The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (incorporating Man)

The Journey to Mount Athos: Two Paths to Heaven

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	JRAI-D-12-00077
Full Title:	The Journey to Mount Athos: Two Paths to Heaven
Article Type:	Article
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Manuscript Region of Origin:	GREECE
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Note on Contributor

Michelangelo Paganopoulos graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1999 with an honours degree in the Arts. Since 2004 he has worked as a visiting tutor on the Symbolic Systems and Religion course at the department of Anthropology, Goldsmiths. He has also published numerous articles on monastic life, as well as on film and cultural studies. In 2012, he received the PhD award for his research on Orthodox monastic life in two rival monasteries of the Republic of Athos, where he lived for extended periods (2002-2004) participating in all aspects of monastic life, as well as talking at length to individual monks.

Short Abstract

This paper investigates the personal journey of Christian Orthodox monks on their way from the worldly world, via a monastery to heaven. The paper illustrates the importance of movement in the spiritual and historical reproduction of the brotherhoods.

Long Abstract

This paper draws two contrasting journeys from the secular world to Mount Athos, an autonomous, Christian Orthodox monastic republic of twenty monasteries with only male monks, situated in northern Greece. Using material gathered during my fieldwork in the neighbouring monasteries of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou (2002-2004), the paper highlights the importance of movement in the spiritual reproduction of the two brotherhoods, as well as in the economic and political status of the two institutions. The aim is to illustrate how the personal transformation of each monk complements the historical movement and changes that take place inside each institution, in relation to an imagined, profane 'world' (*k/cosmos*) out there. The comparison of the internal regimes and external conduct of the monks of Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou, which represent contrasting and indeed competing views of monastic life, will further underline the heterogeneity of ways of life on the Mount, as well as evolving traditions. In this way, the material offers a record of rapid change in the two monasteries, investigating the paradox of monastic life, as manifested by the monks' strive to disconnect and escape from the material world on their way to an imagined heaven; an act which is in itself a way of engaging with the same worldly world they morally and ritually denounce in everyday life.

The Land of the Virgin

The Christian Orthodox monastic republic of Athos is a physically isolated peninsula, situated in Chalkidiki, northern Greece. Athos has the appearance of a disfigured finger pointing towards the south. It is covered by a wild green forest that leads to the rocky mountain that rises impressively 2,033 metres high above the north Aegean Sea. The thick forest, with torrents that flow through deep ravines and streams, and the tempestuous sea surrounding the peninsula, function as natural border between Athos and the secular world, which, particularly in the winter, is almost impossible to cross. At the southern parts of the peninsula, there are no asphalt roads, water supply systems, or electrical wires; only rocky paths. The northern parts are more developed with roads and modern infrastructure built in and around the secular village of Karyes, which is the administrative capital of the republic situated at the centre of the peninsula.

Since ancient times, the peninsula has been associated to ascetic mysticism, as it was thought to be a gigantic rock thrown by the giant Athos at Poseidon during the battle of the Gods and the Giants. By the fourth century, Christian hermits living in isolated settlements had re-occupied this sacred mountain. The republic was founded in the 9th century by the Emperor Vasillios I, who drew the border between Athos and the secular world on the basis of the rule of the *Avaton* (meaning 'No Pass'): the prohibition of all females (women and cattle) from entering the peninsula. The rule was based on a tradition that describes Mary's and St John's rescue from a shipwreck on their way to meet Lazarus, at the site where today the monastery of Iviron stands. Since then, the Republic has also

been known as the 'Garden of *Theotokos*' ('the Mother of God'), and allegedly no woman has crossed into this holy territory ever since. The *Avaton* morally supports the separation of monastic from secular life in the moral terms of a 'spiritual life' (*pneumatiki zoe*), in sharp opposition to the 'materialist world' (*illistikos kosmos*) outside Athos: a world of sin, conflict, self-interest, and constant change. By contrast, Mary's 'Virgin Garden', including the twenty monasteries, is thought to be 'unchanged for a thousand years' [from personal communication with visitors]. According to archival research, the rule was introduced in response to several economic disputes between monasteries, as well as the secular town of Ierissos, over the use of cattle in the fields situated between the monastery of Kolovos and Ierissos (Papachrysanthou 1992: 127-9, 139-57, and Paganopoulos 2007: 123-5). The border resolved such disputes by mapping the land of each monastery and drawing the border between Athos and the 'worldly world' (*kosmikos k/cosmos*).

The life in the monasteries was also organized into the *coenobitic* (communal) way of life, which was first introduced in the Royal monastery of *Meghisti Lavra* by St. Athanasius the Athonite (920-1003AC) who was financially and politically supported by the City of Constantinople (Paganopoulos 2009: 363-4). In the golden days of the Palaeologus Dynasty (1259-1453), the republic counted 'tens of thousands' of monks, and more than 200 royal monasteries, which were funded with donations, land endorsements, gold, and other gifts, offered by secular traders, emperors, kings, princes, and sultans from all over the Christian world (Papachrysanthou 1992: 226-32, Mikrayannanitos 1999: 204, among others). However, as a result of the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in

1453, the connection of the Athonian monasteries to the 'cosmopolitan' city was interrupted. Furthermore, the heavy taxation imposed by the Ottomans inclined the monks to change their way of life from *coenobitic* to *idiorrythmic*. By dispersing in isolated cells, individual monks could use their private property as means to hide treasures from the eyes of the taxman. But the *idiorrythmic* way of life resulted in the dissolution of communal life and, consequently, of the economy of the monasteries, returning them to the semi-hermetic state of the early Christian settlements. Following the inclusion of Athos into the Greek border of 1912, the monasteries were obliged to return to the *coenobitic* life, as per chapter 5, article 85 of the Athonian Charter of 1926, which, on the one hand, guaranteed the economic and political autonomy of the republic from Greece, while on the other encouraged for the reorganization of the twenty surviving monasteries into functional economic units (i.e. 'economy' here means the 'law [*nomos*] of the house [*ecos*]' and is directly related to 'ecology', Paganopoulos 2009: 364). This return to the ideals and practices of *coenobitic* life was seen as a recovery of a lost, 'spiritual' past.

The monks associate their communal rules directly to the 'natural order' (*physiki takseis*) of the landscape. They see themselves living a 'blessed life', in total harmony with the natural environment, into a 'symbiosis' [personal communication with Vatopaidian priest-monk 1/10/2002]. The year is coordinated according to the annual liturgical and agrarian calendar, divided in winter and summer solstices: because the winter nights are longer, the monks spend more time inside their cells praying, or in the church praying collectively. In the spring, when the days are warmer and longer, they spend more time

working outside in the fields for the coming winter. The liturgical calendar starts on the first day of January, and consists of four long periods of abstinence that culminate to twelve great feasts. Each week is further divided in fasting and non-fasting ('oil') days. The monks do not consume any meat because they considered it to be morally equivalent to desire. Instead, they only eat Mary's gifts from the fields: tomatoes, figs, cucumbers, olives, green peppers, nuts; they also produce wine, *tsipouro* (similar to ouzo), candles, and honey among other products, which they export to the secular market. Fish is on the dinner table every Sunday after mass.

The daily program begins with the shutting of the monastery's gate at sunset, which is the time for prayer until the following sunrise. In the winter, because the days are shorter, the vesper starts as early as three in the afternoon (according to 'worldly time', *kosmiki ora*) and lasts for two hours. In the summer, it started as late as eight in the evening, and lasted only for one hour, because of the late sunset. The Divine Liturgy and confessions take place in the night, culminating with the reception of the Holy Communion at dawn that unifies the brotherhood while celebrating the collective sentiment of 'community' in itself. At dawn, the monastery's gate opens to the world, as it is the time for business and for collective work. Night activities are contextualized within 12 'canonical hours', which are succeeded by 12 'worldly hours' for the daytime activities. However, the length of each 'hour' gradually changes from winter to summer to winter according to the movement of the moon for the liturgical life, and the sun for the working days, on the sky: if the day is long, they will spend more time performing work in the field; if the day is short they will spend more time

performing liturgy. Accordingly, in the summer the 'worldly hours' are longer than in the winter; and vice versa, in the winter the 'canonical hours' are longer than in the summer, depending on the length of each day.

The double realm of monastic life is thus based on the natural succession of night and day. The night is dedicated to the cultivation of the spiritual self through private and collective practices of faith, while the day is dedicated to the body (work and rest) and to taking care of the material needs and running of the community. The two set of activities are further contextualized within a double hierarchy: 'an informal spiritual hierarchy which exists parallel to other more institutionalised forms of rank' (Sarris 2000: 8-9). The internal organization of the monastery includes night activities organized on the basis of the spiritual hierarchy led by the priest-monks, while daily activities are organized by the *Council of Elders* (*Gerontia*) with administrative and organizational duties, as well as other financial and legal matters regarding the monastery as an Orthodox institution (Alpentzos 2002: 14-15). At the top of the triangle is the ultimate authority of the abbot, who supersedes both spiritual and administrative hierarchies, being the 'spiritual father' (*pneumatikos pateras*) to all the monks.

Monastic Life as a Rite of Passage: The Rite of Tonsure

'Initiation is a long series of rites to introduce the young man into religious life. For the first time, he comes out of the purely profane world, where he has passed his childhood, and enters into the circle of sacred things [...] he is born again in a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are held to bring about the death

and the rebirth, which are taken not merely in a symbolic sense but literally [...] The two worlds are conceived of not only as separate but also as hostile and jealous rivals [...] From thence comes monasticism, which artificially organizes a milieu that is apart from, outside of, and closed to the natural milieu where ordinary men live a secular life and that tends almost to be its antagonist. From thence as well comes mystic asceticism, which seeks to uproot all that may remain of man's attachment to the world. Finally, from thence comes all [sic] forms of religious suicide, the crowing logical step of this asceticism, since the only means of escaping profane life fully and finally is escaping life altogether' (Durkheim 1995: 37)

In 'escaping life altogether', the Christian Orthodox monastic life offers a life-long rite of passage to heaven, as portrayed by ancient texts, such as St Climacus' *Ladder to Paradise*, written in the 7th century. The monks see communal life as a way to cleanse and liberate the self from the 'worldly passions' (*kosmika pathoi*) thought to be carried into the pure space of the monastery with them from the secular world. The first stage of the catharsis from the passions of the flesh usually takes place in an Athonian 'desert' (*erimos*, referring to isolated monastic settlements) through a 'testing' period (*dokimasia*, 'ordeal') under harsh conditions and constant supervision. After a period of six months to a year, the second part of the ordeal takes place in the monastery under the supervision of the abbot. In the context of the moral separation of monastic from secular life, the ordeal is the transitory process that takes place in harsh conditions, through techniques of the body that aim to 'exercise' body and soul (*askesis* the Greek root of the word *askesis* meaning 'ascetic'). After a period of one to three years,

depending on the novice's progress, the abbot decides if and when the novice is ready to join the brotherhood. The successful completion of the ordeal is celebrated with the rite of tonsure (*koura*).

According to the *Paschalion* (the movable calendar of the 'book of Easter') the ordinations take place on the weekend before, or the week after, the beginning of the Great Lent (*Sarakosti*, meaning 'forty days'), which is the strict period of abstinence preceding the Resurrection of Christ. On a sunny Saturday (March 29th 2003), four days after the celebration of the monastery on March 25th ('Annunciation of the Mother of God'), I witnessed the ordination of four novices in Vatopaidi. Because of the celebration the monastery was fully booked with more than 400 pilgrim-visitors arriving that morning. From outside, the monastic complex stood in between the buzzing forest and the calm sea, glistening in the bright spring sun, as if it was a natural part of the environment; the centre of 'God's creation' (*theou ktisis*). Inside, the monks had recently painted and decorated the wall of the *exonarthex* (outer area) of the main church (*catholicon*) with blossoming flowers. The bright weather and the blue skies of spring, with all its smells and early dawns, gave a feeling of rebirth and renewal. The time of the ordinations complemented the rite as a kind of rebirth; it was as though nature were a part of the rebirth.

The rite consisted of a formal conversation between the abbot, the priest-monk, and the novice, based on a written series of questions and answers, which confirmed his new status as a monk, while publicly declaring his obedience to the abbot and to God. The novice was dressed in white underclothing and white

socks, looking slightly embarrassed for being 'undressed' in the most sacred space of the monastery. The white colour signified a kind of innocent weakness, which, as I was told, aimed to symbolize the innocence of the newborn child. He first prostrated towards the four points of the horizon, as a public acknowledgment of his new 'spiritual family' (*pneumatiki oikogeneia*): first towards the priest-monk who was holding the Holy Cross of Christ, which denotes monastic life as being that of self-sacrifice, in imitation of Christ the 'first monk'; second towards the icon of the Virgin Mary portrayed as the *Vematarissa* (meaning 'Marching Woman'), which symbolically guides him to take the first step of monastic life; third, towards the icon of the *Annunciation of the Virgin Mary* to which the monastery is dedicated, his new home; and finally, the novice kneeled before the abbot, the representative of God and the father figure to the community, who returned the gesture with his blessing. Then the priest crossed the novice's forehead, ears, nose, and chest, three times, using the sanctified, perfumed *Myron*.

During the rite, the old 'worldly self' (*kosmikos eautos*) is declared dead, for a new monk is thought to be spiritually reborn. Bloch and Parry (1982) associated ritual death to fertility and reproduction, as the means of reversing natural time (and in La Fontaine 1985: 15, and Loizos and Heady 1999: 11). The ordination of novices plays on the theme of dying *now*, illustrating Leach's concept of 'sacred time' as the enactment of time 'played in reverse, death is converted into birth' (Leach cited in Gell 2001: 32), functioning to 'deny the psychologically unpleasant reality of irreversible time' (Harris 1991: 152). The social death of the 'worldly' persona of the would-be monk also contains his aspirations toward the

afterlife (as also in La Fontaine 1985: 15, and Bloch and Parry 1982). The monks have a saying: 'If you die before you die, you will not die when you die'. In respect to this, Mantzaridis wrote: '(In monasteries) humans are not born. They only die. And the life of the monasteries is a preparation for death. But preparing for death, just like death itself, is something full of life' (1990:211). Accordingly, a monk's cell in the monastery is thought to be his 'tomb'. Following the second baptism of the novice into a monk, the abbot blesses and gives him the black dress called *rassa*, a black cylindrical hat (*kalymmafki*), and a black, leathered belt, 'to remind ourselves of the death of flesh' [personal communication with a priest-monk]. In this way the novice, cleansed from his secular past, is reborn with a new name, clothing, and a new set of duties (as also in La Fontaine 1985: 16), publicly confirming his new position, as a *rassophoros* (meaning a person who 'carries' the black *rassa*).

The public declaration of the death of the novice's worldly self is symbolized by the act of tonsure. The priest cuts a lock of hair from the kneeling novice. Then the abbot, acting as the godfather of the novice, loudly announces the new name of the newborn monk three times to the enthusiastic responses of the congregation, collectively repeating the name three times in one voice. The new name given to the novice has a particular value and meaning. For instance, in Vatopaidi a common name for monks was 'Romanos', referring to St. Romanos the Melodist, a remarkable Vatopaidian composer of Byzantine music in the 14th century. Nowadays, the name is given to those novices known for their beautiful voice and musical talent. Many are happy to join the monastery's world-famous choir, and described their decision to become monks as a way to liberate

themselves from their parents' expectation, and happily follow their true vocation.

But not everyone in the church looked happy. One novice's biological father and uncle, who came to witness the transformation of their son into a monk, both looked upset. They were standing in a dark corner of the church. The father, who had a desperate look in his eyes, cried. It could have been for happiness, it could have been for loss. During and after the rite his son did not even turn once to look back at him. He was dead. Instead, the white-dressed novice disappeared among the black cassocks of his new brotherhood, like a dissolving light, to be the first to receive the Holy Communion. In the refectory, he and the other three new monks sat next to their new father, the abbot, with their new 'spiritual family' (*pneumatiki oikogeneia*). His biological father sat separately with the rest of the visitors near the entrance.

Tonsure is thus both a rite of separation and aggregation, of rejection and acceptance. As a rite of separation, it marks the successful completion of the first stage of the greater passage to heaven, which is based on the public denouncement of the biological family and rejection of all secular ties. This follows the example of Christ who refused to recognize his mother on his way to the Cross (Matthew 12: par. 47-99). On Athos, this rejection is directly associated with the prohibition of the monks' mothers in the peninsula, according to the rule of the *Avaton*. Their public denouncement during the rite as explored in Bloch's and Guggenheim's article on Catholic baptism (1981), in which they argued that: 'baptism is a ritual denying the woman's ability to produce socially acceptable

children', as it determines the social status of the child. Accordingly, social rebirths legitimize differences of class and gender which constitute the discourse of power of religious ideology in which the godfather replaces the biological parents of the neophyte (1981: 380, 385).

Tonsure is also a rite of aggregation, as the brotherhood collectively welcomes the new member in the community. It is a form of a public 'acceptance' in Rappaport's terms (1999:119-123) with a double significance: it marks the personal acceptance of the young monk who decides to follow monastic life. The rite also signifies the novice's public acceptance by the community. Accordingly, he anticipates a new life being reborn as a 'virgin' in imitation to the body of Christ, and on a collective level, the ordination celebrates communal life as a whole, while anticipating the forthcoming Easter, which is the greatest day of the Orthodox calendar. The moral obligation to the community, the self-sacrifice of the novice and oath of obedience to the central authority of the abbot that the novice makes during his ordination, will become the centrally motivating force in his daily conduct, within a *spiritual family* and hierarchical order 'concerned with legitimacy, reaffirming the divisions and hierarchies that are indispensable to a system of authority' (La Fontaine 1985: 17). Accordingly, after many years of monastic experience, the monk is ordained for a second time, receiving the *Angelic Schema* ('Angelic Patent'), as he is thought to have transformed into an "angel on earth" [following Matthew 19:10-12, 22:30, and Corinthians 7]. The final aggregation can only be found in paradise, where the ladder of monastic life leads, in union 'within Christ' (*en'Christo*). This final 'departure' to heaven

(*anahorisis*, the Greek root of the word 'anchorite') is celebrated with a third rite of passage, the funeral of the monk.

In this context, the monasteries are conceptualized as being both sacred and *liminal* spaces, based on a life understood in a *liminal* state of existence that illustrates Turner's concept of 'liminality' (1967: 93-98) as the marginal state of being, in between life and death, Paradise and Hell, outside the social constrains of the world. Further, this throws a different light on Durkheim's concept of the 'sacred', highlighting the functional interdependence of the two 'worlds' to each other: 'To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use' (Durkheim 1995: 38). On Athos, the movement of would-be monks to a monastery is both esoteric and geographic, illustrating Turner's concept of 'communitas': 'anti-structured' groups formed spontaneously on the way to a shrine (1974: 45-46). On Athos, similar groups of young men are then structured within each monastery's hierarchy, social organization, and particular tradition through the institution's rites of passage. In this sense, the 'Monastery', imagined in-between the ideal and the real world, is an evolving and heterogeneous arena, in which each individual strives toward and against collective ideals of the monastic self.

The Virgin Body as a Way of Life

In everyday life, each monk aims to imitate the image of God (*kath' eikona kai kath' omoiosin*), whose embodiment on earth is visualised in the ideal *imago dei*

of the Virgin Christ (*eikona*, 'image' in Greek/ *imago Dei* in Latin), and who is thought to be the 'first monk' [from personal communication with monks]. In this sense, 'Christ' becomes an archetype of the monastic self. Jung writes that Christ exemplifies the prototype monastic persona, virtue of self-sacrifice, struggle, justice, and being 'as good as perfect … the perfect man who is crucified' (Jung 1968: 69). This, in juxtaposition with Christ shadow, or 'Antichrist', who possesses 'an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality' *(Ibid:* 8-11). Such nature can be associated to demonic behaviour, uncontrolled sexuality, neurosis, greed, and deception. The monks call these symptoms 'passions' (*pathoi*), associated with emotional and sexual urges that they carry in their memory from their secular past and world into the sacred space of the monastery.

In this context, the monastery is a *liminal* space, set in between life and death, earth and heaven, in which each monk can purify and liberate himself from his secular past in his preparation for the afterlife. This path of purification takes place through practices of faith, private and collective forms of prayer, and other cathartic practices such as confession and the Holy Communion. There are also other collective 'techniques of the body', such as fasting, working, and sleeping deprivation, which aim to cultivate the moral (i.e. 'spiritual') persona of each monk (as in Mauss 1985: 17-20). Over time, such practices (both liturgical and daily tasks) become 'habitudes' (as in Mauss 2006: 80), meaning that underneath their private or collective performance lays a connection of each monk to a Durkheimian holy whole: the sacred community with its naturalized rules,

practices, timetables, and hierarchy [1]. In the words of the monks, their monastery is a living 'human body' of which each member of the brotherhood is an active part: 'If a vein is blocked and stops working then the body gets a heart-attack' [speech of abbot of Vatopaidi about the importance of obedience in the refectory, 3/4/03].

Douglas distinguished between 'the physical body' as moral 'microcosm of society [...] polarized conceptually against the social body': the former referring to the moral self and rules of thought and conduct (prohibitions, dress code, and other habitus etc), while the later to social structures (divisions of time, space, labour, hierarchy, and rank) that dialectically contextualize everyday experience in terms of a social and moral order (1996: 77, 87). Her distinction of the moral self from the social body echoes Durkheim's ideas of a double consciousness: 'one that we share in common with our group in its entirety, which is consequently not ourselves, but society living and acting within us; the other that, on the contrary, represents us alone in what is personal and distinctive about us, what makes us an individual' (1984: 84). For the deeply moralist Durkheim: 'If there is such a thing as morality, it must necessarily link man to goals that go beyond the circle of individual interests' (1973: 65). This moral belief in social solidarity, and Douglas's interpretation of Durkheim's distinction of the sacred

[1] I use the term 'community' in the Durkheimian sense of the 'sacred', in which 'God is only a figurative expression of the society' (Morris 1987: 119). Both concepts of 'God' and 'Society' are thought to be *a priori*, meaning that they are independent, collective, external forces that pre-exist the individual, manifested in Rudolf Otto's terms as the numinous experience of 'grace' (Otto 1958: 140), in Greek '*charis'* the root of the word 'charismatic'.

and the profane realms in terms of purity and pollution respectively, are particularly illustrated in collective types of Christian monasticism, such as the *coenobitic* way of life on Athos, which is organized according to the needs of the community in direct relation to each monk's spiritual upbringing.

Douglas (1996/1970) in her revision of Mauss's famous essay on the 'techniques of the body' (Mauss 2006/1936: 77-95) argued: 'there can be no such thing as natural behaviour [...] Nothing is more essentially transmitted by a social process of learning than sexual behaviour, and this of course is closely related to morality' (Douglas 1996: 69). This is represented on Athos by the strict dress code, as the monks and visitors have to be fully dressed at all times in order not to insult the virgin landscape. Other rules prescribe that the monastic body is covered in the black *rassa* and hidden under a long beard that make the monks almost indistinguishable from each other. Through this total tradition of a 'virgin way of life' (*parthena zoe*), the conduct of each monk is thus directly connected to the social order of the community, formulated and controlled according to each monastery's internal hierarchy:

'The enlightened mind is the person who struggles without passions [*apatheia*], in order to achieve a life of an angel on earth. The virginity of a monk is not only external, as some think. Above all, it is internal, a matter of the heart. The obedient subordinate, with his acceptance and deed of service [*thelima*, 'the Elder's will'], and within the love of the Church, gradually comes to cleanse his heart, which is the right path toward a virgin life. The monk who leads a virgin

life tastes the life of the angels' (Archimandrite Ephraim, abbot of Vatopaidi, 2001: 56, my translation from Greek)

Therefore, 'virginity' is not a sexual condition, as many monks are not sexual virgins and some even have children outside Athos, but rather a collective state of mind and body, which manifests itself in terms of social order. In this context, the value of virginity is culturally constructed and used to morally enhance the physical separation of Athos from *a* 'world' out there. It naturalizes the way of life in each monastery by locating it in the landscape and the cosmos, as a projection of the body of Mary, simultaneously the virgin and the providing mother who protects each monk from external threats, *particularly* from the presence of profane women. Thus, Mary projects the masculine ideal of womanhood, seen as the 'bearer of group identity', used in 'the process of demarcation of group boundaries', and 'as an agency of self-defence against encroachment *from the outside* or as a result of conquest' (Goddard 1987: 171-173). In this way, the 'spiritual (way of) life' (*pneumatiki zoe*) inside the monasteries is conceived in the static terms of a 'virgin life' (*parthena zoe*), in moral opposition to the 'materialist world' (*illistikos kosmos*) outside Athos, a world of sin, conflict, self-interest, and constant change. From this prohibition further prohibitions, separations, rules and collective obligations are established, through objectifying structures such as the divisions of time, space, labour, activity, status, and rank, which are conceptualized as 'a set of categories that order experience and make it meaningful, and as a set of relationships which are historically and culturally specific' (Caplan 1987: 19)

In this way, the path to salvation offers a cleansing ordeal, based on self-examination (*automempsia*), a war against the flesh (*enkrateia*), and self-sacrifice (*autothysia*), against all that constitute the 'worldly self' (*kosmikos eautos*). This war begins with the denunciation and emotional detachment from the biological family, which is the first step in the process of separation of each would-be monk from his secular past. In my discussions with younger monks, they particularly referred to their mothers when they talked about their secular past. In their accounts, it was clear that the separation had a shocking effect to them even though they tried not to show it. Some monks are still visited by their mothers, who arrive and stay in boats, as they are not allowed to step on land, to see their sons for a few hours every few years, under the supervision of an elder; but most of the monks that I talked to, had cut every contact. A priest-monk warned me of the danger of this kind of 'passionate love', describing it as a kind of self-obsession that contradicts the moral ideal of self-sacrifice as exemplified by the archetypal figure of 'Christ':

'Christ came to bring War, in order to make Peace. When a young man asked Him what did he have to do to find peace, Christ told him to abandon everything he kept, and follow Him. And when His Mother and sister came to visit Him, He said: "I have no mother and siblings; I only have one father, God". Christ was in everything a virgin; he did not have a family or a country. Our greatest enemy is our family, and by this I mean the exaggerated love we feel for them that do not allow us to be free. The first step of liberation has to be a violent struggle, to put the knife deep to cut through the bone' [interview 10/4/03].

Mothers are seen to be emotional, irrational, and heavily dependant to men. Their earthly love is seen as deceiving, because it is based on *passionate* ties that reveal their self-interest. The memory of a monk's mother is thought to be used by the devil to 'darken a monk's heart', because it can raise negative feelings, such as guilt and nostalgia, especially among untrained novices. These sentiments are seen as excessive and disorderly emotions of the mind and body, thought to be carried from the 'world' into the monastery, and which can interrupt a monk's spiritual development. For this reason, the novices are placed under a strict regime of prayer, work, and confession, and supervised by an elder at all times, in helping them to 'keep their mind concentrated to god' and to avoid such negative thoughts. Through this cathartic process from the past 'the longing for your family lasts for three years. Then you just forget about it; I haven't talked to my mother for 20 years' [middle-aged monk 22/4/03].

A second manifestation of the devil in the form of 'women' comes in dreams of sexual nature that can induce the prohibited act of masturbation. In a number of stories I collected from the field, the monks often referred to a 'world out there' in direct association to the presence of 'cunning and deceiving women', sent by the devil to threaten their celibacy, masculine sense of independence, and emotional detachment from the world (also in Seidler 1987: 87, 92). This anxiety is collectively expressed as a kind of uncontrolled urge, associated to animality and madness (Caplan *ibid*: 8, and Weeks same volume: 32-33). One type of stories I gathered from Athos described the struggle of less experienced monks against the 'Porno-Demon' (*pornodemonas*): a dreamy figure of a beautiful, naked woman with long nails and a black tongue and the hard hair of a pig on her

back, who visits them in the evening in their cells, tempting them to masturbate [from personal communication with monks]. Passions (*pathoi*), such as masturbation, are morally associated to the 'love of the self' (*filautia*), manifested as self-pleasure, which undermines the communal morality of virginity, solidarity, and egalitarianism of monastic life (Archimandrite Vasileios, abbot of Iveron, and Mantzaridis 1997: 22-28). This form of sexual passion is first traced in the mind, through the monks' confessions to the abbot. It can be only controlled through the cathartic practice of the Jesus Prayer, the repetition of the words 'Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me, the Sinner' through out the day and night, and throughout the life of a monk. The novices are required to repeat the prayer with their mouths, the monks with their minds, and the elders with their hearts. The aim is to show 'economy of passions' (*oikonomia pathon*), which refers to their mild and detached manner towards themselves, the others, and the natural environment. This economy of passions unifies the brotherhood under the constant recitation that connects each individual monk to the collective (Paganopoulos 2009: 363-378).

The *Family of Josephaeoi* in Vatopaidi and the *Skete of Serrai*

In contrast to the general perception of monasticism as static and unchanging, monastic life is formed *on the way* to a monastery. In the absence of women, the monks replace biological with spiritual forms of reproduction that depend on the movement of charismatic monks who travel outside Athos to attract and recruit new members. There are two ways of entering Athos to become a monk: either

individually, or with a group ('companionship', *synodeia*) of would-be monks, usually arriving from the same geographic area, who 'accompanies' a charismatic elder (*charismatikos monahos)* in his trips inside and outside Athos, until they settle in a monastery where they are incorporated into an Athonian family on the basis of an internal hierarchy, dependent upon the years of experience of each monk (*see* also Sidiropoulos 2000: 145-155). Each family takes its name either from the charismatic monk though to be its founding 'spiritual father' (*pneumatikos pateras*), or from the geographic area where he had spent either his early years as a young novice, or lived as an old hermit (called *anchorite*, 'departurer'). When the charismatic monk reaches a certain age, he departs to a hermitage for the remainder of his life, while his disciples take his place by becoming 'spiritual fathers' to new 'companionships', multiplying the members of the family, while also expanding its tradition to more monastic settlements inside and outside Athos. The charismatic monk also appoints the first abbot of a renovated monastery, who usually is a trusted disciple. Subsequent abbots are elected by the entire brotherhood.

Athonian families are spiritually reproduced on the basis of the archetypal relation between father and son, echoing the relationship of God to Jesus. This takes on different forms depending on the context it is adopted: between elder (*gerontas*) and deacon (*diakos*), teacher and disciple, abbot and monk, or monk and visitor. Significantly, the father-son relation is based on the submission of the younger to the elders. As part of becoming a monk, the novices and younger monks first have to serve their elders as deacons. During this period they are called *epotactikoi*, meaning 'under order/submission' until the death of the

'spiritual father', which then allows them to travel and attract their own deacons. Thus, the spiritual relationships carry the collective characteristic of an 'an ongoing open-ended flow of spiritual life' (as in du Boulay 1984: 545) instigated by the movement of travelling monks from Athos to the secular world, and back into Athos with more recruits. This network forms the basis in the process of the spiritual reproduction of the brotherhoods. In this way, charismatic monks open the path to younger would-be monks towards salvation that takes place according to, on the one hand, the spiritual tradition and collective history of the family, both formed and taught on the way to a monastery, and on the other, the history and tradition of the monastic institution in which the new monks are incorporated. This process takes place through the experience of travelling, which fuses each monk's personal history within the collective experiences of the brotherhood, and history of the monastery.

Furthermore, the movement of charismatic monks becomes vital in the economic development of the monasteries as shown in a number of researches on Christian monasticism. In examining the spiritual ties between nuns, Iossifides highlighted the importance of contact and 'knowledge of the world beyond their convent walls', to showing how spiritual relationships are not limited in the convent but expand outside. In this context, Iossifides, looking at the life of convents, has pointed to the impact of the increase of religious tourism in monasteries, in terms of their economic transformation from agricultural, 'local economy', to a 'capitalist global economy' (1991: 136-7). In another study of Orthodox monastic life among Romanian nuns, Forbess interpreted the concept of 'charisma' as the ability to travel in order 'to mobilise resources outside the convent' (2005: 152).

These activities, unbounded by the constraints of the secluded life inside the monasteries, reveal the entrepreneurial calling of charismatic nuns and monks (as in Goldman's reading of Weberian 'charisma' 1991: 30), which is vital for the prosperity of the monastic institutions.

Most of the monks of the monastery of Vatopaidi belong to the Family of *Josephaeoi*, whose founder was Joseph the Hesychast (1898-1959), also known as the 'Cave Dweller'. According to testimonies of his disciples, Joseph's *charis* had a 'supernatural' quality (as also in Weber 1968: 19). He often received 'information' from God, anticipating future events. He could watch over his disciples at all times, even though he was not physically near them (Filotheitis 2008: 244-252). He earned his title because he revived the spiritual tradition of *Hesychasm* ('silence') based on the practice of the Jesus Prayer, the repetition of the words 'Lord Jesus Have Mercy on me, the Sinner' as the means of controlling the emotions, thoughts, dreams, and desires of the body. The practice dates back to the 14th century *Hesychast* movement of monks, which was led by St. Gregorios Palamas, who was ordained as a monk in Vatopaidi in 1315, and later became the abbot of the neighbouring rival monastery of Esfigmenou in 1336. Joseph also re-introduced the *coenobitic* (communal) way of life, based on the values of obedience, virginity, and poverty, in his *typiko* ('formalities', the book with the rules of daily conduct and liturgical timetables) written in 1938. In practice, he emphasized 'economy' (*eksoikonomo*) in the training of the novices, because they were deemed to be too soft to follow the hardships of the hermetic life of the Hesychast (Joseph the Vatopaidian 2002: 33, Filotheitis 2008: 350-352, and Paganopoulos 2009: 366-369).

But this 'spiritual' return to *coenobitic* life was accompanied by rapid demographic changes that took place after the inclusion of Athos in the Greek border of 1912. The paradoxical status of Athos, thought to be both within and outside Greece, was enhanced by the double ambiguity about the twenty monasteries' political and economic autonomy, guaranteed by the Greek Constitution of 1925-7. This autonomy raises two questions: first, in respect to the ambiguous status of non-Greek monks; and second, in respect to the ambiguous economic and political relation of each monastic institution to the Greek state. These two issues are illustrated by the history of Vatopaidi and one of its dependant *sketes* (monastic village), the 'Russian' Skete of St. Andrew, or 'Russian *Serrai'* as it is also known. The Skete was one of the places dominated by Russian monks, where in 1909 the movement of the 'Glorifiers of the Name' was formed, claiming that only the name of 'Jesus' in the Jesus Prayer contains the essence of god. Following complaints from Greek monks to the (Greek) 'Ecumenical Patriarchate' in Istanbul, the Tsar repatriated a thousand Russian monks in two waves (in 1912 and 1915), accused them of heresy. However, underneath the theological conflict between the Greek *Holy Committee* and the 'Glorifiers of the Name', there was a general anxiety of Greek monks about the increasing numbers of Russian monks (in 1903, the number of Russians [3,496] was greater than the Greeks [3,276] Sidiropoulos 2000: 106-107). A third wave of Russian and Bulgarian monks called *Celliotes*, because they lived isolated in cells spread on the Mount, were deported from Athos during the Greek Civil War (1944-9) accused of being 'communists' because of their ethnicity [from personal communication with monks of Esfigmenou].

Following these expulsions, and the increasing disconnection of the peninsula from Eastern European countries, the number of monks continued to decrease from 6,345 in 1913 to 2,878 in 1943, and to its lowest recorded number of 1,145 monks in 1971 (Mantzaridis 1980:191). In the same year, the last remaining Russian monk died in 'Russian *Serrai*'. The Vatopaidian Skete was left abandoned for many years, until in 1992 one of the disciples of Joseph the Hesychast, Joseph the Vatopaidian (1921-2009) requested from the Holy Committee to move there a 'companionship' of fifteen monks from his native Cyprus. Nowadays, the Vatopaidian Skete of St Andrew is 'Russian' by name only, as it is the home of about thirty young monks, in their majority from Greek Cyprus. At the site of the Skete, the Vatopaidians have rebuilt the new Athoniada School, with funding from the EU. The School was originally built near Vatopaidi in 1749, with students such as the 'Great Teacher of the Nation' Eugenius Voulgaris, the influential Patriarch of Alexandria Cyprianos Cyprios, the Greek national hero Regas Ferraios, and St Kosmas the Aetolian. After being moved to the 'Russian Serrai', it has become a centre of Greek Cypriot nationalism.

Nowadays, the Vatopaidians claim to be 'spiritually' related to one of its most famous teachers, the priest-monk Cyprianos of Cyprus. But in the context of the greater demographic changes on Athos, their claim for 'spirituality' becomes the hegemonic means of an emergent Greek tradition. Central to the Greek Cypriot nationalist narrative is the figure of the Virgin Mary, symbolizing the monks' 'affinal relationship with the Divine' (Iossifides 1991:150, and cited in Bryant

2002:515), as both Cyprus and Vatopaidi are closely associated with the Virgin Mary. In her comparative study of how Greek and Turkish Cypriots construct their pasts, Bryant suggested that while the Turkish Cypriots emphasize the importance of 'blood' to understand their past, their Greek counterparts emphasize the Hellenic 'spirit', in order to highlight importance of 'metaphors of soul and spirit to represent their kinship with the land' within the Greek nationalist narrative based on ideals of purity (2002: 511, 521). The recent revival of Vatopaidi and its settlements illustrate this as the Greek nationalist nostalgia of a 'spiritual' return to an imagined, golden Byzantium.

Joseph the Vatopaidian's Network: Moral Dilemmas

Joseph the Vatopaidian (1/7/1921 - 1/7/2009) was a disciple in the 'companionship' (*synodeia*) of Joseph the Hesychast, who was into a monk in the New Skete in 1953. During his life, he often travelled to his native Cyprus to gather more 'companions', to bring them into Athos. In this way, he first revived the monastery of Koutloumousiou in 1980, before moving with his second 'companionship' of fifteen monks to Vatopaidi in 1986-7. A member of Joseph's 'companion' at the time told me: 'When we first came here we found the monastery in ruins. The monks wouldn't pray together, wouldn't prepare their meals, and wouldn't take care of the monastery. They didn't even bother to go to the Sunday Mass' [discussion with Vatopaidian priest-monk 3/10/02]. In imitation of his father Joseph the Hesychast, Joseph the Vatopaidian revived the internal, 'spiritual' life of Vatopaidi, as well as its external network with his native Cyprus. On the one hand, he organized the monastery's economic and

social structure according to the rules of Joseph the Hesychast, and appointed his disciple Ephraim as the new abbot. His personal journey into Athos also opened a path from the monastery of Timios Stavros ('Honoured Cross') in his native Greek Cyprus to the Athonian villages of the New Skete, the House of Evangelismos, and the 'deserts' of Koutanakia and Kapsala, among other settlements, where 'companionships' of young novices trained before they were ordained in Vatopaidi as monks. After he renovated Vatopaidi's economy in 1990, he settled in an isolated hut in the forest to 'depart' in peace, while his disciples continued travelling to Cyprus to gather more 'companionships', in order to multiply the population of the monastery, and to expand the tradition of the Family of the Josephaeoi in new monasteries in the US (the monastery of St. Antonius, Arizona), England (the monastery of the Forerunner in Sussex), and *metochia* (Vatopaidian properties) in Greece, such as the new monastery in Porto Lagos, Chalkidiki.

In the last two decades, Vatopaidi has rapidly developed into the most influential institution of Athos, with its population increasing from 53 in 1986, to 48 monks in 1990, and to 73 in 1992 (Mantzaridis 1997: 172, and Alpentzos 2002: 232-5) including sixteen monks aged between 20 and 35, and eighteen monks around 40 years-old (Sidiropoulos 2000:155). A third wave of young monks followed in 1996, and a fourth in 2000. At the time of my fieldwork in 2003, more than 90 monks lived in Vatopaidi, and about 40 in its settlements. According to a number of statistical researches (such as Mantzaridis 2005: 2, and Sidiropoulos 2000: 154-5) Vatopaidi's rapid development in the last twenty years was based on an influx of young and well-educated monks, who brought with them their

knowledge and skills from the secular world. From the thirteen novices I met during my visits to the monastery between 2002 and 2004, eleven of them had studies in an institution of higher education in Greece, Cyprus, and Romania, but none of them had managed to graduate. Their skills were used for the community, *not* for their own personal interest. On this moral basis, many monks that I met in the field had higher education, but not a degree to show for it. The young monks introduced electricity, sanitation, and running water; they also rebuilt the *archontariki* (‘guest-house’) into a luxurious environment with an elevator, restored the chapels and buildings of the monastery and settlements, imported heavy machinery, and introduced computer technology, among other rapid changes. Furthermore, they restored the treasures of their monastery, such as the eight miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary and other holy items and relics, working in co-operation with the Greek Archaeological Service, and the ‘Computer Vision and Image Processing Group’, Department of Informatics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Since 1999, the project was funded by the ‘European Heritage Laboratories Action’.

With this revival of the internal economy of the monastery, the young Vatopaidians also opened up to the secular world, participating in a number of charities and conferences in Athens and the US, and have also founded a publication company to publish their own magazine (*Pemptousia*). They also expanded outside Athos, by building new settlements in their native Cyprus, and at the luxurious Porto Lagos in Chalkidiki, northern Greece. Through the network, they sell copies of miraculous icons, books with the life and teachings of spiritual fathers, and products such as honey, wine, candles and rosaries,

distributed via a network of churches and religious shops worldwide (Paganopoulos 2007: 127-132). A pilgrim consumer can buy 'holy' products from commercial sites such as 'Monastery Products Online' at www.monasteryproducts.org, or even virtually visit the *catholicon* (church) of Vatopaidi and light a candle at www.ouranoupoli.com/athos. On July 1st 2009, on the day of his birthday, Joseph the Vatopaidian died in his isolated cell in the forest. The deacons who found him say that he began smiling after his death. They even took pictures of the 'smiling' corpse, and posted them on *Facebook* and in sites such as http://www.impantokratoros.gr/8D2A12EF.en.aspx [last visit: 11/7/2012].

However, this enthusiastic engagement with the virtual world of the internet, as well as other economic activities, undermines the ideal separation of Athos from the secular world, while raising moral dilemmas regarding the exploitation of the land, the sharp rise of religious tourism and its impact on monastic life, and the importation of new technologies, such as heavy machinery and electric generators, as well as issues of funding, taxation, and the status of monastic properties outside Athos. Eleseos and Papaghiannis identified as the main ecological problem the desertification of the land, a consequence of the exploitation of the forest by extensive logging (1994: 51-4). They also observe that the introduction of telecommunications, water pipes, machines, and electrical generators into the peninsula 'threaten[s] the calmness, form and function of the environment… The pollution of the space from concrete and liquid waste could be out of control' (*Ibid*: 43, my translation from Greek). On the other hand, there are also concerns about the external conduct of the monasteries, as EU funding

represents another problem in relation to the rule of the *Avaton*, the prohibition of females from the peninsula because, traditionally, it is thought to be the land of the Virgin Mary (Paganopoulos 2007: 123-126). For the monks, the prohibition is a matter of tradition and identity, as the rule highlights their disconnection from the secular world. But while most monasteries continue receiving funding, they protested against discussions that took place in 2002 and 2003 about the constitutional rights of women to enter all European sites, since they pay taxes to their government and subsequently to the EU, which funds the Athonian monasteries. The problem is not resolved. Women are still not allowed to enter, despite the funding that most monasteries continue to receive.

Despite the *Avaton*, only in the 20th century there have been six trespasses by women: in 1948, rebel women of the 'Democratic Army' looked for a shelter; in 1954, in two incidences a woman journalist and a Byzantine historian illegally entered for research purposes; in 1969, five tourists, and in 1989 a German couple, also entered for a swim; and more recently, in January 9th 2008, six women led by the MP Amanatidou-Pashalidou of the left-wing political party SYRIZA climbed over the fence in front of the Greek media, in protest against the claims of four monasteries over land and estates in mainland Greece (*metochia*, monastic properties outside Athos), which were donated to them in the past by Byzantine and Ottoman endorsements, but which have been disputed since the inclusion of Athos in the Greek border of 1912. The latter case in 2008 anticipated a wave of revelations and scandals in the Greek media in 2009, about financial and legal irregularities in several exchanges of land and properties. These included the lake Vistonida, and other endorsements which were illegally

exchanged between the monastery of Vatopaidi and members of the Greek government, acting a ‘friends’ of the abbot (Paganopoulos 2009: 375).

In response to the crisis, in December 2008 the Holy Committee of Athos and the Patriarch Vartholomeos asked the abbot to resign from his post. However, the abbot strategically only resigned from his administrative authority as the head of the council of elders, but did not resign from his ‘spiritual duties’ (*pneumatika kathikonta*), thus, essentially remaining the father of the community. Here we see a practical application of the structural separation of administrative from spiritual relationships, tasks, times, spaces, and hierarchies, was used by the abbot to strategically retain his authority over the monks. The Greek state prosecutor then called the abbot and the monk acting as the head of treasury of Vatopaidi, along with the judge Maria Psalti, to be tried in 2009 over neglect of their duties. They were handed a fifteen month jail sentence with a three year parole [Greek newspaper *Eleutherotypia* 18/5/09, and 9/10/2009]. Following further revelations, the abbot was recalled to Athens, on Tuesday 27 December 2010, to be temporary imprisoned.

Athos is a sacred place that is paradoxically both *liminal* and contested at the same time: a uniquely Christian Orthodox, international Potlatch, geographically situated on a cross-road between three continents, functioning as a sacred bridge that offers a number of paths from earth to heaven. It is a ‘free gift’ to Orthodox pilgrims from all over the world, offering personal salvation from a profane world of self-interest and economic insecurity (*see* also Parry 1986: 466-469, on the direct association of capitalism to the Christian notion of a ‘free gift’). The

political and financial tensions between the Greek state and Vatopaidi show how: 'although under capitalism, sexuality and the economy *appear* to have become separate from each other, yet the links between them are innumerable, and both spheres remain significant in the production and reproduction of social reality (Padgug 1979: 16, cited in Caplan 1987: 19). On Athos, these links morally undermine the tradition of virginity while raising ethical questions in respect to the conduct of some monasteries outside Athos, as well as the rise of religious tourism, the ecological desertification of the forest, the political and financial involvement of 'cosmopolitan' institutions in monastic life, among other issues.

The New Zealots of Esfigmenou

'In Orthodoxy the "two worlds" remain separate yet connected, but unequal and asymmetric, for while the laity by a positive effort can transcend the limitations of their flaws through fasting and piety [...] the monastics have chosen the "elevated" path, and an increasing involvement in the "world of the flesh" must be negatively evaluated' (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991:16-17)

Inevitably, the way of dealing with contemporary issues, such as the above, divides the republic in terms of how the monks should re-adjust their lives. As already discussed, the young Vatopaidians enthusiastically continue to grasp the opportunities that the world offers, funding and technology to name a few. But this enthusiastic engagement with the worldly world is seen by other monks, such as the monks of the neighbouring Esfigmenou, as a 'betrayal' of the 'true

faith' (*alithini pistis*) of the 'sacred tradition' (*iera paradoseis)*. This is generally expressed within the wider 'matter of faith' (*thema pisteos*) regarding the application and uses of time inside the monasteries. In some monasteries, as in Vatopaidi, the monks use a double way of counting time, following both the 'old' Julian calendar (*palaio imerologio*) for the liturgical life of the monastery that takes place in the night according to the canonical hours of the Divine Liturgy, and in the 'worldly hours' of the day (*kosmikes ores*) the 'new calendar' (*neo imerologio*) for their external dealings with 'cosmopolitan centres' (*kosmika kentra*) outside Athos. But for Esfigmenou, the 'old calendar' is as much a matter of identity and tradition, as well as a flaming political matter.

The issue goes back to the inclusion of Athos in the Greek border, as in 1923-4 the Greek King and the Patriarchate ordered the monasteries to replace the 'old' Julian calendar with the secular Gregorian calendar. Initially, all the monasteries protested against this change, because they feared that it would affect their way of life. They collectively ceased to commemorate the 'Ecumenical' Patriarch in their prayers according to their vows, with the exception of the monks of Vatopaidi, who adopted the Gregorian calendar without further protests. By 1926-7, the rest of the monasteries also compromised, with the exception of Esfigmenou, whose monks since then continued using only the Julian calendar. Thus, from the very beginning of the issue concern, Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou represented the two extreme oppositions regarding the change of the calendar.

Visible from afar in the sea, hanging from the tower, blown by the wind like a loose red and black tongue with a human skull drawn on it, Esfigmenou's famous

black banner calls for ‘ORTHODOXY OR DEATH’. At the harbour, outside the monastery’s high walls lay a pile of high-tech rubbish: broken computers, TV sets, radios, and mobile phones. They were brought by visitors as gifts to the monks, but were rejected, because their barcodes were marked by the number of the Beast 6-6-6. In a symbolic act of denial, they threw them out of their highest tower. The broken gifts remain on the shore as a testament to the monastery’s uncompromising beliefs and way of life. The monastery’s gate rarely opens. It remains shut, just like the heart of the monks to the world outside its medieval walls. According to the monks, it will only open at the Second Coming.

The black flag was raised in 1973 in protest to the then Patriarch Athenagoras’s effort to reunite the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in the spirit of the greater international project called ‘*Ecumenism’*, by lifting the *anathemas* (‘curses’) against the Pope during the Great Schism of 1054. But in Esfigmenou, this project threatens the purity of their ‘true faith’ in a polluted world of contact: technological, sexual, commercial, cultural, and most importantly, religious contact with the non-Orthodox Other: ‘*Ecumenism*, precisely, is the theory that there is no true faith’ [personal communication with monk of Esfigmenou]. In protest, the monks ceased again to commemorate the Patriarch in their prayers, but more importantly, stopped sending a representative to the central authority of the *Holy Committee* of Mount Athos, thus, cutting all communication with the other monasteries. For them, this ‘betrayal’ is a sign of the end of time, expressed in various prophecies about an imminent end, which identify the Pope with the Antichrist, as prophesized by St. John’s *Apocalypse* (Paganopoulos 2007: 128).

The Esfigmenites accuse the Vatopaidian elders of receiving the 'Devil's money' from 'cosmopolitan' centres for their personal benefit. According to the monks of Esfigmenou, the Vatopaidians in exchange for their co-operation with the 'antichrist Pope' and 'Masonic centres' such as the EU, are willing to negotiate the rule of *Avaton* in order to make Athos a 'hotel'. They also accuse them of importing a 'Latin' type of monasticism, based on frequent confession and Holy Communion [from personal communication with priest-monk of Esfigmenou]. Unlike the Vatopaidians who confess and receive the Holy Communion every fortnight, the monks in Esfigmenou receive the Holy Communion only once every two week, and rarely confess. The monks of Esfigmenou consider the Vatopaidian emphasis on obedience as a way to deceive the young monks. For this reason, while most of the Vatopaidians were ordained at the young age of 25 years old, in Esfigmenou tonsures are forbidden for men who are younger than 35 years old. This reflects on Esfigmenou's population, dominated by middle-aged and older men. Furthermore, while most of the Vatopaidians arrived in groups ('companions') from Cyprus, attracted by the charisma and teachings of Joseph the Vatopaidian, most monks of Esfigmenou arrived individually from all over the world, attracted by the reputation of Esfigmenou as the 'last tower of zealots' which offers them the means for personal redemption from a past life of sin [from personal communication with monks]. The different motivations for joining each institution reflects on their respective social organization: unlike the highly organized environment of Vatopaidi, centralized around the absolute power of its abbot and dominated by Greek Cypriots, Esfigmenou was a segregated community divided in seven groups of monks and visitors alike in terms of ethnicity and language, while the abbot's authority was diminished, as each group

functioned according to its own rules, language, timetables, and customs. In the absence of 'spiritual ties', as conceptualized in Vatopaidi and other monasteries, the abbot of Esfigmenou was not the 'spiritual father' of all the monks, but only *a* 'spiritual father'.

Zealotism is a type of monasticism based on a semi-hermetic way of life that goes back to the deserts in Egypt and Palestine. In imitation of the early hermits, it is based on a strict way of life, including sleep deprivation, *xyrofagia* (eating only 'dry food'), absolute poverty, and isolation. Most zealots live in autonomous cells, shared between two to three monks who are led by an elder. But they are generally spread everywhere on Athos, some live isolated in monasteries, as in Simonopetra (5 zealot monks) and Dochiariou (3), others in isolated 'deserts', such as Kausokalyvia (in 2002, there were about 20 zealots) and the Desert of Kapsala near Karyes (30 zealots). I even met an old zealot left in Vatopaidi, an 80 year-old monk who had lived there before the arrival of Joseph and his 'companion' in 1987. Significantly, both Joseph the Hesychast and Joseph the Vatopaidian were also zealots. In other words, zealotism is a personal choice for a stricter way of life. However, the new zealot monks of Esfigmenou differ both in terms of interpreting the aims of zealotism in respect to monastic life, and in terms of the politicisation of zealotism inside Esfigmenou in direct association to the international ultra-Orthodox sect of the 'Old Calendarist Church'.

The ideal of monastic life as a form of 'self-sacrifice', set in the *liminal* space between life and death, is not achieved in terms of the separation from worldly and emotional ties as in Vatopaidi, but in terms of self-martyrdom as an example

for the world to follow. This is instead achieved through extreme *filoponia* (meaning to be a 'friend of pain'), a value illustrated by the self-imposed poverty of the monastery's poor living conditions as a kind of collective martyrdom. However, this approach to monasticism is criticized by the Vatopaidians, who believe that the semi-impoverished environment of Esfigmenou is not a matter of tradition, as the zealots claim, but a wrong interpretation of 'true faith': 'To be a friend of pain [*filoponos*] is a virtue in monastic life. But pain, as our holy father Joseph the Vatopaidian taught us, is the *means* to achieve divination [*theosis*], not the aim of monastic life. It is not the means to be proud, because pride in itself is a sinful passion' [Vatopaidian priest-monk 6/10/02]. In other words, while for the Vatopaidians the ideal of virginity through frequent, collective practices of faith offers the *means* in achieving salvation, for the monks of Esfigmenou virginity is a personal matter; it is the *end*, embodied in their politicized value of 'martyrdom' as a public manifestation of 'true faith'.

The fundamentalist ideology is publicly manifested by the struggle and 'martyrdom' in the words of the monks of Esfigmenou, against the Athonian authorities. In response to the political activism of the new zealots, the Holy Committee and the Patriarchate issued three eviction notices to the brotherhood in 1974, 1979, and more recently, in February 2003. In the notice, the Holy Committee did not recognize the status of the monks in Esfigmenou, calling them 'occupiers' who break the 'harmony' of Athos, because of their extremist beliefs and their connections to secular, far-right, religious groups in Greece (ultra-Orthodox organizations such as 'St Basil' and 'ELKIS') while keeping a 'cosmopolitan' attitude towards monastic life (Eviction Notice 2003: 5-18). In the

same year, the authorities issued an embargo which cut all connections to the monastery, including buses, boats, and footpaths guarded by Greek policemen wearing EU badges. They also cut the supply of food, petrol, medicine, and visitors.

Still, despite the zealous rejection of new technologies as marked by the Beast, the monks use the internet to make their voices heard in the world whilst they are 'under siege' [www.esfigmenou.com is the monastery's official site, but there are more than 500 sites in reference to the monastery in *Google*, last visit: 2/7/12]. They also publish their own magazine *Voanerges* with articles in five languages (Greek, Serbian, Russian, Romanian, and English). The magazine is distributed through a network of 'Old Calendarist' churches, shops, and institutions all over the Orthodox world. In this way, the monastery's reputation becomes the central motivation for someone to join this particular monastery: in 1986, Esfigmenou had 38 monks (Mantzaridis 1997: 172) but at the time of my fieldwork in 2002, I counted about 130 monks. This rapid increase in the number of monks (and in recent years, visitors) shows that ironically, the longer the embargo lasts, the greater the world-wide reputation Esfigmenou becomes, and more and more visitors and potential monks will find their way into the monastery through secret paths in the forest.

Conclusion

Monastic life on Athos offers a rite of passage to the afterlife, via a journey to one of its twenty monasteries, on the basis of the rule of the *Avaton*: the prohibition of women and cattle from the peninsula. The *Avaton* separates the internal, 'spiritual', 'virginal', communal, and selfless ways of life inside the monasteries, from the materialist and individualist world of flesh and self-interest outside Athos. The *Avaton* functions as both a physical and a mental border that each man has to cross on his striving towards this ideal of virginity, through the social life of the monastery, including its rules, further prohibitions, timetables, and internal hierarchy. It makes the peninsula a sacred place, offering a life-long pilgrimage to *liminal* groups of would-be monks formed *on the way to a monastery*. The essay's aim was to highlight the importance of movement in the reproduction of the population of the brotherhoods, in order to show how the personal history, motivations, and experience of transformation of the monks are fused within each institution's tradition. Further, I also wished to briefly discuss the impact of the younger generation of monks on Athonian life, particularly regarding contemporary issues, such as the nationalization and reputation of the monasteries, their problematic relation to the Greek state, the introduction and uses of new technologies, the rise of religious tourism, the disputes over the 'new' calendar and EU funding, all of which undermine the tradition of virginity, as well as the geographic isolation of the peninsula.

The essay mapped two different ways of entering into the 'virgin life' of the Mount: in groups of monks called 'companionships' in respect to the majority of monks of Vatopaidi, or individually in respect to the majority of monks of Esfigmenou. The two types of movement correspond to a different set of collective motivations, contrasting ways of travelling, paths, antagonistic ideologies, financial competition, as well as a variety of beliefs, aims, interpretations, practices, timetables, and ways of conduct associated to each monastic institution. The comparison of the contrasting environments between Vatopaidi and Esfigmenou, in relation to their financial and political rivalry over 'matters of faith' (*themata pisteos*), illustrated how a sacred source (i.e. a shrine, an icon, a monastery, or the entire peninsula) is contested between rival groups, as also previously discussed in respect to Christian pilgrimages (Sallnow 1981: 163-182, and Bax 1983: 167-177, 1990: 63-75). In this context, monasteries are not static, a-historical, and homogeneous environments, but arenas in which the collective concept of *a* 'sacred tradition' (*iera paradoseis*) is both contested and evolving through everyday life. Further, despite the moral denouncement of the 'worldly world' as the means of escaping from it, the monasteries are not isolated, but rather fully integrated in the same 'worldly world' the monks morally denounce in their everyday lives, through a network that expands from inside Athos beyond its holy borders to the world. In this dynamic strive, what is thought to be inside is thought to be outside, and vice versa: it is the fusion of the two social bodies in which life becomes meaningful, as well as history is made: in the grey area in-between the ideal and the real; thought and expression; the sacred and the profane.

How we willingly become an unwilling part of history

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