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

PAVLIKIANOV Cyril
http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.822

To cite this article:

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 depository¹. 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 Panteleimon in Slavic vernacular of a Bulgarian type². 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 Gerasimos³.


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»⁴. 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 μονῆς τοῦ Σωτήρος τῆς ἐπιλεγομένης τοῦ Κάτζαρι... ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ πνευματικὸς ἡμῶν πατὴρ κύρ 'Αντώνιος δέδωκεν τῷ μοναχῷ Ἐφραίμ τόπον ψυχικῆς αὐτοῦ ἔνεκεν σωτηρίας τὸ ἐπιλεγόμενον τοῦ Ζελιάνου⁶. The passage provides us with no evidence that the place had the status of a monastery, but its *periorismos* informs us that it consisted of some cells: καθώς αἱ μηλέαι καὶ τὰ κελλία Ἰστανται προς μὲν τὸ δυτικόν μέρος⁶. Twenty lines further down Zelianos is mentioned for a second time: τὰ δὲ κατάλειφθέντα τοπίτζια ἅπερ ἔδεσποζεν ἡ μονὴ τοῦ Κάτζαρι, κατέλιπον κάγω μοναχὸς Χριστόδουλος εἰς τὸ μέρος τοῦ Ζελιάνου διὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔντολην⁷ and this time the phrase εἰς τὸ μέρος τοῦ Ζελιάνου makes it clear that


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: καί ἐὰν ποτὲ καυρῷ ἀναφῇ λέγας περὶ τοῦ τοιοῦτον τόπου ὁ Ζελιάνος, Ἰνά Ἰσταμαι καὶ διεκδικώ καγὼ ὃ μοναχός Χριστόδουλος καί οί κατ’ ἐμὲ μαθηταί καί 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: διαμορφών δεξιά τὰ δόκαια τοῦ Κάταρη ἦτοι τῆς μονῆς τοῦ

8. Ibid., No 2, l. 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 τοϋ αύτοϋ ποταμοϋ και τοϋ κατερχομένου από τοϋ Ζελιάνου, 2) το ψυράκιον τοϋ Ζελιάνου, 3) κάτωθεν του μύλωνος τοϋ 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 τοϋ Ζελιάνου και Μακρυγένου.

11. Π. ΧΡΗΣΤΟΥ, Τὸ Ἁγιον Ὁρος. Ἀθωνικὴ πολιτεία - Ἰστορία, τέχνη, ζωή, Athens 1987, 61 and 65; ΠΑΠΑΧΡΥΣΑΝΘΟΥ, 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: овители гелдновш си речь до къзра. и починет първа вогла ис под вълденице зелановы и въходить ог бръдо...18. The term is again «the monastery of Zelianos» - овители зелановы, but this is not surprising, since the document is a compilation of older Greek acts. It summarises the sites where boundary marks (вогла, i. e. βούλαι) of the Xenophontos monastery were placed and the passage до овителм гелдиови си речь до къзра corresponds directly to the act of 1089: τού Κάτζαρη ήτοι της μονής τού Ζελιάνου19. The name of the monastery is transliterated exactly as it was in the Greek original - Ζελιανος (Zelianovy) 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: и починет първа вогла ис под вълденице зелановы и въходить ог бръдо. The passage corresponds to the act of 1089 (είς το άκρον της ράχεως κάτωθεν τού μύλωνος τού 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: κατά ἡπτάντα πρὸς μὲν τὸ δυτικὸν μέρος ρυάκην χρηματίζων διμοίως καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἀνατολικόν μέρος ἑτερον ρυάκιτζιν, τὸ δὲ διαμέσου ραχόνην καθώς ἀνέρχεται μέχρι τοῦ ράχονος ἀναμεταξύ τῶν δύο ρυακιτζίων, ἵνα ἔχει αὐτὸ καθώς καὶ τὸ δυσώματα αὐτοῦ περίέχει[21]. 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 αὐτοῦ ἐνεκεν σωτηρίας[22]). 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 Katzari[23], 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 Zelianos[24], 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 Lavra[25] 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 Ζελιάνου[26]) and the part of Christodoulos (καὶ τὰ μοναχὸς Χριστόδουλος καὶ οἱ κατ’ ἐμὲ

22. Cf. note 5.
24. Actes de Xénophon, No 1, 1. 128.
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 usufructuation 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. As they point out, the phrases τα γαρ δόξαντα των πατέρων οι θείοι νόμοι διακελεύονται οι παιδείς άντερειν ου δύνανται and τα δέ καταλειφθέντα τοπίτζια δπερ έδέσποζεν ή μονή τοϋ Κάτζαρι, κατέληυν ήη μοναχός Χριστόδουλος είς το μέρος τοϋ Ζελιάνου δια την τοϋ Θεού έντολην 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: διέρχεται ως προς δύσιν κρατών τό αυτό ρυάκιον άνωθεν των ‘Αγίων ‘Αποστόλων καταντά είς τον ποταμόν κρατών τον αυτόν ποταμόν κατέρχεται είς την μίξιν τοϋ αύτοϋ πόταμου καί τοϋ κατερχομένου από του Ζελιάνου αντικρύ τοϋ μύλωνος τοϋ Διονυσίου, στρέφεται προς ανατολάς καί ανέρχεται έων δεξιά τό ξυλοκοπειον τής μονής τοϋ Βαρναβίτζη καί αποδίδει είς τό άκρον τής ράχεως κάτωθεν τοϋ μύλωνος τοϋ Ζελιάνου, Ινθα καί Θεον. This time the name of Zelianos is connected with a watermill, a river.

27. Cf. note 8.
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: εξέρχεται τό μονοπάτιν από τοϋ Κάτζαρη και κατέρχεται τό μονοπάτιν μικρόν κάτωθεν, στρέφεται δεξιά προς βόρειον μέρος κατόρθωσιν δρόθις εἰς τόν ύπαιξα δέοντα από τού 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 Panteleleemon 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 Chrysorarres, 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 Xenophontos. The only study of Mount Athos’ topography is that of Papazotos and this locates the monastery

32. Cf. note 17.
34. Γ. ΣΜΥΡΝΑΚΗΣ, Τό "Αγιον Όρος, 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 δρόθος εἰς τὸν ὑκάκα ἐνεύτα ἀπὸ τοῦ Ζελιάνου καὶ Μακρυγένου 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 Желановъ (Željanov), or Желиановъ (Želianov) with the nominative form Желань (Želian). This nominative is attested as a Serbian place-name in a chrysobull Stephan Uroš I issued for Chilandar between 1254 and 1264: ο’ υρείον γορία πολύ ζηλαία καὶ κε μεγάλη καθι θα πράγε υπελα. Ζηλία η μορί οποία χειλανίς. κελό τρίννωα καὶ κε μεγάλης, καθι θα πράγε υπελα. 38

The name Željan seems to derive from the Slavic root Жел-(zhelj), apparent in the word Желатн (zeljati) 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 Trinova 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, 1. 159-161.
Miklosich, έπιθυμείν, θέλειν or πενθειν. It can be found even today in rural districts of Bulgaria and Serbia. If the etymology proposed is right, the name Żeljan 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 Μιχαήλ ό υιός τοϋ Ζελιάνου. The majority of the paroikoi registered in the document are Slavs.


44. Actes d'Iviron IV, ed. by J. Lefort, N. Oikonomidès, Denise Papa-Chryssanthou, Vassiliki Kravari avec la collaboration d'Hélène Métréveli, 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 του Ζελιάνου: Το πρώτο σλαβικό μοναστικό καθίδρυμα στο "Αγιον Όρος"

Το πρώτο θεονόμο μονόδρομο άμεσα σχετιζόμενο με άτομα σλαβικής καταγωγής χρονολογείται στα μέσα του ένδεκατου αιώνος, όταν στις πηγές εμφανίζεται η μονή του Ζελιάνου. Το όνομα Ζελιάνος είναι άναμφίβολα σλαβικής προέλευσης. Η ειδικοποίηση διαφορά μεταξύ της μονής του Ζελιάνου και των καθιδρυμάτων, που διατηρήθηκαν ως σλαβικές εστίες μέχρι σήμερα, εξελάται στο γεγονός ότι η πρώτη έγινε γνωστή στον Άθωνα με το όνομα του ιδρυτή της, ο οποίος κάλλιστα θα μπορούσε να κατάγεται και από τα εδάφη της αυτοκρατορίας. Αποτελούσε, δηλαδή, σλαβικό μοναστικό κέντρο ύστερο από την ίδρυσή της, ένω διά τα υπόλοιπα μοναστήρια, που βαθμιαία περιήλθαν στά χέρια σλάβων μοναχών, ίδρυθηκαν ως Ελληνόφωνα. Συνεπώς, ήδη από τον 1α Αιώνα, οι σλαβικοί πληθυσμοί των Βαλκανίων μετείχαν στην ζωή της θεονόμης μοναστικής κοινότητος.