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*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents:*

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

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### 53. *Meteora: Canonical Rule* of Athanasios the Meteorite for the Monastery of the Transfiguration (*Metamorphosis*)

*Date:* ca. 1350–83<sup>1</sup>

*Translator:* George Dennis

*Edition employed:* Nikos Bees, “Symbole eis ten historian ton monon ton Meteoron,” *Byzantis* 1 (1909), 191–331, with text at 250–52.

*Manuscript:* Codex of the Monastery of the *Metamorphosis*, no. 404, fol. 333r–334r (14th c.)<sup>2</sup>

*Other translations:* Modern Greek, by Sp. Lampros, “Symbolai eis ten historian ton Monon ton Meteoron,” *NH* 2 (1905), 49–156, at 76–77.

#### *Institutional History*

##### *A. Foundation under Athanasios the Meteorite*<sup>3</sup>

What was to become the monastery of the Transfiguration (*Metamorphosis*), the most important of the group of monasteries founded in the fourteenth century at Meteora, a site of unusual towering rock formations in Thessaly near Stagi (mod. Kalambaka), was founded by the hesychast Athanasios the Meteorite towards the middle of that century. Earlier, Athanasios’ monastic career had taken him to Crete and Mount Athos. Fleeing Turkish pirates who were then plaguing Mount Athos, Athanasios and his spiritual master Gregory sought refuge in Thessaly, circa 1340. There was already a monastic community there at Doupiane, a group of anchorites led by a *protos* forming a skete. Like the earlier anchorites, Gregory recognized the authority of the local bishopric of Stagi, whose incumbent Xenophon gave him permission in 1341 to rent some property for his band of ascetics from the skete at Doupiane.<sup>4</sup> Later, Athanasios removed himself to a site known as the “Broad Rock” that he called “Meteoron,” from *meteoros* (“suspended” or “floating in air”); the later monastic foundation here was known as the “Great Meteoron.” The dedication of the first chapel erected here was to the Mother of God *Meteoritissa*. Nicol (*Meteora*, p. 95) reckons that the foundation took place before Athanasios’ master Gregory’s departure from Thessaly, said to have occurred “ten years after his first arrival,” i.e., circa 1350. Subsequently, Athanasios sought to accommodate a community of some fourteen monks in a new church dedicated to the *Metamorphosis* that was to give its name to the whole foundation. In 1359, Antony, archbishop of Larissa, obliged Athanasios with a confirmation of his ownership of the land around the foundation, implicitly acknowledging Meteorora’s independence of the skete at Doupiane.<sup>5</sup>

The anonymous *Life* that preserves Athanasios’ *Canonical Rule* for this foundation was written by an Athonite monk after 1388.<sup>6</sup> Athanasios himself died in 1383 at the age of 78.<sup>7</sup>

##### *B. Subsequent History of the Foundation under Turkish Rule*<sup>8</sup>

The second founder was Joasaph Uroš († 1423?), son of Symeon Uroš Palaiologos, the Greco-

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Serbian despot of Epiros (1348–55) and later ruler of Thessaly (1359–71?), who may have joined the community as early as 1373. He rebuilt and enlarged the foundation's church in 1387–88.<sup>9</sup> In the sixteenth century, this was incorporated into a new church as its apse and sanctuary. Under Joasaph's leadership, Meteora survived the Turkish conquest of Thessaly in 1393. Later Joasaph was able to obtain recognition of Meteora's independence from Patriarch Euthymios II (1410–16), which exempted the monastery from the authority of the local bishop of Stagi.<sup>10</sup>

After Joasaph's death, there was a bitter struggle for supremacy between Meteora and the skete of Doupiane.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century, with the connivance of the Turkish authorities and the active support of the archbishop of Larissa, Athanasios and Joasaph's successors as directors of Meteora successfully established their claim to independence from Doupiane and their entitlement to the title of superior. In the sixteenth century, an era of more tolerant Turkish rule, especially under Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566), made possible a revival of monastic life at Meteora. Two capable superiors of Meteora, Bessarion (1520–40) and his successor Neophytos (1541–55?), strengthened the monastery's cenobitic organization and asserted its authority over the other monastic settlements in the vicinity. A patriarchal *stauropegion* awarded by Patriarch Jeremias I (1522–45) in 1540 confirmed Meteora's independence.<sup>12</sup>

This was also the time (1544–55) at which Meteora's *katholikon* of the *Metamorphosis* was enlarged to its present size, incorporating the earlier structure on the site as built by Joasaph in the late fourteenth century. A refectory was built a few years later in 1557, and the present ensemble of buildings on the site was essentially complete by the end of the sixteenth century. Like Chariton, author of (51) *Koutloumoussi*, and his successors, the monks of Meteora turned to the Christian rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia for patronage and financial support. Radu Mihnea, *voivode* of Wallachia and Moldavia in the early years of the seventeenth century, bestowed the Wallachian monastery of Golgotha with its estates upon Meteora as a dependency. This important bequest provided financial support to Meteora down into the eighteenth century.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the monastery's fortunes took a turn for the worse. External support dried up in the eighteenth century when Phanariote Greeks took over the administration of Wallachia and Moldavia for the Ottomans. Bad relations with Ali Pasha, semi-autonomous ruler of Ioannina from 1788, reduced the monastery to especially dire circumstances. Although Meteora had had some thirty monks at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by 1859 it had only four.<sup>13</sup>

### *C. Meteora in Modern Times*<sup>14</sup>

The part of Thessaly in which Meteora was located was awarded to the independent Kingdom of Greece in 1881, yet the monastery was reportedly pillaged by Turkish soldiers in the course of the Greco-Turkish War of 1897–98. In our own times, Meteora suffered further at the hands of German and Italian troops during the Second World War. It was also occupied by Communist partisans in the aftermath of the war. Subsequently, the foundation, along with its neighbors, was revived under the sponsorship of the Greek government. A small monastic community retains the foundation's relics, icons, and collection of more than 600 manuscripts.

*Analysis*

According to the hagiographic *Life* from which this brief document is extracted, Athanasios the Meteorite decided to employ a canonical rule to institute a reform at his monastery based on cenobitical principles. Some—but not all—of the monks then practicing a kelliotic form of monasticism at his monastery agreed to live according to the *Rule*'s terms. As in (28) *Pantokrator* [28], but not (33) *Heliou Bomon* [26], the author permits [1] those *parakelliotai* already present to remain “since he had once welcomed them.” Henceforth, everyone else was to meet the requirements of the cenobitic life.

*A. Model Typikon*

Almost inevitably, a fourteenth-century document of this sort upholding cenobitical principles of organization invites comparison to (22) *Evergetis*, the preeminent *typikon* of the monastic reform movement. At least two of the document's provisions seem to have been inspired by that earlier *typikon*, and most of the others are consonant with it.<sup>15</sup> Though a direct acquaintance cannot be demonstrated, it seems that this document, like (37) *Auxentios*, (39) *Lips*, (55) *Athanasios I*, (56) *Kellibara II*, (57) *Bebaia Elpis*, and (60) *Charsianeites*, can reasonably be considered an example of the neo-Evergetian revival of Palaiologan times, in which the institutions, if not the actual wording, of (22) *Evergetis* appear to have returned to favor among some of the era's most prominent benefactors.

*B. Lives of the Monks*

## 1. Liturgical Duties

This was a rigorist foundation in terms of liturgical observance. The night office was to be performed [11] daily, not just on Sundays and feasts, in accordance with an unspecified liturgical *typikon*, at this time most likely that of the Sabas monastery in Jerusalem. Unlike other authors, however, ours here admits that monks often neglected their duty to perform the office.

## 2. Cenobitic Life

Unlike some contemporary founders such as the author of (51) *Koutloumoussi* [B17] who accepted variations based on “years and labors,” Athanasios adopts [3] the controversial standard of (22) *Evergetis* [26] in providing for equality in food, drink, and clothing, with due allowance for illness.

Athanasios' uncompromising hostility to private property [8], [9], [10] was unusual in this era when resistance to idiorhythmic arrangements seems to have been weakening elsewhere (cf. (51) *Koutloumoussi* [A8], [B12]) while the tolerance of many founders for alternative forms of monasticism was increasing (cf. (34) *Machairas* [152], (37) *Auxentios* [11], (48) *Prodromos* [17]).

In implicit rejection of more tolerant arrangements such as that portrayed in (54) *Neilos Damilas* [7], Athanasios excepts [8] only articles of clothing “since all are not of the same size.” Moreover, he declares that a community without equality is no more than “an assembly of thieves and a dwelling for the sacrilegious.” Anyone caught with secret possessions was to be excommunicated [10] “as the fathers and St. Basil provided.”

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### *C. Constitutional Matters*

Athanasios has nothing to say about constitutional arrangements for his monastery in this document, perhaps because (as Nicol, *Meteora*, p. 98, has suggested) he did not want to infringe on the prerogatives of the *protos* of Doupiane by attributing to himself or his successor the title of superior.

### *D. Financial Matters*

Athanasios orders [4] that his monks should not sell any surpluses they might have of grain, wine, or oil. This is in conformance with the traditional Basilian prejudice against production for the marketplace that had also been endorsed in (35) *Skoteine* [23].

### *E. External Relations*

As another facet of an outlook hostile to the secular world (note the general condemnation in [5]), Athanasios prohibits [6] teaching “worldly letters” to children and adopts [7] (22) *Evergetis* [38]’s exclusion of women from the monastery’s charitable donations, adding the chilling qualifier “even if she happens to be dying of hunger.” Nowhere else in our collection of documents is institutional misogyny more absolute and uncompromising.

### *Notes on the Introduction*

1. Provisional dating based on the approximate time of Meteora’s foundation and Athanasios’ death in 1383, for which see below, Institutional History, A.
2. The *Canonical Rule* is encapsulated in the *Bios kai politeia tou hosiou patros hemon Athanasiou*, ed. Bees, “Symbole,” pp. 237–60, which dates from after 1388.
3. See Nicol, *Meteora*, pp. 88–104, and “Layman’s Ministry,” pp. 146–51.
4. Bees, “Grammata,” no. 23, pp. 96–98.
5. Bees, “Grammata,” no. 4, pp. 18–19.
6. Ed. Bees, “Symbole,” pp. 237–60.
7. The date is based on a now lost inscription built into the wall of the monastery; see Nicol, *Meteora*, p. 104, n. 22.
8. See Nicol, *Meteora*, pp. 101–24, 131–32, 168–72, and Alexander, “Monasteries,” pp. 95–100.
9. The date is based on a founder’s inscription in the apse of the *katholikon*; see Nicol, *Meteora*, p. 107.
10. Mentioned in a later document of Neophytos, archbishop of Larissa (1541), ed. Zakythinis, “Anekdotia,” no. 3, pp. 288–89.
11. Detailed in the *Syngramma historikon (Historical Discourse)*, a hostile tract drawn up ca. 1521 to contest Meteora’s claims to supremacy over its neighboring monasteries, for which see Nicol, *Meteora*, pp. 71–72.
12. Mentioned in a later document of Patriarch Metrophanes III (1580), ed. Zakythinis, “Anekdotia,” no. 7, pp. 299–302.
13. Nicol, *Meteora*, p. 182.
14. See Nicol, *Meteora*, pp. 172–87.
15. [3] equality in food, drink and clothing, cf. (22) *Evergetis* [26], and [7] women banned from the premises, cf. (22) *Evergetis* [38]; [1], [8], [9] are more generally Evergetian in spirit, but may well have had other sources of inspiration.

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*Translation*

The monks then were living this sort of life and increasing in number each day. [p. 251] The Father saw that having each one live his own life and take thought only for himself is not conducive to unity of spirit but to division and quarreling. He planned, therefore, to draw up a canonical rule for a common life to join together those under his charge. Some of the *parakelliotai* then

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came forward, whereas others refused. Nonetheless, he did not drive them away, since he had once welcomed them. Instead, he allowed them to continue living as they wished.

He then published the *Canonical Rule*:

1. With the exception of those already present, *parakelliotai* should not be received in the future, either by himself or by his eventual successors in governing the *kellion*. Rather, all should carry on their way of life in common in the general *kellion*.

2. Let there be one mind and one will. Let them carry on their struggle on an equal basis. Let them think the same.

3. As far as food, drink, and clothing are concerned, what the last of the monks has let the first have, making allowance for illness.

4. If there should be a surplus of grain, wine, or oil, they should not go around selling it.

5. Foreign, worldly things should not be allowed within.

6. Children should not learn worldly letters.

7. A woman should not pass beyond the prescribed boundary. She should not be given anything to eat, even if she happens to be dying of hunger.<sup>1</sup>

8. No one should have anything at all as his own, except for his clothing, since they are not all of the same size.

9. By no means should anyone living among them possess his own private property. This is why it is called a community. For wherever this kind of equality does not exist, we must not speak of a community, but of an assembly of thieves and a dwelling for the sacrilegious. [p. 252]

10. Whoever, therefore, is discovered possessing anything as his own, even a coin worth only three obols, should not be allowed to partake of the sacred mysteries, according to the tradition of the Fathers and of the great Basil.<sup>2</sup> If he should communicate, he does so to his own condemnation and not to the forgiveness of sins.

He penned these rules in his own hand and confirmed them with the signature of the bishop.<sup>3</sup> He then presented them to those living with him, the ordained monks lord Gregory and Iakobos and all the brothers then under his charge.

11. He also ordained that all the brothers in his charge should assemble in the church not only for the night offices on Sunday and the other great feasts, but that without fail they should also perform the service each day according to the correct tradition of the *typikon*. For often enough they can become careless either because of the malice of the enemy or sluggishness of the body, at

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times too because of distraction or too much to eat. For not all men living as solitaries have received the gift of being able to pray without being distracted, but those to whom grace has given the strong desire and who have strenuously labored at it for a very long time. As it is said, “Woe to the person who is alone.” If he is assailed by *akedia* or some other temptation, “he has no one to come to his aid” (Eccl. 4:10).

### *Notes on the Translation*

1. For Athanasios’ well-known misogyny, see Nicol, *Meteora*, pp. 98–99.
2. Cf. Pseudo-Basil, *Poenae* 13, *PG* 31, col. 1308C.
3. Presumably the bishop of Stagi, but see Nicol, *Meteora*, pp. 99–100, who argues for Antony, archbishop of Larissa.

### *Document Notes*

- [1] Institution of cenobitic life and ban on independent *parakelliotai*. See also the insistence on cenobiticism in (47) *Philanthropos* [1] ff. and (60) *Charsianeites* [B3], [B4], but note the tolerance for alternative forms of monasticism in (37) *Auxentios* [11], (34) *Machairas* [152], and (45) *Neophytos* [17] (missing).
- [2] Importance of one mind and one will.
- [3] Equality in food, drink, and clothing. See also the similar provisions in (22) *Evergetis* [26] and related documents, (37) *Auxentios* [7], (52) *Choumnos* [B20], (56) *Kellibara II* [2], and (60) *Charsianeites* [C3].
- [4] No commercial transactions. So also (45) *Neophytos* [C13], but not (54) *Neilos Damilas* [7].
- [5] Exclusion of “foreign, worldly things.” The reference is obscure.
- [6] No school to be established to teach children to read. For such schools, generally intended for future monks, see also (23) *Pakourianos* [31], (34) *Machairas* [115], and (36) *Blemmydes* [9].
- [7] Women banned from the premises. See also (22) *Evergetis* [38] and related documents, (45) *Neophytos* [19], [C18], (58) *Menoikeion* [14], and (60) *Charsianeites* [C2].
- [8] No personal possessions except for clothing. See also (52) *Choumnos* [B11] and (60) *Charsianeites* [B12], [B13].
- [9] Private property incompatible with communal living. See also (37) *Auxentios* [5], (52) *Choumnos* [B19], (55) *Athanasios I* [5], (56) *Kellibara II* [3], (57) *Bebaia Elpis* [46], and (60) *Charsianeites* [B5].
- [10] Exclusion of those found with private property from the sacred mysteries. See also a similar provision in (47) *Philanthropos* [2].
- [11] Vigilant performance of the daily offices. See also (52) *Choumnos* [A16], [B14]; (54) *Neilos Damilas* [10]; (55) *Athanasios I* [4]; (57) *Bebaia Elpis* [59]; and (60) *Charsianeites* [C17].