi has electricity and central heating throughout the year, produced by two electric generators. The building consisted of three floors connected with an elevator<sup>133</sup>. The rooms for the visitors were luxurious, with constant supply of hot water, and fresh bed covers and pillows that the monks changed everyday. The first and second floor had the biggest number of beds, as each room has up to eight beds. This area was reserved for common visitors. The third floor was far more luxurious, with big rooms of single or two beds, which are reserved for the rich and powerful 'friends' of the monastery, namely, donators, politicians, lawyers, journalists, Archimandrites, and even the Prince of Wales who is a known 'friend' of the abbot, and who between 2001 and 2004 visited Vatopaidi twice.

The collective work related to running the *archontariki* extended to all three floors. At the top floor, the elder responsible for the *archontariki* and for the hospitality given to visitors, worked together with the *archontaris*, the priest-monk in the role of 'guest-master' in the middle floor, and the *pyloros* ('porter') and *arsanaris* ('harbour-man'), checking the new entrances in the monastery in communication with the secretary, who had pre-arranged the number of visitors for each day. In the middle floor, the priest-monks in the role of *archontaris* and their deacons welcomed and accommodated the visitors, while on the ground floor, the monks who worked in the kitchen cooked and served their food, and washed their dishes, while another group of monks washed their bed sheets at the washing machines. Their accommodation also included the priest-

---

<sup>133</sup> For zealot monks, such as the monks of the neighbouring Esfigmenou, the introduction of electricity and the elevator of Vatopaidi 'betray' the 'true monastic life' [from personal communication with monks in Esfigmenou, November 2002]. Ironically, the company that installed the elevator in the *archontariki* of Vatopaidi is called *Draculis*

monk in the roles of *vemataris* responsible for narrating them the tradition of the monastery while exhibiting its holy relics every evening after the vesper.

Nowadays, the increasing tourist industry, based on the nostalgic belief that this is the last ‘virgin paradise’ on the planet, contradicts the tradition of virginity of the landscape. The number of visitors who want to pay their respects to the miraculous Garden has reached more than fifty thousand per year (*Macedonia* Greek newspaper, 28/8/2005, p.31) and the waiting time for a visit can last up to two months. Vatopaidi has 400 beds, but particularly on celebrations they are booked months in advance. I refer to visitors in the sense that they are also pilgrims, as access is restricted to non-Christians. But at the same time, visitors offer a steady income to the monastery, buying the pass to enter, and making *tamata*<sup>134</sup>, and donations. In this sense, the faster they move from one monastery to another (a fortnight maximum stay), the more visitors a monastery gets a year, and consequently, the more money it makes.

Inevitably, the rise of religious tourism raises the question of making Vatopaidi a hotel: ‘They will even let women come in for a swim’, as a monk of the rival monastery of Esfigmenou once put it [November 2002]. However, for the Vatopaidians this is not a ‘hotel’, but by taking care of their visitors they demonstrated the value of Athonian hospitality which obliges the monks to offer shelter to anyone in need<sup>135</sup>.

The impact of tourism was mostly evident in August, which is one of the four annual periods of abstinence, beginning with the ‘Progression of the Holy Cross’ (1/8 with the ‘old’ Julian calendar, 14/8 with the Gregorian calendar), and lasting for two weeks until

---

<sup>134</sup> *Tamata* means ‘Promises’: A number of pilgrims buy from the monastery’s shop, or bring with them, golden or silver plates in the shape of body parts (a silver leg for a broken leg, a golden heart for heart problems), which they place on the icon in exchange for a miracle, usually to heal a relative from a serious sickness or accident. The priest-monks function as mediators in the transaction between the faithful (material gift) and God (miraculous return). However, if the healing process is not successful, it is thought to be the ‘sins’ of the giver that have nullified the exchange, and in this way the ‘giver’ is always put in an unequal position towards the monks, who being the mediators do not hold any moral responsibility in the exchange.

<sup>135</sup> In the words of a priest-monk: ‘The difficulty today is not to hide in a cave, especially when the new monks do not have the abilities to be hermits, but to live here with the visitors to help them with their problems.. Here you can still separate *kosmiki* life in order to find the *charis* of God, even if you are not a monk, because here you learn about obedience in a monastery, not on a mountain’ [3/10/ 02]. Note here that with the term *kosmiki* or ‘worldly’ I refer to both secular visitors and the clergy, who are not monks, but arrive as pilgrims. It also refers to their way of secular life outside Athos. In the thesis, I sometimes use the term ‘*cosmopolitans*’ in order to highlight the root of the word *kosmos*, meaning ‘world’, and ‘cosmic’ meaning ‘worldly’. In this sense ‘*kosmikos*’ means a person of the world, and hence, the translation of ‘cosmopolitans’, meaning world-citizens.

the ‘Dormition (‘sleep’) of the Mother of God’ (15/8). Other important celebrations include the celebration of St Panteleimon (27/7), the ‘Holy Transfiguration’ (6/8), Kosmas the Aetolian who was a monk of Vatopaidi (24/8), the ‘Beheading of John the Forerunner’ (29/8), culminating with the Elevation of the Cross in mid-September (14/9). All these summer celebrations have particular importance for Vatopaidi because of the relics kept in the monastery: the girdle of the Virgin Mary and the eight miraculous icons depicting her, the relics of St Panteleimon and Kosma the Aetolian, and a piece from the Holy Cross), attracting thousands of visitors. As it is a period of abstinence, followed by a period of frenzy agricultural activity (late August to October), the monks are supposed to prepare in their cells, praying and self-reflecting (*automempsia*), for the coming celebrations after the ‘Dormition of Mary’ on August 15<sup>th</sup>. But it was also the busiest time of the year, with hundreds of visitors arriving day by day, as the monastery’s 400 beds were fully booked months in advance. I knew many families from Thessaloniki who went for a week to Ierissos for their summer holiday, and during which the husband left them for a few days for a two-day visit into Athos, while daughters and mothers were limited to a few hours trip with a boat that goes round the peninsula, allowing them to see the monasteries from a distance.

On Christmas, Easter, and summer breaks, Vatopaidi had two priest-monks in the role of guest-masters, in order to be able to deal with the increasing number of visitors. The rest of the year it had one guest-master, a post shared by all ten priest-monks, rotating shifts every two months. They were helped by a group of deacons, consisting of priest-deacons and younger monks working at the first floor, and novices who silently do the washing (dishes, bed sheets, and so on)<sup>136</sup>. Working at the guesthouse was not a task that the priest-monks enjoyed, as they often seemed to be disrupted by the constant questions and requirements of accommodating this large number of visitors from all over the world, with their different needs and reasons for visiting. The task consumed most of their private time, leaving them no time to pray.

---

<sup>136</sup> One of them was a young monk who had arrived in 1995 in the *companionship* from Cyprus: “This week I work at the guesthouse, picking up the telephone, and checking the guest list, under the supervision of priest-deacon M (no12). Wherever M goes, I go too, and he goes wherever the Abbot sends him. M works under the supervision of (Elder) A. So, first the Abbot gives an order to the Elder A, or directly to (the priest-deacon) M, and he then gives the order to me, and I transfer it to the novices who will carry this order. Each one of us has his own responsibility, because for example I cannot do the washing while picking up the telephone at the same time’ [personal communication with deacon working at the guesthouse, 16/8/2003]

As I have already discussed in chapter 6: section 6, and in respect to the tensions between monks of the same rank in August because of the great amount of visitors that arrive in the summer, their presence can be disruptive, either because of their ignorance of the rules, or because of their untidiness, and because of the fact that they cannot get used to the rhythm of monastic life in the few days they stay. They often interrupted the Divine Liturgy in the *catholicon*, because some of them forgot to switch off their mobile phones, on their way in the monastery as they were meant to do. Furthermore, the majority did not know the rules of conduct, jumping cues, talking while eating in the refectory, or generally annoying the monks with their requests. I remember a Sunday morning during the celebration of the ‘Nativity of Mary’ (22/9/02), I was prominently allowed to sit next to Joseph the Vatopaidian during the time of the veneration of the holy item by the congregation (*see* chapter 7: ‘Night Vigil’). In front of us was standing an uninvited visitor, as he should not have been standing there in the first place, but he should have been sitting at the outer area of the church, the *exonarthex*, kept for visitors<sup>137</sup>. The impervious visitor was imitating the prostrations the monks did during the veneration. At some point, as he was eagerly prostrating, his blue jean trousers loosened, leaving the area under his waist bared naked. This made the holy patron of Vatopaidi, Joseph the Vatopaidian, very angry, and he pointedly whispered between his teeth, as I was sitting next to him: ‘Look at him, showing his arse to God!’

The conduct of visitors was a big problem for the monks in respect to their rules, and so they had to contain it not only in terms of the division of space, but also according to the rules of the ‘virgin’ landscape. First of all, they needed permission from the abbot to spend a night in the monastery, and state the reason for their staying. Second, the same night they had to confess to one of the priest-monks. They also had to follow the monastic program, and to be fully dressed, wearing long sleeves and trousers at all times, even in their beds, and even in the boiling summers, in order not to pollute the landscape with their nakedness. Swimming is strictly forbidden on the Mount, though I did hear stories of people swimming at the beautiful sand beaches. Their mobile phones had to be switched off, as there were two public phones, one inside the *archontariki*,

---

<sup>137</sup> At the beginning of my fieldwork, although I clearly stated that I was doing a research on the traditions and practices of Vatopaidian life, I was still seen as a potential monk, and that is why I was allowed to sit next to Joseph. In later months I was put back to the *exonarthex* where I belonged.

and the other outside the monastery, near the huts of the lay workers, to be used instead. Furthermore, visitors were not allowed to take any photographs, unless they have the permission of the abbot. Visitors rarely break the rules, and if they do they are black listed by the central authority at the village of Karyes.

Second, they were kept separately from the monks, by forbidding them to go to near the monks' rooms at the southern wing, limiting their access in the northern-western wing, in areas situated near the main gate, including the guest-house, the monastery's shop, the garden, the *catholicon*, and refectory. Furthermore, on days of abstinence, when the brotherhood dispersed into seven to nine groups in the winter and summer solstices respectively (*see Appendix 3.5: 'Weekly liturgical program'*), the visitors were kept separately in the chapel of *St Zoni* ('Holy Girdle'), situated right in front of the entrance to the guest-house rooms. The chapel is dedicated to the monastery's most sacred item, the belt of the Virgin Mary, which most of them came to see. In this way, the Vatopaidians kept the family environment of the small liturgies in the chapels only for their brothers, particularly for the younger monks who needed to concentrate. By contrast, the priest-monk with the responsibility of the guesthouse also performed the noisy liturgy in the chapel of the Holy Girdle.

In contrast to the luxurious environment of the visitors' rooms, the monk's rooms situated opposite to the visitors, at the southern wing, were of much poorer condition, an old wooden bed with a blanket, a table with the notebook to write the sins for confession, and an old stove, and *without electricity*. Visitors were not allowed in that area, so that they did not disturb the monks' privacy. The separation of monks from visitors extended to the way and spaces of washing the bed sheets. The ground floor underneath the visitors' rooms was the washing and ironing area for the bed sheets of visitors, using a pair of washing machines and an ironing machine. By contrast, the monks washed their own clothes separately, at southern-eastern wing under their cells. They did not use any machines or hot water, but hand-washed them with fresh water coming directly through a pipe from the surrounding hills. From their point of view, they are not using the machines for their own life, which according to them remains 'the same as it was a thousand years ago' [from several discussions with monks and visitors].

### 8.3 Confessing the ‘world’ (*kosmos*)

Often in the mornings, I was assigned to help at the washing machines. Cleaning the dirt of hundreds of visitors was a punishing task. Most of the monks working in this area were of lower rank. Some were assigned to this job as a kind of punishment, such as a Cretan monk who a few years before had been expelled from the monastery of Meghisti Lavra for stealing. The abbot had accepted him in Vatopaidi, giving him a second chance, on the condition that he would work hard, and constantly repent for his sin. Significantly, I never worked with a Cypriot monk, but most of the times there were a Serbian and a Greek monk, with the help of three Romanian novices who had only recently arrived in 2002. We washed and ironed every day hundreds of bed sheets and pillows for the newcomers. As in the kitchen, the work was divided into a morning and an evening shift. If there were too many visitors, the monks who worked in the morning missed the end of the Divine Liturgy at dawn, as they had to start washing to make up the number of bed sheets for the day, while the monks who worked in the evening missed the vesper. By changing shifts every two nights between each other (morning/ evening), the monks of both groups were able to follow both liturgies.

But at the same time, because washing the dirt of visitors is not a sacred task, and the washing machines room is not a sacred space, it is one of the few working spaces where the lower Vatopaidians can joke and gossip about visitors as they were not supervised. They often joked about the bed sheets of the secular visitors for being stained, implying that they have been masturbating. Visitors were thought to be incapable of dealing with sexual dreams: ‘Often the dirt of the worldly mind leaves stains left on the sheet, as visitors are thought to be easy targets of the devil, allowing ‘dirty thoughts of the mind to pollute their hearts’ [personal communication with priest-monk 12/5/03]. In this context, the dirt of the stained bed sheets of the visitors implied that they were masturbating at the same time when the monks were beginning their ‘private canon’ in their cells in the evening. Accordingly, the monks believe that secular visitors ‘smell bad depending on the degree of their sins’ (Ephraim Filotheitis 2008: 245-246)<sup>138</sup>. By

---

<sup>138</sup> ‘One day Father Ephraim of Katounakia was walking behind a cosmopolitan. A dirty smell and stench came to him, and he remembered the time when Elder Joseph (the Hesychast) had told him: ‘That’s right my child. Both the people of the world (*kosmikoi*) but also sinful monks, smell bad depending on the degree of their sins’ (Joseph the Hesychast quoted in Ephraim Filotheitis 2008: 245-246)

contrast, charismatic monks are thought to have a ‘divine odour’, similar to the smell of the sacred relics of saints [12/5/03].

For this reason, the first thing the Vatopaidians ask a visitor is if he has confessed prior to his visit, and if not, it is requested of him to do so immediately. This request is necessary for allowing visitors to sleep in the monastery, drawing a line between those who have confessed and can stay in the monastery, and those who have to leave. Vatopaidi has ten priest-monks (including the abbot) who confess visitors. Despite the traditional rules and practices of repentance, which are the same for everyone, including prayer, prostrations, fasting (Sarris 2000), and if necessary, exclusion from the Holy Communion and the church, depending on the degree of the sin, how each priest approaches contemporary controversial issues, such as sexual intercourse before marriage, differs in terms of strictness and economy. I remember one morning I overheard at the secretary’s office a conversation between two priests arguing about the confession of a Bulgarian visitor. I understood from their discussion that the priest, acting in the role of spiritual father, had asked the visitor to separate from girlfriend, or get married: ‘Since he knows it is a sin to make love before marriage, why is he continuing to do so?’ he told the other priest. But the other priest did not agree with his approach:

‘You have to be careful with his (the visitor’s) confessions for two reasons: first you might affect their relationship that could end up happily in the church, and second, you will make the girlfriend to stay away from the Church. And you, being his spiritual father, how are you going to explain all this mess to God, when you go to confess to the abbot?’ [Vatopaidi 20/9/02]

In this context, economy refers to the mild means of approaching those who have recently arrived from the secular world, in order to gradually bring them into the Vatopaidian rule, and not to scare them away with the strictness of the ‘virginity!’ of monastic life. As the Abbot Ephraim writes: ‘Don’t forget that we live in an era of economy, meaning that we have to be economic towards the human being (*economoume ton anthropo*), because as we know the people today do not have the same strength as they used to in the old times... the spiritual father has to have the ability to penetrate the heart of each man, in order to ask him for things that he can carry and practice’ (Ephraim 2001: 118-119). Thus, by showing economy toward the visitors, each priest is able to develop an intimate spiritual relation with his spiritual

child, offering him his advice about matters regarding worldly life. In advising the visitor, the priest-monk becomes a kind of ‘identity expert’, trying to resolve the ‘ontological insecurities’ in the visitor’s life (as in Bauman 1998: 68), and conversely, the visitor is morally obliged to return to Vatopaidi for more confessions, as the priest becomes his ‘spiritual father’ for life. In exchange, the visitor has to listen and learn, and in return, to offer his support by donating something to the monastery. These changes, both in the role of the monks as mediators between the world of the living and the world of god, and impact of religious tourism in the life inside Vatopaidi, further highlight the transformation of the monasteries’ economies from agricultural and ‘local’ to the ‘capitalist global economy’ (Iossifides 1991:136).

This transformation is a re-adoption of the spiritual relationship between ‘father’ (priest) and ‘child’ (visitor), through which the confessor gains an advantage in respect to his relationship with the visitor. The advantage the confessor has, begins from the very moment of a visitor’s arrival to the monastery, and the *kerasma* (‘treat’) offered to him by the guest-master, including olives, bread, *halva*, Turkish delight, and some coffee or *raki* (a type of ouzo produced by the monks) to help them gain some strength following their long journey to the monastery. This is much more than just hospitality, as it establishes a relationship between host and visitor that looks ‘reciprocal’, but carries much deeper functions: ‘...the treat (*kerasma* or *trattarisma*<sup>139</sup>) establishes a fleeting advantage for the giver, an advantage which the latter is expected to redress in the ordinary course of village interaction. Yet the same act of establishing a temporary obligation (*ypohreosi*) between host and guest also equalizes the relationship between newcomer and the rest of the company. Once he has sat down and accepted his treat, he is on an equal footing with the others and so can be admitted to their more immediate contests over dice or cards’ (Herzfeld 1988: 155).

In this context, Bourdieu observed that it is ‘the manner (*form*) of giving, must be such that the outwards forms of the act present a practical denial of the content of the act... inspired by pure respect for the customs and conventions recognized by the group’ (1977: 194). In practice, the strong position of the priest-monks, as they run the monastery on a day-day basis, is that of being *mediators* between the secular sinful past

---

<sup>139</sup> ‘*Tratta*’ also refers to fishing, and this term shows that for the monks *trattarisma* means to ‘fish’ more faithful and bring them into the Orthodox monastic life.

of the visitors and their promise of redemption in heaven. The priest-monks' realm is thus 'naturally' the middle floor of the guest-house, in-between the sacred ground floor and the top profane floor of Vatopaidi. Accordingly, as we have seen in previous chapters their responsibilities were divided into two kinds of activities: *internally*, by being the mediators between the upper floor of the elders and the ground floor of the monks' working area; and *externally*, by being the mediators between the monks and the secular visitors.

In sum, confession puts the visitor, who is left exposed by opening his heart and private world to the confessor, in a lower position, in a similar way to the parent-child relationship. For instance, in the previous chapters I discussed the function of confession in bringing and retaining order, by connecting the individual monk to the obligations of first serving his elders (personal obedience), and second the daily program. In this context, Joseph the Hesychast's introduction of *frequent* confessions and Holy Communion readopted in the context of religious tourism to externally influence public life (confession as an internal practice of order, and an external practice to increase influence on powerful 'cosmopolitans'). It is therefore a time strategy (as in Bourdieu 1977: 6-9, 29), as frequent confessions oblige the visitors to return to Vatopaidi, since some of those figures become 'spiritual children' of the abbot, as they often travelled to Vatopaidi to confess. In return, they offer to him their 'friendship', that is, financial and political support outside Athos – 'as it was a thousand years ago'.

## PART II: VIRGINITY REVISITED

### 8.4 The Holy Girdle of the Virgin Mary

Most of the visitors that I talked to, visited Vatopaidi to venerate its most sacred item: the Holy Girdle of the Virgin Mary. The huge attraction of the Girdle comes because of its miraculous reputation, including the collective healing of the entire island of Crete from a plague in 1821, the cleansing of Istanbul from the cholera epidemic in 1864, and the curing of the plague of Madytos in Asia Minor in 1894<sup>140</sup>. On a private level, the

---

<sup>140</sup> The Girdle was given as a gift to Vatopaidi by the emperor Theodosius I 'the Great' (347-395AC, emperor 379-395AC), as a gift for the miraculous rescue of his son Arcadius from a shipwreck at the site of Vatopaidi (see chapter 3). According to the monks, the Girdle has travelled to Cappadokia and

belt has been associated with exorcisms (such as of the demonized wife of the Emperor Leo the Wise, who in reciprocation embroidered the Girdle with the gold thread), curing of terminally ill people, and even the resurrection of a dead boy [personal communication with deacon in the role of *prosmonarios* 30/9/02].

Figure 8b<sup>141</sup>



The girdle consists of two pieces: three threads taken from her vest and a belt made out of camel hair, which were allegedly knitted by *Theotokos*, the ‘Mother of God’. The vest is called *esthitos* (that translates as ‘vest’, as well as, ‘sense’ and ‘feeling’), and it

---

Constantinople in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, where it was kept until the Greek revolution of 1821. After the destruction of the monastery by the Ottoman army it ended to the British Consul, based on the island of Santorini. The legend has it that the locals of the island managed to gather the money required to buy the belt from the British, and return it to Vatopaidi via the monastery of Dionysiou [personal communication with *vemataris* (‘step-man’, sacristan) 22/9/02]. In this way, the belt is also connected to the foundation of the Greek state in itself, as its purchase from the British united an entire island, becoming a national symbol of Greek identity.

<sup>141</sup> Belt of the Theotokos taken from: <http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2009/06/30/a-pilgrim%e2%80%99s-guide-to-the-great-and-holy-monastery-of-vatopaidi-8/> and ([http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joseph\\_the\\_Hesychast](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joseph_the_Hesychast), in *Facebook*, or at the monastery’s site <http://vatopaidi.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/miraculous-icons-holy-relics-of-the-holy-monastery-of-vatopedi>, [http://www.pravoslaviето.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide\\_vatopedi.htm](http://www.pravoslaviето.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide_vatopedi.htm) [last visit 10/3/2011])

is celebrated on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, while the belt itself is celebrated on August 31<sup>st</sup>. The two pieces are kept in a silver box portraying the ‘Dormition (‘sleep’) of Mary’, which is celebrated on August 15<sup>th</sup>, and which is the second most important date in the Orthodox calendar after Easter. One morning, the guest-master brought the belt out of its box to show it to me, as a reward for helping him at the guest-house. He tenderly asked me to ‘touch it; on this (fabric) Christ laid his head’ he said with excitement. He urged me to feel the liquid that ‘never stops springing out of the belt’, the *Holy Moiré* smelling of flowers:

---

‘This belt is miraculous. I have been a monk for more than fifteen years, and it has never stopped producing this divine aroma. And not only the belt, but also every single relic (of the saints kept in the sanctuary) has its special odour. For example, the head of St Andrew and the ear of St Chrysostome have their own unique odour. This is the nature of the Holy Spirit. If you take a look at these things from closer, you will find them to be the source of a liquid, which is like oil, and which we call the *Holy Moiré*. Some of our icons have even cried blood, for example (the icon) of the Slaughtered Mary. And these are not lies, as some say that we make up miracles. Why should we do that? We have nothing to earn, because we are monks and we have no property of our own’ [priest-monk 30/9/03]

The *Holy Moiré*, the ‘pure’ liquid that is miraculously produced by the Girdle, is thought to be a product of the ‘nature’ of this Holy Monastery, a symbol of virginity. In the context of the *Avaton*, the prohibition of all females from the peninsula, the belt symbolically replaces the female body’s vaginal discharge, in the same way the monastery with its tradition and ‘spiritual’ way of life replaces the womb of the biological mothers of the monks with the Virgin Mary. The *Moiré*’s reproductive powers are manifested by the ‘miracles’ in a number of miraculous stories of women who became pregnant, aspiring to Mary’s own miraculous pregnancy, being both a virgin and a mother, which was announced by Gabriel to her on the day of the celebration of Vatopaidi (‘Annunciation of Mary’, March 25<sup>th</sup>). The reputation of the Girdle brings into the monastery a number of visitors who make donations, or *tamata* (‘promises’), which are golden ornaments of body parts (a leg, a hand, a heart) in exchange for a miraculous healing. The bigger its reputation, the more income the monastery makes from these exchanges, in which the monks are mediators between god and the material world.

## 8.5 *Virginity on Sale*

‘The monastery is like a business; just like a business advertises its trade, so do we. We advertise the treasures of our monastery, the holy girdle and the relics of the saints, the Holy Cross and the miraculous icons of Mary, to sell the spirit and advertise the Orthodox way of life’ [extract from abbot’s speech in the refectory, 21/9/02]

Nowadays, the Vatopaidians use the *Holy Moiré* emanating from the belt to bless hundreds of white ribbons, which are relevant to, and seen by, women, having particular healing effects on them (as with the copies of the icon of *Svetsaritsa*, see chapter 3, section 9). According to rumours spread on the internet, and in discussions among the faithful, the miraculous product had a particular impact on women who could not get pregnant. After holding the ribbon and praying, many women allegedly witnessed an apparition of Mary, who sat on the side of the bed, entering their private world. In turn, the woman’s private life becomes public property, as the revelations and apparitions of Mary discussed in internet sites publicly confirm the faith of the believer. The miraculous pregnancies echo the tradition of Vatopaidi which is dedicated to the ‘Annunciation of Mary’. The miracles *imitate* her ‘Annunciation’, reproducing it over and over again through the source of the girdle.

Marcel Mauss (1950/ 1990) and Alfred Gell (1998) discussed sacred objects and artworks as ‘social agents’ and ‘moral entities’ (Mauss 1990: 30, and Gell 1998: 21), which, similar to living entities, incorporate a variety of social relations within a particular moral background, becoming the active means of communication through exchange (Mauss 1990: 55-57), and collective agents through style (Gell 1998: 153). In Mauss’s account, gifts have their own life and vocation, possessing ‘individuality’ and a ‘name’, ‘qualities’ and ‘productive power’ (as in Mauss 2002: 56). Marshall Sahlins also highlighted the life of sacred objects associated with ‘fertility and productivity [which] were the essential attributes to this ‘vitality’’ (1972: 167). This point was further developed by Gell (1998: 143-154) in his notion of ‘the rites of consecration’ in Hindu and Buddhist practices, which describe ritualistic procedures of inserting a ‘life-substance’ into an image or an item, stylistically making them ‘encultured beings’ (1998: 153). As in Mauss, Gell’s material is used to substantiate his concept of the ‘social agency’ of images and holy items (Gell 1998: 16-19), in creating networks of

communication and stylistic substance via a particular item, a ‘passive agent’ in his terms.

The process of reproducing the ‘spiritual’ powers of the girdle takes place through the blessing of the ribbons, usually performed by the *archontaris*. He elegantly touched each ribbon to the girdle while elaborating a special prayer. Then he placed each blessed ribbon in a box together with the rest of the blessings of the day. From the church, the deacon in the role of *prosmonarios* took the blessed ribbons to the first floor of the monastery, where visitors, novices and pilgrims helped with their packaging in small plastic bags. Then the product was moved to the second floor to be distributed to the market through the Internet and a network of churches and religious shops in Greece, and beyond. The monks used email, mobile phones, jeeps, and boats for the distribution of the miraculous ribbons to the faithful. The production of the miraculous item reveals two opposite hierarchical structures functioning at the same time in the daily life of the monastery (*figure 8c*).

**Figure 8c: Division of Sacred Space in Vatopaidi**

Outside the monastery: <b>Towards the Profane World</b>		Visitors
↑		
Top Floor: Abbot’s Office, Council of Elders, secretary, and Computer rooms		
Middle Floor: Guest-house	<b>In-between the two worlds</b>	
Ground Floor: Church		
Inside the monastery: <b>Towards the Sacred Self</b>		Sacred
Product	↓	

The ribbons move from the ground floor of the monastery, where the sacred source is kept in the most sacred ground of the monastery, the main church, to the first floor of the northern wing of the monastery where the guest-house is located. After they are packaged they are taken to the top floor of the monastic building with the computer rooms from where the ribbons are exported. The two opposite movements also illustrate the double life of the monastery: on the one hand, the spiritual life taking place in the night through practices of faith, and moving inwards each visitor (and monk) towards the ‘sacred self’ (Csordas, 1994: 276); and the other, the outward movement of the ribbons towards the open market. These movements appear to illustrate Ray’s and Sayer’s definition of the new cultural economies in terms of ‘culture’ that comes from

inside us (1999: 5), and ‘economics’, ‘which are social, aesthetic, and geohistorically-specific’ (Ibid: 6). In this context, miraculous products, such as the ribbons, form an ‘economy of qualities’ (Callon, Meadel, Rabeharisoa 2005) based on ‘the collaboration between supply and demand in a way that enables consumers to participate actively in the qualification of products’ (Ibid: 45). Nowadays, the number of reported miracles has rapidly increased, which together with the introduction of the internet in the monastery by the younger generation of monks, make the belt a good source of profit for the monastery as a religious institution.

In this way, on the basis of the exclusion of women from the peninsula, the Girdle becomes a sacred source of profit for the monks, who, by using new technologies, are mediating between women and god, receiving their *tamata*, and other donations, on the basis of their exclusion. Steward (1991: 81-84) highlighted two important points in discussing the *tamata*: first that ‘the relation between humans and saints is one of negotiation, pleading, and waiting’ in which the term ‘reciprocity’ does not actually reflect the power play between god’s representatives (the monks) and the faithful, as the *tamata* are based on waiting for a miracle to happen, thus, putting the faithful in a subordinated position to god and the monks (*see* also Bourdieu’s critique of exchange as ‘reciprocity’, 1977: 6-9, and Castells on the value of time in the global ‘casino’ economy, 2000: 465-7). The visitors’ subordinated position is evident not only by their exclusion from certain sacred areas (the sanctuary, the altar in the church, the oven, the cemetery), but also by the rule of confession, as in order to spend a night in the monastery they are obliged to confess their sins to one of the priest-monks, who then becomes their ‘spiritual father’ for life.

Second, miraculous healings and the stories surrounding them involve the ‘community as a whole’ (Stewart 1991: 83). Accordingly, the successful selling of the ribbons depends on the spreading of the miraculous stories of the women affected. These private stories become public data, forming a global electronically connected religious ‘collective consciousness’ (Durkheim, 1965: 21-6) that expands through the internet in hundreds of networks of religious sites [more than 500 in my last account, March 2011]. In this context, the use of the internet to spread and amplify the moral messages attached to the vocation of each icon, illustrate Gell’s concept of ‘mimesis’ (1998: 99-101), in which ‘sympathetic magic’ (Frazer’s term 1922) is mechanically amplified into

new forms of mass production<sup>142</sup>. For Gell, magic is a type of an ‘ideal technology’, using heavy symbolism and metaphorical devices which are not far from the art of advertising. He defined the process of magic as: ‘...what you have when you do *without a physical theory on the grounds of its redundancy, relying on the idea, which is perfectly practicable...*’ (1998: 101).

Figure 8d: Internet Advert

**‘LIGHT UP A CANDLE WITH YOUR CREDIT CARD!’**



‘Enter the monastery to pay your respects to the Holy Treasures  
Enter the *Katholikon* in the monastery of Vatopedi, one of the most ornate churches in Mount Athos  
The monk’s prayer is the *Kyrie Eleison*, ‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me’  
[From <http://www.ouranoupoli.com/athos/church.html> [last visit 18/2/2011]

<sup>142</sup> Here Gell referred to the famous work of Walter Benjamin on photography in the ‘age of mechanical reproduction’ (Benjamin 1936/ 2009: 228-259).

Comaroff's article on the new religious 'economies of the occult' (2000: 310), argued that the magic of capitalism (exemplified by the 'casino economy', to make money instantly out of nothing) has re-invented a new religious market, which expands worldwide via new technologies, such as the internet. In this context, the 'sacred' becomes a commodity, reproduced through the spiritual blessing of common items, such as the copies of miraculous icons, into thousands of miraculous products, which are produced within the community, and distributed through a 'meta-network' of 'individuals, activities and locales around the world' (Castells 1996: 508). These products are sold in internet sites, such as 'Monastery Products on Line' at [www.monasteryproducts.org](http://www.monasteryproducts.org), among more than 500 sites, and even accounts in *Facebook* <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/geroniosif> and the monastery's official site at <http://www.vatopaidi.wordpress.com> [last visit 3/3/2011]. In the internet, old traditions are constantly re-invented, as illustrated by the production of the miraculous ribbons that spring out of the sacred source of the Girdle through the rumours. The Girdle is thus a source of a twofold profit: first it attracts more visitors to the monastery, and second, it sells in the market the miraculous powers of Mary's virginity, as illustrated by her 'Annunciation' to which Vatopaidi is dedicated, on the basis of the exclusion of women from the peninsula. This virtual transgression of the holy borders raises further moral questions since it contradicts the tradition of virginity in itself by enabling women to come in contact, through their computer screens, with the sacred.

### **8.6 External Economy: The Issue of *Metochia***

On my way to Vatopaidi, a local man at the village of Ierissos from where I took the boat, when he heard that I was going into Athos, he immediately pointed to the trouble Vatopaidi has also been recently in Greek public life. He told me that the Vatopaidians are not 'real monks', and that they make money for themselves to retire in luxurious isolated cells in front of the sea, which are equipped with electricity, heating, and many other comforts. This was a view shared by many people I talked to outside the monastery, both visitors and monks, who all saw suspiciously (if not with jealousy) the rapid economic revival of Vatopaidi, as morally contradicting the 'real' monastic values embodied in the central value of virginity. They all referred to a scandal

regarding a secret set of illegal exchanges of land and properties outside Athos (*metochia*), between Vatopaidi and members of the Greek government, against the public protests of local councils, who claimed that their land was stolen from them by the Vatopaidians, who used Byzantine and Ottoman endorsements to claim it, and then rent it, sell it, or exchange it for nothing with luxurious estate properties in Athens and Thessaloniki, with the ‘blessing’ of the Greek government<sup>143</sup>.

In 1998, the Abbot and the council of elders of Vatopaidi began a legal process against the Greek state, claiming back lake Vistonida in northern Greece according to old Ottoman rulings. Its claims were followed by three other monasteries, Koutloumousiou, Xenophontos, and Dionysiou<sup>144</sup>, all belonging to spiritual children of Joseph the Hesychast. Ten years later, in January 9 2008, six women, led by the MP Amanatidou-Pashalidou, broke the rule of *Avaton* (the prohibition of women from entering the peninsula) jumping over the fence at the borders with the secular town Ierissos (*figure 8e*). They were protesting against Vatopaidi's claim over 80,000 square metres of land situated at the highly commercial area of Chalkidiki, which included a number of shops, residencies, and hotels. Their symbolic move brought serious protests from all corners of Greek society (*figure 8f*). The women's bravery revealed the political and financial involvement of the monasteries in secular life, which were religiously veiled under the monastic values of poverty, humility, and harmony, based on the separateness of their sacred tradition from our profane life.

---

143 For instance, on my way to Vatopaidi a local man at the kiosk of the village of Ierissos told me angrily: ‘The Vatopaidians eat well. They own half of Karyes. To buy a house at Karyes costs more than 300,000,000 drachmas (about 100,000 euro), so they take the money for the EU and buy the Holy Mount. With the Devil's money they want to make it a hotel, to let women in and allow holidaymakers to swim. Do you know what the Vatopaidian Elders do with the money? They buy houses outside Athos on the coast, to go for their summer and winter holidays. And they recently bought a luxurious building at the port of Thessaloniki, and I've heard that they have even bought half of the Red Square in Moscow. We are talking about billions, all paid by the Masons of the EU and the traitors of KEDE’ (the Greek governing body for national heritages) [19/9/02]

144 Koutloumousios, 4,500 square meters in the highly tourist area of Toroni, including a number of hotels. Vatopaidi: 8,608 square meters in Stageira-Akanthou area, and 12 fields at Kallikrateia, near Thessaloniki. Xenophontos: 53,000 square metres of Sithonia, Chalkidiki's middle peninsula. Dionysiou: 15,400 square metres in Ormelia. All four monasteries have Abbots who are ‘grandchildren’ of the charismatic Father Joseph the Hesychast of the Family of Josepheoi.



Figure 8e: Women breaking the *Avaton* in protest for the 'stolen land', January 2008



Figure 8f: Public protests over 4,500 square kilometres of disputed land, Thessalonica Court, 15/1/2008

The local citizens of the areas disputed by the monastery would hardly describe their relationship to the Vatopaidians as reciprocal. Athos is a 'gift' to Greece in Mauss's sense: a 'gift' and a 'poison' at the same time (2004: 81), being both the 'spirit' of the Greek Orthodoxy, and a burden to the Greek state. The rivalry between Vatopaidi and local councils goes both back to the inclusion of Athos in the Greek state in 1912, and directly relates to the current problems of the Greek economy (I wrote this only recently in 2011). As already discussed, much of the income of the monasteries comes from renting, selling, or exchanging properties and land that was given to them in pre-Greek times, by Byzantine emperors, European Kings, and Ottoman Sultans. Following the inclusion of Athos in Greece, and the two World Wars, the monasteries lost all their properties in socialist countries, but retained their properties in non-socialist ones, such as Greece. In the Greek media, the protesters highlighted the fact that the claims were based on Ottoman contracts, which should have been omitted following the inclusion of Athos in Greece. In other words, the Greek public pays for Athos, because it is thought to be a living relic that proves the linearity of Greece to a 'Greek' Byzantine past, which however is based on a feudal system that should have been abandoned with the foundation of democracy.

Following these protests, further revelations came to light in the Greek media focusing on the exchange of Lake Vistonida with highly expensive properties in Greek cities. In August 2008, Greek newspapers named the involvement of a number of ministers and government agents in handing to Vatopaidi, almost for nothing, land that costs over 60 million euro (Greek newspaper *Eleutherotypia* 20/9/2008 at [www.enet.gr](http://www.enet.gr)). It was revealed that the prosecutors involved, were 'spiritual children' of the Abbot himself (*Eleutherotypia* 19/9/2008), and even the Public Prosecutor had taken trips to the Greek islands in the company of the Abbot, days before he was meant to make a decision over the Vatopaidian claims regarding the lake in 2002 (*Eleutherotypia* 17/9/2008). It was also revealed that the properties given to them were then sold to two offshore American companies, which belonged to investors and lawyers acting on behalf of the monastery itself. This brought to light new accusations of 'dirty money laundering'.



*Figure 8g:* Picture of Abbot Ephraim outside the Greek Parliament, after he testified regarding the scandal. The picture was taken from the Greek newspaper *Eleutherotypia* (February 2009)

In response to the crisis, the representatives of the monasteries of the Holy Committee, and the Patriarch Vartholomeos, asked the abbot to resign from his position, which he did in December 2008. Furthermore, the Greek state prosecutor has called the abbot and the head of Treasury of Vatopaidi, along with a number of Greek officials, agents, and lawyers, to be tried in 2009 (*Eleutherotypia* 18/5/09). However, the abbot strategically only resigned from his administrative authority, as the head of the council of elders, but did not resign from his ‘spiritual duties’ (*pneumatika kathikonta*), essentially remaining the father of the community, while another elder replaced him as the head of the Vatopaidian council. Here, we see a practical application of the structural separation of administrative from spiritual relationships, tasks, times, spaces, and hierarchies: by referring to this separation, which is an ‘economic’ (in the sense of compromising as introduced by Joseph the Hesychast, in chapter 4) interpretation of the value of virginity, referring to the separation of spiritual from materialist life, which are reunited through the sacred in a complementary relationship, the abbot was able to retain his ‘informal’ position despite public statements of the opposite. Following the revelations however, he indeed retired spending hours in his cell praying (according to a recent telephone call with an anonymous monk).

## 8.7 Conclusion

A warm summer morning, in the cosy secretary's office at the top floor of the monastery, the monks were much friendlier than usual, sharing from a bottle of *Southern Comfort* they had kept aside. Despite drinking in the office, they were keen to highlight the separation of the traditional way of life from 'cosmopolitan engagements' [6/8/03]<sup>145</sup>. In the moral context of the collective, the money and new technologies introduced in Vatopaidi in the last twenty years was not in the personal interest of individual monks, but for the collective interest to preserve, restore, and develop of the monastery as a heritage site. By keeping computers, visitors, mobile phones, and lay workers separately in terms of space and timetables, they are able to keep contact with the world from which the revival of both the spiritual and material life of the monastery depends. Furthermore, the priest-monk was keen to highlight that the separation of 'spiritual' (*pneumatika*) from 'materialist' (*illistika*) matters extends to (or rather, is based on) the morality of the self in relation to the community: 'We still follow the thousand year old traditions, but we also use technology to preserve the spiritual life of the monastery. Without money the monastery will collapse. We have a responsibility in preserving its premises. But the two are *separated*. (For example) the machines are used for the good of the monastery, not for our *personal interest*' [3/10/ 02]. Here, the Vatopaidian morality of 'economy', which was rooted to the very re-invention of communal life by Joseph the Hesychast (*see* chapter 4: Part I), enables the monk to detach from the 'materialist world' in order to re-unify and reconnect to it, in the same way *they try* to keep their liturgical life based on 'silence' (*hesychasm*) untouched by the contact with secular visitors.

However, the rapid revival of Vatopaidi, and the means by which it was achieved, is a point for which they have been morally criticized by monks of other monasteries, such as the new zealots of the neighbouring Esfigmenou. In my discussions with them, they

---

In the words of the monastery's secretary: 'You see us joking and laughing and you might wonder: 'what are these monks doing?' laughing and surfing the internet. But we are very strict with our *typiko* according to the rules that were taught to each one of us by our Fathers. They say we make money for ourselves. But according to the rule of poverty, we have no money or property inside our rooms. We share everything, gifts and responsibilities... those who wish to be involved in administrative matters, if they have the skills to do so, are free to volunteer, just like our abbot (did) by accepting his position' [6/8/03] *Read* entire interview in *Appendix no2.3*: 'Selected Interviews from Vatopaidi'

picked on the issue of funding that Vatopaidi annually receives from the EU as a heritage site, and the ‘compromises’ the Vatopaidians will have to make: ‘They will make Vatopaidi a hotel for tourists and their families in’ a monk of Esfigmenou told me [3/11/02] in response to talks taking place in the EU regarding the legality of the *Avaton* that year (2002-2003). In response to the accusations, the Vatopaidians were keen to highlight the responsibility to preserve the monastery’s heritage, and in this way re-connecting the separated realms of spirituality and materiality under a collective aim: the return to the glorious Vatopaidian days of a Byzantine past. In this context, financial security is necessary ‘in order for spiritual life to flourish’ [priest-monk 28/4/03]<sup>146</sup>.

It is this dependence to the material world, which I investigated in the previous chapter both on a personal and a collective level in the daily life of the monastery, in which the paradox of monastic life is historically manifested. The reproduction of miraculous ribbons for instance illustrates how the tradition of Vatopaidi is not only used to separate the ‘virgin’ from ‘worldly life’, but also to economically and politically reconnect to it, on the basis of the Vatopaidian moral logic. The contradiction of moralities (internal/external) is manifested in tensions taking place at the meeting points between the internal and external realms of Vatopaidian life, such as the *archontariki* inside Vatopaidi where monks meet visitors, or the *metochia* outside Vatopaidi referring to land and property disputed between monks and locals. In these terms, following the revelations over the Vatopaidian scandal regarding the properties claimed by the monastery in Greece, the abbot of Vatopaidi resigned from his ‘official’ post, but indeed kept his ‘informal’ position as the ‘father’ of the brotherhood. As discussed in chapter 7, the abbot’s position is not authoritarian, but that of *self-sacrifice*, in imitation to the Crucifixion of Christ, because he devotes most of his time in running Vatopaidi, by taking care of the material needs of the entire brotherhood, and by functioning as a shield to external pressures from the Greek media regarding the illegal exchanges between Vatopaidi and members of the Greek government of land that belonged to local councils. Therefore, the terms by which the monks morally judge their abbot reveal an absolutely opposite understanding of the tensions between the

---

<sup>146</sup> Read entire interview of priest-monk in *Appendix 2.2: ‘Selected Interviews from Vatopaidi’*

Vatopaidian monks and the Greek local councils, as well as a contrasting way in politically evaluating the situation.

For the monks, the abbot works for the good of the community, and for the impersonal and symbolic entity, the ‘monastery’, perceived as a living body. This was the abbot’s obligation both to the monastery and to his monks, not to serve his personal interest. By contrast, the local people of Ierissos, as well as rival monks such as of the monastery of Esfigmenou, all highlighted *self-interest* in his actions. In other words, from the insiders’ point of view, the abbot’s activities are an example of self-sacrifice, but from the outsiders’ point of view of self-interest (also in Herzfeld 1985)<sup>147</sup>. In this context, ‘the ethic of honour is the self-interest ethic of social formations, groups, or classes in whose patrimony symbolic capital figures prominently’ (Bourdieu 1977: 48). This game is played on the basis of a morally rigid separation of internal (private) and external (public) worlds, which in the hands of the monks becomes a strategy of power and identity between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.

In the next and final chapter, I will be comparing Vatopaidi’s internal regime and external vocation to their neighbouring and rival monastery of Esfigmenou, which represents a contrasting and competing view of monastic life. The most salient differences over ‘matters of faith’ (*themata pisteos*) are a contrasting relationship to the landscape, different sets of priorities and understanding of the aims and nature of monastic life, and a contestation of the same tradition based on a different way of counting time. Externally, Esfigmenou has a very different attitude to Vatopaidi towards recent changes on the Mount, such as its attitude to the importation of technology, the rise of religious tourism, and impact of EU funding. It maintains an extremist political agenda within the Orthodox world, and consequently, a different set of motivations for becoming a monk in this particular monastery. Here too, the contrast between internal and external is fundamental to the identity of Esfigmenou, even though it is approached as an explicit criticism of Vatopaidi.

---

<sup>147</sup> Herzfeld (1985) has shown in his ethnography on animal theft in isolated Cretan villages the *habitus* of animal theft is a game of prestige in which self-interest (*eghoismos*, translated ‘selfishness, egoism’) is a kind of initiative ‘on behalf of the collectivity’ (Herzfeld 1985: 11), and animal theft is the ‘necessary improvisation that defines excellence’ (*Ibid*: 139-140, and in Bourdieu 1977: 8).

## Chapter 9: Esfigmenou's Alternative Model of Monastic Life

### 9.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, I briefly discussed in relation to the icon of *Esfagmeni* (sections 3.6 and 3.7) the rivalry between Vatopaidi and its neighbour Esfigmenou over the land of Gregorios Palamas. Nowadays, this rivalry extends to 'matters of faith' (*thematra pisteos*) regarding the engagement of the monasteries with the 'world' that brought changes to Athonian life, which reflects on the contrasting internal regimes of the two neighbours, and opposite understanding of the aim of monastic life. In Esfigmenou, monastic life as 'self-sacrifice' (*autothysia*) is understood as individualist martyrdom. The monks do not work for the community, but sacrifice their private lives in public, as examples of 'true faith' (*alithini pistis*). This chapter offers an alternative, and indeed antagonistic, way of monastic life to that of Vatopaidi, with different moral priorities, aims, and social life, formed by the monastery's extremist reputation and political outside Athos, in Greece and far beyond. This is the 'last tower of the zealots'.

### 9.2 My Journey to Esfigmenou

The name of the monastery derives from the word '*esfigmenou*', meaning the place that is 'stuck in between' two mountain hills. This refers to its geographic position 'stuck' in between surrounding hills that make it look like a fortress. The name also refers to the first zealot monk who arrived in Esfigmenou in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and spent all his life tied with ropes ('*esfigmenos*'), praying whilst eating and sleeping as little as possible (Mikrayannanitos 1999: 223). The tradition of hermetic life regarding this monastery is evident by a number of hermitages (about fifteen), built in caves hanging from the cliffs of the two small hills that surround the monastery, including the cave of the famous hermit St Antonius, who spread Christianity to Russia. The tradition states that the Byzantine Empress Pulcheria founded Esfigmenou in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the monastery is mentioned for the first time in the *Typikon* of Monomachus of 1045, when it was moved from its original position to be re-founded into a Royal monastery at the area where it stands today (*Ibid.*: 221-223).

The first time I took the boat to Vatopaidi from Ierissos (Thursday September 19 2002) I also met monks and visitors going to the monastery of Esfigmenou. In the boat, the

monks of the two neighbouring monasteries did not sit together. The monks of Esfigmenou used the bottom deck to get off at the first stop; the monks of Vatopaidi sat on their own on the upper deck, as their monastery was at the second stop. I could not help noticing the animosity between the monks, who even avoided looking at each other. It was as if for the monks of the lower deck those of the upper deck did not exist, and vice versa. I was hugely impressed: ‘What happened to those *brothers* with the new names, the long beards and long hair, all dressed the same, working hard under the boiling sun that I had seen on postcards?’ I wondered. I pursued the point with one of my fellow travellers who had visited Athos numerous times. He said pointing his dirty finger towards the top deck where the Vatopaidians sat:

‘The Vatopaidians *are not real* monks. They think monastic life is a luxury. They have heating, electricity, and even an elevator. They use the Devil’s money from the EU, and pray with the Pope. Don’t go near them!’ [19/9/2002]

The middle-aged man was going to Esfigmenou. He was thin, wearing scruffy clothes, short haircut, and a very long beard. I then realized that he looked exactly like the monks of Esfigmenou: long beard and *short* hair. This was not the image of Orthodox monks on postcards: those, like the monks of Vatopaidi sitting on the upper deck, had *long* hair. I asked him why the monks of Esfigmenou have short hair. He said:

‘According to the zealot tradition, only those who are blessed enough to become Elders are allowed to grow long hair. It is a matter of humility. Ordinary monks because of their sins must be humble and have short hair. This is the real tradition, which the other monasteries ignore. Those Vatopaidians don’t know what humility is. The real monks are only the zealots’

This animosity towards the Vatopaidians echoed the attitude of the locals I had met at the village of Ierissos from where I took the boat. In my discussions the previous morning, they all agreed that the Vatopaidians are ‘not real monks’, but ‘lazy sods, eating the money from the European Community, which is stupid enough to give them any’ [secular man at a kiosk in Ierissos 18/9/02]. A few weeks later, following my first visit to Vatopaidi, I walked five kilometres north to Esfigmenou. On the way, I could see from the top of a hill the famous black banner of Esfigmenou calling for ‘ORTHODOXY OR DEATH’ hanging from the monastery’s highest tower, and playing with the wind, like a loose red and black tongue with a human skull drawn on it. Next to it, the monks had placed the Byzantine flag of the double-headed eagle, and

the Greek flag, a kind of ‘holy trinity’ of flags signifying the triple identity of the monastery: the blue and white Greek of the present time, the yellow Byzantine with the double-headed eagle of a lost ‘golden’ past, and the ultra-Orthodox black flag calling for ‘ORTHODOXY OR DEATH’.



*Figure 9a:* The three flags of Esfigmenou

From: [http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Europe/Greece/Macedonia/Agion\\_Oros/Esphigmenou\\_Monastery/photo912801.htm](http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Europe/Greece/Macedonia/Agion_Oros/Esphigmenou_Monastery/photo912801.htm)



*Figure 9b:* Esfigmenou: ‘Orthodoxy or Death’ From <http://www.oasis-hotel.gr/agio-oros-monastery/monasteries/index.html>

At the harbour, outside the monastery's high medieval walls, laid a pile of high-tech rubbish: broken computers, TV sets, radios, and mobile phones. They were brought by visitors as gifts to the monks, but were rejected, because the zealots consider technology to be marked by the number of the Beast 6-6-6. In a symbolic act of denial, they threw them out of their highest tower. The broken gifts remain on the shore as a testament to the monastery's hardcore beliefs and way of life. The monastery's main Gate at the front, facing the harbour (north-east), rarely opened. It remained shut, just like the heart of the monks for the 'world' outside the medieval walls. They say that it will officially open on the day of the Second Coming of Christ who will enter in triumph into this monastery. In the words of the monks, the God of Esfigmenou is vengeful. This kind of Divine Justice is depicted on the walls of the monastery. The frescos at the entrance and the *exonarthex* of the *catholicon* portray the story of Joshua, son of Nave and servant of Moses, who led the Israelites to the promised land, and images of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel carrying their weapons. They are soldiers of god, guiding their armies to heaven, in order to bring the divine justice to earth.

The *catholicon* was built between 1806 and 1810 by the Abbot Theodoritos. It consists of eight domes, which divide the brotherhood in eight groups, the seven Elders and the visitors. The *nave* was decorated between 1811 and 1818. Some of its frescos were painted in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but most of them are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is dedicated to the 'Ascension of Christ', which is celebrated forty days after the moveable Easter Sunday (in 2003, Easter was on April 27, and the 'Ascension' on June 5). It is also the day dividing the winter from the summer solstice according to the Julian calendar. The guest-master highlighted the importance of the *catholicon* to the monks:

'On the Ascension of Our Lord to heavens, the disciples were gathered on Mount Olivet in a small room. There Jesus appeared and gave them His blessing, before being carried to Heaven on a cloud of light. Then the Holy Spirit descended on them and the disciples started talking in languages they could not speak, saying things they did not know. This has two meanings: first that we should not be afraid of martyrdom, because like Our Lord sacrificed Himself and went to heaven to sit on the right of God, that's what will happen to those who carry true faith. Second, Christ promises that He will return on the Mount to bring Judgement on the sinners, and salvation can only be found here

in our monastery. That's why we are monks here, but even here it is our sins that will bring the End; only the most virtuous of us will be saved' [12/1/2003].

Esfigmenou is without electricity, heating, or even a decent window. Some of its buildings were infested with rats thriving in the dark nights. The *archontariki* ('guest-house') of Esfigmenou consisted of a small room and a kitchen, facing northwest back at the fields, only lighted with a few petrol lamps. It was opened only in the evening, to sell to visitors (before the embargo) a few hand-made items such as rosaries, candles, and crosses, as well as honey and raki, and videos, CDs, and books about the 'end of the world' and other world conspiracies. The rooms were moist and cold in the winter, and hot in the boiling summer, because of the broken windows that let the air come in. Each room had ten to twenty beds, and was warmed only by a small heating stove using coal. There were no mirrors, as the monks believed that the devil lives inside mirrors, and is manifested in self-narcissism. The monks did not use washing machines, electric generators, phones, radios, or any other electric machine, making their zealot life as difficult as possible; the harder the better, according to the hermetic ideal. This impoverished environment had its own use. For instance, on my arrival the deacon warned me that eating in the cells was prohibited. But a few days later, hungry and tired, I thought to eat some biscuits I had kept in a plastic bag. I had brought it with me, because I was told in Vatopaidi that the monks Esfigmenou 'leave their visitors hungry'. But to my disappointment the bag was wide open and had several holes and the biscuits were left half-eaten. In my shock I realized that the squealing sounds I heard the previous evening, convincing my mind that it was only a dream, was in fact mice or rats eating my food. You could argue that this gave me a lesson in a zealot way.

It was not only the conditions of living that were very different to Vatopaidi but also their way of life. For instance, while in Vatopaidi the first thing the priest-monks asked me was to confess, in Esfigmenou it was requested of me to cut my pony tail in order to be allowed in. I was never asked to confess, but only after a few weeks, I visited the abbot's messy office during the working hours of the day, where he encouraged me to join the 'Old Calendarist Church'<sup>148</sup> by reading an oath of 'true faith' called *martyria*

---

<sup>148</sup> The Old Calendarist Church (*Palαιοimerologites*) is an ultra-Orthodox international sect, based on a network of churches and monasteries across the Orthodox world, who still follows the 'old' Julian calendar, which is thirteen days later than the 'new' Gregorian secular calendar. The differences between 'old' and 'new' Calendarists is a 'matter of faith' (*thema pisteos*) that still divides Athos, as well as the Orthodox world between so-called 'fundamentalist' and 'modernizing' Christians, *see* below section 9.5).

(meaning ‘testament/ to witness’ , and ‘martyrdom’) which I did not accept. Still, in demonstrating the monastery’s tradition for its hospitality, he encouraged me to stay as long as I wished for: ‘to see with your own eyes the honesty of our way of life here, and our prosecution in the hands of the Patriarchate’ [personal communication with abbot 7/12/02]. Furthermore, unlike Vatopaidi where it was required for me to work for the monastery, the abbot of Esfigmenou did not allow visitors to do anything, but pray. My insistence to help at the *archontariki* even caused an argument between two Greek deacons, working there under the supervision of the Albanian priest-monk. One of them asked me to cut wood for the stoves, and help with the visitors’ bed sheets, which were hand-washed and ironed using hot coil. But when the other deacon saw me cutting wood, he got upset, because I was breaking the rule of hospitality. Even so, unlike the Vatopaidians who immediately complained to the abbot about their disagreements, the two monks soon reconciled, without involving the abbot, or through spiritual practices, such as confession as in Vatopaidi. Instead, they negotiated between them that I was allowed to help only on busy days, and gradually got over their argument.

As already discussed, the majority of Vatopaidians at the time of my fieldwork (2002-4) were from 30 to 40 years old, relatively young for monks. By contrast, the majority of the monks of Esfigmenou were middle-aged men, some of them with broken faces that revealed turbulent pasts, and of much lower secular education (most of the monks I talked too, used to be unemployed, or came from working class families). This difference in age can be explained comparatively, as while in Vatopaidi tonsures take place from the age of 25, in Esfigmenou, it is forbidden for novices who are less than 35 years old to become monks, and if they are younger they have to wait for their ordination<sup>149</sup>. Conversely, while I highlighted the educational role of monastic life under the Josephaeoi rule in Vatopaidi (chapters 4-6), in Esfigmenou the monks were grown up men with experience in secular life, and some of them with a criminal past. Unlike the majority of young Vatopaidians, who had arrived together in groups of ‘companionships’ from Greek Cyprus following a charismatic elder, the monks of Esfigmenou arrived on their own, and from all over the world. The Esfigmenites did

---

<sup>149</sup> ‘Our sacred tradition states that those who are less than 35 years old are not allowed to receive the tonsure; it does not count, they are too young. To become a monk is to be married to the Virgin Mary. But you have to be old enough to get married. Vatopaidi with the eighteen and twenty year old so-called ‘monks’ break these rules. They take them young to make them obedient to their evil rule, because the young ones are innocent enough not to question their traitor elders’ [personal communication with priest-monk of Esfigmenou 15/11/02]

not share the same bonding with each other, as many of the Vatopaidians did, and thus, their sense of community was much less important than in Vatopaidi where it constituted the essence of monastic life, because they did not follow the charisma of a ‘spiritual father’, since they do not believe in spirituality, but were attracted to this particular monastery, on the one hand, to escape from a life of sin, and on the other, because of the reputation of the monastery as the ‘last tower of zealots’:

‘Don’t ask about my past. I am only 35, but if I start telling you what I’ve done in my life I would need a whole book to write it down. I used to take drugs; driving two motorbikes (he smiles) and work in nightclubs... you know which one I’m talking about. I used to be a rebel and didn’t have any meaning in my life. And I found myself in a no-way-out. I was desperate. And then, one day I sold the bikes and went to my mother to announce to her that I am becoming a monk in Esfigmenou. ‘You are crazy!’ she shouted at me. I haven’t seen her since... Do you want to know why I became a monk in Esfigmenou? Because one day I sat down and thought that why since 1924, when the new calendar was introduced by the then Pope Gregory, had the whole Orthodoxy to follow the Antichrist? So, all these people who became martyrs for their faith were wrong? Can you see what is happening around us? The Turkish army is ready to attack, they are invading our air space every day and we, without any reaction, without any resistance, follow this Masonic plan. Our youth either has fallen into drugs or joined the Jehovah; we all know (that) the Jew rules the world. Even Simitis (the former prime minister of Greece) has a Jewish surname<sup>150</sup>. They worship money’ [Deacon at the guest-house of Esfigmenou 11//12/02]

Most of the monks that I talked to, first came to Esfigmenou as visitors, and then decided to stay permanently. All first-time visitors have to attend on their arrival at a small meeting room situated in the *archontariki*. The zealots do not believe that they convert people to their group, but that they are ‘enlightening’ them. This is a revealing extract from an interview with Mitsos, a 50 year-old Greek barman: ‘I have a bar in Greece. I have been in prison many times, but now I try to keep it clean, since I met the Albanian Elder N who persuaded me to become an Old Calendarist. I realized many things about my life since then. You’ll see. If you join our Church you must only go to our churches. In Salonica (where we were both from) there are four; I can tell how to get there. And if you want to become a member you have to ask Father N to give you the holy moiré and read our oath with him: “*o koinonon me to akoinonito akoinonitos esti*” [meaning: ‘the one who takes communion/ communicates with the antisocial

---

<sup>150</sup> Actually, the name of the former Prime minister of Greece, Giorgos Simites, comes from the Turkish ‘*Simit*’, meaning the person who is selling sesame bread rolls on the street.

(*akoinonito*, ‘non-communicative’) he is also antisocial’]. Against the rules of the Holy Committee, the monks of Esfigmenou convert seculars to the Old Calendarist Church, by reading the Oath, or *martyria* [meaning both ‘witness’, and ‘sacrifice’]. The Oath refers to the mainstream Church as *akoinonitous* (‘antisocial’) because of their acceptance of the ‘new’ Gregorian calendar. In this way, the words distinguish between the initiated members of the Old Calendarist Church, the purists, from those who are ‘confused’, the followers of mainstream Orthodoxy. Therefore it is the contact with the Anti-Social (symbolically the ‘Anti-Christ’) that inevitably pollutes their ‘true faith’. For the zealots the monks of the other monasteries are ‘anti-social’ because they do not follow the ‘real’ calendar. In this way, they separate the members of their group from the rest of the Orthodox world, which has consequences on the ritual life of the monastery. In this context, the abbot of Esfigmenou only offers the Holy Communion to Old Calendarist members, although ‘new’ Calendarist Orthodox people were also allowed in the monastery, as the zealots try to convert them to their ideology. But by only offering the Holy Communion to Old Calendarists, the zealots clearly separated the visitors in terms of faithful and (still) ‘confused’, thus treating them as polluted.

Esfigmenou by offering shelter to a world of outcasts unifies them under its ultra-Orthodox and hateful ideology. The internal regime that helps each visitor and monk towards a healthier life, morally contradicts the external ideological contact of the monastery in the Orthodox world. Here, as in Vatopaidi, the internal regime and external vocation morally contradict each other, but this time on the extremes. The youngest person that I met in Esfigmenou was Vasillis, or ‘Billy’, as he introduced himself. He was a 23-year old music student from Athens, who got addicted to hard drugs while studying music in London. Because I was also studying in London, the *archontaris* deacon put us in the same room. When I first arrived in November 2002, Billy was already inside the monastery for six months, in a process of rehabilitating from his drug addiction. He was planning to become a monk in Esfigmenou. But the monks did not allow him yet to go to the church, until they were persuaded that he was clean from his dependence. Most evenings, he could not sleep, but stayed up staring for hours at the flame of a petrol lamp. These were the good nights; other nights he was gasping in pain. In my very first week in the monastery, one night I suddenly woke up at the sound of his gasps. As I opened my eyes, to my shock, I saw Billy standing in front of my bed, staring at me in the dark silence. I was scared. ‘He took many trips in

London' the next morning a visitor sarcastically and loudly commented, but Billy simply ignored him. His orders were to remain in the room praying all day and all night long until he clears himself from his haunting past, in both physical and religious ways. In my third visit to Esfigmenou in January 2003, the *archontaris* put me in the same room as before with the same roommates. But Billy was not sleeping there anymore. He had been allocated to a cell, in solitary confinement, at the isolated south wing of the monastery together with the rest of novices. I heard from visitors that the abbot had finally told him that he can stay permanently in the monastery and become a monk, but he had to wait for another two years, as he was only 23 and the zealots do not take monks under the age of 25. As a reward for his progress, he was also allowed to join the rest of the novices in the church and at the refectory. This made his progress publicly known to the rest of the brotherhood that he was 'clean' from the desire to take drugs, confirming his successful first step towards redemption, while opening the way to monastic life.

Some visitors stay permanently, or for long periods, and others even join the brotherhood, if they are allowed. During my total of four months in the monastery I met men from all over the world, with different motivations for being there. Some of them came for a few days or weeks, waiting to join the 'Old Calendarist Church'; others stayed for longer periods and were already members of the Church. Some had travelled outside with monks organizing meetings and protests (*see Appendix 4.1*); others were 'tested', waiting to be ordained into monks; many were hiding from authorities outside Athos; some were old men with nowhere to go; others were younger who stayed in Esfigmenou to fight drug and alcohol addictions, or with severe psychological problems, (not everyone) finding the cleansing monastic life therapeutic. Finally, there were also unpaid lay workers who lived outside the monastery in groups in huts, working for the monks for free food, drink, and shelter, while they were also allowed to hunt and to fish<sup>151</sup>.

---

<sup>151</sup> There were about 30 workers living separately in a big Hut across the monastery, most of them coming from Romania, and Albania. And there were another 10 living inside the monastery, because they were also members of the Old Calendarist Church, so they were allowed to live with the monks. Most of them arrived with siblings, and generally in my discussion with them I felt that male bonding within their group was central in their life; good company, sharing a cigarette, and living in nature, and even being allowed to hunt animals in the forest (against the rules of the Athonite Charter) was their reward instead of money. Such a worker was a Romanian layman 'Dimitris' who told me in excellent Greek: 'We are fine here, sometimes five of us sometimes fifteen, depending on the visas. There are also about ten Albanians and every night we take out the raki and have some good time at the hut outside the

The strongest group of workers were the Albanians, who were divided in two groups: those who were born Christians in Albania like priest-monk *archontaris* ('host-master'), and those who were born Muslims, but accepted to be Christianised and work on Athos. In Esfigmenou they also had to join the *Old Calendarist Church*. 'John' was an Albanian worker with four siblings, of whom two were Christianised and two remained Muslims:

'Four years I'm closed in here. I am from Koritsa. I don't have the permit yet to go to Greece so I have stayed here in Esfigmenou with my brothers. I have forgotten how the world looks like on the outside. But if I go out I'm going to be deported. It is better here. There is no gravest sin than to go to clubs, to meet women and take drugs. Here is much better. I found God... First we went to Corinth (south Greece) but we found things very difficult there. We were illegal immigrants and had lots of problems with the police. We couldn't even walk to the shops to buy cigarettes, because policemen stopped us, asking for papers. Then we went to Thessalonica where two of my brothers were deported. But in Salonica we met members of St Basil (an extremist religious sect associated with the Old Calendarist Church) and they told us about this monastery. So, me and my other two brothers decided to come to Esfigmenou. That was three years ago I think. My other two brothers came here two months ago, but they haven't joined our Church yet, so they stay outside the monastery (in a hut). But soon they will also join us in the monastery. Esfigmenou helped us finding the true God. Things are difficult on the outside, and that is why here is much better. Anyway, I don't care what people say when they are not Christian. They first need to find the true God' [12/2/03].

'John's' acceptance to be Christianised, in order to avoid his deportation to Albania, reveals his marginal position in between the two opposite worlds of fundamentalism and so called 'illegal' immigration (as if human beings can be classified as 'illegal', a

---

monastery. We sleep there, as the monks do not allow us in, but that's better, we prefer it this way... I came from Corinth after I got baptized in an Old Calendarist Church. I had left Romania after Chausesco fell, and first went to Germany, then Italy, and finally Greece. The Germans are racists because they think that all Romanians steal their cars. So I went to Corinth, but what for? There was even more police checking for ids, I couldn't even walk to buy cigarettes. I couldn't work, so I decided to go to (the monastery of) Xeropotamou. But there the monks treat me very badly, and were complaining all the time about my smoking habit. A friend from the Old Calendarist Church then told me of Esfigmenou. Here they may not pay, but they treat us right, letting us free outside the monastery, and only making us go to the Church on Sundays. I've been here two year now, but I am planning to return to Greece for work.' [8/12/03]. Another worker with a very different background was 'Euthimios', a Greek electrician, around 30 years old, who told me that for the last year he had been working for free at the monastery helping the monk with their efforts restoring the roof of the Catholicon. In my question if he is thinking of becoming a monk he was negative, because of his smoking habit and because he 'liked women'. I then asked him why is he in the monastery, and he told me that he is here to support and 'protect' the 'true Greek Orthodox tradition from the Masons'. Like Dimitris, he had also heard about the life in Esfigmenou at the meetings of the religious group ELKIS in Athens.

modern form of slavery). He was entrapped between his Muslim past and Christian future. Although he refused to submit to the idea, it was evident in his behaviour that he felt imprisoned in the monastery, as he could not get out in fear of deportation. His position raises questions about the concept of 'identity' in itself, which is so strong in Esfigmenou: From his perspective, yesterday he was a Muslim Albanian, today an Orthodox zealot, tomorrow nobody knows. Or maybe, God does...

The force behind this gathering of so many and so different people was the ideology for 'Orthodoxy or Death', which unified them under the black flag hanging from the tower, despite their different backgrounds or ethnicity. These visitors were not prominent 'friends' of the monastery, such as the visitors of Vatopaidi. Most of them were middle aged men, social outcasts, uneducated, unemployed, some addicted to hard drugs, others just coming out of jail and having nowhere to go. Their situation echoes Bauman's (1998: 55-78) general argument that people generally seek to *escape* (as in Durkheim's definition of monasticism earlier, 1995: 37) a secular consumerist life related to the rise of 'post-modern' 'agonies of choice' (1998: 74). But the permanent visitors of Esfigmenou were there not as a matter of 'choice', but in desperation and exasperation, looking for a shelter within the ultra-Orthodox ideology of the monastery, because most of them had nowhere else to go to.

### **9.3 Night Struggles**

Already on my first week in the monastery I felt uncomfortable because of the wind coming through the broken windows, the scratching sound of rats, and worst of all, the tearful sound of gasping, accompanied by screams, which was coming from the dark corridor, always at midnight. I was told that there were two demonized monks. Every evening, before the Midnight Office, they were taken by demons and struggled using the Jesus Prayer to fight them. This public form of self-exorcism continued in the church with the Divine Liturgy as their screams often interrupted the night liturgies. A number of monks, and sometimes a few visitors too, fell from their stalls on the floor, some on their knees, others collapsing, gasping for breath, spitting while whispering through gutted gasps 'God forgive me' and 'Christ help me', before screaming in pain as if they were having an epileptic fit. Their brothers tried to revive them by reciting the

Jesus Prayer loudly over their frenzied bodies, holding them down, or helping them to stand back on their feet.

The following morning I saw the demonised monks acting normally, as if nothing had happened the previous night. In time, I realized that this behaviour was quite common, as the liturgies were often interrupted by demonised monks, but for a first-comer this was an unbelievably frightening experience. Over time, I learned that there were two kinds of demons: those who stand for a long period, and those who arrive suddenly during the liturgy. The first ones affect the entire life of the inflicted monk, while the latter, only his public performance during the liturgy. I learned that Esfigmenou had three permanently demonized monks: one was the Greek older monk who was punished for his greed as food was discovered in his cell. The other two were a Russian monk who was stealing food, and a Greek monk with a much more serious sin, as he tried twice to kill the former Abbot Euthymios (died in 1999) with a knife. Despite the attacks, the abbot never called the police, but according to the visitors, both abbot and monk ‘struggled together with the devil for five long years, until the evil inside the monk finally was kicked out’ [personal communication with visitor 20/1/03]. This process of public exorcism is a form of social therapy in relation to the collective<sup>152</sup>. Self-exorcisms, and the torture the permanently demonized monks publicly go through, are a common discussion between monks and visitors. They become living emblems of the ‘true faith’ of this *particular* monastery:

‘The devil lives *here*, because we are the only true monks. Why would he go to Vatopaidi where he knows that those monks are already taken? That is why he appears *here*, because here is the real struggle’ [priest-monk 7/12/02]

In darkness the fear of god grows, as the night liturgies were a place for struggle; but darkness was also offering protection, both from the policemen stationed outside the monastery, and from the demons inside. One night in Esfigmenou during the Matins a young monk fell asleep on his stall. His body leaned forward, and his hat fell on the floor revealing a sleeping face. The monk sitting next to him picked up his hat and

---

<sup>152</sup> ‘Possession is as much an aesthetic... as it is therapy’ though the collective (Boddy 2002: 413). Kapferer extensively discussed exorcisms in Buddhist Temples in Sri Lanka as a ‘social experience’ (1991: 77) in which illness was diagnosed and defined not only in terms of the ghosts that tortured the patient, ‘but also upon other human beings who act in the immediate environment of the patient’ (*Ibid*: 73).

threw it on his sleeping head to rudely wake him up. Even in the collective context of the liturgy, night signifies the personal struggle of each monk against the urges of his body, manifested as tiredness:

‘(During the night liturgies) we keep the light of the candles to minimum, because darkness protects us from Evil. When you are in the church you struggle against the demons; your face changes expression rapidly, because of your agony. It takes strange poses, as the muscles move out of control. Tiredness does not come from attending the church, but from our struggle to kick the demons out from inside us. Do you know what the Devil does to me every night during the liturgy? He sends small devils into my eyelids and tries to close my eyes and make me fall asleep and stop praying. This struggle is so hard, that when your friends see your face under the light like this, they will laugh at you and their laugh would be transmitted to the rest of the pilgrims, and the devil would have taken the whole church. That’s why we need to pray in the dark in order to hide the marks of our struggle. You, *with your electricity and the luxurious lighting settings of your living room, you are definitely blinder than those 90 year-old monks who cover themselves in the church’s darkness*’ [elder of Esfigmenou 1/12/02]

While in Vatopaidi the monks use the night as a private setting for their struggle against the demons, such as the ‘Porno Demon’ that visits them in their cells (*see* section 6.3), in Esfigmenou night is a public arena. Here, the symbolism of darkness was very different from Vatopaidi, where it was associated with the inside self of each monk through *liminal* practices of faith. The low lights of the candles are used to ‘protect’ the monks from looking at each other’s personal struggle, which could transmit devilish laughter and interrupt the liturgy. In this way, the hermetic and personal practice of fighting the inner demons becomes a communal non-event, revealing a semi-hermetic, semi-*coenobitic* way of thinking that extends to the fragmented semi-organization of the monastery.

The monks of Esfigmenou use the ‘old’ Roman way of counting each hour (*palaio imerologio*) which is either stretched or diminished according to the time of the year. In the winter solstice, each nightly ‘hour’ lasts up to one and a half hours, because the nights are longer, while its daily ‘hour’ only lasts for about 45 minutes, because the days shorter. This naturally makes the night liturgies longer, while activities are ceased during the days, which the monks spend in their cells praying (since there is also the embargo imposed on the monastery that does not allow them access to their fields, *see* below). By contrast, in the summer the daily ‘hours’ are longer, and the night liturgies shorter. In this way, although the structure of the program is the same as in Vatopaidi,

divided by night prayer that is co-ordinated according to the face of the moon (*Paschalion* calendar), and daily work and prayer according to the sunrise and sunset, the way it is achieved differs from one monastery to the other, revealing their contrasting internal regimes. The different way of counting the time means that the liturgies in Esfigmenou are longer than in Vatopaidi, and in the winter night vigils lasted up to 16 hours.

#### 9.4 Daily Struggles

After the liturgy, the monks and their followers went to the refectory for the meal. They only ate once a day, because of the limited food. Dinner was only served on the eve of celebratory night vigils celebrations, because monks and visitors needed to be strengthened for the long night vigil, which began with the ‘great vesper’ and continued throughout the night until late in the following morning. Some days, if it was in the middle of a period of abstinence, they did not eat at all. But sometimes, in the context of male bonding, the rules were broken. One day, a Russian priest-monk complained to the Romanian cook about the food, saying that ‘it was all rotten tomatoes and apples’. In a humorous ironical manner, the cook answered: ‘No worries my brother. I will make for you and your brothers spaghetti with a nice sauce to lick your fingers!’ [16/1/03]. Generally, their meals were smaller than Vatopaidi: some veggies, a slice of *komposta* (sweet made of fruits), and fruits of their garden, apples, figs, oranges, and pears. Worst of all, after the embargo of 2003 (*see* below) all connections to the monastery had been cut off, including access to the monastery’s fields and the sea, so they were depending on food brought by visitors. They sneaked into the monastery in the night, in order not to be seen by the police. In exchange, the monks kept the guest-house open in the evening for hungry visitors to eat some bread, olive oils, and onions, so that they could last through the long night liturgies.

The sitting arrangement in the refectory divided the brotherhood into seven groups, each one headed by a priest-monk (including the abbot). Esfigmenou consisted of seventeen ethnic groups of monks: approximately about 60 Greeks, 20 Romanians, 15 Albanians, 15 Serbians, 15 Georgians, 13 Russians, and the rest other nationalities, including Bulgarians, Ukrainians, a few Romanians and Armenians, as well as, individual monks from Poland, Slovakia, Cyprus, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and Syria. Unlike

Vatopaidi, where the monks sat in the refectory with their spiritual supervisors and where friendships were forbidden, the tables in Esfigmenou's refectory were arranged on the basis of ethnicity and language: Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Albanian, Russian, and Bulgarian (some also spoke English between them). The Esfigmenites did not have formal and informal days as the Vatopaidians; neither sat in a particular hierarchical order. Usually they sat with the monks of the same or a close ethnic group, but some times changed tables without permission, if they wished so. Even more importantly, they did not sit separately from the voluntary lay workers, who sat with them. As in Vatopaidi, eating in the refectory was accompanied by the reading from the *Meneon*, the book with the lives of saints, to be used as moral examples for the rest of the day. In Esfigmenou, the chosen text was read by the deacon, in the role of the reader, who focused on the martyrdom of the saints celebrated on each day, as moral examples of 'true faith:'. The gruesome depictions of their sacrificial death in the name of Jesus, made the act of eating and swallowing hard to manage with any pleasure.

**Figure 9c: Refectory of Esfigmenou on both Celebratory Days and Days of abstinence**

	1	
	2 3	
	4 5	
	4 5	
	6 7	
	8 9	
	10 11	
	13 14	
Reader	15 15	Wine
	15 15	Cellar
Kitchen	15 15	
Entrance		
1: Abbot M and <i>Prohegoumenos</i> G, and official guests, vips		
2. Deacons on duty                      3. Elders		
4. Serbian group                          5. Albanian group		
6. Russians, Ukrainians                7. Georgians, Bulgarians		
8. Greeks		
9. Romanian group (kitchen service)		
10-13. Greeks		
14. Mixed nationalities		
15. Visitors		

Unlike the strict and almost silent environment of Vatopaidi, the refectory of Esfigmenou was a public space where tensions were loudly expressed between monks of different ethnic groups. Often it was because of the limited food, as because of the embargo and the poverty of the monastery, the monks had to be careful with the spaghetti and rice that visitors had brought to them. Furthermore, there were tensions

particularly between Serbian and Albanian lay workers, because of Bosnia. In December 2002 for instance, there was an increasing tension between the Albanian workers and a few Serbian visitors, because the workers were complaining that the Serbs lived in the monastery, ‘eating, drinking and not helping with the work’. On a Sunday lunch at the refectory [20/12/02] they had a loud argument about the portion of food given to the Albanian group. The Albanian monks talked in perfect Greek and were very close to the Greek abbot. One Serbian visitor, although I knew that he had never worked in his life, and that he was actually a wanted war criminal hiding in the monastery, started shouting that ‘this is not fair’. An Albanian worker responded in Greek: ‘Maybe you should start working instead of being a lazy \*\*\*\*\*. Are you going to let me eat in peace?’ The Serbian stood up and left the table (a move that would be inconceivable in Vatopaidi). During this episode the abbot seemed disinterested and let things happen. His attitude was totally opposite to the extremely controlling and official attitude of the abbot of Vatopaidi. In another incident the Albanian priest-monk had to restore the order, as some Greek monks were laughing for something the reader had said. But instead of being discrete as was the Vatopaidian manner in highlighting a mistake in public, the priest-monk shouted at them: ‘You are drinking, eating from two plates, and laughing like idiots, sinners!’ After some whispering, the reader continued reading, until the abbot sounded the small wooden cymbal to end the heavy meal without a speech.

Furthermore, even within the Greek group, constituting the majority of Esfigmenou, there were divisions, as became evident to me regarding a group of monks led by a Greek ordinary monk, who is famous outside Athos for his public speeches regarding the ‘Old Calendarist Church’. He often participated in public protests of extremist ultra-Orthodox groups, such as ‘ELKIS’ in Athens, and ‘St Basil’ in Thessaloniki (*see Appendix 4.1: ‘Meeting at St Basil’*), about contemporary issues, such as against European identities, against the prosecution and embargo of the brotherhood of Esfigmenou imposed by the mainstream Orthodox authorities, and above all, against the project of *Ecumenism*, the effort to unify the Catholic and Orthodox Churches (*see below*). An admiring visitor told me that he should have been the abbot, ‘but he is not virgin’ [2/2/03]. Still, often he and his group contradicted the abbot in public, especially regarding matters of ‘true faith’, taking more extreme views than the rest of the brotherhood.

These disorderly incidences revealed that Esfigmenou's environment was structurally segregated, and that the authority of the abbot was diminished. He was not the 'spiritual father' (*pneumatikos pateras*) of the monks -as in Vatopaidi; neither did he conjure spiritual with administrative powers. He was only an administrator. The new zealots of Esfigmenou do not believe in Athonian families, or in ideas of 'spirituality' (*pneumatikotita*), because they think were imported from the 'Papic Church', including the practices of frequent confession and Holy Communion, 'steadily polluting the purity of our sacred tradition' [personal communication with monk 29/1/03, and priest-monk 11/12/02]. According to their semi-hermetic way of life, they only confessed to the abbot once a year, on Christmas Day, unless for a serious crime. They only received the Holy Communion once a week, every Sunday. In practice, because of the issue of language, each group was closer to the priest-monk with whom they could speak in their native language, than to the Greek abbot. Accordingly, the Divine Liturgy in the chapels on days of abstinence took place in four languages, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Russian. But the lack of order in the refectory also opened up a free space for personal improvised expressions of faith, through self-exorcism and self-punishment. One December morning, an old monk began whipping his back with a heavy wet rope while shouting the Jesus Prayer, changing the words of the second part of the prayer 'for I have sinned' to '*...for I am a thief*'. The brotherhood continued indifferently eating. Later that week, it became a public discussion that the old monk was greedy, because he had stolen a piece of bread from the kitchen on a fasting Friday, the most important of the fasting days of the week.

By comparison, while in Vatopaidi such transgressions are dealt privately with frequent confessions to the authority of the abbot, followed by a number of prostrations and prayers with the rosary in the cell, in Esfigmenou redemption and catharsis is a public spectacle: a public demonstration of true faith. The more passionately, theatrically, and loudly the new zealots act, the more status they gain in terms of representing the self in the community. Thus, the meaning and uses of 'public' in Esfigmenou is given a sacred character that is very different from that of Vatopaidi. In Vatopaidi, the private sphere of the monk in his cell is carefully kept separately from the public spaces of the monastery, and from the relationships between monks and visitors that develop in such environments. Matters of disorder and disobedience are dealt in the secrecy of

confession and the private canon of prayers performed in the cell. By contrast, the ‘public’ domain of Esfigmenou has its own moral powers: it is the space where the monks loudly declare their faith; it is the space where they punish their body using themselves as moral examples for the rest of the community; it is also the space where they engage into conflict against each other over matters of faith, which are not trivial to them, but a matter of identity. While in Vatopaidi personal *catharsis* has a collective value signifying a static moral order which is manifested by its strict double structure, in Esfigmenou, the semi-hermetic rule offers the means of representing the self in a disordered, or rather, expressive way.

Accordingly, the Esfigmenites have a very different set of moral priorities and values than the Vatopaidians. While Vatopaidi is ruled according to obedience, virginity, and poverty (humility), which are collective values emphasizing the conduct of each monk within the collective life in terms of *apatheia*, in Esfigmenou its monks have a very different set of priorities, according to their passionate concept of true faith: ‘first is prayer, second is reading the Bible and the Orthodox Tradition of our Holy Fathers, and third poverty. A monk first and above all has to pray for the world and his soul. Second, he has to follow in detail the Old and New Testaments equally, because they complete each other. Tradition is the essence of our Orthodox identity; together with humility, they reveal the virtues of true Orthodoxy in practice’ [guest-master’s speech to visitors, 28/1/2003].

This semi-hermetic, semi-*coenobitic*, model of Esfigmenou is not based on communal values nor practices, such as frequent confession and Holy Communion, because the zealots believe that the concept of ‘spirituality’ (*pneumatikotita*) was imported from the ‘Latin West’ in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the publication of the *Filokalia* (the ‘Love of Beauty’), the main manual of communal life written by two *Latinophron* monks (see chapters 3 and 6). In this context, the Esfigmenites see the Vatopaidian rule for ‘blind obedience’, as a way for the older monks, who are ‘traitors to the Orthodox tradition’, to deceive the younger ones, in order to make them accept their authority without further questioning. In our discussions, they politicized the Vatopaidian value of blind obedience within the context of a greater conspiracy, which aims to destroy monastic life *from inside*. In this sense, the central values of the Josephaeoi for blind obedience,

is used to seduce the younger monks, without their knowledge, into the conspiracy<sup>153</sup>. Instead of blind obedience, the semi-hermetic way of life in Esfigmenou emphasized personal redemption through *filoponia* (meaning to be a ‘friend of pain’). This value is amplified by the self-imposed poor living conditions in the monastery, seen as a kind of collective martyrdom. But the poor condition of the buildings is criticized by the Vatopaidians, who highlighted the moral obligation the monks of all monasteries have towards the monastic properties, including the preservation of holy items and buildings. As already discussed, for the Vatopaidians financial security is necessary, ‘in order for spiritual life to flourish’ [priest-monk 28/4/03]. In this context, they were keen to highlight that they keep the spiritual matters *separate* from administrative matters, in the same way they keep their tradition separate (‘virgin’) from the impact of the ‘world’ inside the monastery. This morally justifies their involvement in secular life, and their acceptance of EU funding for the preservation and restoration of the monastery; but not for their personal benefit. In this context, the Vatopaidians believe that the semi-impooverished environment of Esfigmenou is not a matter of true tradition, but a wrong interpretation of the zealot faith, and that their neighbours’ emphasis on *filoponia* as the end, and not the means to achieve *theosis*, is hypocritical:

‘To be a friend of pain [*filoponos*] is a virtue in monastic life. But pain, as our holy father Joseph the Vatopaidian taught us, is the *means* to achieve divination [*theosis*], not the aim of monastic life. It is not the means to be proud, because pride in itself is a sinful passion... Do you know what the Esfigmenites do? Every day they come all the way here from Esfigmenou pretending that they are tired, and ask for water.

---

<sup>153</sup> In the words of the guest-master of Esfigmenou: ‘The elders of the other monasteries are conspiring Jews [sic] who hate Orthodoxy and they want to change it from inside. The traitors work with the Antichrist Pope, (the Patriarch) Bartholomew, the Jews and the Turkish army [sic], conspiring to infiltrate the Orthodox Faith, because they fear it... Bartholomew is a puppet in the hands of the Pope and the Rabbis who want to establish a universal religion by eliminating our true faith... What do you think? I tell you most of the Abbots of the other monasteries today are hidden Jews [sic]. And that’s why they teach obedience: they don’t want ordinary monks to be like us, free thinkers... They tell them what to think, and how to do things, and just like the devil they have deceived them... Most of the monks know what we are talking about but they prefer to turn the deaf ear. But there are lots of zealots (living) in sketes who share our faith, and we also have our active skete in Karyes. But they cannot raise their voices to support us, because they fear the Holy Committee will expel them from Athos. Only in Esfigmenou is safe to keep the faith’ [28/1/2003]. The ideological anti-Semitism of Esfigmenou is manifested by their exclusion of the *Proimiakos* (Psalms 103 and 104) sung during the vesper by the Vatopaidians, according to the old Hebrew tradition of reciting blessings at set times. In Esfigmenou, the vesper does not include Symeon’s prayer, because it is associated with the Hebrew tradition. Furthermore, they do not have Compline, for the same reason. Because they do not have Compline, their vespers are slower, lasting for about half an hour longer than in Vatopaidi. The zealots have a racist anti-Semitic ideology, which they use to attack the Vatopaidians to visitors, claiming that ‘the Vatopaidians’ beliefs reveal who they really are’, meaning that they are ‘Jewish conspirators’ (sic) who wish to ‘eliminate true Orthodoxy’ [priest-monk of Esfigmenou January 2003].

They come all the way here because they know that we will not give them any water. Then they go back complaining that we are not hospitable, but that we are rich and mean... They are occupiers. Nobody can go to pay honours and worship our Lady in there, because they are all Old Calendarists and they don't let other Christians in... and because they do not accept the funding that all the other monasteries accept, they let their monastery to rot.' [Vatopaidian priest-monk 6/10/02]

It is important to note here that Joseph the Hesychast, the spiritual patron of Vatopaidi (see chapter 3) was also a zealot. The Vatopaidians distinguish a zealot way of life from the contemporary political form of zealotism of Esfigmenou. Zealot monks are generally associated with the hermetic tradition that goes back to the early monks of the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. They are generally spread everywhere on Athos, some live isolated in monasteries, such the monasteries of Simonopetra (5 zealot monks) and Dochiariou (3), and in isolated 'deserts' (see chapter 4), because of the harsh conditions of such places, such as the Deserts of Kausokalyvia (in 2002, there were about 20 zealots) and the Desert of Kapsala near Karyes (30 zealots). Many of these are spiritual relatives to the Family of Josepheoi of Vatopaidi. There is even an old zealot left in Vatopaidi, who was an 80 year-old monk who had lived there before the arrival of Joseph and his 'companionship' in 1987. Therefore, zealot monks exist everywhere on Athos, even in Vatopaidi, and this means that the monks of the other monasteries do not have a problem with the tradition of zealotism per se, but with the politicisation of the 'Old Calendarist' movement through the tradition of zealotism *inside* Esfigmenou, *particularly* because of its political vocation and dividing conduct *outside* its medieval walls.

## 9.5 The issue of the calendar

The 'Old Calendarist Church' (*Palaioimerologhites*) is an international ultra-Orthodox Christian sect that expands from Russia to America, and emphasizes the use of the 'old' (*palaio*) Julian calendar, which is thirteen days later than the 'new' (*neo imerologio*) Gregorian calendar. The internal conflict between 'Old' and 'New' Calendarists has taken several forms, depending on the place and time, but can be generally summed up by self-proclaimed 'traditionalist' clergy, faithful, and monks, against so-called 'modernizers' of the Church and progressive monks such as those of Vatopaidi. The issue of the calendar divided Athos since its very constitution in 1923. Between 1923-4, the Greek government and the Greek King adopted the 'new' Gregorian calendar, and

the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul followed a year later. The Ecumenical Patriarch of the time, called Metaxakis, ordered the monasteries to abandon the Julian calendar, and change to the Gregorian calendar. But the monks protested fearing that the change would affect their ‘sacred tradition’ (*iera paradosis*). For the monks of Esfigmenou, Metaxakis was ‘a traitor with shameful contacts and even friendships with the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish population of Corfu’ [personal communication with Abbot Methodios of Esfigmenou, 27/1/03]. In protest, the monks of Athos collectively ceased commemorating the Ecumenical Patriarch, with the exception of Vatopaidi, whose monks adopted the Gregorian calendar without further protests. By 1926-7, the conflict was resolved, as the rest of the monasteries also compromised, this time with the exception of the monastery of Esfigmenou. Thus, from the very beginning of the issue, Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou represented two extreme oppositions regarding the change of the calendar. Vatopaidi, and the monastery of St Panteleimon, are the only monasteries that are known for using both calendars: the Julian for the liturgical life and the Gregorian for its bureaucratic responsibilities. The contrasting vocations of the two monasteries appears to be unbridgeable, as the issue has since developed into greater matters of true faith, such as, on the one hand, the issue of funding from Brussels and the compromises the Vatopaidians have to make to receive this funding, such as the discussion to abandon the *Avaton*, the rise of religious tourism, and the political and financial involvement of Vatopaidi in Greek public life.

The politicization of the new zealot movement on Athos took place in 1965 in response to the Patriarch Athenagoras’s reconciliatory move to lift the *anathemas* (curses) that were raised against the Pope following the Great Schism of 1054, in the spirit of the greater international project called ‘*Ecumenism*’. But for the members of the ‘Old Calendarist Church’, this project threatened the purity of ‘true faith’ in a polluted world of contact: technological, sexual, commercial, cultural, and most importantly, religious contact with the non-Orthodox Other: ‘*Ecumenism*, precisely, is the theory that there is No True Faith.... There is no patron saint of *Ecumenism*, because no saint ever believed in it’<sup>154</sup>. In response to protests, on November 13 1971, after a special session at Karyes, the Holy Committee decided to leave the decision of which calendar to follow to each monastery’s discretion, respecting their independence. The three monasteries that continued with the ‘old’ Julian calendar were the monasteries of Xenophontos,

---

<sup>154</sup> Anonymous Russian zealot at <http://www2.netdoor.com/~frelia/ecumenism.htm>

represented by the Abbot Eudokimos, the monastery of St Paul represented by the Abbot Andreas, and the monastery of Esfigmenou represented by the Abbot Athanasios (1956-1975). But it was particularly amongst the monks of Esfigmenou who believed that behind this project there is a ‘world conspiracy’ between the Pope and the ‘traitor elders’ of the other monasteries: ‘... we can no longer trust. They want to get Christ out of us. That is why we broke all communication with them in 1972. And the pogrom started; a pogrom that comes not from external enemies, but from inside Athos; and all this, because we do not agree with them’ [discussion with abbot 16/1/2003]<sup>155</sup>

The ‘pogrom’, to which the abbot referred above, is a series of evictions issued by the ‘Ecumenical Patriarchate’ in Istanbul, and the Holy Committee of Mount Athos, beginning in 1974, then 1979, and most recently in 2003. The conflict culminated in November 2002, when the Holy Committee sent a summons to each one of the monks of Esfigmenou, in which they were personally asked to appear in groups of twenty-five by December 5, 2002. The monks of Esfigmenou refused, and so the Holy Committee issued an eviction note to the entire brotherhood (February 2003) for a number of reasons, which can be summed up as: first, because since 1972, Esfigmenou refuses to send a representative at the Holy Committee, cutting off all connections to Athos<sup>156</sup>;

---

<sup>155</sup> ‘The Antichrist today is hidden behind the Pope’s efforts to unify all religions under his power. After the change of the (old) calendar, the Church was separated to two parts with the pretension of scientific accuracy. This is a big lie. The most sacred dogma was defiled: the unity of the (Orthodox) church. They Roman-Catholicized us! The pan-heresy of Ecumenism (the unity of all religions under one common God) sign of our times today has become the most prominent program of the Fanariot pseudo-bishops<sup>155</sup>. We do not longer speak about a single person of Fanari. Behind the Pope’s niceties only deception lies; through Ecumenism he will take over the world, because he is the representative of Satan, and as it was foretold in the Apocalypse he will reign for 1000 years, before Jesus returns to destroy the false priest.... We speak about a well-organized spiritual capture of the Patriarchate by guided persons. They are the same people who have penetrated the administration ranks of the other monasteries (of Mount Athos). The abbots and elders of the Holy Committee deceive the monks with lies, while telling them to be obedient. But we can no longer trust. They want to get Christ out of us. That is why we broke all communication with them in 1972. And the pogrom started; a pogrom that comes not from external enemies, but from inside Athos; and all this, because we do not agree with them’ [Discussion with Abbot Methodios of Esfigmenou, 16/1/2003]

<sup>156</sup> ‘For thirty years the zealots not only reject the politics of the central authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and not only have stopped to pray for the Patriarch Bartholomew during the liturgies, but they have also absolutely cut any communication from the central religious and administrative authority of the Athonian society. They have willingly cut themselves off all Orthodox Churches in order to join the so-called ‘Authentic Orthodox Christians’ group, and *only give Holy Communion to members of the Old Calendarist Church*. Furthermore, in recent years they made a systematic effort to legalize their illegal and anti-constitutional status inside the Athonian society, something very dangerous for the Athonian establishment as a whole. Therefore, Mount Athos is obliged to defend its established status in order to survive’ (Update issued by the Holy Committee informing pilgrims about the present situation with the monastery of Esfigmenou (28/1/2003) p.2, my translation from Greek)

second, the Holy Committee does not recognize the status of the monks of Esfigmenou, because the ordination of the Abbot Methodios in 1999, after the death of the previous Abbots Euthimios (1975-1999), was not approved by the Greek Patriarchate. Furthermore, the eviction highlighted the ‘cosmic’ political connections of Esfigmenou outside Athos, to far-right religious groups in secular Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the US, and Russia, such as ‘St Basil’ and ‘ELKIS’ (*see Appendix 4.1: ‘Meeting at St Basil, Thessaloniki 25/11/02’*). In conclusion, the other monasteries represented by the Holy Committee calls the monks of Esfigmenou ‘occupiers’, while criticizing them for a ‘cosmopolitan way of life’ (eviction note, February 2003)<sup>157</sup>.

The issue of the calendar became evident to me on Christmas day. The Vatopaidians celebrate the ‘Nativity of Jesus’ on December 25<sup>th</sup> according to the Gregorian calendar, while Esfigmenou celebrates Christmas according to the Julian calendar, which is thirteen days later (between the evening of January 6<sup>th</sup> and the morning of January 7<sup>th</sup>). Particularly, the monks of Esfigmenou believe that the Vatopaidians by adopting a double way of counting time are in fact ‘traitors to the true faith’, because of their adoption of a ‘Latin’ way of life. According to a Vatopaidian priest-monk, the Vatopaidians held two Christmas celebrations, one following the Gregorian calendar and the secular Christmas break during which more than 400 visitors arrived, and with beds fully booked months in advance, and they also held a small and as private as possible Christmas celebration, on the evening of January 6<sup>th</sup> to the morning of January 7<sup>th</sup> according to the Julian calendar, in the chapels, separately from the visitors who were kept in the Chapel of the Holy Girdle. But for the Esfigmenites this compromise shows that the Vatopaidians have made Athos a ‘hotel’, and that ‘they even want to let women to come in’:

---

<sup>157</sup> But the zealots of Esfigmenou remained adamant, arguing that: ‘Our abbot was canonically ordained Orthodox priest by our previous abbot Athanasius. After the death of the previous Abbot in 1999 we elected our abbot Methodios in a lawful manner, according to the constitution. It is the other monasteries with their so-called tradition of ‘spiritual fathers’ that break from the Athonite Constitution. Although they pretend they hold elections, they never do, because everybody is obliged to vote for Abbot the person that their Elders tell them from before. Therefore, it is not an election. The traitor elders of other monasteries, such as the Vatopaidi, use the western value of obedience to instruct their monks how to vote for a particular Abbot, according to their Masonic plans. You tell me now, who are the real monks? We, the ones who follow the rules with complete honesty, or the Vatopaidians who have changed tradition, telling the monks what to do, and without letting them question how things should be done?’ [personal communication with elder monk 13/1/03]

‘From 1924 to 1975, the Monastery of Vatopaidi followed the New Calendar for fifty-one years. Thus as the rest of the Athonite peninsula celebrated the feast of St Spyridon, Vatopaidi celebrated the Nativity of Christ along with the Latins. The same followed for all the immovable feasts. Today they say that they use both calendars but they are lying. Everybody knows that they only use the Paptic calendar. You see the Devil has made them *confused*, and they make false promises: they say different things and do as they are told by the Pope’ [Guest-master of Esfigmenou, 11/11/ 02]

These anxieties are well expressed in the oral tradition of the monastery, consisting of stories about the ‘Old Calendarist Church’ (*palaioimerologites*), ‘true faith’ (*alithin pistis*), and prophecies about the end of time. Such stories particularly highlight the ‘confusion’ of the mainstream Orthodox Church regarding the calendar. On the frosty morning of January 7 2003, following the 16-hour long Christmas Liturgy that celebrated the ‘Nativity of a Jesus’, the (unlikely for Esfigmenou’s standards) rich meal, with fish cooked in the oven, lentil soup, and salad, rewarded the congregation for its endurance, as well as a general (unlikely) feeling of harmony and peace. At the end of the meal, the abbot took the opportunity to narrate the story of a failed exorcism of a woman in one of the ‘Old Calendarist’ churches near Athens, on Christmas day in 1930. During the exorcism, Satan took over the woman’s body, who began to talking in strange languages, before beginning to reveal all the deepest secrets of the people who were participating in that ‘new’ Calendarist liturgy. The abbot described them as being ‘confused’. But thirteen days later, when her exorcism was repeated according to the ‘old’ calendar, she accepted the Holy Communion and came at peace: ‘He is taking me out, the one who is born *today*’, shouted the woman on the ‘real’ Christmas day. Her body became a public arena of the invisible war between good and evil, the material platform (sacrifice) on which Jesus triumphs over Satan, and a proof of the right day of Christmas according to the Julian calendar, and not according to the false calendar, in which Christmas is on the night when ‘nightclubs, bars, and bordellos are open’ [personal communication with an old monk of Esfigmenou 2/2/03]<sup>158</sup>.

---

<sup>158</sup> ‘This miracle took place at the town of Lykovrisi back in 1930, in the private ‘Institute of the Virgins’ dedicated to St Irina of Chrysovalantos. The monastery, despite the efforts of the Patriarch a few years before, continued following our Byzantine calendar remaining faithful to our traditions. A 25 year old girl from Piraeus, called Aikaterini Papazachariou, had the Demon inside her for six years. She used to enter New Calendarist churches in Athens shouting ‘My name is *Eosphoros*’ (Satan) and then saying the names and occupations of all those who were in the church, revealing all their dirty secrets so that in the future they would be too ashamed to walk in the church again, because of the humiliation in the neighbourhood. She knew all their deepest secrets, everything, because she was speaking with the voice of Satan. And she was screaming to the people who were following the new Calendar: ‘Welcome *confused*! Sometimes you prefer to choose one side, other times the other, but in anyway you are mine!’

As discussed in previous chapters, the Vatopaidian ‘virgin’ landscape offers a divine example of order, harmony, and beauty (*Filokalia*), which then the monks imitate in the way they organize both their monastic selves, and the monastery’s everyday activities. The Vatopaidian ideal of absolute harmony and order is heavily contested by the monks of Esfigmenou. For the latter, the forest is an arena for passionate struggles against the devil, as for example expressed below in a story of an elder of Esfigmenou:

‘I was walking in our land in the forest, which the Vatopaidians have stolen. Suddenly, two huge wild dogs jumped out from inside the trees and barking like crazy ran after me: one was black, the other was grey. The black one came out of the monastery of Vatopaidi. It ran behind me ready to kill me. But the grey one protected me. It was sent by the Mother of God to save me from Satan’s black dog. I managed to reach our monastery and found safety *inside*’ [Fisherman monk of Esfigmenou, 16/1/2003]

The monk clearly used this story to express his antipathy for the monks of neighbouring Vatopaidi. The ‘stolen land’ refers to the 700 year-old dispute over the ownership of the land that surrounds the two monasteries, which according to tradition belongs to St

Are you blind you fool? The new Calendar is mine, while the older one belongs to the nailed man on the cross!’ That day the new Calendarists celebrate Christmas, the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1931, when all the nightclubs, bars, and bordellos are open for the so-called Christians, she went in the Institute boasting: ‘Today is my birthday, and the world worships me because I am the Antichrist! I am *Eosphoros*, and today is *my* celebration! The Metropolitan of Athens is mine, your priests are mine, you are all mine, and you will all obey me without questioning’. And she turned to the new Calendarists and said: ‘what are *you* doing here (in the Old Calendarist Institute)? Why did you come here? Don’t you belong to me? I am going to punish you for this. I am going to tell all your sins’ and then started reciting the deepest secrets of each pilgrim for everyone to listen and be ashamed.

On the *real* day of our Christmas, it became known that the Institute would hold a night vigil, and so the Church was packed with pilgrims both old and new Calendarists. But the moment the liturgy started she broke into the Church screaming and hitting the pilgrims and saying: ‘What are you doing here *tonight*? Didn’t I tell you that you are mine? This is not for you. Tonight He will kick me out of my favourite child, my Katie (short for Aikaterini the name of the demonised girl), at four o’clock (this is the time of the preparation of the Christmas Holy Communion)’. And saying this, she began stabbing and hitting, biting and kicking, all those around her who were trying to keep her down on the floor. The priest called ‘Your birth Lord Jesus our God’, while trying to move her into the *lite*, to continue the exorcism, but she became even more violent hitting and spitting at him, and swearing the worst kind of insults and lies about his private life. The Devil said: ‘you don’t pull me out! He is pulling me out! You shut the fuck up. You give me a headache...He is taking me out, *the one who is born today*’ (always according to the old Byzantine calendar). Then violently the priests lay her down on the floor holding her because she was going crazy. The priest took the Holy Cup and laid it on her forehead. She was screaming: ‘Jesus kicks me out! I am leaving, I am leaving!’ and then she fell dead. Dead! But after a few minutes she regained her consciousness and accepted the Holy Communion, and became peaceful for the first time in her tortured life. And those who were there, after what they saw and heard, were persuaded that God exists with the old calendar, and Satan and his demons with the new one. Therefore, it is time for all those of the new Calendar to ask for forgiveness, as soon as you can, otherwise you will be punished for your indecisiveness. Amen’ [old monk of Esfigmenou 2/2/03]

Gregory Palamas, the ‘spiritual father’ of the *Hesychast* (‘Silencers’) movement of monks of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Palamas institutionalized the repetition of the words ‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me, the Sinner’, with the aim to ‘witness the Light of the Mount Tabor’ (Gillet 1987:60, and Meyendorff 1974:33-4). His method was challenged by the *Latinophron* Greek monk Varlaam, who saw the mystical practices of the *Hesychast*’s as ‘monstrosities and absurd doctrines that a man with intelligence or even little sense cannot lower himself to describe’ (Varlaam’s *Letter V to Ignatius* [1341], in Meyendorff 1974:89)<sup>159</sup>. The *Hesychast* movement of monks is thus a spiritual connection made to their Byzantine past; it is a matter of identity, a ‘matter of faith’. The confusion over the land under dispute between the two monasteries is because in 1316 Palamas joined Vatopaidi as a novice, but two decades years later he also became the abbot of Esfigmenou (1335). As evidence for their claim, the Vatopaidians keep a book of Gospels, dated back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, which includes a drawing portraying Palamas’s enemy, the ‘*Latinophron*’ Varlaam, on a black horse trying to escape the Archangel Michael’s wrath, who flies above him while pointing his sharp sword towards his head (manuscript *Code* 602, f. 175r). But equally for the Esfigmenites, Palamas *is* one of their abbots, especially when it comes to their own ‘struggle’ against the ‘Western’ forces of globalization. In their discussions with visitors, they often drew parallels between Palamas and their current notice of eviction issued by the *Holy Committee* because of their extremism. Therefore, Palamas’s land is not simply an economic dispute between the two neighbours; it is, above all, a matter of ‘identity of true faith’ (*tautotita alithinis pisteos*), as each brotherhood associates the holy figure exclusively with their monastery, thus, claiming their system of faith to be the true one.

---

<sup>159</sup> This theological conflict was part of the greater rivalry between Rome and Constantinople that began in 1054 with the Great Schism, and which has since defined Eastern monastic life as ‘mystical’, in opposition to the more ‘rational’ Western forms of monasticism (Gillet 1987:61, among others). In the context of the Great Schism of 1054, Palamas’ spiritual teachings became known as *Palamism*, creating the mystical ‘Eastern’ tradition against ‘Western nominalism’ (Meyendorff, 1974:88), though Gillet was careful to point out that in contemporary historical accounts, such as in Lossky (1957) there is a tendency to identifying ‘Palamism with orthodox spirituality’ (1987:60). In the context of the recent rise of the ‘Neo-Orthodox Movement’ as a return to Greek ‘spirituality’, Payne (2006) discussed the revival of Palamas’s Theory, in the context of ‘political Hesychasm’.

## 9.6 Prophecies of global warming

The issue of the calendar contains the greater schism in the understandings of the same *Hesychast* tradition. In this context, the calendar becomes a matter of faith directly associated with the ‘virgin’ land itself. In August 2004, although the monastery of Esfigmenou was still closed by the embargo imposed by the authorities, more than 200 secular Old Calendarist followers jumped over the fence and walked for about 10 kilometres, sneaking in the night into Esfigmenou without the police seeing them, for the ‘Dormition (‘sleep’) of Mary’ (August 15). Three days after the night vigil, the elder monk who was the *melissokomos* (‘beekeeper’) of the monastery, reported a miracle to the monastery’s international magazine, the *Voanerges*. The beekeeper of Esfigmenou placed at the bottom of the box of each hive an image of Mary with little Jesus on the one side, and an image of St Nektarios, the protector of hives on the other side, in order to increase the production of honey. Both images were painted by elder Euthymios, a famous zealot who had died four years earlier, but over time they were covered in wax. The beekeeper reported that miraculously the bees had eaten away the wax revealing in the centre of each side of the tableau the images of Mary and St Nektarios. The images were clear, as if the bees had eaten the wax carefully. The monks then decided to test the miracle by placing a picture of the Patriarch Bartholomew kissing the Pope in one of their public meetings, and see what the bees would do to the picture. Indeed, the monastery’s magazine reported that the bees had eaten the picture of the Pope *itself* (*Voanerges* 16 2004:14). In the same year, the (manufactured) miracle was circulated all around the Orthodox world through the internet as proof of god’s wrath against the traitors who have adopted the ‘new’ Gregorian calendar. For the Esfigmenites, the adoption of the Gregorian calendar for some celebrations and the Julian calendar for others, as well as, the division of day and labour according to worldly and liturgical hours, as they take place in Vatopaidi, are ‘signs of the end of time’. They express these anxieties in contemporary prophecies, such as the one below:

‘These things happened and will happen. They are already written in the prophecies; they are history. One of them says exactly the time of the abolition of the *Avaton* of Athos, and of the stigmatisation of people with the mark of the Beast and the unification of the world under the Antichrist Pope. On this day, which is not far away, the rock of Athos is going to collapse into the sea and the earth will be ripped apart to pieces by a huge wave. Water is going to

cover two thousand meters of the mountain and only thirty-three meters will remain above the sea level. Sixty-five of the monks of Esfigmenou, the most righteous ones, are going to follow Virgin Mary to the top of the mountain in order to witness the coming of the End of Time and to give evidence to the people of the world that this tragedy took place because of the sins of the monks of Athos, and that they should be prepared for Judgment Day’  
[Monk of Esfigmenou 12/11/02]

In respect to matters of faith, the prophecy has two references to contemporary issues: first, the threat of global warming, in connection to the recent discussions over the abolition of the *Avaton*. The wave that will drown Athos considers recent anxieties about global warming. Such a natural disaster is understood in cathartic terms. The world will be cleansed from its dirt, including the corrupted Athos. The Vatopaidians also have similar prophecies, but their interpretation is very different. In an international conference on *Ecological Crisis and the Apocalypse* held in Athens in December 2001, Abbot Ephraim interpreted John’s *Apocalypse* in terms of the current problems of environmental pollution and global warming, highlighting the symbolic affinity between current ecological problems and St. John’s prophecy<sup>160</sup>. He accepted scientific evidence regarding global warming, but also morally criticize scientists (rather than science per se) for polluting the natural environment. His ‘economic’ attitude towards the natural environment echoed the ecological model (rationally talking/ organizing the ‘house’ [*ecos*] according to certain ‘logic’ [*logos*]). In this context, he emphasized on the things we can do to save the planet, rather than simply waiting for the end. As I have already discussed in the thesis, this practical engagement with the environment in terms of ‘economy’ extends outside Athos. The monastery has been engaged in environmental projects, funded by the EU, such as the *Spiritual Ecology Camp* of 1994, which gathered young Orthodox men from around the world to

---

<sup>160</sup> ‘In a world of deep ecological crisis, in a world that uses and abuses the natural environment by polluting and ignoring nature, while not thinking of the future generations, and acting as the owner and abuser, instead of a *good economist* (in Greek ‘*ekonomos*’) and manager of the natural resources, in a world that lives on the edge of the abyss of genetic science and its (moral) implications to the mystery of the human being, with the Ozone hole, the phenomenon of the ‘greenhouse’, the toxic rain, the polluted food products, the nuclear waste plants, and all these things which they (the scientist) prepare for us in the near future, the Apocalypse of John is as contemporary as ever... The message of the Apocalypse is not the destruction of the human race, neither the number of the Beast Six hundred and sixty six, neither the crying and the mourning and the fear for the trouble coming with the rising ecological crisis. The message of the *Apocalypse* is positive. It is the victory of the Church through Man’s redemption and his final release into nature from the decade... The martyr says: ‘Yes, I am running to You, Amen Lord Jesus (22, 20)’ Extract from the Abbot’s speech at the Conference on ‘Ecological Crisis and John’s *Apocalypse*’ in the University of Athens, December 2001, as published in the magazine *Pemptousia* (no8, April-July 2002: 37-43), *my translation* from Greek.

pray and work within the natural environment. Further, in the last two decades, the monastery has participated in numerous international conferences on the environment, such as the *Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection* in Crete, 1991.

By contrast, Esfigmenou's above prophecy carries a very different moral message and contrasting political vocation: the prophecy directly refers to the discussions that took place in the EU between 2002 and 2003 regarding the constitutional right of women to enter Athos, a bill that the zealots passionately resisted, organizing a number of public protests in Thessalonica and Athens. For them it was a matter of identity, a 'matter of faith', which is compromised because of the funding most monasteries receive from the EU. This is only an aspect of a global conspiracy that aims to destroy their 'true faith', organized by the 'Antichrist Pope' and 'Jewish conspirators' (*sic*):

'They [Vatopaidians] want to bring in women with their families. But as it was prophesized, these are all Signs of the Second Coming. The days we are living, chaos and anarchy, were all prophesized by St John. These are all signs of the End of Time. As St John prophesized, nothing will be bought, sold, or exchanged, without the number of the Beast 6-6-6 on it. In the same way, now there are microchips with identification numbers that secret Jewish governments (*sic*) are trying to implant under our skin. You will not need money to buy something from a supermarket; you will only need to show your wrist with your number' [Esfigmenou monk 12/11/02]

The association of the barcode on all products with Satan's number 6-6-6, interpreted through anxieties of the rise of the industrial world, and a world, in a 'Papist-Jewish conspiracy' (*sic*), is in fact neither Athonian nor Greek by any sense. Several studies in Greece have shown (Moustakis 1983, and Kirtatas 1994) that this interpretation of John's prophecy was originally 'prophesised' by Mary Stuart Relfe in the nineteenth century in the US, and was actually imported to Athos in the 1970s by travelling zealot monks. Such contemporary prophecies manifest a 'persecution complex', a collective feeling that the 'world' is out to get them, because of their 'apocalyptic mission' (as in Hall 1997: 361). Despite the rejection of the monks of Esfigmenou of technology, in fact, such prophecies are distributed globally through the Internet, and within an international network of the 'Old Calendarist Church' of ultra-Orthodox churches and institutions worldwide (with branches in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Russia, among other countries), and which are further associated with US Evangelical movements, such as the organization 'Holy Orthodox Church in Northern America', formed in 1987. This network challenges Esfigmenou's moral disconnection from the

world, as its monks are more than connected to the Orthodox world via their extremist politics and ultra nationalist Orthodoxy. This includes a close relationship to the new media, as in the Internet there are more than 500 sites referring to the monastery as ‘the last tower of zealots’. The monastery also publishes a monthly magazine, the *Voanerges* (‘The Energy of the Voice’) in five languages: Greek, Russian, English, Bulgarian, and Serbian. Consequently, the international reputation of Esfigmenou is a strong motivation for someone to become a monk in this *particular* monastery and its fundamentalist ideology, which is a fusion of extreme political and religious sentiments.

Through the production and reproduction of prophecies, recorded in books and cds, the monks not only draw the moral boundaries of *their* community in opposition to the other monasteries of Athos, but also open an alternative, and far more extremist, channel to the world outside Athos. Furthermore, the prophecy reassures the monks of *their* choice for this particular monastery. In the prophecy, only thirty-three metres will remain uncovered with water, symbolizing the years of Jesus (it is said that the Mount is 2, 033 metres high), and only sixty-five of its members, the ‘most righteous ones’, will be saved. Today, a hundred and thirty monks live in the monastery, which means that only half of its brotherhood will be saved. This suggests a different connection to the landscape and to the nature of monastic life in comparison to the Vatopaidians. As discussed in chapter 3, regarding the comparison of the interpretation of the icon of *Esfagmeni* (‘Slaughtered Mary’), the Esfigmenites emphasize martyrdom as their collective motivation, not obedience or harmony.

### 9.7 ‘Under Siege’

Despite Esfigmenou’s rich Byzantine history, the Greek abbot preferred to talk about the Greek Revolution of 1821 as if it is happening today. He was particularly proud of the period between 1812 and 1832, because of the active involvement and ‘martyrdom’ of its monks, who closely worked with Emmanuel Pappas, one of the most influential personalities of the revolution (Mikrayannanitos 1999: 223)<sup>161</sup>. A prominent figure in

---

<sup>161</sup> It is important to highlight here the poverty of Esfigmenou in comparison to the rich inheritance of Vatopaidi, which included the eight miraculous miracles of Mary and her Holy Girdle (*see* chapters 3 and 8). By contrast, **Esfigmenou only keeps the tent of Napoleon, which he gave to the monks as a present for supporting the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman Empire.** This is the only connection the Esfigmenites are proud of with the otherwise hated Europe. For the Greek zealots,

this tradition is St Agathaggelos Ayonnis (April 19), a seventeen year-old monk who was executed in 1819 by the Ottoman army, two years before the Greek Revolution of 1821. St Agathaggelos and St Timotheos, who was another monk of Esfigmenou, resisted torture by ‘refusing to betray the name of Jesus’ becoming ‘a martyr for his Faith’ [personal communication with monk 16/12/03]. His icon has a prominent position in the *nave* of the church, alongside the icons of Jesus and Mary. The monks keep the hand and head of the saint in the sanctuary. As with Vatopaidi’s relics, St. Agathaggelos’ bones ‘haven’t stopped smelling of flowers all over these years’ [*vematariis* 5/1/03]. The symbolism of the martyr’s fragmented and mutilated body becomes even stronger when paralleled with that of Jesus’ sacrifice to save the world. St Agathaggelos imitated Jesus by sacrificing himself for his faith, and in turn, the monks have to imitate his example by resisting to external forces, to protect their true faith. In a speech at the refectory, following the embargo imposed on the monastery by the Athonian Holy Committee in February 2003 (*see* below), the abbot identified himself with St Agathaggelos, defining true faith as the ideal martyrdom: ‘How many things did the holy martyrs suffer in order to keep the name of Christian? ...Nearly sixteen million known martyrs were killed for Christ’s love’ [Abbot’s speech in refectory 15/2/03]. In this context, the monastic ‘love’ is not a matter of economy and obedience as in Vatopaidi, but actual martyrdom. Here, ‘true faith’ is not a matter of order and *apatheia*, but a passionate struggle against the ‘world’.

‘Here we were born, and if it is necessary, here we will die...The dynamite is made the same way that they made bombs during our Revolution (against the Ottoman Empire) in 1821. If you come in, we will blow up ourselves and become martyrs of Christ as it is written in the prophecies. God brought them here; God will take them away’ [30/01/03]

My fieldwork to Esfigmenou was interrupted in March 2003, following the February eviction note issued by the Holy Committee, as the police surrounded the monastery closing all the paths into and out of Esfigmenou. At that time the monks were locked with about 100 visiting followers inside the monastery, opening the back gate only if it

---

Napoleon is a ‘modern hero’, because of his support to the Greek Orthodox cause. The poverty in its intellectual tradition was the result of frequent pirate raids which laid it waste several times (in 873, 1047, and 1534). Worst of all, in 1491, the monastery was totally burned down, including its Library, with much of its treasures lost. Only 372 manuscripts survived. The Library of Esfigmenou was then re-invested with 8,000 books on the values of zealot monasticism, mostly written after 1871, many referring to the ‘martyrdom’ against the Ottoman army.

was absolutely necessary, in fear of the police. It was a week after the Holy Committee decided to take action against Esfigmenou, issuing an embargo, amongst reports by the world media<sup>162</sup>. The imposed embargo of February 2003 brought unity to this otherwise segmented community. The monks that were the most vocal were Greeks, led by the abbot and the Greek monk who is a known zealot from his travelling and preaching in Greece. They organized the monks and visitors in shifts of five, who walked up and down the monastery's battlements, checking for any attempts by the police to break in. The doors were kept shut. They only opened for half an hour before dawn, in order not to be seen by the police, to let in visitors who, despite the embargo, jumped the fence at the borders with Ierissos, and walked through the forest to the monastery, carrying with them food and medicine and other necessities for the monks. The ids of newcomers were checked, so that they did not allow any spies or saboteur in the monastery. Outside, Greek police wearing EU badges were stationed, waiting to arrest the abbot and its six elders, and to evict the rest. The authorities did not allow any boat or jeep to approach the monastery's premises, as all communications with the world outside the monastery are cut. Ironically, this action fits to the idealism of the zealots, that of isolation and martyrdom.



Figure 9e: Monk evicted from Esfigmenou: From <http://www.esfigmenou.com> (27/5/2009)

<sup>162</sup> ‘Armed police [...] last night began blockading [Esfigmenou] [...] The Greek authorities said police would remain outside the monastery until ‘every one’ of the monks left. But a defiant Abbot Methodios declared: ‘We could hold out for two years. We are prepare to fight on, even though the authorities have cut off our electricity, water, heating, and food supplies’ (Helena Smith reporting for *The Guardian*, 29/1/03)

Inside the monastery the tension was increasing. The monks had stopped praying in their cells, as they are used to, but began gathering in the monastery's garden, warning them 'great events are coming!' During the night liturgies, the number of monks falling on their knees, and screaming like they were demonised, sharply increased. Meanwhile, because of the embargo, their supplies were also finishing. The petrol lamps were rarely used, as there is not enough petrol, and most of the monastery was left in absolute darkness. The stoves remained without fire, in order to keep as much as would possible for the future, as nobody knew how long the embargo would last. The monks decided to heat the stoves on days of non-abstinence, in order to cook, but on days of abstinence they did not to put them on, combining thus an economic way of burning the last reserves of wood, and keeping with their strict tradition. On days of abstinence the monastery had no food, and no heating, according both to their zealot ideal and the political circumstances of the time. After eating the little food served in the refectory, some tomatoes and olives with bread, visitors and monks gathered in the garden to discuss about the embargo. Talking about it was the only time they socialized, as most of the time they spent their days and night in their cells presumably praying. The hunger, cold, and darkness made them angry: 'Those bastards, don't they think of the elder monks? There are monks who have spent here 60 years, where can they go now?' one visitor said, only to be answered by an elder Georgian monk in Greek:

'If it is necessary we will fight them with our bare fists. Only dead they can take us out of our home...The ground at Karyes is rotting under their feet because of their sins, as it was foretold in the prophecies. They don't know what they are really in for. They don't know that they do work for God, but for His (sic) destruction. Only the truly repentant monks of Esfigmenou will be saved and witness the Second Coming. So we must not fear but look forward to this. Have true faith that's all you need' [elder7/2/03]

Three weeks after the imposition of the embargo, some visitors wanted to leave, because they were frozen and they had to go back to work. Because there was no boat to take the visitors out of the monastery, some of them asked the *arsanaris* ('harbourman') of the monastery if there was any other way to get out of the peninsula. Tired and hungry, they were disappointed to hear by the elder and fisherman of the monastery (*arsanaris*), that there was 'no way out of here for the time' and asked them for their patience. He then told them a story from the first eviction of the monastery in 1973, when a demonized man who was inside the monastery climbed on the tower with the

flag calling from ‘Orthodoxy Or Death’ and tried to put it down. But he slept and fell on the rocky ground, only to be miraculously saved by the presence of the Virgin Mary. This made him realize his mistake and made him to decide to stay and support the monastery’s struggle against the authorities [*arsanaris* 15/2/03]<sup>163</sup>.

Ironically, the embargo has rapidly increased Esfigmenou’s reputation around the globe, as it attracted even more visitors, rather than discouraging them from approaching the monastery: ‘More than 80 visitors came in the last few nights, and next weekend, we are expecting 200 more, so be ready to help’ the *archontaris* told me a few days before the imposition of the embargo [28/1/03]. According to its tradition for hospitality, Esfigmenou has its gate open for all outcasts, no matter their background, by offering shelter within the warmth of its zealot ideology<sup>164</sup>. Unlike Vatopaidi, where

---

<sup>163</sup> ‘Don’t worry you are not going anywhere. The Virgin Mary won’t let’s you go; it is her wish for you to stay and support us in our struggle against the police. I’ll tell you a story that goes back to 1973 (he refers to the time of the first eviction), when our brotherhood was the only monastery in Athos to publicly denounce the Patriarchate of Constantinople as a traitor. Back then, they also sent the police to evict us, and the commander in charge came outside our truncheons to arrest us. I felt sorry for him, because he would be cursed because of his deeds against our brotherhood. He was begging us, shouting to surrender, and to abandon our monastery, because his orders said that we were occupiers of the monastery. But our saint Abbot Athanasius would not pay any attention to his words. And so, we gathered on the tower, singing hymns to the Virgin Mary to help us to get rid of the intruders in a week. But I heard that the commander’s wife and his two children died of cancer five years... that was the time when we raised our banner (‘Orthodoxy or Death’) on the monastery’s tower. A week after we raised it, I was working at the *arsanas* fixing my nets, when I saw a man with ropes hanging from the tower trying to reach our flag, because the devil made him wanting to put our banner down and take it to the Serbs at the monastery of Hiliandari.’ ‘Come down demonised man you are going to kill yourself!’ I shouted at him, but he was demonized and he wouldn’t listen. Instead, he started climbing up the tower like a maniac. But suddenly, one of the ropes fell loose and the man fell at the rocks in front of our monastery. ‘Ah! *Panaghia mou* (‘Oh! My Holy Mary’) the poor man’ I shouted, hearing the man’s head crashing on the sharp rocks. Nobody could survive such fall. However, Mary saved the man, because she is forgiving and powerful. When we took him in the monastery he was bleeding. Miraculously, he did not have a single broken bone on his body, but he couldn’t remember what happened because of the Demons that overtook him. The poor man! Where did he want to go without asking the permission of the Garden’s owner? The same goes for you too: there is a storm raging outside for three weeks. Can’t you see that *this is not natural!*? You, the desperate who want to leave this monastery and go to his luxurious home, can’t you see that your hopes of crossing the flooded rivers and the muddy forest by feet are pointless without the permission of Mary? Where do you think you are going? You are going to crash your faces on the muddy ground like that man did. That’s why the only thing you should do is stay here and pray for the coming celebration of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin needs you this time to protect this monastery, the last Tower of true Orthodoxy, from being taken by traitors. And that explains why the weather is so bad for such a long period of time’ [*Arsanaris* of Esfigmenou 15/2/03]

<sup>164</sup> ‘We are the biggest brotherhood of Athos, and we give our hospitality to all those who want to come in. We have many believers, true believers, who try to send their money and donations, but the Council in Karyes has now blocked our bank account. We alone with our own hands and not with the Devil’s money had to preserve the monastery and our holy icons. That’s why they envy us. They say that because we do not accept the money from the Masons of the EU, like the Masons who run Vatopaidi, we do not take care of our heritage, but that’s absolutely wrong. We do our best. In 1990, we only had 45 beds for visitors, but today we have 400. We did not come here to make money like the Vatopaidians, but to offer

the visitors and their presence were clearly limited within designed areas so that they were kept as separate as possible from the brotherhood, in Esfigmenou monks and permanent visitors, such as lay workers and unemployed old men, spent most of the day in each others' companionship, even eating together in the refectory. Furthermore, the wing of the guest-house was not separate from the monks' cells as in Vatopaidi. I noticed that visitors were playing an integral part in the monastery's life, as they often talked to new coming visitors about the ideals and beliefs of the monks, even double checking the credentials of not known visitors for the monks. The rumour of police hiding in the forest, waiting to arrest anyone going in or out the monastery encouraged a collective paranoia<sup>165</sup>.

At the sound of two policemen knocking on the monastery's gate, the abbot told them that the monastery was his life. His passionate words led me to the monastery's battlements, from where I could take a look outside behind the gate: there were only a few policemen in a single police jeep, and not the 'riot police' that the faithful pilgrims of the monastery talked about all week. It was just another sign of the mythology surrounding the walls of this monastery and its tradition for an eternal struggle for the protection of true faith, in which the monastic motive of self-sacrifice becomes a political 'martyrdom'. According to them, since the embargo was imposed in 2003 five of their brothers have lost their lives in their effort to break it and bring medicine and petrol from Karyes. But with the embargo imposed, they had to drive on the deadly rocky paths connecting the monastery to Karyes in absolute darkness with the lights of the jeep switched off, in order not to be seen by the two police jeeps watching over the monastery and by monks of rival monasteries. The dangerous drives in the night resulted to three fatal accidents over a period of four years (always according to the testimonies given by monks of Esfigmenou to the Greek media). They even claim that

---

out hospitality from the world. Instead they want to kick us out of the monastery, our home. Where are we going to go? I have been here all my life, since I was 16 years old' [personal communication with abbot 7/12/02]

<sup>165</sup> In such an environment, I was once seen as a spy. One day during my second week in December 2002, as I was looking in my bag I noticed that my Greek identity card was missing. I asked another visitor if he knew who had taken my Greek identity documents. He laughed and admitted that he did, before returning it to me with a broad smile. He calmly replied that the monks had asked him the previous evening to check my credentials, and see who I really was, and what I was doing in the monastery: 'You are ok; at least you say who you are; but there are others who are here spying for the Greek government' [12/12/02].

the hospital in Karyes refused to treat their injured brothers leaving them for dead (*see Appendix 4.3: 'funeral of Father Tryfonas'*)<sup>166</sup>. The deceased monks are considered to be 'martyrs for the Faith' by their brothers, and were remembered everyday with a special prayer during the liturgy (note here that one of the issues between Esfigmenou and the Holy Committee is that the new zealots refuse to commemorate the authority of the 'Ecumenical Patriarchate' min Istanbul). They are the descents of St Agathaggelos, offering contemporary moral examples of true faith to the rest of the brotherhood:

'Now we need True Faith...and when the time has come for the Lord to separate the honest from the sinners...the Lord will tell to the honest: blessed from my Father are those who protected my Faith and my Orders, and they will inherit the Paradise...while the Lord will say to the sinners: go and burn in Hell for an eternity, because you did not protect my Faith and Orders' [Abbot Methodios 5/2/03]

The abbot and the Greek monk who was active in the 'Old Calendarist Church' also kept the monastery's two mobile phones, and gave a number of interviews to the Greek media, as well as *The NY Times*, the *Guardian*, and *Associated Press*, among other international agencies. 'We will fight with our prayer ropes. There are 300 bullets here (rosary)' the abbot told the *NY Times* (8/2/03). Another elder did not even hesitate to go *Live* on Greek television, via the mobile phone, to protest about their situation (*see Appendix section 7.6: 'Live TV Interview'*). In other words, the quest for 'martyrdom' is a strategy of engaging with the 'world', despite the ideal disconnection of the zealots. It is the political vocation of a multiethnic and segregated community that is publicly manifested as the new zealot global movement. Paradoxically, the monastery's hard-core world reputation, which claims to be anti-global, makes this monastery as much, if not even more, connected to cosmopolitan institutions than Vatopaidi. This is illustrated for instance by their refusal to import new technologies in the monastery because they are marked with the Number of the Beast, but at the same time, they build their reputation on the basis of hundreds of Internet sites that can break over the embargo

---

<sup>166</sup> *Associated Press* Sunday February 9 2004: 'Greek Hermit Rebel Monk Killed': A 25-year-old hermit monk died after accidentally driving his tractor off a cliff in an attempt to dodge police who have barricaded the rebel monastery. The incident occurred early Saturday in the Orthodox Christian sanctuary of Mount Athos, where the rebel Esfigmenou monastery has been sealed off by police since Jan. 29. Police said the monk, Tryfonas, who lived in solitary quarters, tried to retrieve a tractor outside the monastery grounds during the night to avoid police detection and drove off the side of a cliff. Esfigmenou's 117 monks are defying an eviction order imposed because of their fierce opposition to efforts to improve relations between the Orthodox Church and the Vatican' [http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20030209/ap\\_on\\_re\\_eu/greece\\_rebel\\_monks\\_2](http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20030209/ap_on_re_eu/greece_rebel_monks_2) [last seen 6/4/2008]

imposed by the authorities on the monastery. The recent upheaval surrounding Esfigmenou has increased its reputation through the new media, attracting extremist Christians from all over the world. Since the Fall of the Berlin wall, the number of monks of Esfigmenou went up from 41 in 1990 to 105 in 1996 (Mantzaridis 1997: 172) because of the reputation of Esfigmenou itself as the ‘last tower of zealots’. As discussed above, during my fieldwork there were 117 monks in the monastery, most of them Greek, but also from Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia, Slovakia, Ireland, Cyprus, and Albania, among other countries.

A few years after my fieldwork, in November 2006, there was even a violent effort of the Holy Committee by sending the police to break in Esfigmenou. This effort was met with physical resistance of the monks inside and was fully covered by the Greek media (first week of November). In response to the rising politico-religious temperature, the Patriarch Vartholomeos offered a hand of reconciliation, but it was all over the news that he and the Holy Committee had actually decided to fund and renovate another ancient monastery near Esfigmenou, re-name it into ‘Esfigmenou’, and introduce a new brotherhood of monks from settlements near Karyes. This response to the refusal of the zealots to come out included the expulsion of the monks from the *kontaki*, the administrative building of Esfigmenou at the village of Karyes, since they did not participate in the *Holy Committee*. The idea was to remove the zealots without causing violence in the ‘Garden of Mary’, by marginalizing them.

In the winter of 2006, the world media (*Reuters* ‘Greek Monks Clash on Mount Athos’ Dec 20 2006, and *BBC NEWS* ‘Greek Monks Clash over Monastery’ Dec 21 2006) reported two violent incidents at the Athonian village of Karyes, between zealots of the monastery of Esfigmenou and a group of monks from Karyes. On November 10, a few monks of Esfigmenou got out of the monastery, in the middle of the night so that they were not seen by the police, and drove all the way to Karyes to get in Esfigmenou’s *kontaki*, before the new monks had a chance to take it. They locked themselves in, and started throwing rocks of burning coal to a group of monks, secular workers, and the police, who tried to evict them. The police was following the order of a Greek court issued in October 2005, which gave two-year suspended custodial sentences to the nine Elders of Esfigmenou, asking for the dismantling of the zealot brotherhood. On December 22, the conflict upgraded from farcical to serious. A group of about fifteen

strong monks went to the disputed building asking for explanations from those who had taken over ‘their’ office. According to witnesses, in a new fight ‘crowbars, pickaxes and fire extinguishers’ were used as weapons (*Europe News* Dec 22, 2006), seven monks got seriously injured and had to be taken to the hospital at the secular town of Polygeros to be treated for head injuries, most seriously, the Greek deacon (whom I knew well from my time there) with a fractured skull.



Figure 9d: Monk with fractured skull in ambulance at <http://www.esfigmenou.com> (20/12/2006)

## 9.8 Conclusion

The comparison of Vatopaidi to the fundamentalist approach of their neighboring monks of Esfigmenou shows staggering differences in the way each monastery engages with the material world. In Vatopaidi, space, time, statuses, and tasks are incorporated within a strict hierarchical system, based on ideas of natural order, and built on the basis of virginity and economy. By contrast, Esfigmenou was a rather chaotic semi-hermetic environment, divided by seven languages in seven groups which functioned independently from each other, and sometimes antagonistically to each other. Unlike Vatopaidi where the abbot took the self-sacrificial place of Christ for the good of the community, in Esfigmenou the abbot is simply an administrator and nothing more. Esfigmenou offers an alternative model of Orthodox monastic life that highlights a much more extremist attitude towards the separation of monastic from secular life. Here, their ideas and symbolic dramas based on notions of purity and pollution are much sharper than those of the Vatopaidians, becoming the *ends* –and not the *means* as in the Vatopaidian economic way. Accordingly, concepts such as ‘virginity’, ‘nature’, ‘spirituality’, and ‘sacrifice’, largely differ from one monastery to the other: in Vatopaidi ‘nature’ means order, the economic *means* to separate from the ‘cosmopolitan’ world. The new zealots do not believe in ‘spirituality’ or ‘spiritual fathers’ (*pneumatikotita, pneumatikos pateras*), while evaluating obedience as a ‘westernized’ form of monasticism, which aims to keep younger monks under control within a greater world conspiracy to destroy the purity of their true faith. The absence of an organized communal life as in Vatopaidi puts an extra emphasis on the value of *filoponia* (‘to be a friend of pain’), not as the means as in Vatopaidi, but as the *ends*.

In this context, while the collective life of Vatopaidi was contextualized in between private and public prayers, times, spaces, in Esfigmenou true faith was manifested publicly in individual performances, exorcisms, arguments, and so on. Furthermore, there was no separation between monks and visitors, or rules of conduct, as for everyone in Esfigmenou the rules were the same, referring to each *person*, rather than rank –as in the impersonal Vatopaidi-. The different understandings of the moral priorities and aims of monastic life between the two very different environments of the two monasteries are encompassed in the issue of the calendar. The contrast between the two monasteries is thus not structural, because they both adopt a morality based on the

separation of monastic from secular life; rather, the contrast comes in terms of interpretation and *style* of practice (as in Stewart 1994). Time here is a political strategy, especially in relation to ideas of self-sacrifice as the way of dealing with the worldly world. For the new zealots offers the political means, in order to re-engage with the 'world' by paradoxically claiming that they are disconnected from it.

In this context, the Vatopaidian abbot's arrest for the economic and political scandal regarding the *metochia* in Greece was his public 'self-sacrifice' (*autothysia*) in the hands of cosmopolitan institutions. In imitation to Christ's persecution, he was motivated by the good of his children, and the prosperity of the monastery, and for this he suffered and was imprisoned by the world of the cosmopolitans. By contrast, in Esfigmenou, the 'nature' (*fysis*) of monastic life is defined as 'martyrdom', a collective *end* against the world, a kind of political self-sacrifice that aims for the personal redemption of each monk. Furthermore, by claiming that only 65 monks will be saved from the imminent Second Coming it prepares the ground towards a more aggressive and extreme form of monasticism. In Vatopaidi, the way of life gives equal emphasis on private and public activities, while the presentation of the self in the community is based on a mild way of acting and thinking about others and the environment, according to the 'economy of passions' and towards the ideal of *apatheia* (to be 'without passions'). In this way, the Vatopaidians directly (re)-connect the inner order of each monk to the social order of the monastery, and through it to the world. By contrast, in Esfigmenou where such economic separations do not exist, because they are seen as compromises to their ideal of virginity, the interpretation and practice of the same monastic values and structures is more extreme and passionate as public manifestations of true faith. In this context, the gap between private and public worlds is widened to the extremes, because there is no emphasis on communal values as in Vatopaidi: thus, the Esfigmenites spend more time in their cells alone than the monks of other monasteries. This is an individualist act of disorder, rather than collective order as in Vatopaidi.

## Chapter 10: Thesis Conclusion

‘The world of the religious is not a special aspect of empirical nature: *It is superimposed upon nature*’ (Durkheim 1995: 230)

The material of this thesis reflected on the Athonian notions of *virginity* and *economy*, which I used as entry points, in order to understand the complementary relationship between the ideal and the real in the life of Athos. As argued in chapter 2, this echoes the issues regarding the gap between anthropological theory and practice. In this context, Durkheim’s definition of monastic life as ‘sacred’ is not static, neither rigidly ‘ascetic’, as argued by Cannell (2005, 2006) in her criticism of the strict and ascetic interpretations of Christianity in terms of purity rather than an open practice. The material from Athos shows that even in monasteries the ideal separation of the ‘sacred’ from the ‘profane’ ‘cannot go as far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible’ (Durkheim 1995: 38). In this context, I re-approached the ‘sacred’ life of the monasteries not in the static and moral terms of purity, as it was represented by informants and visitors alike, but rather as an open and transnational arena of negotiation, renegotiation, and even reinvention of old values and traditions, in respect to the current financial and political interests of each monastic institution. In this context, the agency of the monks lies right in the centre of the paradox and symbolic ambiguities of monastic life in itself: its ideal disconnection from a world of which it is part. The negotiation, contestation, and reproduction of the ‘sacred tradition(s)’ are some of the strategies adopted by each brotherhood on a collective level, as a way of disconnecting from the material world in order to actively re-connect to it. The paradox of monastic life is illustrated by the fact that these strategies have developed in the name of the ‘sacred tradition’ of virginity in the same way the reputation of Athos as ‘unchanged for a thousand years’ attracts thousands of visitors every year.

In the thesis, I looked at several manifestations of the eternal ideal of virginity as the negative interdiction that *separates*, illustrated by Mary as the mother protector of the landscape, her monks, and the ‘virgin way of life’ of the monasteries (chapter 3). This was complemented by economical practices, in terms of daily compromises towards this ideal, which re-unify the spiritual and material separation within a particular economic logic. Chapter 4 tried to understand this Vatopaidian logic, first by looking at the movement of charismatic monks and their groups as the means of replacing

biological with spiritual forms of reproduction, and second, by focusing on the personal journey of the novices from the ‘world’ to the monastery, through their ordeal and rites of passage that offer a cleansing path from their secular past. The next chapter further discussed the striving towards a virgin body, by looking at private and collective practices of faith used to detach the spirit from the body as the moral basis according to the ideal monastic persona, which is exemplified by the self-sacrifice of the ‘first monk’ Christ. The ideal of virginity was further investigated in relation to the community and the moral values that support a double hierarchical system (chapter 6), and a double timetable that contextualizes two sets of activities based on praying in the night and working in the day (chapter 7). These separations are based on a specific morality that highlights communal values as the economic application of each monk in imitating Christ’s self-sacrifice. Conversely, I also discussed economy in complementary relationship to the ideals of virginity, as the daily practices that offer compromising solutions towards this ideal. Central in this economic way of thinking is the Vatopaidian notion of ‘economy of passions’ and ‘blind obedience’ first to the elders and second to the daily program. This separation holds the entire double social system of Vatopaidian life, as the commitment to the elders refers to the each monastic person who is conceived as separated from the living body of the community.

In particular, the co-existence of a liturgical and worldly calendars, as well as, liturgical and worldly hours, the liturgical time referring to the practices of faith that take place in the night aiming to cultivate the monastic self, and the working time that organizes collectively the daily tasks aiming to cultivate the prosperity of the monastery, bring in mind Leach’s concept of ‘sacred time’ (2004: 124-136) as the manipulated time of rituals, running along the ‘ecological time’ that annually organizes the agricultural activities in a circular manner. These two times support a double hierarchical system, as Leach (2001/ 1954) showed in relation to the notions of notions of ‘*gumlao*’ and ‘*gumsa*’ among the Kachin in Highland Burma: the former concept referring to the eternal hierarchy of both humans and spirits while the latter to structural relationships of everyday life, as they both complement each other into a single system. The ‘sacred time’ and ‘ecological time’ function as time-borders between the eternal, invisible, and spiritual world, and the ephemeral, visible, changing, material world. The negotiation between the eternal and the ephemeral worlds takes place on the basis of virginity that supports several further separations, such as informal from formal hierarchies,

activities, and conduct, and on the moral basis of the Christian separation of the spiritual self from the monastic institution. These separations allow the monks to develop several strategies as a way of re-connecting to the same world from which they morally and practically disconnect.

It is also on the moral basis of the same spirituality conceived as separated from materialist dealings that the abbot of Vatopaidi only resigned from his administrative post following the financial and political scandal of the *metochia*. Instead, and despite his conviction, he was allowed to keep his position as the spiritual father to all the monks. Further, it is on the basis of the same separation that the Vatopaidians use new technologies and the internet in the monastery for business, and not for their personal pleasure, as they work (sacrifice their time for praying) for the community and the impersonal monastery, not for their personal self-interest. In other words, it is the cathartic entity of the 'Monastery', whose relics and life are used to construct this moral background, not on the basis of what you do, but rather how and why you do it in the first place. In this sense, the abbot's involvement in the scandal regarding the exchanges and renting of disputed land in Greece is redeemed, because he is perceived as sacrificing his self for the good of his community, in imitation to Christ.

On the other hand, the concept of time in Esfigmenou is a *political* matter as illustrated by their prophecies about the 'end of time'. The monks do not distinguish between liturgical and worldly time, as for them the Julian calendar, and Roman way of counting each hour according to the length of the day and the night, are matters of true faith. Their single adoption of time reflects both in the internal regime of the monastery and on its external vocation as a strict environment with the reputation of being the 'last tower of zealots' on Athos. The ultra-Orthodox reputation of the monastery attracts monks and visitors from all over the world. Although they seem to be unified under the black flag calling for 'Orthodoxy or Death', in practice the brotherhood is fragmented and the power of the abbot diminished. Each of the seven main groups follows their own timetable, speaks in their own language, and has their own customs. The absence of order, which is seen as a 'Westernized' form of monasticism imported by monks such as the Vatopaidians, follows a hermetic way of thinking, in which 'martyrdom' is a central motivation. Here self-sacrifice as 'martyrdom' is collective, and takes place

within extremist and racist political terms in the form of a true faith, based on the dispute over the used of the Gregorian calendars by some monasteries, as in Vatopaidi.

The differences in the conception of time between Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou extend to their contrasting moral priorities and understandings of the ‘nature’ (*fysis*) of monastic life. For instance, we have seen two very different uses of the traditional value of hospitality: in Vatopaidi it is used first to make money (the more visitors the monastery gets the more money it makes, and thus, it does not allow visitors to stay more than two nights according to the Athonian constitution), and second to exert influence outside Athos, through the uses of traditional methods such as the reinvention of confession as the means of making powerful political friends. The obligation to confess on arrival to Vatopaidi immediately puts visitors into a disadvantaged position in respect to confessor, which is further amplified by other means of exchange, such as the treat given to visitors on their arrival, and their limited access to the space and life of the monks. In this context, the separation of the monastic cells from the guesthouse is vital in holding this system together. Finally, the actual form of exchanges taking place through the *tamata* (‘promises’) the golden and silver ornaments offered in exchange for healing miracles, re-affirm the subordinated position of visitors and the mediating role of the monks between them and god, as while the visitor is obliged by his faith to make a *tama* in order to desperately ask for a miracle, there is no prescribed time of respond by god. This means that if the miracle does not happen it is not the fault of god, or of his representatives on earth monks, but of the faithful himself who might need to make another offer, or reconsider (always with the help of his ‘spiritual father’) why the miracle did not work. Despite the rule that does not allow visitors to spend more than two nights in a monastery, the Esfigmenites encouraged their visitors to stay as long as possible, in order to support their political cause in numbers against the imposed embargo and the police van waiting to arrest the abbot outside the high walls of the monastery. By contrast, in Esfigmenou monks and visitors live together. The Esfigmenites used the value of hospitality to attract all kinds of (usually) an older age, who are alienated from secular life, but also politically involved in religious matters. Visitors were not obliged, in fact discouraged from, confessing, because they do not believe in ‘spiritual’ relationships thinking of them as imported from the ‘West’.

For the bitterly rival monasteries, the ‘world’ (*kosmos*) out there is a very different place: they both agree that they have to morally resist to the ‘world’ to protect their ‘sacred traditions’, but at the same time, for the Vatopaidians the ‘world’ is that of opportunity; by contrast, for Esfigmenou it is a threatening world, which they have to resist and fight against *by all means and ends*. This basic difference in understanding the essence of contemporary monastic life and the role of the monks was illustrated by their opposite interpretations of the same values, such as *filoponia* (‘to be a friend of pain’) and *autothysia* (in Vatopaidi referring to ‘self-sacrifice’, in Esfigmenou to ‘self-martyrdom’) which for the Vatopaidians offer the means to salvation, while for the Esfigmenites they are the ends. This contrasting understanding of the moral priorities of monastic life is embodied in the everyday life of each community, which although remains structurally the same (divided in terms of prayer and work, the four seasons, and the same liturgical and agricultural calendar, as well as internal and external hierarchies, according to St. Athanasius’s *Typiko*), in practice these separations are applied in very different ways in two contrasting environments, on the one hand, the highly ordered, well-preserved, and strictly hierarchical Vatopaidi, with its famous ‘friends’ for visitors, and on the other, the impoverished and chaotic environment of Esfigmenou, under embargo, with infamous friends, or rather followers, for visitors, who are also seeking for their personal redemption through the monastery’s struggle against the ‘world’ out there. In conclusion, wish to I argue here that despite the phenomenological heterogeneity of monastic life on the Mount, the comparison of the two monasteries not only highlights their historical and everyday differences, but also their great structural similarities: Vatopaidi is only a mild version of Esfigmenou, and vice versa, Esfigmenou is more of an extremist model of Vatopaidi, build however on the same basic values and separations. These are adopted in different ways according to the respective moral priorities of each institution. The respective moral priorities are then contextualized within their respective calendars, ways of counting and organizing times, hierarchies, and contrasting ways of communal life: one that is based on impassionate obedience, the other on passionate struggle. But essentially, the monks of both monasteries remain fundamentalist outcasts. For Christian monastic life is essentially a fundamentalist way of life in all its forms and various manifestations, based on the same paradox; an empty promise of Paradise to be filled with human activity and meaning, love and hate, detachment and re-attachment, here, on Earth.

## *Appendices*

### *Appendix 1*

#### **Extracts from diary: ‘My Journey to Vatopaidi’**

The very first evening following my arrival to Vatopaidi, before Vesper, the French priest-monk came to my private room at the top floor of the monastery (I was a special guest since I was a researcher), acting in the role of the guest-master (*archontaris*). After he introduced himself, he cunningly asked me: ‘What are you doing here? My poor child, don’t you have any clothes to wear?’ By this cryptic consideration, he meant two things: what was I actually doing there and wanted to stay for long periods, and if I was considering to wearing new clothes, that is, the monastic cap. I hesitantly replied that I was there for a research on monastic life. He smiled: ‘It is not important why you think you are doing here for. *You are here*, and that’s important, that’s God’s will’ he said. He then gave me my first duties, required from my part:

‘First you have to confess, that is what is important right now. Tonight after the Matins, go to find Father C in the Chapel of St George in the catholicon. You never know, he might even accept to become your spiritual father for life. But first you have to confess to him. Imagine that we, who live here, confess at least once a week, and sometimes three times a week, if we sin. But because you have arrived from London, I can imagine what you’ve been up to over there. I know that London is like Babylon, a place of sex, drugs, and sin. For this you have to immediately cleanse yourself from the dirt you carry and bring into here. After that you will have to ask for the abbot’s permission regarding your research, whatever it is. Second, you will be working with me at the *archontariki* (guest-house) during the day. This is not a hotel, you have to work for your staying like we do, because this is the land of the Virgin Mary and we all work for God. You must never miss a liturgy, but you don’t have to come to the Midnight Office, just be awake at 3:00 (in the morning) for the Matins. See you tomorrow at the *archontariki*’ [Priest-monk, Vatopaidi 19/9/02]

The first thing the Vatopaidians ask a visitor is if he has confessed prior to his visit, and if not, it is requested of him to do so immediately. This request is necessary for allowing a visitor to sleep in the monastery drawing a line between those who have confessed and can stay in the monastery, and those who have to leave. The moral line the practice draws between cleansed visitors and sinners illustrates the monks’ conception of Mount Athos as ‘Mary’s Garden’, as it is through the practice of confession that the monks sustain their tradition of virginity and purity. In this context, confession is a cleansing process, a catharsis from the sins the visitor brings with him from the ‘cosmopolitan’ world. My first confession took place the same night, at four o’clock in the morning (our time), during the Matins that were taking place at the same time in the main nave of the church, in the small 14<sup>th</sup> Century Chapel of St Nicolas, which is built on the right of the nave of the *catholicon*. The ancient room was damp and dark lit by a single candle, and filled with smoke of burning incense. The flickering light made the mosaic of Saint Nicolas, hanging over the door, also flicker moving in the shadows. Sometimes the Saint was staring at me in clear light, other times he disappeared in darkness. Suddenly, the figure of the monk came out of the dark corner opposite me. He had been sitting there and staring at me all this time that I was waiting in the room. I felt really nervous. Father C recited a prayer and put his hand on my head and we both kneeled. Then we sat on the two stalls confronting each other in the darkness. He then asked me the time when I had last confessed. I replied that I had never confessed in my whole life. He then highlighted the ‘need’ to confess every two days during my staying in the monastery, in order to keep myself ‘clean’ from ‘sinful’ thoughts. He then gave me a notebook to ‘write down my sins’ during the day, so that I don’t forget them during my confessions. This notebook is the only object a monk has in his cell, except his monastic cap. He then told me to say the Jesus Prayer with him loud and clear ‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy On Me the Sinner’ and to repeat it constantly even in my sleep. He said ‘the problem with the cosmopolitan life that you lead is that there is no aim. It is aimless. Here you will learn to have an aim in your life, to make your life meaningful’. He then asked me to be obedient to the monastery’s rules of hospitality, because ‘obedience is the greatest value of faith, the means to find the meaning in your aimless life’. These words brought in my mind the highly organized movement of the monks in the church, which in a way revealed both their collective aim and their highly organized community, as they move with intention rather than aimlessly not only in the church, but also in their everyday life.

The priest used my confession to teach me, the visitor, and also a potential monk, about cleansing my thoughts from my secular past. Becoming a monk is a bit like coming out of the closet. After I confessed about my relationship with my girlfriend and promised not to have sex outside our future marriage, he then allowed me to receive the Holy Communion, if I wanted, and ordered me to confess again in two days. In closing the rite he put blessed oil on my forehead, ears, legs, and hands, to cleanse me from my sins. He explained:

‘Olive oil is used first on the chest for the healing of the soul and body; then on the ears, in order to hear the voice of God and the gospel; then on the legs for the path in life; and finally on the hands which are poetically created by God for your deeds in life.’

After my confession, I went back to my stall at the exonarthex of the church. In the *Catholicon*, the monks are strictly divided according to their ‘spiritual rank’: Elders and priests are positioned inside the nave, ordinary monks at the narthex, and monks on ‘duty’, novices, and visitors at the exonarthex. Father Ereneos approached me where I was sitting with the other visitors at the exonarthex, and took me by the hand to sit in the nave, next to the two most important Elders of the monastery: the founder and patron of the new Vatopaidi, Joseph the Vatopaidian, and one of his oldest disciples -Father EFTH -who died in the following spring in 2003 (more than 100 years old).

The following day after my first confession, novices and monks came to ask me what I was doing there, and in time I got to know more and more monks and their different personalities and eccentricities, well hidden behind the expressionless faces during the liturgies. But on the day of my confession, I did not even know the face of my confessor. It was left up to me to find him. Only the following morning, after asking other monks, I was able to see the face of my confessor. On the other hand, the special treatment that the monks had for me, made me realize that they saw me as a potential candidate to become a monk. Over time, my confessions made me feel as being supervised by the community as a whole, as my private life became public property through my confession to C., who then confessed to the Abbot. In this way, both my body and soul were kept under constant supervision: during the night through my confessions to priest C., and during my day through my work under the supervision of Ereneos.

A few weeks later and I was already used to the new rhythm, and in fact I was spiritually feeling a change inside me, as being more accessible to the monks both in terms of everyday life, but even more importantly as me being more accessible (my inside thoughts and aims) to the monks themselves. It was a kind of exchange, as the moment they gave me some information about their monastic life, then they also asked me to work and/or pray, and vice versa. Things, however, turned sour because of an incident in the summer of 2003, when I was caught ear dropping, by accident, outside the Council’s Room on a Wednesday evening (6/8/2003, which is thought to be Thursday morning [24/7] according to the monastic timetable). The Abbot and the Elders held their weekly *synaxis* (‘meeting’) at the *Abbot’s Office* at the top floor. I was bored and walking aimlessly at the top floor, in order to avoid seeing Father E who would then give me a task for the evening. I just stood outside the Abbot’s Office, and I heard a loud discussion between Elders and a few prominent visitors. I realized that they were two building contractors, who were visiting to arrange the restoration of the gigantic monastic building. The window was left open, and I unwittingly heard the voices of the Abbot, the ‘First Supervisor’ (*Protepestatistis*), the Secretary, and the Head of Treasury, who were discussing with a Cypriot and an American contractor about money needed to rebuild the monastery. The Abbot was loudly arguing that ‘At least 200,000,000 dollars are needed to rebuild the office and chapels at the guesthouse. With 3,000,000 (dollars) the job will be bad and in the end we will bring the whole south-eastern wall down’. Father G was more conservative in his calculations. Then a deacon monk came to the window, and realizing that I was ear dropping he looked angrily at me, and shut it. *This section was written in 2010 in London: That was the year (2003) when the monastery’s claims against the Greek state were starting to become known, but their secret exchanges of land and properties outside Athos with the Greek government were still unknown (see final section of this chapter ‘Confessing the World’). Four years after my fieldwork, the ambitious Abbot Ephraim had to resign over allegations of laundering ‘dirty money’, fraud, and ‘moral corruption’. The Abbot, and the Head of Treasury, are still waiting to be tried (in 2009). The new Abbot for administrative matters became the conservative Father G who that night was asking for much less money to rebuild the south-eastern wall.*

After I was seeing ear dropping to the Abbot’s Office, my relationship with the abbot froze, and my staying became increasingly uncomfortable. Because at the time, I did not know the mess the monastery was in, regarding the *metochia* (properties in secular Greece), and the scandalous involvement of the

Greek state, which was fully revealed four years later. And partially that is why I was looked with suspicion after I was caught ear dropping. My curiosity the previous night may have given way to the small but bitter speech that Abbot gave the next morning at the Refectory. But it was not just that. The abbot was evidently worried that morning about the increasing presence of sociologists (including me). Although most of the Vatopaidians are higher educated, the Abbot did not allow them to graduate, but instead encouraged them to abandon their studies usually in their final year, so that they can still use their knowledge for the monastery, but not for their own good (by getting a degree -see 'Personal Histories'). But despite this animosity against academia, I also felt that he was a bit paranoid with me regarding the deal he was trying to make with the contractors. In turn, I also felt increasingly paranoid and bitter about the Abbot's speech. It was not surprising that nobody sat next to me in the vesper, although there were monks standing, as they had offered their stalls to visitors. Then the head of treasury (no22), who was the right hand of the Abbot in the monastery's business, and Head of Treasury of the monastery, in a half humorous, half serious way, said to me: 'you have to put your tongue in your mind before you talk or walk, otherwise you will be punished with a haircut'. That evening, the French priest came to my room, who was supervising me in the days at work, and calmed me down with his sweet humour: 'What are you doing still here? Haven't the Cypriots kicked you out yet? Did you decide to stay forever? No, I think you are still young', and we both laughed. He then advised me to do 33 prostrations, while reciting the words of the Jesus Prayer, as I was instructed by my 'spiritual father' Cyprianos during my night confessions. 'Michaelaki, let your soul rest for a bit, do your private canon, and you will see, tonight's liturgy will take all your fears away' he advised. So, although during the day I began feeling uncomfortable, my morning work with Father E, and night sessions with Farther C, became soothing, bringing me closer to both of them, making me emotionally fully depended upon them.

The next evening, the liturgy celebrated the 'sleep of St Anna' (25/7), 'the mother of the Mother of God' as they call her. But being in the church was particularly hard for me, particularly after the Abbot's attack on the Humanities at the refectory the previous day, and because of gossip that I was eavesdropping outside the Abbot's Office. During the night liturgy some monks were staring at me in an angry way, others avoided praying towards my position, and even most importantly they all avoided sitting next to me. I ended up sitting on my own at the exonarthex, feeling polluted. Despite the church being full of people standing, the two stalls next to me were also left empty, as nobody wanted to sit next to the 'communist sociologist' as I became to be known among some visitors. It was 'a matter of negative energy' in my 'spiritual Father's' words the previous evening, and evidently I was to be avoided. For instance, following the liturgy I approached one of the tested novices, with whom I became friends because sometimes we were working together at the guesthouse. But that morning he avoided talking to me saying: 'Stay away! If I talk to you I would need to go for an immediate confession!' So, I felt that while for more than a year the Vatopaidians did not have any problem with me, but fully accommodated all my needs and wishes, after I broke the rules of their hospitality by eavesdropping outside the *Synaxis* of the Elders, I did not feel welcome any longer. But maybe, in such an ordered and introspective environment, I was just going paranoid, feeling guilty for something that I shouldn't have done, without anyone telling me off. It seemed that Father C confession sessions worked on me after all. Because I was feeling guilt, after the end of the liturgy I went to the guest-master of the season Priest GN who at the time was talking to Elder G. I asked him if there is anything to do, any task that I can help, but he replied rudely: 'I am not on duty today so do whatever you want'. In such an environment, I did not even get the time to write my fieldwork notes, because I was always busy and/or supervised by Priest E during the day's work, and Priest C during the night. Father E saw me lost wondering in the garden in my dark thoughts and in his light humorous way he asked me: 'What are you writing and writing my child all the time? Are you spying on us?' My relationship with the Vatopaidians was never clear. Were E and GN's comments and questions made in a humorous and friendly manner, or they were pointing at my weaknesses? Did the Abbot, who represents the whole monastery, want me to abandon my research and become a monk, or did he want me to go? Had he cut through the hypocrisy of my own discipline at the field? Was my spiritual Father C talking about my confessions to other monks, as I suspected, and so they all knew about my weaknesses (arrogance, temper, and curiosity), and they were playing with me?

The next morning, the cook put me to sit back with the visitors, when during my previous staying I was always sitting with the novices. I felt dizzy. Was the Abbot the previous day at the Refectory in his speech talking about me? After lunch I tried to follow him, in order to ask him about his speech. But he was floating away like an ethereal black figure in the middle of the day, and despite him being almost sixty years old I couldn't catch up. Finally, I followed him in the corridors and took the turn he took to realize that I was in a room of the kitchen confronted by all the fifteen novices and young monks of the monastery. They were just staring at me in silence. The abbot appeared from the black mass and gave me

a strong glance. I felt unwanted. By contrast, the previous day my spiritual Father had made me feel more than wanted (with his words). I left the room running. It was time to decide. This was my final day in Vatopaidi. And if this wasn't enough when I went to receive the Holy Communion that morning, the deacon pretended that he did not even know me, asking the name of my spiritual Father. He asked me if I had drunk water that day, as if I hadn't spent months in the monastery and I didn't know the rule. 'Humility? I am too proud to be here in a first place' I thought to myself. I was also ready to punch that deacon. Of course I did not go to receive the Holy Communion. 'Receive Communion by whom? The Abbot who preaches humility while wearing all these golden chains, and demanding to prostrate in his presence?' I thought. 'Tomorrow I am packing.'

These were thoughts of a confused mind under the pressure of accumulated periods of fieldwork, in an institutionalised environment that I was increasingly becoming uncomfortable with, as I could not take any longer going to the church for 12 hours, and washing floors, clearing used candles from the wax to be reused, washing dishes, or washing the bed sheets of hundreds of visitors. Furthermore, I felt that the monks constantly changed jobs for me because I was in fact incapable of completing any of my tasks successfully. The two-fold experience that I had that day was expressed on the one hand by the warm words of my spiritual Father C and my supervisor Father E, both encouraging me to stay, and on the other, the disapproval of the Abbot culminating in the final silent confrontation, which made me realize that I had to make a choice. I could not be allowed to live there any longer for such long periods of time: either I had to join the novices, or go away for while. Of course this could be only in my head, the result of institutionalised life that I was not used to, a life of months of absolute non-property. But I feel that the frozen silence of the novices and young monks gathered in the kitchen was his collective message to me: 'stay or go'.

So, initially confessions made me feel more than welcome in the monastery. But as time passed, and under the unethical (but accidental) conduct from my part, it became apparent that I was not ready to join the monastery, my confessions became harder and harder, as I felt the pressure of the monastery through the advices of my confessor in response to my confessions that I soon had to make a choice: either decide to stay in the monastery or leave. Gradually confessions reached the point where they became impossible, as I had nothing to say any more, and there was more pressure and hard work for me. It became apparent that I did not have what my Father asked me to have in our very first meeting: an aim. After the long periods I stayed in Vatopaidi, which covered a period of two years in and out of the monastery, it was a confession that made me go. I felt that over time my personal world was becoming the property of the monastery, and I could not breathe any more, write fieldwork notes, or even talk to the monks. I felt anxious that everybody knew my past, my uncertainties and weaknesses. Below is an extract from my diary, written many months later, during my final visit to Vatopaidi in the summer of 2004:

The community is highly organized functioning like bees following the orders of the queen Abbot. I might be paranoid, but after my last confession two nights ago, everything that happens around me seems to happen *for* me. First, in the Vesper, Father C gave a speech on the commandment 'honour your father and mother' but he continued quoting from Matthew's Gospel about Jesus' denial of his mother, implying that the monastic Call is greater than the biological family. I thought that the way he arranged his speech was aimed towards me. He is my spiritual Father after all. In another incident, this morning in the Refectory the Abbot gave a speech on anger resulting from the gravest sin of all, self-pride. The abbot even used the exact words I used in my confession to Father C the previous night, as if he knew exactly what I was telling. I feel I am going mad, paranoid. [17/8/2004]

I could not answer to any of these questions for sure. All these questions were right on a certain level and wrong at the same time. But what was certain, what was *real*, was what I felt inside me. I felt that there was an external force that was affecting my way of thinking, and pushing me to the limits. In the context of what was happening to me in Vatopaidi that August, it became clear that because I broke the rules of hospitality the previous year by ear dropping to the *Synaxis*, where the Elders worked for the monastery's 'good' as a whole, my behaviour placed my self-interest and my research, above the Monastery, the community as a whole represented by the central authority of the Abbot, who as a Father, he takes care of his children. Furthermore, I felt that through my confessions to C, who were then transmitted to the abbot through his confessions to him, I opened both my self and my self-interest to the community, which the abbot morally and publicly rejected in his speech, in the same way he did not allow his monks to graduate from their studies in secular universities, as a kind of self-sacrifice for the Monastery's (common) good. In this way, my confessions to my 'spiritual father' in the night, my external conduct supervised by Father E during the day, and the Abbot's central executive and spiritual authority

supervising the two priests, formed a surveillance system of thought, to my mind, which first limited my actions, and second had put me in front of an honest decision, which because of my research I conveniently avoided to face: either I was to be reborn as a monk, or I had to realize that it was time to go. It *obliged* me to make this decision, because it became obvious to me that the monks thought I had stayed enough, and on the other, I abused the hospitality shown to me by eavesdropping outside the *Synaxis*. In other words, it was as if the Monastery (in a Durkheimian sense) was talking to me, while I was negotiating my position with the community as a whole through my confessions to Father C: Was I willing to sacrifice my thesis and join the monks? Was it all my own paranoia? I did not and I cannot know. Maybe the sober and strict mood of the monks was not really against me, but it was because of the sober celebration of the ‘sleep’ of Anna, Mary’s Mother; maybe because it was gossip; maybe because of both. But what was for sure that summer was that my time in Vatopaidi was soon coming to an end. It was as if the Monastery had spoken to me.

## *Appendix 2*

### **Selected Interviews from Vatopaidi**

#### **2.1 Extracts from interviews with secretary-priest of Vatopaidi (20/5/03), who was a member of the second *Companionship* of Joseph the Vatopaidian (1987) [interviews taken 05/05/03 and 20/5/03]**

‘When I was seventeen and a half years old I met *geronta* (elder) Joseph (the Vatopaidian) during my military service in Cyprus together with T and G. After we completed our national service we decided to join him. T even brought his brother with him. Joseph’s charisma had magnetized us. I have four brothers and we all went to the same Christian school. “That’s where I met him (Joseph) for the first time. I was sixteen year old. I was studying at an ecclesiastical lyceum in Cyprus with my four brothers. I was magnetized by his energy. But Joseph insisted that I had to finish my military service first, before I could join him. When I was seventeen and a half, during my military service, I met him again together with Fathers T and G. We decided to follow him into Athos after completing our national service. T even brought his brother with him because we were magnetized by his *charis*. So, we went to the desert of *Kapsala*, near Karyes, where we lived six of us, and one monk from Brazil, for more than six months”. After that, we moved to the monastery of Koutloumousiou and became novices. I must have been about 19 years old. I have four brothers, and a sister who also became a nun in Cyprus in a monastery founded by our beloved grandfather Joseph the Vatopaidian. After high school, I felt alienated from my friends. I was and I wasn’t there, my (secular) life did not have a meaning, an aim. I realized that without the *charis* of Jesus I would never have an aim in my life. That is what monastic life gives: it gives you an aim to come closer to God. And that is why I decided to become a monk.

When our Father (the Vatopaidian) took over Koutloumousiou, he did not wish to become the Abbot, and ordered Christodoulos (one of his disciples) to become the Abbot. Christodoulos accepted but he did not respond to his spiritual obligations in a correct manner. Most importantly, he stopped asking the blessings of our elder, and because he was the Abbot he thought that he could do anything he wanted without showing respect. Our Father Joseph, who is always patient and mild in manner, decided to move back to Cyprus. But the Church of Pafos did not accept him there. They were jealous because of his success in recruiting young monks to send to Athos, and they accused one of his disciples, our brother Athanasios, in the newspapers, for allegedly sleeping with a male prostitute. But when at the trial the judge asked the accuser to point his finger to Athanasios he pointed towards another of our brothers, who was acting as a lawyer on behalf of Athanasios. Such were the great lies against our brother. Three years after we moved to Vatopaidi, the liar (prostitute) visited us, and he even asked for forgiveness! But at the time, our Father Joseph had to take his *companionship* and leave from Cyprus, because the accusations became public and the damage was done. That’s where I first met him. I was sixteen year old. I was studying at an ecclesiastical lyceum in Cyprus with my four brothers. Theanos even brought his brother with him. So, we went to Athos, at the desert of *Kapsala*, near Karyes, where we lived six of us (Cypriots), and one from Brazil, for the previous six months. But then, Christodoulos came back to Joseph, begging for forgiveness and saying that he had understood his mistakes, and that he could not be the Abbot without his blessing. Christodoulos had realized that he had taken too much power for himself, and he was begging Father Joseph to return to the monastery of Koutloumousiou.

And that's exactly what happened. We all went to Koutloumousiou and lived there for another year and a half. But Christodoulos continued acting in the same way, and the situation had not really changed from before. So, we decided again to leave. We made an agreement with the monks of the New Skete to stay there for a certain period of time until we went somewhere else. But because the *Skete* is *idiorythmic*, it was not organized according to the community's needs. It was every monk for himself, and so we had big economic problems, no water, and no space to shelter so many monks. So, we had to leave from there too. Father Joseph then insisted to the Holy Committee to let us take over the monastery of Vatopaidi, which at the time had only ten monks and was almost abandoned. We meant to re-organize the monastery back to a *coenobitic* community; and that's exactly what happened and you can see today we have here more than a hundred brothers. When the monks who lived there before us heard that we are coming, most of them left because they could not deal with the demands and obligations of our *coenobitic* strict way of life. They were used to living on their own, years without organization, and without following the liturgies and practising our tradition on a daily basis. They became so lazy that they knew they had to go. They were saying that they needed "freedom". So, some of them went to *sketes* others to isolated cells. When we finally arrived here there were only five or six left, who had decided to follow our grandfather's strict life... In 1990, once more, our Father (Joseph the Vatopaidian) did not want to become the Abbot. And so he proposed his disciple Father Ephraim to become our first Abbot, because he was young and capable to lead the hard effort to revive the monastery'

## **2.2 Interview about the personal history of a French priest-monk, who was a member of Joseph the Vatopaidian's Companionship of 1986 [interview taken 3/10/02]**

'I studied Theology in Paris, but I wasn't interested in the courses or in the vanity of cosmopolitan everyday life. So I left for Sussex in England to go and find Father Sophronios at the Monastery of St John (the Forerunner). Father Sophronios is a brother of our beloved little Father Joseph (the Vatopaidian), because they knew each other from the New Skete. It was Sophronios who saw me and sent me to serve our blessed Father (Joseph). When I first met him, I fell in love with all my heart at first sight. Such was his charisma. So, I decided to join his *companionship*. But god made it this way, and we were too many people in the Skete and we did not have enough food to survive. Not even water. Sketes are difficult places to live, as every monk is for himself. Nobody will take care of you, as we do here (in the *coenobitic* monastery) [...] You know how all families are, sometimes monks fight with each other. This does not mean that we do not love each other. There were of course different opinions, but you have to learn to fight against, and free yourself from, personal pride. So, in 1986 our wise Father decided to move us out of there. The zealots at the New Skete were following the program of Joseph the Hesychast who was himself a zealot. But monasticism has developed since then. When we first came here in 1987 we found the monastery in ruins. The monks wouldn't pray together, wouldn't prepare their meals, and wouldn't take care of the monastery. They didn't even bother to go to the Sunday Mass... Visitors often accuse us of using technology and that we are loosing our tradition. But this is not true. We use technology; we are not enslaved to it! And we had to use technology in order to give re-birth to the monastery's life, to bring Jesus back in the monastery's premises. You think that the importance of our work is in restoring the monastery's buildings. No! Most importantly we had to restore the faith of this monastery; the monastery's spiritual life [...] The Esfigmenites [...] let their monastery rot, because they do not accept any money (from the EU). Since they do not take care of the monastery, they are occupiers who do not let *real* Orthodox people to go and visit it. We (the Vatopaidians) know that we have a responsibility towards this heritage and towards the Virgin Mary. And that is why we *use* the money from the EU to restore the spiritual life of our monastery [...] Some jealous (monks) accuse us for using technology, thinking that we are losing our tradition. But this is not true. We use technology; we are not enslaved to it! And we had to use technology in order to allow the re-birth of the monastery, to bring Jesus back to the monastery's premises. You think that the importance of our work is in restoring the monastery's buildings. No! Most importantly we had to restore the faith of this monastery; the monastery's spiritual life [...] We still follow the thousand year old traditions, but we also use technology to preserve the spiritual life of the monastery'

### 2.3 Interview with priest-monk in the role of the secretary [interview taken 6/8/03]

“You see us joking and laughing and you might wonder: “what are these monks doing?” laughing and surfing the internet. But we are very strict with our *typiko* according to the rules that were taught to each one of us by our Fathers. They say we make money for ourselves. But according to the rule of poverty, we have no money or property inside our rooms. We share everything, gifts and responsibilities... those who wish to be involved in administrative matters, if they have the skills to do so, are free to volunteer, just like our abbot (did) by accepting his position [...] The Athonite Constitution gives automatically the Greek citizenship to those who decide to become monk, and according to this we are all Greeks here (with a cunning smile). If someone thinks he can take advantage of the system, he is mistaken, because if you have not heard the calling you cannot stay here more than a few weeks. To put it simply you can't take it because you will not have enough faith to follow our program. As far as I know, never a monk of Athos returned to the ‘cosmopolitan’ life after accepting the calling (of God). Deception on Athos cannot last more than a week! [...] Now, if someone thinks that he can have an easy life by becoming a monk, as if he is on a permanent holiday next to the sea, he is also wrong. Other monks and cosmopolitans say about us that we make money to buy villas in front of the sea for our personal joy. These are all lies, because some monasteries are jealous of our development. But we work for the monastery, for our Father Abbot, and above all for God. According to the rules of the Athonite Constitution, which we follow in detail, if someone wants to live on his own in a Cell, or a Hut, or a hermitage first he has to serve an Elder, in order to learn humility and other spiritual matters (*pneumatika*). He does not have to be in a monastery, it can be a Skete or a Hut, but he must spend many years serving an Elder. The position of the Elder, just like the position of the Abbot, is permanent. Only after his death the deacon can take his place, and then he has to ask from the Holy Committee of Karyes the permission to live on his own, or to make his own Companionship of new deacons. It is not so simple to live in a hermitage, and certainly not a matter of money, as the monks of Esfigmenou for example say about us. Furthermore, if someone wants to live on his own, he has to first get the permission of the Abbot. Coenobitic life is a kind of exercise (*askesis*) for body and mind, in order to save the soul, and so it is not to be avoided. It is the nature of monastic life itself, the means to achieve salvation. That is why very rarely the Abbot promotes someone to live alone in a hermitage, because he has to be really spiritually elevated, to the levels of our grandfather Joseph, in order to be allowed in isolation. Spiritually it would have been dangerous to let him live alone. He would have gone mad. But some young monks think that monastic life is on a cliff. They go to the Abbot's office, and push for their case to be allowed to live in a Cell, not because they have become like saints (*agiasei*), but because they cannot take the coenobitic life. They are not used to serve, and they wish to live in an idiorythmic way, but that is not spiritually proper. Some of them, they ask to be transferred to another monastery, where they think the program is less strict But very rarely our Abbot allows the move. They have to have done something, like talking against their brothers, in order for the Abbot to expel him.’

### 2.4 Interview with deacon working at the guest-house [taken 8/8/03]

‘I came following Father Vr. I met him in one of his trips to Cyprus, in 1995. He brought ten of my classmates from our school in Cyprus to Vatopaidi. Then I was 21. Though I was magnetized by the charis of Vr, but here my spiritual father is the Abbot. We are all subordinates to the Abbot as he is our Father, the one that we look in the eye when we give our confessions to him. But each monk has also an Elder who is supervising him at the daily work. There are nine Elders, so there are nine groups of monks, and the Elders' Council divides the working units. This week I work at the guesthouse, picking up the telephone, and checking the guest list, under the supervision of priest-deacon M (no12). Wherever M goes, I go too, and he goes wherever the Abbot sends him. So, this term we are assigned at the *archontariki* (guesthouse), but not for much longer. Priest Gn and his deacons will replace us next month. M works under the supervision of (Elder) A Before that my supervisor here (at the guesthouse) was N, but as you know he left to become the Abbot of our new monastery at Porto Lagos (north Greece) last spring. But last week, it was deacon Gs' (no15) turn to stay at the telephone. The decision of which position each monk works at during the year is taken at the top of the monastery, the *hegoumeneion* (Abbot's office) by the *gerontia* (Elders' Council: nine elders and the Abbot), according to the knowledge and capabilities of each monk for particular tasks. So, while our Father is the Abbot, on September 1st the Elders' Council gives us the administrative tasks, by telling each one of us what we will have to do for the monastery every year. In this way, we all get some time to pray.

This month I am here, but last month I was working at the kitchen for two weeks. We work at the kitchen three, four times a year, changing shifts every two weeks, because cooking for so many visitors is a very

hard task and does not leave much time for prayer. Each group has 10 monks, but the main responsible for the kitchen and cooking are the two cousins (no24) and (no28) who are from Evros. In the Refectory responsible is their third cousin, (no35), who is responsible for preparing the tables and keeping the Refectory clean. His group of monks comes from north Greece, but now we also have some Romanian (tested) novices helping him. *The Romanians are good in carrying things*. So you could say that the main responsibility in the kitchen lies with our first cook (no24) and the *Trapezaris* (no35). So, the Abbot gives an order to the Elder A, or directly to (the priest-deacon) M, and he then gives the order to me, and I transfer it, and supervise the novices who will carry this order. But each one of us has his own responsibility, meaning that I cannot do the washing while picking up the telephone at the same time. However, if there is time the Elders sometimes come to help. They have a weekly meeting every Tuesday where they decide about all these things (what needs to be done). But they all give their confession to the Abbot. In other words, in spiritual matters we are all children of the Abbot, but everyday we take orders from the Elders and Priests, in order to help them with the day's tasks.'

---

## 2.5 Interview with monk about his decision to join Vatopaidi [interview taken 8/5/2003]

“If a young man is not interested in cosmopolitan life, then he has to seriously think of becoming a monk. When a man is baptized into a monk it is a second birth, as he stops replying to his old cosmopolitan name, and only answers to his new (monastic) name, because his new family and siblings are Jesus Christ. He has to stop going to the university too, and to stop depending on his parents. He has to stop thinking of his family and friends outside (Athos), because Christ came to bring War, in order to make Peace. When a young man asked Him what did he have to do to find peace, Christ told him to abandon everything he kept, and follow Him. And when His Mother and sister came to visit Him, He said: “I have no mother and siblings; I only have one father, God”. Christ was in everything a virgin, he did not have a family or a country, because our greatest enemy is our family, and by this I mean the exaggerated love we feel for them that does not allow us to be free. The first step of liberation has to be a violent struggle, and to put the knife deep to cut through the bone. It is painful, but with the help of the prayer it is a struggle that you can win.

When I told my mother that I am going to Athos she cried, and she told me that my father had three cardiac arrests because of me. But as my beloved Elder Haralambos [died in 1996] used to say it takes three years until you can completely take you mind off your parents. And that's how long it took. Today my mother tells me on the phone “I wish all my sons had become monks like you”, because through me she also found Jesus. And Jesus never abandons a monk, but gives him and his family blessing for ten generations to come. The greatest enemy of the monk is his own family, because of the highly charged emotional love between mother and son. This is not the passionless love in Jesus, but an emotional love, full of passion, and of great danger. After hearing the Calling the monk has to abandon everything he has, things and family, to follow his true nature. And don't forget when the mother of God visited our Lord, he replied to her “I have no mother or sister, only one father, God”. Monastic life follows the steps of Jesus, and those who hear the Call, simply know all about it.

My elder was an only child. And there are many monks in here without any siblings. Because of this it is harder for them (to leave their parents behind). At the beginning the parents protest, because they do not understand that their passionate love (for their child) is a sick kind of love; it is a passion, not the real love for Jesus. But when Jesus calls you, what can you do? It takes three years for everyone to understand what has actually happened (after someone decides to become a monk). For example, Elder Haralambos left for Athos when he was 16 years old, while his father was dying of cancer. The doctors gave him six months to live, but Haralambos could not wait and left him behind while he was still alive. Three months later his father died, and his mother never forgave him for not being next to his death bed. But she could not understand. We will all die one day, and because of Haralambos' decision to become a monk, his father went to Paradise to join Jesus. Furthermore, if he had stayed until his father death, his mother would start crying and would not let him go. That is why he decided to leave earlier, while his father was still alive'

## 2.6 Stories of Josepheoi: Keeping the DOOR shut

The two stories below, although they refer to two different charismatic monks, the ‘charismatic’ Joseph the Hesychast and the charismatic Paisios, the most famous hermit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they are identical revealing the charis of the monks who were attacked by the Devil ‘because of their virtues’, the first published in one of Ephraim Filotheitis’ publications, who was a disciple of Joseph the Hesychast, and the second narrated to me by an old Vatopaidian monk, who had arrived to Vatopaidi in 1987 from the New Skete, a follower -but not a member of the *Companionship* of Joseph the Vatopaidian.

### **[Interview with 90 year-old monk Father S of Vatopaidi 19/4/2003]**

‘I became a monk at the New Skete in 1971. There I met Joseph the Vatopaidian, and Paisios amongst many other famous monks. I remember Paisios all the time. One day, on the day we celebrate the Presentation of the Mother of God (November 21<sup>st</sup>), Paisios came to visit (at the New Skete). It was a dark night, and it was raining. After Paisios had finished with his evening prayers he started preparing for the night vigil (that he would hold) in honour of the Mother of God. As he was preparing himself, he heard the steps of someone walking in frenzy on his roof. Then he heard the screams of the Beast, crawling on the roof trying to find a way in. The noise was so loud that the little Father had to shout the prayer ‘Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me the sinner’ against the roof. In a few seconds the noise stopped. The wind was blowing heavily but there were no more sounds from the roof. And then, there was a sudden banging on the door. And another one, and with the third banging *the door opened wide* and the wind brought the rain in, and there was black shadow waiting outside for Father Joseph. But Father Paisios knew that the Demon only visits those who have strong faith, and not the weak because there is no need (to do so), and he wasn’t afraid because he had faith and the Cross in his hand. Paisios then began reciting the words of the blessing of St Basil’s exorcisms, facing his door. He had no fear and so he walked and shut the door. But the Beast did not leave him alone. He continued banging his door and the walls of the hut all night long, but did not dare to come in (the hut) again, because he was afraid of the power of the blessing and the Cross. Nothing more was needed. I met him the following day, and he told me what happened the previous night. ‘That was indeed a good vigil’ I told him and we both had a good laugh’

### **2.7 [Interview with old monk 3/5/03]**

‘One day one of those little devils with the bold head and the orange cloths who had magical powers (he meant a Buddhist monk who had visited the Skete of St Anna) asked our blessed father (Paisios) if he thinks his Gods are stronger than ours. Paisios asked in turn the bold magician to perform one of his evil tricks. The magician stood opposite the door of the cell raised his hand and with his evil force opened and closed the door without touching it only by looking at it and moving his hand up and down! And then, he did it again and again. Father Paisios did not react to this demonstration of magic. He waited. When the orange devil stopped doing his trick, Father Paisios started praying: ‘Lord Jesus! You are my Savior!’ He then asked the magician to repeat his trick, but this time Paisios was holding the Cross and was praying loud the Holy words. This time the magician could not even manage to raise his hands. The door never opened again, and the poor evil fell on his knees praying for forgiveness from God. He then asked Father Paisios if he could join him in Athos. And that’s what happened. Our God is so strong that He even invited a witch to join the Order of Angels; and so, the magician became a monk. Today, he still lives here in Athos; a living proof of the power of God.’

### Appendix 3: Tables

<b>Appendix 3.1: Companionships to Vatopaidi</b>
1987: Companionship of JOSEPH arriving from the New Skete
1990: Vatopaidi turned from idiorythmic to coenobitic
1990: First Companionship of H with Cypriot monks of the University of Thessaloniki, Greece
1992: First Companionship of A with monks from Pafos, Cyprus
1995: First Companionship of P from Cyprus, via the 'Russian' Skete of St Andreas, Serrai
1995: First Companionship of V from Cyprus
2000: Second Companionship of H from Cyprus
2000: Second Companionship of V with monks from Northern Greece, and countries of the 'Eastern' bloc.

### Appendix 3.2: 'Table of Novices'

RANK	Place of BIRTH	STUDIES
Novice (no78)	Athens	Physics
Novice (no79)	South Greece	Physics, Music
Novice (no80)	Cyprus	Computer technologies
Novice (no81)	Cyprus	Religious school in Cyprus
Novice (no 82)	Cyprus,	Theology
Novice (no83)	North Greece	Law
Novice (no84)	North Greece	Law
Novice (no85)	Romanian	Theological School in Romania
Novice (no86)	Romanian	Theological School in Romania
Novice (no87)	Cyprus	Musicology in London
Novice (no88)	Russia	Masters in Theology, Moscow/ Athens
Novice (no89)	Cyprus	Trader, businessman
Novice (no90)	Cyprus	Medicine, Athens

10-15 'tested' young men from north Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia

### Appendix 3.3: 'Education of Priests and Elders'

Nationality and Rank	Position in Vatopaidi	Arrival into Athos	Cosmopolitan education
Joseph the Vatopaidian	Patron	1950s: Companionship of Joseph the Hesychast	
Cypriot (no2)	Abbot of Vatopaidi	1970s: Companionship of Joseph the Vatopaidian	
Cypriot (no3)	Priest/ Elder, Secretary	1986: From religious Cypriot school (Pafos)	
Greek (no4)	Priest/Elder, Porter	1984: Brazil	None
Cypriot (no5)	Priest-monk	1990: Theology University of Thessaloniki	
French (no6)	Priest-monk	1986: Theology University of Paris	
Cypriot (no7)	Priest/Elder	1990: Theology University of Thessaloniki	
Brazilian (no8)	Priest-monk	1990: Theology University of Thessaloniki	
Cypriot (no9)	Priest-monk	1990: Theology University of Thessaloniki	
Cypriot (no10)	Priest-monk	1990: Finances	
Cypriot (no11)	Priest	1990: Theology University of Thessaloniki	
Cypriot (no12)	Priest-deacon	1990: Theology University of Thessaloniki	
Cypriot (no20)	Elder	1983-4: Finances and Law	
Cypriot (no22)	Elder	1970s: Finances and Law: Head of treasury	
Cypriot (no23)	Elder	1983-4: Finances and Law	
Cypriot (no27)	Elder	1983-4: Finances and Law	

### Appendix 3.4: Chorostasia Order of receiving Holy Communion

1. <b>Joseph the Vatopaidian</b> (1/7/1921 Cyprus- 1/7/2009 Vatopaidi) Arrived in 1947 at the Skete Young St Anna in the <i>Companionship</i> of Joseph the Hesychast (1899-1957) Spiritual patron and founder of the new Vatopaidi in 1987-1990. Lived isolated in his cell in the forest					
<b>PRIEST-MONKS: 10 {All belong either to Joseph's <i>Companionship</i>: 1987, or to his disciple H: 1990}. Priests have ritualistic tasks including taking care of the churches and relics, performing rituals, and confessing visitors</b>					
2. Priest- <b>Elder Abbot Ephraim</b> Cypriot Religious School in Cyprus <i>New Skete</i> and <i>House of Evangelismos</i> 1970s -80s: <b>1<sup>st</sup> <i>Companionship</i> of Joseph</b> the would-be Vatopaidian to the monastery of Koutloumousiou (1976-1982). Appointed as Abbot of Vatopaidi in 1990. Forced to resign from his administrative duties in 2009 due to political scandal. Remains 'spiritual Father' of brotherhood, with Elder G (no20) taking over administration					
<b>Name/Rank</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Arrived in Athos</b>	<b><i>Companionship</i></b>	<b>Task</b>
3. Priest <b>Elder C</b>	Cypriot	Religious School, Cyprus	Desert <i>Kapsala</i>	Joseph (1984)	Secretary
4. Priest TH	Greek		<i>Vatopaidi</i> in 1984	Alone	Porter
5. Priest T	Cypriot	Theology, Thessaloniki	<i>House of Evangelismos</i>	Elder H (1990)	1 <sup>st</sup> Supervisor
6. Priest E	French	Theology, Paris	<i>Kapsala</i> in 1984	Joseph(1986-7)	<i>Docheiaris</i>
7. Priest <b>Elder PL</b>	Cypriot	Degree in Law	<i>House of Evangelismos</i>	Joseph (1986-7)	<i>Economos</i>
8. Priest <b>Elder TI</b>	Brazil		<i>House of Evangelismos</i>	Joseph (1986-7)	
9. Priest <b>Elder G</b>	Cypriot	Religious School, Cyprus	<i>House of Evangelismos</i>	Elder H (1990)	Librarian
10. Priest <b>Elder EY</b>	Cypriot		<i>House of Evangelismos</i>	Elder (Elder H 1990)	<i>Skevofulakas/Vemataris</i>
11. Priest GN	Cypriot	Theology, Thessaloniki	<i>House of Evangelismos</i>	Elder H (1990)	
<b>PRIEST-DEACONS: 5 (without the <i>Angelic Schema</i> yet)</b>					
12. Deacon M Cypriot Theology, Thessaloniki <i>Vatopaidi</i> : 1990 Elder H (1990) In 2003 he was promoted to priest-monk replacing Father E (no10)					
13. Deacon P: Cypriot <i>Vatopaidi</i> : 2000 Distribution and CHOIR					
14. Deacon T: Cypriot <i>Vatopaidi</i> : 2000 Secretary and CHOIR					
15. Deacon G: Cypriot <i>Vatopaidi</i> : 2000 Photography and CHOIR					
16. Deacon P Cypriot <i>Vatopaidi</i> : 2000 Stamps / Shop and CHOIR					
<b>Monks: 58 [Arrived in five <i>Companionships</i>: 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996 and 2000]</b>					
<b>Older monks: 3</b>					
17. Older E Cypriot (died in 2003) <i>New Skete</i> 1970s Joseph (1986-7)					
18. Older M Cypriot <i>New Skete</i> 1970s <i>Arsanas/ harbour</i>					
19. Older S Cypriot <i>New Skete</i> 1971 <i>Archontariki</i>					
<b>20. Elder G:</b> Cypriot <i>House of Evangelismos</i> 1983-4 Finances and Law He could not officially become a priest-monk, <i>because he was not sexually virgin</i> . But did replace the Abbot after he resigned from his administrative duties in December 2008, following the scandal of the monastery's dealings with the Greek state.					
<b>21. N*:</b> Later that year he was promoted to Elder, as the Abbot decided to send him to become the Abbot of the monastery's <i>metochi</i> (land) at Porto Lagos, Chalkidiki, North Greece					
<b>22. Elder A</b> Cypriot <i>New Skete</i> and <i>House of Evangelismos</i> 1970s-80s Treasury					
<b>23. Elder GR</b> Cypriot <i>New Skete</i> and <i>House of Evangelismos</i> 1970s-80s					
24. Father EL Greek from Evros 1992 <i>Trapezaris</i> ('Table-Man'): Head of Refectory					
25. Father TF Cypriot 1992 Vineyards					
26. Father AG Cypriot 1992 Baker					
<b>27. Elder VR</b> Cypriot 1984: First <i>Companionship</i> of Joseph at the <i>House of Evangelismos</i> Law					
28. Father EY North Greece 1992 (also brought his brother IO no38) Haghiography					
29. Father SP Cypriot 1995: <i>Companionship</i> of V Secretary					
30. Father IG Cypriot 1995: <i>Companionship</i> of V Music					
↑ <b>Ordination Rite of <i>Angelic Schema</i> ('Angelic Patent')</b> ↑					
...35. Father K Greek from Evros (cousin of EL no24) 1995: Arrived on his own Refectory					
36. Father AVV: Disciple of priest-monk C (no3) 1995: <i>Companionship</i> of V Secretary					
38. Father IO North Greece 1995 (followed his brother IO no28) Haghiography					

39. Father M	Cypriot	1995: Companionship of V	Electrician
40. Father AN	Russian	Arrived on his own in the 1990s	Washing dishes
41. Father NK	Romanian	Arrived on his own in the 1990s	Tools
42. Father SY	Serbian	Arrived on his own in the 1990s	Carpentry
... 46: Father A	Greek	1995: Companionship of V. Worked under priest-monk GN in <i>archontariki</i>	
... 48: Father P	Crete, Greece	Originally a monk of <i>Meghisti Lavra</i> from where he was expelled for allegedly thieving. Arrived to Vatopaidi in 1999	Washing machines
49. Father ST	Cypriot	1996: Companionship of V	Worked under priest-deacon M at guest-house
50. Father ART	Cypriot	1996: Companionship of V	
51. Father NF	Cypriot	1996: Companionship of V	Photography/ Distribution
... 53. Father L	Romanian	Arrived on his own in the 1990s	Dentistry
Left in 1999 because he did not enjoy the life in Vatopaidi. Moved to Romanian <i>Skete of St Prodromos</i>			
... <b>Deacons: changing shifts posts weekly: These posts are from a week in May 2003</b>			
... 57. Father ND	Cypriot	1996: Companionship of V	Guest-house
... 63. Father J	Cypriot	1996: Companionship of V	Blacksmith
... 67. Father E	Greek	1996: Companionship of V	Washing machines ( <i>Plystario</i> )
... 77. Father EU	Cypriot	1996: Companionship of V	Tools
78-90	Northern Greeks and Cypriots	Arrived in 2000	Garden, refectory, guest-house, fields
 <b>Ordination Rite of Koura ('Tonsure')</b>			
<b>NOVICES 13: 8 Cypriots, two Greeks, two Romanians, and a Russian</b> <b>[All arrived after 2000: some in a group from Greece, another from Cyprus, and others on their own]</b>			
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF MONKS IN VATOPAIDI: 90 (in Autumn 2002)</b>			
+ About 20 'tested' young men from Cyprus, north Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia			
'Tested' G			Cyprus

### **Appendix 3.5 'Weekly Timetable: Winter/Summer solstice'**

#### **SUMMER 'Liturgy Timetable' VATOPAIDI: From 21/7/03 to 28/7/03**

Chapel	Elder	Celebration
<b>Monday</b>	Verger: Father TM	Veneration of Mary Magdalene's relic
<i>Paramythia</i>	Abbot	
<i>Archangels</i>	E	
<i>Prophet Elias</i>	C	
<i>St Nikolaos</i>	TH	
<i>St George</i>	T	
<i>St Savvas</i>	PL	
<i>Aghioi Anargyroi</i>	G	
<i>St Panteleimon</i>	EY	
<i>St Zoni (Girdle)</i>	GN with visitors	
<b>Tuesday</b>		
CATHOLICON	Abbot	In <i>lite</i> : Prophet Ezekiel
		In <i>Catholicon</i> : Veneration of relic of 'sacred martyr' bishop Fokas
<b>Wednesday</b>	Verger: Father T	St 'mega-martyr' Christina/ Relic
<i>Paramythia</i>	Abbot	
<i>St Zoni</i>	E with visitors	
<i>Aghioi Anargyroi</i>	C	
<i>Apostle Thomas</i>	TH	
<i>St Eudokimos</i>	PL	
<i>St Dimitrios</i>	TM	
<i>Birth of Theotokos</i>	G	
<i>St Maximos</i>	EY	
<i>St Nektarios</i>	GN	
<b>Thursday</b>		

CATHOLICON	ALL PRIESTS	'Sleep of St Anna, Mother of Theotokos'/ Relics
<b>Friday</b> Verger: Father C		
<i>St Panteleimon</i>	Abbot	Entrance: Relics of St 'sacred martyrs' Ermolaos
<i>Paramythia</i>	E	Ermippos, and Ermokratos
<i>Aghioi Anargyroi</i>	TH	
<i>St Zoni</i>	T	Entrance: Relics of St Paraskevi
<i>St Theodoroi</i>	PL	
<i>St Savvas</i>	TM	
<i>St Modestos</i> (garden)	G	
<i>St Andrew</i>	EY	
<i>St Nikolaos</i>	GN	
<b>Saturday</b> <b>St Panteleimon: Night Vigil/ relics</b>		
CATHOLICON	ALL PRIESTS	After vesper parade of the holy icon of St Panteleimon to his chapel
<b>Sunday</b> Celebration of <i>Anastasima</i> 'Resurrections'		
CATHOLICON	ALL PRIESTS	St Paul of monastery of Xeropotamou

**WINTER 'Liturgy Timetable' VATOPAIDI From 11/2/03 to 17/2/03**

Chapel	Elder	Celebration
<b>Monday</b> Verger: Father G		
<i>Paramythia</i>	Abbot	St Theodora
<i>Apostle Thomas</i>	EY	Remembrance of relics of Sacred
<i>St Nikolaos</i>	C	Martyr Vlasios, Archbishop of
<i>St Dimitrios</i>	TH	Sevastias
<i>St Savvas</i>	T	
<i>Apostle Andreas</i>	E	
<i>St Zoni</i> (Girdle)	GN with visitors	
<b>Tuesday</b> CATHOLICON Abbot St Meletios, Archbishop of Antiochus		
<b>Wednesday</b> Verger: Father T Celebration of Osios Martinianos		
<i>St Zoni</i>	EY	
<i>St Maximos</i>	C	
<i>St Savvas</i>	TH	
<i>St Dimitrios</i>	E	
<i>St Nikolaos</i>	TM	
<i>St Nektarios</i>	G	
<i>Apostle Thomas</i>	GN	
<b>Thursday</b> Verger: Father E Celebration of Osios Auxentios of the mountain		
<i>St Nikolaos</i>	EY	
<i>St Panteleimon</i>	C	
<i>St Dimitrios</i>	TH	
<i>St Zoni</i>	T	
<i>St Savvas</i>	TM	
<i>Apostle Thomas</i>	G	
<i>St Neofitos</i>	GN	
<b>Friday</b> Verger: Father C St Apostle Onesimos, disciple of St Paul		
<i>Paramythia</i>	EY	
<i>St Dimitrios</i>	TH	
<i>St Nikolaos</i>	EY	
<i>St Thomas</i>	E	
<i>St Zoni</i>	TM	
<i>St Savvas</i>	G	
<i>St Triad</i>	GN	
<b>Saturday</b> Verger: Father TH <i>Psihosavvato</i> ('Saturday of the souls')		
<i>St Nikolaos</i> (Cemetery)	EY	Remembrance of the dead 'After Dinner'
<i>St Thomas</i>	C	Martyrs Pamfilos, Oualentos, Pavlos,
<i>St Dimitrios</i>	T	Selefkos, Porfirios, Julianos, Theodoulos
<i>St Savvas</i>	E	Elias, Jeremy, Ishaias, Samouel and Daniel
<i>St Anargyroi</i>	TM	
<i>St Zoni</i>	G	
<i>Birth of Theotokos</i>	GN	
<b>Sunday</b> Celebration of <i>Anastasima</i> 'Resurrections'		
CATHOLICON	Abbot and nine Elders	Entrance of relics of St Theodore of Mytilini

## Appendix 3.6: The Liturgical and Agricultural Annual Circle

### Liturgical and Agricultural Year (Internal economy)

<b>September/ October (Tasks)</b>
<b>September</b>
September 1 The Elders Council discusses administrative matters regarding the next term
September 8 Great Feast of Nativity of the Theotokos (Fish served at the table)
September 14 Great Feast of The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Night vigil
Day
a) Picking up grapes
b) Picking up chestnuts (using sticks and nets), and figs, and remaining apples, oranges, and pears before the frost, or the birds, get them. The monks leave some fruits on the ground to attract birds as a natural form of pest control. Most of this hard work however is done by paid workers and unpaid volunteer pilgrims
c) Pruning various kinds of berries, and clearing weeds, hard woodcuttings, and mulches, from bush fruits.
d) Planting new fruits and veggies (after leaf fall)
e) Mid-October: beginning of picking up green olives. Green olives are preserved in salty water.
Evening
f) Hand-making beeswax candles to be used both in the monastery, and to be exported in the Orthodox market and network of shops, from the US to Russia. Honey and candles are one of the main exports of the monasteries, and the Mount is covered in hives. The monks with volunteer visitors make new candles using honeycomb sheets, which they roll with the help of a wick.
Night
October 1 Celebration of the Holy Protection of Theotokos
<b>November</b>
a) Picking up brown/ black olives using a stick to hit the tree trunk, and nets or tractors to gather the olives
b) Harvesting and storing fruits, such as apples, pears, oranges, figs, nuts, and olives.
c) Pruning grape vines after leaf fall
d) Planting new fruit trees, and checking the condition of the existing ones.
e) Planting of new lentils, tomatoes, peppers, and weekly checked for weed control
November 1 Saturday of Dimitrios (a week after his celebration on October 26th). It is one of the seven 'days of remembrance' on which monasteries are very busy with visitors, as the latter arrive in hundreds to give the names of their relatives to the monks to pray for them. St Dimitrios is the patron saint of the nearby city of Thessaloniki, the 'spiritual capital' of the Hesychast prayer, and home to St Gregorios Palamas, the Father of the Hesychast movement of monks (14th Century- nowadays).
4 <sup>th</sup> Period of Abstinence [Work stops]
November 15– December 24 Nativity Strict Fast
40 days in preparation for the 'Nativity of Jesus'. During the four fasting periods of the year, most monks stop working during the day, with the exception of priests and elders, responsible for accommodating hundreds of visitors arriving for the celebration, to confess and pray. During periods of abstinence, the monks eat only once on non-fasting days, and nothing on fasting days –even avoiding to drink water if possible-. However, some break the rule 'as the Devil tempts them because it is a holy time' (Father C of Vatopaidi April 2003). The monks describe periods of abstinence as periods of 'preparation' for the celebrations of particular importance that follow them. During these extended fasts, the monks eat some bread and olives, and a glass of water. But long periods of fasting are also interrupted on days of special celebrations in the middle of the fasting period, such as Palm Sunday before the Holy week, on which they eat fish to 'strengthen the body' as they say. The 'Christmas fast' as it is also known, is interrupted by celebratory days where fish is allowed, particularly in November, such as the 'Sundays of Luke', and the Great Feast below, while in celebratory days of December olive oil is also allowed, such as on December 4th on the celebration of the Great Martyr Barbara, December 17th on the celebration of Prophet Daniel, and during the 'Fore-feasts' on the last weekend (Friday to Sunday) before Christmas.
November 9 Luke, November 13 St John Chrysostome
November 14 Celebration of St Father Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, Father of the

Hesychast Movement (14th Century), monk of Vatopaidi (1315-6) and Abbot of Esfigmenou (1335)
November 2 Great Feast of the Presentation/ Entry of Theotokos into the Temple
<b>December</b>
Night
December 25 Christmas (Nativity of Lord)/ (Fast)
December 25- January 4 First obligatory fast-free period (After-feast of Nativity of Jesus, in Russian <i>Sviatki</i> ) that lasts for ten days, until January 4
<b>January</b>
January 1 Celebrating circumcision of Jesus with a feast of fish
January 5 Eve of Epiphany: Strict fasting day/ end of <i>Sviatki</i>
January 6 Great Feast of Epiphany of Christ
Day: Work resumes
Intensive work at the fields, and nearby the monastery, also begins throughout January to March, until the beginning of the second fasting period of the calendar, the Great Lent (March-April below).
a) Continuing picking up late apples and pears
b) Planting of new fruits inside the garden, and at the fields
c) Taking care of trees, angles of branches, ties, and supports, for the coming winter
d) Protecting nectarines and peaches from fungal disease (peach leaf curve) using polythene sheet coverings
e) Pruning of fruit trees, apples, pears, bushes, and cane fruits
Forest
f) Logging and exporting wood (paid workers)
Night
January 23 (February 5 with 'old' calendar) Celebration of Martyr Agathaggelos of Esfigmenou: Liturgy includes pilgrimage of his relics kept in Esfigmenou (Fish served)
January 27 Celebration of Relics of St Chrysostome in Vatopaidi: Liturgy includes pilgrimage of his relics kept in Vatopaidi
<b>February</b>
Day
a) Checking the trees' condition under frost and making necessary repairs if possible
b) Checking fruit and veggie storage for rotten fruits to be thrown to the birds
c) Protecting nectarines and peaches with rain covers
d) Checking plums for leaf-curling disease
e) Early sowing of melons
f) Pruning and protecting berries with nets from birds
Forest
g) Logging (paid workers)
Vineyard
g) Untying grapevines to come into growth (both monks and paid workers)
Night
February 2 Great Feast of Presentation/ Entrance of Jesus into The Temple
February 3- February 9 Fast-free period of the 'Publican and Pharisee'
February 19- February 25 Third fast-free period ( <i>Maslenitsa</i> )
<b>March/ April 2003: Great Lent and Easter (moveable)</b>
Day
a) Boosting the population of bees by placing nest kits for new hives
b) Pruning of fig trees after end of frost, before growth starts
c) Watering of fruits and fruits to protect them from the dry cold wind
d) Pruning autumn berries (blueberries, raspberries)
e) Untying and recovering from the frost blackberries and fruit trees against any winter damage from the frost
f) Harvesting early lentils, tomatoes etc
Hives
g) Checking condition of hives and bees

Vineyard
h) Start ('winter pruning') pruning grape vines, constructing overhead arbors on which the vine spreads. The monk <i>ampelourgos</i> ('vine-worker') creates new spurs by cutting the cane in four positions and allowing the leafy branches to develop. He then ties them with a wire
Work stops for Great Lent, and continues after Easter Sunday. However, lay workers continue working as usual, particularly at the fields. The pruning has to be repeated for four years, until the vine has been fully formed.
Night
March 1 (14 with 'old' calendar) 'Saturday of the Souls' / Day of Remembrance: reading of the names given to the monks by the visitors to pray for during the night vigil
1 <sup>st</sup> Period of Abstinence: Great Lent
March 10 (23) – April 18 (May 1) 2003 – 48 days before Easter (27 April 2003)
The Great Lent is the most important fasting period in the Orthodox calendar, leading to Ester Sunday, the greatest celebration of Orthodox Christianity. The Great Lent begins on 'Clean Monday' (which in 2003 was on March 10 <sup>th</sup> ), seven weeks before the movable Easter Sunday. It lasts for 40 contiguous days until the Presanctified Liturgy on Friday of the Sixth week. Symbolically, the Great Lent ends on Lazarus Saturday, which celebrates his resurrection, followed by Palm Sunday the next day. However, the strict fasting continues throughout the Holy Week that follows, or 'Christ's Passion Week' as it is also known. Fasting only ends after the Paschal Great Vigil (Saturday night to Sunday dawn), which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus, the highest peak of the calendar. In this way the actual fasting days are not forty, but forty-seven. The second, third and fourth Saturdays of the Great Lent are traditionally 'days of remembrance' and many visitors arrive to ask the monks to pray for their relatives in the 'cosmopolitan' world, both for the living and the dead. The period of abstinence is very strict, and includes sleeping deprivation and continuous prayer. It is only interrupted for one day by fixed celebrations. In 2003, during the Great Lent the Sunday celebrations of Orthodoxy (16/3), of St Gregory Palamas (23/3), of the Holy Cross (30/3), of St John Climacus (6/4) and of St Mary of Egypt (13/3) included olive oil on the Sunday table. In 2003, the Great Lent also included the fixed Great Feast of the Annunciation of Mary (see below), and the Palm Sunday that follows the Great Lent and precedes the Holy Week, on which celebratory days fish is served at the table. During the Great Lent are aware that they must do as little as possible, as they have to focus on self-reflection: prayer and contemplation, in order to 'remember the sins they committed even as babies' and confess them to the abbot.
March 15 (28) Celebration of Pahomios the first Great Hermit (Esfigmenou)
March 20 (April 2) Celebration of Mark the Hermit (Esfigmenou)
March 25 (April 7) Great Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary
Fish served with spaghetti. Celebration of Vatopaidi's Catholicon (main Church)
March 27 (April 9) Celebration of the John the Russian Confessor of Esfigmenou, particularly important for the Russians. During these celebrations the monks eat fish, lentil soup, spaghetti, and cheese.
April 20 (May 3) Great (movable) Feast of Palm Sunday
Holy Week: Monday April 21 (May 4)- Sunday 27 (May 10) 2003
During the Holy Week of particular importance is the Holy Friday, which follows Jesus' crucifixion the previous night. It is a day of mourning and absolute non-activity as nowhere in the monastery work is permitted. It is the only day when the Divine Liturgy is not read during the night liturgy. At dawn the monasteries' Byzantine and Greek flags hung half-mast, as the monks carry the <i>Epitaphios</i> , which is table with the icon of Jesus decorated with flowers, candles, and golden and silver ornaments around the monastery and back into the church. The priest deacons carrying the <i>Epitaphios</i> are followed by the priests on duty and the Choir, and then hierarchically ( <i>chorostasia</i> ) by the silent abbot, prominent visitors, elders, priests, monks, and visitors, in a rite resembling a funeral procession. Following the rite at the refectory the monks only offer <i>tahinosoupa</i> to the visitors (they eat almost nothing during the Holy Week), which is a soup made of tahini, lettuce, and vinegar. On Sunday Easter (that is actually Sunday morning), following the Easter celebration that takes place the previous night (as the 'days' on Athos begin the previous evening with the vesper) the refectory is decorated with flowers, and the food is very rich, based on fish, traditionally red painted eggs, cheese, and veggies.
<b>EASTER SUNDAY</b> April 27 with Gregorian calendar (May 10 with 'old' Julian)
April 27 (May 10)- May 3 (16) Fourth obligatory fast-free period (called 'Bright Week')
Monday April 28 (May 11) Procession and collective prayer to the Chapel of St Tryfonas, which is built at the fields with the vineyard of the monasteries. Planting new grape vines takes place, as St Tryfonas is thought to be the protector of vine (like the ancient Frygian God Dionysus).
Friday April 2 Celebration of Virgin the Oil Maker in Vatopaidi (see chapter 3 <i>Elaiovrytissa</i> )

<b>May</b>
Day: Work resumes
a) Picking up oregano, parsley, peppers, cherries, tomatoes etc from the garden
b) Harvesting late lentils and other veggies.
Lentils are mixed with barley and castor, and served with rice
c) Removing blossom from fruit tress
d) Watering all recently planted trees
e) Clearing about a square meter of ground around trees and bushes from weed
f) Preparing the ground for melons
g) Pruning of plums
Vineyard
h) Watering and keeping the atmosphere as moist as possible by damping down the floors particularly on dry warm days
i) Spreading of fertilizer (ammonium) if required
j) Pruning of vines by rubbing out harmful buds, and cutting the branches back to about half a meter.
May 23 (June 5) Third movable Great Feast of the Holy Ascension
<b>June</b>
June 1 (14) Trinity Saturday 'Remembrance Day'/ Visitors
June 15 (28) Pentecost, Trinity Sunday
Fasting is not permitted for a week ('Trinity Week')/ Work continues:
Tasks
a) Picking of spring fruits (nectarines, peaches) using nets
b) Protecting ripening fruits from birds with nets
b) Harvesting rhubarbs, strawberries, cherries, melons, plums, tomatoes etc
c) Watering plans, trees
d) Spraying them with liquid made of seaweed to preserve them in storage
Vineyard
e) Clearing grape vines four leaves beyond the developing clusters
f) Pick up green fresh vine leaves to stuff them with rice in the oven ( <i>sarmadakia</i> )
2 <sup>nd</sup> Period of Abstinence [Work Stops]
Night
The Apostles Peter and Paul Fast is a 'moveable' period of strict abstinence and self-reflection, following the Resurrection of Jesus. It can last from one to six weeks, depending on the timing of Easter, as it always begins on the first Monday eight days after the Pentecost, and ends a day before the Great Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul on June 29 <sup>th</sup> . In 2003, because Easter was late, the Pentecost was celebrated on June 15 <sup>th</sup> (28 <sup>th</sup> ), so the strict fast lasted less than a week, from Monday 23 June (July 6 <sup>th</sup> ) to Saturday 28 June (July 11 <sup>th</sup> ). The fasting comes 'in preparation' for the Great Feast of Peter and Paul on June 29 <sup>th</sup> (according to the Julian calendar it falls on July 12 <sup>th</sup> our calendar)
<b>Paschal (Spring) Moveable Period Ends: Daily work resumes according to Gregorian calendar</b>
<b>July</b>
Day
a) Continuing with harvesting summer fruits, gooseberries, and red and white currants
b) Pruning, watering summer fruiting raspberries and black current bushes
c) Thinning out and watering apple, pear, orange trees
d) Preparing ground for new fruits
Night
July 5 Celebration of St Athanasios the Athonite
July 13 Sunday of the Holy Fathers
July 15 St Vladimir 'Equal to the Apostles': important for Russian monks
July 20 Prophet Elias (Fast-free)
July 23 Prophet Ezekiel (Strict fast)
July 25 Dormition of St Anna (mother of <i>Theotokos</i> )
July 27 Great Martyr Panteleimon: RELICS/ Vatopaidi

<p>On this day the Vatopaidians celebrate St Panteleimon, the martyr saint associated with miraculous healing of blind men with olive oil. In Greek, his name is rooted in the word <i>elaios</i>, meaning both ‘oil’ and ‘mercy’/‘All-compassionate, all-merciful’. He is celebrated with a night vigil, followed by feast at the refectory the following morning between July 27 and 28. The Vatopaidians have hundreds of visitors on that day, as the monastery keeps the miraculous head and icon of the saint in the sanctuary. Following the night vigil, the Vatopaidians parade his icon to the <i>Chapel of St Panteleimon</i>, which was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Russian Vatopaidians at the southern wall inside the monastery. Four priest-deacons carry the icon on their shoulders, followed by the <i>chorostasia</i> (priests with Abbot, elders, monks, novices, and visitors).</p>
<b>August</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> Period of Abstinence [Work stops]
August 1 Celebration of Procession of Holy Cross/ Beginning of fasting
August 1 – August 14 Dormition Fast
The Dormition (sleep) of the Theotokos is the most important ‘Fixed’ Great Feast in the Orthodox calendar. Because it is in the middle of the summer holiday, thousands arrive in the monasteries to celebrate the Virgin Mary in her holy land. For this reason, the monks prepare for the celebration and for accommodating the mass a month in advance, with a strict fasting period that lasts for two weeks. The Dormition fast is only interrupted by the Great feast of the Transfiguration of Christ on the fourth day of fasting, but fasting restarts immediately the same evening.
August 5 ‘Fore-feast’ of Transfiguration (strict fast)
On the eve of the nine Fixed Great Feasts, such as August’s Transfiguration of Christ, and the Dormition of Mary, the monks eat nothing. The celebration begins in the evening with the Great Vesper, and it is followed by ‘liturgical cycle’ (Midnight Office, Matins, Divine Liturgy) of the particular day. It lasted for more than 12 hours until the next morning, followed by a great feast based on fish.
August 6 Holy Transfiguration of Christ/ Fish served
This is a particularly important day for Esfigmenou, as they celebrate the <i>Catholicon</i> (main church). Hundreds of visitors, followers of the ‘Old Calendarist Church’, arrive to the monastery despite the embargo that forbids visitors to go to the ‘occupied’ Esfigmenou. After the end of the great feast, the abbot gave a public talk to all those who arrived to the monastery. He talked about the political and financial isolation of Esfigmenou, and the ‘struggle’ of the monks against the ‘evil’ Athonian and Greek authorities. These speeches consist of a mix of Christian neo-fundamentalist political ideas supported by selected religious texts.
August 7 ‘After-feast’ of Transfiguration: Strict fasting resumes
August 14 ‘Fore-feast’ of the Dormition of Mary
August 15 Great Feast of Dormition of the <i>Theotokos</i> (Fish)
End of Abstinence/ Work begins towards new term (September)
Day
a) Checking and spraying the olive trees that have been affected by <i>dakos</i> , the disease that begins from the roots of the vine tree and by mid-October expands to the branches destroying the production
b) Beginning of collecting figs
c) Checking condition of chestnut tress and preparing, mulching, and clearing the grounds
d) Beginning of picking grapes
August 24 Celebration of Kosmas the Aetolian
This day is particularly important for the Vatopaidians, as the prophet St Kosmas was a student of the Athoniada School of Vatopaidi in the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century, and he is considered to be the one of the ‘Fathers of the Greek nation’. During the night liturgy the Vatopaidians venerate his relics kept at the monastery’s Sanctuary, which also attract hundreds more visitors from the ‘cosmopolitan’ world.
August 30 The Beheading of John the Baptist
This day is particularly important for the monks of Esfigmenou, who identify with John the Baptist as an exemplary martyr. John’s beheading shows the path for those new ‘martyrs’ of ‘true faith’. As discussed in the thesis, the new zealots have reinvented baptism as an initiation to the Old Calendarist Church, associating them with the illegal baptisms that John performed in his time. John’s beheading shows the path for those new ‘martyrs’ of ‘true faith’. After the end of the Divine Liturgy, the monks led a procession to the Chapel of St John the Baptist, where they held a small liturgy in front of the icon that portrays his self-sacrifice, offering an example/path for personal salvation.
New cycle begins...

**History of producing and exporting wine Year 1764 (Papaggelos, 1992: 242-254)**

MONASTERY	VINEYARDS ( <i>squares</i> )	WINE PRODUCTION ( <i>Measures</i> )	AVERAGE YIELD
<b>Vatopaidi</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>1054</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>Esfigmenou</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>2.1</b>

**Appendix 4****NOTES FROM ESFIGMENOU**

**[The names of informants and people inside Esfigmenou used in this section are not real, but were changed for reasons of private anonymity. Except for those who willingly gave their names to the national media, for example, the Abbot Methodios and the leader of the St Basil organization Anastasios Theodoridis, both of whom are already known to the wider Greek public and beyond]**

**Appendix 4.1**

**Meeting at St Basil, Thessaloniki, Monday, 25/11 (our calendar)  
Secretive meeting of Old Calendarists at the offices of the extreme religious group ‘St Basil’ (address: Valaoritou 14, Thessaloniki) about supporting the cause and the monks of Esfigmenou**

In my first trip to Esfigmenou I had heard about the extremist religious group of St Basil, which was affiliated to the Old Calendarist Church. Its head quarters are situated in Thessaloniki, my hometown, so I thought of paying a visit to one of their meetings to see these people outside the monastery. The visitor who told me about the meeting was a permanent visitor of Esfigmenou called Mihail from Serbia. He had trusted to me that the meeting was secretly taking place the following Monday, and that it would be about the eviction and the embargo of Esfigmenou. So I decided to take the boat out to Thessaloniki, in order to attend the meeting, and return to Esfigmenou a week later. On that Thursday (21/11), I took the boat from Esfigmenou to Ierissos, and from there the bus to Salonica. On my way to Salonica that morning, one of my fellow travellers, a Greek visitor called Demos, told me among other things about the famous zealot monk Andrianos of Sinai, who used to be monk of Esfigmenou, but left the monastery. According to the visitor, Andrianos, despite of his admirable virtues, had argued with the previous Abbot of Esfigmenou Euthimios (1975-1999), because he was offering the Holy Communion to ‘new calendarists’, something absolutely forbidden in the monastery. This reconciliatory movement of the famous hermit resulted to his social isolation by the rest of the zealots, until he had to leave back to Sinai. Demos himself had receive the holy moiré and read the Old Calendarist oath in the office of Abbot Methodios five years ago.

On Monday evening, after arriving to a rainy Thessaloniki, I hesitantly searched for St Basil’s offices. They were situated on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of a bloc in the centre of the city, ironically opposite one of the central police stations (this ultra-Orthodox organization is supposed to be semi-illegal). In a small room there was a crowd of about 100 people, both men and women, and even some children, pushing and sweating to find a chair to sit. I felt like a spy; I was a spy in a way. I opened my ears. The mainly older people were talking loudly to each other about the ‘betrayal of the Turk loving Bartholomew’, ‘the gay priests of the new Calendarist church’, and the ‘politician traitors of Cyprus’, and other hateful offences. I was surprised to find out that I knew many people in the meeting, some old ladies from my neighbourhood in the upper city, and a few young guys from Athos. The meeting was also attended by Father N of Esfigmenou, the most famous Greek zealot, who has travelled to preach in Old Calendarist Churches in Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria, and is known for his passionate speeches. Another fellow traveller from Esfigmenou, a Greek visitor called Mitsos, once told me: ‘N should have been the Abbot of Esfigmenou but he is not virgin’: ‘The most famous monk is Father N. Everybody know him from his trips to Greece, because he is looking for products, food, medicine and other things, that do not carry the stamp of Satan on them. We believe that all products carry the number of the Beast on them as it was foretold in John’s Apocalypse, you know, the barcode at the back. That’s why the monks threw all the computers and TVs

that were presents to them from the window. N did it. And then he started travelling and preaching about the number 6-6-6 and the New Calendarists all over Greece, while also looking for *asfragista* products (meaning ‘unmarked’ and referring to products that do not carry the Sign 666). He has many followers. He should have been the Abbot but he was not virgin so he could not become a priest.’ (Discussion with Mitsos, Greek barman, January 2003)

Because of his exceptional fanaticism and activism in and outside Athos, Father N is the only monk of Esfigmenou besides the Abbot Methodios, who is allowed to have a mobile phone, in order to arrange for his trips and public speeches. During the meeting, the mobile phone of the ordinary monk N rang (at least) twice regarding some ‘developments in the Old Calendarist Churches of Corinth and Patra’ (gossip). Some other more eccentric-looking ‘cosmopolitan’ people preferred to talk to themselves. The chaotic and hateful atmosphere was intensive. The left wall of the room was covered with Greek and Byzantine flags of the Double Eagle, and the right with a gothic poster of the Second Coming, picturing Hell arising and swallowing the sinners. I had to swallow hard myself; ‘what if they find out that I’m not one of them’ I thought and looked at the front row those well-built skinheads, ‘probably their grandchildren’ I tried to joke to make myself more comfortable. I was a fish out of water. Demos pulled me back on my chair.

The main speaker was a tiny little round man Anastasios Theodoridis whom I knew from the TV, sometimes watching him on the extreme right-wing private channel *Tele-Asti*, where he was often calling for kicking the ‘foreigners’ out, including those of the government. This was certainly a departure from the religious context of the Old Calendarist Church into something more politically sinister, and to which the zealots of Esfigmenou gave ‘blessing’. With his great entrance, the hateful Theodoridis screamed ‘Silence!’ his throat became red from the effort. He was loud enough to shut the audience. I hid in my chair; he continued: ‘This Monday’s meeting is about the eviction that the Holy Committee of Mount Athos has sent to the Abbot Methodios, asking him to send 50 monks to Karyes to be examined for their beliefs. The deadline starts today and ends in a week. As most of you know the zealots are punished for not commemorating the Turk traitor Patriarch Bartholomew, because they are the real Christian monks, and not slaves of the Jews, the Turks, and the Europeans. Of course the saint Abbot will not oblige to their demand. He has shown me all the secret corners, where the monks have put dynamite, as it was made in the Revolution of 1821. But as the prophecy says, at the moment the police enters Esfigmenou the process of the Second Coming will begin, and a great wave will cover most of the world, and the Pope will reveal his hidden face, that of the Antichrist. It is the Pope and the Jews who want to subordinate Orthodoxy to their plan, and it is our pure Orthodox tradition, so cautiously retained in Esfigmenou by the only real monks left. They are behind this so-called “eviction”. We have to act and act fast, to protest and take this to the media. I’ve spoken to the Abbot Methodios and he gave me his blessing to act as we feel appropriate. He advised us to wait and see how the police will act first. His point was that the last time eight of us got arrested in the protests against the Satanic European id, because we started the trouble. As you all remember, I was one of the arrested; that was my martyrdom. I did not betray my brothers; I did not give them a name. But this time let them start first, and then we will take the streets and defend our true faith in the name of Esfigmenou.’

At that point the crowd erupted calling names against the Patriarch in Istanbul, and against the government, only to be interrupted again by a second burst of ‘silence!’ Some questions took place, and the meeting ended with all standing up on our chairs and praying for ‘country, religion, and family’, that would have made the Junta’s Generals of 1967 nostalgic of lost glories. Following the meeting at the offices of ‘St Basil’, I met a group of followers of the Old Calendarist Church planning to travel to Esfigmenou to support them in numbers against the coming eviction. At the time it was not a problem to get me a visa on the same day, as the Abbot of Esfigmenou had telephoned the Border officers at Ouranoupolis to issue all those coming from a meeting with a visa. So, about twenty of us, Greeks and Serbians (including some who had not attended the meeting), took the bus from Salonica to Ierissos and were allowed directly into Esfigmenou, without having to pass from the authorities at Ouranoupolis and/or Karyes. However, after the embargo that was imposed two months later in February 2003, no boats or buses are allowed to the monastery, and no visas are issued, as the monks are locked in the monastery trying to avoid their third eviction, issued by the Holy Committee on the same month. Anastasios Theodoridis was also travelling with the boat, sitting together with a journalist friend and a policeman dressed in civilian cloths. They were going only for a few days to the monastery to get some pictures of themselves in the companionship of the Abbot Methodios, and to show their support for the Old Calendarist Church as part of their ‘true Greek Orthodox’ agenda. They were talking loudly, with rather aggressive gestures, about the ‘traitor;’ Patriarch Bartholomew because of his support of the

international project of Ecumenism, the ‘greatest evil conspiracy of the Jews and the Pope’ against Orthodoxy Christianity. At some point the policeman shouted: ‘do you know what globalisation means *re*? (It means) to let the Zulu and the Mau-Mau have so-called rights, and that everybody is right, even the Satanists’. Then an old man joined the conversation, talking about how ‘communist conspirators’ send the Greek King in exile (in England), and how much he wished for his return. But that comment made the policeman even more upset, and his red face rudely said that ‘all Kings and Queens are foreigners and Masons, agents of the Jewish and Satan’. Then they all started talking against the monks of Vatopaidi, because its Abbot Ephraim is a personal friend to Charles the Prince of Wales. By the end of the trip they had moved on discussing as loudly as they could about their ‘heroic’ protests in Thessaloniki against the naming of Macedonia (FYROM), organized by the Old Calendarist Church and far right parties, following the claim of the Archbishop of Thessaloniki on Greek TV that: ‘We should take back all the missing parts of Macedonia that belong to us!’” The Greek government hurried up to dismiss such claims, but the ultra-nationalist Orthodox sentiment of the Archbishop of the mainstream Church, who is legally elected, shows that the zealots of Esfigmenou are not as alone in their beliefs as people tend to portray them. There was also a Frenchman in the boat sitting alone in a corner, and to whom some of the Theodoridis’ group often stared suspiciously.

To me it seemed that these people, in their racist hallucinations, completely ignored the fact that this monastery is the most ethnically diverse environment on the Mount, with zealot monks of seventeen different nationalities, who have nothing to do with this nationalist group of Greek and Serbian fanatics. The group was going to meet Father G, the second monk of the monastery and subordinate to the Abbot, at the secretary’s office, in order to arrange for an interview with the Abbot. Father G acts as both the Secretary and the Verger of the monastery, traditionally responsible for dividing the daily tasks amongst monks and lay workers. But because the zealots do not pay their workers but let them live next to the monastery, Father G deals mainly with organizing interviews for the Abbot, and publishing the monthly magazine of the monastery *Voanerges*. But to my surprise Theodoridis and his companions did not even know that Father G was not Greek but from Bulgaria! They thought he was Greek because he speaks the language perfectly, but (as racists tend to unwillingly do) did not even bother asking. However, despite this Greek ultra nationalist façade, less than half of Esfigmenou’s monks are Greek, as the monastery has monks coming from 17 countries. The new zealotism is a global movement, which ironically claims to be ‘anti-global’, in the same paradoxical way the monks refuse to import new technologies, but at the same time have hundreds of sites in the Internet with their political beliefs.

## *Appendix 4.2*

### **Troubled Visitors**

**[These notes and interviews were taken before or during the embargo imposed in February 2003, which cut all communications between Esfigmenou and the world outside. Many discussions took place under particular circumstances, for instance, there was no medicine for the elder monks and visitors, limited food and a sense of collective paranoia.]**

Below I will briefly look at the stories of some of my roommates in Esfigmenou, who either wanted to become monks, or lived as seculars with the monks in support to their cause and ideology. Most of them were outcasts of an old age, failed men, some of them uneducated, others with a psychosis, some with drug problems, and most of them unemployed, lonely men usually in trouble. According to its tradition for hospitality, Esfigmenou has its heart open for all these outcasts of life who are finding shelter within the warmth of its zealot ideology. Traditionally, the role of the host-master (*archontaris*) is to take care of the visitors and introduce them to monastic life. But in Esfigmenou he also explains to them about the Old Calendarist beliefs, and even tries to convert them to the Old Calendarist Church. All first-time visitors have to attend on their arrival at a small meeting room situated in the *archontariki*. The zealots do not believe that they convert people to their group, but that they are ‘enlightening’ them. This is a revealing extract from an interview with Mitsos, a 50 year-old Greek barman: ‘I have a bar in Greece. I have been in prison many times, but now I try to keep it clean, since I met the Albanian Elder N who persuaded me to become an Old Calendarist. I realized many things about my life since then. You’ll see. If you join our Church you must only go to our churches. In Salonica (where we were both from) there

are four; I can tell how to get there'. Some of the visitors I have met are Christos, 57 years old unemployed just came out of prison for drug dealing, Mikhail in his 40s wanted by the Serbian military police since the end of the War in Bosnia, Mitsos 52, divorced and wanted by the Greek police for his financial misgivings, Dimitris 32, alcoholic and homeless, Giannis and Kostas in their 60s, homeless, Giorgos 63, whom I have seen many times wandering alone in the Navarino square of Thessaloniki like a madman scrounging for food. People who are socially isolated, unemployed, undervalued, or even ridiculed; in other words, rejects of society' certainly find shelter and something to believe in, the Evangelical spirit of 'rebirth'. These outcasts found a home in the monastery's premises, and their lost identity within the dogmatic, racist, nationalist teachings of Esfigmenou, the Old Calendarist Church, and the nationalist political organizations of the far right outside Athos. Most of them wish to become monks, but the monastery's policy is to make them wait and take a decision (at least) six months later. Such a permanent visitor was 60 year-old Giannis from Salonica, who in his own account was 'an alcoholic homeless bastard'. He lived for three years in the monastery, helping the monks with rebuilding it, as he was a builder. Some of them went to Vatopaidi but they were not accepted there. A poor old man from Cyprus dressed in rogues told me: "I've been to other monasteries and they all kicked me out: 'We don't want a drunk here!' they said. You see, the truth is that I don't have money to give them, but here I don't need money... In Vatopaidi they kicked me out because they realized that I have psychological problems and I need my pills. If I don't take my pills I will not make it. They said I was too old. But here the monks treat me well. They said that I can stay as long as I want, and that they will decide in the future if I am going to be a monk. The Abbot is so good to me. Every two weeks he orders my pills from Karyes and they bring them from Salonica with the boat... I help at the garage carrying materials and tools for the laymen." [21/1/03]. Another visitor was Christos, also from Cyprus: 'I'm four weeks here (in Esfigmenou) now, and they don't want to give me communion yet. The Abbot told me to wait and they will call me... I went to become a monk in the monasteries of Koutloumousiou, Stavronikita, even in Vatopaidi; and they kicked me out one night and told me to leave because I have psychological problems. They said that because I need my pills and because they cannot afford to pay for them I should go out and get well first... Here (in Esfigmenou) they told me to stay as much as I want and they will decide if they let me become a monk. The Abbot even told me not to worry about my pills, they will be sending the little boat over to the mainland and get my pills every week' [18/1/03]. Christos complained that the monks did not give him, neither were planning to give him, the Holy Communion, unless he joined the Old Calendarist Church and read the Oath, to help him resolve his 'confusion' and find salvation.

Many visitors were men in real trouble, some were wanted searching for a shelter to escape from the authorities. A permanent visitor was Michail, a 40-something Serbian Old Calendarist, wanted for war crimes in Bosnia against the Albanian people from the time he served for the Serbia army. He had been in the monastery 'five to six' years. He explained: 'I came in Esfigmenou in 1995 after the war. The Europeans are looking for me. I had a farm near Belgrade, and I wanted a family and a normal life, but the military made me murder innocent people and sin. So I went to Corinthos (in south Greece) to an Old Calendarist Church and I got properly baptized and changed my name to Michail, my proper Christian name. I also like Savvas as a name but they insisted on Michail, like yours'. At that point I interrupted him to ask him about the war. He did not reply pretending he did not hear my question, but continued saying: 'I might become monk here, but I am not sure. I love the cosmic life. I live in the monastery but sometimes we go out to Thessaloniki for some drinks and to listen to some music. I love all that. The monks send me to sell their books and icons to villages all around Greece, and they make money. Lots of money, but they don't give me a penny. I want to return to Serbia but there is still a small problem, which they say it will be resolved soon and I will return home' [8/12/02]. Another visitor friend of mine, was an alcoholic Bulgarian middle aged man, who was openly gay, constantly drunk, and often in trouble with the monks for smoking in the rooms. He spent his days walking all the way to the Serbian monastery of *Hilliandari* to buy *raki* to drink, because the Esfigmenites did not allow him to drink alcohol. But after a few months of constantly breaking the rules, they had enough. One January morning, the Albanian archontaris loudly asked his two deacons: "Tell that ginger head Bulgarian to come immediately and see me!" The room smelled smoke, and as punishment for smoking the archontaris asked him do 200 deep prostrations in the form of push-ups in front of all of us. The deacon then sent a young monk to call the archontaris to come and have a laugh. Maybe that was a way of punishing him, but they also seemed to enjoy it. They then warned him that if he smokes again they will kick him out. It was as humiliating as exhausting experience for my friend. After they left he spat "they need a good \*\*\*\* to feel better". Inevitably, such a character did not last long, even in Esfigmenou: just a week later, the monks accused him of stealing and kicked him out.

After staying in Esfigmenou for two months, the zealots began trusting me, and even considering me to become a monk, so the Abbot officially appointed Billy to work with me at the *archontariki*, under the instructions of the deacons A and E. For the rest of my staying we had to wash all the dishes at the *archontariki*, as well as pick up the plates and wash them at the days of abstinence (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday), as the Refectory was closed. Some days we also helped with the plates at the Refectory after lunch. There we worked under the supervision of the very strict and often angry Romanian Elder in the role of the *Trapezaris*, who often shouted at us and demanded impossible tasks. But one day after we complained to the *archontaris* A, he said that he will talk about it to the Romanian Elder and that the Elder should have not be rude to us because this is against the rule of hospitality (because of which we were here in the first place). Billy eventually became a novice; I was never really into it, as we chose different personal paths. Some visitors however are not successful in adopting the monastery's strict rules and ideology, or because of their nationality. One December day, on my way to my room I passed from the Carpentry, which is run by the Russian Father C and twelve Russian zealots. The elder C had caught a French visitor, wearing the gloves used at the Carpentry by his group. 'Did you steal them?' he angrily said to him in broken French. 'No, no!' the French visitor denied, as his staying was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. I had noticed that the monks did not trust him because of his nationality. Another roommate I had was Stephanos from Bulgaria. Alcoholic and openly gay, he came here because his father threw him out of the house. 'Do you have any alcohol?' he asked me in perfect Greek the very first moment I met him. He had worked for many years at Berrhoea in northern Greece, but it was obvious that he had a very big drinking and attitude problem. 'The bloody monks!' he said to us in the room. 'I asked them to give me some of that *raki* they keep in the *archontariki* and they said "no" because it is Monday (fasting day). They make me go tomorrow all the way to Hiliandari just to buy some alcohol those bastards (Serbian monastery, five kilometres distance)' he said and then asked us for money. The next evening he came back from Hiliandari with some *raki* and cigarettes. He was very kind and offered me cigarettes and booze. He smoked in the room, something strictly forbidden, but the broken windows and the wind cleared the atmosphere soon before the monks found out, until one afternoon the deacon *archontaris* Father A, who used to be a smoker as a 'cosmic sinner', smelled the smoke coming from he room, and entered angry. But Stephanos was not there as he had already gone to the toilet. Father A said to me: 'Tell that ginger head Bulgarian, to come immediately and see me!' Then his strict deacon F from the *archontariki* caught up with him at the corridor, and as punishment for smoking in the monastery made him do 200 deep prostrations in the form of push-ups in front of all of us in the room. The deacon then sent a young monk to call the *archontaris* to come and have a laugh. Maybe that was a way of punishing Stephanos, but they also seemed to enjoy it. They then warned him that if he smokes again they will kick him out. It was as humiliating as exhausting experience for Stephanos. After they left he spat 'they need a good \*\*\*\* to feel better'. Inevitably, such a character did not last long, even in Esfigmenou: just a week later, the monks accused him of stealing and kicked him out.

---

### **Appendix 4.3: The Funeral of Father Tryfonas**

In February 2003, my fieldwork in Esfigmenou was interrupted by the embargo imposed by the Athonite authorities to the monastery calling them 'occupiers', 'schismatics', 'fundamentalists', and questioning their status as monks highlighting their 'cosmic' attitude towards secular politics. It was a very emotional time, the first death of a monk as a consequence of the imposed embargo according to the zealots. Four more accidents were to follow between 2003 and 2006. As many things that happen with the monks of Esfigmenou following their increasing reputation for ultra Orthodox zealotism, the death was reported by the world media. Below is an extract from the report of the *Associated Press* (Sunday February 9)167:

---

<sup>167</sup> [http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20030209/ap\\_on\\_re\\_eu/greece\\_rebel\\_monks\\_2](http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20030209/ap_on_re_eu/greece_rebel_monks_2)  
[6/4/2008]

‘Greek Hermit Rebel Monk Killed’: A 25-year-old hermit monk died after accidentally driving his tractor off a cliff in an attempt to dodge police who have barricaded the rebel monastery. The incident occurred early Saturday in the Orthodox Christian sanctuary of Mount Athos, where the rebel Esfigmenou monastery has been sealed off by police since Jan. 29. Police said the monk, Tryfonas, who lived in solitary quarters, tried to retrieve a tractor outside the monastery grounds during the night to avoid police detection and drove off the side of a cliff. Esfigmenou’s 117 monks are defying an eviction order imposed because of their fierce opposition to efforts to improve relations between the Orthodox Church and the Vatican’

Father Tryfonas was an example of a zealot monk, as he spent many hours day and night isolated in his cell, which was situated at the separate area for the monks who demand absolute silence in Esfigmenou. He was a humble man, as unlike other zealots he rarely shouted or had expressed any aggressive political views in public. In the night, he was the night porter, which made his life even more isolated, and thus valued even higher from his brothers. That February, the weather was terrible with strong northern winds and non-stop rain making the paths around the monastery extremely dangerous to take, because of mudslides, falling rocks, and hidden bumps. At the time, the monks of Esfigmenou felt that they were under siege by the main authority of Athos. The Holy Committee of Karyes wanted to evict them, because of their zealot beliefs and political opposition to the Patriarch, as well as their ‘break from tradition’. For a whole month the monks had refused to open the Gate to let visitors out, in fear of persecution by the local police of Ierissos who had two jeeps waiting outside. It is not that the visitors were willing to leave either. It was indeed a ‘matter of faith’ to stay and help the monks during those anxious times. But when the food supplies finished, one Saturday morning, the brave monk took the monastery’s only tractor to drive it to Karyes, in order to buy new supplies, and return to the monastery. He decided to drive in the middle of the night during a storm, in order not to be seen by two police jeeps permanently stationed outside the monastery. The result was that the tractor turned over and killed him. He was not found until the next morning by the police and was returned to the monastery, on a Saturday, the day of remembering the dead.

The police returned his body from the hospital in Karyes on Saturday evening, and the Gate finally opened. There were no arrests but instead the police just left. The monks knew the policemen well, since a few of them frequently attended the Church of Esfigmenou for the Sunday liturgy. But as they apologized ‘an order is an order’. According to tradition, in the hospital where the body was first taken, because Tryfonas was found outside the monastery a priest must have recited the ‘Thrice Holy’ three times loudly, and then continuing silently the same prayer until Tryfonas was transferred back to Esfigmenou the same evening. In my knowledge no autopsy was performed. After the police brought Tryfonas, the monks immediately carried his body to his cell. They kept his in the cell for one day, to bury it during Sunday’s vespers. According to priest-deacon A who at the time worked at the *archontariki* (host-house), in the cell they do not wash the body, but use a sponge of warm water to clean the forehead, the chest, the hands, the knees, and the feet in a crosswise direction (head to feet and then hands). They then put on the dead monk clean white socks, long pants, and a vest. After his rosary has been placed into his hands, the body is tied with a bandage. They also put on him his used cap and old hood in the shape of a Cross covering his face. Only the abbot’s face remains uncovered. They then place on him a new belt and shoes, pick up the covered body, dress it in black and red ornaments of the *Angelic scheme*, and the *Polystavri*, and place it on a bed made of straw symbolizing the humility and poverty of monastic life. Finally, they cover the corpse with the dead monk’s cassock from head to toes, and sew three crosses with white thread over the head, chest, and feet (priest-monks are buried with their stoles on called ‘*Petrachilli*’).

Because of the circumstances, the vesper that Sunday began earlier, as the monks placed the body in the *lite*, the ‘lighted’ part of the narthex in the middle of the church, where vespers take place, as it signifies both the end of the day and the beginning of a new one, a new ‘cycle’. Thus, it can be seen in relation to the dead monk’s exit from this world, this ‘cycle’, to the next one in Heavens, and the funeral, just as the vesper is used for the monks’ ‘preparation’ for the next day, in a way prepares the dead monk for his departure to afterlife. After the corpse was placed in the middle of the *lite*, the monks placed on the chest of the dead man the icon of the Saint related to him by name and virtue (according to his given name in his ordination). Then the service starts and the whole brotherhood gathers together carrying lighted candles. I was not able to witness the preparation of the body, because the visitors, being outsiders, are excluded from this process. During the funeral rites we sat separately at the *exonarthex*. The mood was sober as the body is carried to the cemetery. First four priest-deacons led the parade towards the cemetery carrying lighted *lanterns* and censers. Light is important in symbolizing the victory of Jesus over the

darkness of death through his resurrection. In the middle of this light box two deacons carried the body of Tryfonas, followed by the choir. Then the rest of the brotherhood followed them in hierarchical order: the Abbot, the rest of the elder priests and their deacons, ordinary monks with the Angelic Schema (9<sup>th</sup> Angel's Patent'), younger monks without it, novices, and finally visitors. But outside the gate of the cemetery we were told to return to the monastery, as visitors are not allowed in the cemetery. On the way, the priests made frequent stops for prayer, giving blessings with the censers, in particular to symbolically strong places, such as the monastery's main Gate facing west, which the dead monk crosses for the last time.

The cemetery is situated separately from the monastery outside its premises, on a higher ground. There, according to the monks they 'tenderly place the body in the ground, which is blessed by the priest who throws oil from the Lamb of Jesus' (Father A, February 2003). Finally, they do ten full rosaries singing the 'Thrice Holy' as the body is covered with ground. After the monk's burial the brotherhood commemorates him for forty days (symbolizing the days of Jesus in the Desert) at the Great Entrance during the preparation of the Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy. If he was an Abbot the commemoration can last up to a year. Although we were not allowed to attend at the funeral, the next morning we were invited by the abbot to join the monks' *litaneia* (collective prayer in honour of saints) at the chapel of St Tryfonas, the protector of the vine of the monastery, which has the name with the deceased. There the abbot delivered a speech on symbolism of the vine and the importance of the coming Easter (Sunday April 27 2003), through which they will anticipate 'the resurrection of our martyr brother at the Hour of the Second Coming'. 'Tryfon martyred for his faith, and just as St Aggathaggelos, he also sacrificed his life for the true faith and Orthodox tradition against the conspirators. He is now one with the angels' the Abbot concluded.

#### ***Appendix 4.4***

#### **GREEK TV: Channel *STAR*, news programme *STARata*, FRIDAY 21/2/03**

On the Greek channel *STAR*, the journalist Giorgos Varemenos invited the Greek mother of four brothers, all living in Esfigmenou. She supported the views and political stance of Abbot Methodios of the monastery, and condemned the eviction of the zealots from Athos: 'The abbot is a very nice man. One of my four sons has a health problem with his skin, and the abbot himself took him to the hospital in Thessaloniki to help him. At the beginning I did not want all of my sons to (become monks in) Esfigmenou. First my two older ones, Abraham and Isaac became monks, and recently my other two sons. My older son was a successful trader in Thessaloniki and I had high hopes for him. But after talking to the Abbot to the hospital in Thessaloniki, and seeing his kindness, I realized that these monks had a real aim, and that I should be happy that all my sons became monks in this monastery. But now the police has surrounded the monastery and want to kick these monks out, and arrest the Abbot who is a holy man fighting for our tradition, yours and mine'. Her interview was interrupted by a phone call, coming from the abbot's mobile. It was the Albanian guest-master of the monastery who added: 'One of our elders needs medical treatment immediately. The police jeeps are parked outside out monastery and we cannot go out and bring some medicine. If now we walk out we will get arrested. They will let us die in here'. On their website <http://www.Esfigmenou.com> the monks of Esfigmenou write that since the embargo was imposed in 2003 five of their brothers lost their lives, because they travelled in the night in order not to be seen by the police, in their efforts to bring some petrol and medicine from Karyes. The zealots considered their five dead brothers as 'martyrs', and they are especially remembered on their name-day. They are *true* descents of St. Aggathaggelos...

Figure Appendix 5: Eviction Notice to a monk of Esfigmenou

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
ΕΙΣΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ ΠΡΩΤΟΔΙΚΩΝ  
ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

Αν δεν βρεθεί στη διεύθυνση  
που αναγράφεται ή είναι άγνωστο  
στης διαμονής να διακολληθεί  
σύμφωνα με άρθρο 278 κτλ.

ΑΡΙΘ. Β. ΚΛ. 7588/06

**ΚΛΗΣΗ ΠΡΟΣ ΚΑΤΗΓΟΡΟΥΜΕΝΟ**

Εισαγγελέας Πλημμελειοδικών Θεσσαλονίκης

Σύμφωνα με το Νόμο

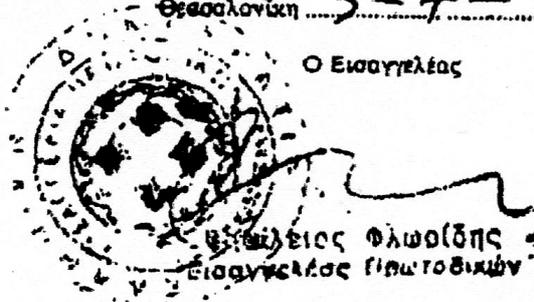
**ΚΑΛΟΥΜΕ**

Τον κατηγορούμενο Μοναχό Αχάια κ.κ. Φραγκιάδαζο Σπύρο  
κατοίκα καρυσ. Αρ. ορακ. οδ. αριθμ. ....  
να παρουσιαστεί αυτοπροσώπως ενώπιον του Γ' ΤΡΙΜΕΛΟΥΣ Πλημμελειοδικείου Θεσσαλονίκης  
που συνεδριάζει δημόσια στην υπ' αριθμ. 176 αίθουσα στον Α' όροφο Δικαστικού Μεταμόνου  
Θεσσαλονίκης την 29 του μήνα Σεπτεμβρίου  
του έτους 2006 ημέρα της εβδομάδας Παρασκευή και ώρα 9 το πρωί για να  
δικασθεί σύμφωνα με το προκοινοποιηθέν εις αυτόν υπ' αριθμ. 5013/06  
κλήτηριο θέσπισμά μας. Με τιφτυρεί

Θεσσαλονίκη 3-7-06

Ο Εισαγγελέας

Κατάλογος μαρτύρων κατηγορίας



Εισαγγελέας Πρωτοδικών ΟΡΗ

## Appendix 5: Hand-written notes from Esfigmenou

# APPENDIX 5

## SELECTED INTERVIEWS FROM ESFIGMENOU

325

### Esfigmenou Interviews

1.

Interview with monk E [redacted] in the guests' room of Esfigmenou where the young monk worked. The small room (in contrast to the large arhontariki "guest house" of Vatopaedi) had a small central table covered in books and religious magazines over world conspiracies, as well as, many books on prophecies and the Second Coming. On a corner laid a small table on which they were selling different lengths of komposkenia "the monastic rosaries" for the visitors to buy for their prayers. The pilgrims could also sign up for the magazine of the monastery published by friends of the monastery outside Mount Athos. The profits would come as a help to the monastery. The monks needed money anyway they could. Most people look poor here. Their clothes are old and torn, the food is minimal, and the behavior seriously straight. The walls of the old room completed the sad image, decorated with pictures of heroes of the 1821 Greek Revolution, the Greek flag, and a painful bloody Jesus on the Cross staring at us.

Question: How long have you been a monk in this monastery?

Father Efthimios: "I have been here for only five years."

Q: What did you do before?

F.E.: "I'm only 35 and I could write a whole book about my life (laughs with himself). I used to work in bars and night-clubs in Thessaloniki where I'm from, and used to hang out with the wrong people. I was a real scam! Can you believe it?" -No, not really...

F.E.: "Yes! I also used to own two heavy motorcycles, and I was running and drinking and getting into trouble."

Q: and Father, what happened that made you join this monastery?

F.E.: "I was confused and I run into a no way out. So, one morning I went to my mother and told her to sell the motorbikes, I'm leaving. 'You are crazy!' She answered (smiles for a little and then takes back his serious face). I don't know what I can tell you; I can't tell you about my past because I want to forget. I haven't spoken to my mother since I came here. I remember that one day I sat down trying to find a solution to my problems. I thought about my country, my religion and I thought what is happening around me, today. I thought about the 666, the mark of the Satan that was everywhere around me. It is exactly as it was foretold by John the Theologian. Our country, our nation, our religion, our soul, are all bought and sold. And then they call us "terrorists"...

Q: Who are they?

F.E.: "The other monasteries. Haven't you heard that the administration of Mount Athos doesn't give us any money to help us preserve the old buildings, despite all the money they take from EEC? Instead, they isolated us under an embargo. Never mind. God is great and the Day of Judgment is coming. God will give them justice just like He punished the three monks of this monastery when they dared to pray for the Pope during

Conversion

Conversion  
Prophet

an *esperino* ('vesper', he talks about an incident that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a popular story often told to the visitors). The rest of the brotherhood cursed on them and they fell dead. In time, their skin ~~hadn't~~ <sup>hasn't</sup> disintegrated, while their teeth, hair, and nails continued growing after their death. They had become horrible mummies and they were kept in the *narthika* of the *Katholic* (the central church in a monastery), for the pilgrims to witness the horror and to ask for forgiveness from God for their own sins. However, visitors only by looking at this horrible spectacle fell in shock, and many died of heart attacks. So, the abbot of the time decided to throw the mummies off an isolated cliff. Some decades later a French researcher together with a Greek student in order to fulfill their curiosity climbed down the cliff. The French died only by watching the bodies, the Greek fell in a coma. So, today we have built the two mummies inside a cave, hidden away from a human eye. This is all caused by the monstrous nature of the Pope, the one who so intimately and often kissed by our "Patriarch" Vartholomeos. (*Pauses*). Do you want to know why I became a monk in Esfighmenou? Because one day I sat down and thought that why since 1924, when the new calendar was introduced by the then Pope Gregory, had the whole Orthodoxy to follow the Pope, the antichrist? So, since 1924, all these people who became martyrs for their faith were wrong? (*Pauses*). Can you see what is happening around us? The Turkish army is ready to attack, they are invading our air space every day and we, without any reaction, without any resistance, follow this Masonic plan. Our youth either has fallen into drugs or joined the Jehovahs. The Jewish rule the world. Even Semites (the prime minister of Greece) has Jewish roots. They worship money."

*Q: Then, why do you accept money from the visitors?* *very well*

F.E.: "Don't tell me about money because you know that we do not accept any from all these Masonic organizations."

*Q: You do not accept, or are you excluded by the Council after all against your own will?*

F.E.: "We do not accept money. But that's not the point. The point is, that we are the last monastery which still fights Ecumenism, and we are the true Orthodox because the others (monasteries) may accept the title "*Palαιοemerologites*" ("old-calendarists") but in reality they are not. They work with the Papist calendar and accept a 'Patriarch' who obediently obeys their wishes. We are not the ones who are 'schismatics', they are. We haven't changed anything in our faith. They have. We are Greek Orthodox Christians as we were a thousand years ago."

*Q: So, can all the others be wrong and you right?*

F.E.: (annoyed) "It is written in the prophecies of Kosmas the Aetolian. There will be few who will resist following the pseudo-prophets. We follow the scripts. They (the other monasteries) belong to a global heresy. However, it is not the fault of the monks who live in the monasteries. They don't know the Truth. The abbots and the elders tell them to blindly obey and they do what they are told. Behind all this are the Masons. They want to dismantle Mount Athos for being the light-house of the Greek Orthodox spirit which they fear and we are the last castle of faith. Here, feels to be alive. Anyway, take that broom from the corner (points with his thin fingers) and start swiping the floor of the *synodikon* (reception room). The new visitors will be arriving soon. And watch for the abbot not to see you working. It is not allowed..." *-I know...*

2.

Conversation between two monks, fishermen, M [redacted] 53 years old from Crete with his epo-taktikos "subject, follower", E [redacted] over 30 years old also from Crete, at the arsanas "port" of the monastery of Esfigmenou, a cold but sunny November morning in front of pilgrims. It is a characteristic that first, the epo-taktikos answered the questions, and then the elder either completed or changed the point of view of his assistant's answer.

*My Question: Which is, after all, the aim of a monk? Why someone becomes a monk? I don't understand. Someone can say that monks are hiding from life and don't offer anything to society.*

Father E [redacted] "You are making the wrong question. First, you need to ask which the aim of the Orthodox Christian is. Have you ever thought how lucky you are that you were born Orthodox? You could have been born in Pakistan and you could have been bombed by the Americans (laughs). Can you imagine how lucky you are to be here, now, in Panaghias Parthenou "Virgin Mary's" garden?

Father M [redacted] (interrupts) "Wait a minute Efthemie, you went a long way. Because all these "academics" (looks at me suspiciously) haven't got anything right. (Looks at me in the eyes) Here, we pray. I pray for my parents, for my family, and for me, the sinner. How would I be able to pray in the proper way, clean, if I was living in the city? In order to help you, I'll give an example from the Bible: God spoke to six hundred thousand people in the desert of Sinai, but nobody heard His Voice. Not even one living soul except Moses. Only Moses could hear the voice of God because he was the only *clean* soul of that lot, he could both hear and be heard by God."

Father E [redacted]: "You can understand it in another way: my prayer does not have any meaning, if I am not *prepared*. Here, in this place, we must always be prepared for the hard struggle that lays ahead us, against the demons, in order to ~~manage~~ and listen to the voice of God."

Father M [redacted] (excited) "Yes! Do you know what the Devil does to me every day during the liturgy? He sends a small Devil, this small (shows with his fingers) into my eye-lids and tries to close my eyes in order to make me sleep and stop praying. Every night, Little Devils are sliding in my eyes and I must pray harder and harder to keep them away so I can concentrate in my prayer, but they are still not afraid, and they *want* to take over my body. I think then that with the help of the Angels I win them and through continuous prayer I manage to overcome sleep (smiles). And other times, he (the Devil) brings thoughts, naked women and other tricks. There are seven deadly sins, three of the flesh, three of the Satan, and one of the humans. The three of the flesh are (he thinks for a moment); hunger, laziness, and prostitution, greed is the sin of the human nature, while envy, suspicion, and blasphemy are the sins that Satan brings. These seven sins reign in the outside world. They come every day in the form of little demons who take over the ones whose faith is weak. Greed lies and pain. How would I be able to pray in such a world outside? My prayer wouldn't be pure, because I would be pretending to pray, like

one of those six hundred thousand who slept in deep sleep and were not able to hear the Call of God, back in Moses time. On the contrary: if I lived in the city, I would have done more bad than good on those that I would pray for, because how can I arrogantly ask for the helping hand of God without knowing the Truth?"

*A pilgrim's question: Can I ask you another question geronta "elder"? Why do you keep the light of the candles in the church so low during the liturgy? Maybe if you threw some more light in the church would help you stay up and read the Holy scripts easier than being in the semi-darkness. Most of the elders hurt their eyes trying to read in the dark.*

Father E [redacted]: "Look, one think is for sure; you, with your electricity and the luxurious lighting set of your living room, you are definitely blinder than any of these ninety year old monks that you talk about. Don't worry about them. You see, only within an atmosphere of 'peaceful passiveness' (*katanexes*) can the Divine Virtue (*thea-haris*, "virtue, gift, divine way") come down to earth, She does not appears in lighting shows (smiles).

Father M [redacted] (interrupts E [redacted]): No, Efthemie, there is also something deeper into this. (E [redacted] agrees moving his head forward and smiling he whispers "always there is", M [redacted] continues...) When you are in a church, you struggle against the demon and your face changes because of your agony. It takes strange poses, and your muscles are moving under the pressure out of control. So hard is this struggle. If your friends saw your struggling face, they would laugh with you, and their laughter in turn could have been transmitted to the rest of the pilgrims, and then the Devil would take us all! That's why we need to pray in silence in the dark: in order to hide the marks of our struggle".

*Another pilgrim's question: Why do you have to pay the honors more than once to all the sacred icons of the church during the liturgy? Isn't it pointless? I find it a bit hypocritical myself...*

Father E [redacted]: "Look! Nobody makes you to kiss an icon. You do it whenever you feel so..."

Father M [redacted]: (interrupting again) "It is a matter of the Divine Virtue. After you have paid the honor to sacred remains of a saint or to an icon, you feel more complete, more powerful; this is because the Divine Virtue comes into you."

Father E [redacted]: "It is as having a small kid in your family and you want to play with it and kiss it all the time. Because your kid gives you strength and happiness, as *Thea Haris* does."

*My question: Can I ask you something else? What is your difference with the other monasteries? Aren't you all old-calendarists?*

329

Father E [redacted]: "This is a very long story. The point is that they want to kick us out of here. They want to transform Mount Athos into a tourist spot. Why do you think they deal with the Devil with the many heads? The Avaton (the rule that forbids the entrance of women in Mount Athos) is going to be abolished in a few years, and the Catholics are going to come in here with their families to stay in the hotel of Vatopaedi (he bitterly laughs staring at the sea); and what about the old monks? Where are they gonna go? (Pauses for a second and says loud) If the tourists are going to come in here we will all have to move to another mountain, possibly to Olympus (laughs looking at M [redacted])?"

Father M [redacted]: (answers to E [redacted]) "Don't worry, you are not going anywhere. (Efthemios smiles and Maximos continues)...this story is going way back before 1973, since we didn't accept the authority of the Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople because of his work for the Vatican. We were the first monastery to publicly protest against the traitor. The commander in charge of Mount Athos at the time came with the police outside our truncheons to force us out of the monastery. I felt sorry for him, but he was cursed because of his deeds. He was shouting at us to surrender and abandon the monastery, but we wouldn't hear him. We gathered in the towers of the monastery, singing hymns to Virgin Mary, to St Agathaggelos, the protector of our monastery, and to the other saints who lived here. And Virgin Mary and the Angels helped to get rid of the intruders in a week. But the commander, his wife and his children all died of cancer. (Pauses). These things that happened and will happen are already written in the prophecies, *they are history*. One of them tells exactly about the time when the *signs* of the abolishment of the Avaton, the stigmatization of the people with the Mark of the Beast, and the unification of the world under the antichrist Pope, will point to the Reign of Satan. At this day, not far away, the rock of Mount Athos is going to collapse in the sea as the earth is going to be tiered apart in pieces. The 2000 meters of the mountain are going to fall under the sea surface, and only the top 33 meters are going to stand above the sea level to remind the future generations what had happened to Mount Athos, because of the sins of the monks. 65 of the monks of the brotherhood of Esfigmenou, the most righteous ones, are going to be warned about the catastrophe because of their true faith. They will follow Virgin Mary to the top of the mountain to *witness* the end, and talk to the people of the world about the (Apocalyptic) days that are coming."

Prophecy

*-Thank you Fathers. We will let you continue your work (they were tying the nets of their small boat). Your blessing...*

*-The Lord, the Lord my child.*

3.

Conversation with Father A [redacted] a monk who for two years used to be demonized, "carrying demons", and had repeatedly tried to "stamp to death the previous abbot of Esfigmenou, E [redacted]s, because of the evil inside him" (pilgrim of Esfigmenou). In the conversation, other pilgrims also participate, among them John, a permanent worker in the monastery of Esfigmenou from Albania; John lives and works in here with his three brothers for almost two years now. They are "children" of the Albanian priest-monk N [redacted] of Esfigmenou and serve him, but they are not monks. It is a sunny day, after a heavy rain that last for three long freezing days, and we were all enjoying the sun, standing together with other pilgrims outside the joiner's workshop staring at the calm sea. It was still freezing.

Father A [redacted] was talking about the mark of 666 and the importance for a Christian to carry "the Sign of God", in order to distinguish himself from the sinners and to be saved when the Second Coming is coming! The "Sign of God", is not as dramatic as it sounds, it means that a pilgrim who wants to carry the "Sign of God" had to join the "old-calendarist" church by reading the oath of the "True Christian" in front of the abbot of the monastery. The topic gradually changes over the prophecy that the whole mountain of Athos is going to collapse in the sea and only ~~the~~ its peak is going to stay above the water with a small number of monks from Esfigmenou who will witness, become "martyrs" of the wrath of God.

Pilgrim: The monastery is the safest place to be today, but when the antichrist comes Father, how are we going to save ourselves? Should we run and hide on the mountains?

Father A [redacted] (smiling) "Well, where are you going to go? Where are you going to hide? Or maybe at the last second you will devote your life to God to save yourself? **Everything is already judged.** Televisions are watching your lives. The people know the truth about it and you know what they do? All the time you can see those house-wives who forget their baby-children in front of a television set, to go shopping or to drink coffee and talk, talk, talk, and their babies absorb the evils of television.

Pilgrim: And all the products are marked by the Barcode of the Beast, eh?

Father A [redacted] "Exactly! As John says you will not be able to buy or sell anything without the mark; and I don't think it is a very good idea to hide on a mountain. They can find you with their satellites any time. Haven't you all heard that it is now fashionable in London to place a microchip under the flesh of your right arm or head, so that you don't have to carry money on you? In the name of security, as all the thieves in the banks work, they persuaded people to pay with a credit card on their forehead, as it is written in the texts (laughs cynically). They will carry the mark on their heads.

John, the worker: How can we enter under the Sign of God when the time comes?

Prophecy  
 belief  
 conversion  
 (2)

Father A [REDACTED] "With faith. Ah! And you shouldn't hear what the women tell you. Is it possible that **the rib** is going to tell you what to do? One day you are going to have to apologize for all these, for letting a woman to dominate you. Because the Man is going to explain himself in front of God about his woman, not the woman about the man. The same goes for the boss and the laborer. All this sociological analysis about equality and everything is just plain dangerous. You are who you are. The boss is the boss. If you have faith in what you are, that is, in what God made you, then He will protect you wherever you are, even if you are far away in England or inside Babylon. God will put you under His Sign. Because today, there is no army, there is no nation, there is no family, no morality or ideals. The final home is God; the only home."

*John talks to me: That's why you need to confess all the time. Of course, you are a good boy (he smiles pointing at me)*

Father A [REDACTED]: "If you say it like this, probably he is not."

#### 4.

*Short interview with the abbot in his small cell, covered in books, cartons, and papers, as well as, rosaries, crosses, and angiographies "painted icons of saints". He was sitting in his ripped off robe looking worried because it was the day when the Council decided to legally and economically persecute the monastery's order. Despite that the zealots denounce television as the "instrument of the Devil", for two weeks now, the abbot and the council of the elders of the monastery frequently gave interviews on the national news, religious channels and radio stations, and even participated on talk shows from the telephone. The Sacred Council of Mount Athos accused the elders of Esfigmenou, and in particular the abbot Methodios, for over exposing the tradition of Esfigmenou by involving the media. The Council said that the abbot has been lying about the presence of a strong police force outside the monastery. In reality, besides the first day, there were only a few policemen standing outside the truncheons. The abbot is upset*

Abbot Methodios of Esfigmenou: "We are the biggest brotherhood here. We are more than 107 monks and we welcome visitors and new people. The monastery is open to anyone who wants to repent, and is welcomed to stay as long as he wants. We don't send people away like they do in other monasteries. We prefer to send letters to Karyes (the administrative capitol of Mount Athos) saying that it is not right for the monasteries to accept the money from EEC. We alone can preserve the buildings and the icons, as it was done for a thousand years now. Why should we change, why should we be also enslaved? Did we become monks to make money? They should give this money to hospitals, not to monasteries. When they accept the money of the tax payers of the EEC, how can they deny entrance in Mount Athos to women, who also paid their taxes, how can they support the Avaton? They don't. Inevitably the European Commission is still discussing on the abandonment of our most sacred rule."

*Question: What is your role, today, under these circumstances?*

Abbot Methodios: "I believe we are Greek. I believe that we stand as guards; that we do not have the right to sell any of our treasures to the EEC. Do they (the other monasteries) want money? They should get a job then, not having all these paid workers to do the job for them. Our workers are not paid. They are pilgrims. Our monastery used to be a military base during the Greek Revolution of 1821; and today, these masons ask us to surrender or the army is going to take us out by force. So, what do they mean? After the Turkish, now monks are going to start attacking monks? For us there is only Hellenism (Greek identity) and Orthodoxy, no money, nothing else."

*Q.: The Sacred Council says that the administration of the monastery voluntarily does not participate at the Council's meetings for 30 years now, and that is why they asked for your expulsion from its premises.*

Abbot Methodios: "On the one hand, they call us to the meetings to tell us that we shouldn't be there, while on the other, they say that we do not accept to join the meetings and because of this, they wish to throw us out of Mount Athos. They ask to send them the catalogues with the files of the monks of our monastery. We've done that several times in the past, and they have returned them. It is empathy. They hate those who want to hold on to their Orthodox tradition."

*Q.: But what about the authority of the Patriarchate of Constantinople? When are you going to accept it?*

Abbot Methodios: "The Patriarchate remains our Patriarchate. We don't have a problem with the Patriarchate but with the people who run it. The point is that most of the monks know that we are right and that we have true faith. They know what they should do; but they don't. They know when they should celebrate and how; but they don't. They don't dare to say their opinion. They do not do what they should do for their own brothers".

5.

*It was a rainy morning of December. The cold wind went through the broken windows of the monastery of Esfigmenou. It was freezing. For a week now, a group of pilgrims was trying to get out of the monastery and return home. However, the weather made it impossible. It was raining non-stop for more than a week, making the ground around the monastery muddy and dangerous (a month later a monk died in an accident, as he was turned around with his tractor in the mud). The only phone of the monastery was not working and the absence of electricity (when it was getting dark at 4:00pm) and heating made the living conditions unbearable for the visiting pilgrims. They were looking for any way to escape from this medieval castle. But Father M [REDACTED], the fisherman (conversation no2) had something else in mind; a personal experience:*

Father M [REDACTED]: "Don't torture yourselves trying to find a way to leave. The Virgin Mary is doing it (not letting you go) because next Wednesday is her celebration (one of the many during the Athonian calendar). That's why she doesn't let you go. She wants you here, with her. So, I am going to tell you about a miracle that happened right here (Maximos points with his fingers outside the window at the *arsana*, "port"). It was five or six years ago; I was sitting at the *arsanas* when I saw a man with ropes hanging from our main tower (points with hand at the tower). In his efforts to reach our "Orthodoxy or Death" flag, he was crawling on the front wall of our tower, because the Devil made him wanting to put the flag down, in order to take it and bring it to the (Serbian) monastery of Hiliandariou (actually founded by the neighbor monastery of Vatopaedi). 'Come down demonized man, come down' I was shouting at him: 'Be patient and I will bring the flag down from inside the castle; you don't have to climb like this, you will kill yourself!' I was telling him. However, who knows what kind of demons had got into him, maybe the Devil Himself, and he wouldn't listen to me. Finally, he managed to grab himself on one of the wall's holes and started climbing up the tower like a maniac. Suddenly, one of the ropes fell loose and the man found himself falling on the rocks of the sea (under the tower). I started praying to Virgin Mary 'Ah! *Panaghia mou* ("Oh my! Holy Mother of God") help the poor man', until a heavy banging sound was heard. (By pointing his fingers outside the window at the *arsanas*) You can see the killing edges of the rocks together with the broken glasses and metal (laid next to the tower, the remaining of gifts to the monastery that were not accepted), can't you? Nobody could survive such a fall. However, *Panaghia*, put her hand to save the man, because she is all blessed and forgiving. He landed on his bag with his stuff, while his face crashed in the sand. He was bleeding when we took him in the monastery, but *os ek thavmatos*, "as a miracle", he neither had a broken leg nor an internal bleeding. *Panaghia* felt sorry for him. The poor man! Where did he want to go without asking for the help of Virgin Mary? The same with you now: there is a storm raging outside, and you (addressing the pilgrims that were desperate to leave the monastery) are hoping to cross the flouted rivers and muddy mountains in the rain, in order not to come in her celebration! Where do you think you are going without the help of the Mother of God? You are going to crash your faces like that man did! That's why, the only thing you should be preparing for is the celebration of *Panaghia*. You should be much honored that she wants you near her on this day; and that explains why the weather is so bad all this time."

6.

*Full-interview with Albanian priest-monk N[REDACTED], about 40 years old, in perfect Greek. He is the archontaris of Esfigmenou, so he is responsible to talk about the history and present of the monastery to visitors, as well as to give advises on matters of faith and answer their questions. His point of view represents the official view of the permanent administration toward monastic life and the history of the monastery.*

Father N[REDACTED]: "So? Tell me. What do you want to know?"

*Question: First, can you tell me about the conflict between the Church of the "old-calendarists" and the mainstream Church? What is the 15<sup>th</sup> canon on which, I heard, you are arguing about and what is the problem with the other monasteries after all?*

Father N[REDACTED]: "Look. Every Church has its representatives who are all under the authority of the Episcopo. In other words, the Church is the body and the Episcopo is the head. A body without a head cannot function, so since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, all the Fathers and Bishops of the Churches started meeting at Ecclesiastical Conferences, named Synods, in order to solve problems within the Church. The first problem that already appeared in the 1<sup>st</sup> Synod was expressed by a priest called Arian, who questioned the Divine Nature of Jesus by supporting that our Lord was a simple human. This is where the word "heresies, heretic" is rooted; to the name of this priest who was, of 'course, expelled from the Church for his belief. In order to solve all the problems of the Christian world, seven Synods were needed. These seven, cover all the theological matters of our faith, and together with the sacred scripts of our Holy Fathers, this is our inheritance. Any further question or observations on the results and the decisions taken by the seven Synods is bound to be set outside our faith, because if we negotiate our faith, we lose it, it is not "orthodox" anymore. We don't even want to discuss about changing our calendar. It was changed in 1924 according to the Papist and Jewish interests over the economy of the world. They hoped to change the form of Orthodoxy starting from our calendar. Do you know what do the Jewish say? In order for Zionism to dominate the world, the word "Orthodox" must be vanished from the face of the earth."

*Q: Therefore, do you connect the phenomenon of globalization with the change of the Julian calendar in 1923, according to a Jewish plan for a global domination over the free market through the establishment of a world religion?*

Father N[REDACTED]: "Exactly. The Papist and Jewish international interests touch all aspects of our lives, and most importantly our religion and our tradition. Do you see what money can change? Do you understand the power of money? The Jewish learn from a young age how to make money; that is why today they are the puppeteers of the world scene and know how to control the world's History. Money is the real face of Evil, Satan himself."

*At this point, I started thinking of a habit that the Greek people have: always to wash their hands after touching money, because as my grandmother says "money is dirty and you never know who touched it before your hands. That's why you always need to wash your hands to keep them clean". Having this in my mind I asked: -so, according to what you say, the other nineteen monasteries who accept the money from KEDAK (the Greek organization that distributes the money coming from EEC) are all corrupted?*

Father N [redacted]: "Unfortunately, yes. Despite that the *typika* (texts of regulatory and legislative content which contain general provisions on the monastic life) have all **officially** changed to a coenobitic mode of life for all twenty monasteries according to the celebratory days of the old calendar, in reality this turn toward our tradition never happened. How is it possible, such a blessed return to our tradition to take place, when they (the other 19 monasteries) pray for the Patriarch Vartholomeos, for whom a large amount of evidence exists that he has repeatedly bowed his head in front of Popes and arch-Rabies? Vartholomeos is the strongest weapon for the establishment of a universal religion (*pan-threskea*) by the colonizers. He is just a puppet, an instrument. They want to extinguish our faith because they fear the one and only True God. What do you think is faith? I will tell you in the right order: first is the **Bible**, then the **tradition** of our Fathers, and finally, **humility**. The first means to follow the Old and New Testaments equally, because they complete each other. 'Tradition' is the essence of our Orthodox identity; together with humility they reveal the virtues of Orthodoxy in practice, and later in action. Vartholomeos, with his actions, has denounced the second and the third element of our faith. He stands against our tradition and he has made of himself a religious celebrity. As I told you at the beginning, the episcopo is the head and the church the body; Vartholomeos is the head of the Sacred Council of Mount Athos and he knows how to control it. Eh! (upset) We do not want this kind of Head! We are not the ones who are 'schismatics', they are, they provoked the 'schism', they decided to change our tradition. We are all 'Orthodox' in our faith and tradition. They chose a different path, the one for a universal religion.

*Q: Is there a possibility that they will shut the monastery down and throw the brotherhood out?*

Father N [redacted]: "Look. Yesterday we resisted, today we resist, the same will happen tomorrow. This is because we have connected our lives with this monastery, **we are this monastery**, and we know we will be saved when the End days are here. It is in the prophecies of St Kosmas the Aetolian and of St Agathaggelos that a Great War is going to occur on earth before the arrival of the antichrist, and only sixty-five monks are going to survive, the ones who had resisted to Satan during their life."

*Q: After all, maybe the End of the world is not as far as it seems...*

Father N [redacted] (finally stretching his facial muscles to wear a smile) "Yes, maybe you are right, that is, **if they take over the monastery**. On the other hand, however, I constantly thank God for bringing me here (pauses), at this sacred place, for giving me the chance to save myself at this last moment before the End. I say 'giving me

the chance', because *we are not all saved in the monastery, we are 117 brothers, too many with too many sins*. I thank God because He guided me and brought me to Greece from Albania, in this Holy land, and then here, to the monastery of Esfigmenou where saints lived. At least I had the chance to learn and see the True faith of God, whatever happens to me in the future."

*Q: Are there any other monks who share your faith?*

Father N [REDACTED] "Most of the monks know what we are talking about but they turn the deaf ear. There are some monks who share our faith in the *sketes* (a group of settlements depended to a monastery, consisting of a number of *kaleves*, monastic dwellings which constitute an *idiorrhythmic* community) of St Anna and St John Prodromos, as well as, in (the monastery) of Dionesiou. We have our own active *sketes* near Karyes. There are a great number of monks who follow our strict way of life in the *sketes*, because they don't have a central authority (being *idiorrhythmic*). But they cannot raise their voice to support our struggle, because they would be expelled from Mount Athos. However, because of their faith, they should remain hopeful: *God has for every one* (a Greek expression) as long as you are a member of his True society."

*Q: If I wanted to join the old-calendarist Church what would I need to do?*

Father N [REDACTED] "First of all, you need to think about it seriously before you decide, because it is a decision that will affect your life. Then, after your thought is crystalized, you can go to our abbot, or to Thessaloniki in one of our churches, but better our Father, and ask to receive the *Holy Mero* ("moiro", perfume, the monastery is also dedicated to Maria Magdalene who washed the feet of Jesus with perfume; here, it is used together with the *martyria*, the oath, as the initiation to the strict Christian group of the "old-calendarists"). From this point and after, you will only receive communion from one of our priests. Our abbot will give you the addresses of our churches in Thessaloniki, so that you can go to pray, ask for forgiveness, and receive communion in the proper way."

*Q: Thank you Father. Bless...*

-The Lord my child, the Lord...

## Appendix 6: Chronology

48-58	Paul's Christian missions (d. 67)
<b>I. Desert Period</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> cent, Egypt, hermitic life in the desert, prayer as both a weapon against Evil and a technique to 'know the self')	
Ab. 150 Hermas of Egypt writes the <i>Shepherd</i> in which the name of God is involved as a prayer. A century later Oregon writes of the 'prayer of the mind'	
324	Foundation of Constantinople as the 'New Rome'
325	First Ecumenical Council, Nicaea
<b>II. Sinai Period</b> (4 <sup>th</sup> to 7 <sup>th</sup> cent, Sinai, Palestine, Israel, Syria, centre: Monastery of St Katherine of Sinai, hermitic-communal life, the prayer in search of the Light of Tabor of Moses, as well as a technique of renouncing the self. The practice is re-named to 'Jesus prayer')	
400	Death of Macarius the Great and Evagrius of Pontus. Macarius, who was also known as 'St Macarius of Egypt' and who was the first desert Father who mentions the power of the name of 'Jesus' connecting it to Baptism and 'warmth of the Heart'. Evagrius, who was a disciple of Macarius, discussed in his <i>Chapters</i> the practice of the prayer as an 'intellectual spirituality', and for this reason, 150 years after his death, in 553, the Church expelled him for his Neo-Platonic interpretation of the prayer. Also Hesychius was the Father who first mentions a technique of breathing.
450	Diadochus becomes Bishop of Photice (d. 458) writer of the <i>Hundred Years of Perfection, Chapters</i> .
451	The Churches of Ethiopia, Armenia, Syria, and Copts are separated from the Christian Church as 'Monophysites' (the Christians who questioned the human nature of Jesus after his Incarnation, arguing instead, that Jesus had one ('mono') nature ('physites'), a Divine one. Both the Pope Leo (449) followed by the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) accused Monophysites of 'heresy' resulting to the expulsion of the above Churches from the body of the Church ( <i>The Wordsworth Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions</i> , 1992). This is historically a significant point in the history of the practice of 'remembrance of the Name', which was practiced in Syria, Palestine, Israel and Egypt, because it is politically divided over a matter of Faith. From this historical point the practice will take various forms, such as 'hesychasm' in Christianity and 'dhikr' in Sufi practices. By the 14 <sup>th</sup> century it is expanded from northern Europe to Delhi.
650	Death of St. John Climacus, writer of the <i>Ladder of Paradise</i> , with instructions on monastic life and the Jesus Prayer. It was published in the 11 <sup>th</sup> century (Vatican Greek 394) and 12 <sup>th</sup> century (Vatican Greek 1754). Nowadays, it has been translated in many languages, including English and French. It is the first text that establishes the prayer as a technology of the self that aims to reach the Divine Light, as well as, a way of life, giving an early definition of 'monasticism'.
662	Death of Maximus the Confessor. Maximus and St Gregory of Nyssa, who was a contemporary to Maximus, Christianised the practice of the 'remembrance of the Name' by associating it to the Christian notion of <i>theosis</i> ('deification'). For the first time through the practice, monastic life is presented in similar terms to a 'rite of Passage' (van Gennep, 1909) leading to Heavens in Union with God.
<b>III. Byzantine Period</b> (8 <sup>th</sup> to 13 <sup>th</sup> cent, Constantinople and Athos: the institutionalisation of the prayer by the Greek Church. The practice was divided by two uses: a 'sacred' one that requires only the constant repetition of the name of Jesus during daily activities or even in sleep and through the heart of the monk as his way of connecting to the world, and a 'profane' one in terms as a pure breathing a technique, sometimes accompanied by repetitive two-fold movement, as a way to prepare the inner self for the prayer itself. The Fathers of the period re-affirmed the union of the two under the Divine Light of Tabor, propagating a 'pure' 'Christian tradition' against the Latin Church.	
726-843 Iconoclasm and the first cracks in the Christian Church and the beginning of the political division between 'East' (Greek) and 'West' (Latin), as in 792 Charlemagne, who became the Emperor in 800, accuses the Greek Church of heresy.	
885 Foundation of the monastic republic of Mount Athos	
964-1004 Foundation of first Royal monastery by St. Athanasios the Athonite, and sponsored by his childhood friend the Emperor Fokas (963-969), and following the latter's murder, by Emperor Ioannis Tsimiskis.	
988	The birth of the Russian Church
1022	Death of Symeon the New Theologian
1054	The Schism between Rome (Catholics) and Constantinople (Orthodox)
1204	Sack of Constantinople by Crusaders
1280	Death of Nicephorus the Hesychast

<b>IV. Athonite Hesychasm</b> (14 <sup>th</sup> to 18 <sup>th</sup> cent, Athos: the prayer as a complete technology of monastic life of ‘silence’ (hesychasm) in coenobitic life, part of the monastery. The establishment of monastic satellites in Athos called ‘Deserts’, in places that have similar harsh weather conditions as in the Egyptian desert.
1316 Gregory Palamas arrives to Vatopaidi, Athos
1335 Gregory Palamas becomes Abbot of Esfigmenou, Athos
1341-51 Three Palamite Councils
1359 Death of Gregory Palamas (Thessaloniki)
1378-1429 Great Schism in the Latin Church
1446 Moscow gains independency becoming ‘autocephalous’ metropolis
1453 The Fall of Constantinople and the birth of the Ottoman Empire
1517 Luther protests (d.1546)/ 1545-63 Council of Trent
1589 Moscow becomes a Patriarch replacing the fallen Constantinople in power
1596 Groups of Polish Orthodox pilgrims join Rome forming the ‘Uniate Church’
1652-8 Reforms of Russian Church (Patriarch Nikon)/ Reaction and new schism within the Russian Church of the ‘Old Believers’
<b>V. The Age of <i>Philokalia</i> (‘love of beauty’)</b>
1782 Nicodemus the Haghiorite publishes the <i>Philokalia</i>
1850 Greek independence and immediate Autocephaly of the Church of Greece
1870 Independence of Bulgarian Church
1879 Re-establishment of Serbian Church
1881 Autocephaly of Romanian Church
<b>VI. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Monasticism</b>
1912-3 Athonian movement of Russian monks called the ‘Glorifiers of the Name’
1917-18 Russian Revolution
1923-4 Conflict between the Patriarch of Istanbul and Athos over the adoption of the Latin Gregorian calendar. The monks stopped commemorating the Patriarch
1927 The conflict is resolved, with the exception of the monastery of Esfigmenou: The birth of the ‘Old-Calendarist’ Orthodox movement in Esfigmenou following the writings of Palamas.
1973 The Abbot of Esfigmenou is excommunicated. The Athonian Council of Karyes declares the brotherhood of zealots ‘illegal’ and their staying an ‘occupation’. The monks of Esfigmenou refuse to discuss with the authorities, and this time stop commemorating the Patriarch once and for all. They also refuse to participate in the Council. A Schism develops.
1987: Revitalization of the deserted monastery of Vatopaidi, which is historically the richest in Athos. Father Joseph with the permission of the Sacred Council from Karyes takes fifteen of his disciples from the New Skete to Vatopaidi to re-organize and re-vitalize its social life and economic situation.
1990 Vatopaidi is turned back to a strict coenobitic community
1996: This year, both monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou doubled their brotherhoods in numbers to almost a hundred monks each. Today, Vatopaidi with the help of donators, world institutions for culture and the environment, and politicians, is the richest and politically strongest community in Athos with its own Internet Site, and Prince Charles as a close friend of the Abbot. By contrast, the monastery of Esfigmenou goes through terrible economic difficulties, since their denial of accepting any money given to the Athos by the EU in terms of ‘matters of faith’. But the poorer the monastery the stronger it gets, since its political ‘Old-Calendarist’ ideology, like all cults, emphasize on this idea of persecution and world conspiracy to eliminate ‘true Orthodoxy’. Vatopaidi is a ‘spiritual’ centre (emphasis on marketing); Esfigmenou is a ‘fundamentalist’ centre (emphasis on ideology)
2002-3: The Greek authorities, under the pressure of the ‘Ecumenical Patriarch’ in Istanbul and the Holy Committee of Athos, issue warrants for the arrests of the Abbot of Esfigmenou and the elders, as well as the expulsion of the rest of the community from the borders of Mount Athos. Tensions rise, threats for violence by both sides
2009-10: The Greek media reveal a number of illegal exchanges between Vatopaidi and three other monasteries with members of the Greek government, against the rights of local Councils. All the monasteries involved consist of spiritual children of Joseph the Hesychast (died in 1959), who revived the tradition of Gregorios Palamas for ‘ <i>hesychasm</i> ’ (‘silence’).

## Glossary

**Agape:** The monastic and impassionate love for the universe (*cosmos*), which is thought to be ‘god’s building/ field’ (*theou ktisis/ ktima*).

**Agna dakrya:** ‘pure tears’ showing ‘true repentance’ (*eilikrinis metanoia*). These are not passionate or emotional tears, but tears that show self-realization and elevate the novice to the state of a monk. See also *metanoia* and *neptikoi*

**Akoinonitoi:** the ‘anti-social’ those who refuse to receive the Holy Communion (*Theia Koinonia*)

**Alithini pistis, and tautotita alithinis pisteos:** meaning ‘true faith’ and identity of ‘true faith’ respectively. It is usually used in reference to more extreme adoptions of Orthodox Christianity, such as in the monastery of Esfigmenou (chapter 9 of thesis), highlighting the opposition of the ‘true’ orthodox to the ‘Papic’, ‘Latin’, ‘Western’, Catholic Church. See also *autothysia* and *Palaioimerologites*

**Ampelourgos** ‘Vine-dresser’, referring to the monks responsible for cultivating the vine plants in the vineyard, situated outside the monastery. Two to four monks and novices help him to pick up the grapes. Despite the rapid changes in monastic life, the monks still use their hands and make wine with their feet while praying, strictly following the monastic tradition of making wine, as it is associated with the blood of Jesus

**Anagnostis or Diavastis** (Reader): The deacon reading the appropriate passages for the saints celebrated according to the *Typikon* of each day at the church and the refectory.

**Anahoritis, or anchorites:** Translates as ‘departurers’ refers to the very experienced monks who were deemed by the *Holy Committee* to be capable and strong enough to live on their own like hermits in isolated cells in the forest near Karyes, or in huts at the southern parts of the peninsula (in “deserts”, see below), until they “depart” (*anahorisis*) from this life to heaven. Today there are very few hermits left, as according to the monks, the new generations are not strong enough to live on their own because of their easy upbringing.

**Anavathmoi:** ‘decrees’

**Angelic Schema or Megaloshema** meaning ‘Angelic Patent’ and ‘Great Patent’ respectively: A cloth-ornament worn by the older members, symbolizing their higher spiritual status and long experience of monastic life. It takes different forms, but generally consists of symbols of Christ and the two archangels, which symbolize the incorporation of the monk who is wearing it into the realm of the angels. In this sense, the older and experienced monks are also referred to as ‘angels on earth’. The cloth is given to the monk during his second ordination after many years of monastic life (see chapter 4, section 9)

**Antidoron** (meaning ‘instead of gift’): the bread offered to all participants at the end of ‘great vespers’ on celebrations, or the Divine Liturgy on any other day.

**Antiphona:** ‘counter-voices’, corresponding musical passages sung by the double choir, conducted by the *kanonarchis*

**Antiprosopos:** the elder ‘representative’ of the monastery in the *Holy Committee*. He is appointed on January 1<sup>st</sup> (circulating role)

**Apatheia:** translated as ‘no passions’. The term refers to an enlightened state of mind which is liberated from the passions (*pathoi*) of the mind and the flesh. It is an ideal state of mind, which practically is applied in the form of ‘*economy of passions*’: the economic and compromising way of learning how to use emotional urges and control the self without succumbing to the passions of the self (see section 6.2 ‘Economy of Passions’)

**Apolytikion:** Hymn in honour of the saint celebrated on the day

**Archontariki, Archontaris:** ‘Guesthouse’ and ‘guest-master’ respectively. The value of hospitality is one of the oldest Athonian values, and the monks are obliged to offer it. Today however it has been commercialized (chapter 8 in reference to Vatopaidi) and politicized (chapter 9 in reference to Esfigmenou).

**Arsanas** meaning and referring to the ‘harbour’, which is run by the elder in the role of *arsanaris* (‘harbour-man’) with various responsibilities, from fishing to supervising the mechanical work that needs to be done in the garage, as well as, to check the visitors arriving with the boat twice a week.

**Artoklassia:** meaning ‘dividing the bread’, and referring to the rite of dividing the bread to be used for the *Divine Eucharist*, from the bread to be used for the *antidoron*, that takes place during the ‘great vespers’.

**Artophorion:** meaning ‘the vessel that carries the bread’, in which the bread is kept covered with the *panaghiari*, to be divided during the rite of *artoklassia*, and to be used for the Holy Communion (*theia prosfora*)

**Askesis:** ‘Exercise’, the root to ‘ascetic’

**Athonian families:** also known as *pneumatiki oikogeneia*, meaning ‘spiritual family’: Rites of passage incorporate secular individuals into Athonian families. In the absence of women, the spiritual reproduction of the monks is based on traditional practices which were introduced by ‘charismatic’ monks, whose movement gathers a number of *companionships* (see below) forming an Athonian family, with a particular tradition and a vocation. There are many families, each one associated with a particular tradition and a particular style, i.e. in psalmody, painting, silversmith, winery, etc. The spiritual relationship between the members of the family is based on the patriarch model of father to son. The name of the family comes from the name, or the secular place of birth, or the monastic settlement of rebirth, of the founder monk. The movement of his disciples then expands each *family’s* tradition in other settlements of monasteries, and beyond Athos [see chapter 4].

**Automepsia:** ‘self-search’, to think and try to remember all your sins before confession. See also *endoskopisi*

**Autothysia:** ‘self-sacrifice’ in Vatopaidi (see chapters 4-6), ‘self-martyrdom’ in Esfigmenou associated with political extremism and activism (see chapter 9)

**Avaton:** ‘No Pass’: The prohibition of all females from the peninsula according to the tradition of the Virgin Mary who is thought to be the “owner” and only woman living in the peninsula. The rule however dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and it was the result of conflicts between monks and locals over disputed land situated on the edges of the peninsula (Papachrysanthou 1992).

**Catholicon:** Monasteries founding and central church, situated in the centre of the monastic complex. It has the shape of the cross, and considered to be the most sacred space in the monastery.

**Celliotes:** A movement of Russian and Bulgarian monks before and during the Greek Civil War that divided Athos into ‘communist’ monks and ‘democrats’. Most of the monks accused of being ‘communists’ were non-Greeks and were expelled from Athos, resulting to the desertification of a number of non-Greek settlements. The name of the *Celliotes* came from their request to be independent from the Greek *Holy Committee* and to remain in their cells without having to travel to a dependant (Greek) monastery for the Sunday Liturgy as they were obliged (see also *Kollivades*)

**Charis: charismatikoï monahoi:** root to the word ‘charismatic’, and has multiple meanings. *Charis* translates as ‘grace’ and/or ‘elegance’, but is also associated with happiness (‘*chara*’). In religious terms, *charis* is the will of the Holy Spirit, which was manifested as a white dove during Christ’s baptism in the river Jordan. The will of the Holy Spirit also re-appeared after Jesus’ Resurrection and His appearance to the 12 Apostles, when they began talking in unknown languages spreading the message of God in the world. In other words, they became ‘charismatic’, as God speaks through Apostles and prophets, using them as vessels, to be heard in the world. It is thought that the Holy Spirit is the source of the *charis* of particular monks, following the New Testament in which the disciples of Jesus speak in different languages, unknown to them, because they have received the *charis* of God. They did so, in order to

spread the Christian message around the globe. A final meaning is in reference to the tears of happiness (*dakrya charas*) that signify the transition of the monk to a higher spiritual level.

**Chorostasia** meaning ‘choir standing’ and referring to the spiritual hierarchy manifested in order of veneration, parades, confessions, and reception of the Holy Communion: the general order is: abbot with visiting abbots of other monasteries, followed by priest-monks, elders, older monks, younger monks, novices, and at the back ordinary visitors.

**Chreia and epithumia**: translated as ‘need and desire’, and considered to be the roots of *pathoi* (‘passions’)

**Coenobitic**: The ‘communal’ way of life of St Basil, first introduced on Mount Athos in the first Royal monastery of Meghisti *Lavra* by St Athanasius the Athonite in 962-966. In *coenobitic* communities private property is strictly forbidden. The monasteries divide labour according to the needs of the monastery, forming a single economic unity, a kind of organic body: ‘If the vein blocks you’ll get a heart attack. The same is with communal life. Work obediently for your brothers and elders’ (Abbot Ephraim) [see also *economy*, *typika*, and *idiorythmic*].

**Companionship**: The groups of monks who ‘accompany’ a charismatic monk in his travels, usually from the secular world into Athos: See *synodeia* and *Athonian family*

**‘Cosmopolitans’ or Kosmikoi**: The term referring to secular visitors, who are not priests or monks, but arrive as pilgrims. The actual term is *‘kosmikoi’*, meaning ‘worldly’ referring to both the visitors (worldly people) and their way of secular life outside Athos (worldly life). In the thesis, I prefer the term ‘cosmopolitans’ in the sense of a person coming from the ‘world’ (*‘kosmos’*), and hence, the translation as ‘cosmopolitans’, world citizens.

**Council of Elders**: See *gerontia*

**Crosier**: The holy stick held by the abbot that signifies his authority. Each abbot has a number of crosiers for each occasion, from golden to wooden ones.

**Dakos** : August insect disease affecting trees

**Dasarchis**: ‘forest-keeper’, the monks responsible for protecting the forest surrounding the fields from fire. Also responsible for retaining its moral order according to tradition: monks and visitors walking in the forest have to be respectful to nature, and always be full-dressed in respect to the Virgin Mary.

**Diakonima or deaconima**: ‘service’ referring to the deacons’ duties, under the *thelima* (‘will/wish’) of his elder

**Diavastis**: ‘reader’, referring to the deacon pointed by the abbot every two days to read from the *Meneon*, the book with the lives of saints, in the church and refectory

**Dikirotrikera**: meaning a ‘set of two and three candles’, and referring to a candleholder carried by the abbot heading the procession and veneration of the holy relics of the monastery (*chorostasia*) during great celebrations.

**Docheiaris** (‘Bottle-man’): the priest-monk responsible for preserving the oil and wine in barrels at the wine store. He is also responsible for separating the oil and wine to be used in liturgies from the one to be used for food, in candles, as a healing remedy, and in soap. He also performs a thanksgiving prayer to Mary on fasting days, in the mornings after the meal in the refectory. The role is shared by the priest-monks annually.

**Dokimasia**: ‘ordeal’, refers both to the cleansing period the novice has to spend in the desert, and to everyday temptations that ‘test’ (*dokimazoun*) the monks. The term is further related to *dokimos*, meaning ‘deacon’, referring to the ‘services’ (*diakonima*) offered by the younger monks to their elders.

**Dokimos, dokimasia**: meaning ‘deacon’, and ‘ordeal’/ ‘testing’ respectively. This is a general term referring to the disciples of an elder called *dokimoi*, meaning ‘under test’, or ‘in service’, depending on

the context it is adopted. **Dokimos** is also the term to which the word ‘deacon’ is rooted, referring to the ‘services’ (*diakonima*) offered by them to their elders.

**Dokimologion** the list with secular names, place of birth, education, and ranks of all the deacons. *See* also *monachologion*

**Ecodomos**: meaning ‘Builder’, and referring to Mary as the creator of Meghisti Lavra, the first Royal monastery founded in 966AC on Athos. According to the tradition, Mary appeared to St. Athanasius at the moment of his despair, to encourage him with his effort to build Meghisti Lavra, and to introduce the *coenobitic* way of life against the protests of the hermits (*see* Introduction, section 2: ‘Economy and Movement’)

**Economia**: meaning ‘economy’ is translated as the ‘law’ (*nomos*) of the ‘house’ (*ecos*), referring to both the internal organization of communal life, and the external conduct of each monastery. Internal economy should be understood in the ‘spiritual’ sense of Weber’s analysis of early Christian asceticism as the ‘spirit of capitalism’ (1905), where he sketched the ‘spirit of capitalism’ as an evolution of the ascetic morality of not being excessive and economic at the same time. The definition of ‘economy’ as the ‘law’ of the ‘house’ echoes *ecology*, as in the same way the monks respect the others, they also have to respect ‘God’s building’ (*Theou ktisis*), the natural environment; hence, the term *eksoikonomo* (‘to practice economy’).

**Economos**: translated as ‘steward’, and referring to the elder responsible for the internal economy of the monastery. He has to supervise the work that needs to be done in the chapels and the church during the day, as well as to pay the lay workers in the evening for their day’s work.

The *ekonomos of metochia* (properties outside Athos) on the other hand, is the elder responsible for renting, selling, exchanging, and using land and properties of the monastery outside Athos. He is also responsible for supervising the lay workers’ rebuilding or restoration that needs to be done in monastic properties inside and outside Athos.

**Ecumenical Patriarchate**: refers to the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul. The foundation of the Royal monasteries in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was based on the childhood friendship between the monk St. Athanasius the Athonite and the Emperor Fokas (murdered in 969AC). Since that time, the Republic has been politically depended to Constantinople, even after the fall of the city in 1453 to the Ottoman Empire. On the basis of an imagined nationalist nostalgia for the ‘golden’ Byzantine times, and following the inclusion of Athos in the Greek state in 1912, today the Greek Patriarchate is considered to be ‘ecumenical’, and the spiritual and political protector of the Republic’s autonomy, although many non-Greek monks would challenge this view.

**Ecumenism**: In 1965, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches began a process of reconciliation, almost a thousand years after the Great Schism of 1054AC. In response the ‘Old Calendarist’ monks of Athos formed the new zealot movement, which strongly protested against Patriarch Athenagoras’s reconciliatory move to lift the anathemas (curses) that were raised against the Pope back in 1054.

**Efimerios**: the monk ‘on duty’

**Eikona**: ‘Image’. ‘*kath’ eikona kai kath’ omoiosin*’: ‘in the image and imitation of God’, in Latin *imago Dei*

**Ekklesiarches** or **Ekklesiastikos** (Verger, literally ‘Church-man’): The priest-monk responsible for the preparation of the church and chapels for the liturgies. He sounds the *talanto* and opens the doors of the church for the Liturgy to begin. His role should not be confused with the *Kodonokroustis* or *Kampanaris*, the deacon responsible for stroking the bell on fixed hours according to the *Typikon*, and on celebrations. During the Liturgy, he is responsible for the lighting, and all the props, censers, icons, Bibles, as they all have to be in order for the priest to use them. After the Liturgy is finished, he shuts the doors of the church, and then he has to pick up the wine and bread to be used for the Holy Communion for the next day from the *docheiaris* (‘Bottle Man’) at the oil and wine storage. In Vatopaidi, the nine priest-monks (except the Abbot) share this liturgical roles: each priest-monk is responsible for cleaning and preparing the *catholicon* once every nine days, while on fasting days (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) they are assigned to perform the liturgy to a different chapel –*See* in Appendix above: Timetables:

‘Weekly Liturgical Program, Summer/ Winter Solstices’. *See* also other liturgical roles: **kanonarchis**, **prosmoinarios**, **prosfonaris**, and **diavastis**

**Elaios**: translated as ‘mercy,’ and directly rooted to the word **elia** and **elaiolado** meaning ‘olive’ and ‘olive oil’ respectively. The saint of the olive trees is **St Panteleimon**, meaning the saint who is ‘All-compassionate, all-merciful’. He was known to be a doctor and a healer of soldiers, and he is particularly associated with the miraculous healings of blind men using olive oil. The etymological connection of **elaios** as ‘mercy’ to the natural product of olive oil naturalizes the liquid as cathartic. In this context, olive oil is used for cleansing both the soul, in rituals such as blessings, confessions, ordinations, and exorcisms, and the body, used as a healing remedy, in food, or to make soap for washing the hands. Olive oil is central in the monastic life, which is based on ideas of ‘repentance’, connecting the material body to the immaterial soul.

**Endoskopisi**: the process of ‘inner-search’. *See* also **automempsia**

**Enkomio**: meaning ‘praise of god’ and referring to the closing prayer of the priest-monk at the end of the Divine Liturgy on great celebrations.

**Enkrateia** and **sophrosene**: To be ‘moderate’ and with a ‘wise logic.’

**Epifotisis**: ‘Enlightenment’ by the Holy Spirit

**Epitropoi**: meaning ‘administrators’, and referring to the two elders, the head of treasury, and the monk responsible for the legal issues regarding the monastic institution, who are advisors to the abbot.

**Epotaktikos**: ‘Under submission’, referring to the disciples of an elder. *See* also **dokimos** (deacon)

**Ergastiria**: ‘Laboratories’, referring to the workshops where the monks restore paintings and other old treasures, with funding from the EU under the ‘European Heritage Laboratories’ action

**Erimos**: ‘desert’: The term **desert** refers to the early asceticism of the deserts in Egypt and Palestine of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Originally, **deserts** were the hermitages for the **anchorites**, the hermits who had lived on Athos before St Athanasius arrival and introduction of the communal way of life. **Deserts** are thought to be very dangerous places, because the monk is all alone against the temptations brought by the Devil, echoing the forty day struggle of Jesus in the desert of Palestine, which was regarded as ‘the land of desolation, the haunt of wild beasts alone; all nature there is hostile to man, subject to Satan’ (Papachrysanthou 1992:59, and also in Meyendorff 1974:11). On Athos “deserts” are thought to be: **Kellia** (‘Cells’) which are farm houses with 10 to 20 monks, **Kalyves** (‘Huts’) which are smaller houses for two to three monks each, **Kathismata** (‘Seats’) which are cells for a single charismatic monk and his disciples, and **Hesychasteria** (‘Silent places’) which are hermitages and caves in desolate cliffs for the very few hermits left on Athos (if any). Only charismatic monks have the automatic right to live as hermits. By contrast, older monks need the permission of the abbot: “Monks cannot live on their own in a hut on the mountain without the blessing of the abbot... all monks have to go through communal life, and after many years, if the abbot thinks an older monk has the capability to live on his own like a hermit, only then he gives his blessing. Then, the hermit has to ask for the permission of the **Holy Committee** too” [priest-monk/ secretary 5/5/03]. In other words,. This, in other words, is another rite of passage, from the “desert” settlement as a novice to the monastery as a monk, and from the monastery back to the “desert” hermitage as an anchorite [desert/ separation from “world”- monastery/ liminal life- exit/ return to the desert for ‘exit’ to heaven: cycle of monastic life]. But nowadays, this passage fades away, as in my knowledge there are only a few hermits left, living on the cliffs of the southern coast, because the majority of monks are used to the comforts of the city, and to them hermetic life is unapproachable.

**Esoteriko kalesma**: translated as ‘esoteric calling’ and referring to the monastic vocation

**Esoterikos kosmos**: Esoteric/ inner world’

**Esthitos** translates as ‘vest’, as well as, ‘sense’ and ‘feeling’, and refers to the vest of the Virgin Mary kept in Vatopaidi and celebrated on June 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Euhelaion**: blessing with olive oil

**Evangelio:** the Gospel, and referring to both the New Testament

**Exapostilarion** meaning ‘dismissal’ and referring to the hymn sung at the end of vespers, Matins, and the Divine Liturgy on the way out of the church.

**Exapsalmos** A group of ‘six psalms’ sung during the Matins: on celebrations: Hymns no3, 37, 61, 87, 102, and 142; and on fasting Matins no27 instead of 37, and 62 instead of 61.

**Exonarthex:** The outer area of the *catholicon*, reserved for visitors and monks on duty  
See also *narthex* and *nave*

**Filautia:** the ‘love of the self’

**Filokalia** ‘Love of Beauty’ is the manual on communal life written by Nicodemus of Naxos of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809), and Metropolitan Macarius of Corinth (1731-1805), two monks who were known for their sympathetic attitude towards the ‘Latin’ Church, and who had earlier translated in Greek Theatine Lorenzo Scupoli’s *Spiritual Combat* (1796) and even published his *Spiritual Exercises* in 1800. The introduction of frequent confession and Holy Communion ‘at the time considered a Latin custom’ (Gillet 1987: 65), which resulted to their condemnation by the Patriarchate in Istanbul, but significantly, with the support of ordinary monks of Athos, it was rescinded. However, their use still divides Athos, as for instance, the zealot monks of the neighbouring Esfigmenou, who receive Holy Communion only one a week, and confess only when necessary, and not systematically as in Vatopaidi where they confess and receive the Holy Communion every two days, accuse the Vatopaidians of following a Western “Papic” way of life (personal communication with guest-master of Esfigmenou 2/12/02: See chapter 9 on Esfigmenou).

**Filoponia:** meaning to ‘be a friend of pain’, and referring to a set of practices such as fasting, sleeping deprivation, sleeping on wood, prostrations and constant praying. There are different approaches to the attitude: in Vatopaidi the monks are ‘economic’, meaning non-excessive in adopting the value, while in Esfigmenou the value in itself it is the ends, adopting a much stricter regime of life.

**Fysiki takseis:** The ‘natural order’ of god, whose energy is thought to be embodied in all things, living and non-living, as part of his ‘creation’ (*ktisis*).

**Fysis:** ‘nature’, referring to both the natural environment and to the human ‘nature’. See also *para-fysin*

**Gerontas:** ‘Elder’ (see *gerontia* below)

**Gerontia:** refers to the council of elders, which is the administrative, executive, and formal authority of each monastery, representing it as a religious institution outside Athos. It is headed by the abbot and the two *epitropoi* (executive administrators). Its members are permanent, and their position is irrelevant from their spiritual (‘informal’) ranking. The members of the council are older monks with particular expertise in bureaucratic, legal, and financial matters, mediating between the internal and spiritual life of the monastery and the external world outside Athos. Their main responsibility is to organize the division of labour and economic activities of the institution both in connection to the needs of the brotherhood and to the dealings of the monastery with “cosmopolitan” institutions outside Athos.

**Glorifiers of the Name:** Russian movement of monks emphasizing the Jesus Prayer in which only the name of ‘Jesus’ in the Jesus Prayer was thought to contain the essence of God. For this reason the movement was named ‘Glorifiers of the Name’ They were led by the priest-monk Anthony Bulatovich and the ordinary monk Hilarion of Caucasus, who wrote a book entitled *In the Mountains of Caucasus*, published in Russian in 1909. But the Greeks accused the ‘Glorifiers of the Name’ of being ‘heretics’ (Gillet 1987: 85).

**Grammateas:** ‘secretary’

**Haghia trapeza** meaning ‘the Holy Table’, and referring to the altar at the centre of the sanctuary behind the *iconostasis*

**Hegoumenos, Hegoumeneion:** The ‘abbot’ and the ‘abbot’s office’ respectively

**Hesychasm** (‘silence’), **Hesychast movement** (‘Silencers’): Ascetic method of meditation, rooted back to the early desert asceticism in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Palestine and Egypt. **Hesychasm** is based on the repetition of the words of the Jesus prayer, or pure prayer as it is also known, with the mouth, the mind, and the heart. As the prayer developed it was accompanied by repetitious movement. The aim of the prayer is to see the Light of Tabor, the Light that led Moses to Sinai, within the self. The prayer was brought from Sinai to Athos in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, by the hermit St Gregorios of Sinai. St Nicephoros the Hesychast, and St Gregorios Palamas institutionalized the practice in the 14<sup>th</sup> century within the movement of the **Hesychasts** (‘Silencers’). The prayer became a matter of conflict in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century between the **Glorifiers of the Name**, a Russian movement of monks who were eventually expelled from Athos. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Joseph the Hesychast (1898-1959) revived the Greek tradition of the prayer in connection to communal life. See also **Jesus Prayer** and **Palamism**

**Holy Committee:** see **Iera Synodos** below

**Iconostasis:** meaning ‘icon-stand’ and referring to the tableau with sacred icons that separates the **nave** from the **sanctuary** of the church

**Idiorythmic:** translated as ‘its own rhythm’, or ‘private/unique rhythm’: The *idiorythmic* way of life emphasizes private property and hence, the dismantling of the communal coenobitic way of life which is based on the rule of poverty. In the idiorythmic mode the monks do not share anything but live on their own, following their own independent program, and have to take care of their food and shelter by themselves as there is no organized economy. It was introduced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and replaced *coenobitic* life as a reaction to the inclusion of Athos in the Ottoman state. The heavy taxation was the reason for the monks to dissolve the economic units of the monasteries and the *coenobitic* way of life, in a system based on private property, which would allow them to hide the Athonian treasures from the taxmen. Following the inclusion of Athos in the Greek borders in 1912, the monasteries were encouraged to return to the *coenobitic* way of life, but the opposite move was forbidden. The reason was that the Greek state in co-operation with the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul wanted to keep the life on Athos under the common order of the *coenobitic* rule.

**Iera Epistasia** translated as ‘Holy Supervision’ and referring to the four-member executive committee appointed to represent a group of five monasteries. The **Holy Epistasia** (‘supervision’) is the administrative authority of Mount Athos as a unified Republic. It is headed by the **Protos** or **Protepistatis** (‘first supervisor’) who keeps his post for five years (4 representatives X 5 monasteries = 20 monasteries).

Meghisti Lavra	Docheiariou	Xenophontos	Esfigmenou
Vatopaidi	Koutloumousiou	Karakallou	Stavronikita
Iveron	Pantokratoros	Filotheou	Simonopetra
Hilliadari	Xeropotamos	St Paul	St Gregory
Dionysiou	Zographou	St Panteleimonos	Konstamonitou

However, because since 1971 Esfigmenou does not send any representatives to Karyes, in protest against the co-operation of the Orthodox Patriarchate with the Pope (see chapter 9), the **Holy Committee** had to replace the representative of Esfigmenou with a priest-monk from Karyes.

**Iera paradoseis:** translated as ‘sacred tradition’, thought to be eternal, and often used in dogmatic terms. It consists of both written and oral traditions, as well as, collective and private practices of faith.

**Iera Synaxis:** the ‘Holy Assembly’ of each monastery consisting of only elder monks who wear the **Angelic Schema**

**Iera Synodos:** The **Holy Committee** is the administrative authority of Athos, situated in the secular village of Karyes, at the centre of the peninsula. The **Holy Committee** consists of representatives (usually an abbot with his advisor) from all the twenty monasteries, and holds frequent meetings regarding political, legal, and financial matters in the peninsula. Since the 1970s, the monastery of Esfigmenou has refused to send a representative in protest over the project of **Ecumenism** (see below), the effort to reunite the Catholic and Orthodox Churches that began in the same decade. In response the Holy

Committee has issued three eviction notes to the brotherhood of Esfigmenou, accusing them of dividing the Mount and calling them ‘occupiers’ of the monastery (*see* chapter 9).

**Iero fos:** the ‘holy light’, the Light of Tabor. *See also Hesychasm and Palamism*

**Ieromonachos:** ‘Priest-monk’. Every monastery has six to ten priest-monks (including the Abbot), depending on its population. They head spiritual activities, such as performing the liturgies, blessing sacred products, and receiving the confession of visitors, as well as supervising the monks at work. Every Sunday, in the *Catholicon* the priest is usually the Abbot performing the Divine Liturgy. The rest of the week, the nine priest-monks share the post, for the liturgies on the *Catholicon* on non-fasting days (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday). On fasting days (Monday, Wednesday, Friday), the brotherhood is divided to ten groups led by the nine priest-monks and the Abbot, spreading in the chapels of the monastery. The visitors are limited in the Chapel of the Holy Girdle, which is close to the guest-house, and the liturgy is performed by the *archontaris* (priest-monk in the role of guest-master). In this way, visitors cannot interrupt the family atmosphere of the chapels.

**Illikos kosmos:** ‘Material world’

**Illistikos kosmos:** ‘Materialist world’, in moral reference to the secular world outside the Athonian borders, and in opposition to the ‘spiritual world’ (*pneumatikos kosmos*) of the *coenobitic* monasteries.

**Jesus Prayer:** ‘You know that we breath our breath in and out, only because of our heart... sit down, recollect your mind, draw it in your nostrils; that is the path the breath takes to reach the heart. Drive it, force it to go down to your heart with the air you are breathing in... you will have no regret... Have no other occupation or meditation that the cry of: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!’ Under no circumstances give yourself any rest... But if, in spite all your efforts, brother, you do not succeed in entering your heart as I have directed, do what I tell you and with God’s help you will achieve your end’ (Nicephoros the Hesychast in Kaloubovsky and Palmer 1951: 32-4). In another text we read: ‘Leave behind all appearances, not only the senses but of what the intellect sees in thought, it turns always more to the interior world, until by the effort of mind it penetrates even to the Invisible and the Unknowable, and there it sees God (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses II*. 163-4; PG 44, 376-77, in Meyendorff 1974: 42-3). *See also Hesychasm and Palamism.*

**Kalymmafki:** ‘small hood’, the black cylindrical hat worn by deacons, and **epanokalimafkon:** ‘on top of hood’

**Kamelos:** The long veil covering the *kalymafki* backwards

**Kanonarchis:** meaning ‘canon-keeper’, and referring to the priest-monk, or his deacon, who keeps the *kanona* (‘canon’, order) of the liturgy. During the Divine Liturgy he has the role of the conductor showing the hymns that need to be sung in antiphony between the double-choir, elegantly moving from one side to the other of the *nave*. *See also somata*

**Kathisma:** A) meaning ‘seat’ and/or ‘sitting’ refer to the psalms sung during Vespers and Matins. There are 150 psalms divided into 20 *Kathismata*. Each *kathisma* is divided into a number of intersections, depending on the context of the liturgy, called *stases* (‘stops’). Each intersection is marked by the sound of *sideraki* (‘little iron bar’ B) The term also refers to the *troparia* (hymns in honour of a saint) of each day. C) A third meaning is that of a stall, as during their performance the monks have to stand up from their stalls. D) A fourth meaning of the word *Kathisma* refers to the smallest ‘desert’ settlements on Athos, in which single monks live in absolute solitary

**Kathismata and Kalyves** meaning ‘Seats’ and ‘Huts’ respectively: isolated cells with an elder priest-monk and one or two deacons. They are *idiorythmic*, following their independent program, and their *economy* is based on private property.

**Kerasma or trattarisma:** ‘treat’, referring to olives, bread, *halva*, Turkish delight, and some coffee or raki offered by the *archontaris* to those who just arrived to the monastery to strengthen them, after their long trip. ‘*Tratta*’ also refers to fishing, and this term shows that for the monks *trattarisma* means to ‘fish’ more faithful and bring them into the Orthodox monastic life.

**Keropoios:** the ‘candle-maker’

**Kipouros:** ‘gardener’ the older monk responsible for the garden inside the monastery

**Kontakia:** Small houses in Karyes which accommodate the representatives of the monasteries during their staying in the village. Each monastery has its own quarter.

**Ktitorissa:** Mary as the ‘builder’ and ‘owner’ of the monasteries; **Ktima**, meaning ‘field’, refers to her ‘virgin garden’ (*parthenos kipos*) which includes the monasteries.

**Kodonokroustis** or **Kampanaris:** The deacon responsible to ring the bell on celebrations

**Kollivades:** A counter movement of monks to the *Celliotes* who were demanding self-independence from the Greek *Holy Committee*. Their name derived from another conflict of the 18th century, regarding the famous Greek zealot monk, Neophytes of the ‘desert’ of Kausokalyvia (died around 1760). He was a zealot teacher and hymnographer at the Vatopaidian Athoniada School, and a close friend to Vatopaidi’s Abbot and founder of the School Meletios. But he was not only famous for his voice, but also for his zealot strictness. The story goes that one Sunday morning he was passing by the central church of the Skete of St Anna where the monks met once a week, and heard the monks inside the Church offering the kolliva, the sweet remembrances to the dead. However according to the seven *Typika* (meaning ‘formalities’, the rules of conduct and daily program) the monks remember the departed only on Saturdays, and never on Sundays, because it is the day of celebration of God (Mikrayannitos 1999:109-10). However, the monks of St Anna because they were rebuilding their central Church during the year 1754-5, as it was ready to fall apart, they were working on Saturdays and for that reason they could not hold the liturgy. The zealot monk Neophytes took the matter to the *Holy Committee* accusing the monks of St Anna of Latin influences, because they changed their sacred calendar. For this, zealot monks were re-named into *Kollivades*, meaning those who associate themselves with the sweet made of rice that is offered every Saturday during the remembrance of the dead at the liturgy. Their new name underlined their zealotism for the exact performance of the ritual at the correct time and place, always according to the Greek tradition [see also *Celliotes*]

**Komposta:** sweet made of fruits

**Kontakia:** The houses in the secular capital Karyes in which the representatives of the monasteries stay.

**Kosmos:** translated as the ‘world’, and referring to the secular world outside Athos. Hence comes terms such as *kosmikoi* referring to ‘worldly’ visitors and clergy, *illistikos kosmos* translated as ‘materialist world’ in opposition to *pneumatikos kosmos* (‘spiritual world’) inside the monasteries, *kosmiki ora* translated as ‘worldly time’ in opposition to liturgical time, *kosmiko imerologio* translated as ‘worldly calendar’ in reference to the Gregorian calendar and in opposition to the “old” Julian calendar, *kosmika vivlia* translated as ‘worldly books’ in opposition to the liturgical sacred books of the monastery, *kosmopolites* translated as ‘cosmopolitans’ and referring both to ‘worldly visitors/ citizens of the world’, and to ‘cosmopolitan’ (secular) institutions.

**Koura:** Tonsure, the public rite of cutting a log of hair from a novice.

**Lanterns** moveable candles used in *chorostasia*, parades, and funerals

**Latinophron:** Greek term referring to someone who has adopted a ‘Latin’ (i.e. Catholic) way of thinking: the friend of the ‘Latins’

**Lavra:** The term *lavra* has multiple meanings and symbolisms. Literally, it means the ‘heart of the fire’/ ‘flame’ and symbolically it refers to the ‘Heart’, the energy each monk has inside himself. However, historically it also refers to the groups of hermits that pre-existed St Athanasius’ introduction of communal life into newly founded Royal monasteries, which were funded by the Emperors in Constantinople in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (the first Royal monastery of *Meghisti Lavra*, ‘Great Fire’, founded in 963AD with the sponsorship of Nicephorus Phokas, despite the protests of the hermits who thought that Athanasius destroys ascetic life by introducing ‘monks of the big city’ on the Mount, see also Papachrysanthou 1992, and Paganopoulos 2006). In this context, the term *lavra* refers to both the ‘Heart’ inside the self of each monk in strong connection to the **Heart** of the community. Both Hearts are

protected with the practice of the Jesus Prayer that unifies the monks into one unit. *Lavres* were also referring to the dispersed groups of two to three hermits that lived on Athos before the arrival of St Athanasios the Athonite in 963, and the foundation of the first Royal monastery of *Meghisti Lavra* ('the Great *Lavra*'). The hermits resisted Athanasios' initiative, seeing with suspicion the involvement of the Emperor who sponsored Athanasios' grant projects, but their hard life eventually disappeared. The use of the word *lavra* remained however, signifying the 'Heart' and the 'Fire', in the mystical context of the Hesychast movement (see *Hesychasm*, *Palamism*, and *Filokalia*). In this context it symbolically connects the 'heart' of each monk to the 'heart' of the group he belongs, and through it to the greater 'heart' of the monastery as a whole. This allegorical relationship is signified in the monks' belief that the elders' hearts beats on the same rhythm with the words of the Jesus Prayer, becoming one: 'the Heart of the Monastery'.

**Lite:** 'Light, enlightened': refers to the 'lighted' with candles, small corner in the *catholicon*, usually between the *narthex* and the *nave*. The *narthex* is the vestibule area of the Church for the ordinary monks, and includes the *lite*, metaphorically meaning the 'lighted area' with the candles. In Vatopaidi, the *lite* dates back to the time of the Emperor Andronicus II Paleologous in 1312, and according to the tradition he spent his last night in that room to seeking enlightenment. A small corridor leads from the *lite* to the *mesonyktikon* (meaning the space for the 'middle of the night') dedicated to the founders of the monastery. **Litia:** the small prayer taking place during the *mesonyktikon* in the narrow area next to the candles

**Logismo:** the 'dangerous thoughts' referring either to memories of the secular past, friends and family, or to sexual desire in thought. See also *meteorismos*

**Magkeipes:** The 'oven-men', referring to the monks who make the bread

**Magkeires:** 'Cooks'

**Malaxation:** Mixing process of filtering the oil, wine, etc

**Mandias:** cowl, and **paramandias:** cloth worn underneath the cowl

**Melisokomos:** meaning 'bee-keeper' and referring to the monks responsible for the bee hives. Honey and wax are the most important products after olive oil, used both for the ritual life inside the monasteries, and as exports (candles, honey, etc.)

**Meneon:** the book with the lives of saints read in the refectory by the *diavastis* as the brotherhood silently eats listening to the moral examples of the life of the saint celebrated on the day

**Mesonyktikon:** meaning 'in the middle of the night'. The term has a triple meaning, first referring to the opening night prayers, translated as the 'Midnight Office', which begin the collective prayers of the Divine Liturgy; second, it refers to the time these prayers take place, 'in the middle of the night' at midnight; and third, to the space these prayers take place, the *mesonyktikon*, which is the dark corridor that connects the *lite* to the *nave* of the *catholicon*.

**Metanoies:** meaning 'regrets', and referring to a set of prayers and deep prostrations, which are given by the confessor during the confession as the means of repentance: *elikrinis metanoia*: 'true repentance' See also *agna dakrya*

**Meteorismous:** meaning 'meteor-like thoughts', and referring to the unfocused mind, that cannot be controlled. See also *logismo*

**Metochia:** referring to estate property, land, and monastic satellites, inside and outside Athos, which the monks use, rent, sell, or exchange, for the monastery's financial profit. These properties and fields were offered throughout the centuries as endorsements to the monasteries by secular traders, Byzantine Emperors, European kings, queens and princes, Ottoman sultans, and nowadays, private donors. Most of these properties were lost in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in socialist countries where land was taken away from monasteries to be redistributed to the people. In Greece there was no such move, and only recently the Greek public was shaken by an economic and political scandal relating to Vatopaidi's *metochia* in Greece and Greek Cyprus (see chapter 8).

**Monachos**, literary means ‘alone’, the root to the word ‘monk’

**Monachologion**: the list with the secular names, background, and rank of all the monks. *See also dokimologion*

**Mylothros**: the monks responsible for mills, used for making olive oil and bread

**Myron**: Sanctified perfumed oil used for washing the legs of kings and priests to be anointed (Lev. (8:10-12), and I Sam. (27:20)). Since Maria Magdalene washed Jesus’ legs with **Myron**, olive oil is seen in serving in the humbler ways, and thus, carrying the message of Jesus for humility. This practice is rooted to the Hebrew tradition of using olive oil for washing the legs of kings and priests to be anointed (Lev. (8:10-12), and I Sam. (27:20)). Olive oil has cathartic qualities, used both as medicine and in confessions, as for the monks ‘the soul and body are interconnected’. (Vatopaidian priest 29/3/2002).

**Narthex**: The middle area of the *catholicon* reserved for the monks. *See also nave and exonarthex*

**Nave**: The central area of the *catholicon* reserved for the abbot and elders. *See also nave and exonarthex*

**Neoimerologites**: the ‘New Calendarists’ refers to the clergy, monks, and faithful who follow the ‘new’ Gregorian calendar. *See also Palaioimerologites*

**Neptikoi**: ‘washers/ cleansers’: the name given to those who practice the *Jesus prayer* systematically. *See also agna dakrya, Hesychasm, Palamism*

**Neumata**: translated as the ‘gestures’. In the Athonian dialect it refers to the music notation of the movement/ gestures of the priest who acts as a *kanonarchis* during the liturgy, a kind of conductor. (see chapter 4, section 7). *See also pneumata* (‘spirits’) and *somata* (‘bodies’)

**Niktofilakas**: ‘Night guard’

**Nosokomos**: ‘Nurse’

**Octoechos**: ‘eight modes/sounds’, is the service book containing the canons and hymns used in the daily services. *Octoechos* is the most important liturgical book of collective psalmodies, in terms of organizing the annual ‘liturgical cycle’. It contains eight musical tones, each one to be sung during the liturgies for two weeks. Every two weeks the Vatopaidians change mode (8 tones sung for two weeks making a total period of 16 weeks), and hence, every year they go through the *Octoechos* three times (16 weeks for three cycles, bringing the total to 48 weeks). The six remaining weeks belong to the movable celebrations of Easter, which take place according to the other liturgical book, the *Paschalion*.

**Oikonomia Pathon**: ‘Economy of passions’: referring to the Vatopaidian mild behaviour and self-constrained attitude to life, including the self, the others, and the natural environment. It does not refer to the absolute rejection of the human ‘passions’ (see *apatheia* and *pathoi*) since this is impossible, but to learning how to control them. *See also Jesus Prayer* and *Tifli Ypakoe*

**Orthos**: ‘stand’, referring to the Matins

**Palaioimerologites**: the ‘Old Calendarists’, refers to the Old Calendarist Church, an ultra-Orthodox sect that since 1926 protests against the adoption of the ‘Papic’, or ‘new’, Gregorian calendar in the Orthodox liturgical timetable. The Old Calendarist Church is an international sect, expanding from the US to Russia, but centralized in the monastery of Esfigmenou, the so-called ‘last towers of zealots’. The monastery in co-operation with Old Calendarist subgroups, such as ELKIS and St Basilios in Greece, often organize public protests against the Gregorian calendar, the mainstream church, and the Patriarchate in Istanbul, whom they call ‘traitors’ to their ‘true faith’ (*alithini pistis*) and Orthodox identity (chapter 9 in the thesis). *See also Ecumenism* and *alithini pistis*

**Palamism**: The doctrine of St Gregorios Palamas (born in 1296), who became a monk in Vatopaidi in 1316 and the Abbot of Esfigmenou in 1335. He was the founder of the *Hesychast* movement of monks (‘Silencers’) who practiced the *Jesus Prayer* in a systematic way. This method was challenged by the

more 'rational' Western Church, which could not accept the 'mystical aspects of the prayer, and who called the Hesychasts as 'naval-gazers', or 'navel-souls' because they bowed their heads while reciting the Jesus Prayer 'in order to facilitate the return of the intellect to the heart' (Gillet 1987: 59). Despite the accusations of a Greek monk Barlaam that the practice was hallucinatory, in 1341 the principal monks of Mount Athos supported Palamas. In the context of the Great Schism of 1054, Palamas' spiritual teachings became known as *Palamism*, creating the mystical 'Eastern' tradition against 'Western nominalism' (Meyendorff, 1974:88), though Gillet was careful to point out that in contemporary historical accounts, such as in Lossky (1957) there is a tendency to identifying 'Palamism with orthodox spirituality' (1987:60). Religious scholars, such as Fr. V. Laurent (in Gillet 1987: 62), Hausherr (1978: 104), and Gillet (1987: 61) interpret Palamas's writings within the context of the political struggle between Rome and Constantinople. From this point of view, the religious value of his writings takes second place to their political significance. However, other writers such as Lossky (1957: 210), Meyendorff, (1974: 79), and Ware (1987: 19), although agreeing that 'the Jesus Prayer was the more or less direct cause of the *Palamite* controversy and the animosity thereby created between Greeks and Latins' (Gillet 1987: 61), still insist that 'St. Gregory Palamas possesses a crucial significance for Orthodox theology and spirituality that the "Monk" (here Ware refers to Lev Gillet) has failed to make clear. His treatment of the great Hesychast theologian is altogether insufficient' (Ware 1987: 60).

**Panaghiari:** 'Mary's Cloth' which covers the bread kept in the *artophorion* to be divided during the rite of *artoklassia*, and to be used for the Holy Communion (*theia prosfora*)

**Parafysin:** meaning 'un-natural'/'against nature', and referring to sin and disorder from the 'natural order' (*fysiki takseis*) of god

**Parakklisis:** prayers referring to the calling of the Holy Spirit, and thanksgiving prayers

**Parthenia:** translated as 'virginity' in multiple contexts: *parthena fysis* meaning 'virgin nature'; *partheniki zoe* meaning 'virgin way of life'; *partheno soma* meaning 'virgin body', and referring to the bodies of Christ and the Virgin Mary; *o kipos tis Parthenou* referring to the Athonian peninsula as the 'garden of the virgin' Mary.

**Paschalion:** the movable calendar of the 'book of Easter'.

**Pathoi:** Human 'passions' of the mind and flesh, *see apatheia*

**Peitharxia** defined as 'obedience/ conformity to the rules'. *See also ypakoe*

**Petrachilli:** priest-monk's stole

**Phiale:** Circular fountain situated at the right entrance of the monasteries' catholicon. Its water is used for blessings.

**Pneumata:** translated as the 'spirits'. In the Athonian dialect it refers to the high pitched notes in the music scores (see chapter 4, section 7). *See also neumata* ('gestures') and *somata* ('bodies')

**Pneumatikos, or pneumatikos pateras:** 'spiritual father': the title is given to priest-monks only, who, being sexually virgin, are allowed to confess other monks and visitors. In Vatopaidi the abbot is thought to be the 'spiritual father' of the entire monastery, confessing all the monks (*see* chapter 5), but in Esfigmenou they do not accept terms such as 'spiritual father' and 'spirituality', because they associate it with 'Western' Christianity. Accordingly, they only confess if they have sinned, unlike Vatopaidi where they confess at least once a week (*see* chapter 9). The second meaning of the 'spiritual father' is in reference to *charismatic* monks, who organize *companionships* to incorporate into *Athonian families*, becoming patrons in a number of monasteries. *See also charis/charisma*, and *Athonian family*

**Pneumatikotita:** translated as 'spiritualism' in the Christian mystical tradition of *Palamism* (see above). Hence come the terms *pneumatikos pateras* meaning 'spiritual father', *pneumatika tekna* meaning 'spiritual children', *pneumatika kathikonta* meaning 'spiritual duties', and *pneumatiki zoe* meaning 'spiritual life'.

**Polyeleos or polyeleon:** meaning ‘chandelier’ and referring to Psalms 134 and 135 which are sung during the transition from Matins to the Divine Liturgy, and during which the *ecclesiarches* shakes the central ‘great chandelier’ hanging above the *nave* of the church.

**Polystavri:** a cloth in the shape of a cross given during the rite of the ‘*Angelic Schema*’

**Pornodaimonas:** ‘porno demon’: a demon in the form of female body and a monstrous head, with pig hair on her back. This demon is thought to visit the spiritually highest and most powerful hermits, and its defeat elevates them to higher spiritual status.

**Portaris or pyloros, portarikion:** The ‘door-man’ is an old task, referring to the monk responsible for shutting the main gate of the monastery at sunset, and opening it at dawn. He is also responsible of recording the names of those who enter, and those who exit the monastery, and accordingly, the reason and how long they are staying in the monastery if they are visitors, or how long, where, and why, they will be travelling outside Vatopaidi if they are monks.

**Pro-hegoumenos:** meaning ‘second-before-the-abbot’ and referring to the elder who replaces the abbot when he is absent outside the monastery.

**Proimiakos:** also referred to as ‘Symeon’s prayer’ (Psalms 103 and 104), sung during the vespers according to the old Hebrew tradition of reciting blessings at set times. However, in the anti-Semitic Esfigmenou, the vesper does not include it because of its strong association to the Hebrew tradition.

**Prokeimenon:** meaning ‘introductory text’ read during the vespers in preparation for the remembrance of the saints celebrated the following day

**Prosforaris:** the deacon who prepares the basket with the *prosfora* (‘offering’, sacrifice)

**Prosmonarios** (‘waiting-man’) is the deacon that takes care of the icons of Mary: he has to keep them clean, and to sing special hymns called *parekkllisis* (devotional prayers) to her during the night liturgies. His main responsibility was to keep the candles lit in front of the icons, symbolizing her presence among the monks.

**Protaton:** The building in Karyes in which the Holy Epistasia makes its meetings.

**Proteplastitis:** the elder on duty as the ‘first supervisor’ distributing and supervising daily work. He is appointed on January 1<sup>st</sup>

**Prothesis** meaning ‘offering’, ‘intention’, and referring to the sacrifice of Christ during the rite of the Holy Communion

**Protos:** The ‘first monk’ who is elected every five years to head the *Holy Epistasia* (‘holy supervision, see above), and who closely works with the spiritual authority of the “Ecumenical Patriarchate” in Istanbul. According to archive research the role of *Protos* dates as early as 908AC, while the post was ratified in 972AC by Emperor Tsimiskis.

**Psyche kai somati:** ‘Soul and body’, Greek expression

**Pyloros:** ‘porter’ Keeps a record of who comes in and out Vatopaidi/ Checks ids (permanent) [Added in 2000, because of the increasing number of pilgrim visitors, though he is not thought to be an actual member of the 10 Priests, and that is why he is permanent

**Raki** is a type of ouzo, served as a welcoming drink to new visitors at the guesthouse, as part of the *coenobitic* tradition of hospitality.

**Rassa, rassophoros:** the monastic black cloth, symbolizing mourning and a life of death, and the monk who ‘carries’ the black *rassa*, respectively

**Royal Monasteries:** The monasteries have three titles: *Basilicas* (‘Royal’), *Patriarchies* (‘Paternal Authority’), and *Stavropigikes* (‘Sources of the Cross’). The term ‘Royal’ refers to the very foundation

and sponsorship of the *coenobitic* monasteries by Byzantine emperors, and their political and financial connection to Constantinople. After the dissolution of Byzantium with the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, the monasteries were re-assessed by the Ottoman Empire as property belonging to the Patriarchate in Istanbul, and that is why they were renamed into *Patriarchies*. Finally, the third title of *Stavropigikes* refers to the cross the Patriarch of Istanbul buried under the sanctuary of each newly re-founded Royal monastery, historically revealing the Patriarch's "spiritual" patronage and strong connection to the monasteries.

**Sarakosti:** the Great Lent before Easter Sunday, meaning 'forty days' of abstinence -with the exception of Palm Sunday, a week before Easter Sunday, when feasting is obligatory.

**Sidirourgos:** 'Blacksmith'

**Sketes:** Monastic villages consisting of a number of huts of two to three monks, which function independently from each other. Most of the sketes remain *idiorythmic*. The monks of all huts only meet on Sundays (and that is if they wish to do so) for the Sunday liturgy at the *Kyriakion* (meaning 'Sunday Church'), which is the central church of the village. The rest of the week, each hut keeps its own program, as the monks hold liturgies and work at their own time. Because there is no communal life, there is no central economy, and such places often have economic problems, with limited food supplies. An additional problem is space, since *sketes* and cells are small buildings, and there is not enough space for newcomers to stay on a permanent basis. In dealing with such problems some *sketes* changed their mode from *idiorythmic* to *coenobitic*. There are twelve *sketes* on the mount of which seven are Greek and Greek Cypriot, two Romanian, two Russian, and one Ukrainian:

FIGURE: Sketes				
Patron Monastery	Skete	Mode	Huts	Nationality
Meghisti Lavra	<i>St Anna</i>	Idiorythmic	51	Greek
Meghisti Lavra	<i>Kausokalyvia</i> ("burned huts")	Idiorythmic	40	Greek Cypriot
Meghisti Lavra	<i>Prodromos</i>	Coenobitic	Building	Romanian
Vatopaidi	<i>St Dimitrios</i>	Under reconstruction		
Vatopaidi	<i>'Russian' Serrai</i>	Coenobitic (1990)	Athoniada School	Greek Cypriot**
Iviron	<i>St Prodromos</i>	Idiorythmic	8	Greek Georgian
Koutloumousiou	<i>St Panteleimon</i>	Idiorythmic	23	Greek
Pantokratoros	<i>Prophet Elias</i>	Coenobitic	36	Ukrainian
St Paul	<i>New Skete</i>	Idiorythmic	28	Greek
St Paul	<i>St Dimitrios of the Ravine</i>	Idiorythmic		Romanian
Xenophontos	Annunciation of Theotokos	Idiorythmic		Greek
St Panteleimon	<i>Bogoroditsa</i> ("God Bearer")	Idiorythmic		Bulgarian

**Skevofilakion:** The safe kept in the sanctuary with the holy props used for the Divine Liturgy and the Holy Communion. In Vatopaidi, the *skevofylakion* also has the holy relics of many saints, and other sacred items, including pieces from the Holy Cross of St Constantine, and pieces from the girdle of the Virgin Mary. Responsible for exhibiting those pieces to visitors is the *vemataris*

**Solemnion:** referring to annual grants of silver and gold given to the monasteries, introduced by the Emperor Phokas (966-969), and continuing until the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.

**Somata:** translated as the 'bodies'. In the Athonian dialect it refers to the high pitched notes in the music scores (see chapter 4, section 7). See also *neumata* ('gestures') and *pneumata* ('spirits')

**Stavrophoros:** meaning 'bearer of (*phoros*) the Cross (*stavros*) and referring to the second stage of monastic life, following the rite of the *Angelic Schema*. See also *Rassophoros*

**Sticheron:** 'verse' in psalms

**Symantron:** 'wooden cymbal'. See also *talanta*

**Synodeia:** Translated as *companionship* and referring to groups formed on the way from the secular world to a monastery, consisting of secular men who follow/accompany a 'charismatic' monk into Athos. Often some of these young men come from the same geographical area, and share a common background. Some of them are real siblings or cousins. The *companionship* takes its name from the charismatic leader, or the geographic area where he come from. On their arrival to a monastery, the

*companionships* are then incorporated first within the monastic family the leader belongs, and second, within the internal hierarchy of the monastery as an institution.

*Synodeikon*, or *Synaxari*: ‘meeting room’

*Tachidromos*: ‘Mailman’

*Tahini*: sesame paste

*Talanta*: ‘Points/ beats’ referring to the sounding of three beats, usually before the vesper and the matins, using a wooden cymbal (*symantron*) which is placed outside the *catholicon* in the centre of the monastery, in order to call the monks to the church

*Tamata*: Translates as ‘promises’. Originally the term refers to a candle lit by a pilgrim in exchange for a healing miracle. But it mainly refers to golden or silver ornaments of body parts paid by pilgrims, i.e. a silver leg for a broken leg, a golden heart for heart problems, and so on.

*Theia Koinonia*: The ‘Holy Communion’

*Theia Liturgia*: the ‘Divine Liturgy’

*Theia Prosfora*: the ‘Divine Offering’

*Theory*: ‘to see God’ (*theo-ory/o*). By ‘theory’ the monks refer to the ‘mystical theory’ of the Hesychast movement of monks of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, led by St. Gregorios Palamas. See *Palamism*

*Thelima*: the elder’s ‘will’ to be served by the deacon. See also *diakonima*

*Themata pisteos*: ‘matters of faith’

*Theotokion*: a psalm in honour of Mary, the *Theotokos* (‘mother of god’)

*Theou ktisis*: translated as ‘God’s building’, and referring to the natural environment

*Thymiato*: censers

*Tifli ypakoe*: ‘Blind obedience’: the central Vatopaidian value in the monastery’s *coenobitic* way of life, as it was first introduced in the *typiko* of Joseph the Hesychast in 1938. See also *Oikonomia pathon*

*Trapezaris*: (‘Table Man’), referring to the elder monk responsible for running the refectory. See also *magkeires*

*Trisagion*: ‘Holy Thrice’ A) the basic Orthodox prayer crossing the self three times while repeating the words: ‘Saint is God, Saint is the Powerful, and Show Mercy on us all’. It refers to the Holy trinity, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God respectively. B) It also refers to rites taking place three days after an event, particularly funerals and blessings of property.

*Troparia*: devotional and remembrance songs for saints

*Typikaris*: The monk who keeps the *typiko* of the monastery with the rules of daily conduct: ‘He has to be the first to give the right example to the rest of the brotherhood, to ensure order in the Refectory, to be seated between Fathers and Brothers, and to educate them by example and through his own presence.’ [From Vatopaidi’s *Internal Regulations*, as per article 6, my translation]

*Typiko*: the book with the timetables, liturgies, agricultural activities, punitive measures, moral values, and instructions in daily conduct, written by charismatic monks, such as Joseph the Hesychast. Each monastery, or settlement, has its own *typiko*, from the tiniest hut, such as Joseph the Vatopaidian’s where he lived only with two deacons, to the great monastery of Vatopaidi. Vatopaidi’s latest *typiko* was signed in 1990, together with the change of the monastery from *idiorythmic* to *coenobitic*. It was written by the patron of the brotherhood Joseph the Vatopaidian as a revised version of the *typiko* of his elder Joseph

the Hesychast which he introduced in 1938 in the ‘deserts’ of St. Basil and St. Anna, and later in the New Skete (*see* chapter 4). *See* also **Typikaris**

**Typikon**: ‘Formalities’: the book with the rules of conduct and liturgical calendar. In total there are seven official Typika of Mount Athos, four of them written during the Byzantine Empire when the Royal monasteries were politically, military, and financially dependent to Constantinople, and three after the Fall to the Ottoman Empire 1453, in which they introduced the **idiorythmic** mode of life as a way of financially disengaging from the Ottoman tax system (*see* **idiorythmic** above). Although the seven Athonian Typika were written at times of, and thus advocated, change, nowadays they are seen in continuity, and have been ratified by the constitution of Mount Athos signed in 1926, into a single **Typikon** that encouraged the return to the coenobitic mode, while prohibited the foundation of new idiorythmic communities. This was seen as a return to the first Typikon of St. Athanasius, also known as *tragus* (‘goat’) because it was written on a goat’s skin, which was signed with the foundation of the first Royal monastery of Meghisti Lavra in 966AC, and it was ratified by Emperor Tsimiskis in 972AC.

**Tyrokomos**: meaning ‘cheese-maker’ and referring to the monks who live outside Athos in monastic land (**metochia**) where they keep cattle and make cheese, which they then import to the monastery to eat on Tuesdays, the day of the **Tyrofagos** (‘cheese-eating’ day of the week).

**Vemataris**: translated as ‘step-man’, and meaning the priest-monk in the role of the sacristan, responsible for preserving and exhibiting the holy relics of the monastery to visitors, every evening after the vesper.

**Vivliothekarios**: the elder in the role of the ‘librarian’

**Vordonaris or Hatlaris**: ‘Whiplash-man’, referring to the monk responsible for the horses and the stable. Nowadays, with the introduction of jeeps and vans in the peninsula the role has eclipsed.

**Xerofagia**: meaning to ‘eat dry food’, and referring to strict fasting with dry food and limited water

**Xylourgos**: ‘carpenter’

**Ypakoe**: defined as ‘obedience to the elders’. *See* also **peitharxia**

**Ypohreosi**: ‘obligation’

**Zostiko**: undergarment belt signifying the power of faith of the monk who wears it, given during the rite of the **Angelic Schema** together with the Cross

## Bibliography

- Alpentzos, G.** (2002) *The Educational Role of the Monasteries* Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, my translation from Greek
- Anderson, B.** (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections of Nationalism* London: Verso
- Anonymous** (1930) *Mount Athos: The Mount of "Saints"* Athens: KKE
- Archimandrite Vasileios [abbot of the monastery of Iveron] and Mantzaridia, G.** (1996) *The Meaning of the Typikon* Montreal-Quebec: Alexander Press
- Argyris, K. and Pentzikis, F.** (2001) *Communion with Monks: Photographs from Mount Athos, 1991-1995* Thessaloniki: Phaos
- Asad, T.** (1993) *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press
- Bakhtin, M.** (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four essays* Translated by C. Emerson, and M. Holquist (Ed) Austin: University of Texas
- Barker, J.** (2007) Comment on Robbins' s article: 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity' in *Current Anthropology* 48(1): 18-19
- Barsky, V.G.** (1998) *The Miraculous Monasteries of Athos: Vasillios Gregorovic Barsky* Translated by A. Tachiaos Thessaloniki: Reptime [first published in 1744]
- Bauman, Z.** (1998) 'Postmodern Religion?' in P. Heelas (Ed) *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, p.p.55-78,
- Bax, M.** (1983) 'US Catholics and THEM Catholics in Dutch Brabant: The Dialectics of a Religious Factional Process' in *Anthropological Quarterly*, (56)4: .167-78  
(1990) 'The Madonna of Medjugorje: Religious Rivalry and the Formation of a Devotional Movement in Yugoslavia' in *Anthropological Quarterly* (63)2: 63-75
- Bell, C.** (1997) *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions* New York: Oxford UP
- Bloch, M.** (1974) "Symbols, Songs, Dance and Features of Articulation" in *European Journal of Sociology* (15): 55-81  
(1989) *Ritual, History, and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology* London: Athlone  
(2002/1979) 'The Disconnection between Power and Rank as a Process' in M. Lambek (Ed) *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* Oxford: Blackwell p.p. 432-45
- Bloch, M. and Guggenheim** (1981) "Compadrazgo, Baptism and the Symbolism of a Second Birth" in *MAN* (16) 3: 376-86
- Bloch, M., and Parry, J.** (Eds) (1982) *Death and the Regeneration of Life* Cambridge UP
- Boissevain, J** (1979) 'Towards a social anthropology of the Mediterranean' in *Current Anthropology* (20): 81-93
- Bourdieu, P.** (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Cambridge: Cambridge UP
- Bryant, R.** (2002) 'The Purity of Spirit and the Power of Blood: A Comparative Perspective on Nation, Gender, and Kinship in Cyprus' in *RAI* 8: 509-530
- Campbell, J.** (1964) *Honour, Family, and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Cannell, F.** (2005) 'The Christianity of Anthropology' in *RAI* 11: 335-356  
(Ed) (2006) *The Anthropology of Christianity* Duke University Press  
(2007) 'How Does Ritual Matter?' in R. Astuti, J. Parry, and C. Stafford (Eds) *Questions of Anthropology* LSE Monograph, p.p. 105-136

- Caplan, P.** (Ed) (1996) *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* London: Routledge [first published in 1987]  
 'Introduction', p.p. 1-30, and 'Celibacy as a Solution? Mahatma Gandhi and Brachmacharya' p.p. 271-95
- Caravelli-Chames, A.** (1980) 'Bridge Between Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament Song as Communicative Event' in *Journal of American Folklore* (93): 129-157  
 (1982) 'The Song Beyond the Song: Aesthetics and Social Interaction in Greek Folksong' in *Journal of American Folklore* (95): 129-158
- Carrette, J.** (Ed) (1999) *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* Manchester UP  
 (2000) *Foucault and Religion Spiritual Corporeality and Political Spirituality* London: Routledge
- Carrithers, M.** (1983) *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: Anthropological and historical study* Delhi: Oxford UP
- Castells, M.** (1996) *The Information Age: Economy Society and Culture* Oxford: Blackwell  
 (2000) *The Rise Of Network Society 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* Oxford: Blackwell
- Chappell, J.** (2001) *An Ethnographic Study of Life in a Modern Benedictine Monastery* PhD thesis for the Department of Anthropology, London: University College
- Christou, P.** (2004) "The Monastic Life In the Eastern Orthodox Church" reprinted from *The Orthodox Ethos, Studies in orthodoxy Vol. 1* (Ed) Philippou, <http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts>
- Coleman, S.** (2008) 'The Abominations of Anthropology: Christianity, ethnographic taboos, and the meanings of 'science' in F. Pine, and J. De Pina-Cabral (Eds) *On the Margins of Religion* Oxford: Berghahn, p.p. 39-58
- Comaroffs J. and J.** (1991) *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* Vol. 1, Chicago, (1997) Vol. 2  
 (2000) "Millennial Capitalism: First thought s on a Second Coming" in *Public Culture* 12(2): 291-343
- Cornwall , A., and Lindisfarne, N.** (Eds) (1994) *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies* London: Routledge
- Cowan, J.** (1991) 'Going out for Coffee? Contesting the Grounds of Gendered Pleasures in Everyday Sociability' in Loizos and Papataxiarchis (Eds) *Contested Identities* New Jersey: Princeton UP, p.p180-202
- Crapanzano, V.** (2000) *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the pulpit to the bench* New York: New Press
- Crisbasan, S.** (1998) "Orthodox Christian Monasticism: Hesychasm" published at <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/1179/10151> [last visit November 2008]
- Csordas, T.** (1987) 'Genre, Motive, and Metaphor: Conditions for Creativity In Ritual Language' in *Cultural Anthropology* (2)4: 445-69  
 (1994) *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* Berkeley: University of California Press  
 (2002) *Body/ Meaning/ Healing* New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Dafis, S.** (1997) *Nature and the Natural Environment of Mount Athos* Thessaloniki: 'Thessaloniki 97 Capitol of Culture'
- Danforth, L., and Tsiaras, A.** (1982) *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Davis, J.** (1977) *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Douglas, M.** (1984) *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* London: Routledge and Kegan [first published in 1966]

- (1996) *Natural Symbols, Explorations in Cosmology*  
 NY: Routledge [first published in 1970]
- du Boulay, J.** (1974) *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* Oxford UP  
 (1984) 'The Blood: Symbolic Relationships between Descent, Marriage, Incest Prohibitions and Spiritual Kinship in Greece' in *MAN* (19): 533-556  
 (1986) 'Women – Images of their nature and destiny in rural Greece in J. Dubisch (Ed) *Gender and Power in rural Greece* Princeton University Press
- Dubisch, J.** (Ed) (1986) *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* Princeton UP  
 (1991) 'Gender, Kinship, and Religion: "Reconstructing" the Anthropology of Greece' in Loizos and Papataxiarchis (Eds) *Contested Identities*  
 New Jersey: Princeton UP, p.p. 29-46
- Dumont, L.** (1972) *Homo Hierarchicus: The Cast System and Its Implications*  
 London: Paladin
- Durkheim, E.** (1973) *On Morality and Society* (ed.) Bellah, R. University of Chicago  
 (1984) *The Division of Labour in Society*  
 New York: Free Press [first published in 1893]  
 (1995) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* translated by Karen E. Fields  
 New York: The Free Press [first published in 1912]
- Elder Sabbas of the Zealot Cell of St Nicolas** at  
<http://www.esfigmenou.com/Text%20Documents/A%20Letter%20of%20Resistance.htm>  
 (20/8/05)
- Eleseos [monk of Simonopetra] and Papagiannis T.** (1994) *Natural environment and monasticism: Preserving Tradition in the Holy Mount* Athens: Ghoulandri-Horn
- Engelke, M., and Tomlison, M.** (Eds) (2006) *The Limits of Meaning: Case studies in the anthropology of Christianity* New York: Berghahn
- Ephraim [Abbot of Vatopaidi]** (2001) 'Interview' in *Experience of Holy Athonite Fathers: Discussions In monasteries of Athos* (Ed.) Melinos, M. Athens: Melinos, p.p. 100-4, my translation from Greek  
 (2002) Abbot's speech at the Conference on 'Ecological Crisis and John's *Apocalypse*' in the University of Athens, December 2001, published in the magazine *Pemptousia* No8: 37-43
- Fedele, A., and Blanes R.** (Eds) (2011) *Encounters of Body and Soul in Contemporary Religious Practices: Anthropological reflections* Oxford: Berghahn
- Feuchtwang, S. and Ming, W.** (2001) *Grassroots Charisma: Four local leaders in China* London and NY: Routledge
- Filotheitis, E.** (2008) *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast Speleotis 1897-1959* Arizona: St. Anthony, my translation
- Forbess, A.** (2004) 'Halsuck, Mount Athos, and the Reconstruction of Monastic Life in Post-socialist Romania' in D. Shankland (Ed) *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878-1920* Istanbul: The Isis Press, p.p. 363-379  
 (2005) 'Democracy and Miracles: Political and Religious Agency in an orthodox Convent and Village of South Central Romania' PhD thesis for LSE
- Fortes, M.** (1970) *Time and Social Structure and other Essays* New York: Athlone  
 (1987) *Religion, Morality and the Person: essays on Tallensi religion* Cambridge UP
- Foucault, M.** (1977) *Discipline and Punish* London: Allen Lane  
 (1991) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Eds) G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf  
 (1988) 'Technologies of the Self' in L. Martin, H. Gutman, and P. Hutton (Eds) *Technologies of the Self* University of Massachusetts Press

- (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* translated by Alan Sheridan Harmondsworth: Penguin [first published in 1975]
- (1992) *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure* London: Penguin
- (1999) *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* selected by Jeremy R. Carrette (Ed) Manchester UP
- Friedman, J.** (1994) *Cultural Identity and Global Process* London: Sage
- Gailey, C.W.** (1998) 'Feminist Methods' in Russell Bernard (Ed) *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* NY and UK: Altamira Press, p.p. 203-233
- Geertz, C.** (1975) *The Interpretation of Cultures* London: Hutchinson
- Gell, A.** (1998) *Art and Agency: An Anthropological theory* Oxford: Calderon Press
- (2001) *The Anthropology of Time* Oxford: Berg [first published in 1992]
- Gillet, Lev** [Archimandrite] (1987) *The Jesus Prayer* NY: St' Vladimir's Seminar Press
- Gilmore, D.** (Ed) (1987) *Honour, Shame, and the Unity of the Mediterranean* A Special Publication of the *American Anthropological Association* (no22)
- (1990) *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* Newhaven: Yale UP
- Goddard, V.** (1994) 'From the Mediterranean to Europe: Honour, Kinship, and Gender' in (Eds) Goddard, Shore and Llobera, p.p. 57-92, Oxford: Berg
- (1996a) 'Women's Sexuality and Group Identity in Naples' in Caplan (ed), p.p.166-192
- (1996b) *Gender, Family and Work in Naples* Oxford: Berg
- (2000) (Ed) *Gender, Agency and Change: Anthropological Perspectives* London: Routledge
- Goffman, E.** (2006) *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* Lightning Source Inc [first published in 1959]
- Goldman, H.** (1991) *Max Weber and Thomas Mann: Calling and the shaping of the self* Berkeley: CUP
- Gombrich, R., and Obeyesekere, G.** (1988) *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* New Jersey: Princeton UP
- Hall, J.R.** (1997) 'Apocalypse At Jonestown' in A. Lehman A, and J. Myers (Eds) *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural. 4<sup>th</sup> edition* California: Mayfield, p,p, 353-64
- Hann, C., and Hermann, G.** (Ed) (2010) *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective* University of California Press
- Harding S.** (1987) 'Convicted by the Holy Spirit: the rhetoric of fundamentalist Baptist conversion in *American Ethnologist* 14(1): 167-181
- Harris, O.** (1991) 'Time and Difference in Anthropological Writing' in L. Nencel, and P. Pels (Eds.) *Constructing Knowledge, Authority and Critique in Social Science* London: Sage, p.p.145-61
- (1995) "Knowing the Past: Plural Identities and the antinomies of loss in Highland Bolivia" in Fardon, R (Ed) *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge* New York: Routledge, p.p.105-23
- (2007) Comment on Robbins's article: 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture' in *Current Anthropology* 48(1): 22
- Heelas, P.** (1998) (ed) *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* Oxford: Blackwell
- Herzfeld, M.** (1980) 'Honour and Shame: Problems in the Comparative Analysis of Moral Systems' in *MAN* (15): 339-351
- (1985) *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village* Princeton: Princeton UP
- (1987) *Anthropology Through the Looking Glass: Critical Ethnography In the Margins of Europe* Cambridge: University Press Cambridge University Press

- (1991) *A Place In History: Social and Monumental Time In A Cretan Town* Princeton University Press
- (1997) *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation State* New York: Routledge
- Hobsbawm, EJ and Ranger, T** (Eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge UP
- Holy Committee of Mount Athos** (eviction note to Esfigmenou, February 2003) *The Issue With the Monastery of Esfigmenou Pamphlet: The Truth of the Case of the Occupiers of Esfigmenou* Mount Athos: Karyes, my translation from Greek
- Huber, P.** (1968) *Athos: Miraculous Icons* Berne: Hallwag
- Internal Regulations of the Sacred Coenobitic Great Monastery of Vatopaidi (1990-2)** [photocopy offered by the monastery's secretary]
- Internal Regulations of the Skete of St Andrew (1992)** [photocopy offered by the monastery's secretary]
- Iossifides, M.** (1990) 'Sisters In Christ: Metaphors of Kinship Among Greek Nuns' PhD thesis for the Department of Anthropology at LSE
- (1991) 'Sisters in Christ: Metaphors of Kinship among Greek Nuns' in Loizos and Papataxiarchis (Eds) *Contested Identities* New Jersey: Princeton UP, p.p135-155
- Joseph the Vatopaidian** (1995) *Athonian Messages* Mount Athos: Vatopaidi, my translation
- (1998) *Praying Speeches* Mount Athos: Vatopaidi
- (1999) *Vatopaidian Teachings* Mount Athos: Vatopaidi
- (2002) *The Charismatic Subordinate Elder Ephraim Katounakiotis 1912-1998* Mount Athos: Vatopaidi
- (2002b) *Askesis: The Mother of Holy Blessing*, Vatopaidian Series No7, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition
- Jovchelovitch, S.** (2007) *Knowledge in Context: representations, community and culture* NY: Routledge
- Jung, C.G.** (1968a) *CW* Vol. 9 Part I: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968b) Part II: *AION* Translated by R. F. C. Hull
- (1969) Vol. 11 *Psychology and Religion* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Just, R.** (2000) *The Greek Island Cosmos: Kinship and Community of Meganisi* Santa Fe: School of American research press
- Kadas, S.** (1984) *The Holy Mount* Athens: Athens AE Publications
- Kapferer, B.** (1991) *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing In Sri Lanka* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press [first published in 1983]
- Karakasidou, A.** (1997) *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990* University of Chicago Press
- Katastatikos Hartis** (1979) 'Constitutional Map of Mount Athos of 1926' Mount Athos, my translation from Greek
- Keane, W.** (1997) 'Religious Language' in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 47-71
- Kirtatas, D.** (1994) *John's Apocalypse And The Seven Asian Churches* Athens: Alexandria
- La Fontaine, J.** (1982) 'Introduction' in Richards, A. *Chisungu*, xvii-xl
- (1985) *Initiation* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books
- Lambek, M.** (1992) 'Taboo as Cultural Practice Among Malagasy Speakers' In *MAN* (27)2: 245-66
- (Ed) (2002) *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Leach, ER** (2001) *Political Systems of Highland Burma* London and NY: Continuum [first published in 1954]
- (2004) 'Two Essays Concerning the Anthropological Representation of Time' in *Rethinking Anthropology* Oxford: Berg [first published in 1961], p.p. 124-136

- Loizos, P.** (1991) 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Person in Greek Culture' in *Contested Identities* (Eds) Loizos and Papataxiarchis New Jersey: Princeton UP, p.p.221-234
- (1994) 'A Broken Mirror: Masculine Sexuality in Greek Ethnography' in A. Cornwall and N. Lindisfarne (Eds) *Dislocating Masculinity* Princeton UP, p.p. 66-81
- Loizos, P., and Heady P.** (1999) *Conceiving Persons: Ethnographies of procreation, fertility, and growth* London and NJ: The Athlone Press
- Loizos, P. and Papataxiarchis, E. (eds.)** (1991) *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship In Modern Greece* Princeton, and particularly the 'Introduction'  
New Jersey: Princeton University Press
- Lossky, V.** (1957) *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*  
Cambridge: James Clarke and Co Lt
- Lukes, S.** (1977) *Emile Durkheim: his life and work: A Historical study*  
New York: Penguin
- Mantzariadis, G.** (1980) *The Holy Mount in Contemporary Society* Thessaloniki: EMS
- (1990) 'The Biological Non-Continuity of Monastic Life' in the records from the *National Monastic Conference, 18-20/4 1990*, I.M. Metamorphosis Publications
- (1994) *Empirical Theology in Ecology and Politics* Thessaloniki: Pournara
- (1995) "La Presence Reelle et Symbolique du Monachisme Athonite Dans La Vie De l' Eglise" in *Studia Monastica* Vol.37: 1 Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, p.p. 193-200
- (1997) *Orthodoxies Forum* Conference at the University of Munich
- (1999) *Sociology of Christianity* Thessaloniki: Pournara, my translation from Greek
- (2005) 'Athonite Monasticism at the Dawn of the Second Millennium'  
Source: <http://www.culture.gr/2/21/218/e21813.html> (18/09/2005)
- Mauss, M.** (1985) 'A Category of the Human Mind: the notion of person; the notion of self' in M. Carrithers, S. Collins, S. Lukes (Eds) *The Category of the Person*  
Cambridge UP, p.p. 1-25
- (2004) *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*  
London and New York: Routledge [first published in 1950]
- (2005) *Marcel Mauss: On Prayer* Translated in English by Susan Leslie  
New York: Durkheim Press/Berghan Books
- (2006) *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation* (Ed) N. Schlanger  
Oxford and NY: Berghahn
- Melinos, M.** (2001) (ed) *Experience of the Fathers: Conversations in the Monasteries of Mount Athos* Athens: Melinos, my translation from Greek
- Meyendorff, J.** (1974) *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*  
New York: St Vladimir's Seminar Pr.
- Mikragiannanos Nicephoros [priest-monk]** (1999) *Athos: Holy Mountain*  
Mount Athos: Little St. Anna Publications, my translation
- Morris, B.** (1987) *Anthropological Studies of Religion* Cambridge University Press
- (2006) *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction* Cambridge: Cambridge UP
- Moustakis, G** (1983) *The Birth of Christian-Fascism in Greece*, Athens: Kaktos
- Newman, P. and Boyd, D. (1982)** 'The Making of Men: Ritual and Meaning in Awa Male Initiation' in Gilbert Herdt (ed) *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea* Berkeley: University of California Press, p.p. 239-285
- Ortner, S.** (1989) *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*  
New Jersey: Princeton UP
- Otto, R.A.** (1958) *The Idea of the Holy* London: Oxford UP [first published in 1923]
- Padgug, R.** (1979) 'On Conceptualising Sexuality in History' in *Radical History Review* 20, spring/summer [special issue on sexuality]

- Paganopoulos, M.** (2006) 'Athonian Economy: Two Ways of Engaging with World Society'  
[ASA 2006] at <http://www.theasa.org/conferences/asa06/panels/panel11.htm>  
[http://www.ifip.dsg.ae/Docs/FinalPDF/Work%20In%20Progress/ifip\\_35\\_Tanasyuk%20&%20Avgerou.pdf](http://www.ifip.dsg.ae/Docs/FinalPDF/Work%20In%20Progress/ifip_35_Tanasyuk%20&%20Avgerou.pdf)
- (2007) 'Materializations of Faith' in de Klerk and Moffat (Eds) *Material Worlds* Cambridge Scholar Publications, pp 122-133
- (2009a) 'The concept of "Athonian economy" in the monastery of Vatopaidi' in the *Journal of Cultural Economy* Vol 2, Issue 3 (November 2009) 363 – 378  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a918289947?waited=0>  
[http://financialgreektragedy.blogspot.com/2010\\_12\\_01\\_archive.html](http://financialgreektragedy.blogspot.com/2010_12_01_archive.html)
- (2009b) 'The Nationalist Facade of Two Monasteries of Mount Athos'  
[https://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/hellenicObservatory/pdf/4th\\_%20Symposium/PAPERS\\_PPS/NATIONAL\\_REGIONAL\\_IDENTITY/PAGANOPOULOS.pdf](https://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/hellenicObservatory/pdf/4th_%20Symposium/PAPERS_PPS/NATIONAL_REGIONAL_IDENTITY/PAGANOPOULOS.pdf)
- Palamas, G.** (1974) *In Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* Translated by Meyendorff, J., 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, USA: St Vladimir's Seminar press
- Papachrysanthou, D.** (1992) *Athonian Monasticism: Principles and Organization* Athens: National Bank of Greece Publications, my translation from Greek
- Papaggelos, I** (1992: 242-254) 'Vineyard and Wine in Medieval Chalkidiki' in *History of Greek Wine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference Proceedings, 7-9 September 1990  
Athens: Cultural technical Foundation
- Papataxiarchis, E.** (1991) 'Friends of the Heart: Male Commensal Solidarity, Gender, and Kinship in Aegean Greece' in Loizos and Papataxiarchis (Eds) *Contested Identities* NJ: Princeton UP, p.p.156-179
- Parry, J.** (1986) 'The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the "Indian Gift"' in *MAN* 21:453-471
- Pavrides, E., and Hesser, J.** (1986) 'Women's Roles and House Form in Eressos, Greece' in Dubisch (Ed) Princeton UP, 68-96
- Payne, D.** (2006) *The Revival of Political Hesychasm in Greek Orthodox Thought* Idaho: Lexington
- Peristiany, J.G** (ed) (1966) *Honour and Shame: The Values of the Mediterranean Society* University of Chicago
- (1976) *Mediterranean Family Structures* (ed) Cambridge UP
- Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers** (Eds) (1996) *Honour and Grace in Anthropology* Cambridge UP
- Pilgrim's Guide to the Great and Holy Monastery of Vatopaidi*** (1993) Vatopaidi
- Pitt-Rivers, J.** (1966) 'Honour and Social Status' in Peristiany (Ed)  
University of Chicago, p.p. 19-78
- Porter Poole, FJ. (1982)** 'The Ritual Forging of Identity: Aspects of Person and Self in Bimin-Kuskusmin Male Initiation' in Gilbert Herdt (Ed) *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea* Berkeley: University of California Press, p.p. 99-154
- Radstone, S.** (2007) *The Sexual Politics of Time: confession, nostalgia, memory* New York: Routledge
- Rappaport, R.** (1999) *Ritual and Religion In the Making of Humanity* Cambridge UP
- (2002) 'Enactments of Meaning' in *A Reader In the Anthropology of Religion* (ed) Lambek, M, p.p.446-468, Oxford: Blackwell
- Richards, A.** (1982) *Chisungu: A girl's initiation among the Bemba of Zambia* London and NY: Tavistock [first published in 1956]
- Robbins J.** (2001) 'Secrecy and the sense of an Ending: Narrative, time and everyday millenarianism in Papua New Guinea and in Christian fundamentalism' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43: 525-551

- (2003) 'What is Christian? Notes toward an anthropology of Christianity' in *Religion* 33: 191-199
- (2007) 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity' in *Current Anthropology* 48(1): 5-18
- Rose, N.** (1989) *Governing the Soul: the shaping of the private self* London: Routledge
- Ross, E.** (1991) 'Diversities of Divine Presence: Women's Geography in the Christian Tradition' in Scott, J., and Simpson-Housley, P. (Eds) (1991) *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, p.p. 93-114, New York: Greenwood Press
- Rubin, G.** (1975) 'The Traffic of Women: Notes on the political economy of sex' in *Towards an Anthropology of Women* Reiter, R. (Ed) New York: Monthly Review Press
- Ruel, M.** (1982) 'Christians as Believers' in J. Davis (Ed) *Religious Organization and Religious Experience* London: Academic Press, p.p. 9-31
- Sahlins, M.** (1974) *Stone Age Economics* London: Tavistock Publications
- Salamon, D., and Stanton, B.** (1986) 'Introducing the *Nikokyra*: Ideality and Reality in Social Process' in Dubisch (Ed) Princeton UP, p.p. 97-120
- Sallnow, M.** (1981) 'Communitas Reconsidered' in *MAN* Vol.16, p.p.163-182
- Sarris, M.** (2000) 'Some Fundamental Organizing Concepts in a Greek Monastic Community on Mt Athos' PhD thesis for the Department of Anthropology LSE
- Schneider, J.** (1971) 'Of vigilance and virgins: honour, shame and access to resources in Mediterranean societies' in *Ethnology* 9: 1-24
- Seidler, V.** (1996) 'Reason, Desire, and Male Masculinity' in Pat Caplan *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* London and NY: Routledge, p.p.82-112
- Seremetakis, N.** (1991) *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* Chicago UP
- Sidiropoulos, G.** (2000) *Mount Athos: References to Anthropogeography* Athens: Kastanioti
- St Gregory of Sinai** (1951) *The Philokalia of the Heart* translated by E. Kaloubovsky and G. Palmer (Eds) London: Faber and Faber
- St John** (2005) *The Revelation of St John the Divine and The Book of Job* London: Penguin
- St John Climacus** *The Ladder of Paradise* (7<sup>th</sup> century AC)  
Translated by Moore, L. (1959) London: Faber and Faber
- St Nicodemos of the Holy Mount and St. Makarios of Corinth** *The Filokalia* at <http://www.archive.org/details/Philokalia-TheCompleteText> [last visit August 2011]
- Stewart, C.** (1991) *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* Princeton and NJ: Princeton UP
- Sutton, D.** (2000) *Memories Cast in Stone* Oxford: Berg
- Tambiah, S** (1968) 'The Magical Power of Words' in *MAN* 3: 175-208
- (1973) 'Form and Meaning of Magical Acts: A pov' in *Modes of Thought* (eds) Horton, R., and Finnegan, R. London: Faber and Faber, p.p. 199-229
- (1979) 'A Performative Approach to Ritual' in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65: 113-69
- (1985) *Culture Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* Cambridge
- (1990) *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* Cambridge UP
- Throsby, D.** (2001) *Economics and Culture* Cambridge UP
- Turner, V.** (1967) *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* London: Cornell
- (1974) *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* Cornell
- (1991/ 1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* Cornell

- Tzanelli, R.** (2008) *Nation Building and Identity in Europe: the dialogics of reciprocity* London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Van Gennep, A.** (1960) *The Rites of Passage* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul [first published in 1909]
- Verdon, M.** (1988) 'Virgins and Widows: European Kinship and Early Christianity' in *MAN* 23: 488-505
- Ware, K.** (1976) "Silence in Prayer: the Meaning of *Hesychia*" in (ed) Pennington, B. *One Yet Two in Cistercian Studies Series* 29: 22-47, Kalamazoo
- (1987) 'Foreword' in *The Jesus Prayer* by Gillet, p.p. 5-21
- Warner, RS** (1988) *New Wine in old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a small-town church* Berkeley: University of California
- Weber, M.** (1968) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology Vol. I-III* Trans. And ed. Roth, G, and Wittich, C. New York: Bedminster Press
- (2003) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* transl. by T. Parsons NY : Dover [first published in 1930]
- (2003) *General Economic History: Max Weber* translated by F. Knight (Ed) NY: Dover
- Weeks, J.** (1996) 'Questions of Identity' in Pat Caplan (Ed) *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* London and NY: Routledge, p.p. 31-51