

This is an extract from:

Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents:

A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments

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48. *Prodromos: Testament of Neilos*¹ for the Monastery
of St. John the Forerunner (*Prodromos*) on Mount Athos

Date: 1330–31²

Translator: Stephen Reinert

Edition employed: Nicolas Oikonomides, *Actes de Docheiariou* (= *Archives de l’Athos* 13) (Paris, 1984), 133–38, with text at 135–38.

Manuscript: Docheiariou 101 (possible 14th-c. autograph)³

Other translations: None

Institutional History

According to the *Testament* translated below, the site of this foundation had originally been [2] the residence of a solitary named John, the author’s spiritual father, located in a densely wooded area of Mount Athos belonging to the Docheiariou monastery for which (41) *Docheiariou* had been written in the early years of the twelfth century. Our author Neilos, who joined John there, inherited [3] the improvised settlement when the latter died on a journey in Thessalonike. Neilos managed to obtain [11] from Arsenios, who is attested as superior of Docheiariou in 1287, an annual stipend (*diakonia*) for the support of a more permanent dependency. According to an inscription of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, this small dependency of the Docheiariou monastery was built in 1294–95 during the reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328).⁴

The present *Testament* would have been composed a generation later, in 1330–31, as the founder Neilos sought to arrange [6] the succession in favor of his own spiritual sons Daniel and Iakobos. The ruins of this foundation are to be found on Mount Athos an hour’s journey from Docheiariou towards the mountain’s administrative center at Karyes.

Analysis

This brief *Testament*, composed by the founder Neilos for the small monastery (*monydrion*) of St. John the Forerunner (*Prodromos*), is useful, considered along with (44) *Karyes*, for illuminating the relationship between a mother house (here, the Athonite monastery of Docheiariou, for which see also (41) *Docheiariou*) and one of its dependencies. Unlike the author of (44) *Karyes* [13], however, who was much more assertive of his foundation’s entitlement to non-interference from its mother house, our author here seems to have been in a weaker position, bound by prior engagements to the great monastery in exchange for its financial support.

Although this is essentially a transmissory document rather than a regulatory *typikon*, it incorporates several common features of the latter genre, including the foundation history [2], [3], a prohibition on alienation of property [7], prescriptions for commemorative services [9] and illumination of the church [10], and an inventory [14] of movable property. This is additional evidence for the convergence of the once very distinct testamentary and regulatory foundation documents.

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A. Lives of the Monks

As an essentially transmissory document, the *Testament* has little to say about the lives of the monks. The monastery was designed [3] to house “a sufficiently large community of brothers.” They were, however, to offer [9] commemorative services (*mnemosyna*) and offer *kollyba* (on Fridays) for the emperors (perhaps in acknowledgement of imperial patronage for the mother house), for the founders (*ktetores*) of Docheiariou, its superior and its brotherhood, and for the author himself. Except for Neilos’ own commemoration, these were likely obligations of the mother house that passed down to its dependencies.

B. Constitutional Matters

1. Relationship with the Mother House

There seems to have been another document, or perhaps an oral understanding, between Docheiariou and Neilos permitting the latter to build this dependent monastery. The monks of Docheiariou apparently drove a hard bargain, requiring Neilos to seek [17] their approval (and that of the Athonite *protos*) for transmission of the monastery to his successors, to provide [9] commemorative services for themselves and their patron the emperor, and to deliver [15] a half-share (later increased to virtually all) of the monastery’s olive and wine crop.

Accordingly, the author records [4] clearing his plans for the succession with the *protos* of the holy mountain and the superiors of the greater monasteries; he also consulted with and obtained [17] the permission of the monks of Docheiariou. Having established [17] that the present document introduced nothing “perverse or injurious” to the interests of Docheiariou, he makes bold [16] to threaten anyone from the main monastery with “canonical penalties” and the vengeance of the patronal saint, John the Baptist, if there is any attempt to overturn his *Testament*.

2. Governance

The author provides [6] that the ordained monks Daniel and Iakobos, his spiritual sons, were to take joint charge of the monastery after his death. The author had himself inherited [3] the site where he was to build the present monastery from his own spiritual father John. Of the author’s successors, Daniel was to be the senior partner, but he was to govern [8] with the advice and consent of Iakobos, not arbitrarily. However, if Daniel should decline the monastery’s leadership, he was not to be allowed to take [12] any of the institution’s property with him. If he accepted, Iakobos was to succeed him as leader should he die in office. After Daniel and Iakobos, the author provides [13] that an ordained and virtuous monk should be superior, assisted by another ordained monk.

Neilos’ injunctions [7] to his successors reflect conventional concerns of private patrons as well as the traditions of the Athonite communities: they were not to appropriate anything of the foundation for themselves, have a horse or servant, or make frequent excursions away from Athos.

C. Financial Matters

The monastery was the recipient [11] of an annual stipend that Arsenios, the superior of Docheiariou, and his elders had granted for its support; the author expected that this would continue after his own death. The monastery owed [15] certain dues to Docheiariou as well, including all the pro-

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duce from an olive grove and a vineyard except for a section marked off for its own use. The author also makes a donation of ten *hyperpyra* as a gift to Docheiariou, perhaps for memorial services for himself.

There is a brief inventory [14] of the monastery's movable properties, including sacred vessels, service books, and a few volumes of ascetic literature by John Klimakos, Makarios of Egypt, and Mark the Hermit.

Notes on the Introduction

1. Oikonomides, *Docheiariou*, p. 134, bases this attribution on the dating; Neilos "of the monastery of the *Prodromos* of Docheiariou" is known as the signatory of an act of the Xenophon monastery, dated to 1322.
2. Dating is based on a note on the verso of the document by an annotator made in 1785, based on a portion of the text now lost; see Oikonomides, *Docheiariou*, p. 134.
3. See Oikonomides, *Docheiariou*, p. 133.
4. See Oikonomides, *Docheiariou*, p. 134.

Bibliography

Ktenas, K., "Ho Protos tou Hagiou Orous Atho kai he 'megale mese' e 'synaxis,'" *EEBS* 6 (1929), 233–81, esp. 263–67.

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Translation

[1.] Inasmuch as I see the end of [my] life approaching—and this [my] advanced age proclaims distinctly—I deem it necessary to make arrangements for the brothers under me and the small monastery¹ which I raised up with God[’s help], and which is honored with the name of John, the venerable and glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist. But lest the ignorant be uncertain about the background of this [monastery], and whence my zeal for it originated, it is fitting that I begin by relating [these matters].

[2.] My spiritual father, that holy abba John of blessed memory, was ever content, in accord with his personal goal, to inhabit those places he might find suitable for tranquil solitude. He loved to dwell in that spot where presently the aforementioned small monastery which we built [can be] seen, and which lies within the territory of the venerable monastery of Docheiariou. At that time [the place] was harsh and cheerless, yet it was pleasing for his purpose, and indeed offered [him] everything. [He and I] dwelt there together a considerable length of time in some small makeshift cells, and we were content with what we had procured as a dwelling place.

[3.] [His] life came to an end while he was away in Thessalonike on some spiritual necessity. Thus was I left alone, yet I decided that I should not depart from this place owing to [his] paternal command [that I remain]. I began, with all [my] might, to clear the dense woods in that area, and thus to change its savagery into docility—but not without the knowledge and consent of the supe-

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rior of the venerable monastery of Docheiariou, and of the entire community. So, with God[’s help], first, I raised up this church, as seen, in the name of John, the venerable and glorious Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist. [p. 136] I built cells for a sufficiently large community of brothers, and with much labor I dug a well, and planted a vineyard and an olive grove. I provided holy icons and books for the church, each of which will be described below.² Without elaborating point by point [all that I did, suffice it to say that], with God’s assistance, I completed this small monastery, such as it appears now, from nothing.

[4.] Wishing to make future arrangements for [this monastery] according to my intent, I relayed and made known this [desire] to our most holy common father, the *protos* of the Holy Mountain,³ and he, as well as [our] most holy fathers, the superiors of the venerable monasteries there, resolved that I did not wish anything unjust or unbefitting our spiritual state. Accordingly I now make [the following] arrangements.

[5.] First of all, to all Christians I offer forth the prayers and forgiveness still owed [by me to them], and in return I implore the same [from them] for the remission of my numerous sins.

[6.] Next [I ordain that], after me, lord Daniel and lord Iakobos —among the ordained monks my beloved spiritual sons, whom from the beginning, with God’s help, I have spiritually educated— jointly take charge of the aforementioned small monastery and those belonging to it when I am gone. [I ordain] that they concern themselves, as I did, with the salvation and spiritual progress of my other spiritual children, and the betterment of the small monastery. However, should the ordained monk lord Daniel be found dwelling here, in accord with [my] paternal injunction, and conducting his life in a highly spiritual manner, consonant with monastic propriety and order, [then I enjoin that he] preside and serve as superior over my spiritual children, as have I.

[7.] Neither of my two successors should appropriate anything [for himself], nor should he have a horse, or his own servant, or anything else unbecoming and alien to the spiritual custom of the small monastery as it has always [been observed], for a spiritual settlement [such as this] has no need of these things. Nor should they make frequent excursions into the world—only once a year, and then in connection with some urgent labor, and they ought to return as quickly as possible. Nor should they have a horse, as mentioned, but only a donkey for the service of the small monastery, on account of the harshness and ruggedness of the terrain.

[8.] [Daniel] should not arbitrarily do what he wants, but should act with the advice and consent of my son lord Iakobos, and he ought to keep with him perfect peace and accord. [They] ought thus to show a profound respect for one another, as the holy apostle says (Rom. 12:10), so that the spiritual state of my other children will be preserved for the glory of God.

[9.] Let [the monks] uphold the memory of our powerful and holy masters and emperors; of the holy founders of the venerable monastery of Docheiariou; of the superior and brethren [of Docheiariou]; and of me, a sinner. Let *kollyba* be [offered] in their memory each Friday throughout the entire year (following the custom of the large monasteries), excepting those designated

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Fridays on which it is not customary (according to the tradition of the church) to commemorate the dead.

[10.] Except in [circumstances of] pressing need, lamps should be kept continually burning before the three sacred icons set out for veneration: that of the Virgin; that of the venerable [St. John the] Forerunner; and that of the Dormition of the holy Mother of God.

[11.] It was ordained by the blessed lord Arsenios,⁴ who served as superior of the venerable monastery of Docheiariou, as well as the honorable and eminent elders who were practicing [the monastic life] there at that time, that once a year they provide a stipend to our small monastery in memory of the founders of [their] monasteries, and all the monks in it. While I was alive, I used to accept this, and when I have passed away, they still ought to provide [us with this].

[12.] Concerning my spiritual son, the ordained monk lord Daniel—if as stated above, he should completely withdraw from the world and [still] be dwelling here (as I have enjoined) [when I die], then [let him] take charge and assume care for my other spiritual children, [p. 137] as well as the greater progress of the *kellion*.⁵ If he does not wish to remain here, as I have already spiritually enjoined, let him be fully excluded from the *kellion*, [and let him not] despoil anything whatsoever of the monastery's property—unless, that is, he desires to experience the educating wrath of God. But if [Daniel] assumes the spiritual direction of this small monastery of mine (as would be pleasing to God, and as I have enjoined), and if he should perish in it when he reaches the end of his life, then at his passing let the monk lord Iakobos succeed him. He should also live and conduct his life in the manner I have outlined above.

[13.] Thus I provide for the leadership of the small monastery up through my first two successors. If upon the passing of these [two] any of my spiritual children should still happen to be alive and present, then I spiritually ordain that a virtuous man who is adorned with priestly ordination as well as [devotion to] the monastic state be present in the small monastery [as its superior], and that he have [assisting him] an ordained monk.

[14.] I have dedicated to the monastery holy icons and books, each of which will be described below:

One paten and chalice; [several] silken chalice veils; two sets of vestments; one pair of eucharistic cuffs; two stoles; two *podeai* of gold [thread]; and two of silk; two *lamnai*; two candelabra for the entrance, and a censer.

[I have also dedicated to the monastery] these books:

A book containing the four Gospels and a *Praxapostolos*, [both] on parchment; *Menaia* of the twelve months in eight fascicles, also on parchment; a parchment Psalter; a parchment book by St. [. . .]; [John] Mauropous' *Canons to the Virgin*,⁶ on paper; a book by [Michael] Glykas;⁷ a parchment *Euchologion*; two *Synaxaria*; two parchment *Parakletikai*; another book of *Theotokia*, this on paper; two books by John Klimakos—one on paper, the other on parchment; a book having

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various chapters; a book by St. Makarios [of Egypt]; and another by St. Mark [the Hermit]; a book by St. Theodore of Edessa;⁸ a parchment *Panegyrikon*; a book of *propheteiai*; and a *Triodion* with the *propheteiai*.

[15.] Now, as I said, when I began to clear [the terrain] and build the small monastery, I also [expended] much labor and raised up a vineyard and an olive grove. Quite a few years ago I decided that after my death the small monastery should have one-half of the grapes and olives for its maintenance, and the monastery of Docheiariou should have the other half. Sometime thereafter, however, the area was devastated because of a very severe winter. There were torrential floodings, and these endangered and at length destroyed the vines and the olive-bearing trees. I set myself again to hard work, and planted another vineyard and olive grove, [these being located] towards the Megale Petra.

I now dedicate this vineyard and olive grove—the ones [located] towards the Megale Petra—to the venerable monastery of Docheiariou, except for a section of the vineyard and olive grove which I have marked off. I have decided that the *kellion* should have [this latter section], along with all the older vines and trees which I replanted [there].

I dedicate ten *hyperpyra* as a gift to the monastery of *Docheiariou*.

[16.] These [provisions] I set forth for my spiritual children and for the aforementioned small monastery, which I—with the [help of] God and the others—labored so hard to erect. No one in the monastery of *Docheiariou*, either present or future, ought [to dare to] dissolve this [*Testament*]. Should anyone attempt to set aside the fitting and just [provisions] which I have made through God's grace for my [spiritual children], he shall first of all experience and be educated by God's mighty wrath. He shall also be subject to the canonical penalties which the holy fathers have prescribed for those who dare [to do] such things. In addition, on the Day of Judgment, he shall have as his plaintiff the venerable [St. John the] Forerunner [himself].

[17.] As previously stated, from the very beginning I never undertook to raise up this small monastery contrary to the wishes of [my brethren], and I have not been moved to make the [provisions] which I have just now made without [their] counsel, or unreasonably. Nor do I bring forth or introduce anything perverse or injurious to this venerable monastery of Docheiariou—as someone viewing [the matter] incorrectly might suppose. Rather, I have performed this as a spiritual act which is pleasing to God himself, and which will also [redound to the benefit] of that very monastery [of Docheiariou]. [p. 138]

[Drawn up] in the presence of the virtuous and holy men who have signed their names below.⁹

Notes on the Translation

1. *monydrion* (“small monastery”), used interchangeably here with *kellion*.

2. In [14] below.

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3. The nominal leader of the Athonite community resident at Karyes; see Alexander Kazhdan and Alice-Mary Talbot, “Protos,” *ODB*, pp. 1746–47, and (44) *Karyes* [3].
4. Attested as superior of Docheiariou in 1287; see Oikonomides, *Docheiariou*, p. 25.
5. Used interchangeably here with “small monastery” (*monydrion*).
6. For these, see Beck, *KTL*, p. 556.
7. Either his *Chronicle* or his *Ninety-Nine Responses to Scriptural Questions*; see Oikonomides, *Docheiariou*, p. 135.
8. Subject of a hagiographical romance, possibly based on events of the eighth century; see Alexander Kazhdan, “Theodore of Edessa,” *ODB*, p. 2043. For the ascetic works of Pseudo-Makarios, see *PG* 34, cols. 401–968, and for those of Mark the Hermit, see *PG* 65, cols. 905–1140.
9. The last line is incomplete; the author ends the document with his signature, and there is a fragmentary reference to the indiction year.

Document Notes

- [1] Need for the *Testament*. See also the rationale in (45) *Neophytos* [1].
- [2] Prior use of the site by a solitary. See also the similar origin of another foundation in (45) *Neophytos* [4].
- [3] Foundation history. See also the brief foundation history for another Athonite dependency in (44) *Karyes* [2].
- [4] Consultation with the *protos* and the Athonite superiors. See also the cautious approach taken in [17] below.
- [5] Forgiveness asked of all Christians. See also the similar requests expressed in (49) *Geromeri* [15], (50) *Gerasimos*, and (51) *Koutloumousi* [B15].
- [6] Designation of successors. See also [12] below. For use of a testament to designate a successor, see also (1) *Apa Abraham* [1]; (10) *Eleousa* [11]; (24) *Christodoulos* [B3], [B5], [C1]; (25) *Fragala* [A7], [B7]; (41) *Docheiariou* [4]; (45) *Neophytos* [16]; (49) *Geromeri* [14]; (50) *Gerasimos* [3]; (52) *Choumnos* [A3]; and (60) *Charsianeites* [B10], [C18].
- [7] Disciplinary injunctions to successors. See similar provisions in (13) *Ath. Typikon* [31], [33], [34], which are themselves based on (3) *Theodore Studites* [6], [10], [18], [20].
- [8] Two successors to govern collaboratively. Cf. arrangements made in (50) *Gerasimos* [3] and (52) *Choumnos* [A3].
- [9] Required commemorations with offerings of *kollyba*. For use of *kollyba* elsewhere, see (4) *Stoudios* [A30]; (27) *Kecharitomene* [71]; (28) *Pantokrator* [8], [44], [49], [53]; (32) *Mamas* [39]; (33) *Heliou Bomon* [39]; (35) *Skoteine* [25]; (37) *Auxentios* [13]; and (43) *Kasoulon* [9].
- [10] Continuously burning lamps. See similar provisions for these lamps in (27) *Kecharitomene* [66], [68]; (28) *Pantokrator* [6], [29], [34]; and (34) *Machairas* [26].
- [11] Annual stipend from the main monastery. See the similar arrangement in (44) *Karyes* [3], and the payments made by the dependency to the main monastery as discussed in [15] below.
- [12] Contingent provisions for the succession. See also [6] above.
- [13] Provisions for subsequent successions. See also (50) *Gerasimos* [3] for a somewhat different attempt to rotate the succession to the superiorship among a founder’s disciples.
- [14] Inventory of sacred vessels and textiles; books. For the former, see also lists in (19) *Attaleiates* [INV 6], [INV 8], [INV 18]; (23) *Pakourianos* [33B]; (31) *Areia* [T11]; (35) *Skoteine* [25], [28], [42], cf. [45]; and (61) *Eleousa Inv.* [5], [6]. For the latter, see the lists in (19) *Attaleiates* [INV 7], [INV 12] ff.; (23) *Pakourianos* [33B]; (34) *Skoteine* [24], [27], [28], [42]; (54) *Neilos Damilas*; and (61) *Eleousa Inv.* [3].
- [15] Payments in cash and in kind to the main monastery. See also [11] above.
- [16] Warning to violators of the *Testament*. See analogous provisions in (35) *Skoteine* [46], (37) *Auxentios* [2], (45) *Neophytos* [22], (49) *Geromeri* [16], (54) *Neilos Damilas* [24], and (60) *Charsianeites* [B22].
- [17] Justification of arrangements as being in the interest of the main monastery. See also [4] above.