

Philanthropy in Constantinopolitan Monasteries and Their Financial Resources in the Palaiologan Period

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Abstract

The institution of monasticism was a vital component of the Byzantine social and economic life especially in terms of their philanthropic functions. Almost entire Byzantine society was attached to monastic foundations which satisfied various needs of the destitute people depending on their economic bases throughout the empire's history. Therefore, the visibility of the institution of monasticism within the Byzantine society was mainly based on its philanthropic activities and charitable institutions that built the bridge between people from different social strata. After all, these philanthropic activities and institutions necessitated a strong economic power to remain to function. However, the economic hardships within the Palaiologan period had a negative impact even on the wealthiest monasteries of the late Byzantine Empire and their philanthropic activities. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the nature of the financial resources of Constantinopolitan monasteries that made philanthropic activities possible in order to have a better comprehension of the Late Byzantine socio-economic history.

Keywords: Philanthropy, Constantinopolitan Monasteries, Monastic Economy, Palaiologan.

Palaiologan Döneminde Konstantinopolis Manastırlarının Hayır Kurumları ve Finansal Kaynakları

Öz

Manastır sistemi özellikle hayırseverlik işlevi açısından Bizans sosyal ve ekonomik yaşamı için hayatidir. Neredeyse tüm Bizans toplumu imparatorluk tarihi boyunca ihtiyaç sahibi insanların çeşitli ihtiyaçlarını kendi ekonomik temellerine dayanarak karşılayan manastır kuruluşlarına mensuptu. Bu yüzden Bizans toplumu içinde manastır sistemi farklı toplumsal katmanlardaki insanların arasında köprü işlevi gören yardımseverlik ve hayır kuruluşları vasıtasıyla gözlemlenebilir. Bununla birlikte tüm bu yardım etkinliklerinin gerçekleştirilebilmesi ve hayır kuruluşlarının görevlerini yerine getirebilmeleri için güçlü ekonomik temellere ihtiyaç vardır. Oysaki Palaiologan dönemindeki ekonomik zorluklar geç Bizans döneminin en varlıklı manastırlarını ve onların etkinliklerini bile olumsuz etkilemiştir. Dolayısıyla Konstantinopolis Manastırlarının bu hayır işlerini mümkün kılan finansal kaynaklarının tabiatını incelemek geç Bizans dönemi sosyo-ekonomik tarihini daha iyi anlamak için gereklidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yardımseverlik, Hayır Kuruluşları, Konstantinopolis Manastırları, Manastır Ekonomisi.

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The greatest monastic center of the Byzantine Empire was Constantinople, and number of monasteries in the city changed throughout the centuries.¹ Alice-Mary Talbot argues that the capital had at least 55 functioning monasteries in the first half of the fifteenth century.² The visibility of the institution of monasticism within the Byzantine society was mainly based on its philanthropic activities and charitable institutions that built the bridge between people from different social strata. However, these activities and institutions necessitated economic power to remain to function. This paper will be focused on the Constantinopolitan Monasteries in the Palaiologan period. In order to have a better comprehension in the institution of the Late Byzantine monasticism, it is vital to analyze its financial base and its philanthropic function together. Therefore, in this paper, the financial resources of the monasteries will be examined along with their charitable activities and institutions.

Since the Byzantine society was far from being purely materialistic, and almost entire society was attached to the institution of monasticism,³ the Byzantine monasteries had an important role in terms of their philanthropic functions and their relationship with the outside world. As Demetrios J. Constantelos emphasizes, the significance of hospitality within the monastic life strengthened the argument that “Byzantine monasticism was not antisocial or indifferent to the plight of this world.”⁴ Monks were taught to be “*philotheoi* (lovers of God), *philoptochoi* (lovers of the poor), and *philanthropoi* (lovers of mankind).”⁵ The reflection of this reasoning can be seen through the philanthropic practices of monasteries, such as food distribution at the gates of the monastic complex, providing care for elderly and sick, and accommodating travelers and those who were in need. The various needs of the destitute people were satisfied by several monastic institutions throughout the empire’s history.⁶ Yet, the main question is whether these monasteries maintained their position as caregivers and protectors of the poor during the Palaiologan period and another one may be how the circumstances of the time affected their philanthropic activities.

The economic hardships within the Palaiologan period had also an impact on the monasteries and their activities. 15th century traveler Clavijo reported that once the great churches and monasteries of the city were in ruin when he visited it.⁷ The land loss that was experienced by the empire led to a material decline of the monasteries.⁸ These establishments possessed vast lands throughout the empire and the lands that were lost in Europe and Asia Minor included many monastic properties. A land loss meant the loss of revenues and consequently a decrease in the ability to perform philanthropic activities for the monasteries' part. On the other hand, the monasteries managed to maintain some of these charity activities and continued to be an important component of social life in the capital of the Empire, especially in a period of increased poverty and destitute. The nature of the financial resources that made philanthropic activities possible will be analyzed in the following section of this paper. In this part, the focus will be solely on the acts of charity and some of the charitable institutions that we know existed within the given period.

The institutionalized form of philanthropic activities, i.e. charitable institutions, was consisted of hospitals, hospices (*xenones*), orphanages, homes for elderly, and the like. The charitable institutions can be considered as important instruments for monasteries' interaction with the outside world and for the fulfillment of the ideal of being the lover of mankind and the lover of the poor. They became a

¹ Peter Charanis, “The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society.” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*25, 64-65.

² Alice-Mary Talbot, “Monasticism in Constantinople in the Final Decades of the Byzantine Empire.” *550th Anniversary of the Istanbul University International Byzantine and Ottoman Symposium (XVth Century)*, 295.

³ Peter Charanis, “The Monastic Properties and the State in the Byzantine Empire.” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*4, 118.

⁴ Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1968, p. 75.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶ Charanis, “The Monk.” p. 82.

⁷ Ruy Gonzalez De Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo to the court of Timour*, at Samarcand, A.D. 1403-6. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 46.

⁸ Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Poverty, Society and Philanthropy in the Late Medieval Greek World*. New York: The Speros B. Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism, 1992, p. 16.

prominent part of the Byzantine society from very early on. However, the information on the condition of these institutions in the Palaiologan period is very limited. Yet, we know that the renovation process initiated by Michael VIII Palaiologos and carried on by his son Andronikos II Palaiologos included the reparation of obsolete hospitals in Constantinople as well.⁹ The wife of Michael VIII, Empress Theodora Palaiologina, restored Monastery of Lips and its adjoining hospital. In the *typikon*, Theodora gave a detailed account of the operation of the hospital with its financial resources and its management.¹⁰ The hospital was equipped to serve twelve female patients with the assistance of three male physicians, yet ‘no women were working at the Lips’ as medical *personnel*.¹¹ In addition to physicians, there were a priest, an assistant, a nurse, a head pharmacist, six attendants, two chief druggists, a blood-letter, three servants, a cook, and a laundress working in the hospital. Timothy S. Miller interprets the modest size of the Lips hospital as an indicator of a change in patient profile, i.e. they began to target solely the very poor due to the impossibility of caring all segments of the society within this setting.¹² Thus, Miller emphasizes, middle-class patients preferred to visit physicians at their private practices.¹³ On the other hand, the hospital of Lips Monastery was well provisioned with sufficient amounts of wheat, wine, food, wood, oil, salt, barley or barley-water, flax-seed oil and the medical material necessary for treatment such as salves and bandages. In addition, mattresses and bedcovers were provided by the hospital and were changed annually.

The most prominent charitable activity during this period was alms and food distribution to the people who were in need at the gates of the monasteries. Giving alms and food to the poor had always been a substantial part of the philanthropic activities of the monasteries and had been performed on various occasions. At the end of each day, the left-overs were distributed to the needy and this daily practice of alms-giving was a rule for most of the monasteries.¹⁴ Moreover, this practice had also been performed in ecclesiastical holidays like Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost and in special occasions such as feast day of the patron saint of the monastery and annual commemoration ceremonies of the people who were mentioned in the *typikon*. For example, Anthony of Novgorod mentioned that Prodromos monastery provided food for the visitors three times each year, on the two major feasts of St. John the Baptist and on Easter.¹⁵ Furthermore, according to the *typikon* of the Lips Monastery, Theodora Palaiologina ordered a distribution of three *modioi* of bread, six *trachea nomismata* and sufficient gold coins for purchasing provisions that were in accordance with the seasonal conditions to the poor at the gate of the monastery on the birthday and on the feast day of St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of the monastery. However, she handed over the decision concerning how some other feast days should be celebrated to the superior and leading nuns.¹⁶ Another example of the practice of alms and food distribution comes from the Monastery of Bebaia Elpis where this practice had a prominent role. According to the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis, the foundress of the monastery Theodora Synadene, nephew of Michael VIII Palaiologos, stated that six *annonikoi modioi* of wheaten bread and four *tetartia* of wine should be distributed to the poor at the gate of the monastery in the feast day of the Mother of God.¹⁷ Moreover, she also ordered to celebrate the commemorations of her parents, herself and her children by distributing four *annonikoi modioi* of wheaten bread and three *tetartia* of wine to the poor at the gate of the monastery. Furthermore, she stated that the commemoration of her husband should be celebrated exactly in the same way as her parents. For the commemoration of her husband, she also wanted food to be distributed to the nuns of the convent in addition to distribution to

⁹ Timothy S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, p. 192-193.

¹⁰ John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, eds. *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000, p. 1281.

¹¹ Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*, p. 201.

¹² Ibid., 200.; for counter-argument: Esra Güzel Erdoğan, Ayla Ödekan, and Nevra Necipoğlu. "II. Andronikos Dönemi Konstantinopolis Manastırlar'nda Philanthropia." *İTÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 6, no. 2 (December 2009), p. 38.

¹³ Ibid., p. 199-200.

¹⁴ Constantelos. *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p. 77.

¹⁵ George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Washington, District of Columbia: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984, 341.

¹⁶ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1277.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 1555.

the poor at the gate without specifying the amounts. While she left the decision of her own commemoration to her daughter, she ordered that her sons would be commemorated in the same way as their parents.¹⁸ For many monasteries, it was emphasized that instead of accumulating a surplus, they should distribute the excess to the poor. This advice can also be found in the *typikon* of the Monastery of Bebaia Elpis. Theodora Synadene strictly forbade all nuns to store the leftovers from the daily meals or to keep them for the next day for any reason since the poor people were suffering from starvation and severe famine.¹⁹ Thus, we can assume that there was a daily distribution of food to the poor at the gate of the monastery. Moreover, she stated that people who had endowed and would make more donations to the convent should be commemorated, yet neither the amounts of alms and food nor the type of charitable distribution was included in the *typikon*. However, the commemoration of her nephew John Palaiologos was an exception. Since he made large donations to the convent, he should be commemorated with the distribution of four measures of wine to the poor at the gate once a year.²⁰ After Theodora Synadene passed away, her daughter, Euphrosyne, ordered a new *typikon* to be organized. In this second *typikon*, she stated that after a nun passed away, a liturgy should be celebrated daily for forty days and within this time, her portion of food should be distributed to the poor at the gate of the monastery. Moreover, for the same nun who passed away, a commemoration should be performed once a year. She also stated that a general commemoration should be performed either on the day after the feast day of St. Nicholas or after the feast day of the Mother of God, and one *annonikos modios* of bread and one measure of wine should be distributed to the needy at the gate of the convent.²¹ Yet another example of alms and food distribution comes from the Monastery of Auxentios. The founder, the Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, ordered commemorations for several people including some family members and the monks.²² As in the above-mentioned examples, bread, wine and coins should be distributed to the poor at the gate of the monastery. Moreover, for the celebration of the patronal feast on the 8th of November, the superior should invite monks from other monasteries and food and wine should be given to the poor at the gate. Another distribution should be made on the feast day of the miracle of Michael, on the 6th of September.²³ Michael VIII also ordered that when the year comes to an end, the remaining wealth of the monastery should be spent for ransoming of prisoners, supporting orphans, and helping "destitute maidens" to marry, rather than accumulating a surplus in the coffers.²⁴ Moreover, to put an emphasis on the importance of charitable activities, Michael VIII asked in the *typikon* rhetorically "[h]ow can they [the monks] enrich themselves while others in the world are poor and worn out by the deprivation of necessities?"²⁵

In addition to hospitals, *xenon*, orphanage, and homes for the elderly were among the charitable institutions that can be considered as an important component of the philanthropic activities of the monasteries. However, during the Palaiologan period, many of these charitable institutions fell into ruins and only a few survived. Thus, for the period in question, we do not have much information about the condition and even the existence of these institutions. We do know, on the other hand, that the *xenon* of Sampson existed during the Latin period.²⁶ There are several arguments about the fate of this institution and one of them argues that the *xenon* was a part of a monastery named after the St. Sampson and maintained its existence until the end of the empire. However, one claim suggests that the institution was demolished by Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos during the restoration process of the city walls.²⁷ In their article, Esra Erdoğan, Ayla Ödekan and Nevra Necipoğlu noted that within their analysis of 39 monasteries, only six of them are known to have hospitals or *xenones* and only five survived after 1261: Lips Monastery, Pantokrator Monastery – thought to lose its function after 1261, Panteleemon Monastery, Pammakaristos Monastery, Petra Ioannes Prodromos Monastery, and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1556.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 1549.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 1562.

²¹ Ibid., p. 1565.

²² Ibid., p. 1228-1229.

²³ Ibid., p. 1230.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 1226-27.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 1226.

²⁶ Constantelos, *Society and Philanthropy*, 120.; and Erdoğan, "II. Andronikos Dönemi.", p. 37.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

Stoudios.²⁸ The information on the existing orphanages (*orphanotropheion*), on the other hand, was even more limited. We know only the possibility of their existence through the presence of the office of *orphanotrophos*.²⁹ The people who were in charge of the orphanages were chosen among the most prominent members among the public servants including church members. The existence of an office in charge of the institution suggests that some of the orphanages were still in function. However, these orphanages were not necessarily adjacent to a monastery. Thus, it cannot be given as an example to the philanthropic institutions that monasteries hosted. Moreover, the office of *orphanotrophos* ceased to exist shortly after 1342.³⁰ Care for the elderly was, with or without a dedicated institution, an important part of the monastic life. People with old age often came to monasteries to spend the rest of their time until the last day of their lives. In addition to those people who chose to become a part of a certain monastery at their old age, there was a charitable institution called *gerotheropheion* that offered care for aged people. As a part of his renovation process, Michael VIII Palaiologos established several old age homes in the capital, but there is no information about these institutions.³¹ It is known that the Pantokrator Monastery had an old age home for 24 four people, yet the fate of this institution after 1261 is unknown.³² Furthermore, the Monastery of Saint George did have an old age home that maintained its function in the 14th century.³³ However, “[m]onastic complexes were able to function, and to support cultural and philanthropic activities, only if they had a strong financial base.”³⁴ The end of Latin rule over Constantinople in 1261 can be considered as an important point for the institution of Byzantine monasticism and it will be beneficial to review the process after 1261 in order to understand how the old monasteries regained and the new ones established their economic bases.

A revival and restoration process had begun when the Byzantines re-established their rule over Constantinople in 1261. The emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos initiated several rehabilitation projects throughout the capital. These projects included reparations of the city walls, palaces – specifically the Great Palace and Blachernae, various public buildings, churches, and monasteries.³⁵ Later on, Andronikos II Palaiologos took over his father’s endeavor by maintaining the imperial support for rehabilitation. Moreover, during his reign, imperial family members and aristocrats undertook the responsibility for establishing new foundations and recovering the old ones. The Constantinopolitan monasteries and their subsequent philanthropic institutions were vital components of these efforts. The emperor Michael, being quite generous to the monasteries, gave their properties back, and even endowed new ones through imperial chrysobulls. Moreover, Andronikos II took it a step further, and enriched the monasteries during his rule.³⁶ An interesting characteristic of these imperial donations was the fact that they did not necessitate any alienation of state properties since they were primarily ‘the transfer of monastic property from one monastery to another.’³⁷ On the other hand, the empire lost its Anatolian territories in its entirety except for a few fortified cities, and most of its European provinces in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Clavijo stated that the church of Peribelo, dedicated to St. Mary, used to have thirty Grecian castles and cities in the empire, and it used to have privileges over these properties, which have been given by the emperor Romanus.³⁸ However, the monastery might have lost these properties until the time when Clavijo visited the city. Consequently, the monasteries were deeply affected by these changes of the borders since they possessed properties far beyond the vicinity of the capital. This process resulted in a decrease in their wealth.

²⁸ Erdoğan, “II. Andronikos Dönemi.” p. 37.

²⁹ Constantelos, *Poverty, Society and Philanthropy*, p. 129.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³² Erdoğan, “II. Andronikos Dönemi.” p. 38-39.

³³ Constantelos, *Poverty, Society and Philanthropy*, p. 131.; and Erdoğan, “II. Andronikos Dönemi.” p. 38-39.

³⁴ Alice-Mary Talbot, “An Introduction to Byzantine Monasticism.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 12, no. 2, p. 239.

³⁵ Alice-Mary Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII.” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47, *passim*, p. 243-261.

³⁶ Erdoğan, “II. Andronikos Dönemi.” p. 29.

³⁷ Kostas Smyrlis, The State, the Land, and Private Property. Confiscating Church and Monastic Properties in the Palaiologan Period, in *Church and Society in Late Byzantium*, ed. D. Angelov (Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo, 2009, p.60.)

³⁸ Clavijo, p. 31.

The invasion of the Byzantine territories by foreign powers such as the Ottomans and the Serbians was not the only threat against the prosperity of the monasteries in the Palaiologan Period. The Byzantine central authority also threatened them. Despite the fact that the first two Palaiologan emperors attempted to rehabilitate the monasteries by restoring their properties confiscated earlier, the advance of the enemies, in particular of the Ottomans, triggered the state to take military measures against them.³⁹ Consequently, there was a tension concerning the control over land and revenues between the state and the great ecclesiastical landlords, including the church, and in particular the monasteries at the time.⁴⁰ There are two contradictory opinions about the impact of the economic power of monasteries on state finances. Peter Charanis argues that the accumulation of vast lands in the monastic properties which were also enjoyed various exemptions and privileges resulted in a decrease in ‘the general welfare of the Byzantine society’, and caused the reduction of the financial power of the state.⁴¹ However, according to Kostis Smyrlis, the impact of large monasteries on the economy has been rather beneficial since monasteries led to an increase in the agricultural production which stimulated commercial activities and consequently a population growth.⁴² Although rural monasteries, especially one in Chalkidiki and eastern Macedonia, were primarily subjected to this tension⁴³, the Constantinopolitan institutions could not be totally free from the danger of confiscation by the secular authority.

A noteworthy example of the properties of the Patriarchate of Constantinople comes from the second half of the fourteenth century. The emperor John V attempted to settle soldiers on the villages of Oikonomeion and Paspapas in Thrace belonging to Hagia Sophia, and asked for the permission of the patriarch in 1367. He was not sure whether his project would be successful or not, therefore, he explained to the patriarch that these lands would remain under his authority only for a year. If the project would serve the purpose, then, he would compensate the church with properties at equal value, but if not, the church would be restored by its same properties.⁴⁴ However, the offer of the emperor was rejected by the Patriarch Philotheus basing on the argument that he was just a guardian, and had no authority over the ecclesiastical properties since ‘the property of the church should not be rented to anyone among the powerful, not even to the emperor.’⁴⁵ Although the synod, which was gathered only for this matter, supported the patriarch’s decision, they would not refuse the emperor easily since he had at first place donated these properties to the church, and he had the authority to take them back.⁴⁶ Having referred the canon law restricting alienation of church’s properties, the synod neither gave the villages up nor concealed its approval. Consequently, until after the Ottoman victory at Maritza in 1371, John V suspended his plans. Then, he confiscated half of the monastic properties and ceded them to soldiers.⁴⁷

In addition to foreign invasion of the lands and threat of confiscation, ‘the abuses of *charistike*’⁴⁸ had been a threat for private monasteries until the middle of the twelfth century when ‘the evolution of the independent monastery’ was completed with ‘the revival of the *ephoreia*’⁴⁹. Since the monastery founders of the Palaiologan period were well aware of the dangers that their foundations would have to face, they took several important precautions concerning the administration and the protection of the monasteries with their properties, and stated their commands in the *typikons* of related foundations.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴¹ Charanis, “The Monastic Properties and the State.” p. 118.

⁴² Kostis Smyrlis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*. Paris: Association des Amis de Centre d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2006, p. 247.

⁴³ Kostis, *The State, the Land and Private Property*, p. 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁵ John Philip Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987, p. 263.

⁴⁶ Kostis, *The State, the Land and Private Property*, p. 62-63.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, p. 263.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 214.; “charistike: (1) program for the concession of ecclesiastical institutions to benefactors unrelated to the original founders; (2) an individual concession under this program” in Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, p. 271.

⁴⁹ “ephoreia: administrative charge of an ephor” in Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, p. 272.

The emphasis over the independence and autonomy of the monasteries, and the appointment of *ephoros*⁵⁰ in order to supervise and protect the monasteries were remarkable points in the *typikons*. The first example concerning the status and defense of the monasteries comes from the *typikon* of Monastery of Lips. In the *typikon*, Theodora Palaiologina emphasizes her wish that the monastery *remains* absolutely independent without being connected to any other convent in any way except for the hospital which she built nearby. She feels the necessity to defend this independence against even the patriarch. Moreover, it is stated that the patriarch has the privilege of being mentioned at the holy services, and the right of making an investigation for spiritual faults. For all other matters, she orders that the nuns should manage all their affairs in accordance with a prescription which would be ordained by her son and the *ephoros* of the monastery, the emperor Andronikos II. She appointed his son as *ephoros* since she thought that the gentle and weak nature of women requires strong protection.⁵¹ Another example can be given from the *typikon* of Monastery of Bebaia Elpis. In the *typikon*, Theodora Synadene was very sensitive about the free status of the convent. She clearly emphasized that the convent should remain completely independent and autonomous, and accused anyone who acts contrarily as impudent and tyrannical. Neither any other convent or church, nor hospice or nothing else could be an exception for her desire of preserving total independence of the convent and its control over its own properties. Theodora named her oldest son as the *ephor* of the convent. After he died, her next oldest son and the descendants of her sons would remain the duty.⁵² The *typikon* of Monastery of Auxentios provides the last example. Emperor Michael VIII surely ordained that the monastery of Auxentios should stay independent and self-governing. Moreover, the monastery should not be charged with any ‘external rule in name and in fact’. By this ‘external rule’, he referred to supervision (*ephoreia*), ‘union with another monastery or as an *epidosis*’, and ‘all other forms of lordship.’ In a similar way with the other monastery founders, the emperor cursed those who might act against the independence of his monastery grievously.⁵³ He essentially explained the reason for this emphasis over the independence and autonomy of the monastery with its own properties. He considered the opposite as slavery, which was ‘a violent intrusion of tribal law’ into the lives. Furthermore, according to him, freedom is the most significant feature for intelligent people, and it supplies ‘the stability of the monastery’ and its progress. In other words, the monasteries that did not enjoy this status of freedom are destined to impoverishment since their properties are distributed [by their masters].⁵⁴

The fortune of a large Byzantine monastery consisted of various elements, and each of them had a particular function in the economy of the institution.⁵⁵ The moveable possessions form the first category which usually includes the attested objects such as icons, crosses, reliquaries, sacred vases, fabrics, lighting, books, property titles, tools, housekeeping objects, stockpiles of grain and pulses, miscellaneous materials, silver, and boats.⁵⁶ Moreover, the monasteries might keep sacred objects in their inventories, which were considered as the wealth of a monastery, and they were more visible than the earthly possessions.⁵⁷ It was possible to be benefited from the commercial value of these objects in times of economic difficulties or just to pay debts. According to the *typikon* of Monastery of Lips, the convent was permitted to pawn one of the holy treasures if the revenues of the convent decreased as a result of the enemy attack or environmental conditions. It was, additionally, stated that the convent should redeem the same vessel or a better one when they are capable.⁵⁸ The great monasteries, especially the Athonite monasteries, had very often ownership of boats for fishing in the sea, in lakes and rivers.⁵⁹ However, despite the fact that Lips Monastery owned a fish pond, the *typikon* did not

⁵⁰ “ephor: overseer(s) of a religious institution without economic rights of exploitation” in Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, p. 272.

⁵¹ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1265-66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 1527-1528, 1529.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 1217-1218.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1218.

⁵⁵ Kostis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁸ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1279.

⁵⁹ Kostis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*, p. 106.

provide any information concerning the possession of boats.⁶⁰ Another thing that the monasteries kept in their inventories was the cash, sometimes even in huge amounts. In some cases, in addition to monastery's money, the monks entrusted their possession sums to the inventory.⁶¹ However, for the Constantinopolitan Monasteries, this was not an operative practice during the Palaiologan period. When it comes to the money belonging to the monastery, it is possible to separate the income into two categories as regular and irregular. This income was put in reserve in order to cover the needs of the monastery.⁶² The provisioning of the needs of monastic communities, including clothing and diet, were clearly organized by the *typikons*.

The other category that constituted the fortune of a large Byzantine monastery consisted of unmovable properties or real estates. In fact, the land was the most important source of income of the monasteries. This could include cultivated or uncultivated fields, vineyards, gardens and orchards, olive groves, pastures, and forests. According to Clavijo, there were gardens and vineyards around the monastery of St. John the Baptist,⁶³ and another church called St. John had gardens, fountains, houses and many other things.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Athonite monasteries had saline, docks, rivers, lakes, ponds and other facilities for the fishery⁶⁵ too as sources of income. According to the *typikons*, it is presumably possible to argue that urban monasteries, especially the Constantinopolitan monasteries of the Palaiologan period, did not have abundant sources related to maritime activity and fishery, unlike the Athonite monasteries. Whether they acquired it in time is a question that could not be answered in the scope of this paper. Furthermore, the real estates of these monasteries included several rural and urban buildings such as churches, metropolises, towers, mills, houses, workshops, and inns.⁶⁶ Among the buildings that the monasteries possessed in the countryside, the mills were the most remarkable by their frequency, and had an important place in the fortune of some monasteries.⁶⁷ For example, Lips Monastery had fourteen mills in the countryside at the end of the thirteenth century.⁶⁸ According to several *typikons*, while buildings such as houses and workshops were mostly used as rental properties by the Constantinopolitan monasteries of the Palaiologan period,⁶⁹ it is not easy to argue that whether other structures were used by proprietary monastic communities or they were also for rent. In addition to all of these properties, the domain or the '*metoique*' consisting of various villages was the basic unit of the wealth of all the great monasteries. Domain's geographical features were the most important factor for the goods that it would provide for the proprietor.⁷⁰

According to Kostis Smyrlis, these possessions of a monastery had to provide both what was necessary for the monks and the nuns, and to produce marketable commodities. The concern to ensure a degree of autarky at the monastic establishments was the prime motivation for remarkable efforts to possess various types of monastic properties. Apart from cereals, the effort to cover the basic needs of monks in wine and in fresh or dry vegetables explains why all monasteries cultivated vineyards and gardens. However, it varied from one monastery to another that which types of goods were the most important. The climate and the area where the monastery and its possessions were located had essential roles.⁷¹

The number of monastic properties was naturally quite changeable. There was no upper limit for the income that monasteries could legally possess, but the lower limit for it should correspond with the number of monks or nuns a monastery was sheltering.⁷² 14th century traveler Ibn Battuta reported that

⁶⁰ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1279.

⁶¹ Kostis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*, p. 104.

⁶² Ibid.p.104.

⁶³ Clavijo, p. 31.

⁶⁴ Clavijo, p. 34.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

⁶⁶ Ibid.p.117.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 119.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1279.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 1279.

⁷⁰ Kostis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*, p. 117.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 117.

⁷² Ibid., p. 32.

monasteries assigned funds to supply the various necessities of the community.⁷³ The *typikons* of monasteries provide information concerning not only the organization of the convent, but also its population. For example, at the Monastery of Auxentios, the number of monks was clearly limited to forty. While sixteen of them should engage in the church offices, the others were responsible for the tasks in the monastery and in the fields.⁷⁴ As a second example, the foundress of Monastery of Bebaia Elpis, Theodora Synadene limited the number of the nuns at the convent to thirty,⁷⁵ however, after her death, her daughter Euphrosyne increased it to fifty.⁷⁶ This might be an indicator of the increase in the possessions of the convent which enabled them to include and supply more nuns. The community, as a characteristic of the time, was organized as the choir system. While choir sisters were only responsible for the offices in the church and free from all other tasks and duties⁷⁷, the other part of the convent should be engaged in physical works.⁷⁸ The last example comes from the *typikon* of Lips Monastery. The foundress, Theodora Palaiologina, limited the number of the nuns in the monastery to fifty at most. Thirty of them should concern themselves with the performance of the canonical occupations, and the remaining twenty should take care of several household duties.⁷⁹ Considering these numbers, the monasteries were far from being crowded or even large in terms of their population in comparison with their fortunes.

Kostis Smyrlis argues that although many monasteries kept the rural properties in the first place, the urban possessions also had a certain importance for them. Many small churches, inns, apartment buildings, as well as houses and workshops taking part in city scenes, belonged to wealthy monasteries. These workshops could be tissue shops, perfumeries, bakeries, butcher shops or rowing workshops. The monasteries also owned mills in Constantinople, some of which were associated with bakeries. The maritime scales were also among the urban monastic properties in Constantinople. The owners of the scales where the trade was taking place were responsible for collecting commercial taxes. Moreover, the domains or the *metoques* were organized as the administrative centers of urban possessions for visiting monks. The place of urban buildings in the fortune seems to have varied for reasons that were not always clear.⁸⁰

Most of the properties of monasteries were essentially acquired without *making a payment*. Almost all of the foundations had first received a tremendous amount of initial endowments when they had been established.⁸¹ In other words, the monasteries built their great fortunes especially on the imperial grants which were made to them.⁸² However, this initial endowment was not the only way of possessing properties for these ecclesiastical institutions. Various methods were employed in order to acquire and to increase their possessions. These were, except for the first endowment, the donation and the legacy, the attribution or the *epidosis*⁸³ of monasteries, the *apotagē*⁸⁴ and the *adelphaton*⁸⁵, the purchase, the occupation of empty grounds, the usurpation and investment.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this original heritage generally remained as the most important part of the monastic fortunes.⁸⁷ The Constantinopolitan monasteries of the Palaiologan period generally received their initial endowments from the emperors or the imperial family members who had wanted to make donations. These monasteries had both urban and rural properties, and not only the distribution but also the amount

⁷³ Ebu Abdullah Muhammed Ibn Battuta Tanci, *Ibn Battuta Seyahatnamesi I*, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2000, p. 507.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1223.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1530.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1564.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1539.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1540.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1267.

⁸⁰ Kostis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*, p. 119-120.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸² Charanis, "The Monastic Properties and the State." p. 101.

⁸³ "epidosis: (1) program for the redistribution of economic assets among ecclesiastical institutions; (2) an individual concession under this program" in Thomas, p.272

⁸⁴ "apotagē: gift(s) of property by a postulant to a monastery" in Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, p. 270.

⁸⁵ "adelphaton: monastic prebend(s)" Thomas p. 270

⁸⁶ Kostis, *La Fortune Des Grands Monasteres Byzantins*, p. 132.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

depended on the preferences of founders and benefactors. Many Constantinopolitan monasteries had possessions in distant provinces⁸⁸ such as the Aegean coasts, Bithynia, Macedonia, and Thrace. Moreover, they owned considerable amounts of properties in the capital as well. Although these buildings often consisted of a more important part than rural properties, the image was not 'homogenous'.⁸⁹

The *typikon* of Lips Monastery can be given as the very first example for the analysis of the financial resources of the monasteries. The foundress, Theodora Palaiologina, endowed her foundation with numerous properties in the capital and in the various regions of the empire, including Lopadion, Macedonia, Smyrna, Pergamon, and Nikomedia, in order to cover the needs of the monastic community and twelve patients and twenty-one employees at its hospital. Some of them were given her by the emperor Andronikos II, while she inherited others from her mother, and had bought herself before the foundation of the monastery. The convent had a great variety of possessions, which were located in and around Constantinople, and various kinds of income. According to the *typikon*, possessions included villages and dependent peasants providing 1149 *nomismata* income annually, several estates worth 1250 gold pieces, 10600 *modioi* of arable lands, 951 *modioi* of vineyards, 376 *modioi* of gardens, olive groves including over 322 olive trees, 16 mills, a fish pond, a pier, a cattle byre, various rental properties including a workshop and over 36 houses. The monastery had possession of 237 *modioi* of vineyards and 98 *modioi* of gardens as well as at least 23 of the buildings in Galata and elsewhere in the city while the other part of the fortune including five villages and three estates were located out of Constantinople.⁹⁰ Theodora thought that these goods were sufficient for the needs of the nuns. Additionally, the postulants were immediately provided with the sufficient necessities in order to prevent their contribution such as the so-called entrance gift, but anyone wishing to make a contribution can make it without expecting to be excused from the prescribed way of life of the monastery.⁹¹ On the other hand, concerning the acceptance of gifts by others, Theodora Palaiologina did not set such rules. Instead, she ordained the acceptance of donations such as property, money, vessels or liturgical cloths by anyone with pious intentions and for his or her memory.⁹²

The second example comes from the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis. The foundress, Theodora Synadene, endowed her convent various kinds of properties, albeit it could not be compared with the wealth of Lips Monastery. For the support and maintenance of the nuns, she donated half of her ancestral estate called Pyrgos, two villages, of one valued at 400 *hyperpyra*, seven vineyards at the vicinity of Constantinople with their houses to the convent. In the *typikon*, the information concerning the sizes of vineyards was not recorded. Additionally, it was mentioned that the vineyards near St. Nicholas Mesamphalos and their houses were bought from a man named Kaligas for 400 *hyperpyra* much earlier than the foundation of Bebaia Elpis. It was also interesting that one of these vineyards were planted at the expense of a neighboring convent. Whether this expansion caused hostility between them cannot be known by depending solely on the *typikon*, but it requires more attention. Moreover, she reported that the vineyard that was bought from Kaligas was barren land, but she transformed it into a vineyard.⁹³ The analysis of the motivation behind this choice necessitates much more extensive investigation than this paper can possibly offer; however, it is possible to argue that the value of vine as a cash crop resulted in an increase in the number of vineyards within the empire's territories during the period in question. Lastly, in the part of the *typikon* describing the boundaries of the convent in great detail, a garden was also mentioned as a property.⁹⁴ Theodora preferred to retain personally a portion of her ancestral properties in order to guarantee the maintenance and the comfort of herself and her daughter. She also ordained that the convent and all her properties should be inherited to her daughter after her own death. Then, after the daughter passed away, all these properties should be immediately donated whenever she had wished and decided. These properties were half of an estate called Pyros, a village in Parapolia, a garden near the convent, and a large vineyard with the houses

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 127-128.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1279.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 1269.

⁹² Ibid., p. 1271.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 1558.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 1563.

around it.⁹⁵ Furthermore, among the sources of income of the convent were the various kinds of donations from wealthy people for their commemorations. For example, for himself and his wife's commemorations, John Theophilos left 300 *hyperpyra* to the convent so that they might purchase an estate. Empress Helena, as the guardian and heir of the properties of Theophilos, first gave 100 *nomismata* to the monastery, and a garden at Blanga was purchased at the request of Theophilos. Later, since the Ottoman Siege of Constantinople from 1394 to 1402 caused the city and its monasteries to experience great economic and physical difficulties⁹⁶, and since the convent was also suffering from this siege extremely, they demanded and received remaining 200 *nomismata* from the Empress.⁹⁷ It is interesting that the empress did not pay the total amount to the convent at once. It might be that, because of the economic instability of the siege, the empress did not want to or could not hand over it to the convent, which was also experiencing economic difficulties. Another example is the donations of the metropolitan of Ephesos and of Mytilene. While the former granted 400 *nomismata*, the latter gave away a solid gold icon to the convent for their commemorations.⁹⁸ At another point, it was stated that Xene Philanthropene restored the convent, which was in danger of collapsing in several places, in 1392. Moreover, in 1400, during the Ottoman siege of the city, her daughter not only donated a wheat-field valued at 300 *hyperpyra*, but also donated 200 *hyperpyra* for the repair of the church and the bell tower.⁹⁹ And finally, Eugenia Kantakouzene Philanthropene, a great-granddaughter of the original foundress Theodora Synadene, donated 100 *hyperpyra* to the convent in order to restore a garden as a vineyard.¹⁰⁰

Despite the fact that the part of the *typikon* of Auxentios Monastery including its inventory is lost, it has some references about the income of the monastery. Although the founder, Michael VIII Palaiologos, did not provide further and detailed information concerning the nature of the provisions, he stated that he restored the monastery, and supplied the community with 'the necessities of life' by appropriating plentiful sources more than which his grandfather did.¹⁰¹ According to Georger Dennis, it is possible to argue that the emperor, rather than only landed properties, endowed the monastery primarily with 'annual cash payments from the treasury' so that the community was able to remain self-supporting 'on the lands that they already had.'¹⁰² Moreover, the emperor appropriated 102 *hyperpera* for various celebrations.¹⁰³ He also stated that he approved the past emperors' endowments to any kind of foundations or people; therefore, he requested that the future emperors would apply this rule and confirm his donations to the monastery without any alteration.¹⁰⁴ Having requested that the successors should continue to make donations to the monastery for its improvement, the emperor needed to explain that he neither sacrificed the imperial treasury for the monastery, nor assigned crowded villages and fertile fields without having carefully considered. The reason of this explanation was that he was afraid of the possible impoverishment of the monastery through the confiscation of the monastic properties or the cancellation of these donations by anyone who thought these donations were made without planning and unconsciously.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the philanthropic activities of the Constantinopolitan monasteries in the Palaiologan period were limited to alms and food distribution to the needy at the gates on special occasions. Moreover, there was a decrease in the number and function of the charitable institutions in the period in question. Yet, it is remarkable that these monasteries possessed considerable financial resources from urban properties to vast lands in the countryside. Even though the economic and

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 1558.

⁹⁶ Nevra Necipoğlu, "Byzantine Monasteries and Monastic Property in Thessalonike and Constantinople During the Period of Ottoman Conquest." *Osmanlı Araştırmaları XV*, p. 124-125.

⁹⁷ Thomas, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, p. 1567.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 1567.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 1568.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 1568.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 1217.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 1212.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 1228-1230.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 1232.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 1230.

political circumstances of the time caused tension between the state and the monasteries about the ownership and utilization of monastic properties, monasteries were able to protect their independence and their financial base. However, this relationship between these two institutions was not always to the detriment of the Byzantine society, on the contrary, to some extent, it was benefitted from both the charitable activities and the incorporation of the monasteries into the economic structure.

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