

## FEMALE MONASTICISM AND THE CHURCH

THE ROLE OF female monasticism within the Byzantine Church from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries can be examined from multiple angles. This chapter primarily focuses on the involvement of nuns in the ecclesiastical controversies of the thirteenth century, employing modern methodologies such as Social Network Analysis. This approach enables us to visualize and quantify the influence of female monastics in the broader social dynamics of Byzantium. A secondary objective is to explore the Church's stance toward female monastic communities and assess how decisions made by ecclesiastical authorities affected these communities—particularly in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the Union of Lyons in 1274.<sup>1</sup>

### Ecclesiastical Controversies and Female Networks

The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries witnessed several momentous ecclesiastical events, including the Arsenite Schism (1265–1310), the failed attempts at union with the Latin Church (1274 and 1438/39),<sup>2</sup> and the Hesychast controversy (in the 1330s and 1340s). These developments cannot be fully understood when viewed solely through an ecclesiastical

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy*; Nicol, "The Greeks and the Union of the Churches," 454–80; Nicol, "The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyons," 113–46; Roberg, *Die Union zwischen der griechischen und der lateinischen Kirche*; Roberg, *Das Zweite Konzil von Lyon*; Evert-Kappesowa, "La société byzantine et l'Union de Lyon," 28–41; Evert-Kappesowa, "Une page de l'histoire des relations byzantino-latines: Le clergé byzantin et l'Union de Lyon," 68–92; Evert-Kappesowa, "Une page de l'histoire des relations byzantino-latines," 297–317; Evert-Kappesowa, "Une page de l'Histoire des relations byzantino-latines: 2. La fin de l'Union de Lyon," 1–18; Puech, "The Byzantine Aristocracy and the Union of the Churches," 45–54; Beaucamp, "Les femmes et l'église," 362–63.

<sup>2</sup> Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*; Blanchet, "L'église byzantine á la suite de l'union de Florence," 79–123; Kioussopoulou, "Η κοινωνική διάσταση της σύγκρουσης," 25–36; van Dieten, "Der Streit in Byzanz und die Rezeption der Unio Florentina," 160–80; Gounarides, "Πολιτικές διαστάσεις της συνόδου Φεράρας-Φλωρεντίας," 107–29; Demacopoulos, "The Popular Reception of the Council of Florence," 37–53; Chrysos, "Η Ανατολή συναντά τη Δύση," 49–62.

lens, as they were deeply intertwined with political and social dynamics. Although each occurred under distinct historical circumstances—by the late thirteenth century, the Byzantine Empire remained a significant power, whereas by the fifteenth century it had become a mere shadow of its former self—they share notable commonalities. Chief among these is the active involvement of women, particularly nuns.

In Byzantium, women frequently played active roles in religious controversies. A prominent early example is their passionate involvement in the Iconoclastic conflict, which established a precedent for female engagement in theological disputes for generations to come. The memory of those who resisted Iconoclasm was preserved and celebrated during the Palaiologan period, with scholars such as Constantine Akropolites chronicling the lives of iconophile saints. Among them, St. Theodosia emerged as a symbolic embodiment of Orthodoxy by the late thirteenth century. It is thus unsurprising that Theodora Raoulaina—a staunch Arsenite and anti-Unionist nun—chose to author the *Life of the Graptoi* (*Vita Theophanis et Theodori Grapti*), further reinforcing this legacy of female theological resistance.

The controversies of the late Byzantine period were marked by significant complexity and fluidity. As the political and ecclesiastical landscape evolved, many participants altered their positions, at times aligning themselves with previously opposing factions, as numerous cases after 1282 illustrate. Nevertheless, some individuals remained unwavering in their convictions, often at great personal cost—including exclusion from the Orthodox community.

## The Arsenite Schism

The Arsenite Schism was the first major ecclesiastical controversy of the late Byzantine period in which women—especially nuns—played a significant role.<sup>3</sup> The conflict began in 1265 with the deposition of Patriarch Arsenios, but it soon evolved into a broader movement marked by strong anti-Palaiologan sentiment. The catalyst was Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos's blinding of the legitimate heir, John IV Laskaris—an act that prompted Arsenios to excommunicate the emperor. In response, and with no reconciliation in sight, Michael VIII convened a synod that ultimately deposed the unyielding

**3** On the Arsenites, see Gounarides, *Tò κίνημα τῶν Ἀρσενιατῶν*; Sykoutres, “Περὶ τὸ σχίσμα τῶν Ἀρσενιατῶν,” 267–332, 15–44, 107–26. See also Puech, “L’aristocratie et le pouvoir à Byzance,” vol. 2, pp. 411–34; Tinnefeld, “Das Schisma zwischen Anhängern und Gegnern,” 143–65.

patriarch. The backlash from Arsenios's supporters, however, was unexpectedly intense and endured for decades, continuing until 1310.<sup>4</sup>

The Arsenite Schism has often been linked to the perceived neglect of the population in Asia Minor following the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, and it is closely associated with the legacy of the Laskarid dynasty. Lacking centralized leadership, the Arsenite movement fragmented into competing factions, including those led by figures such as Hyakinthos and John Tarchaneiotēs. While some groups, like the one headed by Theodore Manouelites, were willing to reconcile with the official Church after 1282 (the death of Michael VIII), others persisted in their opposition until the Schism's eventual resolution in 1310. In the years following 1282, the Arsenites increasingly sought to establish a parallel ecclesiastical structure, conducting liturgies in their own churches with their own clergy, effectively forming an alternative Church alongside the official one.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of women, and particularly nuns, in the discussions surrounding the Arsenite Schism is clearly evident in the source material. Theodora Raoulaina, one of the most prominent female figures of the period, joined the Arsenite cause along with the rest of the Raoul family. Female members of the Tarchaneiotēs family,<sup>6</sup> such as the nuns Maria and Theodora Tarchaneiotissa, were also ardent supporters of the deposed Patriarch Arsenios.

Vincent Puech identifies personal and dynastic motives behind Tarchaneiotissa's involvement in the movement against Michael VIII. Firstly, there was Maria/Martha's animosity towards her sister, Irene/Eulogia. As Puech correctly notes, "one can think that the two sisters of the emperor, having entered into different families, maintained a rivalry."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Theodora Raoulaina aligned with the political commitments of the family into which she married.

Puech further speculates that Maria/Martha sought to play an intermediary role between the Laskaris and Palaiologos families. It is important to remember that the Tarchaneiotēs, Nestongos, and Raoul families supported Michael VIII in his bid for the regency (*symbasileia*), despite being candidates for the same role themselves. These families also objected to the blinding of the young John IV Laskaris, which was done on the advice of Irene/

4 Laurent, "La fin du schisme arsénite," 285–313.

5 Gounarides, *Τὸ κίνημα τῶν Ἀρσενιατῶν*, 70–71, 121–59.

6 On the Tarchaneiotēs family, see Leontiades, *Die Tarchaneiotai*, 61–77.

7 Puech, "L'aristocratie et le pouvoir à Byzance," vol. 2, p. 416. Translation my own.

Eulogia. On the other hand, their kinship with Michael VIII's political opponents<sup>8</sup> suggests that the Arsenites (at least among the aristocratic families) were more focused on gaining imperial power than on restoring ecclesiastical order.

## The Unions of Lyons (1274) and Ferrara-Florence (1438/39)

Since the Schism between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in 1054, as well as the Crusades and the capture of Constantinople in 1204, Byzantines and Latins had viewed each other with suspicion and prejudice.<sup>9</sup> After the recapture of Constantinople from the Latins in 1261, Emperor Michael VIII sought to leverage the possibility of a Church union to secure papal approval for his return to the capital and to prevent renewed Western crusading attempts against the Byzantines. However, the Union—concluded at Lyons in 1274—mobilized several conservative segments of Byzantine society against both the policy and the emperor.<sup>10</sup>

The reaction to the proclaimed union began soon after the return of the representatives from the West. George Pachymeres describes it as a schism affecting the entire Church. In addition to the initial group of opposition known as the Arsenites, a second group emerged: the anti-Unionists. This group included people “whose knowledge was confined to the hoe and the axe, and others with knowledge but excessively zealous in their advocacies.”<sup>11</sup> The motto “do not touch, do not be affected” (*μὴ ἅψη, μὴ δὲ θίγῃς*), which had already been used by the Arsenites, became widely adopted once again.<sup>12</sup>

Female participation in the anti-Union faction became evident soon after 1274. Unionists depicted their activities in a negative light. A synodal

**8** On the marriage of Andronikos Tarchaneiotes to a daughter of John Doukas and his escape to the lands of his father-in-law, see Leontiades, *Die Tarchaneiotai*, 64–65.

**9** Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists*; Kolbaba, *Inventing Latin Heretics*; Kolbaba, “The Orthodoxy of the Latins in the Twelfth Century,” 199–214; Kolbaba, “Byzantine Perceptions of Latin Religious ‘Errors,’” 117–43; Pérez Martín, “Le conflit de l’Union des Églises,” 411–22; Constantinides, “Byzantine Scholars and the Union of Lyons,” 86–93.

**10** Darrouzès and Laurent, *Dossier grec de l’Union de Lyon*; Puech, “L’aristocratie et le pouvoir à Byzance,” vol. 2, pp. 434–53.

**11** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 2, bk. 5, chap. 13, pp. 511–13. English translation by Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy*, 163.

**12** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 2, bk. 5, chap. 23, p. 511, lines 15–16. For Pachymeres’ perspective on the issue of Church Union, see Lampakes, *Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης*, 87–89.

document from February 1277 detailed the resistance against the Union in Constantinople, outlining the involvement of various groups. It began with the imperial family and the senate, then moved to bishops and metropolitans, church office holders, priests, and finally monks and the laity. The document particularly mentioned the high number of women involved and lamented that “this evil” had even reached them.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Constantine Meliteniotes sharply criticized “women who were obsessed with fame and were advocating for religious issues.” After 1282, these women actively participated in various synods that deposed Unionist metropolitans and imposed punishments on members of the clergy and laity.<sup>14</sup>

The expression “women mad after fame” likely refers to Irene/Eulogia Kantakouzene Palaiologina. Once the favoured sister of Michael VIII, Irene/Eulogia supported him throughout his bid for the throne. She brought him the news of Constantinople’s recapture in 1261 and advised in favour of deposing John IV Laskaris.<sup>15</sup> However, the Union significantly altered her relationship with her brother, leading her to become a staunch anti-Unionist.<sup>16</sup>

Pachymeres presents Irene/Eulogia and Theodore Mouzalon as key instigators of the policy shift after 1282. They were instrumental in persuading Andronikos II to renounce the Union and return to Orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Irene/Eulogia convinced Michael VIII’s wife, Theodora Palaiologina, that praying for her husband’s soul was futile, as he was destined for eternal damnation.<sup>18</sup>

The anti-Union movement between 1274 and 1282 achieved significant success in attracting supporters within the palace and among the patriarchal clergy. Relatives of the emperor were openly opposed to his policy. Ogerio

**13** Darrouzès and Laurent, *Dossier grec de l’Union de Lyon*, p. 465, lines 4–9, no. 16 (1277).

**14** Constantine Meliteniotes, *Λόγοι ἀντιρρητικοὶ δύο*, ed. Orphanos, p. 116, lines 6–7.

**15** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 1, bk. 2, chap. 35, p. 225, lines 12–16.

**16** On Irene/Eulogia Palaiologina, see Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen*, no. 29, 18–19.

**17** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 3, bk. 7, chap. 2, p. 23, lines 19–20. For a different opinion, see Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, bk. 6, chap. 1, p. 159, line 17, and p. 160, line 1. See also Pseudo-Sphrantzes, *Chronicle*, ed. Grecu, bk. 1, chap. 4, p. 170, lines 3–4. On Mouzalon, see Samara, *Θεόδωρος Μουζάλων*, with an edition of his letters and other works.

**18** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 3, bk. 7, chap. 3, p. 25, lines 8–12; Talbot, “Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII,” 297–98; Mitsiou, “Regaining the True Faith,” 77–96.

Boccanegra, *protonotarios* of Michael VIII, reported in a letter to Marco and Marchetto, *latores litterarum* of Pope Nicholas III (May–June 1278), about the challenges the emperor faced in implementing the Union. He specifically mentioned the imperial female relatives who were particularly resistant, including Michael's sister Maria/Martha Tarchaneiotissa (widow of Nikephoros Tarchaneiotēs), her daughter Theodora (widow of the great *stratopedarches* Balanidiotes), and his niece Theodora Raoulaina, daughter of Irene/Eulogia, all of whom had been ardent followers of Arsenios. They were imprisoned, and their properties were confiscated.<sup>19</sup> Irene/Eulogia and her daughter, Theodora Raoulaina, were exiled to the fortress of St. Gregory in the Gulf of Nikomedeia.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, female opposition to the Union of Ferrara–Florence of 1438/39—arranged in the hope of provoking a new crusade to save Byzantium from the Ottomans—seems less dynamic compared to that of the thirteenth century (or at least is less prominent in the sources). Only Doukas mentions the behaviour of nuns—notably supporters of Gennadios—who in 1452 protested against the Unionist liturgy in St. Sophia. He describes it as follows:

Those nuns, who considered themselves to be pure and dedicated to God in Orthodoxy, with common resolve and in accord with their teacher Gennadios, and with the abbots and the confessors and the remaining priests and laymen, cried aloud the *anathema*. The Article of Union of the Council and those who had acquiesced in the past and who acquiesce in the present and will acquiesce in the future, they anathematized.<sup>21</sup>

Doukas also criticized these nuns in another context. While addressing the anti-Unionists' claim that the altars had become pagan through their use by Catholics, he reported: "I saw with my own eyes a nun who had taken sacred vows not only eating meat and covering her body with barbarian dress but

**19** See Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches*, vol. 3, no. 2038a; Loenertz, "Memoire d'Ogier, protonotaire, pour Marco et Marchetto," chap. 13, p. 554; Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologos and the West*, 324; Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy*, 170; Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen*, no. 22, pp. 13–14 and no. 28, p. 18.

**20** After 1282, the Unionists were also exiled there. Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 3, bk. 7, chap. 35, p. 117, lines 21–26; Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, bk. 6, chap. 2, p. 171, lines 2–3. For the Fort of St. Gregory, see Foss, *Survey of Medieval Castles of Anatolia*, 68; Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont*, 582.

**21** Doukas, *Historia*, ed. Grecu, chap. 36, §4, p. 317, lines 12–16; Magoulas, *Dukas*, 204; Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 384.

also making an offering to the false prophet and shamelessly confessing his unholy faith [i.e., Islam]<sup>22</sup> Doukas questions the purity that the anti-Unionist nuns preached and demanded, portraying them as preferring Muslims over Latins. Additionally, Demetrios Palaiologos, the brother of John VIII, attempted to seize power in Constantinople in 1442 with the support of anti-Unionists and Turks, although his attempt ultimately failed.<sup>23</sup>

Nothing is known about the exile or imprisonment of nuns following the Union Council of 1438/39. Additionally, very few women from the imperial family or high aristocracy were involved in the anti-Unionist faction. Those who did show any anti-Unionist sentiments often quickly reversed their position. For example, Helen Dragaš, mother of John VIII and Constantine Palaiologos, was influential in shaping her sons' opinions on many important matters. While in Italy, the pope urged the emperor to appoint a patriarch after consulting with archpriests rather than relying solely on the opinion of his mother, who had been a nun since 1426/27.<sup>24</sup> In 1445, she supported the anti-Unionists by refusing to pray for the Unionist Patriarch, but she later changed her stance.<sup>25</sup>

In reality, it seems that the Union of Florence was accepted by the majority of the Byzantine aristocracy, many of whom had family members who had chosen monastic life.<sup>26</sup> A possible reason for this acceptance may be the shift in their socio-economic circumstances since the thirteenth century. After the loss of substantial portions of the Empire, the wealth of the aristocracy increasingly depended on commercial activities rather than land and property, especially in the West. Several prominent aristocratic women became trading partners with the Venetians and Genoese.<sup>27</sup>

The lower classes were likely the main supporters of the anti-Unionists, although shifts between groups were possible over time. Isidore of Kiev claimed that he had not only the majority of the senate on his side but also "the lower classes of the race, the bulk of the populace, a foolish people, and

**22** Doukas, *Historia*, ed. Grecu, chap. 36, §6, p. 319, lines 28–31; Magoulas, *Dukas*, 206.

**23** Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 360.

**24** Sylvestros Syropoulos, *Les "Mémoires,"* ed. Laurent, bk. 10, chap. 24, p. 510, lines 13–16.

**25** John Eugenikos, *Τοῦ νομοφύλακος Ἰωάννου διακόνου τοῦ Εὐγενικοῦ τῷ δεσπότη παραμυθητικόν*, ed. Lampros, p. 59, lines 21–15; Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 369; Kioussopoulou, *Βασιλεύς ή οικονομός*, 184. On Helen Dragaš and her attitude towards the Union, see Petanovič, *Elena*, 143–64.

**26** Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 390.

**27** Mitsiou, "Aspekte der Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte," 32–42.

in no way sensible, who, to put it plainly, readily, alas, accepted the betrayal (at least in part) of their own faith for human considerations.”<sup>28</sup> Contrary to Doukas’s testimony, Isidore referred to a small group of eight anti-Unionist monks around Gennadios—a claim also supported by Theodore Agallianos.<sup>29</sup> It is evident that, due to numerous adverse political circumstances and the looming Ottoman threat, the anti-Unionist movement of the fifteenth century was less vigorous than it had been in the thirteenth.

## The Hesychast Controversy

Between the two unions with the Latin Church, Byzantium experienced another significant ecclesiastical turmoil during the Hesychast movement of the fourteenth century. Women, especially nuns, played an active role in this period.<sup>30</sup> Philotheos Kokkinos refers to a considerable number of women, some of imperial descent, who supported the orthodox position, although he does not mention any female opponents of Hesychasm. However, there were indeed notable women who opposed Hesychasm. Theodora/Theodosia Palaiologina, the *tsarina* of Bulgaria, was an opponent of Palamas,<sup>31</sup> as was Simonis, the wife of the Serbian ruler (1299–1321) and later a nun.

The Register of the Patriarchate records instances where the *ktetorikon dikaion* was revoked from abbesses due to their involvement in ecclesiastical controversies. In 1354, Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos ordered the

**28** John Eugenikos, *Letters*, ed. Lampros, p. 196, line 25, and p.197, line 1, no 22.

**29** Isidore of Kiev, “Letter to Nicholas V,” in Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, p. 92; Theodore Agallianos, *Sermones*, ed. Patrineles, p. 97, lines 238–41; Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 442; Theodore Agallianos, *Contra Latinos*, ed. Blanchet, 122–30.

**30** On Hesychasm, see generally Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm*. Hesychasm developed through monastic practices around *hesychia* (quietness and peacefulness) ending up to mean a specific way of praying in order to envision the Holy Spirit. The biggest supporters were Palamas and Athonite monks. Among its opponents can be listed many scholars and intellectuals. The theological controversy had severe political dimensions until the final prevalence of Palamism.

**31** John Kantakouzenos, *History*, ed. Schopen, vol. 1, pp. 12, 186, 208, 430, and vol. 2, p. 222; Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, bk. 9, chap. 1, pp. 390–91; Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cidone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota*, 223; Fatouros and Krischer, *Johannes Kantakuzenos*, vol. 1, pp. 213, 266–67, and vol. 2, p. 202; van Dieten, *Nikephoros Gregoras*, vol. 2, pp. 102–94; Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen*, 71; Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches*, vol. 4, nos. 2303 and 2679; Oikonomides, “Theodora δέσποινα τῶν Βουλγάρων in a Protagma,” 209–10.

expulsion of nun Angelina Senacheirina from the patriarchal monastery of *kyr David* in Philadelphia, citing that “she had harmed the souls of the nuns and had engaged in unacceptable behavior.”<sup>32</sup>

It remains unclear what specific accusations were made against this nun, but connections with anti-Palamite circles cannot be ruled out. Kokkinos appointed Makarios Chrysokephalos, the metropolitan of Philadelphia, as the *ephoros* of the nunnery.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in 1360/61, the nun Maroulina from the Barangiotissa Monastery in Constantinople was identified as a follower of Barlaam and Akindynos—two prominent anti-Palamite figures. Rather than working for the benefit of the nuns’ souls, Maroulina (according to the document) harmed both her own soul and those of the other nuns.<sup>34</sup> As a result, she lost her rights as *ephoros* of the nunnery.

The most prominent female adversary of Gregory Palamas was Irene Choumnaina Palaiologina, the daughter of Nikephoros Choumnos and daughter-in-law of Andronikos II.<sup>35</sup> After being widowed, Irene took monastic vows and renovated the Monastery of Philanthropos Soter in Constantinople. Highly educated, she supported Gregory Akindynos—likely her second spiritual father after Theoleptos of Philadelphia—to whom she remained loyal until the end of her life.<sup>36</sup>

Abbess Irene Choumnaina was accused by the followers of Palamas of attempting to act as a *didaskalos* (teacher),<sup>37</sup> a role for which she was, in contrast, praised by Nikephoros Gregoras and Matthew of Ephesos.<sup>38</sup>

**32** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 100, no. 191 (March 1354), lines 4–9; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 2359.

**33** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 100, no. 191 (March 1354), lines 12–20.

**34** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., pp. 516–18, no. 258 (February 1361), lines 29–33; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 2433.

**35** For the list of the Antipalamites given by John Kyparissiotēs, see Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cidone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota*, 222–23. On Kyparissiotēs, see Gioffreda, “Giovanni Ciparissiota e il Contra Nilum Cabasilam,” 87–106.

**36** Gregory Akindynos, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 18, lines 8–29, no. 6, and p. 214, lines 94–102, no. 50.

**37** Gregory Palamas, *Orationes antirrheticæ contra Acindynum*, ed. Chrestou et al., p. 468, lines 13–16, and p. 468, lines 32–469; Gregory Palamas, *Contra Barlaam et Acindynum*, ed. Chrestou et al., p. 99, lines 13–15.

**38** Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 3, bk. 29, chaps. 21–24, pp. 238–40, lines 2 and 7; Reinsch, *Die Briefe des Matthaios von Ephesos*, p. 136, lines 5–8, no. 32.

Described as a “Jezebel” by Palamas but regarded as a strong woman by her supporters,<sup>39</sup> Choumnaina’s case highlights the ambiguous status of female pedagogy in these religious controversies. One faction would readily disparage the practice to tarnish the reputation of their opponents, even when members of their own side were known to engage in it as well.

Since the dawn of Christianity, the expression of theological views by women has often been linked to heretical groups in the eyes of religious authorities, and the period under discussion is no exception. The anti-Palamites, for instance, accused their opponents of Messalianism, claiming that both Gregory Palamas and Isidore Boucheir had connections with known Bogomils, such as the nun Irene Porine from Thessaloniki. Allegedly, Irene had converted citizens of Thessaloniki to Bogomilism and also influenced people on the Holy Mountain and in Trnovo through her disciples.<sup>40</sup>

Irene Porine and the nun Agathe were condemned in 1344 at a synod on Mount Athos. Both were followers of the Bogomil monk George of Larissa (1337–1344),<sup>41</sup> who was allegedly a friend of Palamas and Isidore. George of Larissa fled Thessaloniki for Mount Athos before 1338 and was expelled from there in 1344 or 1345. Porine met Isidore and Palamas around 1325/26 in Thessaloniki, where Isidore tutored a mixed group of monks and laypeople. He was accused of teaching strange doctrines and of not abstaining from food and drink at the prescribed times.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Gregoras accused the Bogomils, including George of Larissa and Joseph of Crete, of spending most of their time drinking strong wine and feasting.<sup>43</sup>

Akindynos described Porine and her followers in the following manner:

Their leader and goddess, as it were, was found to be Porine, a minister to them of all infamy and abomination. Isidore visited her more than anyone else and spent his time watching her, as if she were a divine rule, while she was saying and doing everything possible and nodding and dancing and drinking and being constantly intoxicated, and he praised her as a prophet-

**39** Gregory Palamas, *Letters*, ed. Chrestou, p. 323, lines 15–17, no. 1; Gregory Akindynos, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 246, lines 88–103, no. 60.

**40** Kallistos I, *Life of St. Theodosios*, ed. Zlatarski, 19–20; Werner, “Spätbogomilisch-adamitische Spekulationen und Praktiken in religions-historischer Sicht,” 41.

**41** Rigo, “L’assemblea generale athonita del 1344 su un gruppo,” 480, 484, 495; Gones, *Τὸ συγγραφικὸν ἔργον τοῦ οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου Καλλίστου Α΄*, 86.

**42** cf. *De Gregorio Palama*, ed. Migne, cols. 881–82; Meyendorff, *Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 54.

**43** Nikephoros Gregoras, *Antirrhethika*, ed. Beyer, chap. 1.2, p. 131, lines 2–15; Meyendorff, *Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 57n69.

ess together with the sage Palamas. And now they are so attached to her, just as to the 'lower divinity,' or rather, just as the pious to the 'all-transcendent' divinity.<sup>44</sup>

This passage presents Porine as a leader and teacher with significant influence over a group of lay and monastic men, without explaining how or why this situation arose. Nothing is mentioned about her nunnery or the reasons behind her influential position in monastic communities in Thessaloniki and Athos. This may have been of little importance to Akindynos or Gregoras, who were primarily focused on propagandistically linking the corruption of Palamite doctrine to the scandalous behaviour of a morally compromised woman. Similarly, the Palamites, as we have seen, employed the same strategy when targeting Choumnaina.

### Women and Ecclesiastical Controversies: Patterns of Behaviour

In her significant article titled "Les femmes et l'église: droit canonique, idéologie et pratiques sociales à Byzance,"<sup>45</sup> Beaucamp provides a comprehensive examination of the role of women in defending the faith. After discussing the praise of Pulcheria as the "light of Orthodoxy"<sup>46</sup> and Theodora as the "guardian of faith,"<sup>47</sup> she briefly touches on the nuns of the Palaiologan period. Beaucamp rightly highlights the accusation against Irene Choumnaina for attempting to act as a *didaskalos* (teacher)—a common charge also echoed in George Metochites' ironic remarks about Irene/Eulogia Palaiologina's supposed profound knowledge.<sup>48</sup> In the fourteenth century, Philotheos Kokkinos criticized Constantinopolitan women in general as "superficial, credulous, and vain," condemning their "intemperance of tongue."<sup>49</sup> This perspective aligns with earlier ecclesiastical restrictions, such as the Council

<sup>44</sup> Gregory Akindynos, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, p. 222, line 6 and 77, no. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Beaucamp, "Les femmes et l'église," 349–70.

<sup>46</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem*, ed. Heil et al., p. 480, line 21; Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 23–24; James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 14–15; Angelidi, *Pulcheria*, 117–21.

<sup>47</sup> Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 103.

<sup>48</sup> George Metochites, *Historia Dogmatica*, ed. Cozza-Luzzi, chap. 28, p. 39, line 2. On George Metochites, see Samori, "A Self-Portrait of an Unyielding Unionist," 67–103, who is preparing a new critical edition and commentary of the "Dogmatic History."

<sup>49</sup> Philotheos Kokkinos, *Logos on Gregory Palamas*, ed. Tsames, p. 172, chap. 122, lines 16–22.

of Laodicea,<sup>50</sup> influenced by the New Testament, which forbade women from entering the altar, and the Quinisext Council, which later prohibited them from talking during ecclesiastical services.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding this last point, Judith Herrin argued that:

Such a firm denial of the public expression of Christian faith (the prohibition to participate actively in the church) by women could only drive them into other forms of devotion. Of course, they could attend the liturgy as onlookers, but it was in more intimate relations with the holy, such as icon veneration, that they found a way of proving their commitment. Their pursuit of Christian ideals could still be followed in domestic contexts, both within the home and in social work and welfare, but it was always an individual one, peripheral to the ordered ecclesiastical life of the church. While many female Byzantine saints displayed a dedication to the relief of poverty and illness, the contrast between their activity and the great variety of fields open to their male equivalents reveals what very limited possibilities existed for women.<sup>52</sup>

The Byzantines indeed had their own interpretations for women's involvement in Church affairs. John Chrysostom argued that the exclusion of women from the priesthood often led them to become more active in church elections, where they sought to influence outcomes and impose their views on local bishops. This activism was coupled with a sense of *parresia*, or "outspokenness," which sometimes took on a negative connotation as "license of tongue." Chrysostom observed that women felt emboldened to criticize even the highest Church authorities, addressing them more harshly than a master would speak to a slave. This suggests a tension between the perceived appropriate roles for women in ecclesiastical life and the realities of their active participation and leverage.<sup>53</sup>

In the thirteenth century, George Metochites provided a psychological interpretation of the motives driving Irene/Eulogia Palaiologina, a prominent anti-Unionist nun. According to Metochites, her energetic and assertive stance was rooted in her inherent character, which was further shaped by her aristocratic upbringing and education. Before taking monastic vows,

**50** cf. *Council of Laodicea*, ed. Joannou, Canon 11, p. 135, and Canon 44, p. 148.

**51** *Concilium Trullanum*, ed. Alberigo et al., Canon 70, p. 275; Ohme, *Das Konzil Quinisextum*, 260–62, 118–19; Konidaris, "Die Rechtsstellung," 131–43; Herrin, "Femina Byzantina," 116, 120.

**52** Herrin, "Femina Byzantina," 120.

**53** John Chrysostom, *De sacerdotio*, ed. Malingrey, bk. 3, chap. 9, p. 162, line 28, and p. 164, line 44.

These contemporary explanations demonstrate that true conviction or piety alone cannot be considered sufficient motives for women's roles in ecclesiastical controversies; questions of influence and imitation must also be considered. Many women may have simply followed the will of others, such as their spiritual fathers, or aligned themselves with the positions of their husbands or male relatives. For instance, Empress Theodora Palaiologina adhered to her husband's views. After the restoration of Orthodoxy, she was compelled by the Council of Blachernai (1283) to affirm her orthodoxy.<sup>55</sup> However, when an influential woman—often a nun—joined a particular faction, her female and, frequently, male relatives would often follow her example and directives. For example, the nun Eulogia Palaiologina encouraged her daughter, Maria Kantakouzene, to invite the Mamluk Sultan Baibars I to oppose Michael VIII, and the *tsarina* of Bulgaria ultimately followed her mother's instructions.<sup>56</sup>

Late Byzantine sources emphasize the involvement of widows and nuns in major Church events, particularly in the struggle against the Union. The female relatives of Michael VIII mentioned in Ogerios' report were nuns who became active members of the opposition. Since widows traditionally enjoyed more freedoms than married women in Byzantine society, many (particularly from the aristocracy) chose to take monastic vows. The established connection between these women and their spiritual fathers could

**55** Mitsiou, "Regaining the True Faith," 77–96 (new edition and English translation); cf. Pétridès, "Chrysobulle de l'impératrice Théodora," 25–28; Petit, "La profession de foi de l'imperatrice Théodora," 286–87; John Eugenikos, *Oratio ad imperatorem Constantinum Palaeologum*, ed. Lampros, p. 130, line 2, and p. 131, line 3.

**56** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 2, bk. 6, chap. 1, p. 545–47, lines 14–24; Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy*, 164.

influence their thoughts and actions.<sup>57</sup> After 1438–1439, the Unionist historian Doukas expressed particular frustration with the fanatical nuns who surrounded Gennadios.

While the women of the uneducated majority remained anonymous, nuns of imperial and aristocratic descent often succeeded in making their names known.<sup>58</sup> These nuns were members of the Kantakouzenoi, Raoul, and Tarchaneiotas families, which belonged to the so-called *dynatoi* (“the powerful”). Their roles in political and church events are documented in the written sources of the period, which were primarily interested in these social groups.

Prior to the upheaval surrounding the Union of Lyons, many nuns of aristocratic descent had aligned with the Arsenites, becoming familiar with opposition tactics. Consequently, it is not surprising that nuns in the Josephite groups (the supporters of Patriarch Joseph I, who had resigned because of his resistance against the Union in 1275) adopted similar methods to those used by the Arsenites. For instance, Arsenite nuns provided protection to movement leaders, such as Martha Palaiologina, who supported Hyakinthos financially. Similarly, Irene/Eulogia offered refuge to the Josephites. A half-century later, Choumnaina sheltered Akindynos during the Palamite controversy. In some instances, women played crucial roles in strategic decisions. According to George Metochites, Irene/Eulogia was the one who compelled Patriarch Joseph to take an oath before the conclusion of the Union.<sup>59</sup>

With the exception of the Ferrara-Florence Council, the imperial response to disobedient female relatives is generally well-documented. After failing to convince the clergy, monks, and populace of Constantinople with arguments, Michael VIII—determined to maintain peace with the Latin Church—resorted to harsher measures to discipline recalcitrant aristocrats. The typical actions included imprisonment and confiscation of property.

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**57** In Late Byzantium, only rarely spiritual mothers are mentioned, for example the godmother of Sprantzes. Nevertheless, the context and meaning are different, as these spiritual mothers are the abbesses of female communities and not their confessors.

**58** Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” 250–53.

**59** George Metochites, *Historia Dogmatica*, ed. Cozza-Luzzi, chap. 27, p. 37, lines 5–6. See also Laurent, “Le Serment anti-latin du Patriarche Joseph Ier,” 396–407; Laurent, *Regestes*, no. 1401; Darrouzès and Laurent, *Dossier grec de l'Union de Lyon*, pp. 303–5, no. 2. Pachymeres, however, attributes the oath of Joseph to Job Iasites. Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 1, bk. 5, chap. 16, p. 489, lines 26–28.

Public humiliation was another tactic, as demonstrated by the case of Manuel Holobolos and his niece in October 1273. Notably, Holobolos' anonymous niece was also accused of engaging in magical practices.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, Makarios of Pisidia reports that Patriarch Joseph I expelled Arsenite nuns from their monastic communities in Constantinople during severe winter conditions.<sup>61</sup> Other followers of Arsenios were imprisoned, and many left Byzantium to spread negative propaganda about the Palaiologoi abroad.

During the Hesychast controversy, abbesses were removed from the administration of nunneries, and other nuns were anathematized. According to Gregoras, Irene Choumnaina was persecuted for her involvement in the controversy, though the exact details are unclear. An analysis of private documents from the monastery of Prodromos in Serres suggests that she left Constantinople and her monastery before 1355 and lived for a time in the Serres region, where she owned private land.<sup>62</sup> At some point, she returned to Constantinople and likely died around 1355. Gregoras was asked to write her obituary, but no such work has survived. However, he did claim that miracles occurred at her grave, indicating that her beliefs were considered correct. Nevertheless, as an ardent supporter of the heretics, she could not be accepted and venerated as a saint by the official Church.

## Way(s) of Action

The sources provide insight into the methods employed by the opposition during religious controversies. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the strategies of the opposition largely remained consistent. Monks engaged in propaganda within their own monastic communities and utilized pamphlets and other writings to disseminate their ideas more broadly. During the disputes over the Church Union and the Arsenite Schism, the rebels also avoided the official Church institutions in favour of their own assemblies.

The wealthier and more influential members of the opposition groups provided financial support and offered shelter and protection to those sought by the authorities. Additionally, through their networks of kinship,

<sup>60</sup> Pachymeres, *History*, ed Failler and Laurent, vol. 2, bk. 5, chap. 20, p. 501–5, lines 20–24; Bydén, “Strangle Them with These Meshes of Syllogisms,” 133–57.

<sup>61</sup> Eustratiades, “Ο πατριάρχης Ἀρσένιος ὁ Αὐτωρειανός,” 93.

<sup>62</sup> Guillou, *Les archives de Saint-Jean-Prodrome sur le Mont Menece*, pp. 142–44, no. 46; Bénou, *Codex B*, pp. 311–13, nos. 173–77 and 201.

they could mobilize foreign political powers against Byzantium, exerting external pressure on the emperor.

According to Gregoras, only a small fraction of the anti-Unionists were willing to suffer and become martyrs for their beliefs. He claimed that the majority consisted of troublemakers who disguised themselves as monks and travelled to regions outside the Byzantine Empire, where they incited unrest.<sup>63</sup> Donald Nicol has argued that significant disturbances were indeed caused, as fanatical monks and professional agitators stirred up trouble among local populations. They advised the common people to avoid visiting churches, to minimize their interactions with priests, and to reject baptism administered by Unionist clerics. In this way, they disrupted the daily functions of the Church.<sup>64</sup>

After his deposition in 1282 and during his exile, the Unionist Patriarch John Bekkos lamented the actions of certain women, saying, “What can one say when women and children still in the nursery, when men whose knowledge is limited to agriculture or manual labour cry criminal to anyone who so much as whispers about the Union of the Churches?” He complained that “children at school, women chatting over their distaffs and spindles, farmers and labourers, all of them now have only one subject in the forefront of their minds and conversations—the Procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son.”<sup>65</sup> On another occasion, Bekkos complained that “men, women, old and young, [of] all sorts and conditions...thought this peace [in the Church] to be a division and not a union.”<sup>66</sup>

No doubt the populace did not grasp all details of the complex theological differences with the Latin Church. In many cases, their instigators—primarily monks—were also inadequately educated on theological matters. However, this ignorance did not hinder their effectiveness; the arguments they used to incite the people were far more persuasive than abstract theological debates. They simply warned the masses of the peril to their souls if they betrayed the faith of their ancestors.

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**63** Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, bk. 5, chap. 2, p. 127, line 18, and p. 128, line 14.

**64** Darrouzès and Laurent, *Dossier grec de l'Union de Lyon*, p. 465, no 16.

**65** John Bekkos, *De Depositione Sua (Oratio 2)*, ed. Migne, col. 984; English translation of the passages by Nicol, “The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyons,” 124–25. To John Bekkos, see Xexakes, “Ιωάννης Βέκκος και αι θεολογικαι αντίληψεις αὐτοῦ”; Gounarides, “Ιωάννης Βέκκος εχθρός Ρωμαίων,” 29–40.

**66** John Bekkos, *De Depositione Sua (Oratio 1)*, ed. Migne, cols. 952–53.

## Case Study: Theodora Raoulaina and the Arsenite Network

Meanwhile, educated women who demonstrated an understanding of the theological stakes in these controversies were often heavily reprimanded. As previously mentioned, Bekkos struggled to explain how the “evil” of religious controversy had spread to the female population.<sup>67</sup> Modern tools, however, can shed light on this phenomenon. I will focus on one of the female figures in this complex social environment: Theodora Kantakouzene Palaiologina Raoulaina.

Theodora was born around 1240 in the Empire of Nicaea. Her first husband, the *protobestiarios* George Mouzalon, was brutally murdered in 1258 at the Sosandra Monastery.<sup>68</sup> In 1261, Theodora married John Raoul as her second husband.<sup>69</sup> Many members of the Raoul family were Arsenites and, as a result, faced punishment and imprisonment. After John’s death in 1274, Theodora became a nun. She was imprisoned with her mother in Nikomedeia but returned to Constantinople after 1282, where she played a significant role in the restoration of Orthodoxy and the integration of the Arsenite faction led by Theodore Manouelites into the official Church. Along with her mother and sister Anna, Raoulaina participated in the Synod of Adramyttion in 1284, which convened to determine the fate of those involved in the Union.<sup>70</sup> After 1285, as we have already mentioned, she renovated the Monastery of Andrew *in Krisei*,<sup>71</sup> where she also transferred the body of Arsenios.<sup>72</sup>

As a widow of aristocratic descent, Theodora Raoulaina actively participated in the ecclesiastical controversies of her time. On one hand, she was a nun and the founder of monasteries (Andrew *in Krisei* and Aristene).<sup>73</sup>

**67** Darrouzès and Laurent, *Dossier grec de l’Union de Lyon*, p. 465, lines 7–9, no. 16.

**68** Mitsiou, “The Monastery of Sosandra,” 665–83.

**69** On the Raoul family, see Fassoulakis, *The Byzantine Family of Raoul-Ral(l)es*, 1–6.

**70** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 3, bk. 7, chap. 31, p. 97, line 14, and p. 99, line 8. Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Η ζωγραφική της Άρτας στο 13<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα και η μονή της Βλαχέρνας,” 185–86; Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Η Βλαχέρνα της Άρτας*, 120. Acheimastou-Potamianou identified the three female figures in the wall painting with procession of Theotokos Blacherna in Blachernai Monastery in Arta with Anna Palaiologina, Eulogia Palaiologina, and Theodora Raoulaina.

**71** Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, bk. 6, chap. 2, p. 167, lines 17–21, and bk. 6, chap. 4, p. 178, line 19, and p. 179, line 2; Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople Under Michael VIII,” 257.

**72** Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 3, bk. 7, chap. 31, pp. 95–99.

**73** For the Monastery of Aristene, see Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire byzantine*, 51; Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople Under Michael VIII,” 257; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 14–16.

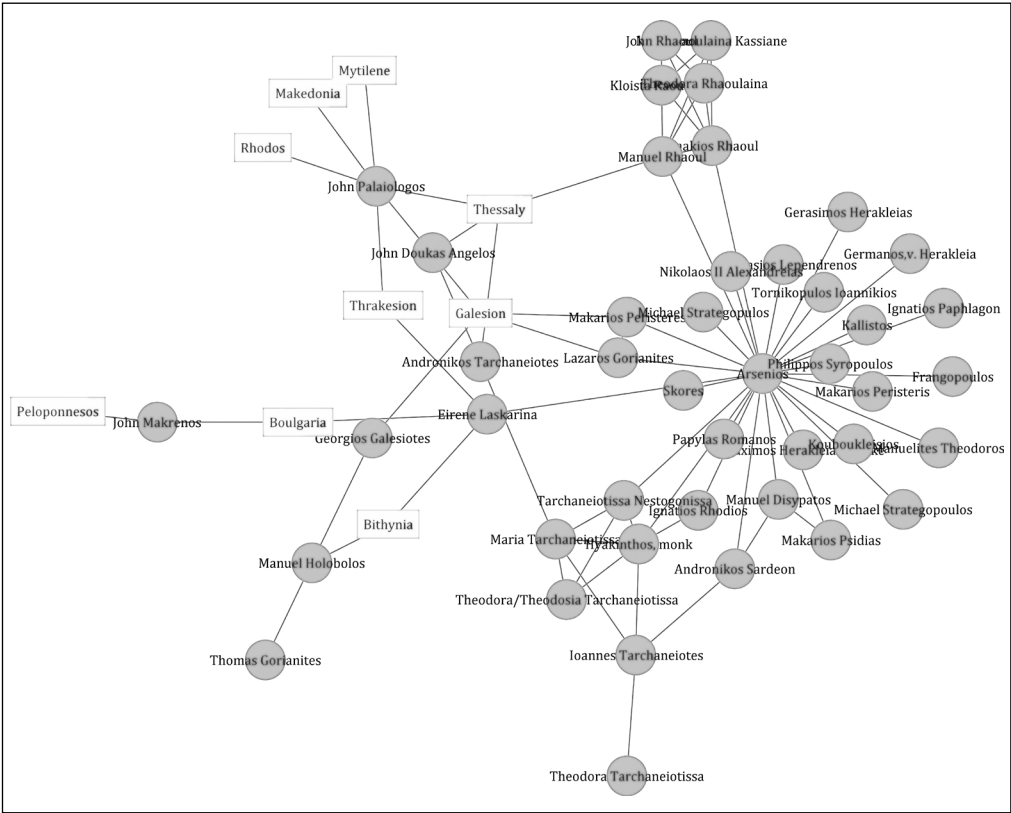


Figure 5.1. Theodora Raoulaina and the Arsenites: the network.

On the other hand, she was a scholar, author, bibliophile, and copyist. She exemplified an Arsenite, who maintained relationships not only with anti-Unionists but also with imperial and patriarchal authorities. For the purpose of our study and due to the complexity of the material, we have focused on the Arsenite network around the year 1280 and the connections of Raoulaina. Our information derives from various sources of the period, including Latin and Greek documents as well as the *PLP* and various more recent studies. Below is a network graph illustrating the connections of the Arsenite movement during the Union of Lyons (see Figure 5.1).

In this network, we have categorized nodes into two classes: important agents (fifty-one in total) and geographical locations (ten in total) related to the Arsenite movement. This classification allows us to reconstruct and evaluate the network on multiple levels, particularly focusing on individual nodes, their positions, and their relevance. According to the results, Raoulaina is connected with only some members of the movement.

Furthermore, we can conclude that the Arsenites were organized into clusters of different size, with only few nodes strongly connected between these sub-groups. Regarding Theodora Raoulaina, her significance within the Arsenite network stems from her position in a dense kinship cluster of nodes around her. However, from a structural perspective, she lacked the potential to act as a key broker within the network.

### **Female Monastic Communities and the Church (Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)<sup>74</sup>**

The relations between female monastic communities and the official Church were not always strained. Outside of periods of religious controversy, the Patriarchate and local bishops generally fulfilled their duties towards the nunneries as outlined in the canons and laws. Even during the period when the Patriarchate was in exile, the Church endeavoured to support endangered monastic communities and provide refuge to nuns who had fled from Latin-controlled territories. While the authorities' interference in the internal affairs of self-governed monasteries and nunneries was limited, Church officials retained the right to oversee the moral conduct of monks and nuns as well as the financial well-being of their institutions.

In previous chapters, we discussed the detrimental effects of the Fourth Crusade on female monastics. However, this situation improved after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261. Both written sources and archaeological evidence reveal a new phase of female monasticism characterized by the establishment or re-establishment of nunneries by prominent aristocratic women, such as Theodora Palaiologina. Consequently, the latter half of the thirteenth century and the early fourteenth century emerged as a flourishing period for female monastic foundations.

After 1261, it becomes much easier to trace the processes related to the establishment of nunneries, such as their financial backing, the lives of the women within them, and their relationships with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Canons and laws stipulated that, like all monasteries, nunneries were under the authority of the local bishop and, in Constantinople, the Patriarch.<sup>75</sup>

**74** What follows is an abridged version of my article, Mitsiou, "Female Monastic Communities in Byzantium and the Role of Silence," 105–14.

**75** On the canonical and legal framework, see Konidares, *Νομική θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 177–78.

Many were designated as patriarchal, stauropegial,<sup>76</sup> or imperial, granting them a privileged status.

This tendency is well documented in the *typika*, where founders and re-founders frequently sought to assert the independence of their nunneries. For example, the Bebaia Elpis *typikon* reflects this intention:

Even he who is the most holy patriarch at the time should take only that which he is commanded to take by the holy canons, he should be content with these things alone and perforce keep his hands off the rest, that is whatever does not lead to the edification and support [of the convent], but to its ruin and destruction.<sup>77</sup>

The patriarchal rights implied here include those of visitation and spiritual correction, as outlined by the Novel of Alexios I Komnenos (1096). This decree granted the Patriarch the authority to investigate all monasteries under his jurisdiction—including independent institutions—in order to address moral failings or deviant behaviour, even based on rumours.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the Patriarch had the right to inspect even the free monasteries to ensure they were not being mismanaged by their administrators.<sup>79</sup>

The reasons behind Synadene's strong rejection of patriarchal intervention in Bebaia Elpis may be linked to the reputation of Patriarch Niphon (1310–1314), about whom Nikephoros Gregoras had little praise. Gregoras criticizes Niphon for his lack of education and his affinity for money and business. These accusations are supported by official documents, which

**76** On the stauropegial monasteries, see Herman, "Das bischöfliche Abgabenwesen im Patriarchat von Konstantinopel," 451–52; Herman, "Ricerche sulle istituzioni monastiche byzantine," 353–55; Soule, "The Stauropegial Monastery," 147–67; Kazhdan and Talbot, "Stauropegion," 1946–47; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, 186, 193.

**77** *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 16, p. 29; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1528.

**78** When a nun from Andrew *in Krisei* became pregnant by a priest-monk from the Hodegon Monastery, he purchased an abortifacient from the doctor Gabrielopoulos. The priest-monk may have been the nunnery's confessor despite the distance between Andrew *in Krisei* (near the Stoudios Monastery) and Hodegon (close to Saint Sophia). The pregnancy and abortion became known during the trial against the doctor, which involved charges of sorcery. Mitsiou, "Das Leben der Kirche von Konstantinopel," 214–20. On abortions in Byzantium, see Cupane and Kislinger, "Bemerkungen zur Abtreibung in Byzanz," 21–49.

**79** Balsamon, *Commentary on Canon 19*, ed. Zepos and Zepos, pp. 346–48; Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches*, vol. 2, no. 1076; Konidares, *Νομική θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 178.

indicate that Niphon redirected revenues from metropolitans and archbishops to the Patriarchate. Gregoras is particularly critical of Niphon's decision to use the income from two female monasteries, *tou Pertze* and *Krataios* under the guise of renovation and maintenance costs. Niphon utilized their resources for a period, potentially diverting funds to support institutions he had established, such as the St. Apostoloi in Thessaloniki. *Krataios* was founded by Anna/Antonia Komnene Raoulaina Strategopoulina after 1293 and was located to the north or northwest of Christos Philanthropos Soter and east of the Basilike market.<sup>80</sup> The nunnery *tou Pertze* has recently been identified with the Latin convent *Percheio*, situated near the Patriarchate.<sup>81</sup> Gregoras emphasizes that Niphon spent extended periods residing in both convents, suggesting that these were not mere visitations. The duration of these stays, combined with information about the possessions of *tou Pertze*, indicates that both nunneries were sufficiently wealthy to meet the Patriarch's demands during his stays. Later testimonies suggest that both convents continued to be under the control of Niphon's successors.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast to Theodora Synadene, other foundresses had differing views on the role of the Patriarch. For example, in chapter 3 of the *Lips typikon*, regarding the election of the abbess, we read "how she is to be elevated to her lofty position of authority and leadership by patriarchal blessing and installation."<sup>83</sup> In the same chapter, Theodora Palaiologina declares:

**80** Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 36–37; Majeska locates the nunnery close to and east of the church of St. Barbara (which has not survived). Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 384–85.

**81** Martin et al., "Un acte de Baudouin II en faveur de l'abbaye Cistercienne," 211–23; Saint-Guillain, "Sainte-Marie du Perchay," 593–603; Saint-Guillain, "Propriétés et bienfaiteurs de l'abbaye constantinopolitaine," 9–40; Tsougarakis, *The Latin Religious Orders in Medieval Greece*, 61–67, 288, 293; Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 396–97; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 61–62. The opinion that the Cistercian nuns of *Percheio* received a former Byzantine monastery and its possessions located in Thrace, Bithynia, and Constantinople has to be reevaluated. Guillaume Saint-Guillain argued that the founder of the nunnery was Guilelmus or another member of the family *du Perchay*.

**82** Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, bk. 7, chap. 9, p. 260, line 10, and p. 261, line 1; van Dieten, *Nikephoros Gregoras*, vol. 2, 198–99.

**83** *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaia Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 21, p. 31; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1530; cf. *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 6, p. 110; Talbot, "Lips," 1267. The description can find a parallel in the Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton. See Rosenqvist, *The Life of Saint Irene*, 26–30.

After choosing her in this way with the help of God, next you should take her and go to the most holy patriarch; and she is to accompany you. Then, after she has received from him the blessing and grace of authority as well as the pastoral staff, as is customary for the patriarch at such installations, you should return to the convent with great joy and cheer, and with God's assistance you will behave towards each other in the prescribed manner.<sup>84</sup>

The *procheirisis* (ordination)—a ceremony in which the abbot received the pallium and his pastoral staff—is well documented in the *euchologia*, or prayer books.<sup>85</sup> However, we lack information on how this procedure might have been adapted for the ordination of a woman as abbess or what specific documents may have been produced in such cases.<sup>86</sup>

It is also recorded that Patriarch Gerasimos, on an unspecified date, confirmed the election of the newly appointed abbess of the renovated convent of Maroules. As was customary, the abbess was escorted to the nunnery by the nuns, who carried torches. The doorkeeper of the Patriarchate, George Sigeros, was able to pinpoint the location where this event took place.<sup>87</sup>

Patriarchal intervention was crucial for confirming the status of a nunnery and affirming the founders' rights. Patriarch John Kalekas and the Synod certified the rights of the nun Agathonike over the small Monastery (*monydrion*) of *tes Kryoneritisses*.<sup>88</sup> Her uncle, monk Theodosios, had built this monastery in Herakleia at his own expense and effort for her and her mother, Anastasia, who was also a nun. All three were refugees from Asia Minor.

The case of the nunnery of Maroules, dating to 1341, provides further insight into this issue. As already argued in this book, the *domestikos* had constructed a nunnery intended for his wife and daughters sometime after 1305 but before 1320.<sup>89</sup> Some time after his death, his son, John Synadenos, sought to convert the nunnery into a male monastery, presenting forged documents.

**84** *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaia Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 26, pp. 33–34; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1530.

**85** Goar, *Euchologion sive Rituale Graecorum*, 490–92; De Meester, *De monachico statu iuxta disciplinam Byzantinam*, 237–38.

**86** Darrouzès, *Recherches sur les ΟΦΙΚΙΑ de l'église byzantine*, 162–63.

**87** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 280, no. 135 (May 1341), lines 83–87; Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2207.

**88** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 1, ed. Hunger and Kreseten, p. 586, no. 103 (1330); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2157.

**89** Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 65–67; Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 196, 336; Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2207; Talbot, “A Comparison of the Monastic Experience,” 7–8.

These charters were later exposed as fraudulent through the testimony of the priest-monk Theodoretos and a later admission by Maroules' wife.<sup>90</sup>

It is important to follow the jurisprudence applied by the Synod which searched for solid testimonies and proof. The fraudulent documents appear to have been a secondary issue in the final decision. The primary concern was to establish beyond doubt that the monastery founded by Maroules was originally intended for women. The following evidence was considered:

- An abbess had been elected and resided in the nunnery for many years.
- John Synadenos had constructed an *eukterion* (unconsecrated church) and a chapel for his mother near the monastery.<sup>91</sup>
- Most significantly, the monastery's refectory (*trapeza*) initially depicted female saints, but John Synadenos later replaced these with male saints.<sup>92</sup>

This evidence made it clear to the synodic court that the Maroules Monastery had originally been a female establishment, with nuns having lived and been tonsured there.<sup>93</sup>

Patriarch John XIV Kalekas and the Synod both affirmed that, according to the Holy Fathers, converting a female monastery into a male one was forbidden.<sup>94</sup> This decision was based on the principle that the original purpose

**90** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 276, no. 135 (May 1341), lines 25–35; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2207.

**91** Kidonopulos assumed incorrectly that the wife of Maroules became abbess in this monastery. Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 66.

**92** Figures of saints were generally a part of the iconography of refectories together with scenes such as the Hospitality of Abraham, the Wedding at Cana, the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes, and the Last Supper. See Talbot, "Mealtime in Monasteries," 111. See also Orlandos, *Μοναστηριακή Αρχιτεκτονική*, 43–60; Popović, "The 'Trapeza' in Cenobitic Monasteries," 281–303; Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity," 332. On the differences between the depiction of male and female saints, see Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 28–32. On the function of female saints' depictions in Cypriote churches, see Connor, "Female Saints in the Church Decoration of the Troodos Mountains," 211–28.

**93** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 278, no. 135 (May 1341), lines 49–52; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2207.

**94** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 280, no. 135 (May 1341), lines 91–96; cf. Theodore of Stoudios, *Epistulae*, ed. Fatouros, p. 784–85, no. 526. On the nunnery of Prodomos called the Nea Petra in Thessaly, which was converted into a male monastery, see Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra*

of the foundations should be preserved. However, in some instances, such conversions were tolerated. The Patriarchate generally did not respond immediately but acted only after receiving requests from individuals with a personal stake in the matter.<sup>95</sup>

The period's sources illuminate the patriarchs' interest in the nuns and the welfare of their communities, allowing us to reconstruct the social and economic networks of the nunneries. Much of the Patriarchate's involvement in managing nunneries was related to financial matters. Lay patrons, primarily *ephoroi* (protectors), were responsible for the *systasis* (maintenance) and *beltiosis* (improvement) of monasteries. However, they often failed to meet their obligations, as we have seen in the case of the monastery *tes Panagiotisses* and its *ephoros* Isaakios Palaiologos Asanes.<sup>96</sup>

Founders and protectors often sought to derive financial profit from the revenues of monasteries. Nunneries could own a variety of assets, including houses, land, vineyards, and gardens, each serving as a potential source of income. For example, the monastery *tes Panagiotisses* (after 1282) owned bakeries, churches, vineyards, and rental properties in Constantinople, generating revenues of three hundred *hyperpyra*. After Patriarch Neilos decided to separate the double monastery of Athanasios, the female portion was endowed with assets worth approximately two thousand *hyperpyra*, including bakeries, houses, land, vineyards, and livestock.<sup>97</sup> Neilos took great care to safeguard the rights of the nuns and ensure their continued security.

In various sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we can identify efforts by patriarchs and emperors to provide financial support to nunneries. For instance, according to Patriarch Gregory of Cyprus (around 1283), the nuns of the monastery of *tou Pertze* received five hundred *modioi* of grain from John Theologites, the apographeus (recessor) of the themes of Thrace and Macedonia, based on a *prostagma*, or an imperial decree. However, Gregory reported to Theodore Mouzalon, the great logothetes, that the *apographeus* had improperly divided the grain between the Patriarchate

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*et profana*, vol. 4, p. 339, no. 3 (September 1274/11 December 1282); Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches*, vol. 3, no. 2031a.

**95** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 282, no. 135 (May 1341), lines 115–26. The synodal court decided that neither the wife of Maroules nor the daughters nor their relatives still living in the monastery should try to interfere in the administration of the monastery.

**96** See above, p. XXX.

**97** Mitsiou, "Das Doppelkloster des Patriarchen Athanasios I," 87–106.

and the nuns, whereas he was supposed to allocate all one thousand *modioi* to the Patriarch.<sup>98</sup>

Nunneries often faced significant financial challenges. Patriarchs, such as Isidore I, specifically addressed these concerns. In his testament (1347–1350), Isidore I divided the existing wine and grain supplies of the Great Church into three parts: one part for the clergy, a second for the poor nuns, and a third for his helpers (monks and laymen).<sup>99</sup>

Internal issues within nunneries often prompted intervention from the Patriarch or local Church authorities, as illustrated by the case of the nunnery of Gerontiou in Thessaloniki.<sup>100</sup> Gregory of Cyprus instructed the Great *char-tophylax* of Thessaloniki and the abbots of Akapniou and Chortaites to investigate accusations made by the nuns against the convent's abbess, a sister of *kyr* Mourinos. Allegedly, she had shown disrespect towards the Patriarch.<sup>101</sup>

The spiritual correction of nuns was a significant responsibility for the patriarchs. They used their catechetical work to remind monastics of the attitudes and behaviours appropriate for individuals dedicated to God. Athanasios I frequently issued general instructions for monks and nuns, mandating that his testament (dated sometime between 1303 and 1305)<sup>102</sup> be read on the fifteenth of every month—the day of monastic tonsure—in all the monasteries of the Byzantine Church. In his discourse, he emphasizes the importance of preventing women from entering male monasteries.

**98** Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 91–92, no. 115; Darrouzès, *Les regestes des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, nos. 1519 and 1483.

**99** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 440, no. 156 (February 1350), lines 188–94; Patedakes, “Οι διαθήκες των πατριαρχών της πρώιμης Παλαιοιολόγιας περιόδου,” 69; Helfer, “Das Testament des Patriarchen Isidoros,” 76–83.

**100** Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 135–36, no. 144; Darrouzès, *Les regestes des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, nos. 1530 and 1531; Janin, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres Byzantins*, 358.

**101** Only Hagion Oros, Megistes Lavras, MS B 39 (thirteenth century) (*Diktyon*: 27091) provides Mourinos’s name. The *protovestiarites* Demetrios Mourinos fought against the Bulgars of the usurper Lachanas in 1279 and in return became governor of Thessaloniki. In a *chrysobull* of Andronikos II, he is named Demetrios, *pansebastos sebastos*. Mourinos is the oldest member of the Venetian family of Morino, which was in the service of Byzantium. See Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 2, bk. 6, chap. 19, p. 589, lines 5–20; Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches*, vol. 4, no. 2357.

**102** Laurent, *Regestes*, no. 1595.

Athanasios I's instructions extended to a broad range of individuals, including priests, monks, men, women, and children.<sup>103</sup> He was particularly adamant that monks should neither eat with women nor sleep in nunneries, and vice versa. His guidance to the exarchs underscored the preservation of traditional practices and the necessity for gender separation within monastic life.<sup>104</sup> Athanasios was renowned for his strict views on monasticism, frequently condemning both nuns and monks for moral failings.<sup>105</sup>

In line with his rigorous stance, some of his successors sought to address issues like sorcery by imposing strict penalties. For instance, Kallistos I intervened in the case of Amarantina, a woman accused of sorcery, by compelling her to join the nunnery *tou Pertze*. There, she was expected to atone for her past transgressions through monastic life and repentance.<sup>106</sup>

The role of nunneries in the process of canonization and the construction of saintly reputations was significant. Philotheos Kokkinos provides an example from around 1347–1350, where he recounts a miracle performed by Patriarch Isidore at the nunnery *tou Pertze*. During a gathering of the entire community, Isidore cured a nun from “the illness of bloodshed” (τῷ πάθει τῆς αἱμορροΐας), demonstrating the Patriarch’s sanctity and divine favour.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, Theoktistos the Stoudite, in his writings on Athanasios I, describes miracles performed by the Patriarch. In the *Life of Athanasios I*<sup>108</sup> and in the *translatio* of his relics,<sup>109</sup> he asserts that some nuns were healed by the holy patriarch. While the *Vita* does not provide specific details about the cured nuns, the *translatio* includes their names and familial connections. This inclusion of personal details was intended to enhance the credibility of the miracle accounts and strengthen the saint's reputation.

**103** Laurent, *Regestes*, no. 1776.

**104** Laurent, *Regestes*, no. 1778.

**105** Athanasios I, *Correspondence*, ed. Talbot, p. 76, lines 11–12, no. 36.

**106** *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., pp. 32–46, no. 180 (autumn 1350?); Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 2318.

**107** Philotheos Kokkinos, *Vita Isidori patriarchi*, ed. Tsames, chap. 65, §2. Also, Neamonites is mentioning this disease, which is a biblical allusion. See Mitrea, *A Late Byzantine Swan Song*, 75n298.

**108** Theoktistos the Stoudite, *Life of Athanasios I*, ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, p. 42, line 26, and p. 43, line 6.

**109** Theoktistos the Stoudite, "Oratio de translatione reliquiarum sancti Athanasii Constantinopolitani," ed. Talbot, 87–90, 98; Talbot, "Cult and Pilgrimage," 271–82.

In conclusion, the relationship between female monastic communities and the official Church from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries was characterized by a complex interplay of support, control, and influence. The Patriarchate and local bishops generally aimed to protect and support nunneries, especially during financial and administrative difficulties. Despite this, instances of financial exploitation by some patriarchs are documented, revealing a more problematic side to their involvement. Founders, like Theodora Synadene, who were concerned about such issues sought to limit the extent of Church interference in their nunneries.

Church authorities were also responsible for overseeing the moral and spiritual conduct of nuns, enforcing adherence to canonical laws.<sup>110</sup> This duty often involved intervention in cases of misconduct or administrative issues within the nunneries. Additionally, nunneries played a significant role in the veneration of patriarchs, often supporting the construction of their sainthood through the documentation of miracles and divine interventions attributed to them.

Overall, while the Church sought to uphold and guide monastic communities, its involvement was multifaceted, encompassing both supportive and controlling elements. The dynamic between ecclesiastical oversight and the autonomy of female monastic institutions reflects the broader complexities of Church-monastic relations during this period.

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**110** Patriarch Kallistos I composed a homily for an unnamed nunnery—likely in Constantinople—after receiving accusations that the nuns were living contrary to monastic principles. See Paidas, “Secular Life’s Behaviours and Debauchery Among Nuns,” 343–57.

