

This is an extract from:

Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents:

A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments

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Published by

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

Washington, D.C.

in five volumes as number 35 in the series Dumbarton Oaks Studies

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Trustees for Harvard University

Washington, D.C.

Printed in the United States of America

www.doaks.org/etexts.html

18. *Nea Gephyra: Testament of Nikodemos for the Monastery of Nea Gephyra near Lakedaimon*

Date: May 1, 1027

Translator: Stephen Reinert

Edition employed: D. Feissel and A. Philippidis-Braat, “Inventaires en vue d’un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance. III. Inscriptions du Péloponnèse (à l’exception de Mistra),” *T&M* 9 (1985), 267–396, at 301–2.

Manuscript: Parisinus, supplément grec 855, fol. 10, a transcription made by Michel Fourmont in 1730 of an inscription on a now lost column found *in situ*.¹

Other translations: French, by A. Philippidis-Braat, in Feissel and Philippidis-Braat, “Inscriptions,” 302–3.

Institutional History

The foundation was dedicated to Jesus Christ (see [1]), perhaps with the appellation *Nea Gephyra* or “New Bridge.” (29) *Kosmosoteira* [67] provides an illustration of other bridges associated with a monastery, including one dedicated to the Mother of God and marked with her image. There is also another example of a Greek monastery in southern Italy acquiring a bridge in 1125.² Aside from the testimony of this document, nothing else is known about the history of this foundation.

Analysis

The author of this unique document, an inscription defining the status of a monastery church established to protect a newly erected bridge built over the Eurotas River, followed contemporary fashion of the early eleventh century in setting up [3] a protectorate (an *ephoreia*) to govern his foundation, though the term itself is not used. Nikodemos sought to secure [2] imperial protection for his foundation by obtaining for it a recognition of its independence (*autexousion*). Like the author of (17) *Nikon Metanoeite* [2] a generation earlier, of whose example he may have been aware, he relied more directly on the good will of the local judge (*krites*) and the military governor (*strategos*). These officials were entitled either jointly or acting individually to appoint [3] a superior for the monastery from among the monks and, if necessary, remove him from office as well. Nikodemos required only that an outsider (i.e., a *xenokourites*)³ not be chosen as superior, which even at this early date was recognized as a potential danger to an institution’s independence. Generally speaking, however, our author was unsophisticated about contemporary perils to private religious foundations, as when he declares [3], with quaint naiveté, that “Whatever the emperor, judge and general do regarding the church, let [their actions] find [favor] with God.” Nikodemos’ confidence placed in the good will of the emperor and his local representatives did not extend to others, however. In defiance (or more likely, ignorance) of canon law, Nikodemos denies [2] the local bishop and his clergy any rights at all in the church. In an attitude typical of

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private benefactors, they are told “not even to set foot in it.” The document concludes [4] with the traditional curse on anyone who might dare to subvert the founder’s prescriptions.

Notes on the Introduction

1. See Curtius, *CIG*, vol. 4, no. 8704, pp. 327–28, and Philippidis-Braat, in Feissel and Philippidis-Braat, “Inscriptions,” p. 302.
2. Francisco Trinchera, *Syllabus graecarum membranarum* (Naples, 1865), no. 98, p. 126; see discussion in Millet, “Église et pont,” p. 105.
3. See (13) *Ath. Typikon* [21]–[29] and (19) *Attaleiates* [30].

Bibliography

- Curtius, Johann Wilhelm, and Kirchhoff, Adolph, *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1877), pp. 327–28.
- Millet, G., “Église et pont à Byzance,” *Byzantina-Metabyzantina* 1.2 (1949), 103–11.
- Zakythinos, D. A., “Kastron Lakedaimonos,” *Hellenika* 15 (1957), 97–111.

Translation

[1.] Through the mercy and abundant compassion of Almighty God, and at his command, a divinely protected edifice—the all-holy new bridge over the river called Iris [Eurotas], near the fort¹ of Lakedaimon—was built by me, the monk Nikodemos. This edifice worthy of God having been completed by my humble self, I resolved at God’s command to raise up from the foundations a holy and beautiful church to our Lord Jesus Christ on the left part of the bridge, so that a church might exist [there] for the safe-keeping of this little bridge. This church was built in the reign of the most pious emperor Constantine [VIII (1025–1028)].

[2.] Bearing in mind the untimely advent of death, I resolved to strengthen this church of God in my own lifetime, above all [by ensuring that it enjoy] independence [through the protection] of the emperor; that it be inspected by and cared for by the judge and *strategos*, who govern the theme; and that the bishop of this same city, with his clergy, not be allowed to exercise any authority in this church, not even to set foot in it.

[3.] After my death, let the monastery be governed and rightly guided by the aforementioned [officials]. Let either both of them, or only one (the one of them who happens to be in the area), select someone good and useful from among the monks in the monastery and appoint him superior. Let them not appoint someone subject to another [monastery] as superior. Thus the superior should lovingly take care of the church and the bridge and the brothers. Should he be negligent, let him be removed and suffer the penalties of disgrace, and let another of the brothers be appointed [in his stead]. Whatever the emperor, judge and *strategos* do regarding the church, let [their actions] find [favor] with God.

[4.] Let him who does not obey, but rather subverts, my prescriptions have the anathema of the

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Holy Apostles and the three hundred and eighteen Fathers, and the curse of Judas. Let him be heir to eternal punishment along with those who said “Away with him, away with him, crucify the Son of God” (John 15:19). Let him have no part with the Christians, and let him be excommunicated from the gift of Christ. The present *Testament* was written at the behest of me, the monk Nikodemos, [p. 302] on the first [day] of the month of May, in the tenth indiction, in the year 6535 [= 1027 A.D.]. Remember, O Lord, those who conform with [this *Rule*] and absolve them of all [their] debts.

Note on the Translation

1. *kastron*.

Document Notes

- [1] Foundation history. Cf. (6) *Rila* [1], (9) *Galesios* [246], (10) *Eleousa* [3], (13) *Ath. Typikon* [2] ff., (17) *Nikon Metanoieite*, (19) *Attaleiates* [3] ff., (22) *Evergetis* [2], [3].
- [2] Definition of the foundation’s status. See discussion in Zakythinos, “Kastron,” pp. 102–4. The text hints at an imperial recognition of the foundation’s independence, perhaps even a formal charter of “independent and self-governing” status; cf. (8) *John Xenos*, Institutional History; (9) *Galesios* [247], cf. [223]; (10) *Eleousa* [18]; (13) *Ath. Typikon* [12]; (19) *Attaleiates* [14]. The protectorate set up here is very similar to that found in (17) *Nikon Metanoieite* [2] and may have been modeled on it. The *Vita S. Niconis*, chaps. 35, 38, ed. Sullivan, *Life*, pp. 116, 132, shows Nikon Metanoieite recognizing some episcopal rights denied here; cf. (10) *Eleousa* [16], [18]. For the exclusion of the bishop from the premises, see also (31) *Areia* [M12].
- [3] Rights of the protectors; responsibilities of the superior. See discussion in Zakythinos, “Kastron,” pp. 104–8. For the protector’s right to appoint a superior, see (13) *Ath. Testament* [12], (17) *Nikon Metanoieite* [13], and (19) *Attaleiates* [26], [29]. For the distrust of *xenokouritai*, see the long discussion in (13) *Ath. Typikon* [17] ff. For the protector’s right to remove a superior, see (14) *Ath. Testament* [16]. The author of (29) *Kosmosoteira* [67] likewise enjoins his superior to care for bridges on monastic property.
- [4] Curse on transgressors. See similar curses in (8) *John Xenos* [2]; (9) *Galesios* [246]; (10) *Eleousa* [19]; (16) *Mount Tmolos* [5], (17) *Nikon Metanoieite* [5]; (19) *Attaleiates* [8], [23]; (22) *Evergetis* [12]; and (24) *Christodoulos* [B14].