

# ON THE MIRACULOUS ICON OF THE THEOTOKOS KNOWN AS *THE AKATHIST*

## FOUND IN THE HOLY MONASTERY OF ZOGRAPHOU, ATHOS

Before the unfortunate events of the Synod of Florence took place, the Papal-controlled West was trying with all its might to subjugate the politically storm-driven East. Even the Emperor Michael Paleologos worked towards this goal: he wanted to stay faithful to his oath to Pope Gregory X, an oath he had given after the blinding of John Lascaris and the usurping of his throne had already taken place in the 13th century.

The Patriarch of those times, John Beccus, acted according to the apostate opinion that was in accordance with the plans of the Emperor. He thus subjugated the Eastern Church under the Papal throne of Rome during the Second Synod of Lugdunum (Lyons). As is well known, the Latins were "convincing" the Orthodox to their delusions not through the word of the Gospel but using the other well-known method of Papism: the naked sword and violence. Thousands of people became martyrs under their swords for the purity of the Eastern Orthodox faith.

The Holy Mountain always was (and still is) the projector and support of the suffering Eastern Church. For this reason the Latins wanted to destroy this bedrock of Orthodoxy. Thus, they entered the centre of Orthodox resistance, the Holy Mountain, and tried to convince the monks by words of persuasion, promises of riches, but also (where such promises did not work) through threats and even tyrannical violence to accept the power of the Pope of Rome on Athos.

A few monks proved weak and cowardly and accepted the money but most of these accepted the Latins and their money out of fear of what awaited them if they denied: tortures of unspeakable pain.

A much larger number of monks of course stayed put to their position and confessed Jesus Christ as the Sole Head of His Indivisible Body and chastised the Pope's sacrilegious usurping of a Vicar Vicarius *exousia* that did not belong to him. This way these monks shed their blood for Christ and stand now witnesses of the Truth in the Heavens, victorious martyrs of the Christ they never denied.



Unfortunately however, the attack was fierce. And exactly because some monks



did yield under the pressure of promises and tortures, two monasteries were lost to the Latins: **Lavra** and **Xeropotamou**. The monks in these two monasteries accepted the Latin intrusion with a subservient fear. A large part in this terrible concession was accomplished through the help of the traitor Emperor who was helping the Latins to ensure these monks deviate towards Rome's unsound dogmas.

God however, who does not abandon His Church, in order to strengthen the faith of the monks and help at least some of the deviant Latins return to the Truth, **punished the Monastery of Xeropotamou**.

One day, when these pitiful Orthodox monks were conducting the newly-introduced profane liturgical acts together with the Latins, a large earthquake shook the grounds. The garrison houses, fortification towers and the very foundations of the monastery fell, together with many of the Latins and deviant Orthodox monks all of whom were instantly killed.

The **other Latins** who had arrived from Italy did not pay attention to this clear wrath of the Heavens and spread out around Athos with rage, trying to find new victims for their delusions.

During these very trying times for the Holy Mountain, there lived **a monk** who resided near the Zographou Monastery and would try ascetically on his own, with great labours and effort.

This monk had this holy custom of reading the Akathist Hymn many times while praying in front of this Icon of the Mother of God. One day, while he was chanting "Rejoice O unwedded Bride" he hears the following words from the Icon: "**Rejoice too, O Elder of God!**" The Elder was frightened but the voice continued calmly: "**Do not fear, but rush to the Monastery and announce to the Brothers and the Abbot that the enemies of myself and of my Son have drawn near. Thus, whoever is weak in the spirit let them hide in patience. The ones desiring a martyr's crown let them stay inside the Monastery; leave quickly**".

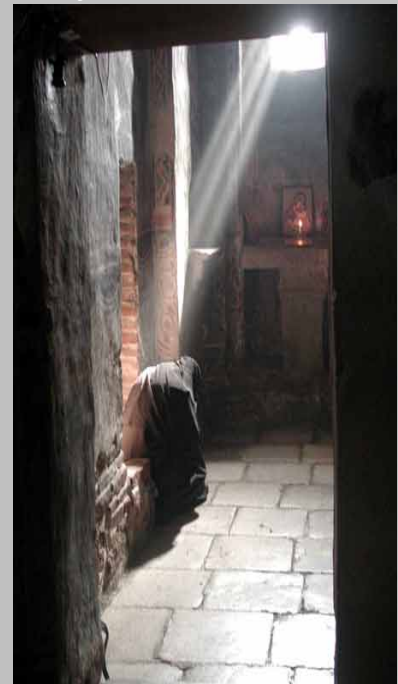
Obedient to the voice and will of our All-Pure Lady, the monk abandoned his cell and ran as fast as he could towards the Monastery in order to warn the Brothers. When he reached the gate of the Monastery, he saw the very same Holy Icon he kept in his cell right in front of him! He immediately

prostrated himself before it, and with great reverence took it inside the Monastery and presented himself to the Abbot holding the Icon.

The Brothers were greatly distressed on hearing the news. The weaker ones immediately left and hid on the mountains or inside caves. Twenty six (26) Monks, however, including the Abbot, felt brave enough to stay in the Monastery. They went up to the tower, awaiting their enemies and the wreaths of martyrdom.

The Latins were soon outside the Monastery. Initially they motioned to the monks to have the gates opened to let them in: if they acknowledged the Primacy of the Pope they would have nothing to fear but his mercy plus a lot of gold. The monks replied to them from the top of the tower: "And who told you that your Pope is Head of the Church? From where does this teaching of yours come? For us, Head of the Church is only Christ! It is easier for us to choose death rather than give in and defile this holy place by your violence and tyranny; we shall not open the gates of the Monastery! Leave now!"

The Latins replied with rage: "Die then!"; and gathering wood around the tower lit a large fire to burn them alive.



And the flame rose up to the heavens and was diffused in the wind, but the Monks did not give in but stayed put to their spiritual outspokenness, glorifying the Lord and praying that He forgives their enemies. In this way, they were made perfect in martyrdom on the 10th of October 1274.

The names of these holy feat-winners are kept in the Code of the Zographou Monastery, as well as in the *Horologia* of the Bulgarian Church.

The holy icon through which the Elder had heard the voice of the Mother of God warn him of the arrival of the enemies of Christianity, had been placed inside the tower together with the martyrs-to-be. Afterwards, however, it was found whole unscathed by the fire (that burnt down the Monastery to the ground).

In memory of this great miracle, they placed this holy icon inside the Temple of the Dormition of the Theotokos, on top of the *Katapetasma*, where the [Despotic](#) Icons (*i.e.* of Christ) are normally placed. An

Unsleeping Lamp shines in front of the face of our All-graceful Virgin and Mother: small, yet always shining.

This Holy Icon of the Mother of God is very dark in colour and it seems that it had already been renovated over the years leading to this event. It is known among the Bulgarians by the simple name "*Cherovo*" (*i.e.* "the one referred to by the Greek word *Chere*", which means "Rejoice"). The place where the miraculous revelation to the elder took place is known till today by the name *Cherovo*.

More information on the historical codes associated with these events is found in the [footnotes](#).

The reader may now wonder what happened to the Lavra Monastery which also accepted the Latins with a subservient fear. We discuss this next.

### THE EXCOMMUNICATED DURING BECCUS' TIMES ...

As we mentioned above, the representatives of the Emperor and of Patriarch Beccus attempted to incorporate the Holy Monasteries of the Holy Mountain in their dark plan of co-officiation with the Papists, initially through diplomacy. However they met a solid resistance from the majority of the Monasteries and as a result they proceeded to criminal actions that make those of the antichristian barbarian pirates seem almost benevolent ...

After they burned the anti-unionist monks on the Tower of the Monastery of Zographou, they proceeded to "pay a visit" to the Monastery of Vatopedion where they were also checked and proclaimed heretics by the Monks. For this reason, after they shackled the Hegumen of Vatopedion in heavy chains, they threw him in the sea where he immediately sunk to the bottom and was drowned, while the other twelve (12) Monks were hanged at the place that today is known for this reason as [Phourcobunon](#).

Similar atrocities were carried out in the Monastery of Iveron, where others were lost when their transport boats were sunk deep in the Iveritan Sea, whereas others were taken captives ...

At the Monastery of Great Lavra, however, they were formally welcomed and in fact in the company of bells ringing; and this brought God's wrath ...

Thus, the Hierodeacon *Lavriotes* who co-officiated burned like a candle thrown in the fire from a terrible illness and died; while the other [seven](#) (7) co-officiating Hieromonks, were found to be **not fully decomposed** after their death, **bloated** and **excommunicated**. Their **black-as-ebony remains**

could still be seen [inside the Narthex](#) of the Cemetery of the Holy Apostles as late as the end of the 19th century, in public, in order to help the monks learn and be chastised by the past events, but also to encourage the monks and other visiting pilgrims who would face this sight to pray for them, so that God may forgive them and show His mercy upon them, by dissolving their bodies ...

### A TERRIFYING MEETING ...

<<One brother would hear about the excommunicated ones on Lavra of Athos that had accepted to co-officiate with John Beccus, the Latin-minded Patriarch of Constantinople at that time. However, he doubted the truth of these events, and would always investigate by asking Athonite pilgrims and elders, whether they had seen this sight with their own eyes, whether they had personally been eyewitnesses to the bodies, in order to rest his doubt which gnawed at him ...

Eventually, he was told that his spiritual father had seen the bodies; so he came and asked [me](#) if I know anything about this, whether I have seen them with my own eyes; and I informed him that I had seen them and that these bodies are most certainly in said state.

I came to the Holy Mountain in 1885 at the age of 20 and I have lived there since. Two years later, it chanced that we were going to bring wheat from the Monastery of Konstamonitou, weighing about 1200 *okes*. For this reason, we were going by sea in our boat. At the time I was 22 years old and it was September, two days after the Feast of the Precious Cross.

In the evening we stopped by the *arsanas* (port) of Great Lavra planning to continue our trip in the morning. Indeed, that is how things happened.

A little while after we had left Lavra behind, my Elder, Monk Meletios, said:

"Gabriel, my child, farther ahead is the place where the excommunicated bodies are situated, the ones who had accepted the Latin-minded ones in Great Lavra and had co-officiated with John Beccus and those with him, that I have seen before; but because you are young and it may be the case that in the future some people will say that all these stories are wild, and that there is nothing really there, no one was excommunicated, these are only mentioned to scare off people *etc.*; for this reason, let us go so that you can see them with your own eyes, so that you do not believe in any words coming from those who doubt that they may tell you in future, for the Holy Writ says that the eye is more reliable than the ear ..."

As soon as my Elder had finished saying these words, we arrived at a bold cliff, where only looking at it one gets a fright; and he said:

"Here they are".

I was scrutinizing the area trying to see something and I responded:

"Are you joking?"

He laughed then and told me:

"What do you think they are, like a Cross or perhaps like Icons, in order for people to look at them and cross themselves? When they have the devil's shape? ... which you will see and then believe ..."

In the meantime, we had come very near the stiff drop and after a lot of effort we managed to get out of our boat and using "all hands and feet", so to speak, we managed to climb five or six metres; and then I saw a cave. We entered and a terrible sight greeted my eyes:

Three men were placed against the rock, standing up, wearing their clothes, *rasa* (vestments) and *zostika* (monk belts), having their eyes open, their hair and beard deeply white and very long, their faces having the colour of *phouma* [smoke, *i.e.* black]; similarly, their hands were facing down, their fingers were a little turned to the inside, the nails on their hands were up to 2-4 centimetres long, while the ones on their feet could not be seen as they were covered by their socks and shoes ...

In fact at the time I wished to touch them thoroughly, to see if their bodies were soft, as it looked like they were, or just dry skin and bones; but my Elder did not let me, warning me:

"do not place your hand on God's wrath ..."

In every other respect, however, I put great care; except for my own hand on them. At the time, looking at them did not scare me; now, however, that I recall those events, my soul gets shaken and I can neither sleep, sometimes for days on end, nor eat, sometimes for two or even three days in a row, while at the time the event had not truly registered in my mind ...

I write this epistle with my own hand on the 2nd of March 1964 on the Holy Monastery of Xenophon.

Hieromonk Spiritual Father Gabriel,

writing from

the Iveritan Cell "Birth of Holy Forerunner and Baptist John",

the one known as "*Malaki*".

([Hagioritic](#) Encolpion - Diary of the Year 2004).



## FOOTNOTES

**other Latins** = In the Synopsis (digest) of the various events that was printed in 1806, it is said that Pope Nicholas himself came and visited Athos. Pope Nicholas was the successor of Pope Eugene, during whose reign the infamous Synod of Florence had convened --the "Nineth Ecumenical Synod" for the Papists. This event is mentioned in the Synopsis on p. 538. The same Synopsis, also re-confirms the above-mentioned events, surrounding the attacks of the Latins on Athos.

We would like to add that our use of the word "Latins" is reserved here exclusively for the Frankolatin Papal supporters of those days and of course we have no problem with *e.g.* the pre-Schism Latin Western Fathers of the Church. A lot of these people had been deceived of course and some of them had probably even been well-meaning, believing that this way they would "cleanse Christianity of evil". Such false teachings and fundamentalist attitudes we have met often where Christ's Truth is absent and a distorted ethos develops, consecrating violence. Of course, how God judged and judges such people is not for us to decide. And we must always pray for our enemies for they are obviously deceived. Had these poor "Crusaders" known of the damage they were doing and what awaits those who attack Christ's Church would they do it? Because we can have no idea in what state death finds man, we must never presume that he thus "went to Hades" awaiting Hell (although there are notable exceptions to this rule). Of course, things do not look particularly good for these people, especially those who died suddenly during these difficult times; that is most definitely true. Anyone who has read the Bible knows that persecution and violence against those who we consider to be in heresy is not Christian. Christ knocks on the door of our soul asking us to open it if we wish to do so. He does not impose His will on us. On the contrary, the Papists would smash the door and drag people in order to "convert" them by force! This is something they would continue to do even during WWII in former Yugoslavia, when more than 800,000 Orthodox Serbs (among others) were murdered for this purpose: "the means justifies the end" indeed! So things



do not look good for them. This becomes particularly obvious when we witness God's ensuing wrath. But our love cannot exclude our enemies. Thus, what we wish to draw the attention of the reader to is towards the spirit of Christianity shown by the martyrs and their love, and not the malice (directed by the devil's wishes) that was shown by the poor persecutors. We do not hate these "Latins" here nor do we ever wish them any harm (at least if we want to live as Orthodox); we certainly do not wish hell upon them or anyone (although hell -- the separation from God and not mythical "created cauldrons of fire" -- is always our own personal choice). But we must be aware of these events in order to understand amongst other things that Christianity is not some "overlapping" conglomeration of "Orthodoxy, Papism with a pinch of Protestantism". Heresy ultimately tries to destroy the very foundations of the Church (unsuccessfully of course) because it is driven by the Devil. Having said this, we need to understand that the heretical Popes, who drove the West in error and directed the Crusades, as supposed "Absolute Heads" of the Church on earth who replaced Christ, showed a demonic pride which condemned and will continue to condemn them without any exceptions to Hades, now and maybe even to the age to come, to eternal hell, as St. Cosmas of Aetolia correctly mentions. What can one do for these people now? Only pray for them. Other than that, the pitiful handful of contemporary Orthodox (pseudo-)ecumenists who talk fanfare and participate in memorial services for the deceased heretical Popes actually harm them (and themselves of course). At the end of the day, acts of agapology (empty words of humanist pseudo-love) harm the deceased Popes who went to Hades because the world remembers and honours them and thus Christ may not remember them at His Dread Judgment. Whereas if we pray for their salvation in private, without however participating in acts that are pleasing "to the world" but not to God, we may provide a greater help to them, even if that only means improving their position in hell.

As regards the story of the bloated bodies near Lavra (about which the reader will learn further down), we must also understand that God is not "evil". His "wrath" is an example for us, to help us; and the result of the fact that He cannot "help" us because we drove Him out of our lives. In reality, this event shows His great love and mercy. For, through the humiliation that the corpses underwent for such a long time, and due to the prayers of those who were frightened yet sympathetic to their state, the deceased were most certainly helped, improving their position; for they themselves cannot do anything but hope on the prayers of others. At the same time, monks learned a lot from this example: in matters of faith we must be strict, because we have the Truth, Christ and cannot resort to half-measures; on



the contrary we are expected to be strict with ourselves and the faith so we can help those who are in deceit and need our help. Thus, God may excuse Papists who lived their life simply close to Him as much as they could, having learned nothing about His Orthodoxy due to the sins of others (Popes, Frankocracy *etc.*), who will never join the ranks of Saints but may still be saved (and live in the age to come like "blind men" among those who can see) and will certainly be judged less strictly since they had not met the Truth even though they desired to do so; unlike an Orthodox who will be judged by the full Gospel. Of course this only applies to people in heresy who have **truly** had good intentions and have **truly** been ignorant; it does not really apply to those who have knowingly persecuted other people or who have knowingly insisted on their heresy *etc.* It goes without saying that had the persecutors been Orthodox (i.e. members of the Church) and had tried to persuade the Papists to join Orthodoxy by force, they would only remain Orthodox by name unless they eventually repented; and if, God forbid, they did not repent then their judgment would be certainly more strict than that of the Papists they persecuted.

The point we wished to draw the reader's attention to was that these Orthodox monks in question knew that the Latins had been in deceit, that Papism was heresy; and despite this, they chose to abandon Christ, give a false witness to those in deceit and to blaspheme His name by co-officiating the Divine Liturgy with the Devil; for it is he who is in control of heresy, even if individual people under the heresy may not realise this. This way, Christ helped both those who had deviated (even after their death) *and* He gave an example to the Latins of that time (something to think about), to the Orthodox of that time (to make the lukewarm think and to embolden His sheep) as well as to all of us today. In other words, His "wrath" was again love. God has a personal measure for each one of us. It is different because we are all different. He knows our hearts and we cannot deceive Him. Thus, our condemnation always happens (i.e. our hell always comes) out of our **own free choice**. For this reason, we must remember that things are not black and white in the spiritual life, as of course is the case in the physical world. However, we must face up to some realities that God has revealed to us in order not to fall victims to empty words of agapology that, as History has shown, bring nothing but wars, hatred, fear, pain, tears; ultimately the Devil and Perdition.

**seven** = according to some sources, eleven (11).

**me** = his spiritual father who writes these words, fr. Gabriel of Iveron.

**a monk** = It was devout martyr Cosmas of Zographou. The exact words of the Panaghia to him were: "ἀπελθε ταχέως εις την Μονήν, ανάγγειλον τοις Αδελφοίς και τω Καθηγουμένω, ότι οι εχθροί εμού τε και του υιού μου επλησίασαν - όστις ουν υπάρχει ασθενής τω Πνεύματι εν υπομονή κρυβήτω έως του παρελθείν τον πειρασμόν -οι στεφάνων μαρτυρικών επιθυμούντες παραμενέτωσαν εν τη Μονή - ἀπελθε ουν ταχέως".

**footnotes** = First we should point out that this is not the only icon known as *the Akathist*. For this reason we always add the place where the corresponding holy icon resides. As relates this particular icon, we have existing written codes that describe these events in detail both in Greek and Slavonic. According to the Slavonic text, these events took place in the year 1276 AD. The Greek text places these events in the year 1280 AD. An additional source is found in the book "Noetic Paradise", edition 7167 of Iviron Monastery, October 28. According to this book, the year when the event took place is 1276 AD (*c.f.* pp. 19-34). In the Synopsis of the various historic events, it is mentioned that in the year 1806 AD, Pope Nicholas, the successor of Pope Eugene during whose times the pseudo-Synod of Florence convened, came to Athos by force. In the same book the reader can find a document on the union of the Churches, as that was drafted by the pseudo-Synod. At the bottom of this document, one can discern the signatures, which included the signature of a priestmonk commissioner *ecclesiarch* of the Great Lavra of the Holy Mountain. As regards Michael Paleologos, this book only informs us that he converted to Latinism, and nothing more (*c.f.* pp. 399, 484, 534, 535 and 538). As regards the signature of the *ecclesiarch* of Lavra, there is credible information written in Russian, that delegates from Mount Athos participated at the Florentine Synod (*c.f.* History of the Florentine Synod, Moscow 1847, p. 84). More information on the persecution of the Holy Mountain by Pope Nicholas himself (because the monks refused to convert to Latinism) can also be found in the Latin book "A reply of some Orthodox to an Orthodox brother" (Constantinople 1840, edition 2). It is particularly noteworthy that this information was known to Leo Alatius (17 b) and he denied it, as it was not in the interests of papism. The arrival on Athos by force is attributed to both Michael Paleologos and to Pope Nicholas. Thus, the Holy Mountain felt the Latin violence not once but twice. Apart from the aforementioned exposition in Greek and Slavonic as regards those sad events (the presence of the Latins at Athos by force and their violence against the Athonite monks who would reject catholicism) there also exists on Athos an epistle that had been written in Greek and dates back to those times. This epistle of protest

is a priceless historical code written and signed by all the residents of the Athonite community towards Michael Paleologos. In it, the [Haghiorites](#) accused him of heresy and plead that he abandon his heresy and return to the Church instead of starting the dangerous enterprise of a pseudo-union between the two Churches. This epistle was written before the actual arrival of the Latins on Athos and the related pressure and thus no extra information is contained in it on those events. A brief discussion on the contents of this epistle of the Haghiorite community can be found in Archimandrite Porphyrius' book "Four speeches of Photius, Archbishop of Constantinople, and their criticism". The destruction on Athos by Michael Paleologos as well as the writing of the aforementioned epistle by the Athonite community against him (before the attacks but after he converted to Latinism) are also kept in codes of the library of Moscow, although we have little knowledge of their precise content.

**Despotic** = The word *despot* has negative connotations in the English tongue. Because the roots of this *koine* word are ultimately connected to Christ, we wish to make an important point here; this is why we present this new word here. The word *Despotis* from where the word *Despot* stems, means *Lord*. It is differentiated from the word *Kyrios* that we met in our discussion of Sunday, in that it does not carry with it the notion of the word *main* (as in that the "lord" is the one of "main" importance in his kingdom) but it concentrates on the other function of a "lord", namely, that he is also the one that "rules over" (the Greek word is *despozo*) his kingdom. Therefore *Despotikos* or -- as it would be transliterated into English -- *Despotic*, means *of the Lord* in the above sense. Thus, in Orthodoxy a *Despotic* icon is an icon of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One God who reigns in His Kingdom, the *Ecclesia*.

**Haghiorite** = a resident (monk) of the Holy Mountain (*Haghios* = Saint, Holy; *Horos* = Mountain). *Hagioritic* = of the Holy Mountain.

**inside the Narthex** = Later on, the story mentions that the bodies were in an area near Lavra but not inside the narthex. This is not a contradiction but due to different time periods. The remains were eventually moved out of the Narthex (early last century) most likely due to the following tragic accident that took place:

Once (exact date not recorded but most likely early last century), three mule drivers (who would work on the Holy Mountain) got a few drinks, and became tipsy. While they were getting to the stage of being quite drunk, they decided to place a bet that would apparently show who was the

bravest of the three.

The bet was that whoever had the courage to bring one of the blackened bodies to the area where they were drinking wine and having fun, would win a certain amount of cash!

Indeed, one brave driver was found who, armed with his gun (not sure what he feared), went and brought the abominable wayworn relic, winning the bet ...

Tradition also mentions that when a pilgrim, who was clearly sensitive, came nearby and saw that pitch-black bloated body, the mingled hair, the crooked nails with the eyes bulging open and with mice going in and out of the mouth, he got such a fright that he was utterly shocked and died from a heart attack ...

It seems that the aforementioned event also became the reason they moved the excommunicated corpses away from the Narthex of the Cemetery and placed them instead inside a cave farther below, near the coast of the Romanian Skete, by blocking its entrance with rocks and camouflaging the surrounding scenery so that it cannot be easily identified. Apparently, that is where the bodies still remain ...

Please note that this last story (on the three mule drivers) exists only as spoken tradition. We did not manage to find historical codes associated with it, although this does not mean that it may not have happened. In fact, it is very likely that something like this was indeed the reason the relics were eventually removed from the narthex. This is because the particularly frightening demonic presence around these bodies, evident in the words of frs. Gabriel and Meletios, had a clearly adverse effect on those who would approach them. Eventually, it must have been decided that they needed to be removed due to their scary nature affecting people. It also seems likely that the decision must have taken place after a serious event took place that forced their hand. Hence, whether the Mule Drivers' story is real or not, is unimportant from the historical perspective.

**Phourcobunon** = from *phourcizo* = to hang, to string + *bunon* = mountain.



