

THE HOLY XENOPHONTOS MONASTERY

THE ICONS

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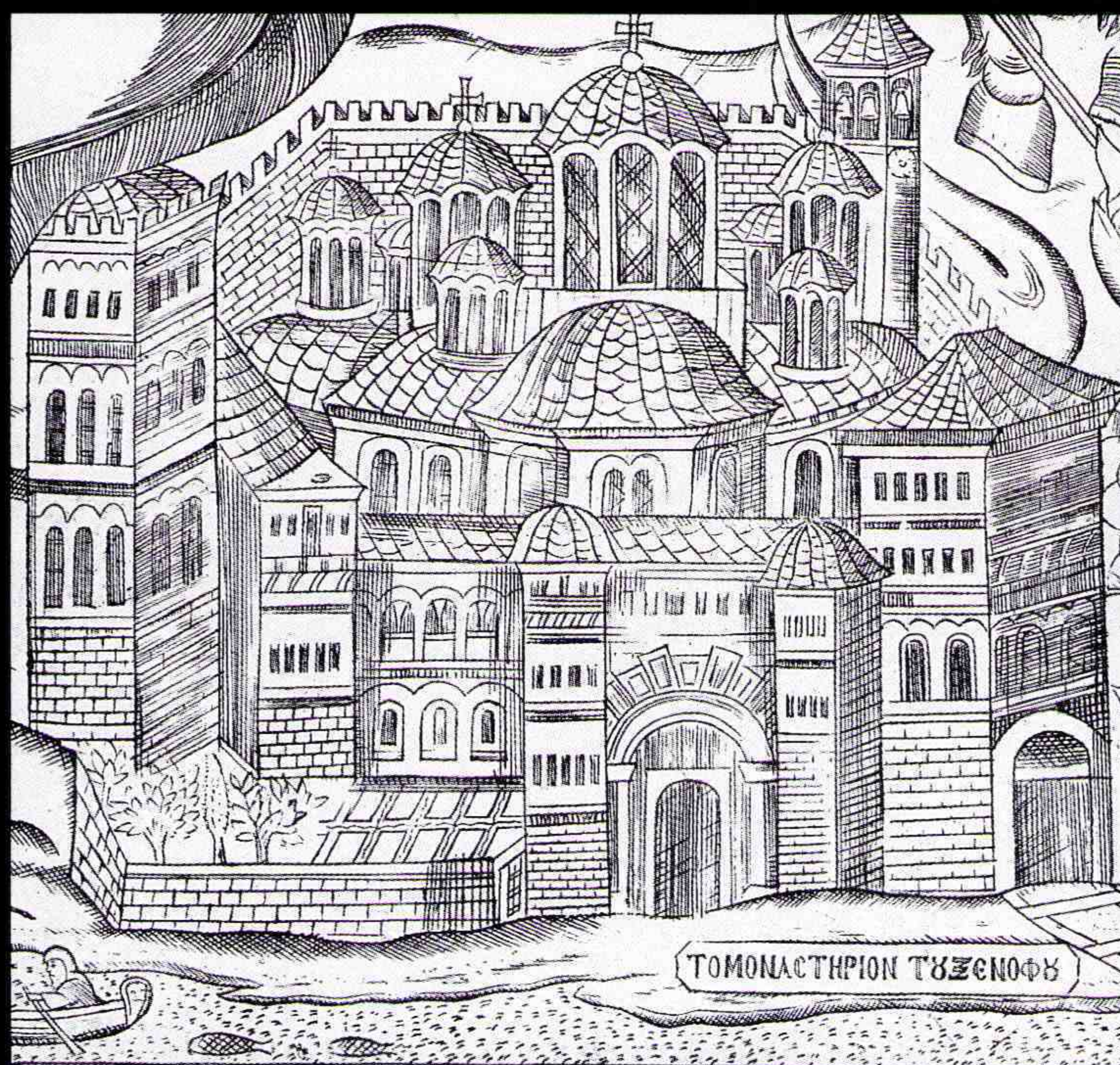
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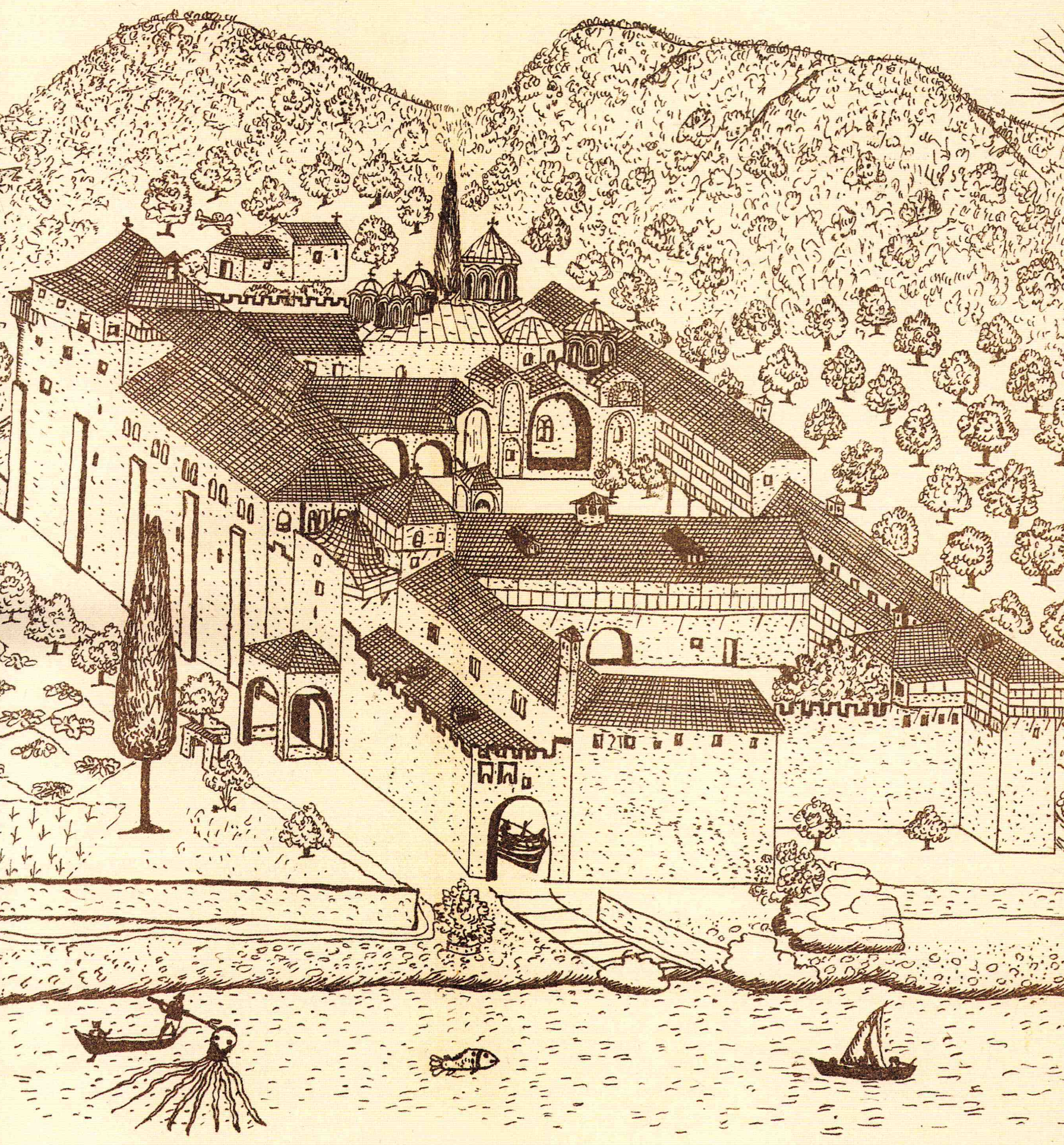
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HISTORY

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THE BYZANTINE PERIOD

THE TIMES OF THE FOUNDER AND HIS EARLY SUCCESSORS

(LATE 10th CENTURY-1078)

The Xenophontos Monastery was founded on a small hill, near the sea, on the western side of the Athos peninsula, between the Docheiariou Monastery, which made its first appearance in the 11th century, and the site on which the new St Panteleimon Monastery was built in the 18th century.¹

The founder of the Monastery was Xenophon, of whom there is evidence for the first time in the year 998, when his signature appears on an unpublished document of the Vatopedi Monastery. This signature means that he was the leader of a brotherhood which had already been constituted and the date must serve as a *terminus ante quem* for the foundation of his Monastery. But its foundation can not have been much distant from that date; no representative of the Xenophontos Monastery was a signatory to the *Typikon* of John Tzimisce, of 973. From that point on there is frequent evidence of Xenophon. He signs his name on Athonite documents referring to the affairs of other monasteries from 1001 onwards² and is the scribe of six of these between the years 1009 and 1017.³ From a signature which reads “abbot of St George” it is to be concluded that the Monastery was from the very beginning dedicated to St George. The founder, a contemporary of St Athanasius the Athonite, seems to have maintained connections with the founder of the Lavra, who miraculously cured Xenophon’s brother Theodore, also a monk on Athos.⁴ Another member of the family, his first cousin the monk Theodulus, lived the ascetic life there and had founded the Monastery of St Nicholas ‘tou Chrysokamarou’, which in the early 11th century he handed over to the Xenophontos Monastery.

Though we know nothing of the secular past of the founder, we may surmise that the Byzantine family to which he belonged was not an obscure one. The handwriting in the texts of the documents which he compiled and the small number of spelling mistakes lead to the conclusion that he was a man of

Fig. 4
The Xenophontos Monastery.
Drawing, V.G. Barskij. 1744.

some education, which, of course, he would have acquired before his arrival on Athos. The monastery which he built was small; it did not include buildings of a monumental character and was enclosed in an enceinte of modest proportions. The first phase of the *katholikon* must date from the period when he was Abbot.⁵ As to the Monastery's internal organisation, it seems that the founder laid down some rules, or at least had given certain instructions about the functioning of the community. There is evidence that "as kyr Xenophon the founder commanded", monks clearly coming from other *monydria* (small monastic foundations) had permission to grind their grain at the Monastery's mill free of charge, and that the Abbot had, in the first week of every Lent, to provide the monks of the Monastery with a sum of money (a 'blessing').⁶

Xenophon is mentioned for the last time in a document of 1018, without the title of Abbot, while in the same document Theodore signs as Abbot of St George. The coincidence of this name with the name of his brother makes it reasonable to suppose that before that year Xenophon, at an advanced age, had handed over the office of Abbot to his brother Theodore. The latter is mentioned as Abbot down to 1035. This last mention of him is accompanied by the information that Theodore was Abbot "of St George of Xenophon". This is the first evidence of the name of the Monastery involving the name of its founder.⁷

Down to 1078, we know of the Abbots Dionysius (c. 1040), Gregory (1047), Gerasimus (before April 1056), who belonged to an aristocratic family, bore the title of *kouropalates*, and served as Protos of the Holy Mountain, Theodore (for whom there is evidence after April 1056 and down to May 1071), and Nicholas (1076).⁸

We do not know what landed property the Monastery had in the time of Xenophon. On Athos specifically this was not large. Nevertheless, from the early decades of the 11th century its vital space expanded by means of transfers, annexations or gifts of adjacent land or of distant *monydria*. In the early 11th century it acquired the Monastery of St Nicholas 'tou Chrysokamarou' and its estates, which included 300 olive trees and vineyards, which its founder Theodulus made over to the Monastery. For a certain period it annexed the *monydrion* of the Prophet Daniel when its Abbot Isaiah was unable to repay a debt to the Monastery, and it came into possession, by donation, of certain lands of the Katzares Monastery. In the 1050s and until 1070 it annexed the Phalakrou Monastery, which was on the opposite, north-eastern, side of the Athos peninsula, and it also had a vineyard in the Karyes area.⁹

Outside Athos, the property of the Monastery was much greater. At Longos (Sithonia) it had a *monydrion* known as 'ton Hieromnemon', at Vour-

voura, the gift of the Emperor Basil II, a metochi with the name of St Nicholas 'tou Chrysokamarou' –probably a possession of the *monydrion* of the same name before the latter was annexed to Xenophontos– and possessions at Phournia. There were also some estates at Kassandra, but its most important possessions, already at that period, were at Kalamaria (metochi of Chartophylax). In the city of Thessaloniki it was the owner of a group of houses.¹⁰

In spite of the property which it possessed, the Monastery went into a gradual decline, until in 1078 it was in a semi-ruinous condition, though it never seems to have been abandoned completely.

FROM THE FIRST RESTORATION (1078) TO THE END OF THE 13th CENTURY

In 1078, the Great Droungarios of Vigla, Stephen, arrived on Athos. This Byzantine official, descended from an Athenian aristocratic family, withdrew to the Holy Mountain a little before Nicephorus Botaneiates ascended the imperial throne (April 1078). The latter had given him permission to abandon the world and had made him a gift of a considerable sum of money. Stephen established himself at the Xenophontos Monastery, which was ceded to him by the Protos of Mount Athos for the large sum of 36 litra “of *trachea* coins”, and very soon, together with three attendants, eunuchs like himself, he was tonsured as a monk, taking the name of Symeon. In the same year he was summoned by Alexius Comnenus, at that time a general of Nicephorus, to persuade the usurper of the throne Basilakes, who had taken refuge in Thessaloniki, to surrender. The mediation of the newly-ordained Abbot seems to have been successful; the bond between the two men was later to prove beneficial for both Symeon himself and the Monastery.

The re-founder took over a monastery which was totally delapidated (“in every way neglected”) and thus in need of renovation from the foundations up. Immediately after settling there, with a grant from the Emperor, but also with his own resources, Symeon restored the *katholikon*, repaired and extended the fortifications, and built cells for the monks. His restoration work was temporarily interrupted when there was a display of hostility on the part of the Protos and the Synaxis towards the residence in the Monastery of his ‘beardless’ followers (eunuchs in the present instance); before 1081 he was forced to leave Athos. His vindication came in 1089: armed with an imperial decree of his old acquaintance Alexius I Comnenus, he returned to the Monastery and

was reinstated as Abbot. By a document of July of the same year, the Protos Paul restored to Symeon the Monastery and all its property.¹¹ We have no evidence of the re-founder after 1089. He was, however, a figure known to and respected by his contemporaries. Theophylactus of Ochrid, speaking of him, in his discourse in favour of eunuchs, describes him as “gentle... amiable... a good manager, who led even the monks on Mount Athos in all exactness”.¹² Symeon left to his successors a flourishing monastery with a number of monks which was large for its size (55 in 1089). Apart from the buildings, he enriched the Monastery with icons, sacred and domestic vessels, and books (in 1089 there were 136), amongst which there was a superb Gospel book, a gift from Alexius I.¹³

The landed property also seems to have increased. On the Holy Mountain he planted vineyards, restored to the Monastery’s jurisdiction the *monydrion* of Makryghenes, annexed the abandoned Monoxylitou *monydrion*, in exchange for the lost Phalakrou *monydrion*, and regularised the collection of rights from other property. However, the most important expansion of the Monastery’s property was outside the Holy Mountain. At Kassandra, land of an area of 1,700 *modia* was added to it, in Thessaloniki it acquired immovable properties, and at Kalamaria, in the Stomion region, following a gift from the Emperor Alexius I Comnenus in 1089, the largest metochi the Monastery ever possessed was set up.¹⁴

The history of the Monastery after Symeon and until the early 14th century remains obscure, since archival documentation is lacking. We know only the names of some of the Abbots who signed documents of other monasteries dealing with Athonite affairs.¹⁵ The events which followed the Latin conquest (1204) and the unsettled state of the Balkans at the same period also had, as we know, an unfavourable effect on Mount Athos. The process of recovery, which began for the other monasteries a little after the middle of the 13th century, would begin for the Xenophontos Monastery in the last years of the century.

FROM THE 14th CENTURY TO THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST

The 14th century was for the monasteries of Mount Athos as a whole a period of prosperity and of a spiritual authority which extended throughout the Orthodox world. The favour of the Byzantine emperors competed with that shown by other Orthodox princes (for example, the Serbs) who sought to bring

the Holy Mountain within the sphere of their influence, a fact which contributed to the economic prosperity of the monasteries. This general observation also applies to the Xenophontos Monastery. As early as 1300, Xenophontos was designated a “royal monastery”, a description which is not found in the preceding centuries, and there is frequent evidence of its representatives in the Athonite documents. Particular mention should be made of the Abbot Barlaam, whose achievements date from between 1312 and 1325. During his term of office he concerned himself with increasing its property and successfully handled the crisis which arose between the Monastery, on the one hand, and the Synaxis of the Mount Athos and the Protos Isaac, on the other, out of a claim on an olive orchard in the Skamandrenos area. Barlaam acted in such a way –though we do not know details– as to turn the hostility of the dynamic Protos Isaac into warm support.¹⁶ Thus, in 1322 the Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus, on the mediation of Isaac, issued a chrysobull confirming the possession of all the estates of the Monastery.¹⁷ The ratification of estates was to be repeated, during the brief period of Serb rule, when the Serbian Prince Stephen Dušan, in 1352, issued a chrysobull by which he confirmed the possessions at Kalamaria, Kassandra, Longos and Ierissos.¹⁸

There was a significant increase in the Monastery’s property at this period, perhaps the greatest in its history. The situation in the immediate neighbourhood of the Monastery did not greatly change, but it acquired many *monydria* situated on its borders, such as the Matzoukes *monydrion*, in 1322. In the early 14th century it annexed the *monydrion* of St Philip, which did not abut on its area at any point. The monydrion thereafter has remained firmly in its possession down to the present day, in spite of quarrels with the Chilandari Monastery and particularly with that of Esphigmenou (starting from the same century), which still went on in the post-Byzantine period.¹⁹

The Monastery’s estates grew particularly outside the Holy Mountain, for example, in Thessaloniki and Chalcidice. The greatest increase took place until a little after the middle of the 14th century. In its early years, the Monastery held individual houses, groups of houses and shops in Thessaloniki and arable land, particularly vineyards on the outskirts – all under the supervision of a monk-steward appointed by the Monastery.²⁰

At Kalamaria, apart from the large metochi at Stomion, at which it had *paroikoi* (dependent peasants), it held land in the unidentified village of Paliron, at “Phouskoulou”, and at Myriophyton. On the Kassandra peninsula, the long-standing possessions of the Monastery were at Sybre, where it had a large grazing ground near the sea. It acquired a second grazing ground in the same