



Rodica Elena Soare

## Byzantine Public Policies: *Charistike*

### Abstract

The institutional strengthening of monasticism as derived from the iconoclastic period, increased the popular piety towards the monks through that of the upper Byzantine social classes, the civil and military aristocracy and the imperial circle. This led to a substantial increase in the number of monasteries from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. While a good part of these did not last long, new monasteries continued to be erected and the wealth of others increased considerably. Due to the owned land properties, the monasteries became an active part of the Byzantine Empire's economy, imposing the need for regulations and activation of specific economic mechanisms. One of the practices applied to monasteries in the tenth and eleventh centuries is



Ph.D. student Rodica Elena Soare, Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Holy Apostle Andrew", "Ovidius" University of Constanța, Romania

charistike. Its purpose was to assign the monastery to a person, charistikarios, who was obliged to manage it financially, receiving as a benefit, the right to dispose of total income and movable and immovable property of the monastery. This study aims to present aspects of the practice of charistike, the influence and changes brought on Byzantine society and culture.

## Keywords

Charistike, Monasticism, Typikon, Eleventh century, Economy

## 1 Introduction

The monasticism played an important role in the Byzantine world, representing the spiritual ideal, the path to perfection for all Byzantines. Its spiritual character did not segregate monasticism from society, even becoming an active component of the Empire's economy over time. This is due, on the one hand, to the institutional character that monasticism has acquired over the centuries, based entirely on ascetic life with all the reverberations produced by it at all levels of the social structure.<sup>1</sup> The affirmation and acceptance of the monastic institution, especially after the confrontation produced by the iconoclastic heresy, had as a result the appearance of a large number of monasteries from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, mostly of them being an imperial and aristocratic initiative.<sup>2</sup> On

---

<sup>1</sup> Rodica Elena Soare, "Monahismul răsăritean, de la asceza particulară la forma instituțională", in *Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească. Istorie, cultură și mărturisire creștină în societatea europeană*, ediția a III-a, Constanța, 24-25 mai 2021, ed.: Pr. Conf. Dr. Constantin Claudiu Cotan, Editura Universitară, București (2021), pp. 81-89.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Charanis, "The monk as an element of Byzantine society", *Dumbarton Oaks papers*, vol. 25 (1971), p. 67.

the other hand, the monastery, a monastic “territory” par excellence, it paradoxically also represented the meeting place and reason for the interaction between the monk and the secular world, with strong social, economic and political implications. Being involved in the social and ecclesiastical life in the Greek East and in the Latin West, the presence of monks was equally manifested throughout the whole Christian area.<sup>3</sup> The piety of the laymen led to the endowment with land properties and various other movable and immovable assets, which often exceeded the capacity of monks’ administration and, especially, their desire to have these worries for the material aspects of life.

## 2 The status and state of monasteries in the tenth and eleventh centuries

From a spiritual perspective, the monastery is a gift to God, which should limit the human intervention in some respects. The most problematic human actions in this regard is related to the alienation of the goods consecrated to God. From the legal perspective, the monastery was built from a personal initiative, being therefore private property. Thus, the owned properties placed the monasteries among the landowners, subjecting them to the imperial laws applicable to them. From the canonical perspective, the establishment of a monastery could not be done without the consent of the Church through the local bishop, to whom the monks were subjected, according to canon 4 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon.

In this context, the imperial laws on the purchase of smallholders’, peasants’ or soldiers’ properties by large aristocratic owners, also refer to monasteries, some of which are considered as belonging to large owners and others belonging to

---

<sup>3</sup> Constantin Claudiu Cotan, „*Petru Damiani sau imaginea unei autorități bisericesti din secolul al XI-lea*”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească...*, pp. 362-380.

the category of small owners. According to the Emperor Romanus I Lecapenus's novel in 934, *hegoumenoi* falls into the category of the "powerful" – δυνατοί, along with the metropolitans, bishops and archbishops, the emperor forbidding them to purchase land from peasants.<sup>4</sup> Another novel offers the example of a monastery as a small owner. The novel issued in 996 by Emperor Basil II redefined the status of monasteries founded in villages on the lands of free peasants, calling the settlements with less than eight monks, houses of prayer and not monasteries.<sup>5</sup> Its purpose was to protect the land ownership of small monasteries founded by peasants on their own land. Such a settlement was found lasting no longer than the very life of the founder. If it was considered a monastery, after the death of the peasant founder who was sometimes monk too, this land would go out of the economic circuit of the Empire passing into the Church patrimony.

The emperors' concern about the efficient use of land was natural in the context of the centralized economy based on tax revenues. The success of the army and therefore the security of the Empire depended on the proper functioning of the economy and the effectiveness of tax collection. At the foundation of the Byzantine economy was the fiscal economic unit, *chorion* – the Byzantine village, which provided most of the taxes paid from working of the land. The interest in the good administration of the monasteries' lands follows the same reasoning, and the imperial concern for them arose due to the inability of the monks to work the lands received through donations and the waste of capital due to the lack of labor force. At the same time, the emperors intuited the economic potential of the monasteries under the conditions of a good administration. The effective management of the monasteries brought revenue to both the State and the Church. A document with a double significance for

---

<sup>4</sup> *Jus Graeco-Romanum. 3: Novellae constitutiones*, Zachariae von Lingenthal (ed.), T.O. Weigel, Leipzig, 1857, Coll. III, Nov. V, p. 246.

<sup>5</sup> *Jus Graeco-Romanum. 3*, Coll. III, Nov. XXVIII, pp. 313-315.

this study is the novel of Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) issued in 964.<sup>6</sup> First of all, it provides information on the state of the monasteries in the tenth century. Secondly, it launches the concept of the efficiency of the material administration of monasteries, which was the basis of *charistike*, marking its initiation.

The contribution of the monastic institution to the victory over iconoclasm allowed the resumption of the momentum of the establishment of monasteries before it. Thus, “their number increased greatly and became disproportionate to the need”, and the erection of monasteries continued, although thousands of monasteries needed material support with the passage of time. The emperor condemned the obstination with which some people continued to establish monasteries instead of helping to rehabilitate the existing ones, considering it vain glory, so he also banned such initiatives. Instead, he recommended that the monasteries be endowed not only with land properties, but also with those necessary for the work of their land and the acquisition of income, “slaves, oxen, sheep and other animals.” Therefore, the monasteries with good administration, became even a source of material and not only spiritual profit for the Empire. However, in order not to lose this spiritual gain, material concerns did not have to prevail for the monks, but had to be left in the laymen’s care, this aspect being an essential aspect in differentiating the two social categories. This was the suggested solution to the present economic problem of the Empire: to stop the construction of new monasteries and to renovate and efficiently manage the existing ones. The involvement of the laity in the life of the monastery was not a novelty at the end of the first millennium, it seemed to be practiced even before the Fourth Council of Chalcedon, since canon 24 issued at this council, regarding the change of destination of the monasteries, stipulated that “the monasteries

---

<sup>6</sup> *Jus Graeco-Romanum*. 3, Coll. III, Nov. XXVIII, pp. 292-296.

once sanctified (consecrated) with the consent (approval) of the bishop should remain forever to the monastery and the goods (things), the possessions which hang (hold) on them (belong to them) to be preserved.” The canon was reiterated at the Quinisext Council, explicitly specifying that the monasteries should not “be granted (...) by any man to the worldly men (lay people)”.

Despite these prohibitions, the practice of entrusting monasteries to the laity continued until the tenth century, being mentioned in the Emperor Basil II’s novel: “metropolitans and bishops can grant or transfer these monasteries to anyone who will want” (the reference being related to monasteries whose foundation violated the law of houses of prayer), or “as regards the independent and large old monasteries, we order them to remain, as in the past, under the authority of metropolitans or bishops who can present or transfer them to anyone they wish.”<sup>7</sup>

### 3 Public policy of administration of monasteries - *charistike*

Since the end of the tenth century<sup>8</sup>, this practice of entrusting monasteries mainly to lay people, under specific conditions, acquires, through the legislative initiative of Emperor Basil II and the agreement of Patriarch Nicholas II Chrysoberges (980-992)<sup>9</sup>, the aspect of a public policy<sup>10</sup> known as *χαριστική* – *charistike*.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Jus Graeco-Romanum*. 3, Coll. III, Nov. XXVIII, pp. 313-315.

<sup>8</sup> Emil Herman, “*Ricerche sulle istituzioni monastiche bizantine. Typika ktetorika, caristicari e monasteri 'liberi'*”, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 6 (1940), p. 317.

<sup>9</sup> Emil Herman, “*Ricerche sulle istituzioni monastiche ...*”, p. 317.

<sup>10</sup> John P. Thomas, “*The Rise of the Independent and Self-governing Monasteries as Reflected in the Monastic Typika*”, in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 30.1(1985), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> The formulated in Byzantine documents is *charistike*, not *charistikion*, cf. Hélène Ahrweiler, „*Charisticariat et autres formes de fondations pieuses*

The origin of this practice is not explicitly documented, as it is inferred from the mentions in the various imperial or patriarchal documents, from its results, from the reactions aroused and from the measures that have been tried to be taken to limit or stop its negative effects. Also, another important source of information are the monastic *typika*, whose appearance in large numbers since the very tenth century is attributed to this practice of *charistike*.

“The gift of grace” or *χαρίστηκεδωρεά* – *charístikedoreá*<sup>12</sup> was an assignment, made to any person, regardless of social status, sex or material situation, during his life<sup>13</sup> (and can extend to the third generation), with the purpose of restoring and administering<sup>14</sup> a monastery, church establishment or charitable foundation, hospital, orphanage, nursing home, etc. The donation was made as a whole, including the rights and privileges of the monastery and all its assets, both movable and immovable.

According to the law, the beneficiary, *charistikarios* did not become the owner, but had the right to usufruct, as a reward for his effort and expertise. He had to draw up a plan of investments from his own capital and measures, and his activity had to be limited to the material problems of the monastery, leaving the monks time and tranquility to deal with the spiritual ones. In the documents, *charistikarioi* also appear with the names *δεσποτης* – despot or *προνοήτες* – suppliers, *επίτροπος* – *epitrope*, *προστάτης*, *κοσμήτω* – deacon, *άντιλήπτωρ*, *άντιλαμβανόμενος*

---

*aux X-XI siècles*”, in *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog Instituta*, vol. 10(1967), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Mark C. Bartusis, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, A. P. Kazhdan et. alli. (eds.), Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1991, pp.412-413.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Charanis, “*The Monastic Properties and the State in the Byzantine Empire*”, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 4 (1948), p. 74.

<sup>14</sup> Αλεξίου, *Ισον Υπομνήματσοσ*, in *Σύνταγμα τῶνθείων καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων*, vol. 5, G.A. Ralli and M. Potli (eds.), Grigoris Publication, Atena, 1855, p. 21

– preceptor, ἑφορος – curator, names adopted by the beneficiaries themselves to emphasize their quality as service providers to the monastery.<sup>15</sup> The founder of a monastery could also be the *charistikarios* of another. The vast majority of beneficiaries came from among the laity, but there are some examples of *charistikarioi* and among the monks: Michael Psellos, Saint Simeon the New Theologian or clergymen, such as patriarch Constantine III Leichoudes (1059-1063).<sup>16</sup>

The most documented model of *charistikarios* is that of Michael Psellos. For him, *charistike* was not only the source of income that ensured his financial prosperity, but it was a commitment similar to that of marriage. The well-known Byzantine personality perfected this occupation to the level of profession. Being focused on the productive potential of the monastery, its administration followed an established business plan. For the success of the activities undertaken, tax exemptions, conflict resolution or the protection of monks, Psellos did not hesitate to use his personal relationships. He managed the monasteries taken in *charistikewith* responsibility and good intentions, and for his experience, capital, relations and effort, he was sought after by the communities of many monasteries.<sup>17</sup> Thus, he made important profits without injustice to the monasteries, which received their own benefit. For this, the monks of Ta Narsou monastery, to which he was connected by his childhood education period, considered him not only the *charistikarios*, but also the founder. All the letters of Psellos requesting something in the name of a monastery emphasized that the good deed by which the request was fulfilled was dedicated to Mother of God and the Holy Martyrs. From his letters one can deduce the

---

<sup>15</sup> Hélène Ahrweiler, “*Charisticariat et autres formes ...*”, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Constantin Claudiu Cotan, „*Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog – părintele teologiei luminii divine*”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească...*, pp. 178-190.

<sup>17</sup> Constantin Claudiu Cotan, „*Mihail Psellos și veacul său*”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească...*, pp. 49-61.



particular situations in which the monasteries given in *charistike* could be: a monastery could be managed simultaneously by even three people, each being responsible with its investment and financial situation; the taxes paid by the monastery could be “adjusted”, depending on the relationship between the *charistikarios* and the imperial official designated for the *thema* where the monastery was located; the taxes paid were the same as for the private property; imperial officials, such as the *thema* judge (*krites*), could abuse the hospitality of the monasteries.<sup>18</sup> Attribution of a monastery as *charistike* could be made to persons or institutions that had property rights or canonical jurisdiction over monasteries: the patriarch for patriarchal monasteries, metropolitans, archbishops and bishops for episcopal monasteries, the emperor for imperial monasteries, officials for monasteries located on the public domain of the state, private persons (usually the founders and their heirs) for private monasteries, the peasant communal assembly for the monasteries belonging territorially to a village, the various officials for the monasteries located on their domains, the monks themselves from a monastery represented by the abbot, in the case of autonomous monasteries.<sup>19</sup>

The reasons for giving the monasteries by the emperors were political ones. Thus, *charistike* was used to assign monasteries to some people as rewards for their services or loyalty. The *logothetes* Nikephoritzes asked Emperor Michael VII (1067-1078) to be assigned the Hebdeomon monastery, with the promise that he would strengthen it and grant it abundantly from his income. The monastery became the thriving economic headquarters of the *logothetes*.<sup>20</sup> The Emperor Constantine IX

---

<sup>18</sup> Michael Jeffreys, Marc D. Lauxtermann, *The Letters of Psellos. Cultural Networks and Historical Realities*, Michael Jeffreys, Marc D. Lauxtermann (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, pp. 185-186, 221-222, 229-230, 287, 375, 399.

<sup>19</sup> Hélène Ahrweiler, “*Charisticariat et autres formes ...*”, pp. 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> MichaelisAttalioatae, *Historia*, Wladimir Brunet de Presle; Immanuel Bekker (eds.), Weber, Bonn, 1853, p. 201.

Monomachus (1042-1055) granted in *charistike* regime the monastery of Homonoia to Anna Radene. The same emperor attributed the imperial monastic complex Saint George of Mangana to Constantine III Leichoudes during his lifetime.<sup>21</sup> The way in which this monastery was granted was called the *pronoia* in the documents of the time, although the use of this term in this situation is controversial. *Pronoia* represented the way of granting properties, other than monasteries, specific to the emperor. The monastery of Mangana was assigned in the *charistike* system, meeting all the specific conditions, the confusion came from the fact that the donation was made by the emperor.<sup>22</sup> The granting of the monastery was strengthened in writing by Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus, exceptionally giving him this immunity. Constantine III Leichoudes renounced to his privileged position and implicitly the income of *charistikarios* in favour of that of the patriarch, accepting the conditioning imposed by Emperor Isaak I Komnenos (1057-1059).<sup>23</sup> By placing the possession of the imperial complex in balance with the patriarchal seat, one can assess the importance and value of the heritage offered by *charistike*. In this case, it was used politically, as a currency of exchange. Isaac Komnenos wanted to diminish the power of the future patriarch over the imperial domains and to clearly delimit the powers in the State. Another example that shows the generalization of this practice is its use even in the areas bordering the Empire, in Italy. The *spatharokandidatos* Christofor Bochomakes received the administration of the monastery of St. Peter in Taranto from the *katepánō* Gregory Trachaniotes as a reward for his service in the

---

<sup>21</sup> Michael Jeffreys, Marc D. Lauxtermann, *The Letters of Psellos...*, pp. 24, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Hélène Ahrweiler, "Charisticariat et autres formes ...", p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Eugen Stănescu, "Les reformes d'Isaac Comnene", in *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, Tome IV, Nos. 1-2, Editura Academiei de Științe Sociale și Politice, București (1966), p. 51.

battles with the Arabs in Sicily.<sup>24</sup> The *katepánō* was the representative of the emperor empowered to make decisions on his behalf.<sup>25</sup>

The attribution of monasteries for administration appeared and developed in various forms, even in and by the Church.<sup>26</sup> With the exception of imperial monasteries, and later autonomous monasteries, the other monastic settlements were under the jurisdiction of the Church. They were an important source of income for bishops and metropolitans, therefore *charistike* was considered a good practice for streamlining monasteries in ruins or in financial stalemate, which would not only have brought any income, but would have been even a burden. Strictly within the Church, another type of donation was practiced, a variant of *charistike*, namely *ἐπίδοσις* – *epidosis*. With the establishment of patriarchal protection over stauropegic monasteries, the revenues from this type of monastery were transmitted only to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, regardless of the diocese in which it was located. This led to a decrease of the incomes of the bishoprics from the monasteries. *Epidosis* was used to provide an additional income to these bishoprics and metropolitans. The beneficiary of the *epidosis* received for exploitation one of the properties of a monastery, for which he had to pay a part of the profit obtained, in money or its value by another way of remuneration. A bishopric or metropolitan in poor material conditions could receive the income of a well-equipped monastery in *epidosis*. Basically, it was a redistribution of income between two unequally developed church settlements.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Francisco Trincherà, (ed.), *Syllabus Graecarum membranarum*, Neapoli, 1865, X, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Rodica Elena Soare, „*Monahismul italo-grec din Italia bizantină în secolul al XI-lea*”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, nr. 4-6 (2021), pp.132-133.

<sup>26</sup> Hélène Ahrweiler, “*Charisticariat et autres formes ...*”, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Albert Failler, “*Le monachisme byzantin aux XIe-XIIe siècles. Aspects sociaux et économiques*”, in *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public, 5<sup>e</sup> congrès, Saint-Etienne* (1974), p. 186.

#### 4 Abuse and consequences of the practice of *charistike*

From the very beginning of the implementation of *charistike*, negative effects have become visible due to the abusive use of this form of administration of church property. The first deviation is the very hijacking of the system from its main purpose. The monasteries given to the laity were not always the ones in financial impasse or in need of improvement, but on the contrary, the thriving ones. Without investing, *charistikarioi* enriched themselves on the expense of the monasteries, which led to their ruination, because not only the additional income was used, but even the goods of the monastery were sold. The transfer of the right of *charistike* from one person to another allowed the exemption of responsibilities.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the trace of the abusively assigned goods was easy to erase.

Another violation of the rules of *charistike* was the intervention in matters of spiritual and monastic discipline: the imposition of novices in the monastery without taking into account the rules of the monastic community, at best, the abbot being only informed; the presence of a large number of laymen in the monastery, almost as that of the monks, who led a life that did not comply with the monastic rules; undermining the authority of the abbot, which led to disorder and disobedience on the part of the monks; the use of the monastery as a domestic residence, which allowed the presence of women in the monasteries of monks or men in nunneries.

These abuses were reported by the Patriarch John V the Oxyteof Antioch (1090-1155) in an indictment addressed to the public opinion and attention of Emperor Alexios I Comnenus (1081-1118).<sup>29</sup> In order to emphasize the seriousness of the facts, Patriarch John – known as the notorious accuser of illegalities,

---

<sup>28</sup> For example, the patriarchal monastery of Saint Mamas, Paul Gautier, “*Réquisitoire du patriarche Jean d’Antioche contre le charisticariat*”, in *Revue des études byzantines*, tome 33 (1975), p. 114.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Gautier, “*Réquisitoire du patriarche Jean d’Antioche...*”, pp. 87-89.

compared the practice of *charistike* to the heresy and desecration of gifts to God. The likeness of the emperors who initiated, practiced and tolerated *charistike* with the iconoclastic ones, however, was exaggerated, being valid only in the effects that this practice could have had on salvation from the perspective of Patriarch John of Ochia. While iconoclastic emperors wanted to destroy monasticism for its ideological principles, the emperors of the eleventh century supported it to draw material benefits from monasteries for the economy of the Empire. The abuses, however, were undeniable. To correct them, some of the patriarchs tried to take some measures. Constantinopolitan Patriarch Sisinnius II (996-998) had sensed from the very beginning the wrong direction in which the use of this practice was heading, so he commanded that the patriarchal monasteries under the *charistike* program should return to the custody of the Patriarchy. This decision was overturned by his successor, Patriarch Sergius II (999-1019), who justified that the provisions refer only to the correction of irregularities and not to the entire system of *charistike*.<sup>30</sup> Subsequent measures followed that same pattern - *charistike* was not abolished, but only intervened to remove the abuses. Patriarch Alexius I the Studite (1025-1043) at the synods of 1027 and 1028<sup>31</sup> highlighted the blatant illegalities of the *charistikarioi*, prohibited by the synodal decision: the transfer of the right of *charistike* to a third person; assigning a monastery of monks to a

---

<sup>30</sup> The documents have not been preserved, but they are inferred from the commentary of the canonist Theodore Balsamon to canon 13 of the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. *KANONEΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΗΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΝΤΙ ΣΥΝΟΔΟΥ ΕΒΔΟΜΗΣ ΣΥΝΟΔΟΥ*, in col. Σύνταγμα τῶν Θείων καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, vol. 2, G.A. Ralli and M. Potli (eds.), Grigoris Publication, Atena, 1852, p. 614.

<sup>31</sup> *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, Vol. 1, John Philip Thomas, Angela Constantinides Hero, Giles Constable (eds.), Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 204.

woman *charistikarios* and a nunnery to a man; punishing the abusive *charistikarioi* going as far as cancelling the cession of the monastery; imposing to the *charistikarioi* on diocesan monasteries to respect their duties to bishops and metropolitans; the prohibition of the assignment of monasteries in the vicinity of the diocesan headquarters; the return of monasteries assigned in *epidosis* to the bishoprics and metropolises in law, if their economic situation became unstable.<sup>32</sup>

The limitation of the power of *charistikarios* over the material administration of the monastery failed with all the efforts of Patriarch Alexius I the Studite. Thus, by the middle of the eleventh century, the practice of *charistike*, now institutionalized, reached its peak. The Church seemed to give in to such rapacious beneficiaries, more and more monasteries being ceded. The takeover of power by Emperor Isaak Komnenos (1057-1059) raised a new issue for the Church. The emperor was determined to confiscate the entire monastic and church properties surplus, which put the Church in a position to choose the lesser evil, in this case, it accepted the continuation of the cession of the monasteries with all the risk of abuses, in order not to lose them in favor of the State.

When Alexius I Komnenos became emperor, Patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos (1084–1111) began annulling the *charistike* rights of the predators. He also took a series of measures to gain real control over the management and administration of monasteries and their assets and to recover monasteries granted under *epidosis*. These had been given to clergy who had emigrated from Asia Minor because of the Empire's loss of these territories in order to provide them with an income. All these measures were strengthened and legalized by a novel by

---

<sup>32</sup> Αλεξίου, *Ισον Υπομνήματα*..., pp. 21-22.

Emperor Alexius I Komnenos<sup>33</sup>, which contributed to their implementation. The rigorous control over the granting of monasteries and their inventory, determined the decrease in the interest of people eager for enrichment in taking over other monasteries in *charistike* during the twelfth century. Yet this practice was so ingrained that it could not be stopped, but only replaced by another variant of divestiture, *ephoreia*. In this case, the beneficiary, engaged in the effort to administer a monastery for symbolic remuneration or only for his spiritual benefit. Thus, by establishing clear boundaries of the benefits, the abuses were greatly limited.

Deviations from the original meaning of *charistike* produced reactions of people involved directly or indirectly. On the one hand, hierarchs such as Patriarch John V the Oxyte, Metropolitan Leo of Chalcedon and Patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos of Constantinople, took the attitude corresponding to the hierarchical position occupied in the Church. Although there is no direct mention of a reform of monasticism in the documents of the time, their actions can be considered as reforming initiatives due to the proposed objectives and the reputation of these hierarchs. However, the purpose of these interventions wasn't the definitive stop of the practice of *charistike*, but limit the duties of *charistikarios* in order to stop the transgressions and correct the negative effects produced.

Another reaction to the abusive *charistikarioi* was that of the founders of monasteries. Although indirect, it was much more radical, by protecting their monasteries and obtaining for them the status of independence and autonomy specified in the monastery's *typikon*. Traditionally and implicitly, the monastery was a private settlement, and this status was respected as such over the centuries, without the need for a special way of attestation. This situation changed in the eleventh century, when

---

<sup>33</sup> *Jus Graeco-Romanum. 1: Novellaeetaureae bullae imperatorum post Justinianum*, Zachariae von Lingenthal (ed.), T.O. Weigel, Leipzig, 1857, Coll. IV, Nov. XXXV-XXXIX, pp. 346-348.

through the practice of *charistike*, the interference of the laity in the life of the monastery imposed the need for a form of protection,<sup>34</sup> leading to the development of this type of document, the monastic *typikon*, specific to the Byzantine monasticism. Appeared in the seventh century, the *typica* are based on the previous tradition of regulation of the monastic life. This tradition completed the collection, recording and transmission of the rules of first Egyptian monasteries. Each generation of holy monks has gathered and synthesized the treasure of rules, from the *Perceptions* of Saint Pahomie and the *Monastic Rule* of St. Anthony, to the *Longer and Shorter Rules* of St. Basil the Great, finding themselves in one form or another, to a small or greater extent in the section of monastic rules in a *typikon*.

Until the eleventh century, the composition of the *typica* was not made according to a standardized pattern, being rather the product of the moment necessity of the monastery. In the eleventh century, this structure pursued by the authors of the *typica* was consecrated, including the concerns of the founders and/or of the community: the internal disciplinary rules, in addition to the moral ones, those of food, clothing, private property; liturgical program; the way of transmitting the monastery from the founder, the inheritance and the choice of the abbot; obtaining and maintaining the autonomy and independence of the monastery.

Self-governing terms – *αὐτοδέσποτος* and independence – *ελευθέρα*, with their synonyms that were later used as interchangeable phrases, *αὐτόνομος* – autonomous, *αυτεξούσιον* – self-government, appeared for the first time in the *Typikon* of the Great Lavra of Mount Athos: “In no case will we allow anyone from a foreign lavra or monastery to become its abbot, even after our death we do not wish it to be allowed to be granted to a lay person or clergyman or monk or subordinate to

---

<sup>34</sup> *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents...*, p. 43.



a lay person or clergyman or monk or subordinate to another monastery, but on the contrary, it must be free (ελευθέρᾳ) and autonomous (αὐτοδέσποτος), in accordance to our intention and command.”<sup>35</sup> The condition of the monastery had been strengthened by a chrisobull of Emperor Nikephoros II Phocas, through which the imperial patronage provided protection to the monastery after his death and that of Saint Athanasius the Athonite (920-1000). It is interesting to note that this concept of an independent monastery was accepted and legislated by the same person who sowed the germs of the principle that was the basis of *charistike*, in about the same period of time. Although the zeal and care that property of the Church would not become subject to an inappropriate or unqualified person, were shared by the emperor and the monk in equal measure, the decision was made by the emperor on the advice and initiative of Saint Athanasius the Athonite, as he himself pointed out.

Thus, the status of an independent monastery was outlined: it was administered by the abbot, helped by the monks with administrative ministries, without the interference or the concession of economic benefits to the founder or his family. However, the independence of such a monastery came in exchange for the lack of subsidies and investments and represented, therefore, a financial effort from the founder and a sustained concern for administration from the abbot. That is why the independence status has not been generalized. In the eleventh century, from their *Typica*, three such monasteries are known to have obtained their independence from the civil and Church authorities because their owners used their friendly relations with the emperors and the patriarch of Constantinople: Mother of God *Antiphonetria* of Myriokephala on Crete, the community of monasteries on Mount Galesios and the Mother of God *Eleousa* of Stroumitza.

---

<sup>35</sup> “Ath.Typikon: Typikonof Athanasios the Athonite for the Lavra Monastery”, in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents...*, p.255.

## 5      **Relationship of clergy – monks in the context of *charistike***

The circumstances of the operation of the monasteries on Mount Galesios, although detailed, were less used in the study of *charistike*. These monasteries were founded by Saint Lazarus, and information about them is presented in the *Life* of the Saint. Upon returning to his native lands from the Holy Land, Father Lazarus joined the two monk brothers from the Saint Marina hermitage, practicing the ascetism as a stylite. His holiness became quickly known, so with the help of some benefactors, cells were built to house the disciples gathered around him. A wealthy woman named Iudith of Calabria paid for the reconstruction of the church. Seeing the economic potential of the monastery in full development, the Metropolitan Theodore II of Ephesus donated land to the community, “which they worked it and obtained quite a lot of food from it”.<sup>36</sup> After seven years, due to the reputation of Saint Lazarus and the position of the monastery on the main road to Ephesus, the monastery had become thriving, but it was no longer a place of silence and prayer. For this reason, the Venerable Lazarus headed to a more isolated place on Mount Galesios. However, this decision was not approved by ecclesiastic authorities of Ephesus. The Metropolitan Theodore sent him a letter commanding to return to Saint Marina, which was the beginning of the conflict between Lazarus and clergy. The metropolitan’s departure to Constantinople worked in favor of Saint Lazarus, who continued to quietly prepare his first place of hermitship on the mountain. The conflict escalated as the Venerable Lazarus persevered on the mountain, thus founding not one but three monasteries: of the Savior, the Mother of God and the Resurrection. Understanding that the saint’s decision was unwavering and that

---

<sup>36</sup> Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh Century Pillar Saint, in Byzantine Saints’ lives in translation*, Washington D.C., 2000, Cap. 34, p. 120.

any command would have not any effect, the metropolitan sent representatives to check him, trying to find reasons for inconsistency with the monastic life in order to denigrate his ascetism and force him to leave the mountain. This harassment caused fear and insecurity among the monks, some of whom put pressure on Lazarus to secure another monastery, in the event that they would be driven off the mountain after his death. Thus, he founded the monastery of Bessai, despite of his wish, on a land given by the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus. This monastery was located in an accessible and more friendly place compared to the mountain. Although it was only started and even with the church being in construction, the Monastery of Bessai attracted a very large number of monks, over 200, becoming economically efficient and a real commercial center,<sup>37</sup> but far from the ascetic ideal. This complicated the saint's situation even more. Owning the land given by the emperor seemed to legitimize the presence of the Venerable Lazarus with his community at Bessai, so the pressure to descend from the mountain increased considerably, coming from all sides: from some of the monks, from the emperor and from the ecclesial Ephesian authority. Before Saint Lazarus' death, monks Gabriel and Pachomius were sent to Constantinople to obtain imperial protection for the monasteries on the mountain, but monk Gabriel, pursuing his goal of moving to Bessai after the death of Father, asked the emperor for the protection for the monastery of Bessai, which was exactly what Father Lazarus didn't want to. The emperor was thus persuaded to issue an imperial administrative act, *prostagma*, recognizing the metropolitan's legal rights over Galesios and summoned Lazarus to leave the mountain. Saint Lazarus maintained his position unchanged, following the promise made to the Lord to make his monasteries a place of almsgiving for people in need, against the petty interests of all others on the monasteries's fortune. If the wishes

---

<sup>37</sup> Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros...*, Cap. 216, p. 309.

of the monks and even of the emperor seemed somewhat justified, the attitude of the metropolitan of Ephesus it was at least bizarre. An explanation not so far from the truth in the context of the events in the eleventh century, is the pursuit of the material advantages that would have brought to the diocese a monastery founded by a monk with the reputation of a saint as Lazarus, located in an area accessible to visitors. The physical effort involved in climbing the Mount Galesios, due to the geographical landscape, to which was added the fear of devil's attacks in the pass that offered the only access to the mountain, limited the number of pilgrims, while a monastery built on a practicable road, as Bessai, would have attracted more benefactors with their gifts, being a good deal for an eventual *charistikarios*. Even if in the Life of Saint Lazarus the term *charistikeis* not mentioned, this is the obvious reason for the reaction of the monks to the attempts of the Church authorities to control in one way or another the monasteries. The statement of the metropolitan and other clergymen from his circle, such as the bishop of Tralles, that the name of the Galesios will disappear after the death of Saint Lazarus, shows their lack of interest in the monasteries on the mountain. The imminent death of the saint could have been regarded by the clerics as a relief because it would have facilitated their takeover of these monasteries. But the continuation of the harassment of the monks even in the final days of Lazarus' life proves that, for the benefit of the metropolitan, the transition to the heaven of Father Lazarus had to take place in Bessai and not on Galesios, so the name of the saint could be linked to the first. The protection of the Lazarus' Monasteries on Mount Galesios was the reason for writing the ample composite document, the *Typikon*, which includes, besides the testament – the *dyatiposis* of Saint Lazarus, the set of rules that were to be observed by the monks in the monasteries and also the very comprehensive *Vita*. Immediately after the death of Father Lazarus, based on this act, the monks obtained the independence of the Galesiote monasteries confirmed by

Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos and the Patriarch Michael I Cerularius (1043-1058).<sup>38</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

The spiritual perfection offered by the monasticism was the goal of the ascetic movement of the beginnings of Christianity. The material side cannot be excluded, however, through the human nature of the monk. The evolution of monasticism from the personal ascetic movement to the institutionalized form and the interaction with the other Byzantine institutions, presents specific forms in the eleventh century. By this century, monasticism had become an integral part of the Byzantine society in all its aspects. From an economic standpoint the growth of the monastic land patrimony required imperial intervention through a public policy, the *charistike*. It was designed to solve the problems of all parties involved: the State did not lose taxes provided by the agricultural land, the Church no longer had the burden of monasteries that could not support themselves and the monks could peacefully deal with spiritual perfection and prayer for the good of the Empire. However, soon after the implementation of this public policy, in addition to honest administrators, there were also abusive ones. Throughout the eleventh century, there were made many attempts to correct the illegal practices without terminate the *charistike*. The rapacity of the *charistikarioi* sparked protest reactions from some hierarchs, measures from some Constantinopolitan patriarchs and protective initiatives from the founders. An important consequence of the *charistike* was the emergence of independent monasteries, whose status was obtained through the monastic *typikon*. Appeared in previous centuries, the *typikon* became a document officially accepted by the patriarch and emperor in the eleventh century, gaining a

---

<sup>38</sup> Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros ...*, Cap. 223, p. 316.

standardized form and becoming an emblem for the Byzantine culture.

The practice of *charistike* disappeared by itself when the shape of the benefits changed. A new type of monasteries arose and worked in parallel with the *charistike*, the *ephoreia*, for which the beneficiary received a symbolic payment or was content with the spiritual gain of the good deed. *Ephoreia* replaced the *charistike* in the early twelfth century. The disappearance of the practice of *charistike* did not make up for the misdeeds. This overturned the way the secular world related to monasticism and brought changes in Byzantine mentality. The boundary line between laity and monasticism had become extremely thin. The use of the goods of a monastery, although gifts brought to God, by laymen or even clergymen, was no longer considered a sin since the monks assumed poverty by entering into monasticism. The monks, sometimes being deprived of those necessary for the living by the *charistikarioi*, devoted more time than they should for work, and some even ended up practicing activities that were not in line with the status of a monk, such as trading.<sup>39</sup> The monks seemed infected by the care for profit of the *charistikarioi*. The “body” of the Byzantine Empire, the profane, tried to take possession of the “soul”, monasticism, and, finding blame for his own intrusion, lowered it from the pedestal of the Byzantine spiritual ideal by turning its face to the new humanistic cultural current born in the eleventh century.

Monasticism seemed changed also from the perspective of the clergy. The evaluation of monasticism during the twelfth century is expressed by the image of an abbot who teaches the monks how to obtain more fruits of the earth, forgetting about those of heaven. Archbishop Eustathios of Thessaloniki (1115-1195) noticed that the disobedience from inside of the monastery, mentioned by the Patriarch John V the Oxyte, was also extended outside it, some of the monks behaving without reverence for the

---

<sup>39</sup> Eustathii Thessalonicensis, *De Emendanda Vita Monachica*, Karin Metzler (ed.), W. de Gruyter, Berolini, 2006, Cap. 62, 64, pp. 73-77.

local hierarchy<sup>40</sup>. Thus, the reversal of the hierarchy clergy – monks – laymen, putting the laity forward, considered by the Patriarch John to be the cause of the failure of *charistike*<sup>41</sup>, actually revealed the disagreement between the clergy and the monks. Apparently, it's nothing but the same reaction of monasticism to the constant attempt to impose the ecclesial authority. This attempt was initiated together with the process of institutionalization of monasticism, but in a new shape sketched by the political and cultural changes of the eleventh century Byzantine Empire.

---

<sup>40</sup> Eustathii Thessalonicensis, *De Emendanda...*, pp. 12-13, 203.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Gautier, "Réquisitoire du patriarche Jean d'Antioche...", p.114.