CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

Introduction

Writing a history of the first 500 years of monasticism in Constantinople (*ca*. 350–850) is a little like documenting the busy life of a famous individual of humble birth. The inevitable forces of birth, growth and maturation govern much of what transpires in that life, but not everything. Many other forces play a role along the way, some of which lend themselves to documentation and appear both understandable and predictable, while others defy description and explanation altogether. When it is the case that such a life is begun in rags and ends in riches – a pattern that generally holds true for the monks and monasteries of Constantinople – family legends are easily born. These legends tend to sum up the principal motivations and guiding principles of an individual's life in light of society's highest expectations, even as they diminish the significance of his or her minor daily struggles, preoccupations and small, unnoticed victories and defeats. To detect any single thread or pattern that runs through every development from birth through maturity is always a difficult task, though it is especially so under these circumstances, when one is faced with considerable material of legendary or semi-legendary character. Probably the most that can be said is that behind the idyllic representation of any famous life – be it of an illustrious individual living over several decades, or of a successful monastic movement lasting centuries – there is always a necessary and constant process of adaptation and accommodation at work. If any one theme guides this history, therefore, it is that the monks and monasteries of Constantinople proved themselves to be experts in the business of adaptation and accommodation over the centuries. More precisely, this was the character embodied by the movement's vanguards and most memorable success stories as they settled into a city whose own historical trajectory was one of great change and development during the period *ca*. 350–850. But what does it mean to say that the city's historic monks and monasteries were skillful at adapting and accommodating their way through the early Byzantine centuries? And what are we to do with the various reports and legends that followed them in their tracks?

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

As an initial point of reference for the first of these questions, one might reflect upon Derwas Chitty's now famous book, *The Desert a City*. This study summed up the historical significance of a near contemporary group of Eastern Christian monks – the desert monks of Egypt and the Near East (*ca*. 250–650) – by noting how their desert communities were gradually turned into virtual monastic cities. Chitty's monks and monasteries transformed their chosen homes into cities rather than having their desert homes transform them.[1] Returning to Constantinople and the experience of its monastic community, one might expect the reverse process: a metamorphosis of Constantinople into a virtual desert, culturally and religiously speaking, under the growing numbers and influence of its monks-in-residence over the centuries. Very little evidence points in this direction, however. Indeed, the larger pattern to emerge over time is rather one in which monks and the institutions they built were as much shaped and influenced by their life in Constantinople as they were a force for promoting fundamental desert monastic ideals among their urban neighbors. In the end, the realities of city life made a difference. Consciously or not, the monks and monasteries of Constantinople tended to become cosmopolitan in their basic outlook and actions. They were cosmopolitan in cultivating contacts with their urban neighbors, and they were cosmopolitan in their close attention to local affairs. The fact that Constantinople was not merely a big city, but also an imperial capital and an ecclesiastical hub, as well as an emerging cultural center, only served to accelerate this process.

To put it another way, the city managed, bit by bit, to circulate water through the arid and austere gardens of ancient desert monastic tradition. This is not to say that Constantinopolitan monasticism ended up as a mere watered-down version of ancient monastic tradition. It is only to suggest that its monastic gardens flourished (and indeed, sometimes failed) in ways that no Egyptian or Palestinian counterpart could have. Daily life was richer and more open-ended in many of Constantinople's monasteries, the more so as the centuries unfolded. The presence of numerous highly educated monks within the ranks of the city's eighth- and ninth-century communities illustrates the point. Not only were monks such as Plato of Sakkoudion (ob. 814), Theodore of Stoudios (ob. 826), and Theophanes the Confessor (ob. 818) highly cultivated in comparison to their desert counterparts of centuries past, but paradoxically they used their advanced educations and love of learning to revive interest in that primitive monastic

[1] Chitty (1966).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

world of the past. Books and ideas, circulating freely within an urban context, penetrated the walls of the monastery, leading to the reinvention of an almost forgotten monastic past. But influences from without could also produce a completely different effect, fixating the monk's attention on breaking developments in the outside world. The Nike Revolt (527) was just such a case. Although it would be wrong to say that monks were deeply involved in this tumultuous chapter in the city's history, involving emperors, circus factions and ordinary people, they could hardly shield themselves from its consequences, and indeed played a small but significant part in some key developments. They were drawn into being participants, even though the world of the circus and the court was supposed to lie far beyond their ordinary field of vision.

Although they were subject to the influence of urban life over the centuries, the monks and monasteries of the city were themselves an influential force in local affairs. By the end of the fifth century, they had already made significant contributions to the resolution of important dogmatic questions in the empire. By the later sixth century, many dozens of communities had sprouted up in both city and suburbs to meet the rising fortunes of the local economy and expanding population. By the middle of the following century monks and nuns stood alongside their urban neighbors, the emperor of Byzantium included, to defend the city against its enemies and weather out the dark days of the seventh century. By the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth, with local standards of living improving, local monasteries expanded their numbers once again, and then proceeded to exercise tremendous influence upon local politics and the church, in addition to making significant contributions toward the renaissance of elite culture.

Each of these steps marked an historic inroad into the internal workings of social groups and classes that were, technically speaking, alien to the monastic way of life. That said, as late as the early ninth century a monk like Theodore of Stoudios could still be caught declaring that every person inhabits a specific place in the social sphere – the soldier holding his sword in preparation for battle, the shepherd with his cloak and staff ready to tend the sheep, the doctor wielding his medical instruments on the way to surgery, and the monk's place in the social order clearly signaled by his garments of renunciation.[2] Theodore's insistence on the particular roles imposed on all individuals by virtue of their vocation and station in life could not be more clear. A warning against crossing social boundaries

[2] Theod. Stoud., *Ltrs.*, 69, 184.6–185.31.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

reverberates throughout his thinking. And yet at other times he was ready to claim that questions of faith imposed the same duties and responsibilities on everyone alike, in effect placing the priest and monk on the very same footing as the government official and farmer.[3] All of this may seem a singular contradiction in beliefs, only reconcilable when one puts Theodore's comments into their proper rhetorical context. Questions of rhetoric aside, however, this is certainly the place where Theodore and many other monks must have found themselves by the end of their community's first 500 years of history. Even if they were monks, first and foremost, they were also citizens of the world, drawn towards an engagement with others by virtue of their common experience and common faith. Usually, too, there was even more to the monk's engagement with the world than comments like those of Theodore reveal. One thing to remember in this regard is that outsiders regularly sought access to monks and monasteries for their own benefit. Sometimes this was simply a matter of asking for blessings and prayers, while at others there were more practical, if not calculating, motives at hand. These ranged from recruiting monks to support some political cause, to courting them for their talents and prestige. Either way, the positive interest in the monastic orders shown by lay people and churchmen tended to increase with time, prompting higher levels of social engagement from monks themselves.

Throughout the writing of this book, I have tried to keep these perspectives on the wider context of the city's monastic history ever in mind. Organized in three parts, the book follows Constantinople's monks from one great turning-point in the city's history to another. It begins with the decades immediately following Constantine's refoundation of the city of Byzantium in the year 324, and it ends with the so-called Triumph of Orthodoxy and the conclusion of the Iconoclast Controversy in 843. The aim of the book is to give as complete an account as possible of the dynamic relationship between monk and city during this roughly 500-year period, even when persistent questions as to *who is influencing whom*? and *how much*? often remain easier to ask than to answer.

Part I is concerned with the years *ca.* 350–565. After reviewing patterns in monastic life empire-wide over these 200 years, it then turns its attention to Constantinople proper in the same period. This was an era in which a number of critical developments in the relationship between city and monk took place: the number of monks setting up residence in the city increased enormously; generous grants of land and money became readily available

[3] Theod. Stoud., *Ltrs.*, 425, 595.12–19.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

for the development of monastic institutions; church and imperial officials recognized the growing strength and great potential of the monastic order and consequently took an increasing interest in regulating its way of life; and monastic leaders themselves broadened their range of interests beyond those of their desert-father predecessors, notably in their increased attention to developments outside the walls of their monasteries, including lingering pagan practices, doctrinal and disciplinary irregularities in the church, and various imperial initiatives which touched upon the things that monks cared about. Notwithstanding their growing interest in and dependence on the outside world, the monks of this age did not normally seek to acquire direct power and influence. Social services and educational institutions, for example, were typically in the hands of others. Moreover, and in keeping with an already long-established tradition, monks tended to shun ordination to the priesthood and decline service to the official church. Nor did they seek to broaden their cultural horizons much in the direction of secular society and the church. All of these tendencies speak to the fact that the monastic estate was still, in principle and mostly in practice, an order apart during the age. Their public role was normally limited to private spiritual counseling, sudden appearances on the streets of the city to contest explosive religious issues, and more orderly and invited attendance at the most prominent religious and civic festivals. Beyond that, they were for the most part outsiders to the society within which they lived, both morally and practically speaking.

Part II considers one of the darkest chapters in Constantinopolitan history (*ca.* 565–730) and the fortunes of the city's monastic establishment within it. While the last decades of the sixth century and opening decade of the seventh were kind to almost all local monks, with the exception of the city's Monophysites, their future then grew quickly uncertain. Many of the city's previously founded religious houses simply disappeared as a result of the difficult living conditions of the middle seventh century and later. Several prestigious institutions continued to exist, however, and a small number of new foundations emerged as well. It is fairly clear that no particular social group or institution prospered in the period – neither the church, the military, nor the imperial house. The same held true for monasticism, of course, with the difference that monks generally had less at stake, economically and institutionally, and their response to the difficulties at hand was therefore of a different order entirely. The specific response of the city's monks to the crises of the seventh and eighth centuries was one of adaptation for the purposes of mere survival combined with a new sense of commitment to a range of social, cultural, church and civic activities, now increasingly

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

deemed proper to their vocation. Monastic politics diminish considerably, probably because monastic groups found it in their best interest to cooperate with local authorities as much as possible and to blend into the urban landscape rather than stand out as either odd or dangerous.

Part III of the study turns to the years *ca.* 730–850, an age of resurgence in the empire on the whole and a period of vibrant growth, prosperity, diversification and increased influence within monastic ranks. Numerous monasteries stirred with activity, and some gained great wealth and prominence. The most dynamic and influential house of the age by far was certainly the Stoudios Monastery under its reforming abbot Theodore (*ca.* 759–826). Among its many achievements, the Stoudios founded a monastic school for children and a state-of-the art scriptorium for its monks; recruited as many as 1,000 monks to its doors within the course of a decade; transformed the monastery's considerable property holdings in and outside the city into a kind of monastic federation; drafted one of the first comprehensive monastic rules of the Byzantine age and reformed the monastic liturgy; and last but not least spearheaded a number of high-profile and explosive religious crusades against the emperors and the official church. Abbot Theodore was himself a genuine celebrity during his own lifetime by virtue of his high standing among abbots, his wide circle of friends and patrons in high places, and his many literary accomplishments. He even came close to winning an appointment to the patriarchal throne. All of these developments at the Stoudios are a powerful testimony to just how far Constantinopolitan monasticism had come since its early days. No longer were monks content merely to practice their religious discipline in relative obscurity, emerging from their monastic walls only in times of severe crisis or on solemn occasions. By the early ninth century, the Stoudios and many other monasteries like it had acquired much more than their distant predecessors had ever hoped for and wanted to possess. Indeed it is clear that they had greatly modified many of the ideals of the earliest monks – even the earliest urban monks – as a function of their close links to the world, considerable economic resources, diverse cultural projects, strategic institutional advancements, and political ambitions. In short, monks were important actors in the resurgence of the later eighth- and ninth-century city. The benefits to them were many as long as they were ready to play an active role in Constantinople and the contest for power, influence and recognition alongside individuals from other social and professional orders. This part of the book will examine each specific dimension of the monastic life in detail – from its place within church and state, to relationships with society, to institutional life and cultural

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

activities – in order to give a vivid sense of what the triumph of monasticism in the middle ninth century was all about.

Given the importance of monks to the empire's capital city by the middle ninth century, if not long before, it comes as some surprise that no one has written this book already. Over a century ago, Eugène Marin set out to do so with the publication of his *Les moines de Constantinople depuis la fondation de la ville jusqu'à la mort de Photius (330–898)*. This is a long and in many ways well-informed study. Its weaknesses are many, however, including a marked Roman Catholic bias and a virtual blindness to the complexities of the larger urban social context in which monks lived. Following the fashions of the day, Marin was also fond of peppering his narrative with soft quotes and dramatic turns of phrase, much of which saps the analytical value of his work.[4] In addition to these defects, though no fault of his own, Marin's work went to press far too soon for it to profit from the less ambitious, but still excellent, studies of Jules Pargoire at the turn of the twentieth century, notably his "Les débuts du monachisme à Constantinople,"[5] together with Henricht Bacht's admirable exposition of monastic politics in the early 1950s.[6] By the end of the 1970s, Gilbert Dagron and Raymond Janin had added considerably to our knowledge of both local urban history and local developments in the monastic world.[7] They were joined by other noteworthy scholars in the subsequent decades, including quite recently Marie-France Auzépy and Daniel Caner.[8] One could go on to cite any number of important recent monographs whose relevance for the study of local monasticism and urban history is clear.[9] What has been missing, on the other hand, is a modern work of local history with a focus on the development of monasticism throughout the

[4] For his chapter on CP and the Papacy, Marin (1897) 223–54.
[5] Pargoire (1899) 67–143. [6] Bacht (1951–1954) 193–314.
[7] Dagron (1970) 229–76; Dagron (1974); Dagron (1977) 3–25; Janin (1964); Janin (1969); Janin (1975).
[8] Auzépy (1988) 5–21; Auzépy (1993a) 117–35; Auzépy (1994) 183–218; Auzépy (1997); Auzépy (1998) 85–99; Auzépy (1999); Caner (2002).
[9] E.g. Patlagean (1977); Speck (1978); Gregory (1979); Mango (1980); Winkelmann (1980); Av. Cameron and Herrin (1984); Mango (1985); Herrin (1987); Berger (1988); Treadgold (1988); Ashbrook Harvey (1990); Ruggieri (1991); Kaplan (1992); Elm (1994); Kountoura-Galakê (1996); Lemerle (1986); Magdalino (1996); Haldon ((1997b); Pratsch (2000). Since this book went into production, any number of interesting and relevant studies have also appeared, including P. Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (The Early Church Fathers) (London and New York, 2004), the nice collection of essays presented in M. Mass (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge and New York, 2005), and yet another collection brought together by A. Louth and A. Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies. Papers from the Thirty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23–25 March 2002* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2006). To my regret there was no time in the final phases of this project to take this and other important new research into consideration.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

ages. For the later period, there is Rosemary Morris' exemplary study, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118*.[10] However, no comparable monograph exists for the earlier periods of Byzantine history.[11]

Perhaps there is an explanation. Just over twenty-five years ago, Cyril Mango could remark: "No other aspect of Byzantine life is as amply documented as monasticism . . . Yet, in spite of this overabundant harvest of literature, it is no easy matter to give an account of Byzantine monasticism in terms that would be understandable today."[12] A generation later, there is still something to Mango's reading of the field as far as the early Byzantine centuries are concerned. The texts are still to be found in relatively great supply, and yet our capacity to yield adequate and reliable historical information from them – enough to write *understandable* rather than just *suggestive* histories – never quite lives up to expectations. To be sure, the last twenty-five years have given scholars more tools with which to work on monastic history. These include several newly published critical editions and helpful translations of important texts, together with better commentaries than existed in the past.[13] There are also any number of useful auxiliary resources to draw upon, such as *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, *The Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire I: (641–867)* and the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit, Abteilung I: 641–867*.[14] To these one should also add the on-line, searchable *Hagiography Database of the 8th–10th Centuries* hosted by Dumbarton Oaks.[15] This wealth of available resources should be sufficient, one might think, leaving only the well-sharpened tools of the historian's discipline to do the rest. The truth of the matter is that these advances in both text editing and textual criticism, along with easier access to a broad range of historical data, have intensified the study of monastic history without always making its broader outlines more clear. In some instances long-standing and much-cherished historical truths have simply crumbled under the pressure of modern interpretation. For example, it was fine for scholars once to think that monks had a special affection for icons and

[10] Morris (1995).
[11] Olivier Delouis' *Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Stoudios à Constantinople: La contribution d'un monastère à l'histoire de l'Empire byzantin (v. 454–1204)*, a Ph.D. thesis defended at the Université Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne in December 2005, came to my attention in the final stages of my research. Dr. Delouis declined to make the work available to me for this publication.
[12] Mango (1980) 105.
[13] For editions, e.g., Theod. Stoud., *Ltrs.* (1992); Nikeph., *Short.Hist.* (1990); *V. Steph.Young (BHG 1666)*. For translations, *Holy Women* (1996); Mango and Scott (1997), *Byzantine Defenders* (1998). For commentaries, e.g. Rochow (1991); Auzépy (1999).
[14] *PLRE* (1971–92); *PBE* (2001); *PmbZ* (1998–2001).
[15] See http://www.doaks.org/Hagio.html.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

defended the practice of icon-worship *en masse* and to the death during the Iconoclast Controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries; but now that position is far from secure.[16] Similarly, what older scholars confidently maintained about the strength of monastic economies for most of the early centuries has now come under heavy criticism: small and weak – not robust – is the uneasy consensus observed today.[17] In these and other cases older historical models have passed away without being replaced by new ones that inspire much confidence.

A fair number of these (and other) contested interpretations turn upon particular readings of Byzantine hagiography.[18] Or, more generally speaking, they reflect a wide range of dispositions within modern scholarship toward this plentiful and yet elusive genre of Byzantine literature. The differences in approach begin with the very question of whether hagiography can really be called a *genre* of literature at all, a term that would imply some sense of unity in the way that hagiographers constructed their narratives, employed models, used language, managed evidence, targeted their audience, defined their ultimate aims and purposes, and so forth. Faced with this difficult problem, some scholars have come forth and not only affirmed that hagiographical texts of different sorts can be fitted into a single genre of literature, but they also claim to understand its rules well enough to be able to advance historical propositions as well as confirm or dismiss recorded historical events based upon their genre-aware criticism of hagiographic texts. Marie-France Auzépy has been on the forefront of this type of analysis, her thinking on the subject ambitious and tenaciously argued. Yet the response to her work has been mixed. Even when other scholars have been sympathetic to its overall direction, their reactions to particular types of literary analysis, not to mention the historical conclusions that follow, have been firm and even at times fierce.[19] The question, then, is whether any useful and coherent approach to hagiography and its "representational strategies" and "representational calculus" is within reach, be it along the lines recently proposed by Auzépy, or perhaps borrowing from some other school of thought.[20] There will always be long queues

[16] See, *inter alia*, Schreiner (1976) and (1988).
[17] Cf. Holl (1898) 192–3, Savramis (1962) 45–52, Charanis (1971) 83 over and against Winkelmann (1977) 480–1, Haldon (1997b) 294–5 and Kaplan (1992) 21, 116, 209–14, 282.
[18] For general points of reference and resources, Ehrhard (1936–1939); Halkin (1957); Nesbitt (1969) 443–89; Dümmer (1990) 284–96; Kazhdan (*List*); *ODB* 897–9.
[19] See Auzépy (1992) 57–67, Auzépy (1993b) 3–5 vs. Acconcia Longo (1992) 3–17 and Auzépy (1993) 7–15; Auzépy (1999) vs. Déroche (2002) 179–88 and Mango (2001) 280–2.
[20] The quotes are from Perkins (1994) 255–71, esp. 260 and 266.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84821-3 - The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, CA. 350-850
Peter Hatlie
Excerpt
More information

of historians who will either wrongly treat the methodological difficulties associated with hagiography lightly,[21] or rightly caution against the pitfalls of using it uncritically as an historical source.[22] The bigger challenge is to see whether there is a constructive, middle-way between these two positions.[23] This is a particularly serious matter for the present study, given that it relies on evidence from over 150 separate hagiographical texts.

Among the most able of scholars at work in this field today is Marc van Uytfanghe, whose research considers hagiographic texts from many epochs and different cultural contexts, Christian and pagan alike. In two of his best-known studies,[24] he proceeds from an examination of the literary development of hagiography and its principal themes to brief discussions of interpretation. Instead of classifying hagiography as a literary *genre*, he prefers the expression *hagiographic discourse* in view of the following criteria: (1) *hagiographic discourse* takes as its subject people who are close to God, but not God or gods themselves; (2) it represents a fundamentally subjective account, rooted in oral tradition and borrowing freely from both historic and invented materials as it comes to be written down; (3) it is more performative than informative, which is to say that it favors idealization, apology, clarification and edification over the mere neutral transfer of information; and (4) because it deals with archetypes and platitudes, *hagiographic discourse* tends to picture the world in fixed terms, where values as such virtue and vice or good and evil are separate and static entities.[25] Different types of saints' *Vitae* fit the category of *hagiographic discourse*, in Van Uytfanghe's view, but so do sermons, hymns, epitaphs, letters and any number of other types of writing which seek to create a portrait of holiness and godliness without merging the identity of deity and human in the subjects they treat.[26] The emphasis of this system of classification and approach is more on the function of the hagiographic material rather than on the formal literary components that are present. Van Uytfanghe's work thus surrenders the hope that hagiographic texts can be decoded, as it were, on the basis of internal literary analysis alone.

[21] Gamillsheg (1976) 1–23; Brown (1973) 1–34.

[22] Schreiner (1976) 178 *et passim*; Dagron (1981) 151–2; Mango (1984) 25–41; Lemerle (1986) 108–9; Goehring (1990) 136–37; Dümmer (1990) 286–9; Dagron (1992) 59–68; Brubaker and Haldon (2001) 202–3.

[23] For a recent restatement of this question for fourth- and fifth-century hagiography, Sterk (2004) 193–4.

[24] See, *inter alia*, Van Uytfanghe (1987) 150–83 and Van Uytfanghe (1993) 135–88. See also, helpfully, Kauser (1993) 135–88; Krueger (1997) 398–9, 413–19; Rapp (1998) 431–48.

[25] Van Uytfanghe (1993) 147–9.

[26] Van Uytfanghe (1987) 155–6; Van Uytfanghe (1993) 143–7.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org