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The Gift of the Monks and the Economic Avaton of Athos: Re-evaluating the relationship between Church and State in Greece

Michelangelo Paganopoulos
Assistant Lecturer
Goldsmiths, University of London



Abstract

This paper proposes a re-evaluation of the relationship between the church and the state in Greece and the EU, focusing on the case of Mt. Athos. The paper argues that Athos is a Maussian 'gift' to Greece: the carrier of the Modern Greek identity, and a poison (farmakon) to the Greek economy, symbolizing decades of corruption of a state that is still struggling to get over its feudal past. It further argues that it is vital to work collectively towards social and political cohesion between the state and the church, through transparency and regulation in Greece, in order to confront the challenge of the European Unification and the unregulated market. These include issues of the avaton, metochia, the impact of the UNESCO Heritage funding and taxation, as well as, discussions over Russian investment in energy policies and transport networks which challenge the European policy objectives for the environment and Transport Network operations undertaken by Structural Funds. Athos is a meeting place of contestation between various secular (i.e. 'cosmopolitan') forces. A re-evaluation of the relation of Athos to Greece and Europe therefore could be used as a strategic model for restructuring and regulating the relationship between secular and theocratic offices; the present and the past; change and tradition.

Keywords: *Avaton, Kosmikos k/cosmos, Oikonomia ('economy'), partheniki zoe ('virginity'), funding, metochia, taxation, network economy*

Author Bio: *Dr. Michelangelo Paganopoulos* conducted fieldwork in two monasteries of Mount Athos between 2002 and 2004, as part of his Ph.D. thesis in social anthropology, entitled: 'The Virgin land: An ethnographic study of monastic life in two monasteries of Mount Athos'. He has been working as an assistant lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London, and has also published articles on monastic life, as well as, in the arts and cultural studies. He is now editing a volume for Cambridge Scholars entitled *In Between Fiction and Non-Fiction: Reflections on the Poetics of ethnography in the Formation of World Society* (forthcoming).

The Paradox of Monastic Life: *Virginity* and *Economy*

Since the inclusion of Athos in the Greek territory in 1912, the thousand-year old monastic republic of male-only monks remains an untaxed haven. Its economic and political autonomy was established in the Athonian Charter and Greek Constitution of 1925-6, as per article 105 (see Appendix 1). Following the accession of Greece in the European Common Market in 1977, the special status of the peninsula and autonomy of each monastery were recognized and ratified in 1979: 'Recognising that the special status granted to Mount Athos, as guaranteed by Article 105 of the Hellenic Constitution and the Charter of Mount Athos justified exclusively on grounds of a spiritual and religious nature, the community will ensure that this status is taken into account in the application and subsequent preparation of provisions of community law, in particular in relation to customs franchise privileges, tax exemptions and the right of establishment' (Joint Declaration No. 5, attached to the Final Act of the accession Treaty, 1979).ⁱ Although in the past monks have publicly attacked the Schengen Agreement as Satan's world-conspiracy, allegedly aiming to unify the world under his powers -as prophesized in St. John's *Apocalypse*-, the agreement confirmed the republic's 'special status' and guaranteed its exemption from EU's Value Added Tax (VAT) subject to special rules concerning excise-duty and value-added tax.

Following the recent collapse of the Greek economy, there was a general call for the taxation of monastic properties outside Athos (*metochia*)ⁱⁱ as the means of regulating the awkward relation between the state and the monasteries. The need for taxation was further highlighted by revelations in the Greek media regarding the Vatopedi scandal that preceded the economic crisis of 2008-2012, culminating in the imprisonment of its Abbot Ephraim in December 2011 over money laundering and neglecting his duties. The Greek media highlighted the mediatory role of monks and government agents in public life, who secretly acted against the interests of the Greek state, as the damage from such 'spiritual' relations was reported to be in the millions of Eurosⁱⁱⁱ. In response to the call for transparency, the monks sent two letters to two Greek Prime Ministers, in which they used the 'special status' of Athos to defend their tax-free haven on the 'grounds of anonymity'. They argued that the monasteries' revenue is: 'just about sufficient to cover repairs to buildings, their basic daily needs and food and lodgings for visitors [...] this special status should continue to apply otherwise several monasteries will be unable to keep operating'^{iv}. In protest against discussions over the taxation of the monastic properties, the Athonian Council refused to attend to the scheduled meeting with the Finances minister Georgios Mavraganis, as for them the 'special status' of Athos is a matter of faith ('*thema pisteos*') associated with the collective conceptions of 'Orthodox identity' (*tautotita*) and 'sacred tradition' (*iera paradoseis*) allegedly untouched for more than a thousand years.

Religiously veiled under the monastic values of poverty, virginity, and humility, the geographical separateness of the peninsula from the 'worldly world' (*kosmikos kosmos*) is enhanced by the *Avaton* ('no pass'/trespassing) referring to the thousand-year old prohibition to all females and cattle from entering the peninsula (Paganopoulos 2007: 122-5). Accordingly, the 'virgin life' (*parthena zoe*) of the Mount illustrates Durkheim's definition of monasticism in terms of a 'sacred' way of life, in opposition to the 'profane' (i.e. secular) world (1995:37). However, while in Durkheim monasticism offers an 'escape' from the worldly world, the recent scandals of Vatopedi challenge this moral disconnection of sexuality (virginity) from economy, highlighting instead, the historical dependence of the monasteries to powerful 'cosmopolitans' (meaning 'world [*cosmos*] citizens [*politiss*']), including Emperors, traders, European Kings, Ottoman Sultans (Gillet 1987:65, Papachrysanthou 1992: 226-32, among others), and today the European Union.

The moral contradiction in the dependence of the monks to the world of flesh reveals the greater ontological paradox of Christian monastic life, also highlighted by Loizos and Papataxiarchis: 'In Orthodoxy the "two worlds" remain separate yet connected, but unequal and asymmetric, for while the laity by a positive effort can transcend the limitations of their flaws through fasting and piety [...] the monastics have chosen the 'elevated' path, and an increasing involvement in the 'world of the flesh' must be negatively evaluated' (1991:16-17). This observation inevitably raises further questions of how to morally justify historical *change*. The paradox is illustrated by the contradictory, and yet, complementary, relation of the Athonian concepts of 'virginity' (*parthenia*), in reference to the legend of the Virgin Mary which informs the landscape and the virgin way of life inside the monasteries, and the 'economy' (*oikonomia*) of each monastery, meaning the 'law of the house' and referring to the everyday practices and compromises the monks have to make in their strive towards the ideal (Paganopoulos 2009: 363-378).

According to archival research, the rule of the *Avaton* was introduced by Emperor Vasillios I in 885AC, in response to several economic disputes between monasteries and the secular town of Ierissos over the use of cattle in the fields situated between the monastery of Kolovos and Ierissos (Papachrysanthou 1992: 127-57, and Paganopoulos 2007: 123-5). The monastery charged a high price to rent the land for cattle, while other nearby monastic settlements also had their own claims over the land. The Emperor resolved these disputes in a letter addressed to a single authority of Athos, the Council of Elders, which drew the border between Athos and the 'worldly world' (*kosmikos k/cosmos*). Following the foundation of the republic by St Athanasius the Athonite in the 10th century, it has been alleged that the Holy Mary appeared to him introducing herself as the 'builder' (*ecodomos*) of the first Royal monastery of Meghisti Lavra (meaning the 'great *Lavra*'), encouraging him to complete his work. Following his accidental death in 1004, she supposedly re-appeared to the first Abbot of Meghisti Lavra, re-introducing herself as the '*economos*', meaning the 'stewardess' of the monastery, and 'economy' with the *coenobitic* (communal) life as the 'law' (*nomos*) of the 'house' (*ecos*).

Following four centuries of Ottoman ruling, during which the *coenobitic* (communal) life was dismantled and the *idiorythmic* model was introduced as a way of avoiding taxation, the notion of 'economy' (*eksoikonomo*) was re-introduced in the early 20th century with a return to communal life, by the charismatic Joseph the Hesychast (d.1959) as a new kind of self-management in the training of younger monks, particularly since the younger ones were deemed to be too soft to follow the hardships of the hermetic monastic life of the Hesychast (Joseph the Vatopedi 2002: 33, Filotheitis 2008: 350-352, and Paganopoulos 2009: 366-369). The return to the *coenobitic* way of life was encouraged by the Athonian Charter of 1926, as per chapter 5, article 85 (*Katastatikos Hartis* 1979: 63-64), as a nostalgic return to, and recovery of, the ideals of 'Byzantine universalism' (Tzanelli 2008:141-150), on the basis of a romantic 'longing for an age before the state' (as in Herzfeld 1997:22). Further, the Treaty of Sèvres of 10 August 1920, and the Lausanne Convention on 24 July 1923, ratified the constitutional autonomy of Athos, placing it under the spiritual protection of the 'Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople' in Istanbul, and the political protection of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The independent status of the Republic places it in a paradoxical position, as it is situated within the Greek borders but is also independent of Greece. This presented internal complications about the monasteries' relationship to the Greek state, namely that the status of non-Greek monks living on Athos is unclear. Despite article 6 of the Athonian constitution of 1926 declaring that 'all monks living on Athos, regardless of their ethnicity gain the Greek citizenship' (*Katastatikos Hartis* 1979: 33), non-Greek monks represent different Orthodox

traditions from that of Greeks, which in the past have led into conflicts over matters of faith, with demographic consequences.

Following the inclusion of Athos into the Greek border of 1912, the monasteries were obliged to return to the *coenobitic* life, as per chapter 5, article 85 of the Athonian Charter of 1926 (*Katastatikos Hartis* 1979: 63-64). The Charter on the one hand, guaranteed the economic and political autonomy of the republic from Greece, while on the other hand it encouraged for the reorganization of the twenty surviving monasteries into functional economic units (i.e. 'economy' here means the 'law [*nomos*] of the house [*ecos*]' and is directly related to 'ecology', Paganopoulos 2009: 364). The return to the ideals and practices of *coenobitic* life was seen as a recovery of a lost, 'spiritual' past, as a kind of spiritual resurrection by Greek monks. Historically, however, it was the result of the rapid demographic changes that took place in the peninsula in the first half of the 20th century, as a consequence of the accession of the Republic to Greece in 1912.

Vatopedi's Network economy: Contemporary Issues, Moral Dilemmas

One of the main issues regarding the paradoxical status of the monasteries is their constitutional and financial ambiguity. Nowadays, the contradictory image of contemporary monasticism is manifested in various forms: including questions over the pollution of the 'virgin' landscape and over-extraction of wood^v; the importation of new technologies and the internet that challenge the silent isolation of the monks from the world (i.e. *hesychasm*); and the rapid rise of religious tourism^{vi}. Parallel to these internal issues, there is also the thorny issue of the EU and UNESCO restoration and structural funding, and the compromises the monks might have to make in the future in order to receive further funds. For instance, between 2007 and 2013 the monasteries received €348 billion, comprising €278 billion for the Structural Funds (the European Regional Development Fund, ERDF, which was set up in 1975 for the creation of infrastructure and productive job-creating investment, and the European Social Fund (ESF), that was set up in 1958), as well as an extra €70 billion for the Cohesion Fund that was set up in 1994 to further support the working conditions and employment, as well as the environment and transport infrastructure projects, all of which would help to speed up the unification of Europe on several levels.

However, the EU legislative body makes it clear that: "[...] aid under the Cohesion Fund is subject to certain conditions"^{vii}. In particular, the EU funds raised two kinds of questions over the *exceptional* status of Athos: questions over the legality of the *Avaton* rule, and vice versa, the impact of funding in Athonian life; and questions over the distribution and actual use of structural funds. In 1999, the UNESCO world heritage fund was interrupted because of the issue of the *Avaton*, raised in the European parliament over the right of all EU citizens to access all European areas^{viii}. In opposition to the thousand year old rule, the EU put forward the principle of '*acquits communautaire*', referring to the obligation of the funded monasteries to participate in the public discussion over women's right of access. The second issue regarding the distribution of funding was associated with corruption in the conduct of some monasteries. According to some reports in the Greek media, EU funding was not used to restore the monasteries or preserve the natural environment, but for investing in land and privileged properties outside Athos, with the co-operation of government agents and lawyers acting on behalf of the monastery.

This tension between the monasteries and local authorities over public land was exemplified by the rapid economic and demographic revival of Vatopedi in the 1990s by the Family of Josephaeoi (Paganopoulos 2009: 371-373) which was funded by the EU and the

Greek government via the 'Athos program'^{ix}. The fund was used for the restoration of buildings, cataloguing artworks, relics, and printed material, as well as conservation of the natural environment. Although a portion was subsidized by *KEDAK*^x, the program was mainly dependent on EU funding under the guidelines of UNESCO as a 'World heritage Site'. In addition to this, following the great fire in March 2004, extra-budgetary funds were given to Vatopedi to help with the restoration of 10,000 sq² of destroyed land of the neighbouring Serbian monastery of Hilliandari. The 2004 damages and the cleaning and restoration projects that were planned for 2005 and 2006 were estimated to have cost approximately 30 million euros, and yet, the Centre of Preservation of the Holy Mount and Heritage (KEDAK), the 10th Ephorate of Byzantine and post-Byzantine antiquities of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and the money allocated by the Greek Ministry of Culture over the next five years, managed to raise around 1 million euros, as the rest of the damage had to be covered by the EU and other international organizations. UNESCO's report, highlighted further problems of internal management, both regarding the use of the funds, as well as, concerns regarding the preservation of the land in itself for which these funds were originally allocated:

'[...] A number of other management problems have become evident in visits to the site by the members of ICOMOS and other organizations in recent years. Large European Union funded infrastructure projects have promoted intrusive road development projects (in a territory that has very limited vehicular traffic) and which have threatened long maintained landscape qualities around and between monasteries. Equally EU funded restoration projects are taking place without reference to the WH values recognized at the moment of inscription, and without following normal conservation standards for documentation, investigation and analysis. Concern has been expressed that the chestnut forest surrounding the monasteries – the last extensive forest in the Mediterranean area – is threatened by careless habits of timber extraction and increasing road building between monastic settlements.' [<http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/1292>]

In fact, a large amount of the funds that were meant to be allocated and distributed towards the restoration of the damaged monasteries and preservation of the forest, were used by the elder monks of some monasteries to invest in land and properties inside and outside Athos. As early as 1998, the Abbot and the council of elders of Vatopedi began a legal process against the Greek state, claiming ownership of the lake Vistonida in northern Greece according to Byzantine and Ottoman rulings. Their claims were followed by those of three other monasteries: Koutloumousiou, Xenophontos, and Dionysiou, all belonging to 'spiritual children' of Joseph the Hesychast^{xi}. All four monasteries have Abbots who are 'grandchildren' of the charismatic Joseph the Hesychast (d. 1959) founder of the Family of Josepheoi who revived the *coenobitic* life and *economy* of a number of monasteries and settlements inside and outside Athos (Paganopoulos 2009: 371-6).

Ten years later, on January 9th, 2008, six women, led by the Member of Parliament Amanatidou-Pashalidou, broke the rule of the *Avaton* by jumping over the fence at the borders with the secular town Ierissos, in protest against Vatopedi's claims. The women's bravery brought into the public spotlight the political and financial involvement of the monasteries in secular life. The revelations of 2008 threw further light into Vatopedi's financial misconduct through informal political connections, which were carefully covered under the veil of 'spirituality' (Paganopoulos 2009:373-376). From 2008 to 2012, the Greek media unravelled a network of connections that expands from Athens to Moscow and the US, through which the monks claimed public land, including forests and lakes, then exchanged it with highly valued properties with the secret involvement of politicians, judges, and lawyers, in order to rent or sell it to off-shore companies in the US and Cyprus to agents acting secretly on behalf of the monastery^{xii}. The media identified the banks of the Marfin Group as the main source of the capital flow to the monastery. The Bank granted

unchecked loans to the monastery, only to be returned to companies of the same Group (such as the Hygeia Medical Group, Vivartia, Singular Logic, and other investing banks, all of which were related to MIG) in the form of capital share increase, or for the purchase of shares of the Group's off-shore companies, such as Torcaso Investment Ltd.

Furthermore, in addition to this money-laundering system, through Anthemias and other companies of the Papistas Group, all acting as partners of the monastery, Vatopedi was enabled to engage in the buying and selling of property estate and land in Greece and Serbia in exchanges that involved members of the Greek parliament and other prominent public figures. For instance in 2007, one of Vatopedi's off shore companies bought a property in Serbia from the company Sasa Gerum for a reported €704,500. A year later, the monks then sold it to the company Digital Printing Center for a reported €2,450,000 (i.e. 3.5 times higher in price). Furthermore, with money coming from funding, loans, and similar transactions the monastery bought a number of prominent properties in Thessaloniki and Athens, which they then rent of sold. All these companies, and banks such as Emporiki in Athens and Laiki in Cyprus, as well as the individual politicians, lawyers, and other public personalities who were involved in these exchanges acting as surrogates in several non-transparent transactions are all still under investigation, some of them already imprisoned. In total, the records of the Bank of Greece show that between 2006 and 2008, the monastery of Vatopedi alone had received government financing amounting to €5,947,353.88, rental income of €9,160,114.10, loans from other creditors of €9,261,300.80 which were used to pay other loans, and cash from the monastery's everyday business of €1,342,021.09, all amounting to a total of €25,710,798.22 (these numbers are taken from the detailed investigation of journalist Kostas Vaxevanis in *Pandora's Box* [31/1/2012 ERT.GR])^{xiii}.

In response to the scandal, the Greek state prosecutor called for Abbot Ephraim and the head of the monastery's Treasury, along with a number of Greek officials, agents, and lawyers, to be tried in 2009 (*Eleutherotypia* 18/5/09). Furthermore, the representatives of the monasteries of the Holy Committee and the Patriarch Vartholomeos asked Vatopedi's Abbot to resign from his position in December 2008. The Abbot strategically resigned only from his administrative duties, as the head of the monastery's Council of Elders (*gerontia*), but refused to resign from his 'spiritual duties' (*pneumatika kathikonta*), thus, essentially remaining the father of the community on the basis of the structural separation of administrative from spiritual hierarchies (Sarris 2000: 8-9, Paganopoulos 2009: 365-6). Still, this tactical semi-resignation did not prevent his conviction in the Greek courts two years later, followed by his humiliating arrest in front of the cameras and subsequent imprisonment in Athens (*AthensNews/gw*, *AMNA*, *Reuters*, *BBC* 29/12/2011).

Despite all that, Abbot Ephraim's brotherhood refused to condemn him, seeing him as a 'martyr' who sacrificed himself for the good of his community and the monastery, in imitation to the self-sacrifice of the 'first monk' Christ. In my discussions with Vatopedians in the field, many highlighted that the 'spiritual life' (*pneumatiki zoe*) of the brotherhood depends on the financial and political status of the monastery. Furthermore, according to the ideal of poverty, the abbot does not own any private property in his name, but everything belongs to the impersonal entity: the 'Monastery'. Thirdly, the monks were keen to highlight to me the missionary role of the monasteries as educational institutions inside and beyond the Greek state (Alpentzos 2002:14-15). This echoes Parry's assertion that Christianity is an 'ethicised salvation religion' which 'encourages the separation of persons from things', and in which charity becomes a 'free gift' and Christianity the ideological counterpart to unregulated capitalism (1986:453-473). In this sense, Vatopedi is seen both as a centre of Orthodox spirituality, as well as, a business, as also testified by Ephraim himself in one of his speeches in the refectory during my fieldwork:

-“The monastery is like a business; just like a business advertises its trade, so do we. We advertise the treasures of our monastery, the holy girdle and the relics of the saints, the Holy Cross and the miraculous icons of Mary, to sell the spirit and advertise the Orthodox way of life” [extract from abbot’s speech in refectory, 21/9/02]

In this context, the concept of ‘economy’, in association with the ideal of ‘virginity’, offer a variety of individual and collective strategies, on the basis of re-inventing traditional practices which are technologically reproduced, such as the vocation of sacred objects, as well as, the life-biography of charismatic monks. The production and distribution of such sacred products allow the monks to actively engage inside and outside Athos with a network of institutions (i.e. the network/informal economy). For instance, the object that symbolizes the virginity of the landscape and the monastic self is the girdle of the Virgin Mary, kept in Vatopedi. The Girdle was given as a gift to Vatopedi by the emperor Theodosius I ‘the Great’ (347-395 AC, emperor 379-395 AC), as a gift for the miraculous rescue of his son Arcadius from a shipwreck at the site of Vatopedi. According to the monks, the Girdle was taken to Cappadocia and Constantinople in the 4th century, where it was kept until the Greek revolution of 1821. After the destruction of the monastery by the Ottoman army it ended up with the British Consul, based at the island of Santorini. The legend has it that the locals of the island managed to gather the money required to buy the belt from the British, and return it to Vatopedi via the monastery of Dionysiou [personal communication with *vemataris* (‘step-man’, sacristan) 22/9/02]. In this way, the belt is also connected to the foundation of the Greek state in itself, as its purchase from the British united an entire island, becoming a religious symbol of pan-Orthodox identity.

In their article on the new religious ‘economies of the occult’ (2000:310), the Comaroffs argued that the magic of capitalism (exemplified by the ‘casino economy’: to make money instantly out of nothing) was re-invented through a new religious market, which expands worldwide via new technologies such as the internet. In this context, the ‘sacred’ becomes a commodity, reproduced through the spiritual blessing of common items, such as copies of miraculous icons and items. These not only attract more visitors to the monastery, but simultaneously, expand its vocation through a ‘meta-network’ of ‘individuals, activities and locales around the world’ (as in Castells 1996:508). This is illustrated by the world-wide reputation of the Girdle that brings to the monastery a number of visitors, who make donations, or *tamata* (‘promises’), which are golden ornaments of body parts (a leg, a hand, a heart) in exchange for a miraculous healing. The bigger the item’s reputation, the more income the monastery makes from these exchanges in which the monks are mediators between god and the material world. According to the monks, the girdle miraculously produces Holy Moiré. The monks use the liquid to bless thousands of ribbons which allegedly impregnate sterile women. The ribbons are then sold through the internet and a network of churches and institutions in Greece and Russia (Paganopoulos 2007: 129-132).

The Vatopedians exhibit the girdle in public pilgrimages from Cyprus to Moscow and the US. During these pilgrimages, the miraculous girdle is not only supposed to heal the desolate, but above all, gains its own vocation, socially possessing ‘individuality’ and a ‘name’, ‘qualities’ and life-substance reproductive power (i.e. the Holy Moiré), thus, becoming both a ‘social agent’ and a ‘moral entity’ (as in Mauss 1990:30 and 56, Gell 1998: 21 and 153, and Sahlins 1972:167, among others). In this sense, it becomes the centre of a network economy allowing Vatopedi to engage with the world through the mediatory role of the monks between cosmopolitan and monastic institutions.

During the latest pilgrimage of the girdle to Moscow in November 2011, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the Russian Railways CEO and chairman of the board of trustees of the

St Andrew the First-Called Foundation Vladimir Yakunin, had the opportunity to meet Vatopedi's Abbot Ephraim and Monk Nektarios in order to discuss future investments in Vatopedi, including a possible railway that would connect the monastery directly to Moscow^{xiv}. This relationship is reciprocal: following Ephraim's arrest by the Greek authorities in December 2011, President Putin and the Russian Patriarch Cyril were among the most prominent public defendants of the Abbot's actions. Cyril organized a series of Orthodox protests in Moscow, including a letter to the Greek government in which he requested from the Greek government the immediate release of Ephraim (ekathimerini.com, December 29, 2011). A month later, Greek PM Samaras and Putin held a meeting with the chairman of Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom, Alexey Miller. The latter reportedly expressed: 'an interest in investing' in Greece's Public Gas Corporation (DEPA) and gas distribution operator (DESFA) as well as the Public Power Corporation (PPC). Miller also conveyed Russia's interest in building power stations in western Greece that could transform gas being carried by the South Stream pipeline into electricity that could be channelled to Italy' (ekathimerini.com, Jan 26, 2012). Putin's frequent visits to Athos instigated further discussions over energy policies, which amount to a serious challenge to European policy objectives for the environment and/or the Trans-European Transport Network, undertaken by Structural Funds. In this context, Athos becomes a meeting place of *contestation* between various secular (i.e. 'cosmopolitan') forces, including those between the Greek state, the Church, the monasteries, Russia and Europe.

This active involvement of the Vatopedians with the same world they morally and practically denounce in their everyday life, on the basis of the tradition of 'virginity' (*parthenia*) and the association of the peninsula with the Virgin Mary, highlights the moral contradiction in the paradox of monastic life as discussed above. This contradiction is often highlighted by the Greek media in their way they portray the Vatopedi scandal, focusing on the argument that "a monastery should not be a business"^{xv}. However, this morally strict point of view is rather a-historical, completely ignoring the historical 'reciprocity' between monks, and political and market institutions throughout the history of monasticism (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991: 16). But also, ironically, it echoes neo-fundamentalist views on monastic life. For instance, the neighbouring rival to Vatopedi monks of the monastery of Esfigmenou, who belong to the new zealot movement of the 'Old Calendarist Church' (*Palaioimerologites*), famously refuse to accept funding from the state and the EU, because they believe that such cosmopolitan institutions work for the 'Antichrist Pope'. In this context of a world-conspiracy, the zealots believe that the Vatopedian emphasis on obedience for instance is a way for the Vatopedian elders to deceive the younger members on their brotherhood into a false (i.e. imported) type of monastic life, which aims to destroy Orthodoxy 'from the inside' [from personal communication with monks of Esfigmenou].

Esfigmenou is the heart of the *new* zealots of the 'Old Calendarist Church', an international ultra-Orthodox political sect that takes the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1926 by most monasteries of Athos as a betrayal and a 'matter of faith' (*thema pisteos*). The monastery has been associated with extremist political parties in Greece, Europe and the US, and its monks have participated in a number of public protests against the international project of 'Ecumenism', the effort to unify the Catholic and Orthodox Churches that began in the 1970s (Paganopoulos 2007: 127-128). Since the 1970s, the zealots refuse to participate to the Holy Committee of Athos, and to commemorate the Patriarch in their prayers. In February 2003, following the third eviction note issued by the Holy Committee and the Greek Patriarchate against the 'occupying' brotherhood, the monastery has been under embargo, while the Committee funds another nearby abandoned settlement to become the new Esfigmenou, in order to further isolate the zealots. But ironically, the

bigger their struggle against the world becomes, the greater their ultra-Orthodox reputation spreading worldwide.

For the Esfigmenites, the public discussion over the abolition of the *Avaton* is a consequence of EU funding, and a sign of the Second Coming as prophesized by a number of charismatic monks: from Paisios's famous prophecy of the great petrol war over Alaska, to prophecies about the end of time and the tsunami that will cover the 2,000 metres of Mount Athos, leaving only 33 metres above the water, a number echoing the years of Christ on the Cross. Only sixty-six righteous monks will be saved to witness the Apocalypse (prophecy from the monastery of Esfigmenou, Paganopoulos 2007: 128). Many of these prophecies are spread over the internet, books, and magazines, or by word of mouth, forming an informal network of reinvented mythologies in direct relevance to the world today. They reveal a collective anxiety over contemporary matters of faith, including identity and tradition, money and corruption, pollution and disillusion with the new world.

Ironically, these contemporary and collective anxieties also echo Karl Polanyi's warning about the 'demolition of society' as a result of the 19th century's structural separation of the economic from the political and social sphere, resulting to the 'dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity "man"' (1944:ch.6): the pollution of nature, petrol wars, debt, riots, and the worldwide rise of unemployment along with the rise of neo-fundamentalism and neo-fascism, are all symptoms of a world society in formation; a world in a *liminal* chaotic state of rebirth. For Polanyi, stability can only be achieved through regulation, transparency, and cohesion. His call is directly relevant to the awkward relation of the monasteries both to Greece and the EU. Therefore, a re-evaluation of these net-relations, with taxation as its central focus, could be then used throughout the EU as a strategic model for restructuring and regulating the relationship between secular and theocratic offices; the present and the past; change and tradition.

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Appendix 1

The Constitution of Greece – Part Three: Organization and Functions of the State

Chapter Three: Regime of Aghion Oros (Mount Athos)

Article 105

1. The Athos peninsula extending beyond Megali Vigla and constituting the region of Aghion Oros shall, in accordance with its ancient privileged status, be a self-governed part of the Greek State, whose sovereignty thereon shall remain intact. Spiritually, Aghion Oros shall come under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. All persons leading a monastic life thereon acquire Greek citizenship without further formalities, upon admission as novices or monks.

2. Aghion Oros shall be governed, according to its regime, by its twenty Holy Monasteries among which the entire Athos peninsula is divided; the territory of the peninsula shall be exempt from expropriation.

The administration of Aghion Oros shall be exercised by representatives of the Holy Monasteries constituting the Holy Community. No change whatsoever shall be permitted in the administrative system or in the number of Monasteries of Aghion Oros, or in their hierarchical

order or in their position to their subordinate dependencies. Heterodox or schismatic persons shall be prohibited from dwelling thereon.

3. The determination in detail of the regimes of the Aghion Oros entities and the manner of operation thereof is effected by the Charter of Aghion Oros which, with the cooperation of the State representative, shall be drawn up and voted by the twenty Holy Monasteries and ratified by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Parliament of the Hellenes.

4. Faithful observance of the regimes of the Aghion Oros entities shall in the spiritual field be under the supreme supervision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and, in the administrative, under the supervision of the State, which shall also be exclusively responsible for safeguarding public order and security

5. The afore-mentioned powers of the State shall be exercised through a governor whose rights and duties shall be determined by law.
The law shall likewise determine the judicial power exercised by the monastic authorities and the Holy Community, as well as the customs and taxation privileges of Aghion Oros.

Endnotes

ⁱ *Official Journal L 291*, 19/11/1979 P. 0186 ; Source: UNESCO/CLT/WHC
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/454>11979H/AFI/DCL/04

ⁱⁱ Επιβολή φόρου ακίνητης περιουσίας (ΕΤΑΚ)

ⁱⁱⁱ Abbot Ephraim taken to Korydallos prison' (*Athens News/gw, AMNA, Reuters, BBC, 29/12/2011*)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16344621> [last visit 9/6/13]

^{iv} The first letter was sent to George Papandreou in March 2011; the second to the current PM Samaras in August 2012. See online reports *Ekathimerini.com* [15/5/2012] and ΕΘΝΟΣ «Ε» [14/8/2012 and 30/8/2012].

^v See Eleseos and Papagiannis 1994: 43-54, and in *Official Journal of the EU* OJ C 318 E, 13/11/2001, written question E-0576/03 by Mikhail Papayannakis GUE/NGL to the EU Commission 28 February 2003 with subject 'the declassification of woodlands in Greece', including Athonian forests.

^{vi} According to reports there are more than 50,000 visitors to Athos a year, Greek newspaper *Macedonia* 28/11/2005, p.31.

^{vii} Link: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/structural_cohesion_fund_en.htm

^{viii} See Swiebel and Rojo reports 2003; Anna Karamanou and the European Parliament and the Chairperson of the Committee of Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities report in July 2003, and in the *Official Journal of the EU* 2004/C 58 E/023, written question P-0556/03 by Maria Izquierdo Rojo (PSE) to the Commission (20/2/2003); and 318 E, 13/11/2001, p. 0252, written question P-1954/01 by Gianni Vattimo (PSE) on the 'violation of the principle of equality of access to Mount Athos', on the basis of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, "Equality Between Men and Women", as per article 23 : '[...] requests the lifting of the ban on women entering Mount Athos in Greece, a geographical area of 400 km² where women's access is prohibited in accordance with a decision taken in 1045 by monks living in the 20 monasteries in the area, a decision which nowadays violates the universally recognized principle of gender equality, Community non-discrimination and equality legislation and the provisions relating to free movement of persons within the EU'. See also Corrigendum to Directive 2004/58/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States amending Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 and repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC (*Official Journal of the European Union L 158 of 30 April 2004*), and L 229/38 EN *Official Journal of the European Union* 29.6.2004 'RIGHT OF EXIT AND ENTRY to all Union citizens' (CHAPTER II: Article 4).

