The Monastery of Zelianos, the First Slavic Monastic Institution on Mount Athos

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According to the prevailing view the first Slavic monastery on the Holy Mountain was the Russian monastery of Xylourgou, an inventory list of which, drawn up in 1142, mentions the existence of forty-nine Russian books in its depository. The second monastery which seems to have accepted Slavs was the traditionally Bulgarian monastery of Zographou, whose abbot in 1163 signed a document of the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleemon in Slavic vernacular of a Bulgarian type. The monastery of Chilandar was taken over by the Serbs thirty-five years later, in 1198, when Saint Sabas and his father Stephan Nemanja received it officially from Alexios III Angelos and from the Protos of the Holy Mountain Gerasimos.


Nevertheless, it seems that the first Athonite monastery directly connected with persons of Slavic origin was founded a century earlier. In the eleventh century the sources mention the existence of a monastery named «ἡ μονὴ τοῦ Ζελιάνου». The name Zelianos is obviously Slavic, so we have to investigate the following problems: 1) the chronological sequence of the data about the existence of the monastery; 2) the changes in its property; 3) the locality of the foundation and 4) the origin of its name.

**Chronological sequence of the events**

1) 1033-1034. Zelianos

An act of sale dated to 1033-1034 reveals that the Athonite Monastery of Katzari possessed a piece of land called Zelianos’ place: Χριστόδουλος μοναχός και ηγούμενος μονής τοῦ Σωτήρος τῆς ἐπιλεγομένης τοῦ Κάτζαρι... ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ πνευματικὸς ἡμῶν πατὴρ κύρ 'Αντώνιος δέδωκεν τῷ μοναχῷ Ἂφραίμ τόπον ψυχικῆς αὐτοῦ ἔνεκεν σωτηρίας τὸ ἐπιλεγόμενον τοῦ Ζελιάνου. The passage provides us with no evidence that the place had the status of a monastery, but its periorismοs informs us that it consisted of some cells: καθώς οἱ μηλέαι καὶ τὰ κέλλια ἰστανται πρὸς μὲν τὸ δυτικὸν μέρος. Twenty lines further down Zelianos is mentioned for a second time: τὰ δὲ καταλειφθέντα τοπίτζια ἐπεὶ δεύδοσαν ἡ μονή τοῦ Κάτζαρι, κατέλιπον κάγω ἕφραίμ μοναχός Χριστόδουλος εἰς τὸ μέρος τοῦ Ζελιάνου διὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντολήν and this time the phrase εἰς τὸ μέρος τοῦ Ζελιάνου makes it clear that - ορθόδοξος κοινότης καὶ κεντρόφυγες


5. ΤΕΝΟΥΝΚΙ, Ακτίρ του Ρωσικού μοναστηρία, 10-17, No 2; Actes de Saint Pantéleémon, 31-35, No 2, l. 2-3 and 23-25.


7. Ibid., No 2, l. 39-41.
Zelianos was the name of a person who was implicated and participated in the contract described in the document. It remains uncertain whether Zelianos lived alone, or was accompanied by some disciples, but it should be stressed that if Zelianos really had any, this had to be declared, as it is declared about the Abbot of Katzari Christodoulos: καὶ ἐὰν ποτὲ καυρῷ ἄναψῃ λέγας περὶ τοῦ τοιούτου τόπου ὁ Ζελιάνος, ἵνα ἵσταμαι καὶ διεκδικώ καὶ καγώ ὁ μοναχὸς Χριστόδουλος καὶ οἱ κατ’ έμε μαθηταί καὶ διάδοχοι. So, the text of the document does not clarify if Zelianos was an abbot of a monastery, or a solitary hermit, and the only objection to this remark may be based on the plural of the word «cells» which presupposes collective settlement. Nonetheless, it is obvious that at the time of the contract Zelianos was not living on the land Anthony had assigned to Ephraim and consequently this land was not his only possession. This consideration is confirmed by the periorismos of the parcel which refers neither to a church, nor to a chapel. The conclusions one may draw from these data are two: 1) the place Zelianos lost in favour of the monk Ephraim was not his main residence, but a hermitage with adjacent farming terrain. 2) Zelianos was probably the legal representative, i. e. the abbot of a group of anchorites, because his property in the region consisted of at least two pieces of land and seems to have been larger than was usual for solitary hermits.

Therefore, notwithstanding the lack of direct evidence, we may assume that in 1033-1034 a monastery directed by a Slav named Zelianos was already functioning.

2) 1089. Zelianos’ monastery

In a document of 1089 the name of Zelianos appears clearly as a name of a monastery: διαφύουν δεξιά τὰ δόκαμα τοῦ Κάτταρη ἵπτο τῆς μονῆς τοῦ

8. Ibid., No 2, I. 41-43.
The text indicates that at this time the monastery of Zelianos was perceived as identical with the monastery of Katzari and that the term monastery was not in frequent use, since it is to be found only once, while in another three instances it is absent: 1) είς το άκρον τού αύτον ποταμού και τού κατερχομένου από το Ζελιάνου, 2) το φυάκιον τού Ζελιάνου, 3) κάτωθεν τού μύλωνος το Ζελιάνου. It seems that in 1089 the monastic institution founded by Zelianos at the beginning of the century was no longer independent and that the conventional term «monastery» was only a reminiscence of its former status. Therefore, the only conclusion one may draw from this data is that by the middle of the eleventh century the anchorite group of Zelianos was probably described as a monastery.

3) 1363. Zelianos’ place

Denise Papachryssanthou, editor of the Xenophon archive, suggests that it was the Russian monastery which inherited the territory once possessed by Zelianos. Nevertheless, the document of 1089 makes it clear that the monastery of Saint Panteleimon was not a direct heir to Zelianos’ domain, since in the late 11th century what was left of the monastery of Zelianos already belonged to Katzari. This monastery remained autonomous till 1363, when the Serbian Protos Dorotheos granted it to the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon. In 1363 the name of Zelianos appears again in an interpolated copy of an act of Dorotheos, concerning the donation of the monastery of Katzari to the Russians: είς τον φύακα φέοντα από το Ζελιάνου και Μακρυγένου. In this instance the name of Zelianos is simply a place-name in the vicinity of Katzari.

11. Π. Χρήστου, Το 'Αγιον 'Ορος. 'Αθωνική πολιτεία - Ιστορία, τέχνη, ζωή, Athens 1987, 61 and 65; Παπαχρύσανθος, op. cit., 244 and notes 297-298.
12. Actes de Xénophon, No 1, 1. 133-134.
13. Ibid., No 1, 1. 135.
14. Ibid., No 1, 1. 136.
15. Ibid., 7-9. The editor offers no opinion about Zelianos’ origin.
4) 1612. The Zelianos Monastery in a Slavic document

The monastery of Zelianos is mentioned again in 1612 in an unpublished Serbian act of the Xenophontos Monastery: οφελικτος θέκος δο οφιτελς Ζελιάνος σι ρεγχ δο καώδα. η ποινετη πρεβα θολα ις ρον πεδενίετε Ζελιάνος κε δυχοτιτη ου θρευδο...18. The term is again «the monastery of Zelianos» - οφιτελς Ζελιάνος, but this is not surprising, since the document is a compilation of older Greek acts. It summarises the sites where boundary marks (βούλαι, i.e. βοηθοί) of the Xenophontos monastery were placed and the passage δο οφιτελς Ζελιάνος σι ρεγχ δο καώδα corresponds directly to the act of 1089: τον Κάταρη ήτοι της μονής τον Ζελιάνου19. The name of the monastery is transliterated exactly as it was in the Greek original - Ζελιάνος (Zelanovy) and this fact indicates that the Serbian scribe was unaware of the Slavic origin of the name. Hence it appears that the place-name was already quite obsolete. The only objection to these conclusions can be based on the statement of the text that the first boundary mark of Xenophontos was set in the neighbourhood of Zelianos’ watermill: η ποινετη πρεβα θολα ις ρον πεδενίετε Ζελιάνος κε δυχοτιτη ου θρευδο. The passage corresponds to the act of 1089 (είς το άκρον της ράχεως κατόθεν τον μυλόνος τον Ζελιάνου20), but not so completely as in the first case. The re-arrangement of the text makes it clear that the compiler knew the exact site of the mill, so it is probable that the name of Zelianos was not forgotten until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, it is certain that the Serbian document reproduces the name mechanically and consequently contains no data about any further development of Zelianos’ foundation.

Therefore, the only conclusion one may draw from points 3 and 4 is that first hand evidence of the existence of Zelianos’ monastery disappears before the year 1100.

18. «Near the great river not far from the monastery of Zelianos, i.e., not far from Katzari. The first sign is situated right under Zelianos’ watermill and climbs upwards to the mountain crest» (my translation).
Changes in the property

We have no information about Zelianos’ early domain, since the only piece of land described by the document of 1033-1034 is the one Zelianos lost in favour of the monk Ephraim. It was situated on a hill and its boundaries coincided with the streams forming the natural borders of the hill to the east and to the west: καί ἕστιν ὁ περιόρισμός αὐτοῦ ὁπεῖτος καθὼς αἱ μηλέαι καὶ τὰ κελλία ἑστανται πρὸς μὲν τὸ δυτικὸν μέρος ρυάκην χρηματίζων δρόμοις καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατολικὸν μέρος ὁπεῖτον ρυάκην, τὸ δὲ διαμέσου μεῖζον ρυακίτζιν, ἀνέρχεται μέχρι τοῦ ῥαχόνος ἀναμεταξὺ τῶν δύο ρυακίτζων, ἵνα ἔχει αὐτὸ καθὼς καὶ τὸ δυσκοιμία αὐτοῦ περίμεχε21. The only valuable thing on this terrain were some apple trees and cells in its western part and the lack of other cultivation confirms the description of the place as a hermitage (τόπον ψυχικής αὔτοῦ ένεκεν σωτηρίας22). No neighbours are mentioned, so the exact locality of the land remains unknown.

It seems that at this time Zelianos had some connections with the monastery of Katzari23, because the Abbot of Katzari Christodoulos stresses that his spiritual father, Anthony, had assigned to the monk Ephraim a piece of land which belonged to Zelianos. In 1089 there was a monastery of Saint Ephraim in the vicinity of the monasteries of Katzari and Zelianos24, so a conjecture can be made that it was founded on the land formerly owned by Zelianos. Forty years earlier, in 991 and in 996, Anthony appears as Katzari’s Abbot in two documents of the Great Lavra25 and it is probable that in 1033-1034 he was still alive. The way in which Christodoulos acts, demonstrates that Zelianos was dependent on the decisions of Anthony and one may suggest that Zelianos was Anthony’s disciple. Nevertheless, there is an obvious differentiation between the part of Zelianos (εἰς τὸ μέρος τοῦ Ζελιάνου26) and the part of Christodoulos (καὶ κατ’ ἑμὲν ὁ μοναχὸς Χριστόδουλος καὶ οἱ κατ’ ἑμὲν

22. Cf. note 5.
24. Actes de Xénophon, No 1, 1. 128.
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μαθηταὶ καὶ διάδοχοι 27), so the interpretation we propose is that both Zelianos and Christodoulos were Anthony’s disciples, but it was Christodoulos who was elected to be Katzari’s Abbot, whereas Zelianos probably seceded from the monastery, retaining the usufruct of some lands which belonged to it. Such an explanation is supported by the opinion of the editors of the document, P. Lemerle and G. Dagron, who believe that Anthony’s conscience was not clear with regard to Zelianos’ land 28. As they point out, the phrases τα γαρ δόξαντα των πατέρων ολ θείοι νόμοι διακελεύονται ολ παιδείς άντέρειν ου δύνανται 29 and τα δὲ καταλείψαντα τοπίτζια ἀπερ ἐδέσποζεν ή μονή τοῦ Κάτζαρι, κατέλυπον κάγω ο μοναχός Χριστόδουλος είς τὸ μέρος τοῦ Ζελιάνου διὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντολήν 30 indicate that Zelianos disagreed with the abuse of his rights. It seems that Christodoulos and Anthony feared that his protest against the donation of his land might damage the monk Ephraim and the contract they were trying to sign with the Abbot of Saint Tryphon, so they decided to recompense him with a piece of abandoned land possessed by the monastery of Katzari. This land is described as τοπίτζια; unfortunately we dispose no further information about it. Though the relations between Anthony and Zelianos cannot be clarified in detail because of the lack of precise data, we can assume that it was Zelianos’ occupation of Katzari’s land which gave rise to the latent conflict described in the document.

The act of 1089 concerns a terrain the Abbot of Katzari had bestowed up on the monastery of Xenophon: διέχεται ώς πρὸς δύσιν κρατῶν τὸ αὐτὸ ρυάκιον ἀνωθεν τῶν Ἀγίων Ἁπόστολων καταντά εἰς τὸν ποταμόν κρατῶν τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμόν κατέρχεται εἰς τὴν μίξιν τοῦ αὐτοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ τοῦ κατερχομένου ἀπὸ τοῦ Ζελιάνου ἀντικρύ τοῦ μύλους τοῦ κυροῦ Διονυσίου, στρέφεται πρὸς ἀνατολάς κρατῶν τὸ ρυάκιον τοῦ Ζελιάνου ἀνέχεται δὴν δεξιά τὸ ξυλοκοπεῖον τῆς μονῆς τοῦ Βαρναβίτη καὶ ἀποδίδει εἰς τὸ ἄκρον τῆς ράχεως κάτωθεν τοῦ μύλους τοῦ Ζελιάνου, ἐνθα καὶ ἠπέκτει 31. This time the name of Zelianos is connected with a watermill, a river.

27. Cf. note 8.
28. Actes de Saint Pantéléemôn, 32.
29. Ibid., No 2, l. 28-29.
31. Actes de Xénophon, no 1, l. 120-122 and 132-136.
and a stream in the vicinity of the Barnabitze’s monastery. It seems that the river and the stream formed the south and the west boundary of Zelianos’ land.

The basic conclusion one may draw from these data is that in the second half of the eleventh century the monastery of Zelianos was probably a self-sufficient economic unit.

The document of 1363 informs us that the place of Zelianos lay to the north of Katzari: ἔξερχεται τὸ μονοστάτιν ἀπὸ τοῦ Κάτζαρη καί κατέρχεται τὸ μονοστάτιν μικρὸν κάτωθεν, στρέφεται δεξιά πρὸς βόρειον μέρος κατόφορα ὁρθῶς εἰς τὸν χώκα ήξοντα ἀπὸ τοῦ Ζελιάνου καί Μακρυγένους. This fact makes it clear that in the middle of the 14th century the Athonites were still aware that the place-names Katzari and Zelianou were not completely identical.

Locality of the foundation

As already pointed out, the monastery of Zelianos was located in the vicinity of Katzari. The sources contain no direct indications about the place where the two foundations were built, but the later Russian descriptions of Saint Panteleemon monastery point out that in 1766 the land of Katzari was used for the establishment of the Xenophontos skete.

G. Smyrnakes identifies the monastery of Katzari with some ruins he saw near the stream of Chrysorrares, not far from the monastery of Pantokrator, but the data we have already commented on do not agree with this conjecture. More acceptable seems to be the information of Papachryssanthou, who declares that the modern place-name Katzari is to be found 1.5 km to the north-east of the Old Rossikon Monastery. These references make clear that the monasteries of Katzari and Zelianos were situated on the western slope of the peninsula, between the Old Rossikon and Xenophon. The only study of Mount Athos’ topography is that of Papazotos and this locates the monastery

32. Cf. note 17.
34. Γ. ΣΜΥΡΝΑΚΗΣ, Τό Ἅγιον Ὀρός, Athens 1903 (reprinted in Karyes 1988), 678.
35. Actes de Xénophon, 9.
of Katzari in the rear part of an «ancient vineyard» of the Russian monastery. Papazotos’ map offers no details, but elucidates the fact that the place-names Katzari and Barnabitze are to be found on the two banks of the stream which flows from Makrygenes towards the new monastery of Saint Panteleemon. The passage κατόφορα ορθώς είς τὸν ύπακον έξεντα από τοῦ Ζελιάνου και Μακρυγένους indicates that Zelianos’ foundation was situated on the same stream, so one may suggest that it lay higher than the monastery of Katzari and not far from the modern road connecting Karyes with Xenophonotos and Vatopedi, where even today the visitor may see the cross of Makrygenes.

 Origin of the name

As it was often the practice in Athos’ early settlements, the Zelianos’ monastery was named after its founder, who lived during the first half of the 11th century.

There is no direct evidence of the language spoken by Zelianos and his congregation, but the name is undoubtedly of Slavic origin. The common genitive form Ζελιάνου derives from the Slavic genitive Желгановъ (Željanov), or Желидновъ (Želianov) with the nominative form Желгаиъ (Željan). This nominative is attested as a Serbian place-name in a chrysobull Stephan Uroš I issued for Chilandar between 1254 and 1264: ου χρυσον γορα πολλ χελιναι κ αν μεγαλαι κακο κ υτη πραγε βυλαι. χελαι αν τορανε κον ρηλαινται. σελο τρηνυαι κ αν μεγαλαι, κακο κ υτη πραγε βυλαι.38

The name Željan seems to derive from the Slavic root жеЛа(Želja), apparent in the word Желети (Želëti) and meaning, according to Franz von

37. Cf. note 17.
38. «Near the Black Mountain with half the land and with the same land boundaries it previously had. Land near the sea, the narrow pass of Zelian, the village Trînova with the boundaries it had before» (my translation); cf. Actes de Chilandar II. Actes slaves, ed. by L. Petit and B. Korablyev, Viz.Vrem., Priloženje I k XIX-mu tomu, Sankt-Petersburg 1915 (reprinted in Amsterdam 1975), 382, No 4, l. 159-161.
Miklosich, ἐπιθυμεῖν, θέλειν or πενθεῖν. It can be found even today in rural districts of Bulgaria and Serbia. If the etymology proposed is right, the name Željan corresponds to the Greek name Πόθος or Ποθητός.

The documents make it clear that Zelianos was not an eminent person, so he may have originated from the Chalkidiki peninsula or even from Ierissos, where the presence of Bulgarian Slavs is attested by some early documents of the Monasteries of Iviron (982) and the Lavra (989). Three centuries later, in 1341, a praktikon describing the possessions of Iviron in the village Radolibos on the Strymon mentions the paroikos of the name Zelian. The majority of the paroikoi registered in the document are Slavs.


44. Actes d’Iviron IV, ed. by J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, Denise Papachrysanthou, Vassiliki Kravari avec la collaboration d’Hélène Métrévéli, Paris 1995, AA XIX, No 87 (A), l. 215, No 87 (B), l. 238.
so we may conclude that at this time the name Желганъ was in common use among the Bulgarian Slavs in the vicinity of the Chalkidiki peninsula and that its transliteration in Greek as Ζελιάνος was a current one. The monastery of Zelianos can be therefore described as a Bulgarian foundation.

The essential difference between the monastery of Zelianou and the later Slavic institutions on Athos is that the former began its existence by taking the name of its founder, a Slav, who could well have been a Byzantine subject. It was a Slavic monastic institution from its inception, while all the other monasteries which gradually took on a Slavic character were originally established as Greek monastic institutions. The former was a minor habitation named after its founder, while the others were major habitations, which at a certain moment were taken over by the Slavs. This is evidence, therefore, of the fact that the Slavic population of the Balkan peninsula participated, though on a limited scale, in the life of the monastic community on Athos in the early 11th century. Nevertheless, we must stress that the Athonites never paid any attention to Zelianos’ origin and always perceived him not as a foreigner, but as an integral part of their society.

Cyril Pavlikianov, Η μονή τού Ζελιάνου: Τό πρώτο σλαβικό μοναστικό καθίδρυμα στό Αγιον Όρος

Τό πρώτο δθωνικό μονόδρομο άμεσα σχετιζόμενο με άτομα σλαβικής καταγωγής χρονολογείται στά μέσα του ένδεκατού αιώνος, δηλαδή στις πηγές έμφανιστές ως σλαβικές εστίες, έγινε στο νόμο ζελιάνου. Η δθωνική και αυτής τής πρώτης μονής, μεταξύ της μονής τού Ζελιάνου και τόνομα Ζελιάνου, έγινε αναμφίβολα σλαβικής προέλευσης. Τό καθεστώς διαφορά μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου και τόνομα Ζελιάνου, που διατηρήθηκαν ως σλαβικές εστίες, μέχρι σήμερα, έγινε στο νόμο ζελιάνου, όπου ιδρύτης τής άθωνικής, άθωνικής και αυτής της μονής, άθωνικής και αυτής της μονής, άθωνικής και αυτής της μονής, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου, μεταξύ τής μονής τού Ζελιάνου.