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IDIORRHYTHMIC INQUEST: SYLVESTER, PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA, JEREMIAH II, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, AND THE MISSION TO RESTORE COMMUNAL MONASTICISM ON MOUNT ATHOS IN THE 1570s*

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ABSTRACT. Over the second half of the sixteenth century a new form of monasticism, *idiorrhythmia* ("living according to one's own devices"), seemed to be spreading across the Orthodox monasteries of the Eastern Mediterranean. The communal regime practiced for centuries in the venerable monasteries of the East was gradually collapsing: first at St. Catherine's on Sinai around 1557, then at the monasteries of Palestine, including the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem. When the patriarchs of Alexandria (Sylvester [1569-1590]) and Constantinople (Jeremiah II [1572-1579; 1580-1584; 1587-1595]) came together to celebrate Christmas at Thessaloniki in 1573, Sylvester was tasked with travelling to Mount Athos to investigate the state of the monastic life there. His inquest revealed a shocking state of affairs: monks moving without hindrance to and from Athos and engaging in the sale of goods to the outside world, including spirits which they drank themselves. Beardless youths and laypersons lived in monasteries; livestock were allowed to pasture on the Holy Mountain. This contribution will examine Patriarch Sylvester's inquest and the subsequent effort to restore communal life at the major monasteries on Athos.

Keywords: Mount Athos; Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire; Patriarchate of Alexandria; monasticism; *idiorrhythmia*

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Introduction

This contribution will explore a historical event – the attempt to restore communal monasticism on Mount Athos in the 1570s – at the intersection of two very different aspects of movement. The first, more obvious aspect is the pronounced mobility of the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church in this period, of whom Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch is but one example. Though little is known about the precise details of the movements of high-ranking members of the Orthodox clergy in the medieval period, there is no evidence that they travelled extensively. At least in the Byzantine world, long-distance travel is mainly attested as a monastic phenomenon.[1] Bishops, archbishops and patriarchs did not leave their sees without good reason, and truly footloose ecclesiastics were, unsurprisingly, monastic clergy, like Sava of Serbia.

The mobility of the high Orthodox clergy of the first century and a half of Ottoman rule presents us with a very different picture. Patriarchs in particular seem to have led a very peripatetic lifestyle, which was at least in part prompted by their new role as tax collectors for their community and the need to raise vast sums of money to secure their appointment as patriarch by the sultan.[2]

The patriarchs of Constantinople are thus known to have often undertaken visitations or tours of the lands under their jurisdiction: to cite just two examples, the two longest-serving patriarchs of the sixteenth century, Jeremiah I (1522-1546) and Jeremiah II (1572-1595) each undertook sojourns far away from Constantinople that lasted years. Jeremiah I had only been on the patriarchal throne a few months when he decided to go on a pilgrimage which brought him to Cyprus, Egypt, the Holy Land and Sinai.[3] By contrast, instead of moving south, his later successor Jeremiah II made his way northward through the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1586, arrived in Moscow in the summer of 1586 and oversaw the establishment of the new patriarchate there in January 1587 before returning to Constantinople.[4] Drives for the collection of alms, often led by the patriarch himself into the territory of a fellow patriarch, which was apparently accepted by the latter without comment in our sources, were a common feature of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire.[5]

Besides this obvious peripatetic activity of the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule, a second major aspect of "Orthodoxy on the Move"

1 For Middle Byzantine period, see Ritter 2019. The outstanding travelers of the late period were also monastic, such as Gregory of Sinai and Sabas of Vatopedi.
2 On the fiscal role of the patriarchs of Constantinople in this period, see Papademetriou 2015.
3 On Patriarch Jeremiah's pilgrimage, see Stroumpakes 2005: 36-43.
4 Hannick and Todt 2002.
5 Çolak 2015: 215-216.

which this paper will explore is the question of monastic *stabilitas loci*, and in particular the status of this principal of communal monasticism within a unique form of monasticism, which was termed *idiorrhythmia* in the sources. The *stabilitas loci*, considered one of the defining features of Christian cenobitic monasticism, was based on the principle that monks were to stay within the confines of their cloisters at all times, leaving only on exceptional occasions. Monastic travel could be divided into two broad categories: the much-maligned *vagratio*, the self-indulgent Wanderlust of the itinerant beggar-monk, and the pious *peregrinatio*, a journey undertaken for spiritual edification.[6] In the Orthodox tradition such beggar-monks or gyrovagues eventually became known, at least in the post-Byzantine period, as *kabiotas* (καβιῶτας).[7]

The *stabilitas loci* was especially emphasized both in the sixth-century *Benedictine Rule* and the somewhat earlier *Rule of the Master*.[8] While the *stabilitas loci* had an extremely important role in the monasticism of the Latin West during the Middle Ages, its role in Byzantine monasticism, while not negligible, was not nearly as prominent.[9] Indeed, more recent scholarship on Byzantine monasticism has underlined the wide variety of forms monasticism took, where eremitic monasticism retained a prominent place and even within cenobitic monasteries the obligation of the *stabilitas loci* was often not strictly observed in the breach.[10]

Silvester, Patriarch of Alexandria (1569-1590): A Life on the Move

Even though Patriarch Sylvester of Alexandria (1569-1590) occupied one of the longest patriarchates of Alexandria during the Ottoman period, little is known about his life and thought, and there is a surprising dearth of scholarship on his person.[11] Sylvester came to be overshadowed by his two immediate

6 Delouis, Mossakowska-Gaubert and Peters-Custot 2015: 3-5.

7 De Meester 1942: art. 9. This term for gyrovagues does not seem to be attested in the medieval period.

8 Sena 2008.

9 The classic study on *stabilitas loci* in Byzantine monasticism is Herman 1955; the canonical sources for the obligation of *stabilitas loci* are listed in de Meester 1942: art. 122, §2-3.

10 In this regard see especially Talbot 2019.

11 Longer treatments of his patriarchate are to be found only in Mazarakis 1932: 102-129 and Papadopoulos 1935: 612-638. Sylvester is only mentioned in passing in the standard works on the Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule: Panchenko 2016: 135 (as signatory for a petition to the qadi of Jerusalem to install Sophronios as patriarch there), 254 (on the forged addition of his signature to certain documents); 299 (as a recipient of alms from an embassy of Ivan the Terrible), 370 (need of Patriarch Sophronios to consult with Sylvester regarding union). Podskalsky 1988: 129-130 (within a section on Meletios Pegas); Runciman 1968: passim.

successors, Meletios Pegas (1590-1601) and Cyril Loukaris (1601-1620). Born as Sergios in the village of Stephanon on the island of Crete, he entered Agarathos Monastery on Crete and became its abbot; his successor as patriarch, Meletios Pegas, would have the same *cursus honorum*, as he also became a monk and then abbot at that monastery.

Why Sylvester was chosen as patriarch, like many of the details of his life, is unclear: Crete certainly had strong connections with Egypt, and St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai had an important presence on the island through its dependent monastery or *metochion*.[12] Whatever the precise reasons for Sylvester's election, the defining feature of his patriarchate was his prolonged absence away from his see. Though the existing scholarly literature does not permit an accurate and thorough presentation of his travels, his signatures on synodal decisions as well as the exchange of some letters present a clear pattern of extended journeys outside of the Alexandrian Patriarchate, particularly in Jerusalem and above all in Constantinople.

Already relatively early in his patriarchate, Sylvester seems to have spent five years in Constantinople (1574-1579), before coming to Jerusalem in 1579.[13] Perhaps on the way from Constantinople or Jerusalem Sylvester spent some time at the famed Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos; in any case, he would attempt to intervene in monastic life there, as evidenced by his letter to the monks of March 1579[14], reinforced by a similar letter of his colleague Patriarch Sophronios of 1580[15], as well as an undated missive of Sylvester to the Christians of the island of 1580.[16] Letters from Meletios Pegas to Sylvester written while the patriarch stayed at Damietta in 1581 attest to his presence once again within his own jurisdiction.[17]

These extended absences away from his flock must have prompted Sylvester to find someone to manage the Alexandrian Church during these long sojourns. His choice fell upon his fellow Cretan and abbot of Agarathos Monastery, Meletios Pegas, whom he called to Egypt around the year 1574, while gradually entrusting him with ever more important offices, as *protosynkellos*, *epitropos* and then archimandrite.[18] Meletios thus had become the de facto patriarch of Alexandria when Sylvester left once again for Constantinople in 1583, arriving

[12] For a discussion of the problem of this *metochion* of Saint Catherine's on Crete, see Sevcenko 2006: 22, n. 46.
[13] Papadopoulos 1935: 616.
[14] *MM*, vol. 6, 266-269.
[15] *MM*, vol. 6, 277-281.
[16] *MM*, vol. 6, 266-269.
[17] Papadopoulos 1935: 616-617.
[18] Mazarakes 1932: 113; Papadopoulos 1935: 614.

in time to sign on November 20th a joint decision of Patriarch Jeremiah II rejecting the Gregorian Calendar Reform.[19] Fittingly enough, Sylvester died while travelling at Lindo on Rhodes in 1590.[20]

The Rise of Idiorrhythmia: The Background to Sylvester's Athonite Visitation of 1574

On the basis of the diary of the German scholar Stephan Gerlach, who was present in Constantinople at the time, we know that Patriarch Jeremiah II went on a visitation through Macedonia, the Morea and the Peloponnese from October 1573 to July 1574. The purpose of this journey was to collect the annual tribute due to the sultan, amounting to 4,000 ducats.[21] According to the documentation restoring cenobitic life at Lavra and Vatopedi on Athos discussed below, Jeremiah celebrated Christmas at Thessalonike with his fellow patriarch Sylvester, in 1574. During the days they spent together, Sylvester informed Jeremiah of his intention to go on pilgrimage to Mount Athos and correct monastic life there. He had, apparently, heard of the spread of irregular monastic practices to the Holy Mountain, and it was agreed by the representatives of the Athonite monasteries found in Thessalonike at that time that after his visitation an official document would be issued to this effect.

The heterodox monastic practices that had caused Sylvester's visitation were described as *idiorrhythmia* (ἰδιορρυθμία). What exactly are we to understand by this term? Given its importance for the history of monasticism in the Orthodox world, there is surprisingly little scholarship on this form of monastic living, and almost all of it is written from the perspective of the church authorities. These authorities, among whom we must of course include Sylvester as well, took an extremely negative line: indeed, there are almost no balanced descriptions of this practice.[22]

The defining feature of *idiorrhythmia*, and what clearly set it apart from communal monasticism, was its rejection of the notion of apostolic poverty: instead, each monk could own and otherwise dispose of property. Other features of the system that are described as idiorrhythmic in the scholarship must be taken with a grain of salt and reflect the system of *idiorrhythmia* in a particular

[19] Mazarakes 1932: 114-117; cf. Hannick and Todt 2002: 578 (no. 14).
[20] Mazarakes 1932: 128.
[21] De Gregorio 1996: 360-361.
[22] See, for instance, de Meerster 1942: art. 8, with further abundant references there to the negative assessments of *idiorrhythmia* from the scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Less biased descriptions in Laurès 1901; Talbot 1991; Talbot 2019: 39-43.

time and place, namely on Mount Athos from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. It is on Athos that all monasteries had become idiorrhythmic by the middle of the eighteenth century. Even after the tide had begun to turn towards communal monasticism, nine of the twenty principal monasteries were still idiorrhythmic by 1900, and it was not until 1992 that *idiorrhythmia* disappeared from the principal monasteries, though it continues to survive in smaller monastic establishments (*sketes*) even today.

The features of this Athonite system of *idiorrhythmia* included the division of a monastery into "families" or groups, each headed by a godfather-like senior monk or *proestos* (προεστώς), who together formed a ruling council (*synaxis*) within each monastery. A president, who represented the monastery at the Athonite central administration at Karyes, was elected every year by the council. His duties were, however, mostly ceremonial. The main pillar of communal life within idiorrhythmic monasteries on Athos around 1900 was the "family": each family dined together in its own dining room, and all necessities beyond the basic allowance of food and wine, including clothing and medical expenses, was provided by its head, the *proestos*.[23]

Since the official line of the Orthodox Church throughout the Late Byzantine and Ottoman periods was to support cenobitic monasticism and condemn *idiorrhythmia*, our descriptions of *idiorrhythmia* when it first emerged as a discernible system of monasticism, that is from the end of fourteenth century, are very one-sided and biased. To my knowledge, the first extensive description of *idiorrhythmia* stems from the monk Pachomios in a manuscript of Iviron Monastery written in the year 1540:

> There are four excellent virtues which the monk possesses and is so-called: refraining from women and meat, poverty and obedience. All [monks], both the cenobites and the *idiorrhythmoi*, have the first two of these, while the cenobites alone have the remainder, namely that it happens that the *idiorrhythmoi* are imperfect and between the secular and monastic estate and trespassers of their own customs. And if one were to answer that the cenobites own possessions, as well as those not living in obedience [in a communal monastery] but in *hesychia*, know that that which the cenobites possess is not theirs, but held in common and each thing [the cenobite] possesses is his brother's, not his own. If someone does not possess anything, he lives in poverty, for ownership is not prohibited by scripture, but rather evil ownership. The anchorites, however, are not subject to anyone, since, being in the wilderness, they do not possess something, which they shall subordinate. By the same.

[23] The role of these families or groups of monks within monasteries, consisting of seven or eight monks, is vividly described for Athos around 1900 by Laurès 1901.

> Those participating in the monastic life through *idiorrhythmia*, since they are without leadership and are content with their own rule and regulations, rather than that of the Holy and Universal Church, are like a single woman mixing unlawfully with each person, or prostitute, and, those in the *koinobion*, if they live cenobitically, are like a woman of utmost decency, who does not know another man unlawfully, but if they do not live according to the coenobium but idiorrhythmically, they are like an adulteress, not content with her own man, and with impunity mixing and defiling with others, on account of which she is instead more blameworthy than the prostitute.[24]

Thus, in Pachomios' view it was the idiorrhythmic monks' lack of poverty and obedience which rendered them "imperfect" monastics, even though they did not eat meat and were chaste.[25] According to this interpretation, only cenobitic monks and anchorites were valid forms of monastic life. The complex governance of Athonite idiorrhythmic monks of the eighteenth century onward is not evident in critiques like that of Pachomios: we can only speculate whether or not idiorrhythmic communities before the golden age of *idiorrhythmia* on Athos were organized along similar lines. The details of how idiorrhythmic communities operated, however, were clearly of little interest to their critics: much more concerning was their claim to share the status of monks despite

[24] *Haupturkunden* 212-214 (nr. XIV: Συναγωγὴ διαφόρων κεφαλαίων, ὅτι δεῖ τοὺς ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ μονῇ μοναχοὺς κοινῶς βιοῦν κατὰ πάντα καὶ ἀρκεῖσθαι τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις), at 213: Τέσσαρές εἰσιν ἐξαίρετοι ἀρεταί, ἃς ὁ κεκτημένος μοναχός ἐστί τε καὶ ὀνομάζεται, τὸ ἀπέχεσθαι γυναικὸς καὶ κρέατος καὶ τὸ ἀκτήμονα εἶναι καὶ ἐν ὑποταγῇ. Καὶ τὰς μὲν προλαβούσας δύο πάντες ἔχουσιν, οἵ τε κοινοβιᾶται καὶ οἱ ἰδιόῤῥυθμοι, τὰς δὲ λοιπὰς μόνοι οἱ κοινοβιᾶται, ὡς ἐντεῦθεν συμβαίνειν τοὺς ἰδιορῥύθ- μους ἀτελεῖς καὶ μέσους εἶναι τῆς τε κοσμικῆς καὶ μοναδικῆς πολιτείας καὶ παραβάτας τῶν συνθηκῶν αὐτῶν. Εἰ δέ τις ἀντιλέγοιτο, ὅτι καὶ οἱ κοινοβιᾶται κτήματα ἔχουσι, καὶ οἱ ἐν ἡσυχία ἀνυπόκτατοί εἰσιν, ἴστω, ὅτι οἱ κοινοβιᾶται ἅπερ ἔχουσιν, οὐκ ἰδίως ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ κοινῶς καὶ ἕκαστον, ὅπερ ἔχει, τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐστιν, οὐχ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπειδὲ οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει τις αὐτῶν τι, πάντως ἀκτήμων ἔστιν, οὐδὲ γὰρ κεκώλυται τὸ ἔχειν παρὰ τῇ γραφῇ, ἀλλὰ τὸ κακῶς ἔχειν· οἱ δὲ ἀναχωρηταὶ οὐχ ὑποτάσσονταί τινι, διότι ἐν ἐρημίᾳ ὄντες, οὐκ ἔχουσι τόν, ὃν ὑποταγήσονται. Τοῦ αὐτοῦ·Οἱ ἐν ἰδιορῥύθμῳ τὸ μοναχικὸν μετερχόμενοι, ὡς ἀκέφαλοι καὶ τῷ ἰδίῳ κανόνι καὶ τύπῳ στοιχοῦντες, μὴ μέντοι τῷ τῆς ἁγίας καὶ καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας, ἐοίκασιν ἀπολελυμένῃ γυναικὶ καὶ ἀθέσμως ἑκάστῳ συγγινομένῃ, ἤγουν πόρνῃ, οἱ δὲ ἐν κοινοβίῳ, εἰ μὲν κατὰ κοινόβιον πολιτεύονται, ἐοίκασι γυναικὶ κοσμιωτάτῃ, καὶ ἕτερον ἄνδρα παρὰ τὸν νόμιμον οὐ γινωσκούσῃ, εἰ δὲ οὐ κατὰ κοινόβιον ἀλλ' ἰδιορῥύθμως, μοιχαλίδι ἐοίκασιν, ἣ τῷ ἰδίῳ ἀνδρὶ οὐκ ἐξαρκουμένη, καὶ ἑτέροις ἀδεῶς συμφύρεται καὶ μιαίνεται, διὸ καὶ μᾶλλον περισσοτέρως τιμωρεῖται τῆς πόρνης. On this excerpt, see Amand de Mendieta 1972: 107.

[25] In later centuries, in contrast to other forms of monastic life on Athos, the consumption of meat was allowed in idiorrhythmic establishments: see Amand de Mendieta 1972: 228.

rejecting poverty and obedience. In the same tract Pachomios also criticized the lavish dress of idiorrhythmic monks.[26]

Well into the middle of the sixteenth century, cenobitic monasticism seems to have retained its pride of place on the Holy Mountain. The last of the twenty principal monasteries on Mount Athos, Stavronikita, was founded in the 1540s by Patriarch Jeremiah I of Constantinople as a cenobitic institution.[27] Nonetheless, there are indications that cenobitic monasticism was losing ground already in the fifteenth century: thus, cenobitic life was (re-)instituted at Vatopedi in 1449.[28] The economic basis of Athonite monastic life was no worse in the first century and a half of Ottoman rule than it had been in the Late Byzantine period, and indeed the major monasteries seem to have enjoyed a period of substantial economic prosperity.[29]

The true catalyst for the rise of idiorrhythmic monasticism on Mount Athos, as well as elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, was the changing legal status of monasteries. As a starting point in examining this question, it must be underlined that a coherent doctrine for how Christian monasteries were to be treated under Islamic law in the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire was apparently never formulated. Instead, an ad hoc system seems to have been employed, which varied from region to region. In the former provinces of the Mameluke Sultanate such as Egypt, Syria and Palestine that were conquered by Selim I (r. 1512-1520) in 1516-1517, the Ottoman state simply continued the arrangements that the region's monasteries had made with Muslim rulers going back centuries.

The monasteries in the former Byzantine territories of Asia Minor and the Balkans were a different matter, since in most cases the Ottoman conquest was their first experience with Muslim rule. The Ottoman approach to taxing and governing the monks and their properties was marked by pragmatism: by and large, monasteries had their lands and privileges confirmed by the Ottoman sultan. Yet the question of whether monasteries fulfilled the criteria of being an endowment (Ar. *waqf*, Turk. *vakıf*) was not addressed in detail until the middle of the sixteenth century. Even so, jurists from the Hanafi School of Islamic

[26] *Haupturkunden* 212-214 (nr. XIV: Συναγωγὴ διαφόρων κεφαλαίων, ὅτι δεῖ τοὺς ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ μονῇ μοναχοὺς κοινῶς βιοῦν κατὰ πάντα καὶ ἀρκεῖσθαι τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις), at 213-214.

[27] On the founding of Stavronikita, see Chitwood 2017.

[28] *Acts of Vatopedi* 339-342 (no. 231).

[29] See Zachariadou 1996; Zachariadou 2006. For the situation of Byzantine monasteries more generally at the time of the Ottoman conquest, see Oikonomidès 1976; Smyrlis 2008; Smyrlis 2009. The broader issue of authority and control over the land in the last centuries of Byzantium is examined *in extenso* by Estangüi Gómez 2014.

jurisprudence, the dominant strand of legal thought in the Ottoman Empire, had already begun to grapple with this question at the time of Mehmet II.[30]

The legal status of monasteries in the European half of the Ottoman Empire – interestingly enough, there is no evidence for a similar process in the empire's Near Eastern territories – changed dramatically during the reign of Selim II (r. 1566-1574). In 1568 and 1569, in what is known as the "Confiscation Affair", Selim II issued fermans that ordered the confiscation of monastic property, arguing that their agricultural land, *miri*, in fact belonged to the fisc, although it could be purchased back by the monks, and that endowments to monasteries did not fulfill the requirements of a *waqf*.[31] One of the major problems in recognizing monastic endowments was that such foundations were, from the perspective of Muslim jurists, aimed at the upkeep of buildings (churches), while valid charitable *waqfs* were only supposed to benefit the needy, including the poor, travelers and sick. Under the Hanafi jurist Ebussuud Efendi, one of the foremost legal thinkers of the first Ottoman centuries, a loophole was found whereby monastic endowments could be considered valid if they were categorized as family *waqfs*.

Though this clever bit of legal reasoning preserved the status of the Christian monasteries as endowments, the effects of the Confiscation Affair were ruinous: since monasteries were forced to repurchase their agricultural lands from the Ottoman fisc, only the wealthiest monasteries survived. Although the question has never been explored in detail, the financial distress of the Confiscation Affair undoubtedly had a hand in the rise of *idiorrhythmia*. With traditional monastic endowments no longer able to support the large cenobitic communities they had sustained in earlier centuries, and now subject to the ever-increasing scrutiny of the Ottoman fisc and Islamic jurists, alternative forms of monasticism offered a means of continuing monastic life.

Championing Communal Monasticism: Sylvester's Letter to the Monks of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian, March 1579

One last subject needs to be explored before examining Patriarch Slyvester's visitation of the Athonite monasteries in 1574: the patriarch's own views on monasticism. Other than the documents describing his stay on Mount Athos, it is difficult to gain a sense of Sylvester's ideas about communal monasticism. He had been a monk and then abbot of Agarathos Monastery on Crete, which seems to have been a wealthy, albeit otherwise unremarkable monastery.[32]

[30] See the overview of Kermeli 2012.

[31] Among the numerous studies of the Confiscation Affair include: Alexander 1997; Fotić 1994; Kermeli 2000.

[32] Psilakes 2002[3]-2003[2], vol. 1, 9-39.

We can, however, learn something of the patriarch's views on monasticism from his letter of March 1579 to the monks of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos.[33] In many respects, this letter established a pattern for combating idiorrhythmic monasticism that had crystallized some five years after his Athonite visitation.

The letter, which in fact was a document bearing the patriarch's seal (τὸ σιγιλλιῶδες γράμμα τῆς ἠμῶν μετριότητος) and thus an epistle with legal force, begins with Slyvester's admission that he had been prompted to write the letter out of concern for the constitution and correction of the monastic community on Patmos. It follows with a discussion of the basic function of monasticism with reference to the writings of Basil of Caesarea (undoubtedly his *Asketikon*). Since the basic principle of monasticism is to achieve the salvation of one's soul, it is necessary to discard all worldly cares upon entering the monastic life; Sylvester compares this process to disrobing before entering a bath. Monks were to imitate the apostolic life, and Sylvester explicitly mentions monasteries on and around Mount Sinai, Jerusalem, Mount Athos and Meteora as places that ought to "thus live communally, with one heart, one will and one desire among all."[34] *Idiorrhythmia* is then explicitly named: "Tell me, beloved [ones], what good or profit benefits the monk in the salvation of his soul through *idiorrhythmia*? Nothing, except much concern for worldly cares."[35]

According to Sylvester, there are three types of monasticism: eremitic (living in solitude), semi-eremitic (living with one to two other monks) or communal.[36] He then relates the story of the invention of communal monasticism by Pachomios, who caused this form of ascetic life to spread throughout Libya, Ethiopia and Egypt. Was Sylvester here perhaps expressing some pride in communal monasticism having been invited within his patriarchate? He then makes a reference to John Klimakos and, finally, to the founder of the island's monastery, Christodoulos, who, according to Sylvester, had intended his monastery to be a *koinobion*.

We then learn the immediate reason for Sylvester's letter: an ordained monk from the monastery, Joseph, had gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and met both Sylvester as well as the Patriarch of Jerusalem and other prelates gathered together in a synod there. Upon being questioned by the assembled hierarchs about the circumstances at his monastery, he was berated for the fact that his

33 *MM*, vol. 6, 266-269.

34 *MM*, vol. 6, 267: πολιτεύονται οὕτως κοιωοβιακῶς καὶ τὸ μία ἐν πᾶσι καρδία εἶναι καὶ θέλημα ἔν καὶ μία ἐπιθυμία.

35 *MM*, vol. 6, 267: εἴπατέ μοι, ἀγαπητοί, τί ἐσθλὸν ἢ τίς καρποφορία πλουεῖ τῷ μοναχῷ τῇ ἰδιορυθμίᾳ περὶ ψυχικὴν σωτηρίαν; οὐδεμία, πάρεξ φροντίδα πολλὴ καὶ μερίμναις βιωτικαῖς.

36 *MM*, vol. 6, 267-268.

congregation was no longer a communal monastery.[37] It was then decided that the monastery must return to being a *koinobion*, which the present letter was meant to accomplish.

Any monks opposing the return to communal monasticism were to take their belongings and leave the congregation, and in the future any members of the congregation opposing communal life would be censured. A recalcitrant ordained monk was not to participate in any divine service, while a regular monk was to become a private person once again: they would be outside the church and inherit the lot of Judas.[38]

Some salient features of Sylvester's monastic thought can be gleaned from his letter to the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos. First, communal monasticism was a legitimate form of monastic life, indeed one of three forms, alongside that of the eremitic and semi-eremitic variety. Second, idiorrhythmic monasticism was not a valid expression of monastic life, since its practitioners were not able to focus on the salvation of the soul, as they remained burdened with earthly cares. Third, the monastery's founder, Christodoulos, had intended his foundation to be a cenobitic establishment: thus, any attempt to introduce *idiorrhythmia* represented a violation of the founders' wishes. These three points were already apparent in the reintroduction of communal monastic life at the Great Lavra five years earlier.

Sylvester's Athonite Visitation of 1574

As related at the beginning of this study, during Christmas of 1573 the two patriarchs, Sylvester and Jeremiah II, met in Thessalonike. It was there agreed that Sylvester would journey to Mount Athos and correct errant monastic practices, and these corrective provisions would be officially endorsed by Jeremiah upon Sylvester's return. In September of 1574 a synod was held in Constantinople with both Sylvester and Jeremiah present that ratified the measures suggested by Sylvester.

It is worth briefly discussing the documentation that has survived for this visitation. As Giuseppe de Gregorio has convincingly demonstrated, two versions have survived of the patriarchal letter.[39] The first and more extensive document, which was sent to the Great Lavra and was edited by the German theologian and church historian Philipp Meyer in the nineteenth century, was

[37] *MM*, vol. 6, 268-269.
[38] *MM*, vol. 6, 269.
[39] For all this, see de Gregorio 1996: 367-368.

dispatched to this monastery as an official act.[40] Later, a second and more cursory ratifying letter was sent to individual monasteries. Though no one has been able to consult the Lavra version of the letter since Meyer used it for his edition, de Gregorio edited the second abbreviated version, which is transmitted in Vat. gr. 2646, as well as reprinting Meyer's version. A later copy of this first version is transmitted by Vatopedi Monastery.[41]

As with Sylvester's letter to the monks of St. John the Theologian on Patmos, pilgrimage was the reason which prompted the events leading to the visitation, for Sylvester wanted to make a pilgrimage to the monasteries there and, at the same time, make an inspection and correct errant practices.[42] As part of these efforts, Sylvester first restored the Great Lavra as a *koinobion* once again:

> "Behold, he then physically departed with God to the Holy-named Mountain, and, having spent some time there, among the other things he corrected was the practice of the cenobitic life and ordered [them] to live in peace and harmony, and restored the most divine monastery of the Holy Lavra and the holy and God-bearing Athanasios on Athos, as a pure coenobium, for it had for many years functioned poorly as an idiorrhythmic monastery, and he now brought about that it was run again as a coenobium, as was said, because its holy founder also ordered [these] rules."[43]

As with the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos, Sylvester justified his reintroduction of communal monasticism at the Great Lavra on the grounds that the monastery's founder (*ktetor*), this time Athanasios the Athonite instead of Chrysodoulos, had intended his establishment to be a *koinobion*. Thus, by introducing idiorrhythmic monasticism, the monks at the Great Lavra were denying the will of their founder. At this point in the patriarchal letter, however, Sylvester's activities were restricted to the Great Lavra alone.

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40 *Haupturkunden* 215-218 (no. XIV).

41 *Acta Vatopedii* 136-144.

42 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 370, line 5: Ἁγιώνυμον Ὄρος, ὡς ἠβούλετο καὶ διὰ μελέτης εἶχε τοῦ προσκυνῆσαι τὰ ἐκεῖ σεβάσμια μοναστήρια, ἐξέτασιν ποιήσηται καὶ διορθώση, καὶ εἰς τὸν τοῦ δικαίου τόπον ἀποκαταστήση πάσας τὰς διαφοράς.

43 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 371, lines 9-12: ἰδοὺ ὅτι σὺν θεῷ ἀπῆλθε σωματικῶς εἰς τὸ ἁγιώνυμον ὄρος, καὶ καιρὸν ἱκανὸν ἐνδιατρίψας, μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὧν διωρθώσατο, καὶ κοινοβιακῶς ζῆν καὶ διάγειν ἐρυθμίσατο ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ ὁμονοίᾳ, ἀποκαταστήσας καὶ τὸ θειότατον μοναστήριον τῆς ἱερᾶς λαύρας τοῦ ὁσίου καὶ θεοφόρου πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἀθανασίου τοῦ ἐν τῷ ἄθῳ, κοινόβιον καθαρόν, ἐκ πολλῶν χρόνων ἰδιόρυθμον οὐ καλῶς διαρκέσαν, νῦν δὲ πάλιν κοινοβιακῶς διάγειν ἐκτελέσας, ὡς εἴρηται, ὡς καὶ καταρχὰς ὁ ἱερὸς αὐτῆς κτήτωρ ὡρίσατο (…).

In the next part of the letter, the remit of the provisions was expanded to the entire Holy Mountain. It is for this reason that this document is sometimes seen as a *typikon* applying to the entirety of Mount Athos, even though its provisions seem to have been a dead letter until the end of the eighteenth century, when Patriarch Gabriel IV issued a decree for Mount Athos echoing the language of the patriarchal letter and, perhaps in the lead-up to this decree, a copy of the letter was made.[44] For this purpose, Sylvester had undertaken research on the documents governing monastic life on Athos: "[I]n the presence of the entire holy synaxis, and the most holy protos, the abbots of the reverend monasteries, and the remaining monks, but also the local pious [bishop] of Ierissos and the Holy Mountain, he inspected and read the reverend chrysobulls of the famed emperors, and the seal-bearing documents of the most holy patriarchs, which give information on how life was to be structured at their time, to do that which is blessed, beneficial and useful and to abstain from that which is harmful and not beneficial to those who ought to live piously and virtuously. That which is canonical, blessed and pleasing to God they have transmitted as customs."[45]

On the basis of this research, performed in the presence of the dignitaries listed above, Sylvester then returned to Constantinople and, together in a synod with Jeremiah II, promulgated a number rules for monastic life on the Holy Mountain. The departures from communal monastic life listed in the letter can be broadly categorized into the correction of economic and disciplinary infractions. In sum, they paint a remarkable picture of monastic life.

The regulations of the synod regulating economic life on the Holy Mountain attest to the varied attempts of the monks to survive in the difficult years after the Confiscation Affair of 1568-1569. The keeping of female livestock

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[44] De Gregorio 1996: 349: the copy was supplied with numbered provisions, giving the letter a legal character which the original did not have. Though the letter is not explicitly identified as a *typikon* (used with qualification by Amand de Mendieta 1972: 108-109, a designation not accepted by de Gregorio 1996: 347), its ordinances were to apply to the whole Holy Mountain, and can thus be justifiably included amongst the constitutions governing monastic life on Athos in the Early Modern period (it is printed with other constitutions in the study of Papachysanthou 1999: 59-61).

[45] *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 371, lines 12-15: ἐθεάσατο παρούσης πάσης τῆς ἑκεῖ ἱερᾶς συνάξεως, τοῦ τε ὁσιωτάτου πρώτου, τῶν σεβασμίων καθηγουμένων, τῶν λοιπῶν ἐνασκουμένων, ἀλλὰ δὴ καὶ τοῦ κατὰ τόπον θεοφιλεστάτου ἱερισοῦ καὶ ἁγίου ὄρους, καὶ ἀνέγνω τά τε σεπτὰ χρυσόβουλλα τῶν ἀοιδίμων βασιλέων καὶ τῶν ἁγιωτάτων πατριαρχῶν σιγιλλιώδη τίμια γράμματα, τὰ κατὰ καιροὺς δοθέντα αὐτοῖς περὶ τοῦ πῶς δεῖ διάγειν αὐτοὺς, τίνα τὲ ποιεῖν εὐλόγως καὶ συμφερόντως καὶ ἐπ' ὠφελίᾳ καὶ τίνων ἀπέχεσθαι, ὡς ἐπιβλαβῶν καὶ μὴ συμφερόντων αὐτοῖς, τοῖς θείως καὶ ἐναρέτως πολιτεύεσθαι ὀφείλουσιν, ὡς κανονικὸν καὶ εὔλογον, θεῷ τε φίλον καὶ ὡς τὰς συνθήκας δεδώκασιν (…).

on Athos, banned already under Athanasios the Athonite in the tenth century, was apparently being practiced, and thus was banned by the synod; male animals needed by the monasteries, presumably above all beasts of burden, were, by contrast, excepted from this ban.[46] The monks were also engaged in the distillation of raki – this marks perhaps one of the first references to the drink – which the synod forbade them from producing or drinking.[47] Chestnuts were not to be collected for sale, only for one's own consumption.[48] The cultivation of grain and barley on the Holy Mountain was completely forbidden; legumes were, however, excepted from this rule.[49] In sum, these regulations aimed at curtailing the economic exploitation of Athos, especially by idiorrhythmic monks.

The economic activities of monks living in hermitages or small monasteries (*sketes*) received particular attention. The inhabitants of *sketes* were forbidden from practicing viticulture beyond what was necessary for their own use.[50] The churches at the Athonite "capital" at Protaton served as a central market for economic transactions on the Holy Mountain, where the price of certain foodstuffs was fixed by the synod: six aspers per serving of nuts, five per serving of cherries and eight per pound of olive oil.[51] The purchase of a hermitage, whether on the grounds of one of the principal monasteries, at Protaton or within a *skete* was also regulated by the synod, in that, if the monk chose to leave, he was not to take anything from the hermitage with him, only that which he had himself brought.[52]

Of particular interest for the topic of this special issue were regulations issued for the travel of hermits, either monks or ordained monks. It seems that these monastics left Athos to seek support outside of the Holy Mountain in the form of *adelphata* or *sarantia*;[53] this activity was forbidden and henceforth restricted only to the "public" monasteries (*katholikoi monasteria*), that is monasteries not in private ownership or control, thus presumably excluding many hermitages and small monasteries on Athos.[54] Finally, individual monks were forbidden from buying or selling monastic clothing: such monks were only to receive

46 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 372, line 20.
47 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 372, lines 20-21.
48 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 372, line 21.
49 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 373, lines 23-24.
50 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 374, line 28.
51 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 373, line 24.
52 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 373, line 23.
53 The precise meaning of both terms is not entirely clear. Rather than the sort of old-age pensions known from the Late Byzantine period, it is more likely that *adelphata* in this sense were simply incomes or allowances for an individual monk. The meaning of *sarantaria* ("forty" in some sense) is more unclear (see de Gregorio 1996: 374, n. 11).
54 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 374, line 26.

compensation for their labor and a fair price for the material, while the clothing itself would only be bought or sold communally, and even this activity was to only cover the monastery's own needs.[55]

A second category of ordinances issued by the synod consisted of disciplinary measures imposed upon the monks of Athos. Of these regulations, one addressed a problem often bemoaned in Athonite *typika*: the presence of boys on the Holy Mountain. The synod forbade the presence of such youths either in the monasteries or in hermitages, not even on the grounds of education, kinship, monastic training or any other reason.[56] In a similar vein, lay workmen on Athos had to be tonsured within three years or leave the Holy Mountain.[57] The forgery of documents related to the ownership of hermitages was also forbidden.[58] Indeed, the transition to Ottoman rule resulted in a bout of forgeries of supposed grants from Orthodox rulers in Byzantine times, which were intended to establish a monastery's claims to property that had actually been acquired more recently or whose documentation was lacking.[59]

Particularly vexing was the practice of housing nuns (*monachai kalograiai*), so-called "fellow sisters" (*synadelphoi*), in hermitages outside of Athos and in villages.[60] This certainly violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the *abaton* custom on the Holy Mountain, which prohibited the female presence (including animals) there. Though the nuns do not seem to have resided on Athos itself, it is interesting to note the formation of these loose monastic communities containing both men – Athonite hermits – and women.

Conclusion

The patriarchal letter and synod were not the only interactions that Sylvester would have with Mount Athos.[61] He had already been attested as a signatory in a patriarchal act resolving a dispute between Esphigmenou and

55 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 374, lines 26-27.
56 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 372, lines 18-19.
57 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 372, lines 19-20.
58 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 373, line 22.
59 Fotić 2005: 68-72.
60 *Patriarchal Letter of Jeremiah II and Sylvester for the Great Lavra* 374-375, lines 29-30.
61 Problematic in this respect is his signature, along with that of the patriarchs Jeremiah II of Constantinople and Sophronios IV (1579-1608) of Jerusalem, in a document granting the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Adrianople stauropegial rights, in what is supposedly a document of June 1591: *Acts of Pantokrator* 47-49 (no. 16); not listed in Hannick and Todt 2002 (probably due to the problematic dating).

Vatopedi monasteries on Athos in July of 1577.[62] Whether Sylvester cultivated relations outside of these instances is not known, but merits further research.

To return to subject of this special issue, two types of mobility – "Orthodoxy on the Move" – are evident in Sylvester's visitation to Mount Athos in 1574. On the one hand, Sylvester's peripatetic existence was representative of the footloose patriarchs of the early Ottoman era. On the other, in his attempt to regulate *idiorrhythmia* on Mount Athos he also sought to limit the movement of these monks. As seen above, one of their more blameworthy practices was to seek support outside of the Holy Mountain by traveling in search of benefactors. In this endeavor the patriarch seems to have failed, at least in the short to medium term: *idiorrhythmia* continued to spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world in the following centuries, and it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a more concerted effort was made to suppress it on Athos. The "restoration" of cenobitic life at the Great Lavra and Vatopedi thus seems to have been a dead letter for around two centuries.

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[62] *Acts of Esphigmenou* 53-54 (no. 28); cf. Hannick and Todt 2002: 577 (no. 3).

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