

# The Monasteries of Athos and Chalkidiki (8th-11th Centuries): A Pioneering Front?<sup>1</sup>

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Following the re-establishment of the Cult of Images in 843, the Bithynian Olympus (present-day Uludağ, Turkey) became the site of so many monastic settlements that it was all but impossible for the ascetics there to find true solitude. Therefore, they set their sights on Mount Athos in Chalkidiki, and began to settle there from the ninth century onwards. It was a turbulent time for the region, and as a result of complex political developments the land was abandoned and reverted to the state (*klasma* lands), with the tax revenues benefitting central authorities rather than local communities. The economic growth of the ninth century thus explains the conflicts over the lands around Mount Athos between the peasant population, the monasteries founded in the Chalkidiki region, and the monks on Athos itself. These conflicts were exacerbated by the foundation of the large institutions of Xeropotamou, Lavra and Iviron – the latter two of which also enjoyed the status of »imperial monasteries«. The extant documentation allows us to better understand both the attempts by the monastery to appropriate the lands and the resistance to these attempts by the village communities, who were particularly concerned with retaining grazing lands for their animals. Interestingly, the officials and judges in charge of the region seemed to have favoured the village communities in these conflicts.

*Keywords: Monasticism, Chalkidiki, Athos, village communities, Byzantine taxation.*

The Slavic invasions left the region south of Thessaloniki, and in particular Chalkidiki, in a state of semi-desertion. Gradually, farmers and monasteries in the region handed over this area, which is relatively favourable to agriculture, not without conflict. The establishment of monasticism on the Athonite peninsula was to become an important factor in the development of this region, especially after the middle of the 10th century and the foundation of large communities on the holy mountain, such as Xèropotamou, Lavra and Iviron. On both sides, as the conflicts that have occurred show, a real concern for territorial conquest has emerged.

After the official end of the Iconoclast Controversy in 843, the Bithynian Olympus (present-day Uludağ, Turkey), which was thought to have been the centre of resistance to the iconoclast movement, was all but overrun by a multitude of new monastic and eremitic foundations. This prompted the ascetics, who lived there in the hope of finding isolation

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This article was translated from the French by Rutger Kramer with the assistance of Ella Kirsh.

1 I am referring to a concept familiar to geographers, but also often used to describe territorial conquests (such as those in the American West), without taking into account the fact that my article deals with relatively modest territorial gains.

from society, to go looking for a new place of retreat. For reasons that will be explained below, they found what they were looking for in Chalkidiki in present-day Greece, and more specifically on the most mountainous and inhospitable of the three peninsulas that jut forth into the Aegean Sea: Mount Athos.

According to legend, the first of these hermits on Athos was called Peter, but there is no proof he ever really existed.<sup>2</sup> That means that the first credible source on this process is the *Life of Euthymius the Younger*.<sup>3</sup> The protagonist of this hagiography, born in 823/824, fled from his former life as a married soldier-peasant and settled on the Bithynian Olympus in 841. Once there, he heard rumours of Mount Athos, a new El Dorado for those seeking to escape secular life. And so it was that around the year 860, Euthymius, together with one disciple, left for Mount Athos, which he reached after a long journey that involved a number of ascetic adventures, such as a brief period as a stylite in Thessaloniki or the foundation of several monasteries on Chalkidiki. He retired alone to the island of Hiéra, in the shadow of the peninsula of Athos, where he died in 898. There does not seem to have been a coenobitic settlement yet in the period described. Rather, several more or less isolated eremitic colonies dotted the landscape, each harbouring a small group of anchorites. Euthymius, who had been ordained a deacon, had undoubtedly received a mission from the archbishop of Thessaloniki to hold services for the hermit who already lived on the mountain, and maybe even to organise them.<sup>4</sup>

The region had suffered greatly under the Avar and especially Slavic invasions of the 6th and 7th centuries, followed by Bulgarian raids in the 9th and 10th centuries. The settlement of Slavic peoples in Chalkidiki may be seen in the many toponyms and names of villages even today, as well as in the volume of Slavic names in the peasant lists maintained by the Athonite monks.<sup>5</sup> The available source material does not allow us, however, to establish with certainty the moment when the Byzantine administration took control of the regions to the southeast of Thessaloniki, between that city and the river Strymon. The first mention of a *strategos* in Thessaloniki dates to 836, but an 824 letter by Michael II to Louis the Pious shows that there were already *themes* established for defensive purposes (but also to facilitate the reconquest of the area).<sup>6</sup> Perhaps we even have to go back to the age of Nikephoros I (802-811) to find the

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- 2 An older *vita* (BHG 1505) attributed to a certain bishop Nicholas, has been edited in Lake, *Early Days*, 18-39, and later also by Binon, *La vie*, 41-53. This dossier has been reassessed by Papachryssanthou, *La vie ancienne*, 19-61. For the version by the fourteenth-century theologian Grégory Palamas (BHG 1506), see Rigo, *La Vita di Pietro*, 177-190.
  - 3 *Vie d'Euthyme le Jeune* (BHG 655), ed. Petit, 168-205. This *vita* was written by a disciple of the saint, whom he tonsured himself around the year 875; it was therefore composed shortly after the death of the saint. The oldest extant manuscript dates to the eleventh century. Euthymius: PMBZ 1851.
  - 4 Papachryssanthou, *La vie de saint Euthyme le Jeune*, 225-45. The same author gives us a handy summary of the *Life* in *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 18 and 22-29.
  - 5 F. Brunet, *Sur l'hellénisation*, 235-265; Lefort, *Toponymie et anthroponymie*, 169-170. More generally, see Lemerle, *Invasions et migrations*.
  - 6 *Concilia*, 2.2, ed. Werminghoff, 477, l. 10-11. We only have the Latin translation of this text, dated to 10th April, second indiction, which gives »*Thraciae, Macedoniae, Thessaloniae et circumiacentibus Sclaviniis*« as the regions whose leaders and armies were supposed to recognise the authority of the Empire. The *theme* of Thracia was given a *strategos* from 679-680 onwards (Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 349), whereas the *theme* of Macedonia already had one between 789 and 802 (*ibid.*); it seems logical that the *theme* of Thessaloniki would have existed in 824 as well, surrounded by *Sclaveni*, that is the Slavic population, which remained more or less independent.

origins of this phenomenon,<sup>7</sup> but by and large it seems clear that Byzantine institutions were established in the region in the first half of the 9th century – and wherever Byzantine institutions appear, taxation would follow. And yet, a fiscal system had already been in place during the reign of Nikephoros I.<sup>8</sup> We catch a glimpse of his policies through the entry for 809/810 in the famous *Chronographia* by Theophanes. The historian was not a fan of Nikephoros, who had usurped the throne of his idol, Irene; in fact, he goes so far as to call him a tyrant. To emphasise his unfitness to rule, he lists a number of abuses (which he calls *κακώσεις*), that he compares to the Ten Plagues of Egypt that God had visited upon the pharaoh in order to prompt him to let the Hebrew people go.<sup>9</sup> The third of these goes as follows: »His third abuse was to order a general census, and to increase the taxes by an additional levy of two *kératia*<sup>10</sup> for administrative expenses.«

It is here that we stumble across a seemingly intractable difficulty posed by the sources at our disposal. We know about Byzantine modes of tax collection, and even have teaching manuals for administrators, which show us the inner workings of the state apparatus in later periods.<sup>11</sup> Newly cultivated lands were reviewed, entered into a land register,<sup>12</sup> and taxed at the instigation of a censor (*ἀναγραφεύς*), whereas the level of these taxes in proportion to the size of the estate was verified by an inspector (*ἐπόπτης*). The level of sophistication leads us to believe that the system was already fully functional under the Isaurian dynasty (717-802),<sup>13</sup> something which seems to be confirmed by Theophanes' mention of a general census under Nikephoros. It seems logical that the empire exerted or reasserted a significant level of control over Chalkidiki in the first half of the ninth century. But, even if the lands had been registered on paper, the situation on the ground was still far from stable. This explains the increasing quantity of *klasma* lands in the region.

To gain an idea of what exactly this means, and how these lands came to be, the fiscal treaty extant in the *Codex Marcianus* gr. 173 fols. 276v-281 is enlightening:

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7 At the same time as that of Macedonia: Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 352.

8 On the Byzantine fiscal administration, see the seminal work by Oikonomidès, *Fiscalité*.

9 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 486-487.

10 The *dikératon* was undoubtedly invented by Leo III (see next footnote); Nikephoros may have transformed it into a regular contribution. When he took power by overthrowing Irene on 31 October 802, Nikephoros was General Logothete (*genikos logothetês*), that is to say in charge of the finances and the taxes of the Empire.

11 Oikonomidès, *Fiscalité*. See also *Géométries du fisc byzantin*, ed. Lefort *et al.* The texts in question are difficult to date; the oldest passages might even go back to the early tenth century, given the mention of an interest rate levied by the state of 7 *nomismata* per pound, which was the going rate under Leo VI (886-912). Even if the text transmitted to us dates from after the reforms of Alexis I Komnenos (1081-1118) – cf. Morrisson, *La logarikhè*, 419-464 – these treatises allow us to know how things functioned from the eighth century onwards, as one of the surtaxes mentioned was instigated by Leo III (717-741) in order to repair the city walls of Constantinople (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 412). Two fiscal treatises are still extant in the *Codex Marcianus*: Dölger, *Beiträge*; completed by Karayannopoulos, *Fragmente*, 318-334. English translation in Brand, *Byzantine Treatises*.

12 On the Byzantine land registry, see Oikonomidès, *Fiscalité*, 31-34.

13 See the above note. Some people even argue that it goes back to the century before: Gorecki, *Heraclian land tax reform*, 127-146. This question will be revisited in 2019-2020 during a seminar by Constantin Zuckermann at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*.

The so-called separately established hamlets (*ιδιόστατα*) and *proasteia* came into being this way. When parts of the countryside (*χώρα*) were devastated by some foreign incursion or by some other act of divine wrath, and the surviving inhabitants were likely to move on account of being compelled [to pay taxes] even for what had been devastated, there came an inspector (*ἐπόπτης*) sent by the emperor. After his investigation, he remitted their tax (*τέλος*) either in a lump sum for the whole place or in instalments for the devastated parcels (*στίχοι*). Then if these owners returned within thirty years, the *sympatheia* [remission] was restored [to full taxability]; but if they did not return and the thirty-year period passed, another inspector is again sent and removes that former *sympatheia* to the register of desolated land (*κλάσμα*). So when these things happened, either the inspector who created the *klasma* or another one after him separates into a special part the land pertaining to those parcels which have been made *klasiria* and surveys (*περιορίσειν*) it and inscribes it on the bureau's register (*σεκρετικὸν πρακτικόν*), and he will make separate and enrol the survey of the remaining devastated taxable area of the village land and thereafter this division which has been made *klasma* might be sold or given (*ἐκδοθῆναι*) or hired out by contractual (*ἐκκληπτορικὸν δικαίον*) or lease holding (*πακοτικόν*) right or entrusted to some [government] bureau (*σέκρετον*) and thus be inhabited and improved.<sup>14</sup>

The oldest document conserved on Mount Athos is a copy of the *sigillion*<sup>15</sup> (a charter signed and sealed by the emperor) drawn up in June 883 by Basilios I (867-886) in favour of the monks living on Mount Athos, but also favouring the monastery founded by John Kolobos close to Ierissos, at the edge of the peninsula.<sup>16</sup> The emperor granted protection to the monks of Athos and the Kolobou monastery against any form of harassment they might suffer from both administrators (*strategoï*, the emperor's men, or basically anybody who felt responsible for the region) and inhabitants of the Ierissos region, from villagers to fishermen. It becomes clear immediately that the main imperial agents affected would be those in charge of the fisc. Given that there is no question of fiscal exemption – and indeed there would not be for a long time – this implied that the lands of Athos and the Kolobou monastery were fiscally unproductive, meaning they had become *klasma* lands after having been deserted for at least thirty years. A while later, in a charter for the Protatos monastery recording a judgement by Leo VI<sup>17</sup> from February 908, we learn that the monks of Kolobou had obtained from the emperor certain unwarranted benefits which he now sought to revoke. The Athonite monks would no longer need to be worried: the villages in the region would retain their properties, and Kolobou's reach would be limited to Ierissos and the town of Kaména. The judgement finished with an important clause for our current purposes: »all the neighbours will benefit from the liberties and usage rights by right accorded to *klasma* lands (*κατὰ τὸν τύπον τῶν κλασματικῶν*).«

14 Dölger, *Beiträge*, c. 7, 116.

15 *Actes du Prôtaton*, no. 1, ed. Papachryssanthou, 180.

16 PMBZ 22783.

17 *Actes du Prôtaton*, no. 2, ed. Papachryssanthou, 184-185.

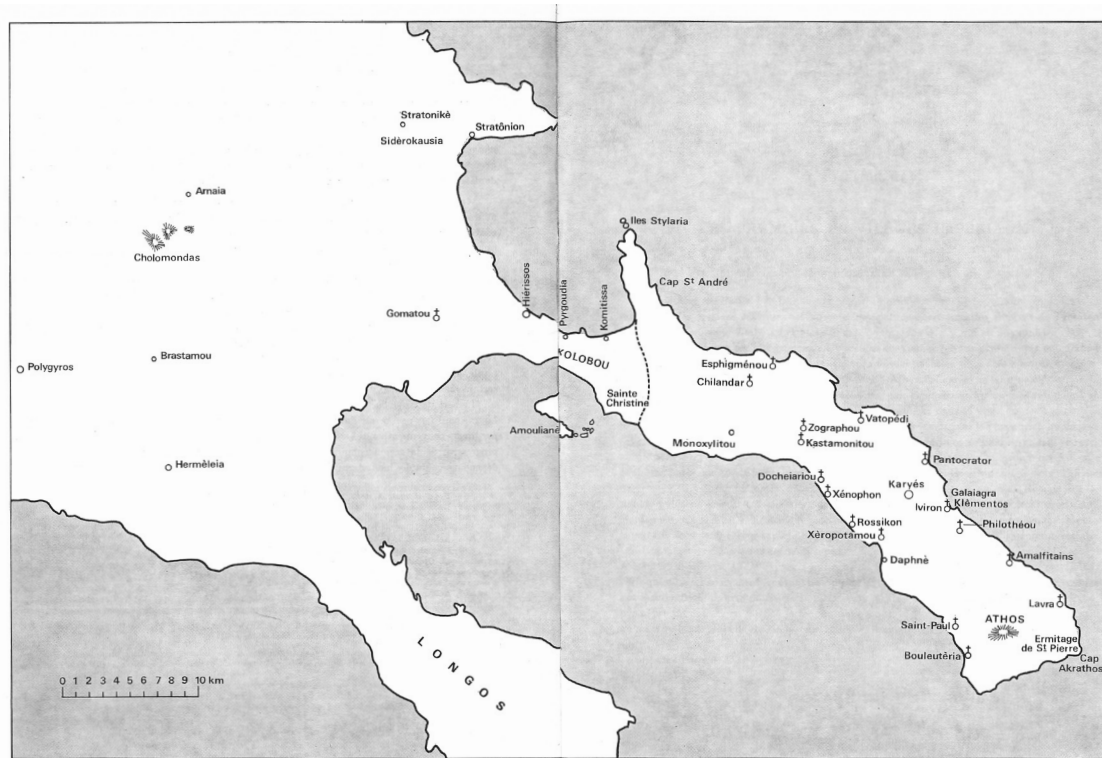


Fig. 1: Map of Chalkidiki, in: *Actes du Prôtaton, no. 1*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 42-43.

We learn a bit more about this statute through charters that have been conserved in the archives of Lavra and Xeropotamou, a monastery that had been founded before even Lavra, albeit at an uncertain date. These charters date from before the year 963, i.e. before the foundation of Lavra by Athanasius the Athonite<sup>18</sup> and Nicephoros Phocas. The latter of these two would go on to become emperor shortly afterwards (r. 963-969), and the monastery, which was the property of its founder, *ipso facto* obtained imperial status. Nonetheless, Lavra retained ownership titles for the lands that had been donated to them, most notably those of the monastery of Saint Andrew in Peristerai, founded in 870/1 by Euthymius the Younger. He had obtained a cloister consecrated to the apostle Andrew, located about 30 kilometres southeast of Thessaloniki, which had been ruined and transformed into a sheep pen. In 884, he installed his male heirs there; his female followers would found a small nunnery nearby. Euthymius, who had been its first hegumen, relinquished that position to his grandson Methodius<sup>19</sup> in 884, so he could retire, first as a stylite in Thessaloniki, later on Mount Athos – although not without visiting his monastery on the way there. At an unknown point in time, the monastery in Peristerai became imperial: between 944 and 959, a chrysobull by Constantine Porphyrogenitos confirmed the independence of the community as an imperial monastery, thus clarifying its relation to the metropolitan of Thessaloniki.<sup>20</sup> In 963, Nicephoros Phocas donated the imperial monastery of Peristerai to Lavra, which had just been founded.

18 PMBZ 20670.

19 PMBZ 25073.

20 Mentioned in the chrysobull of Constantine X Doukas in favour of Lavra, no. 33, June 1060, *Actes de Lavra I*, ed. Lemerle *et al.*, 202-203, l. 25-40.

Among the ownership deeds that entered the archives of Lavra at that point, we find a charter confirming the acquisition of *klasma* lands in the course of a general sale in 941.

»+++ I, Thomas, imperial protospatharios, asekretis, inspector and anagrapheus of Thessaloniki, acting on a divine ruling by our great and peaceful emperors, sent by God, Romanos, Constantine, Stephen and Constantine<sup>21</sup>, who commanded me to sell the lands on the peninsula of Pallenee, also called Kassandra, to those among the inhabitants of the theme of Thessaloniki who would want it; because, based on the authority of the chrysobull about these lands sent by our holy emperors, it concerns *klasma* lands, I have sold to you, Euthymius<sup>22</sup>, monk and hegumen of the monastery known under the name of Saint Andrew the First-Called Apostle, that is of [the community of] Peristerai, the very pious imperial monastery which you represent, an area of 800 *modioi* situated in the place called Leukon, together with Posidiou and Korakeon, as well as another measuring 1000 *modioi* situated in the place called Ptelaia, together with Stephanike, the field situated in Apebreos, and the field of Moutaleos together with the adjoining uncultivated lands. In total, I have sold you, if the two are tallied up, 1200 *modioi* of cultivated lands, and 600 more *modioi* of wild lands, which makes a total area of 1800 *modioi*.<sup>23</sup> For this reason I have received from the aforementioned Euthymios, monk and hegumen, 36 *nomismata* of gold, which I must turn over to the fisc. You will also contribute to the outstanding taxes for these lands, which are as high as 12 *nomismata*, proportional to what you retain. Nobody among those who have acquired lands on the peninsula of Pallene will be able to contest your right to water, to logging and gathering brushwood, or your grazing rights, any more than you can forbid those who so desire from making use of the uncultivated lands that you have acquired. Because it has been decreed and disposed that everybody shall be master only over the [part of their] fields which have [has] been sown, but that the grand total of the grazing lands on the peninsula will be, as has been said, owned by and accessible to all, not just those who have bought these lands, but also those who have not sold it but who, faced with raids and barbarian invasions, have come to take refuge there. Thus, for your security, I have written this, I have signed it with my own hand, and I have authenticated it by affixing my seal. Written in the month of August, Fourteenth Indiction, Year 6449. +

+ I, Thomas<sup>24</sup>, imperial protospatharios, asekretis, and inspector of Thessaloniki, have completed [this charter] with my autograph and my seal in the above-mentioned month and indiction. <sup>25</sup> + «

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21 Namely Romanos I Lekapenos, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, Stephanos Lekapenos, Constantine Lekapenos

22 PMBZ 21932.

23 About 180 hectares.

24 PMBZ 28296.

25 Lavra no. 2, *Actes de Lavra* I, ed. Lemerle *et al.*, 94-95.

Of course, we should not forget that, at the same time, the same administrator also sold 100 *modioi*<sup>26</sup> under the same conditions to a peasant called Nicolas,<sup>27</sup> son of Agathon.<sup>28</sup> This allows us to establish two important points about the status of *klasma* lands: they allowed for grazing on the uncultivated parts, and refugees had the right to settle there under pressure of »barbarian invasions«, which, in 941, probably meant the Bulgarian raids in the area. Moreover, if these two documents from Lavra indeed concern the same area – that is, the peninsula of Pallene or Kassandra, at the southernmost tip of Chalkidiki – similar situations occurred elsewhere in the region as well. This may be seen, for instance, in the first charter for Xeropotamou, dated to April 956, in which John, the *chartoularios* of the general *logothésion*,<sup>29</sup> under orders from the emperors Constantine VII and Romanos II, re-evaluated the *klasma* status of the lands in Ierissos which had been sold to the peasants by the inspector Thomas,<sup>30</sup> as well as their allocation to the monastery of Saint Nikephoros in Xeropotamou.<sup>31</sup> As it happened, Thomas had sold these too cheaply, and consequently at a tax rate that was lower than allowed. Eleven peasants had each acquired 50 *modioi*, and two had even bought 200, all close to Ierissos, a small town and episcopal see situated close to the Athonite peninsula. John declared: »In my estimation, they [should] have been sold at a value of 38 *nomismata*, of which 19 have been put aside as they have already been paid; as for the remaining 19, I went to collect them and turn them over to the general *logothésion*«.

The monks of Xeropotamou were treated thusly: »[they] also displayed an imperial *horismos* by our holy purple-born emperors, enjoining me to give them 1000 *modioi* of the lands mentioned straight away, so they could possess it; because the monastery did not have an inch of land to take care of its needs, in order that they pray for their imperial majesties. After the monks had paid up the 19 *nomismata*,<sup>32</sup> the monastery of Xeropotamou was made proprietor, by imperial *prostagma*, of the above-mentioned land, sold by the aforementioned *protospatharios* Thomas. Nevertheless, the monastery must retain and possess these lands for the good of the mountain and pray for the might of the emperors, in accordance with the orders given in the above-mentioned imperial *horismos*. This was written on venerable purple, and I have imposed upon the monastery for security [the sum of] 9 *miliaresia* and 11 *foleis*.«<sup>33</sup> It did not seem to matter whether or not Xeropotamou had other possessions outside of Mount Athos: the monastery immediately seized the opportunity offered by the cadastral revision 15 years after 941, to obtain lands in a coveted area, the »suburbs« of Ierissos. And with that, the competition with the peasantry, both rich and poor,<sup>34</sup> for control of the lands of Chalkidiki began in earnest.

26 About 10 hectares.

27 PMBZ 25954.

28 PMBZ 20177.

29 The institution led by the General Logothete, in charge of maintaining the registry and levying taxes.

30 This is the same Thomas mentioned earlier in the context of sales for the benefit of Peristerai and Nicholas, son of Agathon.

31 *Actes de Xèropotamou* 1, ed. Bompaire, 39-40. This charter could well indicate that Xeropotamou is the oldest monastery on Mount Athos.

32 Those deposited in 941 by the peasants.

33 Dölger, *Beiträge*, c. 21, 120 : »The buyer ... is not required to pay the tax that was the subject of the temporary relief [then of an exemption or *klasma*], but instead of each *nomisma* of the former tax (*δημόσιον*) is written down: tax raised under a *libellos* (*λιβελλικόν*), one-twelfth of a *nomisma*.« On this specifically, see Oikonomidès, *Das Verfalland*.

34 Kaplan, *Les élites rurales byzantines*, 299-312.

Before that could happen, however, another, even more impactful process would need to be completed. This was the delineation of the Athonite territories – which has persisted until the present day, even if it has not always been easy. The year was 942, and a conflict was brewing between, on the one hand, the peasants and the monasteries in Chalkidiki close to the Athos peninsula, and on the other hand those who simply called themselves the monks of Athos, working in the name of the community of Athonites – even if one of the signatories<sup>35</sup> of the eventual treaty<sup>36</sup> used the title »John, monk and hegumen of Athos«. As it happened, the monasteries and the peasants from the region around Ierissos acquired the *klasma* lands up to Mount Zygos, but the monks of Athos claimed to hold the same territories.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear that the Athonite monks did participate in the sale of the *klasma* lands. The two parties thereupon reached an agreement about the boundaries (διαχωρισμός) and requested that the inspector, Thomas, would come to trace them physically. What follows is a report by said Thomas,<sup>38</sup> who explains how the Athonite monks claimed possession of the whole of Mount Athos, because this was inscribed under their name in the ancient *klasma* register (καθώς καὶ ἐν τοῖς παλαῖοις τοῦ κλάσματος κώδιξιν ἀναγράφεται δημόσια εἰς πρόσωπον τῶν μοναχῶν τοῦ Ἄθως<sup>39</sup>). Once the boundary had been fixed, however, the lands situated between Athos and the monastery of Kolobou were sold to the local people, who received the λίβελλον of the sale. Beyond that boundary, the land was attributed (παρεδόθη) to the monks, who confirmed the delimitation (περιορισμός). All this ended up confirming that the territories held by the Athonites were *klasma* lands, which follows from such statutes on *klasma* lands as we have seen in Lavra no. 2. On top of all that, the peasants retained the right to bring their flocks to Athos for protection in case of a foreign invasion, provided they notified the monks and refrained from building sheep pens or beehives. The animals were already a nuisance to the monks, who had only received a small plot of infertile land.

What follows is a charter served and sealed by the *strategos* of Thessaloniki, in which the boundaries between the territory of the monks of Athos and the inhabitants of Ierissos are traced and fixed.<sup>40</sup> However, it is but a brief document, revisiting the charter of the inspector Thomas without bringing anything new to the table. Still, the monks complained to the emperor about the dealings of the administrator, whom they thought was on the side of the peasants; and as we will see, this was more often the case. The emperor, for his part, essentially stonewalled them and sent a *prostagma* to the *strategos* of Thessaloniki in order to

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35 What is meant here are *signa* at the top of the document, i.e. those of the parties to the contract, not to be confused with the signatures of the guarantors, which were much longer and which feature the archbishop of Thessaloniki at the top of the list.

36 Prôtaton no. 4, May 942, *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 191-192.

37 ἐκ τῆς παρ' ἑμῶν ἐξωνισθείσης γῆς, *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 191-192, l. 18-19.

38 Prôtaton no. 5 (entre mai 942 et août 943), *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 195-197.

39 *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 195-197, l. 20-22.

40 Prôtaton no. 6, *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 201-202.



wrap things up. Added to this was a letter of advice by the *magistros* Kosmas,<sup>41</sup> which probably dealt with the *klasma* lands, given that he actually went there. He journeyed at the head of an imposing delegation (albeit without Thomas, so as to avoid provoking the locals), in order to set the boundaries (l. 6) »in accordance with the charter of Thomas Morokoumoulos«. <sup>42</sup> Likewise, at the end, »having thus fixed the boundaries and established the border lines according to the delimitation set by the inspector, we have enacted this decision in writing, and presented the [resulting] document to all parties involved.«<sup>43</sup> In short, the monks' reclamation failed a second time. The message was clear this time: the same boundaries exist even today.

At this point, the monks of Mount Athos were still living in small colonies of hermits, even if, from an outside perspective, they were already organised in a way that allowed them to be a single party in the legal procedures and to negotiate with the emperor directly. Near the end of the tenth century, the situation had changed fundamentally, most notably following the foundation of Lavra in 963 and that of Iviron in 979/980 by Iberian monks (from the ancient kingdom of Iberia, also known as Kartli in present-day Georgia) from the monastery of Athanasius – both monasteries with imperial status from the get-go.<sup>44</sup> Each of these communities was soon given a host of smaller monasteries, notably those situated in Chalkidiki. With regards to Lavra,<sup>45</sup> Athanasius obtained the imperial monastery of Saint Andrew of Peristerai in 964, a monastery that was rich to the point of decadence. In 989, he received the patriarchal monastery of Gomatos, also in Chalkidiki, which he immediately transformed into a *metochion*.<sup>46</sup>

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41 This was an important person: PMBZ 24110. Kosmas was the nephew of the patriarch Photios, who was one of the most important advisors to Romanos I Lekapenos, and who is generally seen as having taken a leading role in the composition of the novella of Romanos of 934, aimed at land acquisition by the aristocracy. Cf. Lemerle, *The Agrarian History*.

42 Prôtaton no. 6, *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 201-202, l. 6.

43 Prôtaton no. 6, *Actes du Prôtaton*, ed. Papachryssanthou, 201-202, l. 39-41.

44 By seceding, the Iberian monks of Lavra continued to benefit from their imperial status.

45 *Actes de Lavra I*, ed. Lemerle *et al.*, 58-61.

46 A *metochion* is a dependency of a monastery; the monastery staffs it with monks so as to ensure it is administered to its advantage.



Those who follow a monastic lifestyle, far from sorrow, need any small bit of material assistance that will help them avoid the complete decay of their bodies, so that, through this assistance, their soul may accomplish something useful. In fact, a soul separated from its body can do neither good nor evil; but what does happen is that, under pressure of bodily necessities, even monks would harm their neighbours and can become insufferable.

After the monks of the imperial monastery of Kolobou had thus pestered their neighbours and fellow taxpayers, the inhabitants of the village of Siderokausia, these villagers called together a tribunal in order to give them the appropriate aid. This was an ancient and confusing affair; [the judge has deemed it useful to explain] its origins in order to make it easier to understand the judgement for those who would learn of it in the future. Several religious establishments are dependent on the aforementioned village of Siderokausia; they are situated within its limits (περιορισμός), in accordance with the ancient delimitations established by the former *spatharokandidatos* and inspector Nicolas, under the reign of *kyr* Leo and Alexander. This document, which has been produced by the very venerable monks Euthymius the priest, son of the *kyr* John of Iviron,<sup>51</sup> and George,<sup>52</sup> the nephew of this John,<sup>53</sup> gives the following itinerary: it begins in the place known as the »Three Churches«, and, crossing numerous heights, tops, hills, descents and other landmarks that are mentioned, it reaches the sea at the port of Papas – and from there, it returns to the aforementioned »Three Churches«. Within the perimeter of this *périorismos*, mention is made of several isolated farms that belong to the monastery of Kolobou, as well as a place called Arsinikeia, which is not otherwise named, a small and clearly delineated place bordered on three sides by the aforementioned hills and by the river that runs alongside it, and on the other side by the water mills of the monastery of Saint John (Kolobos) and the wall of trees delineating them. [The terrain] close to the sea, which goes all the way there by way of an isthmus, is called not only Arsinikeia, but has been given a name by the isolated farms (ἀγρίδια) of the village (κώμη) of the Siderokausites, which are built there. These flat, wooded lands came into the possession of the Siderokausites and belong to them with the exception of a part, the *metochion* of Belikradou, which is close to Upper Arsinikeia (Anô Arsinikeia), as indicated by the decisions of the judges from the capital and the memories of the judges in the province. While Lower Arsinikeia (Katô Arsinikeia), as mentioned, was once completely covered in woodland and trees, with canals dug to bring waters from the heights to operate the mills and make fertile the gardens and orchards, as well as the grazing lands for the beasts, the monks thought it would be a good idea to allow a multitude of animals loose there, which ruined the seeds that the Siderokausites living there had planted.

These inhabitants, refusing to bear such damages, agreed to go to the tribunal, and, once there, started shouting all at once like a bunch of louts; one, that the grain that had just been sown had been trampled to such a degree that it could not grow anymore; another, that the grain that had just grown, had been eaten by the cattle; yet

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51 PMBZ 22942.

52 PMBZ 22180.

53 These are the leaders of the monastery of Iviron in 995. The fact that Kolobou was still called a »monastery« here indicates that it had not yet been demoted to the status of *metochion*.

another, that the harvest had been done by the teeth of the animals before harvest time. The monks, furious, responded: »we alone should be in possession of the entirety of Arsinikeia, just as it has been recorded in this delimitation in the name of our monastery.« The mob responded: »The record only mentions the *metochion* of Belikradou: by which right would they retain the sole rights to Arsinikeia under the pretext that they have established a great number of *paroikoi*?« The monks objected: »By the judgement of the tribunals of the capital and of the province, not only do we hold the property rights over Arsinikeia, but you have had the right to use a part of those lands since time immemorial, and you retain it without being hindered.« Having said that, they showed the judgement of the protospatharius and former high *chartoularios*, Constantine Karamalos,<sup>54</sup> as well as another by Nikephoros,<sup>55</sup> who was *anthypatos*, patrician and *strategos* of Thessaloniki at the time, and who would subsequently be elevated to the dignity of *magistraton*, and who died in the *themata* of Italy. The mob, thrown into complete disarray, cried out: »You have the right to the *metochion* in Upper Arsinikeia, but not to Lower Arsinikeia, because different names distinguish them ... there where you have built mills, made gardens and planted orchards, in the process aggrieving the community (τὸ κοινόν). You know very well that it was established thusly, given that the judge at the time had visited and examined each of these placed by himself.«

Confronted by the hullabaloo caused by these incomprehensible cries, the judge came up with an appropriate solution, well thought-out and profitable to both parties: he divided the region. He determined that the monks of the monastery of Kolobou would become the proprietors of the territory of Upper Arsinikeia, the *metochion* of Belikradou and all the other assets featured in the *brebion* of the imperial *sakellion*,<sup>56</sup> just as had been recognised in their favour in their documentation – and he had crosses engraved showing the division of the territories. In the main part of the *metochion*, from the large and elevated plane tree on the edge of the creek, the boundary descends from the house belonging to the village (χωριόν) of Kloutzéta, and, from there, towards a forked tree, and from there, towards another tree close to which lies a rock in the shape of a root; after the stream that is there, there looms another plane tree at the foot of the hill. And just like that, the separation to the advantage of the Siderokauses had been made, to the agreement of both parties. As far as the division between the *metochion* and the mills was concerned, this started from a tree planted on the Memoria hill, where the people also put up a venerable cross; from there, towards another tree that grew close to the paved square, and then towards the other plane tree situated in the middle of the small islet separating the two streams; from there, the boundary runs to the large rock on the side of the hill.

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54 PMBZ 23918.

55 PMBZ 25608.

56 The lands of Kolobou, being an imperial monastery, were also imperial lands, managed by the imperial *sakelle*; the *brébion* is the administration of the imperial goods.

Now that the places had thus been delineated and separated from those that fell within Arsinikeia, the monks took care to record the decision and guarantee full and entire ownership ... over the slopes on both sides of the mountain; but they did not have any decision and could not impose themselves on any other place, no matter what it was called, in Arsinikeia. Because the judge had the campsites reduced to ashes and chased away the *paroikoi*, after which he stipulated that they (i.e. the monks) could only drive their flocks there for three months per year, namely from the first of July until the end of September, and nothing more. They did not have the right to gather or take away even the smallest morsel of seasonal fruit, nuts, plums or whatever else, from the trees that grew there. If anyone among them were to be caught in the act, they would be punished and receive a heavy yet equitable fine of 1 *miliaresion* per .... Only the ownership of water mills, gardens and orchards that had belonged to the monastery were not signed over to the monastery of Kobilou; this community was given possession of six water mills which belonged to them in each.... but the monks would not have the right to either construct new mills or to enlarge their gardens and orchards, which must always remain in the same state and surrounded by fences. If, through their own negligence, their fences were to break down and some four-footed animal came in and caused some kind of damage, its owner would not be held responsible. Given that the community [of villagers] (κοινότης) possessed neither mills nor gardens, they (i.e. the villagers acting together as a community) received the right to divert the waters from the canal for the mills in shifts of 24 hours to wherever they wished in order to irrigate the gardens they would make there. The right was granted to the territory of the monastery of Kolobou to keep only the part of the communal fishery, for the foreseeable future, in the river called Arsinikeia, and to receive the three quarters that are allocated to them. Concerning the mountain that dominates the zone allocated to the *metochion* – a part of the area that specifically belongs to the monastery of Kolobou – should the harvest of acorns or chestnuts or the fruits of the mountain not be sufficient, the monastery would not prevent the inhabitants of Siderokausia from going to the woods. The pigs owned by the monastery, which were also fed regardless of their number, would not be taxed (ἀποδεκατίζεσται); but those belonging to the *paroikoi* and the local people would be subject to the levy of the *balanistrion* as well as other pastoral taxes (ἐννόμιον); the villagers would share this levy equally with the monastery. For the annual tax, the monks will pay 1 *nomisma* and the community of Siderokausia 2 *nomismata* because they possess twice the amount of arable and grazing lands. In order to keep the memory of these judgements intact, the current record (*engraphon hypomnèma*) has been established by Nicolas, the protospatharius and judge of Strymon and Thessaloniki. It has been given to the monastery of Kobilou along with a copy to confirm it (ἴσον) to the village (χωρίον) of the Sidèrokausites. Signed by the hand who has given the judgement, and furnished with his usual seal.«

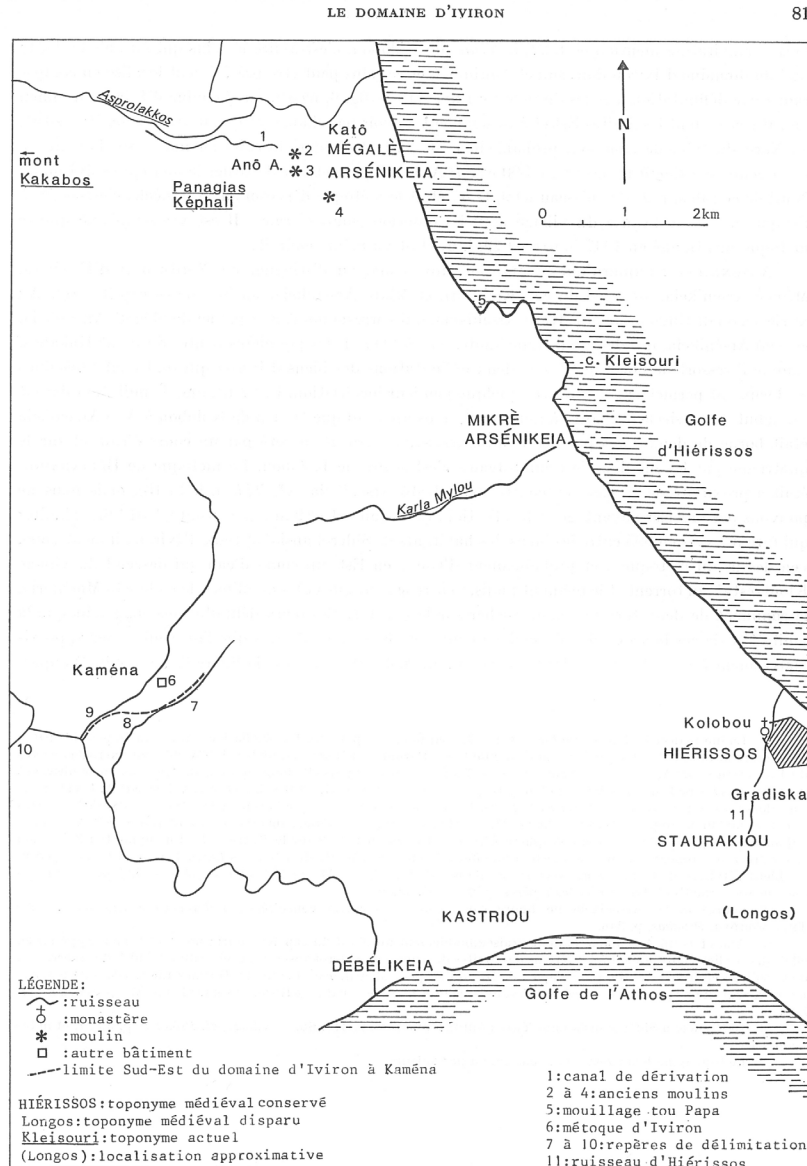


Fig. 6. — Arsénikéia, Kaména et Débélikeia.

Fig. 3: The possessions of the Iviron monastery, in: *Actes d'Iviron I*, ed. Lefort et al., 81.

This document is important for several reasons, chief among which is the pride of place it gives to village communities. It becomes clear immediately that the entire village – or at least the heads of the families – was present at the tribunal. Also, the text is emblematic of the struggle to enhance the value of newly cultivated lands during a time of tremendous economic and demographic growth.<sup>57</sup> The village that started it all was situated at the relatively high altitude of 500m, at least ten kilometres from the coast of the Strymonian Gulf.

<sup>57</sup> Harvey, *Expansion*; Laiou and Morrisson, *Byzantine Economy*, 43-90.

The entire affected area evidently stretched all the way to the sea, with a coastal plain that used to be quite inhospitable, while the village dominated over it from a relatively steep hill. This was where John Kolobos had originally founded his monastery, before it was moved to Ierissos. He must have retained lands there, however. The *metochion* of Belikradou could well be the original site of the monastery, and, as happened quite often, the lands would have been exploited by < *paroikoi* > who would pay rent. The coastal plain was from the outset in the state evoked at the end of the second paragraph of the translation above: water was led to the mills through a network of canals, cutting through gardens, orchards and grazing lands. Nevertheless, the villagers had already started the »conquest« of the territory, which had always been thought of as a wasteland, and thus especially well-suited for keeping animals. Several families from the town established themselves there, leading to the foundation of the »isolated farms (ἀγρίδια)<sup>58</sup> of the village (κώμη) of the Siderokausites«. These farmers, who were first and foremost landholders, had even sown grain there, which inadvertently led to their protestations when the < *paroikoi* > of the monastery let their animals out there to feed during crop season. The judge, for his part, would only allow grazing after the harvest, »for three months per year, namely from the first of July until the end of September, and nothing more«.

On the other hand, the monks had also gone on the offensive. Outside their *metochion* of Belikradou, they had built encampments for the < *paroikoi* > in an attempt to occupy the lands that had been considered wasteland until recently. The judge would not budge on this point, however: he »had the campsites reduced to ashes, and chased away the < *paroikoi* >«. This might well have been the most sensible option given the pressure exercised by the mob of villages at the tribunal: the judge essentially decided in favour of the peasants.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, Kolobou belonged to an otherwise powerful institution, the original monastery of Iviron. It is clear that the latter also tried to obtain part of the territory of Chalkidiki, despite the fact that it already possessed vast tracts of land there through the donations granted to the monasteries of Polygyros and Leontia.<sup>60</sup>

Naturally, we could give more examples by perusing the dossiers about Mount Athos in ever greater detail. One of the best examples stems from the archives of Iviron, and tells of a conflict about 70 km north of Ierissos, around the episcopal see of Ézoba close to Strymon. The people living in that town, which was mostly inhabited by farmers, contested the pretensions of the monastery of the Georgians (or Iberians, that is, Iviron) with the help of their bishop whose possessions were entangled with those of the townspeople.<sup>61</sup> If we add to this

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58 Dölger, *Beiträge*, c. 5, 115 : »One thing is the cultivated terroir (ἀγρός), another thing is an isolated farm (ἀγρίδιον). Indeed, cultivated land refers to any area (χωρος) exploited, while an isolated farm is a part of the territory of a large village that constitutes a wedge and also holds a part of the exploited area.«. The text describes the various reasons leading to the rise of the isolated farms in the taxable land of the village (χωρίον).

59 We should not forget that this administrator, in agreeing with the peasants, also agrees with the empire. The last novella aimed specifically at the protection of the poor/powerless, credited to Basil II, was issued on 1 January 996: Svoronos, *Les Nouvelles*, 190-217.

60 See my commentary on this dossier: Kaplan, *Les hommes et la terre*, esp. 113-114 and Id., *L'activité pastorale*, 418-419. Lefort, *Rural economy*, 283-284.

61 Kaplan, *Villes et Campagnes*, 21-22.

the considerable efforts put into the foundation of Lavra by Athanasius, who even went so far as to drill into the mountains to irrigate the monastic gardens<sup>62</sup> and who, above all, thought it would be useful to have a deep-water harbour<sup>63</sup> where passenger ships could make land, we get an idea why I have chosen the title for this article.

From the 9th century onwards, based on the models of Peristerai and Kolobou, the monasteries in the region of Thessaloniki invested huge efforts in their lands, which would more often than not start out as *klasma* lands and thus be partially uncultivated still. In the course of the tenth century, the great foundations on the peninsula of Athos, such as Xèropotamou, Lavra and Iviron, absorbed parts of the older monasteries and in the process imposed themselves on the development of the land. The example of the competition between Iviron, with its old rights to Kolobou, and the village community of Siderokausia is enlightening in that regard.

Thus, the monasteries of Chalkidiki played a major role in the expansion of southern Macedonia in the 10th and 11th centuries, benefiting for themselves from the efforts also made by the medium and small peasantry.

### *Acknowledgements*

This article is dedicated to the team currently busy editing the archives of Athos, and more specifically to Jacques Lefort, who left us too soon and who led this team for over twenty years with an exceptional *maestria*, not to mention his eternal good humour.

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62 Kaplan, *Aumônes, artisanat, domaines fonciers*, 367. See *Vie A d'Athanase l'Athonite*, c. 234, ed. Noret, 112-113, l. 11-25 and *Vie B d'Athanase l'Athonite*, c. 66, ed. Noret, 201, l. 1-11.

63 Kaplan, *Aumônes, artisanat, domaines fonciers*, 367, and Id., *Monks and trade*, 56-57.



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### Abbreviations

PMBZ = Ralph-Johannes Lilie, Claudia Ludwig, Beate Zielke and Thomas Pratsch, *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*. Accessed on 24 May 2019: [www.degruyter.com/view/db/pmbz](http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/pmbz).

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