

This is an extract from:

*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents:*

*A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*

*edited by John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero*

*with the assistance of Giles Constable*

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49. *Geromeri: Testament of Neilos Erichiotes for the Monastery of the Mother of God Hodegetria in Geromeri*

*Date:* 1337

*Translator:* George Dennis

*Edition employed:* Basiles Krapsites, *Thesprotika*, vol. 2 (Athens, 1972), pp. 160–68, with text at 163–67.

*Manuscript:* Ms. Geromeri library (19th c.)<sup>1</sup>

*Other translations:* None

*Institutional History*

The monastery of the Mother of God *Hodegetria* is located above the modern town of Philiates north of Igoumenitsa in the northwestern corner of Greece near the Albanian border. The attribute may be derived from the monastery of Hodegon in Constantinople where this pious icon, allegedly painted by St. Luke, was kept. Some details of its founder Neilos Erichiotes' life are known from the brief hagiographic tract devoted to him by a monk named Job that is preserved in a sixteenth-century copy at the monastery.<sup>2</sup> Early in his monastic career, Neilos, then resident in Constantinople, suffered persecution and exile for his opposition to Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos' church reunification policy based on agreements reached with the Roman papacy at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. After the abandonment of the unionist policy upon the accession of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328), Neilos relocated to the Holy Land, where he lived for thirty-one years at Mount Sinai, Mount Carmel, Jericho, and a monastery near the Jordan River. Later, he moved again, this time to Greece, finally settling at Erichos near Valona in the territory of the independent despotate of Epiros. Nicol (*Despotate*, p. 243) estimates that Neilos founded the monastery of the *Hodegetria* around 1330.

The founder's *Testament* translated below was confirmed by the despot of Epiros, John II Orsini, in 1337, probably at the end of Neilos' life. This document is preserved only in a copy of the nineteenth century in the monastery's library. Preserved separately is a record of the intervention of Patriarch John XIV Kalekas (1334–47) in a dispute in 1336 between the monks of an unnamed monastery and the bishop of Bouthrotos and Glyky. Asdracha ("Deux actes," p. 163), has suggested that the unnamed monastery may have been that of Geromeri.<sup>3</sup>

According to Nicol (*Despotate*, p. 243), the present monastery church dates from a renovation in 1568, long after the fall of the Despotate of Epiros to the Ottoman Turks in 1479. At the time of its renovation, Geromeri held a patriarchal *stauropolegion*, specifically exempting it from the authority of the metropolitan of Ioannina. However, if Asdracha's identification is correct, the monastery's patriarchal *stauropolegion* might conceivably have dated back to as early as 1336.

*Analysis*

Most of this short testament is taken up by the author's confession of faith ([1] through [11]), understandable enough for an author like this one who suffered persecution and exile for his opposition to the Union of Lyons in the late 1270s (cf. [12]).<sup>4</sup> One must go all the way back to (3) *Theodore Studites* to find another document in our collection in which a confession of faith plays such an important part, but it is noteworthy that our author's opponent, Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, lists "correct faith in the divinity" in (37) *Auxentios* [3] as one of the qualifications for election to the superiorship.

In the style of an old-fashioned founder, our author exercises [14] his right to appoint the monk Isaias as his successor and provides for his own burial at the monastery. His original disciples Gerasimos and Kallinikos were always to be welcome at the monastery even if they should leave for a time and want to come back later. Yet "unsuitable and rebellious" monks had no such right to stay but should be expelled.

The author also obliges [15] his monks to pray for the various benefactors of his foundation. Above all, these included the Despot John Angelos Doukas, better known to history as John II Orsini (1323–1336/7),<sup>5</sup> despot of Epiros, and his wife the *basilissa* Anna Palaiologina. The author appeals to the ruling couple to provide "protection and guidance" for the monks, just as they had previously undertaken to protect him.

Locally, the nobleman John Apsaras, who donated [13] an ancient vineyard which the monks then restored, was one of the first benefactors of this foundation. By the time this document was drawn up, another member of his family, Nicholas Apsaras, appears [15] along with Aristarchos Kapandrites in the author's list of benefactors for whom the monks should offer prayers. The author entreats these local noblemen "to distribute the necessities to the monks" insofar as their own resources should permit. The traditional curse of the 318 Nicaean Fathers concludes [16] the *Testament*, warning off the aristocracy, priests, other ecclesiastics, monks or "anyone else" who might attempt to harm the monks or nullify the author's *Testament*. The despot himself<sup>6</sup> confirms the provisions of the testament in a subscription.

Evidently like his counterpart the author of (35) *Skoteine*, our author owed the good fortune of his foundation at least in part to the patronage of supportive members of the local nobility. Here, however, Apsaras and Kapandrites seem to have become the foundation's lay protectors (*ephoroi*), in practice if not also in title. (58) *Menoikeion*, a contemporary document from an independent monastery, illustrates how a protectorate could become the functional equivalent of old-fashioned ownership (*ktetoreia*). Perhaps the author's attempts to build equally good relations with the rulers of Epiros were intended to prevent this from happening so readily to his foundation.

*Notes on the Introduction*

1. See Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 243.

2. *Vita*, ed. Krapsites, *Thesprotika*, vol. 2, pp. 161–62; content summarized in Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 244.

3. Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 237.

4. Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 244.

## FOURTEENTH CENTURY

5. So Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 95.

6. For the identification, see Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 244.

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### *Translation*

[1.] In the beginning God made all things, and after he had done that he created man, Adam and Eve, endowing them with the divine gifts of grace and guarding them by his commandment. But owing to the envy of the devil and the inexperience of the woman—alas for our weakness—because of our forefathers who did not heed the command of their creator, from disobedience we have harvested death. Instead of being immortal we have become mortal, instead of indestructible, destructible. Like a flower of the field which blossoms today and like the grass which springs up, such is our nature. Tomorrow it withers away and vanishes as a flower and dissipates like a shadow. I am well aware that I am human, that I have fulfilled the allotted days of my life, and that I am already approaching extreme old age. Tied down by my weakness and oppressed with other infirmities, although death is not yet upon me, I have decided to make a formal profession of my religious beliefs, to make it clear to all who know me as well as to those who do not know me. I shall then briefly explain about my way of life.

[2.] I preface what I am to say with the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in whom I was baptized and in whom I have lived and to whom I offer pure worship, as I begin with these words. I believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one essence, one godhead, one majesty, made known in three hypostases, characterized by three distinct properties and by three sanctifications which come together in one lordship and godhead glorified by the seraphim. I give praise to the unborn Father, to the Son born of the Father, to the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, having complete existence from him, consubstantial and of the same origin as the Son and through him provided and sent to creation.

## 49. GEROMERI

I profess that the Father is the one origin, the one source of both. These are caused by him, equal in honor, transcending time, and without separation. I proclaim that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. I hold wholeheartedly to the true teaching in the Gospels of Our Lord Jesus Christ that he is the only cause and sender, and I turn away from all false and illegitimate doctrines. It is proper to the Father to give birth and to send forth and not to be born or to be sent forth. It is proper to the Holy Spirit not to be born or to give birth. The three are without beginning and coeternal; this is true of the Father, true of the Son, true of the Holy Spirit. I shall describe him who is above us by using examples that are on our own level such as sun, light, ray; fountain, water, river; mind, word, spirit. The three are equal, divided and undivided, divided in hypostasis and undivided in essence, one God, triune, consubstantial, inseparable, indivisible [p. 164].

I confess that the only-begotten Son of God, the Word, came down for us and for our salvation and assumed flesh from the all-holy and virginal blood of the most holy and supremely spotless Mother of God, the ever-virgin Mary. He became that which he was not. He did not depart from his godhead, nor did he undergo change, confusion, or division, but he preserved what was characteristic of each of the converging natures safe and unchanged. Indeed, from this very unity he deified what was added, in the manner of an exchange. He remained what he was and he took on that which he was not, one Christ manifested in two natures, the divine and the human. He has two wills and two energies. He has fully realized all the natural and blameless sufferings of humanity. Then for our sake he underwent the cross and death. He rose again in three days and was taken up from earth in glory. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He shall come again to judge the living and the dead and to recompense each person according to his deeds.

[3.] I believe that the Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets. I acknowledge one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and that the remission of sins is accomplished by one holy baptism. I hope and look for the resurrection from the dead of all human nature, as well as judgment and retribution, and eternal life in the age to come. I hold to the holy symbol of faith, firmly and unshaken, nor do I accept any addition or any removal. Moreover, I embrace the seven holy ecumenical councils. I also embrace with my soul, will, mind, and speech the revered, orthodox, local synods which decreed matters of ecclesiastical discipline, expositions of sacred dogmas, and canonical regulations. Whatever they affirmed, so do I affirm, and in turn, what they rejected, so do I reject and disavow. I cast out those whom they cast out, and in turn I receive those whom they received. Those whom they anathematized I too subject to anathema.

[4.] I honor the first [ecumenical Council of Nicaea I (325)]<sup>1</sup> which decreed that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. I anathematize Arius and those who agree with him and abusively call the Son a creature and later [in time]. I confess that the Son of God is coeternal with the Father and without beginning, the creator of all things and not a creature, the maker not something made, the craftsman not the product, before time and not subject to time.

[5.] I revere the second [ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381)]<sup>2</sup> and I reject Makedonios, who fought against the Spirit and is hated by God, as well as his fable that the Holy Spirit is less and is subservient to the Father and the Son. I give glory and power to the Holy Spirit as being

## FOURTEENTH CENTURY

equal in divinity and glory to [the Father and the Son]. In like manner I hate and abhor the blasphemy of Apollinaris teaching that the flesh of the Lord was without a soul. I believe correctly and firmly that mind and soul dwell in it, with a rational soul and intellect.

[6.] I associate myself with the third [ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431)],<sup>3</sup> and I spit out Nestorios, that Judaizer and worshiper of humanity, who divided and cut up the one Christ into two, and who asserted that he was simply a man and not God made flesh, and likewise that the holy virgin who brought forth the Lord was not the Mother of God but [only] “Mother of Christ.” I glorify the holy virgin especially and truly as Mother of God and the one Son in one *hypostasis* who without seed took flesh from her as our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and Son of God.

[7.] I adhere [p. 165] to the fourth [ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451)]<sup>4</sup> and I utterly reject and declare the opposite of the unfortunate Eutyches<sup>5</sup> and the wicked, demonic Dioscoros, with all those who turned away from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and made up the story that he bore his flesh in imagination only and so babbled about one nature and linked suffering to the godhead. I wholeheartedly and clearly proclaim that the one Christ our God is perfect God and perfect man in two natures without confusion or division.

[8.] I revere the fifth [ecumenical Council of Constantinople (553)],<sup>6</sup> condemning] the deviant Origen, Evagrius, and Didymos, who taught there is to be an end to punishment and uttered thousands of other blasphemies. I also set at naught and utterly reject Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorios, with his blasphemous doctrines.

[9.] I take to heart the sixth [ecumenical Council of Constantinople (680–81)],<sup>7</sup> and I loathe the heresiarchs hated by God Theodore of Pharan, Honorius, Cyrus, Peter, Pyrrhos, Sergios, Paul, as well as the deviant Makarios, his disciple Stephen, and Polychronios, the old man who thought like a child, who said that our Lord Jesus Christ even after taking flesh had one will and one energy. I confess that our Lord Jesus Christ had two natural wills and two natural energies after taking flesh, not in a division of persons but in that not one of the two natures is without a will or an energy.

[10.] I revere the seventh and final [ecumenical Council of Nicaea II (787)],<sup>8</sup> and I reject those God-hating, loathsome fighters against images who claim that the uncircumscribed must be without flesh and who therefore set aside the adoration of the sacred icons. I also reject as impious and accursed those who think that it is someone else besides the Son<sup>9</sup> of God who has freed us from the error of idolatry. I venerate the holy icons, and I honor and embrace them, since the honor shown them goes on to the prototype, according to the great Basil noted for his divine [learning].<sup>10</sup> I give glory to our Lord Jesus Christ circumscribed according to his humanity, uncircumscribed according to his godhead, subject to suffering and not subject, created and uncreated, the same and also God.

[11.] In the same way I honor all the holy councils inasmuch as they agree in all sound teachings.

#### 49. GEROMERI

But I anathematize the heresies which have appeared at various time and places, . . . barbarism and other wicked opinions, and everything uttered by the impious<sup>11</sup> to justify them, such as the blasphemies and nonsense of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9–24), of the *Medenistai*, the *Bogomils*,<sup>12</sup> the *Chatzitzarii*, the *Sabellians*,<sup>13</sup> the *Paulianists*,<sup>14</sup> and the rest of the heresies, and likewise I anathematize everything taught by atheists.

[12.] Desirous of briefly explaining my situation, I shall begin immediately. It was in fact as a child that I put on the wonderful yoke of the Lord and took up his burden which is light (Matt. 11:30). I bid farewell to everyone and fled a long distance away. I settled in a place I thought would be conducive to my salvation.<sup>15</sup> But the sower of weeds (Matt. 13:39), our enemy the devil, spread weeds and dissension in the church trying to besmear it with new-fangled terms and herodox teachings. I cannot begin to describe how much I suffered in the way of exile and other afflictions at the hands of those whose beliefs were wicked. How many places I journeyed past, how many customs I witnessed, how many holy men also, how many regions of the earth I explored, and the benefits I derived from these, according to God's will, it is impossible to commit to writing.

[13.] Finally, some time ago I came to this very country, and with me were two monks, [p. 166] Kallinikos, who was ordained, and Gerasimos. We found this place rough, impassable, uncultivated, and not at all suitable for human habitation and settlement. By the sweat of our brow, strenuous labor, wearisome and unceasing toil, we cleaned up the place, as can be seen today. The place was made useful and suitable for the settlement of monks. There was an ancient vineyard located a bit outside the village of Geromeri, and this was given to us by the noble lord John Apsaras.<sup>16</sup> We labored long and hard in that vineyard and made it fruitful again.

[14.] This then, is a true account of our situation. For myself now, I can see that life is soon to leave me and that death is drawing near. So that after my death there will be nothing concerning our disciples which is not properly arranged, I make the following dispositions. This body of mine, composed of earth and clay, should be given burial in this place in which, as was mentioned, we labored so much. In my place I designate the honorable monk, lord Isaias, to remain here with those chosen souls. They should owe him complete obedience, love, and honor, and should readily obey him as their superior. They should listen attentively to what he may say to them concerning their salvation and spiritual welfare. If the ordained monk Kallinikos or the monk Gerasimos should be troubled by certain thoughts and leave there and then want to come back again, let them be received since they have truly and generously labored there previously and are our disciples. But if a person seems unsuitable and wants to rebel against his own superior, let him be expelled from the monastery in dishonor, inasmuch as he did not wish to remain in the order to which he was called, according to the holy Apostle (I Cor. 7:20).

[15.] Having now disposed of these matters in this way, I assure my lords in the spirit and my sons, the pious and most noble Lord John Angelos Doukas and the most Christian *basilissa*,<sup>17</sup> Lady Anna Palaiologina, of my heartfelt prayer. I beg God always to bestow his gifts on them, to grant

## FOURTEENTH CENTURY

peace to the empire and victories over its enemies, visible and invisible, and an abundance of all sorts of good things. After ruling on earth to a ripe old age, may they be found worthy of the kingdom of heaven. I pray too that their children may be protected by God and as their heirs succeed to their authority and lordship enlarging in the future “the line of their inheritance” (Deut. 32:9). I place a fitting request before their majesties to provide protection and guidance for the humble monks with me, just as, led as they were by God, they undertook to protect me.

To my sons, the officials of this place, the most noble *kaballarios* lord Nicholas Apsaras and lord Aristarchos Kapandrites I leave assurance of my prayer and pardon which I owe them. I entreat them to look reverently upon the aforementioned monks and to love them. In accord with their own resources, may they be willing to distribute the necessities to the monks, just as other religious Christians who love the monks. In turn, these monks are obliged to pray regularly in a special way for their orthodox and pious lords, for their Christ-loving army, and for all other rulers and ruled, as they have been taught by me. Moreover, I ask pardon of every orthodox Christian [p. 167] and beg the favor of their prayers, so I might have them as provision for my journey away from here. In turn, from the bottom of my soul I leave behind pardon for all Christians who have both hated and loved me.

[16.] If anyone should see fit to oppose this present plain and true *Testament* of mine and think to take steps to nullify it, and if he should provoke any disturbance or try to bring about any harm to our monks, whether he be of the ruling class, be enrolled among the priests, in the ecclesiastical order, or wearing the monastic habit, or anyone else, at any time whatever, may such a person never come to stand at the right hand of Christ, may he fall under the curses of the three hundred and eighteen God-bearing Fathers in Nicaea and of the other six holy and ecumenical synods, and of all the saints who have pleased God from eternity, and of myself a sinner.

[Confirmation]

The present *Testament* of the most holy and divine father, lord Neilos, Erichiotes, founder of the revered monastery of the most holy Mother of God *Hodegetria* located in the place called Geromeri, has been gladly received by my majesty, read, and thoroughly understood. It has been confirmed by the present customary bull of my majesty, for the perpetual security and eternal observance of its sacred commands and dispositions. It shall be preserved inviolate by our majesty and by our legitimate successors forever.

In the month of December, the fifth indiction, the year 6845, and from the birth of Christ 1337 [A.D.].

### *Notes on the Translation*

*Editors' note:* The assistance of our translator, George Dennis [GD], is gratefully acknowledged for the notes to this document.

1. For this council and its personalities, see Aristeides Papadakis, “Nicaea, Councils of,” *ODB*, pp. 1464–65.
2. For this council and its personalities, see Aristeides Papadakis, “Constantinople, Councils of,” *ODB*, p. 512.

## 49. GEROMERI

3. For this council and its personalities, see Aristeides Papadakis, "Ephesus, Councils of," *ODB*, p. 707.
4. For this council and its personalities, see Aristeides Papadakis, "Chalcedon, Council of," *ODB*, p. 404.
5. Contrasted as *Eutychea ton dystyche* in the Greek text. [GD]
6. For this council and its personalities, see Papadakis, "Constantinople, Councils of," p. 512.
7. For this council and its personalities, see Papadakis, "Constantinople, Councils of," pp. 512–13.
8. For this council, see Papadakis, "Nicaea, Councils of," p. 1465.
9. *eisin*, which should read *hyion*; see J. Gouillard, "Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie," *T&M* 2 (1967), 1–316, at p. 296, line 92. [GD]
10. Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 45, PG 32, col. 149C.
11. *eusebon*, which should read *asebon*. [GD]
12. See Dmitri Obolensky, "Bogomils," *ODB*, p. 301.
13. The text reads: *Sadelianoï*; for Sabellianism, see Karl-Heinz Uthemann, "Monarchianism," *ODB*, p. 1391. [GD]
14. *Paulianistai*, possibly the same as the *Paulikianoi* (Paulicians), for whom see Nina Garsoïan, "Paulicians," *ODB*, p. 1606. The other two obscure sects mentioned here, the *Medenistai* (lit. "nihilists") and *Chatzitzarii* could not be identified. *Medenistai* may be a scribal error for *Montanistai*, for whom, see T. E. Gregory, "Montanism," *ODB*, p. 1401.
15. Constantinople; see above, Institutional History.
16. Spelling of his name follows Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 244.
17. Title of the wife of the despot of Epiros; see Nicol, *Despotate*, p. 105, n. 84.

### Document Notes

- [1] Meditation on death. See also the contemporary reflections on this subject in (50) *Gerasimos* [1] and in (51) *Kouloumoussi* [A1], [C1].
- [2] Confession of faith. See also the confessions in (3) *Theodore Studites*, Concerning Faith, (7) *Latros* [1], [2]; (10) *Eleousa* [2]; and in (54) *Neilos Damilas* [1].
- [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10] Endorsement of the seven ecumenical councils. See also earlier endorsements in (3) *Theodore Studites*, Concerning Faith, and (7) *Latros* [3].
- [11] Condemnation of heresies. See also earlier condemnations in (3) *Theodore Studites*, Concerning Faith, and (7) *Latros* [3].
- [12] Early autobiography. The holy man's *Vita*, ed. Kraptsites, *Thesprotika*, vol. 2, pp. 161–62, provides additional details of the events of his life alluded to here.
- [13] Foundation history; patronage by lord John Apsaras. For similar local patronage, see (35) *Skoteine* [9], [10], [45].
- [14] Founder's dispositions. For the founder's burial at his monastery in this era, see (39) *Lips* [42]; for burial of other relatives, see also (46) *Akropolites* [6] and (57) *Bebaia Elpis* [142]. For appointment of a successor, see the contemporary (48) *Prodromos* [6] and (50) *Gerasimos* [3]. For discussions of the rights of monks who have departed to return, see (24) *Christodoulos* [B6] and (48) *Prodromos* [12].
- [15] Prayers for the despot of Epiros and his wife; request that local officials patronize the monastery in return for prayers. For similar arrangements, see (35) *Skoteine* [10]; (45) *Neophytos* [7]; (53) *Choumnos* [A18], [A20], [A26]; and (58) *Menoikeion* [1], [16], [22].
- [16] Curse on violators; confirmation by the despot of Epiros. For use of such curses elsewhere, see (35) *Skoteine* [46]; (37) *Auxentios* [2]; (45) *Neophytos* [22]; (48) *Prodromos* [16]; (50) *Gerasimos* [5]; (51) *Kouloumoussi* [A15], [B20]; (54) *Neilos Damilas* [24]; and (60) *Charsianeites* [B22]. For a similar imperial confirmation of a private testament, see (35) *Skoteine* [46].