

FEMALE MONASTERIES IN LATE BYZANTIUM

FOUNDATION, ORGANIZATION, AND NETWORKS

MODERN STUDIES REGARD medieval monastic foundations as a form of patronage, viewing them as expressions of power and unequal social relations.¹ However, the reasons behind their widespread prevalence in Byzantium—and particularly the role of women in this process—are still not fully understood.² Margaret Mullett has argued that while the Greek word *kte-tor* can mean both “patron” and “founder,” in English we can make the distinction that “founders are monks and patrons are secular, or at least secular becoming monastic.”³ Of course, this is only a general idea, and numerous exceptions can be traced. On the other hand, Michael Grünbart has correctly pointed out that while “foundation” can mean the construction of a building, it can also refer to the network of people associated with the foundation.⁴

As we will argue, foundations and patronage represent not only networks of individuals but also networks of material culture, including rules, texts, and spaces. This study approaches monastic foundations as complex systems composed of multilayered networks. Employing Network Analysis, we focus on specific components, such as textual and spatial networks. Our aim is to visualize and (if possible) to quantify these foundations as networks of unequal relations while also tracing the expressions of female power embedded within their intricate spatial and textual structures.

1 Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 155–61.

2 Konidares, *Το δίκαιον της μοναστηριακής περιουσίας*, 16, 101; Konidares, *Νομική θεώρηση των μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 26–43; Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*; Herman, “Ricerche sulle istituzioni monastiche byzantine,” 293–375; De Meester, “Les typiques de fondation,” 489–508; Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, 130; Janin, “Le monachisme byzantine au Moyen Âge,” 5–15; Geelhaar and Thomas, *Stiftung und Staat im Mittelalter*; Stathakopoulos, “I Seek Not My Own,” 383–97; Kambourova, “Le don de l’Église—une affaire couple?,” 213; Mullett, “Founders, Refounders, Second Founders, Patrons,” 1–27; Alivisatos, *Die kirchliche Gesetzgebung des Kaisers Justinian I*, 98–112; Frazee, “Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation on the Monastic Life,” 263–79; Troianos, *Οι πηγές*, 64, 151–56, 242–45, 270, 314–15, 276, 306–8; Janin, “Le monachisme byzantine au Moyen Âge,” 5–44.

3 Mullett, “Founders, Refounders, Second Founders, Patrons,” 1–27.

4 Grünbart, “Female Founders—Das Konzept,” 21–28.

In practical terms, a foundation meant that a person of means (who often later became a nun) built or rebuilt a monastery (most cases deal with renovation, and only a few with completely new monasteries). In Byzantium, nunneries could be founded by men (emperors, members of the imperial family, monks, and bishops),⁸ despite the decision of Patriarch Alexios the Stoudite in 1027 that there should be no male founders for female monasteries and vice versa (this decision was renewed in 1169 by Patriarch Loukas Chrysoberges).⁹ Female founders were empresses, wives of local rulers, members of the aristocracy, and, finally, common nuns.

Existing textual and visual evidence links monastic foundations to the tradition of imperial philanthropy—a model that both male and female aristocrats, in the capital and the provinces, emulated to enhance their prestige and accumulate social capital. It is no coincidence that the most prominent female patrons belonged to powerful families, such as the Palaiologoi, Synadenoï, Raoul, Strategopouloi, and Tarchaneiotes. These elite lineages sought to reestablish landmarks within the Constantinopolitan landscape as enduring symbols of their familial significance and legacy.

Among female patrons, widows played a significant role.¹⁰ Indeed, the connections between widowhood, monastic life, and foundation are extremely close, as Byzantine women very often took the monastic habit during widowhood. Sharon Gerstel and Sophia Kalopissi-Verti argue:

The ability of widows to participate in church foundation...reflected the strong juridical rights of widows in Byzantium and their critical position within families where they served, on occasion, as heads of household.... The increased involvement of widows — even humble women of the Byzantine village — in the foundation of churches in the late Byzantine period, appears to benefit from changes in attitude toward the alienation of dowry properties in the last centuries of imperial rule.¹¹

Dionysios Stathakopoulos proposed that female patronage is influenced by the so-called “bag-lady syndrome”: women, who as a rule outlive men by several years, are concerned about a potential lowering of their financial

⁸ Loukaki, “Monastères de femmes à Byzance du XII^e siècle,” 35.

⁹ Grumel, *Regestes*, nos. 833 and 1086.

¹⁰ Konidares, “Η θέση της χήρας στη βυζαντινή κοινωνία,” 35–42. For information on widows in middle Byzantine hagiographical texts, see Nikolaou, *Η γυναίκα στη μέση βυζαντινή εποχή*, 172–82. For dowry and inheritance in traditional (modern) villages in Greece and Cyprus, see Piault, *Familles et biens en Grèce et à Chypre*.

¹¹ Gerstel and Kalopissi-Verti, “Female Church Founders,” 195–96.

status and, as a result, only make their largest donations after their death.¹² On the other hand, we can assume that women—especially widows who did not choose to remarry—owned property that they could dispose of freely.

Widowhood offered economic freedom of action, and this freedom had a basis in the legislation of Justinian and in the *Ecloga* (726). The former enabled female ownership of property as a dowry or as *parapherna*.¹³ Nevertheless, it was the *Ecloga* that stipulated a widow could become the head of the family, thus obtaining legal control of her dowry properties.¹⁴ Along with a variety of legal freedoms, widowhood also provided wealthy women with further motivation to adopt the monastic life. The construction and re-foundation of a monastery allowed them to express their own wishes and enabled them to live a monastic life in line with their personal tastes. Women could take their lives into their own hands.

The Rules of Foundation

The foundation of monasteries in Byzantium is strongly connected to the *ktetorika typika* (founding statutes). The first known *typikon* for a Byzantine nunnery is that of Kecharitomene in Constantinople (first half of the twelfth century).¹⁵ In the Palaiologan era, five more *typika* are dated: Lips, Anargyroi, Bebaia Elpis, Philanthropos Soter, and Baionaia. The *typika* constituted an essential part of a larger dossier that included the founder's testament and additional documents. By the thirteenth century, they had already acquired their main form, characteristics, and topics. They addressed all possible matters, such as the election of the abbot/abbess and the monastic *offikia* (offices) and their duties as well as constitutional, financial, and liturgical issues.

12 Stathakopoulos, "I Seek Not My Own," 385.

13 *Parapherna* (or *exoproika*) denoted usually the movable property of the wife, e. g. household items and clothing that she brought into the matrimonial home. It remained her personal property, but as these objects were used to cover the needs of the family, they were recorded in the marriage contract and were managed by the husband.

14 *Ecloga*, ed. Burgmann, title 2, chap. 5, §1; Freshfield, *A Revised Manual of Roman Law*, 28. For earlier legislation, see White, "Property Rights of Women," 539–48. See also Buckler, "Women in Byzantine Law About 1100 A.D.," 410. For inheritance disputes concerning the dowry, see Macrides, "Dowry and Inheritance in the Late Period," 89–98.

15 Mitsiou, "The Monastery of Kecharitomene and the Contribution of the Assumptionists," 327–44.

The very existence of the *typika* may seem paradoxical, as state and church legislation regulated the foundation proceedings and aspects of monastic life. Nevertheless, laws and canons provided only a general framework, whereas a *typikon* organized a specific community and addressed the wishes of a particular founder within the existing legislation. The canon and civil law related to monastic foundations are based principally on Justinian's *Novels* (*Novellae constitutiones*), the legislation of Leo VI, and the canons of the ecumenical and local synods. Justinian established a basic juridical framework by reinforcing and broadening the ecumenical synods, especially the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon.¹⁶

Briefly, it should be mentioned that since Chalcedon, all monasteries were placed under episcopal authority. According to Canon 4, "no monastery should be built without the local bishop's permission, who will then exercise supervision in the monastery."¹⁷ Justinian reinforced this canon, arguing that "he who wishes to build a monastery must first speak with the bishop of the region, so that the bishop will go there, say a prayer, and fix the cross; only then must the foundation commence."¹⁸ Nevertheless, as we shall see, the bishop's rights were questioned, and many founders tried to replace them with imperial or patriarchal protection or even with total independence.

In addition, the canonical and legal framework regulated the maintenance of the original status of the foundation. Canon 24 of Chalcedon determined that "once a monastery, always a monastery, and its material goods must remain in its possession."¹⁹ Chapter 7 of Justinian's Novel 120²⁰ forbade the alienation of monastic properties. Finally, both Justinian's Novel 131 and Novel 14 of Leo VI (886–912)²¹ imposed the compulsory conclusion of all construction works undertaken by a monastery. Specifically, Justinian maintained that "he who has begun to build a new monastery or to restore an old one will be compelled to complete it."

¹⁶ This study does not address in detail the legal regulations but will refer to laws and canons whenever they are relevant to its argument.

¹⁷ *Council of Chalcedon*, ed. Alberigo et al., Canon 4, pp. 139–40.

¹⁸ Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 5, chap. 1, pp. 28–29.

¹⁹ *Council of Chalcedon*, ed. Alberigo et al., Canon 24, pp. 148.

²⁰ Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 120, chap. 7, pp. 585–87; Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 7, prefatio-chap. 2, pp. 48–54.

²¹ Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 131, chap. 7, p. 657; Leo VI, *Novellae*, ed. Troianos, no. 14, pp. 76–79.

In a *typikon*, the status of a monastic foundation is normally declared in its first chapters. Since the so-called Evergetian reform,²² there has been an increased desire among founders to establish independent and self-administered monasteries (both imperial and private). The first chapter of the Kecharitomene *typikon* declared that the nunnery:

[S]hould be independent and under its own control, a stranger to all mastery and ownership, and that no one at all should have any right or privilege in respect of it but it should remain independent in every way, separate and in control of itself, and be administered in accordance with what will be expressly laid down here by me. It should neither be made subject to imperial or ecclesiastic or personal rights at any time nor assigned as a gift or *epidosis* or for reasons of *ephoreia*, stewardship or superintendence or for any other reason to any kind of person whatsoever or monastery or holy house or orphanage or other bureau or any hospital but remain for ever only under the authority of the Virgin Mother of God *Kecharitomene*.²³

Theodora Palaiologina (d. 1303) also declared that the Lips foundation was to keep the right to govern itself (*autodespoton*).²⁴ The dowager empress rejected any efforts by the emperor or patriarch to attach it or subordinate it as a dependency to another convent. She made similar regulations for the Anargyroi nunnery, stipulating that it be “separate and independent,” and she omitted the customary list of perceived threats to the independence of her foundation. This convent was to remain unattached to any other foundation and was not to be united by the emperor or patriarch with the Lips convent. The empress decided, rather innovatively, that although Lips and Anargyroi had to remain separate entities and could never become one monastery, they were allowed to cooperate to a certain extent.²⁵ Similar concerns and regulations regarding the independence and freedom of the institution are found in the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis. Any involvement of individuals via *epidosis*,

22 Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, 214–43. On the *Evergetis typikon*, see Jordan and Morris, *The Hypotyposis of the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis*.

23 Gautier, “Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôméné,” chap. 1, pp. 29–31; Jordan, “*Kecharitomene*,” 667–68.

24 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 1–2, pp. 106–7; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1265–66. On Theodora Palaiologina, see Melichar, *Empresses of Late Byzantium*, 71–103.

25 *Typicon monasterii sanctorum Anargyrorum*, ed. Delehay, chap. 57, pp. 137–38; Talbot, “*Anargyroi*,” 1291.

or union, with another institution should be avoided; moreover, it should be regarded as treason and, therefore, deserving of capital punishment.²⁶

Related to the status of the nunneries is the issue of the “protectorate.” Most *typika* of nunneries foresee the existence of a protector (*ephoros*) who mediates between them and the outside world and who has an overall controlling function. The Kecharitomene *typikon* made provision for a female protector. More specifically, the foundress Irene Doukaina referred to those individuals who would take over the supervision (*antilepsis*) of the nunnery after her death: her daughter Eudokia, followed by Anna Komnena (the well-known historian), her daughter Maria, and so on. However, it always had to be a member of her family.²⁷

Contrary to the ideas of the Komnenian Empress, Theodora Palaiologina imposed a male protector upon the foundation. For the Lips Monastery, she nominated her son Andronikos II (1282–1328) and his successors as guardian and protector, arguing that women need strong protection “inasmuch as they are accustomed to staying at home and the silence which is most appropriate to [them].”²⁸ Such a gender-oriented statement merely disguises the effort to ensure the most powerful protector for the monastery. Similarly, the foundress of Bebaia Elpis authorized a male relative to be “protector and helper” after asserting that the nature of women is frail.²⁹ Her eldest son should be followed by her next eldest son and other suitably powerful and pious relatives.

John Philip Thomas has argued that “one of the most significant developments of the Palaiologan era was a drastic curtailment of the once very extensive and arbitrary rights of lay patrons of ecclesiastical institutions.”³⁰ These lay patrons—primarily protectors (*ephoroi*)—were responsible for the maintenance (*systasis*) and improvement (*beltiosis*) of the monasteries, but they often failed to fulfill their duties. The difficulties faced by the nunnery *tes Panagiotisses* (also known as Mouchliotissa) due to its protector offer a good example. After the death of the foundress Maria Palaiologina (after 1307) and her daughter Theodora, her son-in-law, Isaakios Palaialogos Asanes, obtained the protection (*ephoreia*) of the monastery. Asanes

26 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 14–16, pp. 27–29; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1527–28.

27 Gautier, “Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè,” chap. 80, pp. 143–47; Jordan, “Kecharitomene,” 709–10.

28 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 3–4, pp. 108–9; Talbot, “Lips,” 1266.

29 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 18–20, pp. 29–31; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1528–29.

30 Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, 253.

contributed to its decay by putting a financial burden upon the monastic community for his own gain.³¹

The fear, attested in the *typika*, that powerful individuals might try to exploit even a *monydrion* (small monastery) is supported by various sources. The monk Theodosios' final wish was for the small nunnery *tes Kryoneritisses*, which he founded in Herakleia, to remain under the ownership of the nuns.³² However, a certain George Kounales prevented this by producing a fake testament that favoured the deceased *mesazon* (chief minister), Nikephoros Choumnos. A *terminus ante quem* for the testament is 1327, the year Choumnos died as the monk Nathaniel and was buried in the Monastery of Philanthropos Soter in Constantinople.³³ The key point, however, is that after Choumnos' death and the fall of Andronikos II (1328), a certain nun, Agathonike, appeared before the synodic court, likely in the hope of securing a favourable ruling under the new regime.³⁴

In some cases, the Patriarch and synod transferred the rights of the administration of a nunnery not to a male or a layperson but to a nun who could promise to improve the financial situation of the monastery. This occurred in the cases of Maroulina from the Varangiotissa convent³⁵ and Eleodora Tarchaneiotissa.³⁶ The nun Martha Syriana succeeded in securing not only the administration rights but also the *ktetorika dikaia* of Pausolype Monastery for the rest of her life after making improvements in the nunnery.

31 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, Koder et al., pp. 62–77, no. 184 (October 1351); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2330; Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, 261; Smyrlis, *La fortune des grands monastères byzantins*, 68–69.

32 Perhaps the monastery' name *tes Kryoneritisses* was the same as that of the monastery they left behind in Skamandros. In Thrace, there almost certainly existed a *proasteion* (a rural estate or suburban property) named Kryon Neron (meaning "Cold Water") near the village of Melandros, close to Rhaidestos; there was also a Kryoneron in the region of Bizye. See Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 477.

33 Verpeaux, *Nicéphore Choumnos*, 45. Darrouzès (*Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2157) dates monastery's acquisition by Choumnos between 1316 and 1320.

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

35 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., pp. 516, no. 258 (February 1361), lines 10–13; Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2433.

36 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 2, pp. 468–69, no. 628 (March–April 1401); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 3190.

The previous *ktetor*, nun Kallinike, agreed to give away her rights. Syriana was obliged, however, to undertake the restoration of the church and the improvement of the monastic properties.³⁷

The nun Theodoule Tzouroulene rebuilt the Church *tes Gabraïnes*, which was in a sorry state. In her absence, a neighbour, Kontostephanos, used the area around the church to plant a vineyard. After expelling him, patriarch Matthew I in 1400 granted Theodoule ownership (*ktetoreia*) and protection (*ephoreia*) of the church.³⁸ According to John Philip Thomas, “the conversion of *ktetoreia*, the traditional Byzantine concept of private ownership of an ecclesiastical institution, to *ktetorikon dikaion* (founder’s right) took place in the Palaeologan era, just as had occurred earlier in the medieval West.”³⁹

The obtainment and possession of the founder’s right enabled changes to be made even to the original form and status of nunneries. By the will of the founder, male monasteries could be transformed into female monasteries and vice versa. The patriarchal Monastery of Theotokos Hodegetria in Didymoteichon was abandoned by its monks and later inhabited by nuns. However, this monastery soon fell into decay, and the nuns were relocated to other convents. To avoid further financial losses, the unknown *oikeios* of the emperor, who held the founder’s rights (*ktetorikon dikaion*), in May 1340 requested the synod’s permission to return the monastery to its former status.⁴⁰

37 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 1, pp. 454–55, no. 200 (January 1365); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2476. See Zhishman, *Das Stifterrecht* (Τὸ κτητορικὸν δίκαιον) *in der morgenländischen Kirche*, 65–66.

38 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 2, pp. 395–99, no. 579 (June 1400); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 3138. On the church *tes Gabraïnes*, see Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire byzantine*, 172.

39 Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, 253. On the differences between *ktetorikon dikaion*, *despoteia*, and *ktetoreia*, see now Neyzi, “Monasticism in Late Byzantine Constantinople,” 121–51, who distances from Thomas’s view. Generally, the *ktetorikon dikaion* is based on the *jus patronatus*, which concerns the property rights of the monastery’s founder. These ownership rights stem specifically from the act of establishing the monastery as well as the spiritual and administrative rights outlined in the ownership deed, known as the *typikon*, which can be inherited. The authority responsible for granting the founding rights is the relevant ecclesiastical body, which also holds the power to revoke these rights if the founder fails to meet their obligations regarding the monastery’s maintenance and operation.

40 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 190, no. 127 (May 1340); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2199; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 241; Bakirtzes, *Byzantine Thrace*, 70–73. For the title of *oikeios* and its meaning, see Verpeaux, “Les *oikeioi*,” 89–99.

Church courts often found it difficult to decide upon the correctness of such transformations.⁴¹ A case from the year 1341 serves as a good example. On the old ruins of a church, the military official Phokas Maroules built a new church dedicated to Theotokos.⁴² The newly founded nunnery (some time after 1305 but before 1320) was to become a residence for his wife and daughters; he also built cells and a circuit wall and endowed the monastery with adequate lands. Some years after Maroules' death, his son, John Synadenos, with his mother's assistance planned to transform it into a male monastery. The synod declared that the Holy Fathers forbade the conversion of a female monastery into a male monastery.⁴³ Nevertheless, these conversions were often tolerated. The Patriarchate generally did not react immediately but only after being requested to do so by individuals who had a personal interest in the matter.

According to a patriarchal document (*sigillion*) of Joseph I (1266–1275), the Nea Petra—founded circa 1271 by Anna Palaiologina near Veleshtinos in Thessaly—was also transformed into a male monastery. A *chrysobull* (imperial golden bull charter) of Michael VIII confirmed this transformation. The Patriarch offers no canonical justification for this decision, simply mentioning that it was the wish of its founders, Anna Palaiologina and John Maliasenos. There were probably political reasons for fulfilling the wishes of the Maliasenoi, ardent supporters of the Palaiologoi in Thessaly. The *chrysobull* ordered that the local bishop should refrain from annoying the existing and future nuns.⁴⁴

41 Talbot, "The Conversion of Byzantine Monasteries from Male to Female," 360–64.

42 Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 2207; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 65–67; Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 196, 336; Talbot, "A Comparison of the Monastic Experience," 7–8. On Maroules, see Efthymiadis and Mazarakis, "Questions de chronologie sur Ramon Muntaner," 313.

43 *Patriarchal Register*. vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., pp. 280–82, no. 135 (May 1341); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 2207. Prior to the thirteenth century, the monasteries of Dalmatou, Zaoutzes, Theotokos Panachrantos, Areia, and Panagia in Thebai (known as Dekane) as well as the Monastery in Megalopolis had been turned into nunneries. See Magdalino, "Some Additions and Corrections to the List of Byzantine Churches," 278–79; Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 214–15; Talbot, "The Conversion of Byzantine Monasteries from Male to Female," 360–64. On the other hand, the nunnery of Myrelaion was converted into a monastery. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 352.

44 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 4, pp. 361–62, no. 11 (December 1271); Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden*

Networks of Patrons and Texts

Foundation as a form of patronage is widely regarded as an expression of power and social hierarchy. Michael Grünbart has further highlighted that foundation entails not only material and institutional acts but also the creation of a network of individuals associated with the monastic establishment.⁴⁵ The Bebaia Elpis nunnery provides a compelling case for examining such networks. Its foundress, Theodora, married into the influential Synadenos family, becoming the wife of the *megas stratopedarches* John Angelos Doukas Synadenos. Theodora Synadene entered the convent alongside her daughter, Euphrosyne, who was still a child at the time. Her husband, John—later known by his monastic name Joachim—was likewise honoured as a founder. All three family members are represented as founders in the *typikon*, accompanied by some of the most striking examples of Byzantine illumination.⁴⁶

The *typikon* preserves the Synadenos family's vision in two distinct versions. The original *typikon* was composed at the time of the foundation, while a later part was added by Euphrosyne Synadene as abbess of the convent. Euphrosyne adapted the original to reflect her own intentions and the evolving needs of the community. Notable modifications included increasing the allowable number of nuns, instituting commemorative practices for members of the monastic community, and prohibiting the education of lay children within the monastery. In addition, Euphrosyne crafted a kind of familial album, incorporating references to her grandparents, parents, siblings, and their descendants. In this way, the *typikon* offers a distinctive portrayal of both the monastic community and the founder's extended family. Remarkably, Euphrosyne and her parents are the only individuals depicted twice, highlighting different stages of their lives: her parents are shown

des Oströmischen Reiches, vol. 3, no. 2031a; Laurent, *Regestes*, no. 1411; Giannopoulos, "Αἱ παρὰ τὴν Δημητριάδα βυζαντιναὶ μοναὶ," 210–40.

45 Grünbart, "Female Founders—Das Konzept," 21–28.

46 Other *typika* contained also illuminations and portraits of the founders. For example, the lost manuscript Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, MS B. VI. 01 (Pasini 237) (1286) (*Diktyon*: 63769), which contained the cartulary of Makrinitissa and Nea Petra, featured portraits of Anna/Anthousa Maliasene and her husband holding a model of their foundation. Anna Maliasene was a cousin of Theodora Synadene. For a similar case, see Fugger and Stefec, "Das illuminierte *Typikon* des Eugenios-Klosters in Trapezunt," 41–66. On the illuminated manuscripts in Byzantium, see now the volume by Tsamakda, *A Companion to Byzantine Illustrated Manuscripts*. Nonetheless, illustrated *typika* have not been included in this Companion.

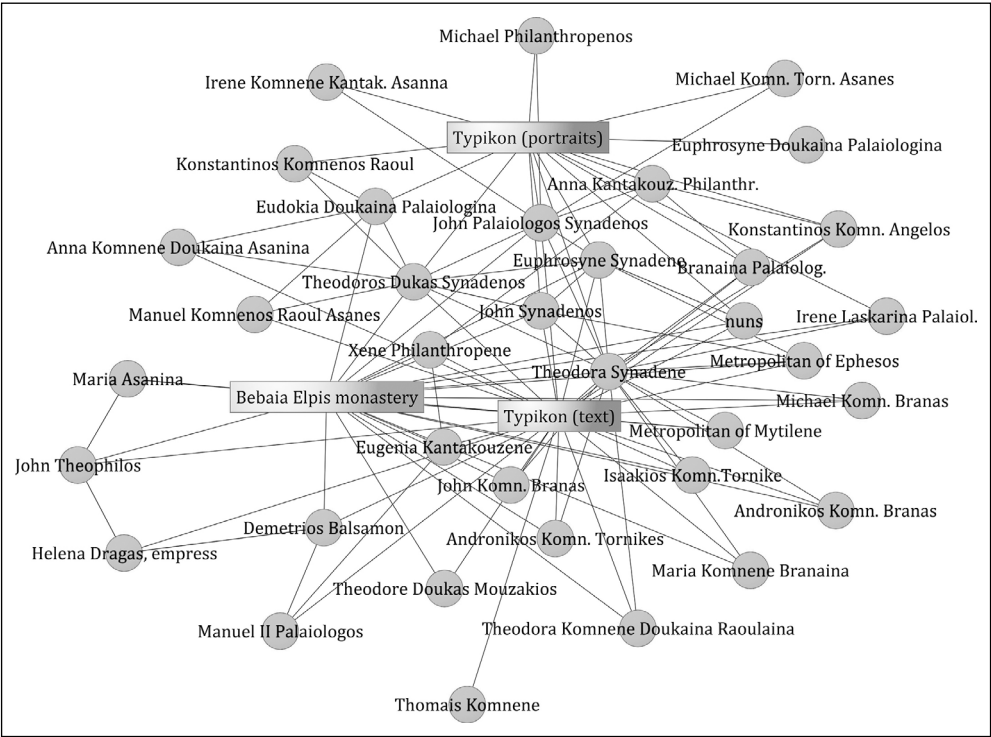


Figure 2.1. Lincoln *typikon* network, all.

before and after their monastic tonsure, while Euphrosyne appears both as a child and later in her role as abbess.

The history and dating of the manuscript, Oxford, Lincoln College, MS gr. 35 (ca. 1300–1355), are notably complex. Numerous scholars have examined its structure and proposed varying interpretations of its present form. Particularly valuable is the most recent description by Georgi Parpulov, which offers the most precise and comprehensive account of its contents to date.⁴⁷

47 *Diktyon*: 48689; Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 190–206, and figs. 143–54; Hutter, “Die Geschichte des Lincoln College *Typikon*,” 79–114. See also Hennessy, “The Lincoln College *Typikon*,” 97–109; Gastgeber, “Das *Typikon* Lincoln College gr. 35,” 95–110; Gaul, “Writing ‘with Joyful and Leaping Soul,’” 243–71. On the manuscript description, see Coxe, *Catalogus codicum mss. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus*, 18–19, Parpulov, “Lincoln College MS, Gr. 35.” During a recent trip to Oxford and the Bodleian Library, I had the opportunity to consult the original manuscript and make my own observations. I plan to present a slightly different perspective on the composition and history of this codex in an upcoming article.

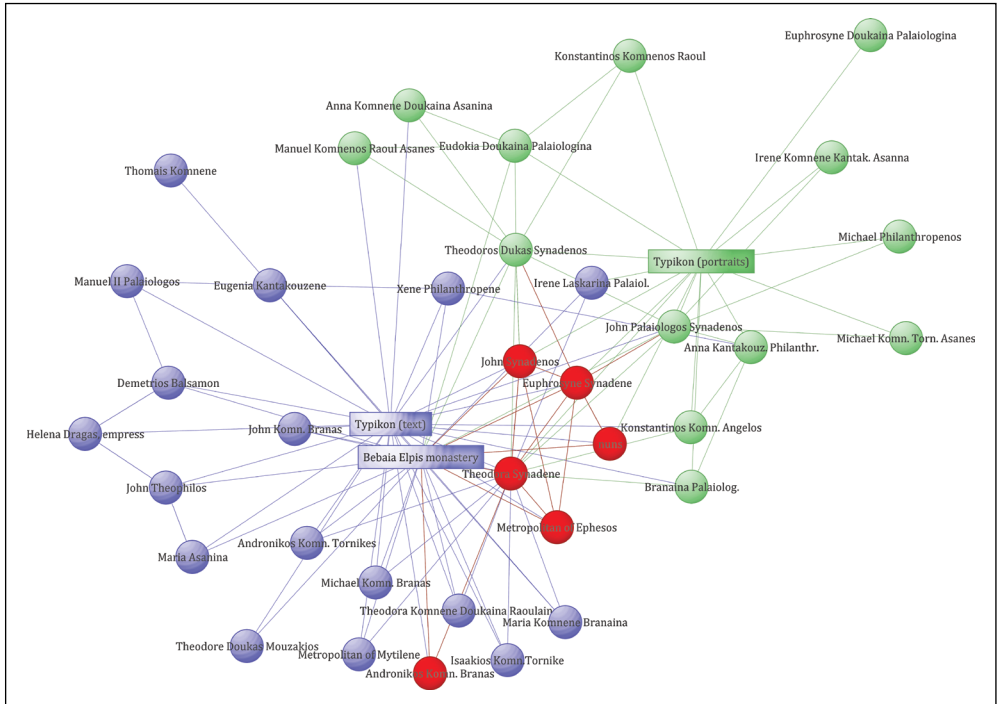


Figure 2.2. Lincoln *typikon* network, Newman Clustering Coefficient.

Scholarly research has identified two principal female scribes involved in the production of the manuscript, along with an additional female assistant. A fourth hand has also been recognized, responsible for later additions. The images appear to be the work of a distinct illuminator, though it remains uncertain whether this individual was one of the nuns portrayed on fol. 12r.⁴⁸

The Lincoln College *typikon*—in both its text and illuminations—reflects the patronage network established by Synadene and her daughter, who held the *ktetorikon dikaion* (founder's rights) and oversaw the organization of a female monastic community. Like any foundation charter or devotional artifact, the *typikon* can be understood as a network of relational connections involving a range of agents. The complex web of relationships embedded within the Lincoln College *typikon* lends itself well to visualization and analysis through the methodologies of Social Network Analysis.

To illustrate Synadene's patronage as recorded in the Bebaia Elpis *typikon* (see Figure 2.1), we created a multi-mode ego-network with three categories of nodes: agents (persons), knowledge (i.e., the text and illuminations

48 Hutter, "Die Geschichte des Lincoln College *Typikons*," 90n52, 108.

of the *typikon*), and places (the monastery). In addition to kinship relations, we visualized all the agents mentioned in the text, even if they do not have their portrait in the *typikon*.

The network may seem densely interconnected at first glance, but further analysis allows for identifying further sub-structures.⁴⁹ The application of one of the most common algorithms for cluster detection, named after the physicist Newman, results in the identification of three clusters, which can be connected to the tight group of the first patrons (red) to the second generation (green) and later patrons (blue) (see Figure 2.2).

When it comes to central positions of individuals within this network graph, a non-surprising result is that Theodora Synadene has the greatest betweenness centrality (indicating intermediary potential, 0.0725), while her daughter and abbess, Euphrosyne, comes second in the rank (0.0425).

Conquering the Space: A Network of Female Foundations

The foundation of female monasteries required careful consideration of location. Founders often chose to establish them within cities or fortified areas, primarily for reasons of security—particularly in response to the threat of enemy attacks and other forms of instability. Access to water was another critical factor. It is therefore unsurprising that many nunneries in the Byzantine capital were situated near aqueducts and natural water sources and frequently incorporated cisterns within their enclosures.⁵⁰ Similarly, provincial nunneries prioritized proximity to water, recognizing that effective water management was essential for sustaining monastic life.⁵¹

In other instances, the size and location of available land played a decisive role in a founder's choice.⁵² A common pattern was to establish a monastery on property already owned by the founder or their family. For example, the nunnery of Nea Petra was founded around 1271 near Veleshtinos in Thessaly by Anna/Anthousa Palaiologina and her husband, Nicholas Maliasenos. The land itself was an imperial gift to the Maliasenos family. The foundation document issued to both founders emphasizes that the site's tranquil

⁴⁹ For the terminology used here, see the introduction.

⁵⁰ Crow et al., *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople*, 111–13 (maps 13–15); Ousterhout, “Water and Healing in Constantinople,” 73 (Philanthropos Soter *hagiasma*); Talbot, “Holy Springs and Pools in Constantinople,” 161–74.

⁵¹ Cf. Bénou, *Codex B*, pp. 100–1, no. 47 (1344), where the nun Aikaterina Amoirisa reaches an agreement with a neighbour regarding water rights and channels.

⁵² Talbot, “Founders Choices,” 48.

and eremitical character further influenced their decision to establish the monastery there.⁵³

Once the site was selected and the extent of the endowment determined, construction began on essential elements such as cells, courtyards, a surrounding wall, and a gate to provide residence, security, and seclusion for the nuns. Within the enclosed space, additional buildings could be erected as needed, often in significant numbers, as suggested by the detailed Ottoman survey of 1455.⁵⁴ Central to the foundation was the construction and adornment of the main church (*katholikon*), which required not only architectural investment but also the acquisition of icons, liturgical books, sacred vessels, and furnishings.⁵⁵ To ensure the monastery's long-term viability and financial independence, it was also endowed with income-generating properties and estates.⁵⁶

Byzantine nunneries were primarily an urban phenomenon, with Constantinople serving as a prominent example of this characteristic, particularly in the late Byzantine period. Following the events of 1204, the number of nunneries declined significantly, and sources register little to no major building activity during this time. Nevertheless, a few convents under Greek sovereignty are known from the first half of the thirteenth century, including St. Antony in Nicaea, the Blachernitissa, and St. George in Arta.⁵⁷ The monastic landscape of Constantinople underwent dramatic transformation as many Orthodox churches were appropriated by Western monastic orders, who also constructed new buildings. Contemporary sources, such as the *Encomium of Gregory of Cyprus on Michael VIII*, depict a city marked by devastation and monastic decline following the Latin occupation and the events leading up to the restoration of Orthodox rule in 1261.⁵⁸

53 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 4, p. 397, no. 28 (September 1271); Giannopoulos, "Αἱ παρὰ τὴν Δημητριάδα βυζαντιναὶ μοναὶ," 210–40.

54 İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul*, 320–22 (Lips Monastery).

55 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 68, no. 184 (October 1351), lines 38–40.

56 On the financial aspects of foundations, see below, Chapter 3.

57 Acheimastou-Potamianou, "The Basilissa Anna Palaiologina of Arta and the Monastery of Vlacherna," 43–49; Parani, "The Joy of the Most Holy Mother of God the Hodegetria," 113–45.

58 Gregory of Cyprus, *Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα κυρὸν Μιχαὴλ Παλαιολόγον καὶ Νέον Κωνσταντῖνον*, col. 376.

Nikephoros Gregoras underscores the Latins' disregard for the numerous buildings destroyed by fire during their occupation of Constantinople. In his view, the city's recovery under Michael VIII marked a resurrection—life returning after a symbolic death.⁵⁹ A more nuanced perspective is offered by the historian George Pachymeres, who acknowledges that, despite the damage, some private structures remained in good condition after 1261. In contrast, David Jacoby has challenged the bleak portrayal found in Byzantine sources, distinguishing between the relatively well-maintained Venetian Quarter and the more severely affected areas under Latin imperial control.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the city was clearly suffering from depopulation. Pachymeres recounts the presence of Izz al-Dīn Kaykāwūs II in Constantinople around 1261, portraying him wandering drunkenly through the deserted streets—a vivid testament to the capital's desolation at the time.⁶¹

The Byzantine initiative to reclaim and reassert control over Constantinople began under Michael VIII Palaiologos, who was hailed as a “New Constantine.” This program of symbolic and physical restoration included the commissioning of a statue depicting the emperor holding the church of St. Sophia as well as the construction or restoration of key religious institutions, such as the churches of Theotokos Nikopoios and monasteries like St. Demetrios, St. George of Mangana, and Peribleptos. Michael VIII also enacted policies to facilitate the reoccupation of the city by allowing Byzantines to take possession of abandoned homes.⁶² His successor, Andronikos II, continued this legacy, overseeing the renovation of major churches, including the Holy Apostles, St. Sophia, and the Theotokos of Blachernai. Like his predecessor, he was celebrated as a “New Constantine,” particularly for his ecclesiastical initiatives.

According to the calculations of Vassilios Kidonopoulos and Alice-Mary Talbot of the newly established monasteries in Constantinople between 1261 and 1328, twelve—approximately one-third—were founded by women. Narrowing the focus to the period between 1282 and 1328, nine of the twenty-two monastic institutions that were restored had female patrons, while women were responsible for founding four out of the ten

59 Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 1, pp. 106, 107, 127; Puech, “La refondation religieuse de Constantinople,” 351–62.

60 Jacoby, “The Urban Evolution of Latin Constantinople,” 277–97. See now Mitsiou, “Die Netzwerke einer kulturellen Begegnung,” 359–74.

61 Pachymeres, *History*, ed. Failler and Laurent, vol. 1, bk. 3, chap. 3, p. 235, lines 5–10.

62 Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople Under Michael VIII,” 243–61.

the monastery remains debated. Raymond Janin, a leading authority on the topography of Constantinople, situates it near the Lips Monastery, south of the Church of the Holy Apostles. In contrast, Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger identifies it with the Bayezit Ağa Camii.⁶⁶ However, the 1455 Ottoman survey suggests a location near the Lips Monastery, making a site in or around the current Bali Paşa Camii plausible.⁶⁷

A document dated to 1360 records unauthorized donations to the *kyra* Martha Monastery by a woman named Bryennissa alongside disputes concerning the improper use of a building within the complex. In 1402, a priest pledged never to serve again at the monastery, suggesting possible moral misconduct, though the document offers no explicit details.⁶⁸ Despite such issues, the nunnery maintained strong ties with elite Byzantine families, particularly the Palaiologoi and Kantakouzenoi. Around 1392, Helen Kantakouzene Palaiologina (1333–1397), wife of Emperor John V Palaiologos (r. 1354–1391), entered the convent under the monastic name Hypomone. Her entry was marked by a congratulatory letter from the statesman and theologian Demetrios Kydones.⁶⁹ The monastery endured until the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, and in 1455 it was still prominent enough to define an entire neighbourhood in the Ottoman survey.

A significant example of post-1261 monastic patronage is the Lips Monastery (now Feneri Isa Mosque), situated near the Church of the Holy Apostles.⁷⁰ Originally founded by the admiral Constantine Lips in 908 on the remnants of a sixth-century structure, the complex underwent substantial reconstruction between 1294 and 1301 under the patronage of Empress Theodora/Eugenia Palaiologina, the wife of Emperor Michael VIII

66 Laurent, “Kyra Martha,” 296–320; Talbot, “Kyra Martha Nunnery,” 1163; Effenberger, “Zu den Eltern der Maria Dukaina Komnene Branaina Tarchaneiotissa,” 169–82; Effenberger, “Die Klöster der beiden Kyra Martha,” 255–93; Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer von Konstantinopel-Istanbul*, 211–12.

67 İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul*, 323–25; Melvani, “The Monument of a Palaiologina and the Monastery of Kyra Martha,” 161–74.

68 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 256, no. 218 (1360), lines 81–84; Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 2, p. 570, no. 687 (January 1402); Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 3253; Kraus, *Kleriker im späten Byzanz*, 290.

69 Demetrios Kydones, *Epistulae*, ed. Loenertz, pp. 103–10, no. 222; Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, 35–38. See also Angelou, *Manuel Palaiologos*, 39–40.

70 Marinis, “The Monastery tou Libos”; Marinis, “Sacred Dimensions,” 188; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 113–14; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 86–87; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 259–66.

(d. 1303).⁷¹ The empress endowed the monastery with extensive properties, including land, vineyards, buildings, and gardens amounting to approximately twenty thousand *modioi*. She also commissioned the construction of a second church dedicated to St. John Prodromos, which was appended to the south side of the original church. This new addition functioned as a mausoleum for members of the imperial family. The monastery likely became the final resting place of several prominent figures, including Theodora Palaiologina herself, Irene of Montferrat (d. 1324), Emperor Andronikos II (d. 1332), Constantine Palaiologos (d. 1306), and Irene of Brunswick, wife of Andronikos III (r. 1328–1341). The last known burial at the site was that of Anna of Moscow, the bride of John VIII Palaiologos, who died during a plague outbreak in 1417.

Whether the *typikon* was composed by an anonymous ghostwriter or directly authored by the founder herself is not the primary concern here. What is more significant is that, in the mid-fourteenth century, a perambulatory exonarthex was constructed around the south and west sides of the monastery to accommodate additional burial sites. The Ottoman survey of 1455 provides crucial details, recording 108 one- and two-storey houses as well as a single church within the monastery complex.⁷² In addition to the Lips Monastery, the dowager empress also founded the Anargyroi Nunnery, located near Lips, although its precise location remains uncertain.

Another member of the imperial family, Theodora Raoulaina, is better known for her scholarly pursuits than for her role as a foundress. Her monastic name remains unknown. She founded the St. Andrew Monastery *in Krisei* (known as St. Andrew “By-the-Judgment”), which still survives today as Koca Mustafa Pasa Camii.⁷³ The monastery’s history likely dates back to the sixth century, as the site had been occupied by the Monastery of St. Andrew near the Gate of Saturnin. The site was later transformed (certainly before 792) into a nunnery named “the Judgment” (*Krisis*). Emperor Basil I is credited with rebuilding it, and (following the period of Iconoclasm) it was rededicated to St. Andrew of Crete. For an extended period, until the mid-thirteenth century, no further information about the nunnery is available.

71 Melichar, *Empresses of Late Byzantium*, 94–102; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 259–66.

72 İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul*, 320–22, 493–94. The added St. John Prodromos demonstrated an extraordinary brick decoration. See Ćirić, “Brickwork and Façade,” 77–102.

73 Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 225; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 312–16.

Between 1282 and 1289, Theodora Raoulaina restored the nunnery and took up residence there.⁷⁴ Her foundation played a crucial role in ecclesiastical events following the renunciation of the Union of Lyons (1274). It also served as a place where prominent members of the imperial family took the monastic habit. In the Ottoman survey of 1455, the nunnery is listed as “Kızlar Manastırı,” which included a gate and five one- and two-storey houses.⁷⁵

The original structure followed the ambulatory type, featuring both an esonarthex and an exonarthex on its western side, though it underwent significant alterations during the Ottoman period. According to Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, the church restored by Theodora was a domed edifice with three apses, complemented by a tripartite domed narthex on the west. A cistern—one of the few surviving Byzantine elements—was located to the southeast of the church.⁷⁶

The nunnery also housed a library that preserved part of the foundress’s book collection. Located away from the bustling city centre and the imperial palaces, its placement raises questions regarding Theodora Raoulaina’s motivations for choosing this specific site and church. One possible explanation lies in her staunch opposition to the Union of Lyons, making the restoration of a church dedicated to a saint associated with the Iconoclastic period symbolically significant. Alternatively, she may have selected the location due to familial landholdings in the area. Furthermore, the monastery gained religious importance as a pilgrimage destination, owing to its association with the burials of St. Andrew of Crete and Philaretos the Merciful.

The Monastery of St. Mary of the Mongols, also known as *tes Panagiotisses* or *Mouchliotissa* (present-day Kanlı Kilise), was founded at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century by Maria Palaiologina. A prominent member of the imperial family, Maria was the half-sister of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328) and the widow of Abaqa, the second khan of the Mongol Ilkhanate in Persia.⁷⁷ After 1282,

74 Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 9–10.

75 İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul*, 317, 491–92.

76 Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 172–73.

77 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 68, no. 184 (October 1351), lines 31–37. On the previous faulty assumption that Mouchliotissa was constructed in 1266–1267 by Maria Akropolitissa, see Schreiner, “Die topographische Notiz über Konstantinopel,” 381–83. See also Bouras, “Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη,” 37; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 199. On Maria Palaiologina see now Melichar, “Imperial Women as Emissaries, Intermediaries, and Conciliators,” 103–28; Prazniak, *Sudden Appearances*, 55–78.

Maria Palaiologina acquired a group of buildings and a church in the Phanari district, converting them into the Monastery of Panagia ton Mougoulion ("Mother of God of the Mongols"). The *katholikon* is architecturally notable for its rare tetraconch plan crowned by a central dome and flanked by a tower and a narthex. However, a comprehensive architectural analysis is hindered by the many reconstructions and alterations the site has undergone over the centuries. Charalampos Bouras has suggested that the tripartite narthex may date to the thirteenth century—a period characterized by the addition of such elements, including narthexes and burial chapels.⁷⁸

It is likely that the only original construction undertaken by Maria Palaiologina was the set of cells intended for the nuns. Some frescoes survive in the apse, narthex, and a two-chamber crypt, though their precise dating—whether late Byzantine or post-Byzantine—remains uncertain. The nunnery is located near the Monastery of Chora, where Maria is depicted as the nun Melania, reflecting her notable patronage.⁷⁹ Uniquely, Kanlı Kilise (St. Mary of the Mongols) was never converted into a mosque. Instead, Sultan Mehmed II endowed the church to the mother of Christodoulos, or Atik Sinan, the Greek architect of the Fatih Mosque, thereby preserving its Christian identity through the Ottoman period.⁸⁰

Maria Doukaina Komnene Palaiologina Glabaina, daughter of Alexios Philanthropenos, was married to Michael Tarchaneiotēs Glabas, *protostrator*. Following her husband's decision to take monastic vows, Maria herself entered the monastic life under the name Martha sometime between 1304 and 1321. Together, the couple founded the Monastery of Pammakaristos (present-day Fethiye Mosque), where Maria undertook the renovation of the chapel in which her husband was buried around 1310 (*terminus ante quem* 1321).⁸¹ She may also have been the founder of the Glabaina nunnery in Constantinople, situated northwest of the Kyriotissa Monastery (modern Kalenderhane Camii).

Irene Choumnaina, later known by her monastic name Eulogia, stands out as the founder of both a female and a male monastery, constituting the most prominent example of a double monastery established by a woman in

78 Bouras, "Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη," 40; Ryder, "The Despoina of the Mongols and Her Patronage," 71–102.

79 Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 384–85.

80 van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*, 276.

81 Kidonopoulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 41–42. It may have been located at the site of Burmalı Minare Mosque. See Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 249.

the late Byzantine period. The daughter of the influential scholar and statesman Nikephoros Choumnos, she was born in 1291 and married John Palaialogos, son of Emperor Andronikos II, in 1303. Following her husband's death in April 1307,⁸² Irene took monastic vows before 1310 and became known as Eulogia. Deeply committed to philanthropic endeavours, she directed significant resources toward charitable and religious causes.⁸³ Among her most notable undertakings was the renovation of the Monastery of Philanthropos Soter ("Merciful Saviour") in Constantinople, a project carried out with the assistance of her parents and most likely completed before 1320.⁸⁴ While the monastery has traditionally been associated with the Mangana complex,⁸⁵ recent scholarship—particularly the work of Nicholas Melvani—has challenged this identification. Melvani proposes that the monastery was instead located at the site of the Komnenian Kecharitomene and Philanthropos complex, near the Aetius Cistern.⁸⁶

In any case, the foundation functioned as a double monastery, featuring a shared church and a common refectory.⁸⁷ Upon his death in 1327, Nikephoros Choumnos—having taken monastic vows under the name Nathaniel—was interred in the male section of the monastery.⁸⁸ Although the nuns resided in separate buildings, they likely participated in communal worship and dining—a practice that deviated from the typical arrangements of other double monasteries, where such shared spaces were often expressly avoided. According to Neilos Damilas, the interaction between the male and female communities was limited to the exchange of practical goods, such as

82 Irene Eulogia Choumnaina, *Correspondence*, ed. Constantinides Hero, 120–21; Stolfi, "La biografia di Irene-Eulogia Cumnena Paleologhina," 7.

83 Gregoras, *Roman History*, ed. Bekker et al., vol. 3, p. 238, lines 13–20; Savramis, *Zur Soziologie des byzantinischen Mönchtums*, 31–33.

84 Meyer, "Bruchstücke zweier τυπικά κτητορικά," 48; Talbot, "*Philanthropos*," 1386; Laurent, "Une princesse byzantine au cloître," 29–60.

85 Janin, "Les monastères du Christ Philanthrope à Constantinople," 135–50; Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 527–29; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 33–36.

86 Melvani, "The Duplication of the Double Monastery," 361–84.

87 Sinkewicz, *Theoleptos of Philadelpheia*, p. 220, lines 45–46, no. 9; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 109; Demangel and Mamboury, *Le quartier des Manges et la première région de Constantinople*, 49–68; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 33.

88 Theodore Hyrtakenos, *Monody to Nikephoros Choumnos*, ed. Boissonade, 287. See also Laurent, "Une fondation monastique de Nicéphore Choumnos," 42–44; Stolfi, "La Biografia di Irene-Eulogia Cumnena Paleologhina," 10.

clothing, footwear, and other items produced through the monastic handicrafts of each community.⁸⁹

High-ranking officials often played a central role in the establishment of monastic institutions particularly for the benefit of their immediate family; they typically selected sites near their residences. Before 1320, Phokas Maroules founded a monastery for his wife and daughters adjacent to his home at the Gate of St. Romanos.⁹⁰ This trend was not limited to the capital; provincial elites emulated Constantinopolitan precedents by founding monastic establishments within their own spheres of influence. A notable example is the now-ruined Lykousada Monastery near Phanarion in Thessaly, which was established between 1282 and 1289 by Hypomone, the wife of the *sebastokrator* John Doukas. Significantly, the monastery was granted stauropegial status, placing it directly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch.⁹¹

Shifting financial dynamics in the late fourteenth century altered the profile of monastic founders. The decline of the traditional landowning aristocracy coincided with the rise of a new, mercantile elite—wealthy aristocrats engaged in trade—who increasingly assumed roles as patrons of monastic institutions. These individuals often redirected portions of their commercial capital toward the support of religious foundations. One of the most illustrative examples is George Goudeles and his establishment of the nunnery of St. Nicholas in the Forum Tauri of Constantinople. The history of this institution is reconstructed through a series of Goudeles' testaments, which survive solely in Latin translation. As a prominent *homme d'affaires* under Emperor Manuel II, Goudeles regularly updated his testaments to reflect changing decisions concerning the distribution of his wealth. Remarkably, seven such documents from 1465 alone are preserved in the Genoese archives.

89 Pétrides, "Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas," chap. 8, p. 101–3; Talbot, "Neilos Damilas," 1471–73.

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; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 66; Failler, "Pachymeriana Novissima," 225–26; İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul*, 335, 497 (in the Top Yıkığı quarter). For the Gate of St. Romanos, see Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 420–21.

91 Lampros, "Ἀνέκδοτον χρυσόβουλλον τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Ἀνδρονίκου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου," 116–19; Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 4, pp. 369–71, no. 15 (August 1273); Lampros, "Νείλου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως σιγίλλιον περὶ τῆς μονῆς Λευκουσιάδος," 174–75; Belanidiotes, "Ἡ ἱερὰ μονὴ Λυκουσάδος," 162–64; Bees, "Fragment d'un chrysobulle du couvent de Lycousade," 479–86; Ostrogorsky, "Das Chrysobull des Despoten Johannes Orsini," 205–13; Koder and Hild, *Hellas und Thessalien*, 208–9.

A testament dated March 4, 1421—recently edited and thoroughly analyzed by Thierry Ganchou—offers critical insight into the foundation’s administration.⁹² It also suggests the existence of a *typikon* and likely an inventory associated with the nunnery.

The case of St. Nicholas is extremely interesting, as it demonstrates elements of both continuity and change. The nunnery was built in Constantinople and not in Pera, even though Goudeles had close ties with the Genoese colony. Moreover, it included a hospital and could support twenty-four (and later forty) nuns. The nunnery was founded for his daughter, Theodora, and his second wife, Anna. The foundation had clear commercial overtones, acting in some cases as a repository for Goudeles’ money. The fact that two abbesses were appointed as joint heads of the community while the founder supported it financially mainly through his portfolios in public banks is eye-opening regarding innovative financing strategies.

Foundation and the Transformation of Space: The Case of Bebaia Elpis Nunnery

Monastic patronage offered women of means a unique avenue for agency within the constraints of Byzantine society. Although excluded from the formal priesthood and ecclesiastical teaching roles, women’s material contributions to the Church were both significant and welcomed. In particular, women from imperial and aristocratic families played a vital role in the establishment and endowment of monastic institutions.⁹³ Through their foundations, they not only provided religious and charitable infrastructure but also shaped monastic life according to their personal ideals and values. These acts of patronage allowed them to assert authority over specific spaces and communities, subtly negotiating the boundaries of gender and power in late Byzantine society.

Therefore, it is essential to interpret the founding activities of these women within an alternative analytical framework: that of space. When examining the monastic landscape of Constantinople and its historical geography, Raymond Janin’s foundational work remains a crucial reference. However, Janin did not distinguish between male and female monastic foundations, nor did he allocate them to separate categories or chapters. Similarly, in his important study on the buildings restored in Constantinople

⁹² Ganchou, “L’ultime testament de Géorgios Goudélès,” 346–53; Harris, “The Goudelis Family in Italy After the Fall of Constantinople,” 168–79.

⁹³ Koubena, “A Survey of Aristocratic Women Founders,” 25–32.

between 1261 and 1328, Vassilios Kidonopoulos acknowledged the significance of female patronage in the post-recovery reconstruction process but did not offer a gendered analysis of the patrons. His primary focus remained on the architecture and topographical identification of these monuments. This highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that takes gender into account when reconstructing the spiritual and urban landscape of late Byzantine Constantinople.

However, the influence of gender studies and the discourse surrounding the social construction of the sexes have significantly contributed to the incorporation of spatial concepts into Byzantine monastic scholarship. Scholars such as Alice-Mary Talbot have raised critical questions regarding the gendering of space within monastic environments.⁹⁴ In her seminal article, "Building Activity in Constantinople Under Andronikos II: The Role of Women Patrons in the Construction and Restoration of Monasteries,"⁹⁵ Talbot directly addresses the same questions that this study seeks to explore.

One particularly illuminating case for examining the interplay between female patronage and the transformation of sacred space is the convent of Bebaia Elpis, which offers valuable insights into how women influenced and redefined monastic landscapes through their foundations.

The Topological Networks of Bebaia Elpis

Henri Lefebvre has argued that space is fundamentally a social construction, shaped by human practices and interactions.⁹⁶ Michel de Certeau further refines this perspective by distinguishing between fixed topographies and dynamic, socially produced spaces. He differentiates "place" as a site of stability and order, whereas "space" emerges through the movements, trajectories, and temporal activities that animate it. Space, in this sense, is a practiced place, shaped by intersecting elements, such as direction, time, and action.⁹⁷ Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes that spatial organization carries social meaning, with elements like doorways and thresholds

94 Talbot, "Women's Space in Byzantine Monasteries," 113–27; Gilchrist has defined Gender Archaeology as follows: "Gender Archaeology classifies male and female activities, roles, relationships and cultural imagery according to the social and sexual divisions." Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, 2

95 Talbot, "Building Activity in Constantinople Under Andronikos II," 329–43.

96 Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*; Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*; Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*.

97 de Certeau, *L'Invention du Quotidien*. On Michel de Certeau, see Giard, *Michel de Certeau*; Dosse, *Michel de Certeau*.

functioning not merely as architectural features but as markers of social positioning and relational structure—connecting inner and outer realms, public and private, sacred and profane.⁹⁸

This last point leads us to consider how patronage actively transforms space by reshaping the network of spatial relationships within a monastic complex. Specifically, the reconfiguration of connections between rooms—through the strategic placement of doors, thresholds, and axial alignments—alters not only the flow of movement but also the social and symbolic hierarchy embedded in the space. While traditional ground plans offer valuable representations of architectural space within a larger topographical context, they are limited in capturing the dynamic relationships between interior spaces. By contrast, converting these topographical layouts into topological network models enables a more nuanced understanding of how rooms interconnect and how spatial hierarchies are constructed and negotiated. Such models allow us to trace paths of circulation, access, and restriction, thus revealing the social logic inscribed in architectural design.

The value of topological representations for spatial orientation was first demonstrated in the 1930s with the design of the London Underground map. Faced with the complexity of representing a dense network of stations and transit lines, early topographical maps proved ineffective for passenger navigation due to their reliance on real-world scale and geography. In response, a topological map was introduced—one that abstracted spatial relationships and emphasized the connections between stations rather than their physical distances. This schematic approach, which underlies modern metro maps, prioritized clarity and usability over geographic accuracy, enabling more intuitive orientation within the network. Similarly, applying such topological principles to monastic architecture allows us to visualize and analyze spatial relationships—such as access, hierarchy, and circulation—beyond the constraints of scale or form.⁹⁹

This kind of topological network facilitates a more nuanced understanding of “accessibility” and the symmetry within the spatial syntax of architectural environments—a concept introduced by Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson in their seminal work *The Social Logic of Space* (1984). In such models, each room or discrete spatial unit is conceptualized as a node, with direct connections to other rooms represented by lines or edges. This

98 Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*; Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*. On Bourdieu, see Schwingel, *Pierre Bourdieu zur Einführung*.

99 On the appliance of network analysis in Archaeology, see Kohler, “Complex Systems and Archaeology,” 93–123.

abstraction allows for the visualization and analysis of movement patterns, levels of access, and degrees of spatial segregation within a building. Utilizing Network Analysis software, these topological representations can be constructed and computationally analyzed, offering valuable insights into the organizational logic of monastic spaces and the ways in which patronage may have transformed spatial hierarchies and interactions.¹⁰⁰

In previous studies, I have employed this method to investigate spatial organization and patronal impact within entire monastic complexes, including the Monastery of Sagmatas in Boiotia (ca. 1105/6) and the Lips nunnery in Constantinople.¹⁰¹ The case of Sagmatas is particularly valuable due to the preservation of its additional monastic buildings and the full circuit wall, enabling a comprehensive topological analysis. By contrast, at the Lips nunnery, only the *katholikon* survives. Nevertheless, it was possible to apply a topological network model to the extant remains, reconstructing the spatial configuration of the Theotokos Church as it existed prior to the modifications introduced through the patronage of Theodora Palaiologina. This comparative approach highlights both the methodological adaptability and the interpretive potential of spatial syntax analysis in varied archaeological contexts.¹⁰²

We can now apply the same methodological framework to the case of the convent of Bebaia Elpis. Scholars have proposed various locations for the site. Raymond Janin and others have situated it to the south of the Forum Tauri, near the Propontis, and thus south of the Mese. Alice-Mary Talbot, drawing on descriptions of adjacent properties, argued that Bebaia Elpis was more likely located in the Heptaskalon quarter, in the south-central part of the city. Alkmene Stauridou-Zaphraka and Kidonopulos offered a different hypothesis, placing the nunnery toward the southeastern end of the Valens aqueduct, near the Zeugma. More precisely, they situated it along the western slope of Constantinople's third hill, within the area formerly designated as the tenth district of the city.¹⁰³

100 Hillier and Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space*, 223–41, 242–61.

101 Mitsiou, "Byzanz. Monastischer Raum und Raumordnung," 197–218. See also Mitsiou, "Byzantine Monastic Space," 175–98.

102 Mitsiou, "Female Monastic Space and Patronage in Late Byzantine Constantinople," 378–81, and plates 13–16.

103 Stauridou-Zaphraka, "Η Μονή Μωσελέ και η Μονή των Ανθεμίου," 66–92; Stauridou-Zaphraka, "Το Κοντοσκάλιο και το Επτάσκαλο," 1303–28; Kidonopulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel*, 72. On Heptaskalon, see Preiser-Kapeller, "Heptaskalon und weitere Anlegestellen am Goldenen Horn," 101–2.

According to a more recent hypothesis, the main church of Bebaia Elpis may be identified with the Vefa Kilise Camii, a structure previously thought to be the Church of St. Theodore.¹⁰⁴ If this identification is correct, the core of the building can be dated to the tenth or eleventh century. It features a domed church with a narthex, and a cistern located to the south of the church may also belong to this early phase. In the first half of the fourteenth century, an exonarthex with three domes was added. These southern extensions were repurposed as burial spaces for the *ktetores* and their families. Although now only partially preserved, mosaics still adorn the domes of the exonarthex. At the same time, a portico was constructed along the church's south side, and remnants of a rectangular room—likely associated with a belfry tower—are still visible in this area.¹⁰⁵

The architectural features of the Vefa Kilise Camii correspond closely with the descriptions found in its *typikon*. By 1392, both the church and its bell tower were reportedly at risk of collapse. Their restoration was undertaken by the nun Xene Philanthropene, who financed the repairs at a cost of two hundred *hyperpyra* (gold coins). This sum covered essential materials, such as tiles, nails, and plaster, as well as the wages for skilled labour and other necessary expenses.¹⁰⁶

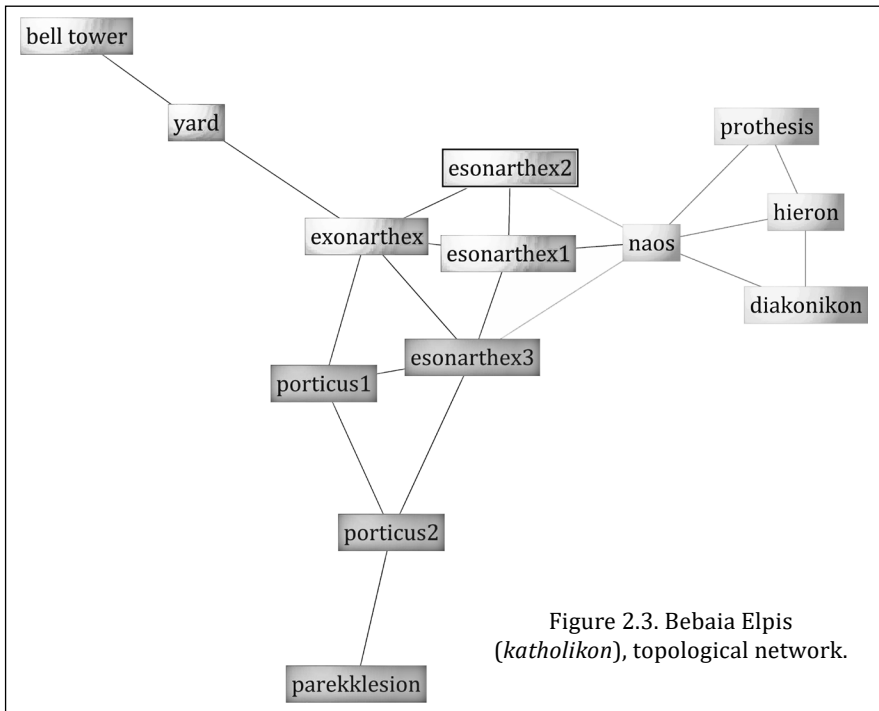
The *katholikon* of the nunnery is depicted in an illumination (fol. 11r) in the Lincoln College *typikon*, offering valuable insight into its architectural form and typology. The text of the *typikon* further complements this visual evidence, particularly in detailing the spatial organization within the *peri-oros* (enclosure) of the complex. It confirms the presence of several ancillary buildings beyond the church itself. The re-foundation of the nunnery included significant architectural enhancements, such as the addition of an exonarthex, a belfry tower, and mosaic decoration. The complex also contained monastic cells, a refectory, a cemetery chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas, storage facilities, and a bath. These new constructions, initiated by Synadene, were built on properties belonging to her aristocratic *oikos*, underscoring the connection between elite landownership and female monastic patronage.¹⁰⁷

104 Effenberger, "Die Klöster der beiden Kyra Martha," 262–64; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 169; Ivanov, *In Search of Constantinople*, 240–43.

105 Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 169.

106 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 159, pp. 104–5; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1568; Talbot, "Female Patronage in the Palaiologan Era," 259–74.

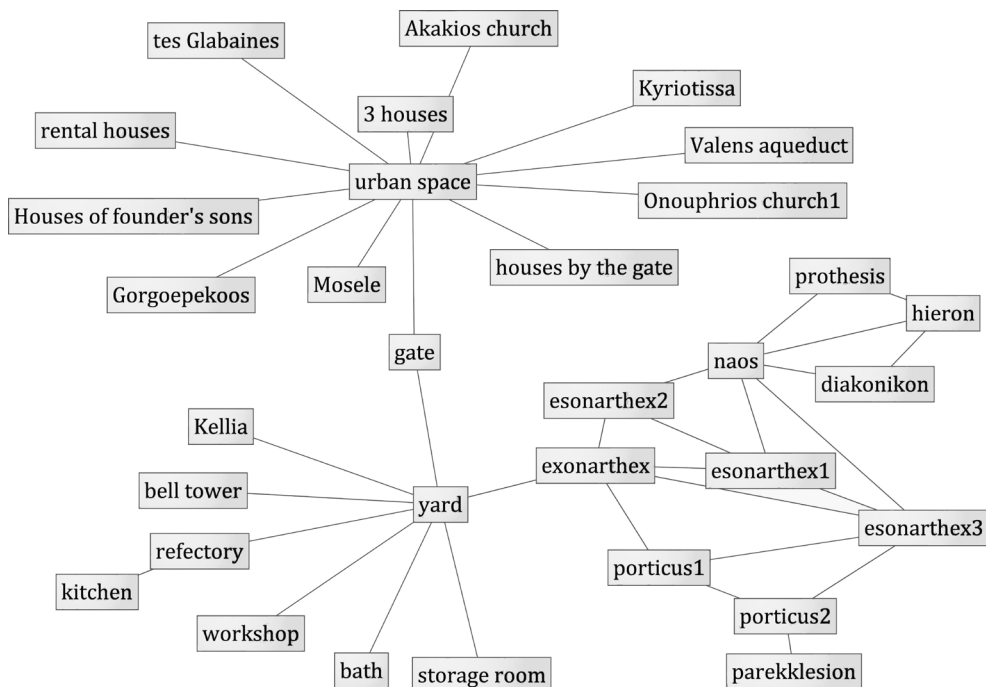
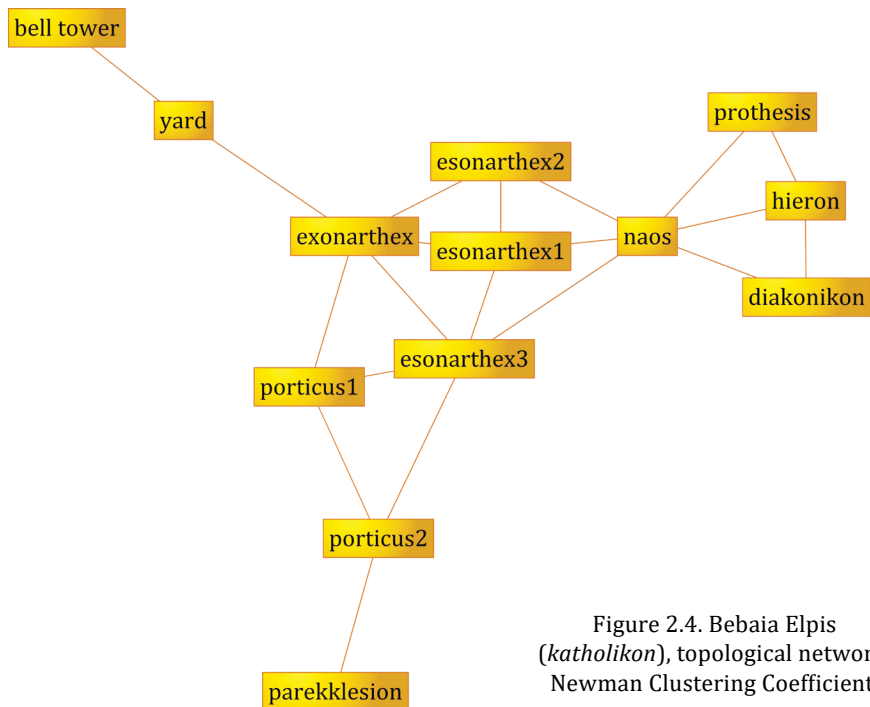
107 Smyrlis, *La fortune des grands monastères byzantins*, 37.



We constructed two topological networks using ground plans and architectural reconstructions featured in an article by Arnie Effenberger.¹⁰⁸ The first network focuses exclusively on the *katholikon*, visualizing the accessibility relationships among its various architectural components and highlighting areas of restricted or absent access (see Figure 2.3). In this model, we excluded later Ottoman interventions, such as the addition of the minaret, in order to preserve the integrity of the Byzantine spatial configuration.

In the subsequent analysis, we expanded our focus to the entire monastic complex, incorporating the details provided in the *typikon* regarding the extant buildings. While the precise spatial arrangement remains speculative, we propose that the various components of the complex were likely organized around a central courtyard, as no internal walls or courtyards are specifically mentioned in the sources. The cells, potentially housed in a two-storey structure, may have provided individual rooms for the nuns, with the prohibition of idle talk near a nun's cell suggesting a deliberate effort to maintain silence and separation. The bathhouse was likely situated near a water source—possibly the Valens aqueduct—where additional facilities,

108 Effenberger, “Die Klöster der beiden Kyra Martha,” 287–88, 290, figs. 1, 2, and 4.



such as washrooms and a cistern, might have been located. The kitchen and refectory were probably positioned near one another, not far from the central church. Storage rooms, commonly located along the perimeter, are also indicated. Within the monastic enclosure, there were at least two vineyards and a garden. Additionally, in our analysis, we considered the surrounding urban space as a node that facilitates connectivity within the larger monastic network. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 illustrate the proposed configuration of the monastic complex and its spatial clusters, though these renderings should be regarded as approximations rather than definitive layouts.

Although this case study alone does not allow for definitive, gender-specific conclusions—a broader, systematic comparison of the spatial syntax of male and female monastic institutions would be necessary to draw such conclusions—it enables us to visualize and interpret the evolving interconnectivity of a monastic complex in the aftermath of its foundation. Monasteries and churches should be viewed as dynamic, spatial entities, continually reshaped by architectural additions and functional reconfigurations. Particularly significant are the internal and external modalities of connectivity. It is conceivable that the circuit wall included additional access points, possibly in

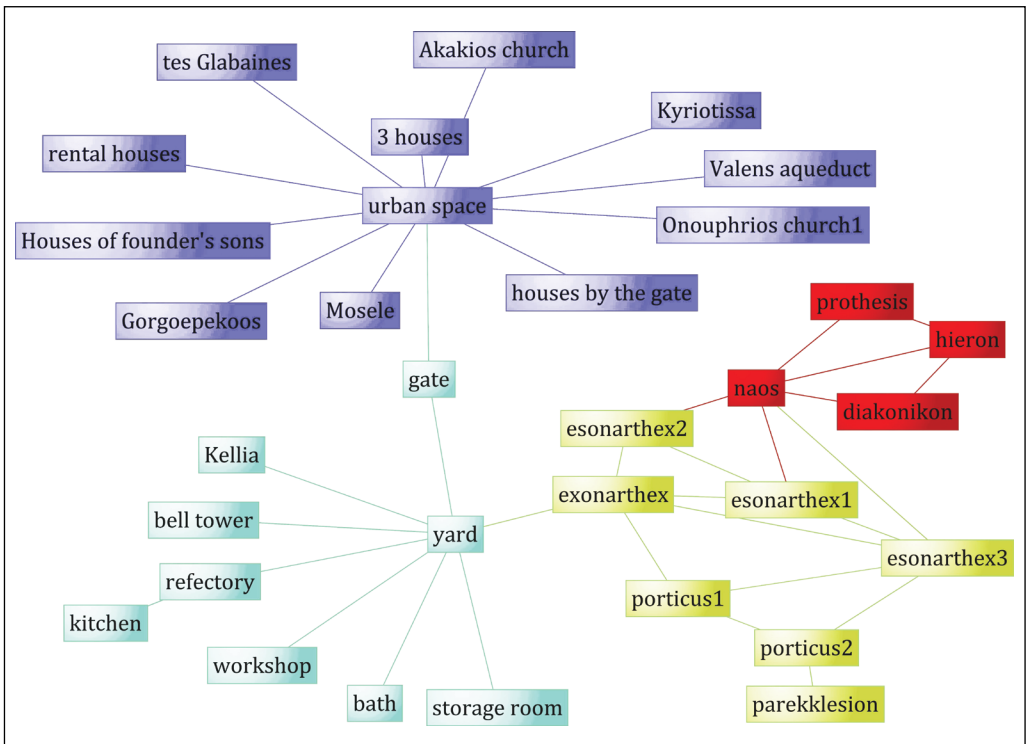


Figure 2.6. Bebaia Elpis (entire complex), topological network, Newman Clustering Coefficient.

the form of secondary entrances or subterranean passages. Further research into both newly founded and restored monastic institutions is essential for elucidating the intentions of their patrons, especially to assess whether they sought to create open and accessible environments or, conversely, to impose more restricted and hierarchical spatial structures. In the case of Bebaia Elpis, the spatial syntax—characterized by the formation of distinct and separate clusters—strongly suggests a model of controlled and limited accessibility.¹⁰⁹

While a topographical reconstruction of the described arrangement of building suggests a densely packed monastic complex largely separated from the outside world, the space syntactic analysis de-composes the spatial arrangement in different clusters of rooms serving different purposes while also allowing for close control of movements (and their limitation) within the complex. This spatial “logic” correlates with the detailed prescriptions of movements and stays of members of the community according to their functions and hierarchical positions (see Figure 2.6).

Typika and the Organization of Monastic Life

Beyond establishing the legal and institutional status of a monastic foundation, *typika* primarily served to regulate the daily life of a convent. They outlined the internal organization of the community, codified interpersonal relations among the nuns, and governed the degree and nature of their interactions with the outside world.¹¹⁰ The following summary focuses on key aspects addressed in these documents, including the roles of monastic officials, the liturgical schedule, and dietary regulations for the nuns.

Entrance to the Nunnery: Motives, Age, Numbers, and Gifts

Women entered convents for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, monastic vows were taken following the end of an engagement, the death of a spouse, or in anticipation of one’s own death. In numerous cases, entry into the monastic life occurred with the mutual consent of both husband and wife, reflecting a deliberate and shared decision to embrace religious devotion.¹¹¹

109 A gender-influenced difference between female and male monasteries was the depiction of female and not male saints in the refectory, *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 2, ed. Hunger et al., p. 278, no. 135 (May 1341), lines 47–49.

110 Galatariotou, “Byzantine Women’s Monastic Communities,” 263–90; Janin, “Le monachisme byzantine au Moyen Âge,” 5–44; Konidares, *Νομικὴ θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 75–162.

111 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*,

A letter from Demetrios Chomatenos illustrates the normative expectations regarding spousal monasticism: he informs a female recipient that should her husband enter a monastery, she too would be required to follow suit, employing the term *melendytesei* (μελενδυτήσσει), meaning “to put on the dark robe.”¹¹² In other cases, entry into the monastic life was prompted by personal crises, such as an unhappy marriage, the death of a child, or as penance for criminal acts. Adulteresses and women guilty of murder were sometimes compelled to enter a convent as part of their moral and legal restitution.¹¹³

It should be emphasized that mothers were generally prohibited from abandoning their underage children in order to enter monastic life. In the first half of the thirteenth century, Patriarch Germanos II denied a request from the wife of a certain Xeros in Ikonion, citing her responsibility for several young children as the reason for his refusal.¹¹⁴ Similarly, Neilos Damilas in 1399 explicitly forbade the entrance of women with children under the age of ten, although he made an exception if the child was a girl and could accompany her mother into the convent. For mothers with children over ten, entry into the monastery required a probationary period of three years, during which it would be assessed whether they could remain separated from their children.¹¹⁵

The case of the nun Melane, wife of Basil Basilikos,¹¹⁶ poignantly illustrates how personal and familial circumstances could compel women to seek

vol. 2, p. 49, no. 360 (1383); Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2749; *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 256, no. 218 (1360), lines 81–82; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2427; Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 2, pp. 458–60, no. 622 (1401); Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 3183. Cf. Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 5, chap. 38, p. 621; Oltean, *Devenir moine à Byzance*, 153–56.

112 Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata*, ed. Prinzing, p. 413, line 68, no. 138 (1222).

113 Oltean, *Devenir moine à Byzance*, 140–53, 181–96.

114 Germanos II, *Letters*, ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, vol. 1, pp. 465–66; Laurent, *Regestes*, no. 1298. On Germanos II and translations of his works, see now Angold, *Germanos II*, 16–80.

115 Pétridès, “Le typikon de Nil Damilas,” chap. 5, p. 100; Talbot, “Neilos Damilas,” 1470. Konidares, *Νομική θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 84.

116 The πρωτοϊερακάριος (prothierakarios) Basilikos, the emperor’s first falconer, was of Persian (i.e., Seljuk) origin. On the brothers Basilikoi, who served at first the Seljuk sultan and later joined Michael VIII Palaiologos, see Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks*, 121–22. Kubina incorrectly identifies Basilikos as being of Ottoman descent. Kubina, *Die enkomiasische Dichtung des Manuel Philes*, 79–80.

solace and meaning in monastic life during the Byzantine period. Despite her noble lineage, considerable wealth, and her husband's prominent role at the imperial court, Melane was burdened by childlessness—a condition that led to deep feelings of regret and emotional anguish. Her inner turmoil, set against a backdrop of external privilege, is vividly expressed in a thirty-eight-verse poem composed by Manuel Philes, which captures the tension between worldly status and spiritual emptiness.¹¹⁷

Philes' poem, in which Melane's despair is poignantly expressed, underscores the profound psychological toll that childlessness could exact on a woman of high social standing in Byzantine society.¹¹⁸ The work highlights how the inability to bear children could eclipse even the most advantageous economic and social circumstances. Beyond reflecting Melane's personal grief, the poem gestures toward the broader cultural expectations surrounding female fertility and motherhood, revealing how central these roles were to a woman's identity and perceived fulfillment. Subtly, the poem also attributes a measure of blame for Melane's childlessness to her foreign husband, thereby intertwining personal sorrow with latent cultural tensions.

Confronted with the unfulfilled dimension of her life, Melane sought refuge and spiritual purpose in the monastic vocation. For many Byzantine women in comparable circumstances, the convent offered a space for coping with personal loss, reorienting one's identity, and embracing a life of religious devotion. Melane's decision exemplifies a broader societal pattern in which childlessness—especially following the death of a husband—often led women to the cloister, where monastic life served both as consolation and as a means of redemption.

We can thus argue that while some women embraced the monastic habit out of genuine piety, for others, the convent functioned as a shelter and place of refuge. Many women donated their possessions to a monastery in return for care during illness and the assurance of a proper burial.¹¹⁹ In some cases,

117 Manuel Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, vol. 1, poem 180, p. 87; Rhoby, "Poetry on Commission in Late Byzantium," 281–82. On Philes, see Stickler, *Manuel Philes und seine Psalmenmetaphrase*, 10–36.

118 Similar expressions of pain can be found in the testament of the childless Maria Pakouriane from the end of the eleventh century. See now Chitwood, "The Testament of the Nun Maria," 97–126. Special prayers for pregnancy are attested early on in the Christian world. See the Coptic prayer from Upper Egypt (?), dated around the seventh century, in Gansell, "Prayer for Pregnancy," no. 174, pp. 292–93.

119 Cf. the case of Irene Apokaukissa, see Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 2, pp. 509–10, no. 655 (1401); Darrouzès,

serious illness and the fear of imminent death prompted women to be tonsured even in male monasteries. One such case is that of Anna, daughter of the priest Theodore Limpos, who fell ill and died in the Monastery *ton Zaboulon* (commonly known as Vazelon) in Trebizond; she was tonsured as the nun Anysia by the monks and was buried there.¹²⁰

A significant number of nuns entered the monastery at a very young age, sometimes even as infants.¹²¹ Over time, church authorities established age limits for monastic entry, though these varied considerably. Basil the Great proposed sixteen or seventeen as the appropriate age.¹²² The Council of Carthage (419) set the threshold at twenty-five (Canon 126), while the Quinisext Council (or *Concilium Trullanum*) (691) reduced it significantly to ten years (Canon 40).¹²³ In an effort to reconcile these divergent standards, Emperor Leo VI (Novel 6) ultimately endorsed the age of ten as the minimum requirement for taking the monastic habit.¹²⁴

The *typika*, in turn, present discrepancies regarding age limits for entering a monastery. The Lips nunnery allowed individuals under twenty but older than sixteen to enter if they had spent their childhood in the monastery, while the Baionaia nunnery set the limit at thirteen.¹²⁵ Euphrosyne Synadene entered the Bebaia Elpis Monastery as a young girl simply because she accompanied her mother, who was also the foundress.

Most women were tonsured as nuns during widowhood. Theoleptos of Philadelphia,¹²⁶ the spiritual advisor to Irene Choumnaina, suggested that she take monastic vows to alleviate the “fire” or “heat” (*kaminos*) of

Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople, no. 3216; Talbot, “Old Age in Byzantium,” 276–77.

120 Ouspenskij and Benešević, *Ta Acta της Μονής Βαζελώνος*, trans. Petropoulos, p. 226.5–10, no. 70 (thirteenth century, second half).

121 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., p. 68, no. 184 (1351); Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 2330.

122 *Council of Carthage*, ed. Joannou, Canon 126, pp. 397–98.

123 *Concilium Trullanum*, ed. Alberigo et al., Canon 40, p. 258.

124 Leo VI, *Novellae*, ed. Troianos, no. 6, pp. 60–63; Konidares, *Νομική θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 79–80.

125 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 17–18, pp. 115–16; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1270–71; Pétridès, “Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas,” chap. 5, p. 100; Talbot, “*Neilos Damilas*,” 1470.

126 On Theoleptos of Philadelphia see Salaville, “Un directeur spirituel à Byzance au début du XIV^e siècle,” 877–78; Constantinides Hero, “Theoleptos of Philadelphia,” 27–38; Rigo, “Nota sulla dottrina ascetico-spirituale di Teolepto Metropolitano,” 165–200.

widowhood. The term *kaminos* likely refers to the burden of a sexually active woman living without a husband. In Choumnaina's case, psychological factors such as frustration or even depression also likely influenced her decision.

The *typika* framed the size of the monastic community based on its financial strength. In the twelfth century, the Kecharitomene *typikon* was allowed to have twenty-four nuns, excluding the abbess and six assistants. The number could be increased to thirty or forty nuns if finances permitted. At Lips, up to fifty nuns were admitted: thirty were responsible for the canonical hours and twenty for household duties.¹²⁷ At the Anargyroi nunnery, thirty nuns were admitted, with eighteen dedicated to hymnody and twelve responsible for general housekeeping duties. Generally, about sixty percent (three-fifths) of the personnel were assigned to hymnody, while forty percent (two-fifths) were assigned to other services.¹²⁸ Initially, Theodora Synadene assigned thirty nuns to her foundation; later, her daughter increased the number by adding twenty more.¹²⁹ If the demand exceeded the regulated number, the remaining nuns would be delegated to smaller nunneries (*kathisma*).¹³⁰

Members of female monastic communities are rarely mentioned by name in historical sources, with epistolography being a notable exception. In his letters to the Philanthropos Soter community, Theoleptos of Philadelphia names the nuns Agathonike, Theodote, and Christophile. However, another nun, whom the abbess Irene “removed from the infidels,” is left intentionally anonymous, likely for her protection.¹³¹

Founders usually regulated the so-called *apotage*, which involved a gift of part of one's property to the monastery. Canon 19 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council prohibited *apotage*. However, Novel 5 of Leo VI permitted

127 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 5–8, pp. 109–10; Talbot, “Lips,” 1267.

128 *Typicon monasterii sanctorum Anargyrorum*, ed. Delehay, chap. 60, p. 139; Talbot, “Anargyroi,” 1292.

129 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaia Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 23, p. 32, and chap. 147, p. 97; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1530 and 1564.

130 Sphrantzes, *Memorii*, ed. Grecu, chap. 18, §5, lines 1–3: “Λαβοῦσα δὲ μικρόν τι κάθισμα, συνέδραμον εἰς ὑποταγὴν τοσαῦται, ὅσαι οὐκ ἂν ἐχώρησαν εἷς τε τὴν τοῦ Λιβὸς μονὴν καὶ τῆς Κυρα-μάρθας (sic!), ἥ δὲ οὐ πλείους ἢ δύο καὶ δέκα προσελάβετο.” Sphrantzes specifically mentions the Lips and *kyra* Martha nunneries as being fully operational in the early fifteenth century.

131 Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Letters*, ed. Constantinides Hero, pp. 38–68, no. 2.

such donations.¹³² Emperor Alexios I Komnenos reiterated the prohibition of *apotage* in a Novel (1096), requiring that donations be recorded in the *brebion* (the monastery's register) and made known to the Patriarch. Some women preferred to make voluntary offerings to the nunnery, as evidenced in the cases of the Kecharitomene and Lips monasteries.¹³³

Monastic Tonsure

The preparation stages (also known as novitiate) before taking final monastic vows were established by Justinian in Novels 5 and 123.¹³⁴ Canon 5 of the Council of Constantinople (861) set the duration of the novitiate at three years but allowed for exceptions in cases such as sickness or previous moral conduct.¹³⁵ The same synod also mandated the presence of an instructor or mentor, known as an *anadochos*, to guide the novice through this period.

In Kecharitomene, the novitiate period varied depending on a person's background. If the novice was an acquaintance of the founder, the length of the probationary period for the so-called *mikro schema* (or small monastic habit) was determined by the abbess, while the period for the *mega schema* (or great monastic habit) was only six months. However, if the novice was neither known to the community nor experienced in monastic asceticism, the novitiate lasted six months for the *mikro schema* and three years for the *mega schema*.

The novitiate could be shortened in cases of illness or impending death.¹³⁶ Female *typika* from Late Byzantium are mostly silent on this matter. However, in the Lips nunnery, a distinction is made between experienced and non-experienced women. For the experienced, the test period is

I32 Leo VI, *Novellae*, ed. Troianos, no. 5, pp. 54–61.

I33 Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches*, vol. 2, no. 1096; "Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," ed. Gautier, chap. 7, pp. 43–45; Jordan, "Kecharitomene," 672; *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 14, p. 114; Talbot, "Lips," 1269.

I34 Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 5, chap. 2, pp. 29–30 (a novitiate of three years); Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. Schöll and Kroll, no. 123, chap. 35, pp. 618–19 (the abbot decides). See also Konidares, *Νομικὴ θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 88–97, with all the references to the texts of law. See also Oltean, *Devenir moine à Byzance*, 221–35.

I35 *Council of Constantinople (Protodeutera)*, ed. Joannou, Canon 5, pp. 455–57; Konidares, *Νομικὴ θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 90–91.

I36 "Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," ed. Gautier, chap. 30, p. 77; Jordan, "Kecharitomene," 685.

only six months, while for the latter, it extends to one year. Regarding the *anadochos*, only Neilos Damilas explicitly mentions the necessity of a mentor for future nuns.¹³⁷

The holy service of monastic tonsure took its final form in the ninth century and was included in the *euchologia* (prayer books) as the “Akolouthia of the Great and Angelic Schema.”¹³⁸ The service was divided into two parts: the first involved the future monk or nun making a vow of virginity, obedience, and poverty, while the second part was the actual tonsure (*koura*) and the dressing of the monk or nun in monastic garments. The tonsure is typically performed by a priest, bishop, or abbot who is also a priest in male monasteries. Other sources confirm this procedure but also report deviations. For instance, a certain confessor named Theophilos was accused of tonsuring a nun in the monastery of *pinkernes* Theophilopoulos, despite being suspended from his duties as a priest and confessor.¹³⁹

There are two *schemata*, or monastic habits, which represent different degrees of monasticism: the *mikro schema*, or Small Schema and the *mega schema*, or Great Schema. In the Small Schema, monks and nuns wore a tunic, a *mandyas* (cloak), and, for nuns, a veil that, in Late Byzantium, was often replaced by a head covering known as the *skepe*. Monks typically covered their heads with a *koukoulion* (hood), which was part of the common monastic habit. The Great Schema included a special garment called the *analabos* (a scapular with crosses) and a distinctive *koukoulion*, setting it apart from the small schema.” The Great Schema is generally associated with a commitment to rigorous asceticism and greater isolation from the world. Additionally, monks and nuns in both *schemata* wore belts and leather shoes or sandals.¹⁴⁰ The regulations regarding shoes include gender-specific details:

137 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 18, p. 116; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1270–71; Pétridès, “Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas,” chap. 6, p. 100; Talbot, “*Neilos Damilas*,” 1471–72.

138 Goar, *Euchologion sive Rituale Graecorum*, 407–14. About the “Small” and “Great Schema,” see Konidares, *Νομική θεώρηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν τυπικῶν*, 111–16.

139 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et Diplomata graeca Medii Aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 2, pp. 461–63, no. 205 (1401); Darrouzès, *Les registes des Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, no. 2480. See Papagianne, “Οι κληρικοί των βυζαντινῶν γυναικείων μονῶν καὶ τὸ ἄβατο,” 75–94. On *euchologia* in Byzantium, see the webpage of the “Euchologia-Project” at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Medieval Research, Department of Byzantine Research (PI: Prof. Claudia Rapp).

140 Radle, “The Veiling of Women in Byzantium,” 1072–76, 1079–80, 1084–85, 1087–89, 1108.

they should be suitable for women, meaning they must be high enough to cover the legs.¹⁴¹

The colour of monastic garments carried significant symbolism, especially in relation to the tonsure. According to Canon 45 of the Quinisext Council, nuns were required to wear a “black/dark garment” (*melan endyma*) upon taking their vows.¹⁴² However, in practice, these monastic garments were often more brown or brownish in tone rather than pure black. This was mainly due to the limitations of dyeing technology until the late fourteenth century. High-quality black dyes were not widely available, and those that were—typically derived from the fruits of walnut, chestnut, or oak trees—resulted in garments that were gray, brown, or even bluish rather than true black. Moreover, achieving deeper, darker hues was costly, as it required a longer, more labour-intensive dyeing process involving multiple rounds of dye application.¹⁴³

Canon 45 of the Quinisext Council indicates that some future nuns would enter the tonsure adorned in silks, various garments, and even with gold and jewels. The Synod condemned this practice, arguing:

it is not lawful for her who has already of her own free will put away every delight of life, and has embraced that method of life which is according to God, and has confirmed it with strong and stable reasons, and so has come to the monastery, to recall to memory the things which they had already forgotten, things of this world which perisheth and passeth away.¹⁴⁴

Nuns and monks would adopt a new monastic name, as the tonsure was regarded as a form of second baptism (even in the absence of water). This new name was chosen by the novice in consultation with the abbess. While the first letter of the new name was typically, though not always, the same as the initial of their lay name, this was not a strict requirement. In Late Byzantium, certain names were particularly popular, including Maria, Martha, Kallinike, Theodoule, Eulogia, Hypomone, Melania, Theoktiste, Xene, and others.¹⁴⁵

141 So is mentioned in *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 36, pp. 125–26; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1276; cf. *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaia Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 98, p. 73; Talbot, “*Bebaia Elpis*,” 1551; Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience in Byzantium*, 72–73.

142 *Concilium Trullanum*, ed. Alberigo et al., Canon 45, p. 262; Ball, “Decoding the Habit of the Byzantine Nun,” 25–52.

143 Finlay, *The Brilliant History of Color in Art*, 54.

144 *Concilium Trullanum*, ed. Alberigo et al., Canon 45, p. 262; Schaff, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 498.

145 Talbot and McGrath, “Monastic Onomastics,” 89–120.

The Abbess and the Other Officials

According to Talbot, the administrative structure of convents generally mirrored that of male monasteries. Both systems typically featured a twofold division of responsibilities: one group was assigned to choir duties, while another managed housekeeping tasks.¹⁴⁶ Within a nunnery, all members were expected to observe a strict internal hierarchy, headed by the superior. The process of electing this superior offers a rare insight into staff selection practices within Byzantine institutions, including nunneries.

Political theory identifies six primary modes of selecting individuals for positions of authority: election, assignment, co-optation, sortition (selection by lot), competition, and descent. Each method is based on different assumptions about equality or inequality. For example, sortition presumes equality either among the candidates themselves or between the decision-makers and the candidate pool. In contrast, methods such as descent, competition, and co-optation imply varying degrees of inequality, whether among the applicants or between those selecting and those being selected.

In the *Kecharitomene typikon*, the selection of a new superior involved a combination of selection methods. Initially, the current abbess and the nuns would choose three pious and intelligent candidates, writing each name on a separate slip of paper.¹⁴⁷ These were sealed and placed on the altar, where they remained until the abbess's death. Upon her passing, the priest—accompanied by the convent's protectress—would draw one of the sealed slips by lot (sortition) to determine the new superior. If the abbess died unexpectedly, the protectress would assist the nuns in the selection process. In such cases, she could help identify the three candidates, possibly including an outsider if needed—a practice reflecting co-optation. Ultimately, the final decision rested on the drawing of lots, combining both sortition and co-optation in a distinctive selection procedure.

At Bebaia Elpis, the election of the abbess involved the full participation of the monastic community. Although the *typikon* does not specify the precise method of selection, it required the nuns to assemble in the church and choose the candidate considered superior in every respect. The selection emphasized key qualities such as leadership, obedience, and experience, with particular attention to the candidate's demonstrated piety, prudence,

146 Talbot, "Monastic Experience," 11.

147 Gautier, "Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," chap. 11, pp. 47–51; Jordan, "*Kecharitomene*," 674–75.

and administrative ability.¹⁴⁸ While the description in the *typikon* remains somewhat vague, it is clear that preference was given to nuns with proven leadership and prior experience in monastic office. Once elected, the new abbess was required to present herself to the Patriarch, who would formally approve her appointment and bestow the pastoral staff, thereby validating the community's choice through higher ecclesiastical authority.

At the Lips nunnery, the election of a new superior was entrusted to a committee of choir sisters who were given one week to deliberate and reach a decision. Once the selection was made, the newly chosen superior, accompanied by the senior priest and twelve of the most respected nuns, would present themselves to the emperor. Upon their return to the nunnery, the priest would formally entrust the new superior with a box containing the *typikon*.¹⁴⁹ Similar procedures were observed in the Anargyroi nunnery, reflecting a consistent practice in the election of abbesses across the two different monastic communities.¹⁵⁰

The *typika* not only outlined the duties of the superior but also established mechanisms for accountability in cases of misconduct. At the Lips nunnery, for example, the *typikon* encouraged harmonious relations between the abbess and the nuns.¹⁵¹ However, if the abbess acted "in a manner unworthy of the *Typikon*," the nuns were instructed to report her to the spiritual father. Comparable regulations were in place at the Anargyroi nunnery, reflecting a broader concern with maintaining discipline and ethical leadership within monastic communities.¹⁵²

At Bebaia Elpis, the *typikon* was explicitly placed in a position of authority above the abbess, underscoring that even the superior was subject to its regulations.¹⁵³ The abbess was instructed to "forget feminine weakness" and govern "if not 'like a man' (*Job* 38:3), then at least in a manly fashion." She was expected to avoid arrogance while nonetheless commanding the

148 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 26, pp. 33–34; Talbot, *Bebaia Elpis*, 1530.

149 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 7, p. 110; Talbot, "Lips," 1267.

150 *Typicon monasterii sanctorum Anargyrorum*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 59, pp. 138–39; Talbot, "Anargyroi," 1292.

151 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 9, p. 111; Talbot, "Lips," 1268.

152 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 10, p. 112; Talbot, "Lips," 1268; *Typicon monasterii sanctorum Anargyrorum*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 59, pp. 138–39; Talbot, "Anargyroi," 1292.

153 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 13, p. 27; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1527.

respect of the nuns.¹⁵⁴ In turn, the nuns were required to practice obedience and refrain from taking any action without the abbess's permission. In dealing with misconduct, the abbess was to correct the faults of her sisters calmly and without anger, showing forgiveness and leniency "to the extent permitted to a male superior who is not a priest."¹⁵⁵

Damilas adopts a relatively tolerant stance toward disobedient nuns, permitting expulsion only in cases involving those who are genuinely disruptive or malicious.¹⁵⁶ His *typikon* also outlines a tripartite leadership structure within the convent:

Concerning the superior and the two nuns who have responsibility for the administration of the affairs of the convent, I am recording in the officially registered document how there should always be three of them. If one of them should die, the entire body of nuns—or a majority—should elect another who is capable of fulfilling her duties with fear of God and in all humility.

This structure reflects both an emphasis on shared governance and a clear procedure for leadership succession.¹⁵⁷

At Lips, the abbess was required to consult the spiritual father when appointing the most important officials within the community. However, the "leading nuns" also had the authority to consult him independently on various matters and to keep him informed of appointments as they occurred. In contrast, Bebaia Elpis adopted a more democratic approach, requiring that monastic officials be selected through general election and voting. This procedure was intended to ensure transparency and to prevent the abbess from appearing to act improperly or in a manner contrary to apostolic tradition.¹⁵⁸

The officials of the nunnery included the *oikonomos* (manager or steward), *ekklesiarchissa* (responsible for the church and its choir), *skeuophylakissa* (sacristan), *kelarissa* (cellarer), and *docheiareiai* (treasurers). In some cases—such as at Kecharitomene—the position of *oikonomos* could

154 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 34–35, pp. 38–39; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1533.

155 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 32, p. 37; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1532.

156 Pétridès, "Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas," chap. 17, p. 108; Talbot, "Neilos Damilas," 1476–77.

157 Pétridès, "Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas," chap. 18, p. 108–9; Talbot, "Neilos Damilas," 1477.

158 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 73, p. 60; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1544.

be held by a eunuch, though it was more commonly occupied by a nun. The primary responsibility of the *oikonomos* was to oversee the monastery's real estate and manage the financial accounts of those entrusted with the care of its lands. This role also included supervising maintenance and repairs, ensuring that the monastery's properties were efficiently administered and remained a reliable source of support for the community.¹⁵⁹

The *skeuophylakissa* was entrusted with the preservation of the monastery's sacred utensils and household goods, maintaining a reliable inventory to prevent theft or embezzlement. She was also responsible for the storage and protection of important documents.¹⁶⁰ The *kelarissa* managed the community's essential supplies, especially food, and kept detailed records of all provisions entering the monastery.¹⁶¹ The *ekklesiarchissa* oversaw the care of the church, ensuring it was properly cleaned, that icons were hung appropriately, and that lighting was maintained on both weekdays and feast days. She also maintained order during services and coordinated the synchronized kneeling during sacred rites. In addition, the church steward was present when any portion of the monastery's movable property was sold, underscoring her trusted role in matters of stewardship.

Additional key offices included the *docheiaireiai*, who oversaw various financial responsibilities within the monastery. One treasurer was in charge of distributing clothing to the nuns, while the other maintained the financial records.¹⁶² At Kecharitomene, financial administration was notably organized around two distinct treasury boxes. The first box held coins—typically gold or electrum (a gold and silver alloy)—from the monastery's revenues as well as funds set aside for regular expenses. This box was jointly sealed by the abbess and the two treasurers. The second box was reserved for older currency, intended for use during times of financial difficulty. It was sealed by a broader group: the abbess, the *oikonomos*, the *skeuophylakissa*, and the two *docheiaireiai*, all of whom shared responsibility for the monastery's economic affairs.

The *epistemonarchissa* (prioress) was responsible for maintaining order during communal gatherings, particularly when the nuns assembled for

159 Gautier, "Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," chap. 14, pp. 55–59; Jordan, "Kecharitomene," 677–78.

160 Gautier, "Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," chap. 19, pp. 65–67; Jordan, "Kecharitomene," 680–81.

161 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 24, p. 119; Talbot, "Lips," 1272.

162 cf. Gautier, "Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," chap. 24, p. 69, and chap. 28, p. 75; Jordan, "Kecharitomene," 682 and 684.

chanting. She was expected to closely observe the behaviour of the sisters to ensure it aligned with their spiritual development. The *ergodotries* (literally “work givers”) supplied materials to the working nuns for garment production, and once completed, the garments were delivered to the *dochei-areia* of garments for distribution or storage. The *pyloros* (portière), who held the keys to the monastery, was tasked with guarding the entrance. No one was permitted to enter or exit the convent without the prior knowledge and approval of the abbess. This role was typically assigned to one of the older and more modest nuns, emphasizing the importance of discretion and vigilance.

Internal and External Connections—Daily Regime

External visitations were strictly regulated by the *typika*, as preserving the *abaton*—the sacred, secluded space of the convent—was essential. At Kecharitomene, female relatives were permitted to visit once or twice a year, and if a nun’s mother was ill, she was allowed to stay overnight. Visits from male relatives were generally prohibited, with rare exceptions during feast days honouring the icon of the Theotokos Kecharitomene. Nuns were allowed to leave the convent to visit dying parents, but only if accompanied by two elderly nuns. In the Lips convent, relatives could meet the nuns only at the entrance and under the supervision of “respected” sisters. At Bebaia Elpis, young nuns were occasionally permitted to visit their families “for a short rest,” but they too had to be escorted by two senior nuns and were required to return the same evening, after which the abbess would question them about the visit.¹⁶³

Visitations by spiritual fathers and priests were also governed by the *typika*. At the Lips convent, the spiritual father was required to visit three days each month. During his stay, he lodged in small rooms located in the monastery’s guesthouse and heard confessions in the morning, typically in the church’s narthex.¹⁶⁴ In Bebaia Elpis, the spiritual father likewise held responsibility for hearing confessions, though in this case the practice could take place daily, reflecting a more continuous spiritual oversight.¹⁶⁵

163 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 77, p. 63; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1546.

164 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 11–12, pp. 112–13; Talbot, “Lips,” 1268–69; cf. Pétridès, “Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas,” chap. 9, p. 103; Talbot, “Neilos Damilas,” 1473.

165 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 105–11, pp. 75–78; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1553–54.

The surviving fragment of the Philanthropos Soter *typikon* reveals that a coenobitic lifestyle—marked by communal living—was considered appropriate for both the nuns and monks of this double monastery. The community shared a common refectory and kitchen and participated collectively in manual labour. Nuns were not allowed to eat or work apart from the group, reinforcing the ideal of communal discipline and unity. Additionally, young girls could be admitted into the monastery, both for educational purposes and to ensure their safety.

This approach contrasts with the practices of other convents, where a clear division often existed between nuns engaged in ecclesiastical duties—typically the literate members—and those assigned to manual labour. In some aristocratic foundations, such as the Lips convent, women from the founder's family held a privileged status. They were sometimes granted special apartments and personal attendants, reflecting the influence of social hierarchy even within monastic settings.¹⁶⁶

A significant portion of life in a nunnery was dedicated to liturgical duties.¹⁶⁷ The Lips *typikon* underscores that the primary responsibility of the nuns was the performance of the canonical hours. The hymnody was to follow the prescriptions of the liturgical *typikon* of St. Sabas, which was praised as being “both moderate and the royal road,” reflecting a balanced and authoritative model for worship.¹⁶⁸

The daily schedule in a nunnery was structured around the various Offices celebrated in the choir. Typically, these included the seven daytime Hours, the night Office of Vigils, and the daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy. On feast days, the liturgical observance was expanded, often including two celebrations of the Liturgy. While the exact timing of each Hour could vary according to the season, the structure and duration of the services differed between *typika*. To regulate the Daily Order of Prayer, monastic time followed the Jewish division into four principal hours: the First Hour at 6 a.m., when Matins were held; the Third Hour at 9 a.m.; the Sixth Hour at noon; and the Ninth Hour at 3 p.m. In the late afternoon, Vespers and Little Compline were sung, followed by the Midnight Office later in the evening.

166 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chaps. 40–41, pp. 128–29; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1278; Gkoutziokostas, “Observations on the Dating of the *Typikon*,” 79–85.

167 Kouroupou and Vannier, “Commémoraisons des Commènes dans le *typikon* liturgique,” 41–69.

168 Cf. *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 79, p. 64; Talbot, “*Bebaia Elpis*,” 1546–47; Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy*, 137.

The *typika* of Byzantine nunneries consistently emphasize the central role of liturgical practice in monastic life. The regular celebration of the Divine Office was regarded as a fundamental spiritual duty for the nuns—a priority reflected in the strict regulations governing participation. For example, Damilas explicitly prescribed severe penalties for nuns who failed to attend parts of the Office, allowing exceptions only for those who were ill or elderly.¹⁶⁹ This insistence on full participation highlights the importance of communal worship as the core of monastic devotion.

At the Bebaia Elpis nunnery, the choir sisters—who were dedicated solely to the performance of church services—held a particularly important role within the community. These sisters were overseen by the *ekkle-siarchissa*, an official whose responsibilities were intimately connected to the liturgical life of the convent. The qualifications for this position were notably rigorous, reflecting the vital role she played in upholding both the spiritual and musical integrity of the community. According to the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis, the *ekkle-siarchissa* was required not only to possess thorough knowledge of the ecclesiastical offices and rituals but also to be capable of singing and chanting in tune.¹⁷⁰ This requirement represents one of the earliest recorded instances where professional singing ability was explicitly stated as a prerequisite for a monastic office, underscoring the growing importance of musical proficiency in liturgical performance. The emphasis on such qualifications indicates a broader trend toward the specialization and professionalization of musical and liturgical roles within monastic life.

In the Byzantine monastic tradition, commemorations for deceased family members held an important place in the spiritual life of a nunnery. These observances typically involved liturgical services, memorial prayers, and the charitable distribution of bread at the monastery gates, serving both devotional and philanthropic purposes.¹⁷¹ The Lips *typikon* provides detailed instructions for these commemorations, highlighting the enduring bond between the monastic community and the families of its benefactors.

According to the same *typikon*, the empress and her family were designated as the primary recipients of the Eucharistic offerings made during

169 Cf. *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 4 and 30, pp. 109, 122–23; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1267, 1274; *Typicon monasterii sanctorum Anargyrorum*, ed. Delehay, chap. 59, pp. 138–39; Talbot, “*Anargyroi*,” 1292; Pétridès, “*Le typikon de Nil Damilas*,” chaps. 10–12, pp. 104–6; Talbot, “*Neilos Damilas*,” 1473–75.

170 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 49–56, pp. 46–50; Talbot, “*Bebaia Elpis*,” 1536–39.

171 Krausmüller, “From Individual Almsgiving to Communal Charity,” 111–26.

the monastery's liturgies.¹⁷² These offerings, performed on the anniversaries of their deaths, were intended to ensure the continued remembrance and intercession for the souls of the empress, her ancestors, her mother, her son the emperor, his wife, and her other children. The document specifically instructs the nuns to include the empress in their prayers—not only during communal liturgical celebrations but also in their private devotions—underscoring the significance of these spiritual practices as a sustained link between the living monastic community and their deceased patrons.¹⁷³

Furthermore, the Lips foundation was intended to serve as the final resting place for the empress and her family.¹⁷⁴ The *typikon* mandates that annual commemorations be held for all individuals buried within the monastery, thereby ensuring that their memory would be perpetually honoured. This tradition of burial and liturgical remembrance within the monastic setting was not merely an expression of personal piety; it also functioned as a means of reinforcing the enduring relationship between the monastic institution and the imperial household. The monastery thus operated simultaneously as a spiritual sanctuary and a dynastic memorial.

The inclusion of these commemorative provisions in the *typikon* underscores the central role of memorial practices in Byzantine religious life, especially within monastic communities. It reflects a deeply held belief in the efficacy of intercessory prayer for the dead and the necessity of maintaining their memory through ritual acts. Such practices were considered vital for the salvation of the souls of the departed and were instrumental in shaping the spiritual identity and social function of the convent.

At the Bebaia Elpis nunnery, the performance of memorial services was not merely a significant component of monastic life but the central function around which the entire institution was organized. The foundation's primary purpose was to ensure the regular, devout commemoration of the souls of the foundress and her family.¹⁷⁵ This focus underscores the profound interconnection between spiritual obligations and familial loyalty in the Byzantine monastic tradition. Through these commemorative practices, the nunnery served as a lasting spiritual legacy for the founder's lineage, binding monastic devotion to the memory and salvation of the aristocratic family it was designed to honour.

172 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 30, p. 122–23; Talbot, “Lips,” 1274.

173 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 52, p. 135; Talbot, “Lips,” 1281.

174 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 42, p. 130; Talbot, “Lips,” 1278–79.

175 Smyrlis, *La fortune des grands monastères byzantins*, 133–34.

According to the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis, in addition to the customary commemorative services held on the Saturdays of Meatfare and Pentecost, special commemorations were required on the anniversary of the foundress's death. These memorial services were meticulously prescribed for a broad range of her relatives and later benefactors, ensuring that their souls would be perpetually remembered and prayed for within the monastic community.

The specific individuals included in these prayers were:

The foundress herself, whose memory was central to the spiritual activities of the nunnery.

Her parents, commemorated on **October 25**, emphasizing the importance of filial piety and the continuation of the family's spiritual legacy.

Her brother Michael/Manuel Komnenos Branas Palaiologos, commemorated on **June 6**.

Her other brother Andronikos/Arsenios Komnenos Branas Doukas Angelos, commemorated on **June 28**.

Her sister Maria/Mariamne Komnene Branaina Laskarina Doukaina Tornikina Palaiologina, commemorated on **September 16**.

The husband of her sister Isaak/Joasaph Komnenos Doukas Tornikes, commemorated on **January 8**.

Their son, Andronikos Komnenos Doukas Palaiologos Tornikes, commemorated on **July 3**.

Synadene's husband, commemorated on **February 6**.

Their daughter-in-law, Thomais/Xene, wife of the foundress's son, John Palaiologos, commemorated on **February 11**.

Sympentheros of Synadene, father-in-law of the foundress's son, the *protostrator* Theodore/Theodoretos Doukas Mouzakios, commemorated on **December 24**.

Their descendants:

Theodora/Theodosia Komnene Doukaina Raoulaina Palaiologina, daughter of Theodore Doukas Synadenos and granddaughter of the foundress, commemorated on **July 23**.

Other relatives:

Synadene's nephew, John/Joasaph Komnenos Doukas Angelos Branas Palaiologos, son of the Despoina of the Bulgars, commemorated on **August 8**.

Further commemorations:

Anonymous Metropolitan of Ephesos (exact date of death unknown).

Anonymous Metropolitan of Mytilene (exact date of death unknown).

John Theophilos, commemorated on **December 9**, and his wife **Maria Asanina**, commemorated on **November 24**.

Xene Philanthropene, commemorated on **February 13**, and her daughter **Eugenia Kantakouzene**, commemorated on **February 11**.¹⁷⁶

No specific causes of death or ages are provided for the individuals commemorated. However, their generous donations to the nunnery are recorded. From the available data, we observed a higher mortality rate during the winter months, particularly in February. This trend is consistent with seasonal mortality patterns, where deaths typically rise in winter due to influenza and other respiratory illnesses.

Commemoration acts were seen as patronal privileges, reserved for benefactors who had established and supported the nunnery. This practice highlights the reciprocal relationship between the monastic community and its patrons; the latter provided material support, while the former ensured the spiritual well-being of the patrons and their families through continuous prayer and memorial services.

The emphasis on memorial services at the Bebaia Elpis nunnery reflects the broader Byzantine belief in the power of liturgical prayer to assist the souls of the deceased—a fundamental aspect of their spiritual worldview. It also underscores the deeply personal nature of monastic foundations, which often served not only as religious institutions but also as family memorials, preserving both the memory and the spiritual welfare of the patrons across generations.

The desire for perpetual remembrance—a key element of Byzantine monastic life—is evident in the practices surrounding the regular reading of the *typika* in various monastic foundations. These readings served not only as reminders of the founding principles and rules but also as acts of commemoration, ensuring that the memory of the founder and that the foundational intentions remained alive within the community.

In the Lips nunnery, the *typikon* was read three times a year during the dinner hour—a tradition consistent with practices in other independent monastic foundations. These specific occasions included the two patronal

176 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 113–19, pp. 80–82, and chaps. 135–44, pp. 91–94; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1555–56, 1561–62.

feasts (Theotokos and John Prodromos) and Easter. The *skeuphylakissa* at Lips was entrusted with safeguarding all paper documents, including the *typikon*. These documents were stored in sealed boxes to ensure their protection, underscoring the importance of preserving the physical embodiments of the monastery's spiritual and legal foundations.

At Bebaia Elpis, the *typikon* mandated the reading of the document in the refectory at the beginning of each month during mealtime—a practice that originated from the Evergetis. This monthly reading ensured that the monastic rules and the founder's intentions were consistently reaffirmed within the community, providing ongoing guidance and reflection.

These practices reflect the Byzantine monastic tradition's emphasis on the written word as a means of ensuring continuity, discipline, and remembrance. The regular reading of the *typikon* reinforced both the spiritual and administrative order within the monastery, serving as a perpetual act of commemoration. It aligned the daily lives of the monastics with the enduring memory of their benefactors and the foundational ideals of their community.

In the monastic life of Byzantine convents, manual labour was an essential part of the daily routine, complementing the liturgical and spiritual activities. The *typika* often delineated roles based on literacy, drawing a clear distinction between those engaged in choir duties and those considered illiterate. For instance, the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis instructed illiterate nuns attending church services to recite simple yet spiritually meaningful prayers, described as “short but powerful phrases which are accepted by God in place of any other prayer.”¹⁷⁷ This provision ensured that all nuns, regardless of literacy, could actively participate in the spiritual life of the convent. Moreover, the *typikon* emphasized that no manual labour should interfere with the time dedicated to holy services, underscoring the sanctity and inviolability of liturgical worship.

On the other hand, Theodora Synadene regarded manual labour as a necessary safeguard against idleness. She considered it not only a practical necessity but also a form of spiritual discipline. Her perspective highlights the belief that engaging in work was essential for maintaining a balanced and productive monastic life, which served as a defense against the distractions and spiritual perils associated with inactivity.¹⁷⁸

177 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 62, p. 53, lines 11–15; Talbot, “*Bebaia Elpis*,” 1541.

178 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chap. 95, pp. 71–72; Talbot, “Bebaia Elpis,” 1550–51.

At the Monastery of Baionaia, handiwork played a vital role, integrating both the spiritual and practical dimensions of monastic life. The nuns engaged in various forms of manual labour, including the production of garments. However, the *typikon* specified that these garments could not be made for their own family members. Instead, the nuns were permitted to sell them to monks and laypeople outside the monastery—a tradition that endured into modern times. In addition to garment production, the nuns also tended gardens, which formed an essential part of their daily responsibilities. Nonetheless, the more physically demanding gardening tasks and other strenuous labour were delegated to secular workers.

A letter by Maximos Neamonites (dating to the early fourteenth century) offers an unexpected glimpse into the practical realities of monastic life, particularly regarding the role of manual labour among nuns. The letter recounts the case of a woman who, following her husband's death, entered monastic life along with one of her daughters. Notably, the daughter supported them through wool work, highlighting a form of labour essential to their sustenance.¹⁷⁹ Although the letter does not delve deeply into their daily monastic routines, it sheds light on the significant role that such practical work played within the community. The focus of the letter—a request concerning the family's unmarried lay daughter—also illustrates how monastic labour was deeply intertwined with broader familial and social responsibilities, even after taking religious vows.

Diet, Bathing, and Sickness

Dietary regulations and fasting practices in Byzantine monasteries were carefully outlined in the *typika*, reflecting both moral principles and practical considerations.¹⁸⁰ These foundation documents governed not only the types of food permitted but also the frequency, timing, and manner of meals. The influential *typikon* of Kecharitomene stipulated that fish and cheese were allowed on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. On Mondays, the diet consisted of legumes with oil and seasonal shellfish, while Wednesdays were limited to legumes with oil and vegetables. Similarly, the *typikon* of the Lips Monastery, drawing on the traditions of the *typikon* of St. Sabas, allowed three types of dishes—fish, cheese, and legumes—on

179 Mitrea, *A Late Byzantine Swan Song*, p. 92, lines 1–4, no. 4, and pp. 61–77 (analysis).

180 Dalby, *Tastes of Byzantium*, 93–97.

non-fast days (Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays).¹⁸¹ On fast days, the prescribed diet included legumes, vegetables, and seasonal shellfish (on Mondays) or simply vegetables and legumes (on Wednesdays and Fridays). The *typikon* also permitted dispensations from the regular dietary restrictions on feasts of the Lord and other major celebrations, demonstrating a degree of liturgical flexibility within the structured ascetic framework.

The *typikon* of the St. Sabas Monastery also influenced the dietary regulations of the nuns at Bebaia Elpis.¹⁸² The nuns were instructed to observe strict moderation, defined as ceasing to eat “when one is still a little hungry,” and to avoid treating food as “a pleasurable end in itself, but only a means of survival.” This emphasis on restraint aimed to transcend bodily gratification and reinforce the ascetic ideals expected of monastic life. However, in contrast to this daily austerity, the foundress made a notable exception for the patronal feast, commissioning an “elegant and costly meal” valued at three *nomismata*.

With regard to the *trapeza* (refectory), the *typikon* of Kecharitomene instructed that, upon hearing the designated signal, the nuns were to enter the refectory in an orderly and reverent manner, following the conclusion of the Holy and Divine Liturgy. They were expected to do so without causing noise or disturbance. Any disruption to the peace and solemnity of the setting was to be addressed by the *trapezaria*, the monastic official responsible for overseeing the refectory. Persistent offenders were subject to further disciplinary action at the discretion of the abbess.

At the Lips Monastery, meals were taken at a common table with a prescribed seating order, and eating in secret was strictly prohibited.¹⁸³ Bebaia Elpis stipulated that a book should be read aloud during meals, and this was to be the only voice heard in the refectory; all others were to remain silent. The nuns were also instructed to keep their gaze fixed on the food before them, avoiding distraction or observation of others.¹⁸⁴ These regulations aimed to promote discipline, humility, and a sense of communal equality, thereby preventing favouritism and avoiding internal tensions.

181 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 13, 29, and 32, pp. 112, 123–24; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1275.

182 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 79–82, pp. 64–65; Talbot, “*Bebaia Elpis*,” 1546–47.

183 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehay, chap. 29, p. 122; Talbot, “*Lips*,” 1274.

184 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehay, chaps. 85–86, pp. 67–60; Talbot, “*Bebaia Elpis*,” 1548. On women, nuns, and silence, see now Mitsiou, “Silence,” 57–70.

Bathing practices at both the Lips and Bebaia Elpis were strictly regulated. Nuns were permitted to bathe only four times a year—"especially if they are young"—specifically before Lent, the Fast of the Holy Apostles (the earliest regulated Christian fast), the Dormition of the Mother of God, and Christmas.¹⁸⁵ As with dietary regulations, elderly nuns were allowed to follow their physician's advice. No restrictions applied to nuns who were ill, reflecting a measure of practical flexibility within the otherwise austere monastic framework.¹⁸⁶

The *typika* offer detailed guidelines for the care of the sick within monastic communities. At the Lips nunnery, a weekly visit from a physician was mandated, with provisions for additional visits during Lent in cases of emergency. Notably, any treatment prescribed by the doctor required the approval of the spiritual father, underscoring the intersection of medical care and spiritual authority. The nunnery also maintained a hospital storehouse stocked with salves and bandages. Interestingly, the *typikon* makes special mention of nuns feigning illness, suggesting that both genuine and imagined sickness could be used to circumvent the community's strict daily discipline.¹⁸⁷

In some cases, the preferential treatment afforded to sick nuns led to resentment among the rest of the community.¹⁸⁸ The *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis instructs that a "skilled and pious" physician should be summoned to examine the ill.¹⁸⁹ The nunnery was responsible for covering the cost of medical treatment and for adhering to the doctor's recommendations during the recovery process. These provisions reflect both the value placed on compassionate care and the potential for tension when communal equality appeared to be compromised.¹⁹⁰

185 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 34, p. 125; Talbot, "Lips," 1276; *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 101, p. 74; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1552.

186 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 90, p. 70; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1549–50. On the health regulations in Bebaia Elpis, see also Volk, *Gesundheitswesen und Wohltätigkeit im Spiegel der byzantinischen Klostersypika*, 255–65.

187 *Typicon monasterii Lips*, ed. Delehaye, chaps. 33 and 35, pp. 124–125; Talbot, "Lips," 1275–76.

188 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 92, pp. 70–71; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1550.

189 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chap. 90, p. 70; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1549–50.

190 *Typicon monasterii Theotoci Bebaias Elpidos*, ed. Delehaye, chaps. 90–94, pp. 70–71; Talbot, "Bebaia Elpis," 1549–50.

Beyond the *typika*, additional documentary sources shed light on the role of nunneries as shelters for the sick and elderly. For instance, in 1291, Kaliaba Anysia, a nun in Trebizond, composed her will while ill, illustrating the vulnerability of aging nuns and the support structures within their communities.¹⁹¹ Female monastic institutions actively sought medical assistance when needed. A brief, four-line letter preserved in Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS F 096 sup. (thirteenth century), fol. 33v, records that Nicholas Mesarites, Metropolitan of Ephesos, noted how nuns in his diocese had reached out to a doctor—likely Basil Megistos, who was probably a relative of his. Such documents highlight the practical responsiveness of Byzantine convents to issues of health and aging, complementing the normative prescriptions found in the *typika*.¹⁹²

Convents also served as refuges for women suffering from psychological illness. One such case is that of Tzourakina, a woman who owned property near Kontoskalion in Constantinople and later lost her mental faculties. In 1402, the Patriarch, acting in his capacity as her legal guardian, arranged for the sale of her house. The proceeds—eighty-four hyperpyra—were allocated to the Monastery of St. Andrew *in Krisei*, which accepted Tzourakina into its care. This case illustrates the broader role of Byzantine nunneries as charitable institutions offering shelter not only to the physically ill and elderly, but also to those with mental health needs.¹⁹³

As previously noted, female monasteries in Byzantium often served not only religious and charitable functions but also acted as places of punishment and moral correction. Women who had committed transgressions were sometimes required to enter monastic life as a form of atonement. One such case is that of Amarantina, a former sorceress who, having shown repentance, was enclosed in a nunnery before December 1351 as her sole punishment. Patriarch Kallistos I took personal pride in guiding both Amarantina and the broader clergy of Constantinople back to the path of God. Interestingly, despite her past, the emperor granted Amarantina one hundred hyperpyra, which she used to acquire an *adelphaton* (a form of monastic lodging) in the Mangana Monastery.¹⁹⁴ In another case, the Archbishop

191 Ouspenskij and Benešević, *Ta Acta της Μονής Βαζελώνος*, trans. Petropoulos, pp. 229–30, no. 78 (1241).

192 *Diktyon*: 42764; Giarenēs, *Ο βυζαντινός λόγιος Νικόλαος Μεσαρίτης*, 32; Nicholas Mesarites, *Epistulae*, ed. Cataldi Palau, 187–232.

193 Hunger, “Zu den restlichen Inedita des Konstantinopler Patriarchatsregisters,” 66–68; Darrouzès, *Les registres des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople*, no. 3257.

194 *Patriarchal Register*, vol. 3, ed. Koder et al., pp. 76–80, no. 185 (1351); Darrouzès,

of Ohrid ruled that Chryse, a woman who had attempted to poison her husband, must enter the Monastery of the Holy Apostles in Epiros and perform the penance prescribed for murderers.¹⁹⁵ In her situation, the monastery also served as a refuge from a violent domestic life. These examples highlight the multifaceted role of nunneries as both instruments of ecclesiastical discipline and sanctuaries for women in distress.

Les registes des Actes du patriarchat de Constantinople, no. 2331; Cupane, "Magie und Zauberei im späten Byzanz," 49–53. On Mangana Monastery, see Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantine*, 70–76.

195 See Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata*, ed. Prinzing, p. 389, no. 121; cf. Mitsiou, "Mobile Criminals," 128–29.

