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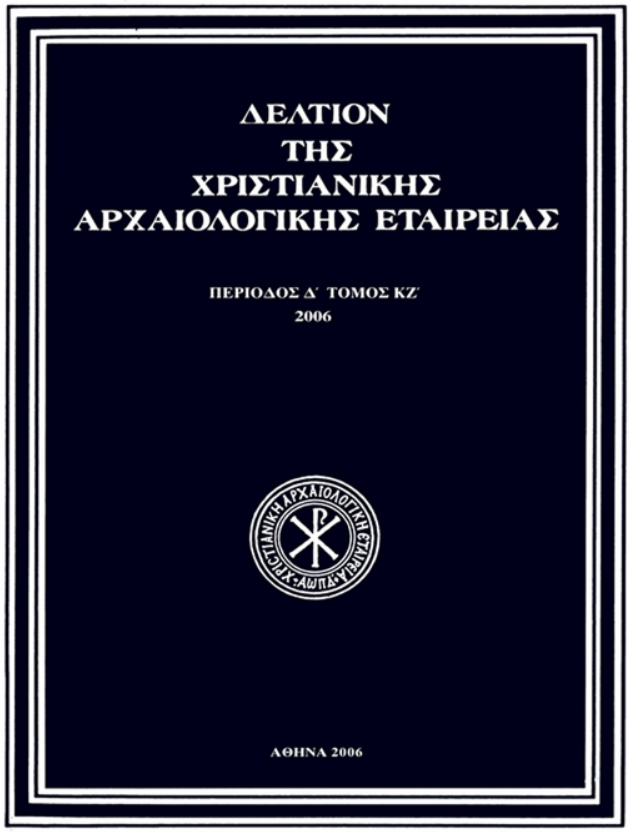


**Μοναχές στη βυζαντινή ύπαιθρο**

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# Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside

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# NUNS IN THE BYZANTINE COUNTRYSIDE

In the last two decades a number of articles have been written about female monasticism in Byzantium. A wide range of sources, including monastic foundation documents, preserved buildings, and funerary effigies, enables us to draw a fairly accurate image of the nun's spiritual life, to reconstruct (potentially) her architectural setting, and to view a deliberately idealized portrait of her physical appearance[1]. An examination of the written sources, both primary and secondary, has led scholars to conclude that female monasticism, in Byzantium, was primarily an urban phenomenon. In many ways, the study of known works of art has favored the same conclusion.

The notion that Byzantine nuns were largely urban creatures, however, rests on the type of sources that have been available to date. Anthony Bryer, Alice-Mary Talbot and Dorothy Abrahamse, for example, have used Raymond Janin's studies of ecclesiastical foundations in Byzantium's large population centers and holy mountains to pinpoint the locations of monasteries and convents within the empire[2]. After compiling statistics from Janin's *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins* (Paris 1975), Talbot, for one, concluded that there was a "startling paucity of nunneries outside the capital, only 17 over a period of eleven centuries"[3]. At the same time, she acknowledged that Janin's compilation, published posthumously and in unfinished form (limited to the regions of Bithynia, Hellespont, Mt. Latros, Mt. Galesion, Trebizond, Athens and Thessalonike), offered an incomplete set of data for statistical analysis. Accidents of survival of monastic foundation documents, the *typika*, may also have affected our perception of the relative numbers of urban and provincial nunneries, since of the six surviving rules for nunneries five are for convents in Constantinople, and only one is for a rural convent, the female monastery founded by Neilos Damilas at Baionaia in Crete. As a result several explanations have been offered to explain the alleged paucity of rural nuns and nunneries: the prohibition or discouragement of convents at the celebrated monastic centers of the provinces (such as the holy mountains); concerns for women's safety in the isolated countryside, especially in coastal regions during times of piracy; and circumstances of foundation, which favored the construction or renovation of urban monasteries that were closely aligned with aristocratic or imperial sponsorship[4]. These conclusions and explanations have passed into the literature with little question.

The same point about sources and methodology may be raised with regard to the examination of the artistic evidence. The known buildings, manuscripts, and minor works of art are largely the products of the upper aristocracy in Byzantium's cities. They have the additional virtue of being well published, especially in western languages. But, what picture would emerge if we examined a different set of data – data, for example, generated by those who lived in the Byzantine countryside? In writing a book on the Byzantine village, Gerstel has noted that the mention or representation of nuns was surprisingly frequent in churches and docu-

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[1] Investigation of the Constantinopolitan nunnery of Constantine Lips, for example, would allow for a synthetic approach to urban nunneries. Preserved "sources" include the foundation document (J. Thomas and A. Hero, eds., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, III, Washington, D.C. 2000, 1254-86); the church (T. Macridy, "The Monastery of Lips and the Burials of the Palaeologi", *DOP* 18 (1964), 269-72; C. Mango and E. Hawkins, "Additional notes on the monastery of Lips", *DOP* 18 (1964), 299-315); and a relief tomb plaque, most likely from the Lips monastery, representing Maria Palaiologina and the Virgin (T. Papamastorakis, "Επιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατά τή μέση καί ὕστερη βυζαντινή περίοδο", *ΔΧΑΕ* ΙΘ' (1996-1997), 301-2.

[2] A. Bryer, "The Late Byzantine Monastery in Town and Country", in *The Church in Town and Country*, ed. D. Baker, Oxford 1979, 220; A.-M. Talbot, "A Comparison of the Monastic Experience of Byzantine Men and Women", *GOThR* 30 (1985), 2 (repr. eadem, *Women and Religious Life in Byzantium,* Aldershot, Eng., 2001, XII); D. Abrahamse, "Women's Monasticism in the Middle Byzantine Period: Problems and Prospects", *ByzF* 9 (1985), 36.

[3] Talbot, "A Comparison," 2.

[4] Ibid., 4.

ments found in or concerned with late Byzantine villages[5]. This new visibility of nuns in village contexts suggests that our view of locales of monasticism, particularly in the case of women, needs to be reconsidered. In this paper we propose to present some new evidence for female monasticism in rural and provincial areas and suggest avenues for further investigation[6].

One of the most significant research tools that has become available for study of the late Byzantine era in recent years is the *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, published in Vienna in twelve volumes between 1976 and 1996. This massive compilation provides a comprehensive directory to all individuals from the Palaiologan era known from sources published to date. Since its invaluable indices include listing by profession, it is a relatively simple matter to identify all the nuns recorded in the *PLP*, just over 250 in number[7]. Checking of all entries on nuns reveals that approximately 100 of them have some connection with the Byzantine countryside, either as nuns residing in rural monasteries, as supporters of the decorative program or restoration of rural churches, or as owners of rural properties (which were often granted to monasteries in exchange for prayers for the donor's soul). Thanks to the *PLP* ten more nunneries can be added to the seventeen listed in Janin's *Grands centres*, which had omitted such important regions as Cyprus and Crete[8].

Among the most useful written sources are monastic archives documenting the sale or donation of properties to monasteries. The Acts of Athos, for example, mention nuns from relatively humble backgrounds who were involved in land transactions, some of them recording properties in villages near the Holy Mountain or further afield[9]. The acts of the Vazelon monastery near Trebizond enumerate numerous cases in which nuns ceded their lands to this institution, most often to secure commemorative prayers for themselves and their parents. The nun Anysia Papagenakopoulos, for example, in a will dated December 13, 1344, ceded to the monastery fields in the areas of Choulianos, Chortokope, and elsewhere, along with threshing floors[10]. Other important evidence comes from 14th-century marginal notes in a copy of the Synaxarion of Constantinople owned by the monastery ton Hiereon near Paphos, Cyprus, documenting the death dates of its monks and nuns, as well as donors to the monastery (including nuns from unspecified convents), for the purposes of proper commemoration[11]. Of the one hundred names of rural nuns known from the Palaiologan era, twenty come from this document alone[12], demonstrating how accidents of preservation can skew statistics when we are dealing with a restricted data set.

Mentions of nuns owning rural properties can also be found in non-ecclesiastical documents. Property inventories or *praktika* record cases where nuns owned fields in villages. The *praktikon* of 1264 for Latin-held properties on the island of Kephalonia, for example, mentions a field belonging to the nun Mastrangelena[13].

Much caution is necessary in the analysis and use of the above data, however, since in most cases only the most limited information is available about the personal circumstances and place of residence of the nun. Ownership of rural properties did not necessarily mean that the nun lived in a monastery in the countryside. Wealthy urban nuns such as Irene Choumnaina, the founder of the Constantinopolitan

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[5] S. Gerstel, "Rural Nuns in Byzantium", *BSCAbstr* 30, 2004, 30-31.

[6] Nikolaos Drandakes first published several of the churches mentioned in this article. It is fitting, therefore, that a paper concerned with the Byzantine countryside be dedicated to his memory. His passion for his research and his generosity to younger scholars will be long remembered.

[7] Listings were checked of the terms Äbtissin, Nonne and synadelphe.

[8] See *PLP* 74, 996, 5667, 7213, 7214, 21351, 23351, 25156, 29503 and 91058.

[9] Several cases are discussed in A.-M. Talbot, "Women and Mount Athos," in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, Papers from the Twenty-Eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1994, eds A. Bryer and M. Cunningham, Aldershot, Eng., 1996, 67-79.

[10] T. Ouspensky and V. Benechevitch, *Actes de Vazélon : Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de la propriété rurale et monastique à Byzance aux XIII-XV siècles,* Leningrad 1927, 57-59. See also no. 7 (Kataphyge Skoularopoulos, 1482), no. 78 (Anysia Kaliave, 1291), no. 123 (Makrina Kalieropoulos, 1415), no. 185 (Makaria Sagmataras, 15th c.).

[11] J. Darrouzès, "Un obituaire chypriote : Le Parisinus Graecus 1588", *ΚυπρΣπ* 15 (1951), 25-62; C.N. Constantinides and R. Browning, *Dated Greek Manuscripts from Cyprus to the Year 1570,* Washington, D.C. - Nicosia 1993, 74-81.

[12] It should be noted that the *PLP* identifies most of these twenty nuns as belonging to the monastery ton Hiereon, which was evidently a double monastery, although the evidence is inconclusive, and some are certainly nuns from other nearby convents. Constantinides and Browning assume that the monastery ton Hiereon is exclusively male. The marginal notes warrant detailed further study for evidence on rural economy and acts of personal piety.

[13] The item is recorded in the *praktikon* of the village Avlon. See T. Tzannetatou, *Πρακτικόν τῆς Λατινικῆς Ἐπισκοπῆς Κεφαλληνίας τοῦ 1264 καί ἡ Ἐπιτομή αὐτοῦ*, Athens 1965, 33, line 58.

monastery of Christ Philanthropos, possessed extensive landholdings in Macedonia and Thrace, including fields and houses[14]. Theodora Synadene left properties, including lands and vineyards, to her convent of Good Hope[15]. In these cases, Constantinopolitan women who had taken monastic vows were able to maintain control, even from an urban convent, of family properties that had formed part of their dowry. These texts demonstrate that even after taking the habit some aristocratic nuns retained properties far from the capital. They may have had the ability and opportunity to conduct their own economic affairs, but it is more likely that they used bailiffs as agents.

Nuns like Anysia and Mastrangelena must have lived in more modest circumstances, and are more likely to have resided in the vicinity of their landholdings. The same is true of the nuns mentioned in the synaxarion of the ton Hiereon monastery; several are closely identified with their villages (e.g., "the nun Athanasia from the village of Phalia", "the nun Theodosia Skammene from the village of Pentalea"), and their gifts of vineyards, oxen and a heifer suggest rural residence. Some of these nuns had been married with children. For such rural nuns rules for monastic seclusion may have been suspended to enable the supervision of agricultural properties, or male members of the family may have represented their interests in many economic transactions. According to the early-fifteenth-century *typikon* for the rural convent of the Virgin Pantanassa at Baionaia, Crete, a nun was permitted to speak with relatives, "either with her own brother or child, or with a stranger ... in the presence of the superior"[16].

Artistic sources offer a more complete view of female monasticism far from the city, linking the women to specific settings. As is well known, in the late Byzantine period members of extended families or collective villagers undertook the construction and decoration of modest churches that were intended for life-cycle rituals and perhaps, as well, for burials.

*Fig. 1. Anydri, Crete. Church of St George. Dedicatory inscription (photo: Gerstel).*

Donors' inscriptions in several churches of this type, especially in the Mani and on Crete, include the names of nuns who may have been related to the principal donors[17]. Among the names of donors listed in the church of St George in Anydri in western Crete, dated 1323, is that of the nun Pelagia (Fig. 1)[18]. The name of the nun Kallinike is the last recorded among those of twenty-seven villagers and their families who donated small sums of money, properties, or gifts in kind towards the construction of the chapel of the Archangel Michael in Polemitas, Mani, dated 1278 (Fig. 2)[19]. Of the twenty-seven named villagers, Kallinike is one of the few for whom no gift is recorded. Her inclusion in this list may reflect her familial relationship to the other donors rather than a financial commitment to the construction and decoration of this extremely modest church. Interestingly, a portrait of St Kallinike, a rarely depicted saint, is found in the adjacent church of St Nicholas, suggesting that this nun or another woman in the village might have influenced the decoration of a second church perhaps used by the same family. Saint

[14] See A. Laiou, "Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women", *ByzF* 9 (1985), 97, 98.

[15] Ibid., 99.

[16] A.-M. Talbot, trans., "Neilos Damilas: Testament and Typikon of Neilos Damilas for the Convent of the Mother of God Pantanassa at Baionaia on Crete", in J. Thomas and A. Hero, eds., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, IV, Washington, DC 2000, 1471.

[17] See, for example, the nuns Kataphyge and Eugenia, listed with the names of other sponsors, in the church of the Savior in Vlithias, Selino, Crete (1358-59) (I. Spatharakis, *Dated Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, Leiden 2001, 106-7; G. Gerola, *Monumenti veneti nell'isola di Creta*, vol. IV, Venice 1932, 438-49); the nuns Eupraxia and Kataphyge in the church of St George, Galata in Hagia Triada, Crete (Gerola, op.cit., 537); the nun Katerina in the fifteenth-century church of the Virgin at Skafidhia, Selino, Crete (Gerola, op.cit., 448). The word "nun," referring to a donor, is included in a partially preserved inscription in the church of St John in Hagios Basileios, Pediada, Crete (1291) (S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece*, VeröffTIB 5, Vienna 1992, 93, fig. 76).

[18] For the inscription in the church of St George, Anydri, Selino, Chania, Crete (1323), see Gerola, op.cit., 443-44.

[19] For the text of the inscription, see Kalopissi-Verti, op.cit., 71-4, fig. 37; N. Drandakes, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες τῆς Μέσα Μάνης*, Athens 1995, 148-9.

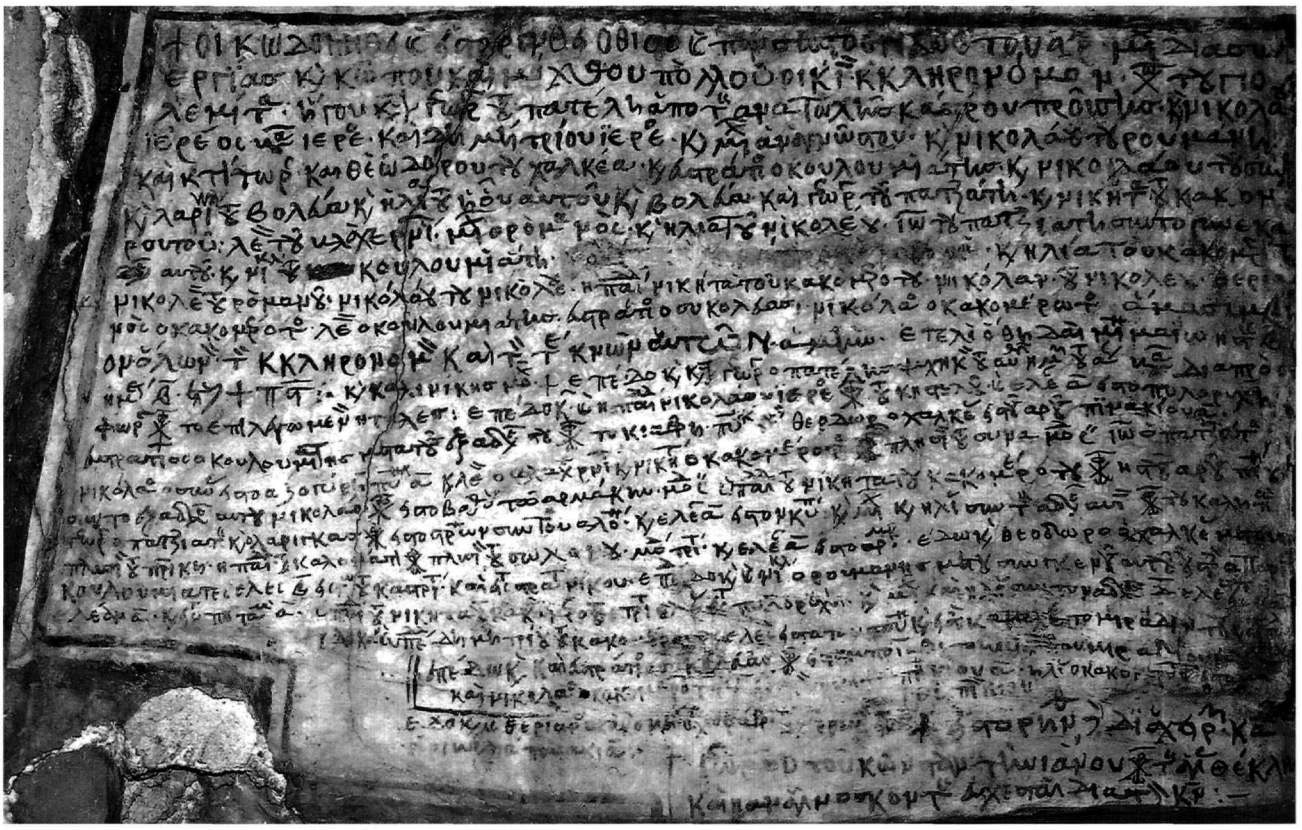

*Fig. 2. Polemitas, Mani. Chapel of the Archangel Michael. Dedicatory inscription (photo: Gerstel).*

Kallinike is represented along with the portraits of five other female saints, including Saint Nonna, the mother of Gregory Nazianzenos. Nonna is also rarely represented in Byzantine churches, but the literal understanding of her name, which in colloquial late Greek means nun, might suggest a further tie to the female monastic listed among the village donors[20].

Inscriptions in other churches include the names of nuns related by kinship to donors. In the church of St George at Longanikos, Lakonia (1374/75), an inscription over the main entrance names Basilios Kourtesis, priest and *nomikos*, his mother, the nun Martha (probably a widow), his wife Anna and their children, and his sister, the nun Magdalene (Fig. 3)[21]. According to an inscription over the west door of the small, single-aisled church of St Marina in the village of Mournes, Crete, the donors were the members of the Koudoumniakos family – three brothers and their mother, probably a widow, named as the nun Eugenia[22]. It is difficult to determine, based on these texts, whether these nuns were directly involved in church patronage. In all likelihood, their names are included in the lists so that they could have been remembered in the blessings accrued to their family through church foundation.

Some church decoration, however, seems to imply a more active connection between nuns and small churches of the

[20] The other saints are Barbara, Kyriake, Anastasia, and Thekla. Thekla and Kyriake are given prominent places in the program as full-length portraits at floor level. Thekla is represented on the north pier of the church (opposite St Basil) holding a book and raising a hand in an intercessional gesture. St Kyriake is represented adjacent to an equestrian St George in a blind arch on the north wall.

[21] O. Chassoura, *Les peintures murales byzantines des églises de Longanikos, Laconie,* Athens 2002, 19.

[22] Gerola, op.cit., 490-91; J. Albani, «Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Μαρίνας στόν Μουρνέ τῆς Κρήτης. Ἕνας ἄγνωστος βιογραφικός κύκλος τῆς ἁγίας Μαρίνας», *ΔΧΑΕ* ΙΖ΄ (1993-1994), 211-22. Albani dates the church to ca. 1300.

*Fig. 3. Longanikos, Lakonia. Church of St George. Dedicatory inscription (photo: Gerstel).*

Byzantine countryside. The cave church of Ai-Giannakis is located within the cliffs bordering a river valley near the modern-day town of Hagioi Anargyroi (Zoupena), several miles from Geraki. The church is comprised of several chambers separated by masonry walls. Nikolaos Drandakes suggested that the southernmost chamber, accessible only through a narrow door, might have been the living quarters of a hermit, while the adjacent room, decorated with wall paintings, may have been used as a chapel[23]. At the end of the thirteenth century, paintings were added to the outer chamber, particularly to its east wall, and several new images were painted within the inner chamber, supplementing the eleventh-century program[24]. The new paintings fundamentally changed the devotional scheme of the chapel by adding female and military saints to a church that had been initially decorated with monastic imagery. Two centuries after the building had been constructed as a hermitage the church may have retained a sacred reputation and may have attracted pilgrims who commissioned new paintings to suit their own devotional needs. These local pilgrims may have come from the surrounding towns and villages, including Geraki, Kallone, and Chrysapha[25]. Two women, a nun and a layperson, are among the late medieval supplicants who are remembered in this shrine. Adjacent to the image of Basil is the inscription: "Remember, Lord, the soul of your servant, the nun Euphrosyne Glyka. Forgive her on the Day of Judg-

[23] Drandakes reports that he saw a skull in a depression in the innermost chamber; given the poor context, however, it would be impossible to date this artifact. N. Drandakes, «Ὁ σπηλαιώδης ναός τοῦ Ἁι-Γιαννάκη στή Ζούπενα», *ΔΧΑΕ* ΙΓ΄ (1985-1986), 79. The eleventh-century images include the Deesis (in the apse of the inner chamber), the Archangel Michael, St Basil, St Nicholas, St John Chrysostom, St Euthymios and St John Kalyvites. Drandakes links the hermitage and its decoration to the rise in monasticism in the region following the preaching of St Nikon in the late tenth century.

[24] The thirteeth-century images of the inner chamber include an equestrian saint (George?), St Christopher, St Catherine, St Demetrios, an enthroned saint (Matthew?); those in the outer chamber include: Zachariah, Basil, Elizabeth and the infant John, Kyriake, and the Deesis. Drandakes, op.cit. (n. 23), 88-91.

[25] Graffiti of 1713 and 1719 between the portraits of Basil and Zachariah name the priest Panagiotakis Sigelas from the nearby village of Perpene (modern Kallone). Drandakes, op.cit. (n. 23), 81, n. 3. Candles continue to be lit within the chapel.

ment" (Fig. 4)[26]. The name of Kale Alype, a laywoman, is inscribed by a different hand in an invocation adjacent to the portrait of St Catherine in the church's inner chamber.

Other rural churches contain portraits of nuns along with supplicatory inscriptions. The thirteenth-century frescoes of the church of St Theodore in Ano Poula, outside the village of Kepoula, Mani, include the representation of a female donor, today barely discernible, in the east blind arch of the south wall adjacent to the image of St Theodore Teron. A lengthy inscription, today only partially visible, gives her identity as the "closely resembling nun Kyriake, daughter of Leo"[27]. It does not appear that Kyriake's portrait is funerary but supplicatory, i.e., the likeness of a woman invested in church construction.

The church of Hagia Triada outside of the village of Psinthos, Rhodes, dated 1407/8, was built and decorated through the expenditures of the nun Kataphyge Allexenas and her children. Kataphyge is mentioned in the inscription as the primary donor[28]. Dressed in monastic habit, Kataphyge offers a model of the church to Christ (Fig. 5). She is represented on a white background surrounded by flowering plants, a sign that she was deceased at the time in which the church was decorated[29]. A second portrait of a nun, inscribed "Μάρθα(ς) μων(α)χεῖς τῆς Ἀρχοτοκεφαλήνης" is found in the church of the Savior in Kakodiki, Crete (Fig. 6)[30]. Martha is dressed in a light brown robe with a brown cloak covering her shoulders and brown cap on her head. Her crossed arms and her placement against a white background and landscape suggest that hers, too, was a funerary portrait. Another Martha is represented kneeling at the feet of the enthroned Virgin in the church of the Koimesis at Alikambos, Crete, dated 1315. An inscription accompany-

*Fig. 4. Hagioi Anargyroi (Zoupena), Lakonia. Cave church of Ai-Giannakis. St Basil with adjacent supplicatory inscription (after Drandakes, ΔΧΑΕ ΙΓ' (1985-1986), 88).*

[26] +Μνήστη(τι) [K](ύρι)ε την ψυχη της δουλην σου Εφροσινης μοναχής την Γλήκα (καί) σιχορισον αυτή εν ημερα κρισεος. Drandakes, op.cit. (n. 23), 81; *PLP* 93351.

[27] The nun is inscribed [Ἡ] πα[ρό]μηος Κυρι[ακὴ] μο(να)χ(ή). See N. B. Drandakes, «Ὁ Ταξιάρχης τῆς Χαρούδας καί ἡ κτητορική ἐπιγραφή του», *ΛακΣπ* 1 (1972), 287-8 where other examples of use of the epithet παρόμοιος are given; Kalopissi-Verti, op.cit. (n. 17), 106; N.B. Drandakes, «Ἔρευναι εἰς Μάνην», *ΠΑΕ* 1974, 127. Double portraits of nuns, such as those in the Kariye Çamii, are labeled Ἡ αὐτὴ μοναχὴ followed by the name of the deceased. It may be that the word παρόμοιος is used in a similar fashion, i.e., validating the idealized image of the nun as a rendering of the actual person. See, for example, P. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami, I: Historical Introduction and Description of the Mosaics and Frescoes,* New York 1966, 279-80 (Tomb D).

[28] I. Christophorake, «Χορηγικές μαρτυρίες στους ναούς της μεσαιωνικής Ρόδου (1204-1522)», in *Ρόδος. 2400 χρόνια*, Athens 2000, 460-1, pl. 181a.

[29] A deceased nun, Euphrosyne Drakon(topoula), is also named in a painted inscription in the church of St John, Stilos, Crete. The date of the inscription is either 1271 or 1280. Gerola, op.cit. (n. 17), 428.

[30] Gerola, op.cit. (n. 17), vol. II, Venice 1932, 330, pl. 9.2.

*Fig. 5. Psinthos, Rhodes. Church of Hagia Triada. Portrait of Kataphyge Allexenas (photo: Ioanna Bitha).*

*Fig. 6. Kakodiki, Crete. Church of the Savior. Portrait of Martha Archotokephalene (after Gerola, Monumenti, II, pl. 9.2).*

ing the small figure asks the Lord to "remember the servant of God, Martha the nun" (Fig. 7). The representation of Martha and the adjacent inscription suggests that the nun was buried in close proximity to the church.

Many of the nuns named in the inscriptions appear to be widows – this is the case in churches at Longanikos (Lakonia), Mournes (Crete), and Psinthos (Rhodes). In these cases, Martha, Eugenia, and Kataphyge are mentioned together with their children and it is possible that, upon taking vows, they funded the construction of small chapels to ensure the salvation of family members outside the monastery.

The majority of the names of the female monastics from rural settings derive from those of female saints who lived in the early Christian centuries: Kallinike, Euphrosyne, Eugenia,

*Fig. 7. Alikambos, Crete. Church of the Koimesis. Portrait of the nun Martha (photo: Gerstel).*

Katerina, Pelagia, Thekla, and Eupraxia[31]. In the late period, according to church inscriptions, nuns also took the names of Martha and Mary Magdalene, the companions of Christ[32]. Both of these names are included, for example, in the donor's inscription in the church of St George in Longanikos, Lakonia. A number of the names, through their literal meaning, refer to monastic virtues or characteristics. These include Kataphyge (refuge), Eugenia (nobility), Eupraxia (success), and Sophrosyne (propriety). The adoption of names that were literally associated with specific traits was common in village communities, as has been demonstrated by Angeliki Laiou[33], but the selection of such names also followed broader patterns of monastic naming[34].

Architectural or archaeological traces of female monasteries in rural settings are few or have yet to be identified. Several, however, are described in the documentary sources. Nicholas Maliasenos and his wife, Anna Komnene Doukaina Maliasene, for example, founded the rural convent of St John the Baptist on Mount Pelion in 1272[35]. According to surviving documents, the female monastery entered by Anna, who took the name of Anthousa, was endowed with vineyards, fields, and fruit trees. However, there is no information on whether the nuns who entered the convent came from the surrounding villages or from a greater distance.

Information about the rural nunnery of St John the Baptist at Baionaia, Crete, is derived from the foundation document written by Neilos Damilas ca. 1400[36]. There is, unfortunately, no accounting of the numbers of nuns living in the convent, yet the text reveals that the community could welcome mothers and daughters (providing that they were older than ten years of age) and women who were separated from their husbands (if her husband agreed to the separation). In addition to praying, the nuns were engaged in handiwork and labored in the garden or vineyard. Expulsion from the convent was warranted if a nun was "found to be a procuress, or if she is wanton, a troublemaker, or malicious, and is not willing to make amends"[37]. Interestingly, this list parallels the sins of women represented in Late Byzantine scenes of Last Judgment in village contexts, demonstrating that within the walls of the convent, women were subject to

[31] The names of nuns appear in the following churches: St Michael the Archangel, Polemitas (Kallinike); Ai-Giannakis, Hagioi Anargyroi (Zoupena), Lakonia (Euphrosyne); Savior, Vlithias, Crete; St Marina, Mournes, Crete (Eugenia); Panagia, Prodromi, Crete (Katerina); Panagia, Sekremiana, Kandanos, Crete (Pelagia); St Theodore, Mertes, Crete (Thekla); St George, Hagia Triada, Crete (Eupraxia). A couple of these names are missing from *PLP*.

[32] Both names are mentioned in the donors' inscription in St George, Longanikos, Lakonia. For citations of the names based on written sources, see *PLP* 16866-16874, where the nine listings all refer to nuns named Martha, and *PLP* 16023.

[33] A. Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire,* Princeton 1977, 108-41.

[34] For a study of monastic names, including those of nuns, see A.-M. Talbot and S. McGrath, "Monastic Onomastics" (in press).

[35] N. Giannopoulos, «Αἱ παρά τήν Δημητριάδα βυζαντιναί μοναί», *EEBΣ* 1 (1924), 210-33. For a fragment from Anna's sarcophagus, which bears an inscription with Anna's secular and monastic names, see N.J. Giannopoulos, "Les constructions byzantines de la région de Démétrias (Thessalie)", *BCH* 44 (1920), 195.

[36] Talbot, op.cit. (n. 16), 1462-1482.

[37] Ibid., 1477.

many of the same rules of behavior that governed life in agrarian settlements[38].

The substantial numbers of rural nuns documented in monastic archives and recorded in donor inscriptions and portraits in rural churches suggest that female monasteries or at least nuns could be found in the Byzantine countryside just as in urban settings. Their traces have proved elusive for several reasons. First of all we must acknowledge that the names and any physical remains of small rural convents may simply have disappeared. Secondly, many women termed μοναχή, especially those with families, may have taken monastic vows on their deathbeds, a common practice. This may have been the case with Kataphyge Allexenas and Martha from Kakodiki, already deceased when their donor inscriptions were painted. Another possibility is that some of these rural nuns – especially widows – took quasi-monastic vows and lived in a type of house monastery[39]. Such patterns are known in the medieval West where the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the growth of the Beguines, a *Frauenbewegung* that attracted women from a rural background who took vows of celibacy and simplicity of life and, most importantly were not cloistered[40]. It is unknown whether or not Byzantine village women lived together in group homes, but it is a question worth asking. Such small settings would be extremely difficult to trace archaeologically and would have largely escaped notice in the written sources. We thus conclude that one should remain open to the possibility of the existence of other kinds of smaller and less formalized monastic groupings of women in the later Byzantine countryside.

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[38] S. Gerstel, "The Sins of the Farmer: Illustrating Village Life (and Death) in Medieval Byzantium", in J. Contreni and S. Casciani, eds., *Word, Image, Number: Communication in the Middle Ages*, Florence 2002, 205-17.

[39] The one reference we have found to such a house monastery describes a very different situation in Constantinople. In 1352 a certain Thiniatissa (*PLP* 7738) was accused of having taken monastic vows but then remaining in a private house which she transformed into a bordello.

[40] B. McGinn, "Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of Vernacular Theology", in idem, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete*, New York 1994, 1-14, esp. 2. McGinn cites Matthew Paris' description of the Beguines in the early 1240's as "nec adhuc ullo claustro contenti." See Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* IV, ed. H. Richards Luard, London 1877, 278. See also P. Galloway, "Discreet and Devout Maidens: Women's Involvement in Beguine Communities in Northern France, 1200-1500", in D. Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in Their Communities,* Cardiff 1997, 92-115. We thank J. Douglas Farquhar for these references.

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# ΜΟΝΑΧΕΣ ΣΤΗ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗ ΥΠΑΙΘΡΟ

Θέματα που αναφέρονται στις μοναχές στο Βυζάντιο έχουν ως επίκεντρο κατά παράδοση τις μονές των αστικών κέντρων. Οι σωζόμενες γραπτές και καλλιτεχνικές πηγές, προπαντός όσες συνδέονται με τα μεγάλα αυτοκρατορικά γυναικεία μοναστήρια, εκ της φύσεώς τους οδήγησαν τους μελετητές στο να παρουσιάσουν μοναχές αριστοκρατικής καταγωγής –κυρίως τις μορφωμένες και όσες ήταν γνωστές ως χορηγοί έργων τέχνης και οικοδομημάτων. Στο παρόν άρθρο έχουν συγκεντρωθεί για πρώτη φορά οι λιγοστές μαρτυρίες για μοναχές που ζούσαν στην ύπαιθρο.

Παρά το διαφορετικό χώρο δράσης, οι μοναχές των αστικών κέντρων και της υπαίθρου παρουσιάζουν αρκετά κοινά χαρακτηριστικά. Για παράδειγμα, αρκετές από τις μοναχές της υπαίθρου, τα ονόματα των οποίων αναφέρονται σε επιγραφές ναών και εκκλησιαστικών εγγράφων, φαίνεται ότι ήταν χήρες που έδωσαν τον όρκο του μοναχισμού σε προχωρημένη ηλικία.

Τα ονόματα που λαμβάνουν οι μοναχές στην πόλη και στην ύπαιθρο ακολουθούν επίσης παρόμοια πρότυπα, καθώς πολλές παίρνουν ονόματα μαρτύρων των πρώτων χριστιανικών αιώνων. Ωστόσο, κατά τη σύγκριση μεταξύ γυναικών μοναχών στα αστικά κέντρα και στην ύπαιθρο αντίστοιχα, διαφαίνεται μία διαφορά. Αν και στην ύπαιθρο της βυζαντινής αυτοκρατορίας διασώζονται μόνο λίγα αρχιτεκτονικά ή αρχαιολογικά κατάλοιπα γυναικείων μονών, η σπανιότητα αυτή υλικών μαρτυριών ίσως μπορεί να δικαιολογηθεί από το ότι ορισμένες μοναχές της υπαίθρου ζούσαν πιθανώς ομαδικά σε άτυπα οικοδομήματα, φαινόμενο που έχει μεν επισημανθεί στη Δύση, δεν έχει όμως ακόμη διερευνηθεί στη βυζαντινή επικράτεια.