14. Monastic Culture in Medieval Byzantium

New Forms of Early Monasticism

**St. Hilarion (291 - 371)**
- disciple of St. Anthony
- self mortification
  - lived like wild beasts
  - eschewing fire
  - ate whatever they could "graze"
  - loaded themselves up with chains
  - lived on pillars
  - Symeon the Stylite

**Lavra = cave monastery**
- solitary and coenobitic combined
- grouping of caves around a residential home
- gather in community only Sat. and Sun. for prayer
- started in Palestine
- 140 known near Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Jordan by end of 4th century

The Ideal Life

Human life same a spiritual life
- sell all possessions
- distribute proceeds to the poor
- renounce the world
  - physically
  - spiritually
- no murder
  - no wrath and harsh language
- no adultery
  - no lustful glances
- no perjury
  - no swearing of oaths (not to God)
Saint Basil (330-379)

- considered one of the Eastern Church Fathers
- took a journey to Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt
- studied several forms of monasticism
- Longer and Shorter Rules
- helped monasticism gain widespread acceptance

Peak of the Early Monastic Movement

5th and 6th C.
- monks courted by aristocracy and emperors
- basked in the fame of their miraculous exploits
- from outcasts to popular heroes

Regulations grew
- Justinian ruled no monastery could be founded without the bishop’s consent

Stylite Monks

- St. Symeon the Stylite (d. 450 CE)
- St. Daniel the Stylite (d. 493 CE)
- arrived near Constantinople
- established a reputation for taking on demons and curing the bishop
- 1st sat on a low column
  - 2x person’s height
- then 2nd and 3rd—sponsored by the Emperor Zeno
- monastic complex developed around column
- colder than in Syria
Monasticism and Iconoclasm

- Monasticism is essentially a “lay” movement
  - not beholden (theoretically) to Emperor
- monasteries were the only ones to fight against the Isaurian iconoclasts
- emerged greatly strengthened after Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea 787)
  - 132 monasteries attended
  - great surge of monastic construction for 30 years afterwards

Monastic influence after “Triumph of Orthodoxy” (843)

- monasteries greatly strengthened after iconoclasm
  - rebellious monks became new series of martyrs and confessors to the Eastern calendar
  - monasticism seen as only pious lifestyle
- Many Patriarchs post 843 were former monks:
  - Methodios (843-7)
  - Ignatius (847-58)

St. Theodore the Studite (759-826)

- descended from prominent family of civil servants
- political man and strict disciplinarian
  - careless monks had food and water rationed
- helped organize resistance against second Iconoclasm phase
- wished to reform the monastic movement with the spirit of the early Fathers
- hard work, poverty and obedience
  - not mystical contemplation
  - emphasized copying books
The Studite Rule
• could not own slaves or female animals (?)
• go out seldom
• sever all family links
• hold everything in common
• distribute to the poor any income beyond sustenance
• set up a hierarchy of command
  – assist. abbot
  – administrator
  – assist. administrator
  – store-keeper
  – disciplinary officers

Regulations on Monasteries during the Macedonian Dynasty
Romanus I Lecapenus
935  monasteries barred from acquiring new lands
  – even by way of donation
937  reaffirmed by Constantine VII
Nikephoros Phocas (963–9)
• castigated monasteries for their affluence and greed
• decreed no new foundations
  – appreciated monastic life—not against them
Basil II
996  monasteries should revert to the village upon the death of the abbot
• under the jurisdiction of the Bishop

Legal independence of monasteries
1. primarily agricultural but profitable
2. by imperial and canon law inalienable
  – static or grow
3. varied ownership
  – imperial, patriarchal, episcopal, private
New administrative form in 10th century

• lay ownership (*charistikarios*)
  – pass on to generations
• gained complete control of a monastic estate
  – could despoil it if desired
  – became assets to be traded or sold
    • Michael Psellos gained rights over a dozen monasteries
• what if patron was of low morals, or a foreigner?

How monasteries grew in power

Machairas Monastery
Small monastery on Cyprus sent mission to
  Emperor Isaac II (1185-95)
• granted an orchard from the crown and tax exemption of 12 gold pieces
• Emp. Alexius II (1195-1203) gave complete tax exemption and land and 24 tenant farmers

Wealth of Machairas Monastery

1210 a nunnery founded nearby was to receive an annual income of 8% from the monastery
= 24 gold pieces per annum
  – yearly income of 1,200 gold pieces
  – *typikon* or book of directives for monasteries
Important Monasteries

Bithynian Olympus
- St. Platon (uncle of Theodore the Studite)
- Methodius 1&2 (Patriarch and Slav Apostle)
- Theophanes the Confessor (Chronicles)

Mount Athos
- eclipsed all other holy mountains
- http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Athos/Monastery/Megisti%20Lavra.html

Mount Athos
Splendid Architecture
Symeon the Theologian (949-1022)

- mystic, not a reformer
- reacted against the dull materialism of monastic life
- he proclaimed that the purpose of a spiritual life to be an inner transformation which led to a direct vision of God manifested in the guise of ineffable light