Introduction

In 1998, Mrs. Kanella Georgopoulou guided me over stone fences and through fields of donkey thistles to a dilapidated chapel below a small village in the Mani. Bleeding from the scratches of thistles and parched by the heat of the high sun, we contemplated the face of the Virgin. Once found in the apse of the church, a section of the painting now lay shattered on the ground below. Gazing at the pieces of her village's history, Mrs. Georgopoulou asked why no one was interested in the past. "When we are gone," mused the octogenarian, "there will be no one left to tell the tale." Mrs. Georgopoulou was one of the numerous elderly villagers in the Mani, Boeotia, and Crete who expressed to me the same concern – village life would soon disappear.

In the Late Byzantine period, the greatest concentration of rural villages occurred within the territorial limits of modern Greece. They and the lives of their inhabitants are the subjects of this book. One cannot look at Byzantine villages, however, without sifting through the settlements that grew over or in close proximity to them. For in the rural village, the line between the past and the near present is indistinct. Thick medieval walls are often incorporated into traditional houses, despite the challenge they present to modern electrification. Churches, supporting a service that has hardly changed from the thirteenth century, continue to serve settlements that have subsisted for generations. In small villages of the Greek countryside, grindstones continue to tax the muscles of women who must provide the flour that is baked weekly into bread. Paths long inscribed into the ground – linking house and church, church and cemetery, cemetery and house, house and field – still guide the villagers' footsteps as they visit one another, tend fields and animals, and join in ritual celebration and commemoration. The questions that inform the study of Late Byzantine villages emerge from an understanding of the unchanging nature of rural settlements and the place of the villager within those settlements. The word *order* (τάξις), often employed to describe Byzantine society, can be used with greater authority for the village, which is regulated by economic hierarchies, family dynamics, and gender roles. Within the village, each person has his or her place.

In 1977, Angeliki Laiou published the volume *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study*.[1] For more than three decades it has remained the foremost English-language study of the Late Byzantine peasantry. Based on her analysis of the monastic estate inventories that record the fiscal obligations of 1,547 dependent families in the region of Macedonia, Laiou sought to set forth the basic facts about Late Byzantine peasant society and its demographics, kinship structures, and naming patterns. The book concluded with the reconstruction of the life of an imagined woman, whom Laiou named Maria, drawing from the historian's reading of the tax registers and on her own intuitive understanding of the rhythm of life in a village setting.[2] Based on tax assessments, Laiou's study

[1] A. E. Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study* (Princeton, 1977). See the reviews of this book by C. Mango in *Church History* 49 (1980): 484; D. Jacoby in *Speculum* 61 (1986): 676–79; J. Herrin in *JHS* 100 (1980): 290–91; and T. E. Gregory in *American Historical Review* 83 (1978): 993–94.

[2] In his review of the book, Michael Angold noted: "this exercise provides a fascinating picture of some of the realities of peasant life . . ." M. Angold in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10 (1979): 155–57.

differed substantially from that of the *Annaliste* historian, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie,[3] who only two years earlier had published his foundational study of the village of Montaillou, the notorious mountaintop settlement in the Ariège in southwest France.[4] Using the inquisition register written by Jacques Fournier, Bishop of Pamiers (1318–25), the author probed the most intimate details of his subjects, relying almost wholly on Fournier's account in order to understand late medieval village society and mentalité, both collective and individual.[5] Although published so close to each other and examining villages that were roughly contemporary and of similar size, the studies' use of sources and vistas of scholarship could hardly have been more different – a difference that was manifested most obviously by the covers of the two first editions. Laiou's volume presented the cropped image of a land register, whereas the French edition of *Montaillou* featured a misty, long-range photograph of a village in the Pyrenees. One emphasized the primacy of the word and captured, in a single image, the fiscal relationship of peasant and landlord that formed the basis of debates over feudalism and land tenure in both East and West; the other evoked setting and the place of the peasant within the landscape, an approach that raised issues that were culturally broader and potentially diachronic in scope. Although the analysis of book covers, often selected by editors rather than authors, seems an unfair way to characterize content, the contrasting covers nevertheless highlight the nature of the sources and approaches in two very separate fields and mark the poles between which I began my own work and from which this study departs.[6]

This book is about medieval Orthodox people of extremely modest means – sometimes called villagers, sometimes called peasants. It is also a study of their surroundings, their churches, and their devotional patterns.[7] The word for peasant in Byzantine Greek *georgos* is compounded from *ge* (earth) and *ergon* (work), and rooted the villager to the land through nomenclature, just as another common term for villager, *choriates*, from the word *chorion* (village), also linked individual and setting through the power of naming. Moving beyond the analysis of the individuals who inhabited the village and their interactions, this is also a study of spaces – agricultural, domestic, and ecclesiastic – and the place of people and animals within these spaces. How common men and women negotiated these spaces is evidenced in the construction of houses and settlements, and in the building and decoration of churches. Notions of space also include the creation of a sacred landscape in which saints assisted and interacted with both the living and the dead.

The study of the Greek village in the later Middle Ages requires a broad understanding of the sources, both written and material. Tax assessments, medieval handbooks on medicine, obituaries, property contracts,

[3] On the Annales School, see P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–89* (Cambridge, 1990); S. Clark, ed., *The Annales School: Critical Assessments* (London, 1999). For a discussion of the application of an Annaliste approach to the study of settlement archaeology, see J. Bintliff, "The contribution of an *Annaliste*/structural history approach to archaeology," in *The Annales School and Archaeology*, ed. J. Bintliff (Leicester, 1991), 1–33.

[4] E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, 1975). See also J. Duvernoy, *Le registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325)* (Toulouse, 1965).

[5] The volume has been praised for its originality but also critiqued for using the writings of a single source, Fournier, to draw an unbalanced view of village life. Critics of the Annales School have also taken the author to task for the uncritical merging of anthropology/ethnography and history. See, among other reviews, S. Stuard, "An Unfortunate Construct: A Comment on Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's 'Montaillou'," *Journal of Social History* 15 (1981): 152–55; J. L. Nelson in *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 32.1 (1979): 154–55; and M. Hechter in *Contemporary Sociology* 9 (1980): 44–45. On the archaeology of the site, see now A. Brenon and C. Dieulafait, *Autour de Montaillou un village occitan: histoire et religiosité d'une communauté villageoise au Moyen Âge* (Castelnaud la Chapelle, 2001) (with collected bibliography).

[6] Studies of village society have continued to thrive since the publications of Laiou and Ladurie, increasingly focusing on the individuals who inhabited the village, giving them greater agency in the structure and organization of their lives. Eamon Duffy's analysis of Morebath, a tiny sheep-farming village of thirty-three families, provides a recent compelling study of an agrarian community as seen through the accounts of Christopher Trychay, who served as parish priest from 1520 to 1574 for the remote Devonshire village. Trychay's account, interpreted by Duffy, provides valuable insights into communal involvement in the rituals of the church year. In acknowledging an emphasis on individuals and their interactions within the village, the original cover of this book features a detail of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Alchemist* of ca. 1558, closely cropped to emphasize the interactions of men and women engaged in work and conversation. See E. Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven, 2001); J. Erkine Binney, *Accounts of the Wardens of the Parish of Morebath in Devon, 1520–73* (Exeter, 1904).

[7] I am not interested in engaging in semantic arguments about the use of the word "peasant," a word that is widely used in the field of Byzantine Studies. Considering my emphasis on the physical space occupied by *paroikoi* and independent peasants, I intentionally use the word "villager" throughout this text. For an overview of the nomenclature, see A. Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," in *The Byzantines*, ed. G. Cavallo (Chicago, 1997), 43. For an anthropological definition of the peasantry, related to this study, see S. W. Mintz, "A Note on the Definition of Peasantries," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1973): 91–106.

and inscriptions on buildings and monuments provide valuable material for the study of village culture. Written sources are combined with the yields of archaeological investigation and the abundant remains of monumental painting. When these sources are viewed through the lens of modern gender, anthropological, and linguistic theory, the image of the Late Byzantine village becomes rich and complex. The "peasantry" becomes a microsociety with its own social and economic hierarchies. Invisible members of the village community begin to emerge – for example, nuns who took vows after the death of their husbands. Widows, once a silent population, are now seen to form an extraordinarily large part of village society. Priests are not only liturgical celebrants, but also farmers and heads of household. The village teems with animals, a source of food and a sign of wealth. Viewing the village from multidisciplinary and broad theoretical perspectives provides the opportunity, for the first time, to give voice to segments of the Byzantine population that have been little studied or not even identified. The village also becomes a landscape of sounds – the sharp voices of gossiping women, the low chant of the priest, the strike of the chisel against stone, and the tinkling bells of sheep and goats.

As the mirrors of rite and community, monumental images found in village churches provide a rich, yet largely undervalued, cache of information. Set apart from the study of written sources by disciplinary divides, the painted sources corroborate, augment, and occasionally contradict information offered by the relatively small number of surviving texts. Monumental imagery is one of the most abundant sources for the study of the medieval village. Analyzing the region now encompassed by modern-day Greece, Manolis Chatzidakis estimated that approximately two thousand churches were built and decorated between the seventh and fifteenth century.[8] The majority of the churches can be assigned to the period between the thirteenth and fifteenth century; the political ruptures of 1204 and 1453 bracket their construction and decoration. In the southern Peloponnesos, approximately eighty churches in Lakonia and fifty in Epidauros Limera belong to this period, the majority after 1261, when most of the region was returned to Byzantine rule following an interregnum of Western knights.[9] The use of the painted data is not without its hazards. In the Late Byzantine period – to apply a chronological term that derives from the history of imperial Constantinople – many Orthodox villagers found themselves living under foreign rule. Of approximately 900 churches still standing on the island of Crete, for example, 95 percent are dated between the thirteenth and fifteenth century – that is, the period in which Orthodox villagers lived under Venetian hegemony (1204–1669).[10] Italian names included in village church inscriptions pose problems of interpretation and raise questions about relationships between indigenous villagers and new settlers. The chronological limit of 1453, significant in discussions of Constantinople and imperial hegemony, may not be as important for the consideration of villages in the former empire's hinterlands. A number of churches from the late fifteenth century are mentioned in this volume.

The information gathered from ecclesiastical decoration suggests that the church was far more than a container for the ritual celebration of weekly services. Written and painted sources illuminate its role as a guardian of rites of passage – moments of spiritual and physical transformation. Devotional strategies created to fulfill the unique needs of the late medieval village placed the Church in the critical position of providing succor and assistance in a time when political systems were transitory, and the memory of a lost and regained empire omnipresent. It appears from the representation of particular sinners in late medieval churches in Greece that those who disrupted religious and village order through alternative beliefs or subversive actions were publically condemned, illuminating the Church's role as a regulator of local society. At the same time, monumental imagery expresses the views of the villagers, who, at times, used painted representations to manifest dissatisfaction with their overlords.

In addition to foregrounding evidence provided by monumental decoration, this is the first study to address synthetically the archaeology of the late medieval village in Greece and to set the archaeological evidence on an equal footing with that of the painted and written sources. Field excavation and survey archaeology provide ways of understanding the shape of the village and the interactions of people within it. As the principal investigator of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century village that was built over ancient Panakton, I use this excavated site as a model by which to discuss comparable

[8] M. Chatzidakis, "Η μνημειακή ζωγραφική στην Ελλάδα. Ποσοτικές προσεγγίσεις," *Ἀκαδ. Ἀθη.Πρ.* 56 (1981): 375–90.

[9] N. B. Drandakes, "Σχεδίασμα καταλόγου των τοιχογραφημένων βυζαντινών και μεταβυζαντινών νάων Λακωνίας," *Λακ.Σπ.* 13 (1996): 167–235.

[10] C. Maltezou, "Κοινωνία και τέχνες στην Ελλάδα κατά τον 13ο αιώνα. Ιστορική εισαγωγή," *Δελτ.Χρ.Ἀρχ.Ἑτ.* 21 (2000): 9–10.

settlements and through which to explore the everyday lives of the people. What was the extent of their household belongings? What do the remains tell us about patterns of religious devotion?

My study then takes the answers to these questions and compares them to data from little-known and/or unpublished works from a number of sites in Greece that have been excavated over the past one hundred years. In addition, I introduce evidence from survey archaeology to consider the siting of villages and their specific physical features. A discussion of Byzantine horizontal watermills, for example, draws information from both archaeological survey data and painting in village churches to illuminate the position of the mill *and* the miller in village society.

Emerging from the study of written, painted, and archaeological sources is a series of overlapping landscapes: agricultural, domestic, and sacred. I am interested in the place of late medieval men and women within these landscapes and cultural horizons. This project is a study of the living, but it is also takes account of the dead. It is also an analysis of the memory of the living, of generations past, and of generations such as Mrs. Georgopoulou's that are passing. At the core of this study is a belief in the continuity of village life, especially when considering patterns of lay piety. Thus, material for this book is also drawn from ethnographic studies undertaken by the author and collected from a number of sources.[11] To these is added the evidence of epic poems and songs that circulated into the Ottoman period in Greece; such popular songs summoned the assistance of saints and recalled with longing a glorious Byzantine past.

Abstract ideas take us only so far into the village, however. For this reason my study begins with the remains at hand. Three sources introduce the people, churches, themes, and approaches that form the core of this book and illustrate the kinds of materials available for study. The first is a private act of donation (Figure 1).[12] Dated June 1457, the act is written on the last page of a Greek Gospel book of 1326, a location that was intended to guarantee and safeguard the transaction.[13] In all likelihood the book belonged to the church of St. Kyriake, the institution that was the recipient of the donation. The two crosses at the top of the page are the signs (*signa*) of Constantine Strelitzas and his wife, Constantina, an Orthodox couple living in the settlement of Mouchli in the central Peloponnesos. The formulaic donation was typical for the period and demonstrates the type of pious act that would have been familiar to many villagers: in exchange for a modest donation – in this case a vineyard – prayers would be offered in perpetuity for the commemoration of the souls of the donors and of their families.[14] The simple text states:

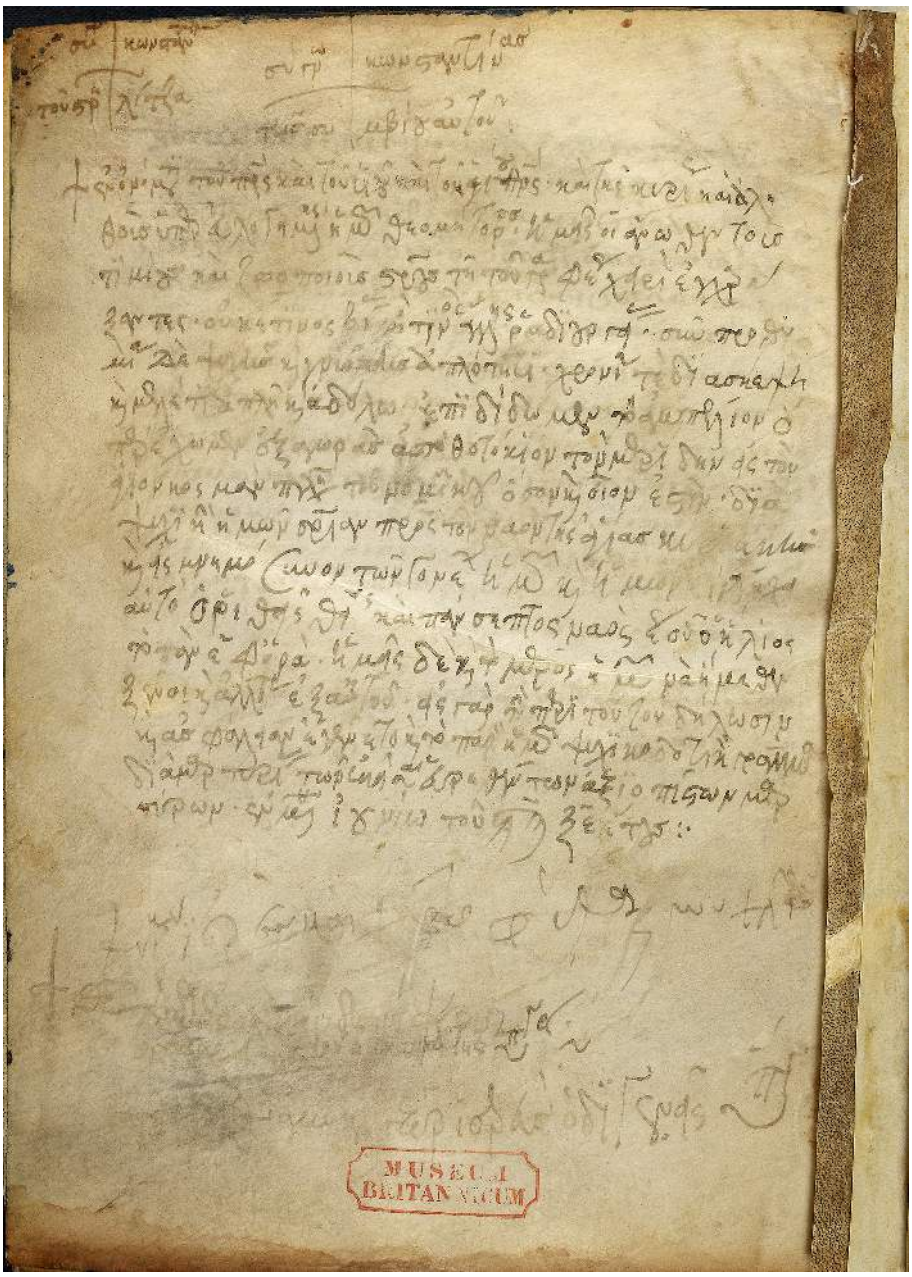
> In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and of our sovereign and true greatly blessed Mother of God. We, the above, having signed with the venerable and life-giving cross through the hand of the notary, without any coercion or any other deception, [but] with a willingness of the soul and purity of mind, and after long consideration and simple and guileless thought, give this vineyard, which we have obtained through purchase from Th[e]otokios Meridis [in the area of] St. Kosmas adjacent to Nomikos as much and that which it is to the church of St. Kyriake for the salvation of our souls and for the commemoration of our parents and of ourselves, so that the above-mentioned sacred and all-holy church has it as long as the sun shines upon everything, and we and our heirs will always be estranged and separated from it. Regarding this act and its security this soul-giving letter was written to state and secure this through the trustworthy witness of those who were present.

[11] On the use of ethnography in archaeological fieldwork, see S. Aschenbrenner, "Archaeology and Ethnography in Messenia," in *Regional Variation in Modern Greece and Cyprus: Toward a Perspective on the Ethnography of Greece*, eds. M. Dimen and E. Friedl, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 268 (1976), 158–67.

[12] London, British Library, ms. Addit. 5117, f. 224v. See M. Manoussacas, "Un acte de donation à l'église Sainte-Kyriakè de Mouchli (1457)," *TM* 8 (1981): 315–19; M. Richard, *Inventaire des manuscripts grecs du British Museum*, I, *Fonds Sloane, Additional, Egerton, Cottonian et Stowe* (Paris, 1952), 4.

[13] Similarly, see the fifteen acts of 1308/9–1380/81 written on the first two folios of a Gospel book, Athens, National Library of Greece, B. N. 70. For an initial discussion of the acts, see H. Saradi-Mendelovici, "The Frankish Morea: The Evidence Provided by Acts of Private Transactions," in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. S. Gerstel (Washington, DC, 2013), 186–211.

[14] Similar phraseology can be found in acts of donation to the Lembiotissa Monastery, located between Smyrna and Nymphaion in Asia Minor (F. Miklosich and J. Müller, eds., *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, IV [Venice, 1871], 71, 127, 170, 227, 234), and to the Vazelon Monastery near Trebizond (T. Ouspensky and V. Benechevitch, *Actes de Vazélon: Matériaux pour server à l'histoire de la propriété rurale et monastique à Byzance aux XIIIe-XVe siècles* [Leningrad, 1927]).



1. Private act of donation of June 1457, British Library, Add. 5117, fol. 224 v (© British Library Board)

In the month of June in the year 6965 (= 1457).
Signed:

† Nicholas, priest and *chartophylax* of Mouchli
† . . . archdeacon (?) Akamates, I signed
† The *protekdikos*, George Digenis, priest of Amyklai, I signed[15]

[15] Translation by the author.

Although the church named in the deed has not been identified among the architectural remains of medieval Mouchli,[16] its dedication points in all likelihood to a small chapel intended for burials. If this is the case,

[16] Today the scattered remains of houses and churches still mark the site of what once was a large population center; few of the remains can be securely identified. See E. Darko, "Ἡ ἱστορικὴ σημασία καὶ τὰ σπουδαιότερα ἐρείπια τοῦ Μουχλίου," *Ἐπ.Ἑτ.Βυζ.Σπ.* 10 (1933): 454–82.

2. Dedicatory inscription of 1462, church of St. John the Hermit (Hagioi Pateres), Ano Phloria, Crete

then St. Kyriake was probably located on the outskirts of the settlement. In 1457, the year in which the couple signed the act, the Byzantines still ruled Mouchli. One year later, in July 1458, the city and the surrounding countryside were surrendered to the Turks. The fate of the Strelitzas family goes unrecorded.

The inability of Constantine and Constantina Strelitzas to sign their names is not unusual for this period. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, most of the modest benefactors to Late Byzantine churches in the countryside would have had only a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing. Nonetheless, certain legal standards had to be observed. The act includes proof that the couple was legally able to donate the property by establishing their ownership through purchase, and the Strelitzas took steps to prohibit their descendants from contesting the gift. The gift of the vineyard – whose value was in the sale or the use of the grapes harvested from it – would have been ample cause for a priest to recite commemorative prayers annually on behalf of the couple and their descendants. Similar gifts were occasionally memorialized through the inclusion of the benefactor's name or portrait within the church and requests for the priest to recite prayers on his or her behalf.[17]

Five years after the Strelitzas act was notarized, Xenos Digenis, an Orthodox artist from the same Peloponnesian town, Mouchli, painted the small church of St. John the Hermit (today Hagioi Pateres) in the village of Ano Phloria in the prefecture of Chania, Crete, an island under Venetian rule.[18] A refugee from the Morea (Peloponnesos), the artist recorded his name and the town of his birth in a foundation inscription on the south wall of the small, single-aisled chapel (Figure 2). Placed next to the sanctuary screen, the framed inscription is set apart by an ornamental band from the monumental images below it. The upper lines of the text, naming the donors and outlining their contributions, are in large, capital letters. The last lines of the inscription, which names Digenis and requests the viewer (or priest) to pray on his behalf, are rendered in a smaller, more personal script. The use of different letter forms to differentiate between those who commissioned the painting and construction of the church and those who carried out the commission is common in the last centuries of Byzantium and

[17] See Ch. 5, 131–33.

[18] The church is now known as Holy Fathers. For the *Life* of St. John the Hermit, one of the Holy Fathers, see L. Petit, "Saint Jean Xénos ou l'Ermite d'après son autobiographie," *AB* 42 (1924): 5–20. For the church, see G. Gerola, *Monumenti veneti nell'isola di Creta*, 4 vols. (Venice, 1905–32), IV, 449; M. Vasilake-Mavrakake, "Ὁ ζωγράφος Ξένος Διγενὴς καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων στὰ Ἀπάνω Φλώρια Σελίνου τῆς Κρήτης," in *Πεπραγμένα του Δ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου, 2, Βυζαντινοί και Μέσοι Χρόνοι* (Athens, 1981), 550–70.

witnesses the growth of a class of artisans.[19] The inscription reads:

> The holy and sacred church of our holy father John the Hermit was raised from the ground up and painted through the effort and expense of Kyr Manouel Eremoioannes, and of his wife Kale, and of their sons George and John, and of their daughters Theotokou and Stamata. I, Manouel Eremoioannes, leave to [the church of St. John] twenty goats and ten beehives, and I leave an area in its entirety, the one encompassed from ditch to ditch including houses, trees, and a vineyard, and the vineyard of Mournea and the field, as much as it is. Kyr Aligiezo Cocco bequeathed all of these things to St. John. Amen. In the year 1462, the 20th of July. This was accomplished by the hand of Digenis from the town of Mouchli in the Morea. You, who look upon this, pray to the Lord on my behalf.[20]

Like the church of St. Kyriake in Mouchli, this modest building is supported by a donation of property. Milk and honey provided by the goats and beehives would have funded the upkeep of the building and compensated a priest for celebrating the liturgy and reading commemorative prayers for the souls of the donors, whose bodies were, presumably, interred nearby. The dedication of the church to St. John the Hermit, the name saint of the donor, Manouel *Eremoioannes*, meant that the workings of the saint would have been particularly effective.[21]

The imagery within the small, barrel-vaulted church indicates that the structure was intended for both the living and the dead. The depiction in the apse of Sts. John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, the authors of the two most common liturgies, shows that the church was used for regular celebration; the words inscribed on their open scrolls derive from the silent prayers uttered by the priest in preparation for such rites. But the representation on the south wall of the Virgin and St. John the Baptist turned in supplication toward Christ (the so-called Deesis); the representation of the Archangel Michael, the guardian of souls, on the west wall; and the placement of the dedicatory inscription above the Deesis and facing a representation of St. John the Hermit on the north wall all demonstrate that the builders of the church were interested in expressing the hope for eternal salvation. To this end, they summoned heavenly assistance – the most effective of intercessors: the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist; the Archangel Michael; and the donor Eremoioannes' personal advocate, his name saint, John the Hermit. Furthermore, the representation of three large-scale military saints (Theodore, Demetrios, and George) reveals the donors' interest in divine protection for both the living and the dead. The inclusion of St. Mamas in the church decoration, as we shall see, was also significant, for the donors – as indicated by the mention of goats, beehives, and vineyards – were involved in agricultural production. It therefore fell to Mamas and other saints connected to farming and animal husbandry to protect related donations made to the church.

One last critical detail emerges from this inscription, and it is the inclusion of the title *Kyr*.[22] A titular designation for a man of elevated status within the village, the title reminds us that villages were economically and socially stratified.[23] We do not, however, know if *Kyr* refers only to the benefactor's financial well-being (his ability to support the construction and decoration of the church) or if it additionally hints at his social connections, including his association with Lord *Kyr* Aligiezo Cocco, most likely a Venetian living on Crete.

The excavated medieval village of Panakton, a hilltop settlement between Athens and Thebes, constitutes a third source for the study of the village.[24] This single-aisled

[19] See, for example, the inscription in the church of the Holy Anargyroi in Kepoula, Mani (1265) below. I argue in Ch. 2 that differences in script may also reflect differing levels of literacy. The different letter-forms in the Digenis inscription are noted in Vasilake-Mavrakake, "Ο ζωγράφος Ξένος Διγενής," 555 n. 24, but without comment. In 1491 the painter inscribed his own name in the same fashion in the Myrtia Monastery in Aitolia, Greece. See M. Chatzidakis and E. Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετὰ τὴν Ἅλωση (1450–1830)*, 2, Κέντρο Νεοελληνικών Ερευνών 62 (Athens, 1997), 255.

[20] Translation by the author. For the Greek text, see Vasilake-Mavrakake, "Ο ζωγράφος Ξένος Διγενής," 556.

[21] Vasilake-Mavrakake, "Ο ζωγράφος Ξένος Διγενής," 556 fn. 26.

[22] On the use of the word *kyr* in a village context, see Séminaire de J. Lefort, "Anthroponymie et société villageoise (Xe-XIVe siècle)," in *Hommes et richesses dans l'empire byzantin*, vol. 2, eds. V. Kravari, J. Lefort, and C. Morrisson (Paris, 1991), 229. For other inscriptions from village churches containing this title, see S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece* (Vienna, 1992), 34, where the author observes that the term designates a man in the village who enjoyed "a certain social pre-eminence."

[23] A 13th-century inscription painted in the apse of St. John the Baptist in Kastania, Messenian Mani, divides its donors into the "elite" (πρόκριτοι) and the "common people" (κοινός λαός), unambiguously establishing social divisions. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions*, 65, no. A17; Ph. Drosogianne, *Σχόλια στὶς τοιχογραφίες τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Προδρόμου στὴ Μεγάλη Καστάνια Μάνης* (Athens, 1982), 5, 196–99, 216–24.

[24] S. Gerstel et al., "A Late Medieval Settlement at Panakton," *Hesperia* 72 (2003): 199–204.

3. Church of the Sotera, Panakton, Attica

church located at the center of the settlement was the focal point of the community (Figure 3). In ruins today, the church would once have resembled the Cretan chapel at Ano Phloria in its simple, vaulted construction and colorful interior decoration. Indeed, traces of paint found in the narthex and nave confirm that the interior was once covered by figures of standing saints. A tomb in the northeast corner of the narthex contained the skeletons of three adults: two men and one woman. These are the remains of villagers who, like those named in inscriptions, would have been responsible for the church's construction and upkeep. A coin found under the last of the remains to be entombed, those of the female adult, indicates that the deceased was placed in the grave by the end of the fourteenth century at the earliest.[25] The relationship of the skulls and the positioning of the bodies within the shared grave also suggest that the three skeletons represent members of a single family, much like the husband and wife memorialized in the act of donation to the Mouchli church. The tomb's location next to the entrance to the church indicates that the family buried within was also responsible, at least in part, for the construction of the narthex, which was added to the village church shortly after its initial construction. Like those villagers named in the act and the church inscription, the Panakton family desired to link its fate to that of its local church. Burial in sacred ground ensured the protection of the body and prayers for the soul in perpetuity. And, indeed, the fact that the skeletons survived centuries after abandonment of the site and exposure of the church to looting demonstrates that the bodies were well hidden within the tomb. As we shall see, materials recovered from the tomb's interior show that the deceased were indeed recalled by the members of their family and community.

These cases – a modest act appended to a Gospel book, a church inscription naming donors, and the common grave of three villagers in a remote hilltop settlement – illustrate the types of evidence that can be gleaned from written sources, church decoration, and archaeological excavation. They reveal the

[25] A Venetian tornesello minted under the doge Antonio Venier (AD 1382–1400) was found below the rib cage of the skeleton. The burial of the woman, therefore, postdated 1382. Other coins found on site, which include two torneselli dated to the reign of the doge Michele Steno, AD 1400–13, demonstrate that the settlement continued to exist into the early 15th century.

villagers' close ties to the land from which they derived their wealth and in which they were buried, their concerns about health in life and the protection of the deceased, and their interest in preserving the memory of the individual and the family. How villagers signed documents and the ways they were named in inscriptions also provide information about levels of literacy, the stratification of village communities, and the interaction of the village supplicant and the saints through the process of prayer. The position of the church at the center of village life (and death) and the mirroring of the name, face, or profession of the faithful in ecclesiastical decoration further suggest the critical role played by the church and its community of saints in village life.

What was the physical setting for such interactions? What were the features of the village and the place of men and women within and beyond its boundaries? What evidence survives that might enable us to reconstruct the context of the medieval villager in Greece? These are the subjects of Chapter 1.

CHAPTER ONE

The Landscape of the Village

Understanding the landscape of the Late Byzantine village poses a particular challenge to modern-day scholars. Although churches, built of local stone, are found in abundance, they often appear to stand in isolation. Observing the small churches that survive in the Messenian countryside around the excavated site of Nichoria, the archaeologist John Rosser was prompted to ask: "where is the evidence for concomitant Byzantine domestic architecture? There are virtually no such identifiable remains, probably because the villages were modest in size and the houses were of simple construction which was easily destroyed and plowed over."[1] Where, indeed, are the remains of Byzantine houses and, by extension, Byzantine villages? Eroded by time or dismantled by human intervention, how can we reconstruct their plans, their settings, and their populations?

The study of the Late Byzantine agrarian village in Greece is coming increasingly under the intense scrutiny of archaeologists and architectural historians.[2] In order to investigate the landscape of the village, however, one first needs to define it. The legal language of the tax treatise, the archaeological language of ceramic scatter and habitation remains, and the ethnographic/ethnoarchaeological language of setting all contribute to an understanding of the village's plan, its features, and its population.

Fundamental to any discussion of legal terminology is the eleventh- or twelfth-century fiscal treatise cod. 173 in the Biblioteca Marciana, which defines the Byzantine village, the *chorion*, as a place where people live together and where houses are situated in close proximity to one another.[3] Other legal texts, such as the Farmer's Law (*νόμος γεωργικός*), composed in an earlier period but still widely circulated in late medieval times, indicate that a cluster of neighboring houses was, in turn, surrounded by arable land and then by uncultivated fields and woodlands.[4] Related to the *chorion*, yet different from it in size and features, was the *agridion*, a satellite settlement; scholars frequently translate this term as "hamlet." This smaller settlement was built on uncultivated land that was counted within the fiscal district of the *chorion*. Located at some distance from

[1] J. Rosser and W. A. McDonald, "Introduction," in *Excavations at Nichoria in Southwest Greece,* vol. 3, *Dark Age and Byzantine Occupation*, eds. W. A. McDonald, W. D. E. Coulson, and J. Rosser (Minneapolis, 1983), 354.

[2] On the use of both written and archaeological sources to understand the landscape, see J. Bintliff, "Reconstructing the Byzantine Countryside: New Approaches from Quantitative Landscape Archaeology," in *Byzanz als Raum: Zu Methoden und Inhalten der historischen Geographie des östlichen Mittelmeerraumes in Mittelalter*, eds. H. Belke et al., Tabula Imperii Byzantini 7 (Vienna, 2000), 37–63.

[3] Most recently, see L. Neville, "The Marcian Treatise on Taxation and the Nature of Bureaucracy in Byzantium," *ByzF* 26 (2000): 47–62, and eadem, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100* (Cambridge, 2004), with collected bibliography and a discussion of the date of the text. For a translation of the tax treatise, see also C. M. Brand, "Two Treatises on Taxation," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 35–60. For a discussion of the term *chorion*, see also M. Kaplan, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIe siècle: propriété et exploitation du sol* (Paris, 1992), 95–101.

[4] I. P. Medvedev, ed., *Vizantiiskii zemledel'cheskii zakon [Nomos Georgikos]* (Leningrad, 1984). For an English translation and commentary, see W. Ashburner, "The Farmer's Law," *JHS* 30 (1910): 85–108; idem, "The Farmer's Law (Continued)," *JHS* 32 (1912): 68–95. More than one hundred copies of the law code, ranging in date from the 11th to the 16th century, survive. See also the description of the village in A. E. Laiou, "The Byzantine Village (5th–14th c.)," in *Les villages dans l'empire byzantin (IVe-XVe siècle)*, eds. J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, and J.-P. Sodini, Réalités byzantines 11 (Paris, 2005), 39.