

## On the 'Upbringing and Education' of Adolescents in Iviron Monastery

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**Abstract:** This article examines the placement and education of adolescents brought from Georgia to Mount Athos by George the Athonite in the 11th century. Evidence preserved in the 1047–1090 border acts of Iviron indicates that the children's shelter located in the domain of Saint Barbara was owned by the Iviron Monastery. A comparative analysis of similar institutions under the jurisdiction of the Great Lavra (Neos Island, Mylopotamos) and the metochion of the Petritsoni Monastery (Nikoltsminda) demonstrates that, in the monasteries of Mount Athos, beardless adolescents could be accommodated in designated spaces outside the main monastic enclosure. The location of the orphanage (beyond the Athos Peninsula), its dating (from 1047), and the functions of orphanotropheia (the upbringing and education of orphans) in Byzantine practice suggest that this building mentioned in the Acts likely served as the residence and educational space for the adolescents brought by George the Athonite.

**Key Words:** George the Athonite, Athos, Iviron Monastery, Byzantine education, Orphanotropheion.

The purpose of this article is to examine the activities of George the Athonite within the framework of Byzantine educational practice. The research primarily focuses on reconstructing the placement and education of adolescents brought from Georgia by the Holy Father to the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos, an issue that remains open in the scholarly literature.

The figure of George the Athonite and his multifaceted activities occupies an important place in the study of the cultural and literary history of Georgia in the 10th-11th centuries. Previous scholarship has examined in detail his special role in the reform of the Georgian church as well as his contributions to translation and liturgical activities. However, his initiatives require further historical contextualization within the broader framework of Byzantine philanthropic institutions and monastic practices.

The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of information preserved in the *Acts of Iviron* regarding the children's shelter under the Georgian monastery's care which allows for the reconstruction of the institution or space where adolescents brought by George the Athonite were accommodated for their upbringing and education. The study draws on both hagiographic texts and historical sources.

Based on the hagiographical text of George the Minor the activities of George the Athonite have been studied extensively from various perspectives. It has been suggested that during his visit to Georgia at the invitation of Bagrat IV he may have founded a type of school in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Papuashvili, N., n.d.) and even developed a "model" of special education (Gamsakhurdia, S., 1975). In addition, some scholars propose that the eighty orphaned children mentioned in "The Life of

George the Athonite“ received their education on Mount Athos (Tavzishvili, G., 1948). However, it is also noted that the text of “The Life“ contains no direct evidence that the Athonite father founded a school for children in southern Georgia, and that “we must rely only on individual manifestations of pedagogical views” found in the text (Aptsiauri, J., 1980, p. 95).

Indeed, the hagiographical work of George the Minor contains important information for the study of pedagogical practices and the age differentiation of adolescents, which clearly demonstrates similarities with the Byzantine educational tradition. In order to analyze these similarities and to evaluate the activities of George the Athonite from an educational perspective it is essential to determine the nature of educational practices for children deprived of parental care in Byzantium. Accordingly, a consideration of the structure and functions of educational and philanthropic institutions operating in the Eastern Roman Empire is necessary for reconstructing George the Athonite’s charitable activities.

Scholars of Byzantine culture distinguish three types of educational institutions in the Eastern Roman Empire: the State University of Constantinople<sup>1</sup>, the Patriarchal School<sup>2</sup>, and schools attached to churches and monasteries<sup>3</sup>.

Of the institutions listed schools attached to churches and monasteries are of particular interest as they not only provided education for adolescents but also functioned as shelters. This dual role corresponds closely to the activities of George the Athonite which as evidenced in George the Minor’s text included the gathering of orphaned children and responsibility for their care and education. Two types of institutions are especially relevant in this context: children’s shelters or so-called orphanotropheia and monastic schools.

#### *a) Orphanotropheion*

The establishment of the first orphanotropheia in Byzantium was linked to initiatives of the clergy and represents one of the earliest forms of Byzantine philanthropic activity. Over time the functions of such institutions became closely intertwined with the responsibilities and duties of local bishops and monasteries.

Such charitable shelters were usually headed by local bishops or by clergy of various ranks. For example, Basil of Cappadocia (4th century) is known to have established a boarding school in Caesarea similar to an orphanotropheion which was administered by monks of the monastery. In addition this institution also fulfilled an educational function preparing adolescents for monastic life. The boarding school followed a curriculum developed by Basil the Great that corresponded to the classical *propaideia* and *paideia*, that is the system of encyclical education (Miller, 2003, p. 115)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The confirmation of the duration of the university’s existence and its functioning in a specific institutional form remains a controversial issue. Some researchers identify the institution periodically mentioned in written sources with the University of Constantinople, while others deny its existence altogether, except during the reign of Theodosius II. For further discussion, see Lemerle (Lemerle, 2017, p. 54)

<sup>2</sup> Written sources concerning the Patriarchal School contain contradictory information, which complicates the reconstruction of the functioning of this institution. see Browning (Browning, 1962, pp. 167–168; Lemerle, 2017, p. 94). Some researchers even argue that the Patriarchal School did not exist at all (see Angold (Angold, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> see Baynes & Moss, 1948

<sup>4</sup> At the stage of *propaideia* (which began at the age of six to eight and lasted three to four years) the discipline of grammar was taught. This stage of instruction was also referred to as γράμματα (“letters”), πεζὰ γράμματα

Like the boarding school of Basil the Great other monastic shelters also placed great emphasis on education. Many sources indicate that these institutions primarily taught practical subjects, among which music<sup>1</sup> and grammar were the most important. Grammar, in particular, was considered essential across all educational frameworks and was taught in secular schools, orphanotrophia and monastic or episcopal boarding schools alike. Accordingly, in monastic boarding schools adolescents not only completed the propaideia curriculum but also primarily studied calligraphy, taxigraphy (ταχυγραφία) (stenography), and library work. Instruction in these disciplines supported the copying and reproduction of manuscripts (Kalogeras, 2012, p. 167). As a result novice copyists and calligraphers trained in the monastery often continued their work in other scriptoria.

#### b) Monastic school

The monastery was a central institution in Byzantine society exerting significant influence on both secular and religious spheres. Above all, it served as a primary promoter of the country's cultural development. In addition it provided patronage to orphanotrophia, the poor, hospitals and various other charitable institutions.

The primary sources for reconstructing the functioning of monastic schools are hagiographical texts and monastic typicons. For example according to the rules of Pachomius the Great (IV c.) all members of the monastery were required to know how to read and write as well as to memorize the Psalms and the New Testament. In addition to providing shelter and food monasteries offered a form of education for the children under their care, though the teaching of disciplines had to be adapted to this context. Evidence of encyclical education can also be observed in the great monasteries of Egypt. For instance, in Alexandria, both classical Greek literature (secular subjects) and Christian literature (sacred disciplines) were taught (Cooper, 2020, p. 155).

Regarding Byzantine monastic schools recent researches indicate that only a few written sources have survived that explicitly mention a school within a monastery (Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, 2000). In earlier hagiographical texts, references to schools are rare and generally

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or *ιερά γράμματα*. It is generally assumed that the term *ιερά γράμματα* indicates the use of biblical texts (e.g., the Psalms) in the process of learning to read.

Encyclical education also known as *paideia* (παιδεία or ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία) began at the age of twelve to fourteen and lasted approximately four years, until the age of eighteen (Moffatt, 1986, p. 706; The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies, p. 787). Encyclical education represented a higher level of general education in contrast to the elementary, propaideia and included the study of grammar as well as rhetoric and dialectic. Philosophy was set apart as "the art of arts and the science of sciences."

In the sources, the term "grammar" is sometimes used synonymously with orthography; however, in some cases the discipline of grammar also encompassed subjects belonging to encyclical education (Lemerle, 2017, p. 113; Browning, 1992, p. 83).

<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the teaching of music served the purpose of enabling adolescents to participate in Christian liturgical rituals. For example, choirs of orphaned children sang psalms on holidays in various churches of Constantinople and even greeted the emperor with song in the Hagia Sophia (Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, 1935). Similarly, George the Athonite, when invited to the court of Constantine X Doukas in Constantinople had his young disciples perform "Zhamoba" before the emperor. At the conclusion of the performance, the emperor praised the holy father for teaching orphans to sing (Aptsiauri, 1980, p. 98).

pertain to church schools rather than monastic institutions<sup>1</sup> (Nousia, 2016),<sup>2,3</sup>. While evidence for monastic or boarding schools does appear in written sources from the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, such references remain infrequent<sup>4</sup>.

However it should be noted that the educational practices of monasteries were not uniform and were regulated by typicons; for example, the cohabitation of beardless adolescents was largely prohibited within cenobitic communities<sup>5</sup>. It is likely that for this reason adolescents were placed in a designated area reserved for them - a metochion (Alice-Mary Talbot, 2018, pp. 83–96), where in addition to spiritual training an educational program also took place. The typicon of the Petritsoni Monastery mentions a building known as the *Sokhast'eri* (სოხასტერი) located in Nikoltsminda where six adolescents were entrusted to a local priest for their education (Kartvelta monast'eri bulgaretshi da misi t'ip'ik'oni, 1971, p. 108, 116). According to *The Lives of Sts. John and Euthymius* the "beardless" were accommodated outside the main territory of the monastery.

A similar tradition of charitable and educational care can be observed in the activities of Georgian monks. The author of the *Life of George the Athonite* highlights this with particular emphasis, portraying George the Athonite's charitable initiative as the crowning achievement of his multifaceted activities. He notes that one of the primary reason for George's journey to Georgia was to care for orphans left without guardians and parents (Dzveli kartuli agiograpiuli lit'erat'uris dzeglebi, II, 1967, p. 173; Aptsiauri, J. 1980, p. 108)

As is well known at the invitation of Bagrat IV George the Athonite from Iviron monastery, visited Georgia to implement church reforms. During his stay he witnessed numerous hardships, including the struggles of socially vulnerable families, exacerbated by widespread famine. Moved by these circumstances George the Athonite decided to gather orphans and needy children and provide them with care. Families voluntarily brought their children and left them at the doors of the Holy Father. According to George the Minor, the number of children under his care eventually grew to eighty.

Although the charitable activity of George the Athonite clearly reflects the philanthropic traditions characteristic of Byzantine culture it encompassed more than mere charity. At the same time the Holy Father was guided by a complex national aim: he sought to establish an intellectual and religious community in the Iviron area which would both ensure a worthy continuation of the work initiated by Georgian translators and strengthen the Iviron Monastery by increasing the number of Georgian monks. A key component of this initiative was the education of the children and adolescents placed under his care and the decision to take them with him to the Iviron Monastery.

As the hagiographer George the Minor notes the gathered orphans and homeless children were divided into four age categories. We propose that the division of adolescents by George the Athonite

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars of Byzantine culture emphasize that, in many cases, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between the functions of these types of institutions (Becker, 2006, p. 166).

<sup>2</sup> *Vita S. Gregentii*, Ep. Homeritae, ed. A. A. Vasiliev, Viz, Vremmenik 14 (1907; ed. 1909), cap. 1, p. 41, cited in Magoulias (1976, p. 120).

<sup>3</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 368 (cited in Magoulias, 1976, p. 121).

<sup>4</sup> According to the *Life of Peter of Argos* (10<sup>th</sup> century), a monastic schoolboy studied secular disciplines such as Greek literature, alongside the Holy Scriptures (*Vita Petri Argivorum*, pp. 4-5, cited in Miller, 2003). In the Stoudios Monastery, the disciplines of the Trivium, primarily grammar and shorthand were taught to children in a separate metochion (*Vita of Nicholas of Stoudios*, PG 105, 869C-872C, cited in Lemerle, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Some sources indicate the opposite, see Talbot (Talbot, 2019, for further details).

aligns closely with the model of age-related development and education reconstructed in recent research. Category I, comprising children who could not yet distinguish between right and left and were still nourished with their mother's milk (Dzveli kartuli agiograpiuli lit'erat'uris dzeglebi, II, 1967, p. 168) corresponds to the preschool stage of a Byzantine youth. Category II corresponds to adolescents at the propaideia stage while Category III aligns with the age associated with encyclical education (paideia). Category IV included those who had already reached adulthood were capable of making their own decisions and voluntarily became disciples of the Holy Father.

Thus, George the Athonite's grouping of adolescents into age categories corresponds closely to the Byzantine educational model. This raises a natural question - where on Mount Athos were the adolescents brought from Georgia by the Holy Father to receive their upbringing and education if as noted above cohabitation with children was prohibited according to the monastic typicons?

In this context it is worth examining the practice of raising and educating beardless adolescents on Mount Athos in the 10th-11th centuries as reflected in both Georgian and Byzantine sources:

#### 1. The Great Lavra (*The Life of Athanasios of Athos, Version B*)

In Version B of *The Life of Athanasios of Athos* "Mylopotamos" is mentioned several times - a territorial unit related to Mount Athos that, according to the editors of the Greek critical edition, served as the metochion of the Great Lavra.

According to the hagiographical work Athanasius periodically visited Mylopotamos where a space was designated for training in obedience; this space is referred to in the text by the term φροντιστήριον. Scholars note that this term may denote either a monastery or a school, depending on the context (*The Life of Athanasios of Athos, Version B, 2016, p. 686*).

Of particular interest is the island of Neos, described in Version B of the *Life*, where a similar φροντιστήριον was located. In this space untutored novices and young monks underwent training and received education. As the hagiographer notes, the island itself acquired the name Νέωι precisely because of the "school" that operated on its territory<sup>1</sup>. The same information is confirmed by Version A of the *Life*, which records that the island of Neos was a royal donation to the Lavra of Athanasius the Great and that its name derived from the preparatory formation of young monks carried out there<sup>2</sup>.

According to the aforementioned text, it is evident that on Mount Athos there existed a special area located outside the monastic enclosure reserved for adolescents and young monks. This arrangement allowed the monastery, on the one hand, to provide for the upbringing and education of adolescents and, on the other hand, to comply with the requirements of the typicon.

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<sup>1</sup> "The island of the Neoi is one of the gifts to the Lavra from the most mighty emperors of blessed memory. It received its name on account of the school that was on it and the fact that the younger monks received their early training there".

"Ἡ τῶν Νέων νήσος μία ἐστὶ καὶ αὐτὴ τῶν πρὸς τὴν Λαύραν δωρεῶν τῶν κρατίστων καὶ αἰδιμῶν βασιλέων· οὕτω δὲ ἐπωνομάσθη διὰ τὸ φροντιστήριον γεγονέναι ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ προγυμνάζεσθαι ἐκεῖσε τοὺς νεωτέρους τῶν μοναχῶν" (*Life of Athanasios of Athos, Version B, 2016 p. 309*).

<sup>2</sup> "having been transformed, in name and in function, into a place of instruction and training for young monks." "εἰς φροντιστήριον δὲ καὶ γυμναστήριον νέων μοναχῶν ἐπωνύμως μετασκευασθεῖσα" (*Life of Athanasios of Athos, Version B, 2016, p. 686*).

## 2. The Connection between the Island of Neos and the Iviron Monastery (*The Lives of Sts. John and Euthymius*)

According to the hagiographical text *The Lives of Sts. John and Euthymius*, John and Euthymius donated a substantial amount of property to the Great Lavra. Among the listed donations was the island of Neos which had been granted to John the Athonite by the Byzantine emperor Basil (Dzveli kartuli agiograpiuli lit'erat'uris dzeglebi, II, 1967, p. 52).

If we follow the chronological sequence it is most likely that this island, first granted by the emperor to John the Athonite and subsequently donated by John to the Great Lavra is the same one mentioned in *The Life of Athanasius of Athos* which served an educational function. However in the text of *The Lives of Sts. John and Euthymius* the island is presented solely as a source of income and it would be premature to hypothesize that the adolescents taken by George the Athonite were housed there, since no direct source confirms this. Furthermore, the conflict that erupted between Georgians and Greeks on Mount Athos in the mid-11th century (after the deaths of Euthymius and Athanasius) would have made it difficult for the inhabitants of the Iviron Monastery to permit the use of the material resources of the Great Lavra.

## 3. The Educational Space near Iviron Monastery: Hypothesis and Arguments

It is likely that the Iviron Monastery itself possessed a similar educational space which George the Athonite intended as a place for the upbringing of the children entrusted to his care, particularly given that, according to the typikon of the Petritsoni Monastery the metochion/sokhaster at Nikoltsminda functioned as a learning space for novices. This suggests that a comparable precedent existed within the Georgian monastic tradition regarding the accommodation and formation of beardless boys.

This assumption may be further supported by information preserved in the Acts of Iviron concerning the monastery's estates. The document most likely dated to 1090–1094 is a boundary act signed by Gregory Xeros (Greek: Γρηγόριος ὁ Ξηρός) according to which six domains with defined borders were transferred to Iviron. To enforce the transfer, Gregory Xiros' subordinate relied on the certification of reliable witnesses and the former border markers recorded in an act drawn up by Andronicus in 1047 (Iviron I, n. 29). Of the six domains listed, the domain of Saint Barbara (Greek: Ἁγία Βαρβάρα) also included the lands of the Orphanotropheion (Acts of Iviron, 2008, p. 199). According to the Greek text (ἐξ ἀριστερῶν τὰ παράνοτροφείου) (Acts of Iviron, 2008, p. 205), the boundaries of the domain of Saint Barbara bordered the left side of the Orphanotropheion, indicating that the Orphanotropheion was a separate institution - or perhaps a distinct building - under the possession of the Iviron Monastery, similar to the metochion of the Petritsoni Monastery in Nikoltsminda or the island of Neos in the possession of the Great Lavra.

As indicated in the Acts of Iviron, the 1047 Border Act of Andronicus confirms that the domain of Saint Barbara in Western Chalcedon - including the lands of the Orphanotropheion - was already in Iviron's possession by that year. George the Athonite had been appointed abbot of the Georgians monastery in 1044; therefore, it is highly plausible that the Orphanotropheion was established or overseen during his leadership. Its mention as a border mark in the Act confirms that the institution was already operational, providing a suitable space for the upbringing and education of adolescents under George's care.

The existence of a similar institution in Western Chalcedon also indicates that the upbringing and preparation of beardless youth for monastic life was entirely feasible even under the strict typicon of Mount Athos. Since the orphanage was located outside the Athos peninsula, it provided a designated space in which the adolescents entrusted to George the Athonite could be placed for education.

According to the above data, it is evident that the Iviron Monastery owned a children's shelter - an orphanage - within the Barbara domain in Western Chalcedon, which likely also functioned as a training and educational space, similar to orphanages in the Byzantine Empire. The institution was active between 1047 and 1090 making it plausible to assume that George the Athonite could have placed the adolescents brought from Georgia in this very location.

Thus, based on the hagiographical texts analyzed in this article - "The Life of George the Athonite" by George the Minor and "The Life of Athanasius of Athos" - it is possible to reconstruct the practice of raising and educating adolescents under the jurisdiction of the monasteries of Mount Athos in the 11th century. According to the Life of Athanasius of Athos, the beardless adolescents of the Great Lavra were placed in areas outside the main monastery - namely, Mylopotamos and the island of Neos - where designated training spaces were established. As the typicon of the Petritsoni Monastery indicates, the Byzantine practice of raising beardless adolescents separately finds a parallel in the Georgian monastic tradition (the metochion of the Petritsoni Monastery in Nikoltsminda), which suggests that the Iviron Monastery likely maintained a similar system.

This assumption is supported by a source preserved in the Acts of Iviron, which confirms the existence of an orphanage - a children's shelter - on the property of the Iviron Monastery from the mid-11th century. This period coincides closely with the activities of George the Athonite on Mount Athos. Several arguments further support this hypothesis. First, the function of the orphanage - providing upbringing, education, and preparation for monastic life to orphans and socially vulnerable children - aligns fully with the needs described in the Life of George the Athonite. Second, the location of the orphanage outside the Athos peninsula is entirely consistent with the monastic typicon, which prohibited beardless adolescents from residing within the main monastery. Finally, the existence of an orphanage owned by the Iviron Monastery suggests quite plausibly that the orphanage in the Barbara domain was intended specifically for Georgian adolescents.

Thus, the assumptions presented in this article offer an additional perspective on the multifaceted activities of George the Athonite. While the Acts of Iviron currently provide the only direct evidence of an Orphanotropheion at the monastery the precise function of this facility for the adolescents under George's care remains uncertain and requires further research.

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