Spiritual Guidance for Aristocratic Women: A Living Tradition after the Fall of Constantinople? Gennadios Scholarios and the Nun Sophrosyne

Marie-Hélène Blanchet

Women and Monasticism in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean: Decoding a Cultural Map

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Women and Monasticism in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean: Decoding a Cultural Map

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In memory of
Elizabeth A. Zachariadou
1931-2018
and Ruth Macrides
1949-2019

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Abbreviations

AASS: *Acta Sanctorum*
AB: *Analecta Bollandiana*
ΑΔ: *Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον*
BHG: Fr. Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca* [Subs. Hag. 8a], Brussels ^{3}1957.
Byz: *Byzantion*
BF: *Byzantinische Forschungen*
BMFD: *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides Hero and G. Constable [DOS 35], vols 1-5, Washington, D.C. 2000
BMGS: *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BSl: *Byzantinoslavica*
BZ: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CA: *Cahiers archéologiques*
CCSG: Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca
CCSL: Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CFHB: Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CRAI: *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*
CSCO: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSHB: Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
ΔΧΑΕ: *Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας*
DOML: Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library
DOP: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
DOS: Dumbarton Oaks Studies
DOT: Dumbarton Oaks Texts
DTC: *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*
ÉO: *Échos d'Orient*
ΕΕΒΣ: *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*
ΕΕΚΣ: *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Κρητικῶν Σπουδῶν*
GRBS: *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
JÖBG / JÖB: *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*
LSJ: H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. St. Jones et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford ^{9}1889-1940, rev. repr. 1996.
MGH. SS: Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores
NE: *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων*
OCA: Orientalia Christiana Analecta

OCP: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
ODB: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, eds A. P. Kazhdan, A.–M. Talbot, A. Cutler, T. E. Gregory and N. P. Ševčenko, vols I-III, New York–Oxford 1991.
PG: J.–P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca*, 1-167, Paris 1857-1866.
PLP: *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, ed. by E. Trapp et al., Vienna 1976-1996.
PmbZ/1: *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Erste Abteilung (641-867)*, eds Fr. Winkelmann, R.–J. Lilie, Cl. Ludwig, Th. Pratsch, I. Rochow et al., vols 1-6, Berlin–New York 1999-2002.
PmbZ/2: *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Zweite Abteilung (867-1025)*, eds Fr. Winkelmann, R.–J. Lilie, Cl. Ludwig, Th. Pratsch, B. Zielke et al., vols 1-9, Berlin–New York 2009-2013.
RÉB: *Revue des études byzantines*
RHM: *Römische historische Mitteilungen*
ROC: *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*
RSBN: *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*
RSBS: *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi*
SBN: *Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*
SC: Sources chrétiennes
Subs. Hag.: Subsidia Hagiographica
TM: *Travaux et Mémoires*
TU: Texte und Untersuchungen
VV: *Vizantiiskij Vremennik*
WBS: Wiener Byzantinistische Studien
ZRVI: *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta*

Marie–Hélène Blanchet*

Spiritual Guidance for Aristocratic Women: A Living Tradition after the Fall of Constantinople? Gennadios Scholarios and the Nun Sophrosyne

The Palaiologan period is extremely rich in sources on aristocratic nuns. Although the entrance into a monastery implied theoretically equal treatment of nuns regardless of their social origin, the *Typika* of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that regulated female monastic life made an exception for the nuns from the Byzantine aristocracy. Special provisions allowed them to escape some of the constraints others were subject to, a phenomenon which is also traceable in the correspondence between spiritual fathers and their spiritual daughters of aristocratic origin. Spiritual father's advice generally aimed at moderation rather than encouragement of a rigorous asceticism as if his role was to mitigate and adapt the harshness of the rule according to the personality of his spiritual daughter.

In the light of these considerations, I would like to analyse two fifteenth-century letters of spiritual guidance by Gennadios Scholarios, on which scholars and specialists in female monasticism have hardly commented[1]. Both letters were probably addressed to a single person, a member of the large family of Asanes, Simonis Palaiologina Asanina, who took the monastic name Sophrosyne. Gennadios' letters contain some information on the living conditions of this "lady" within her monastery; moreover, they provide interesting information on the recommendations lavished by the spiritual father, who was also personally involved in this correspondence. A comparison with the sources of the fourteenth

* CNRS, UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée, Monde byzantin (Paris).

1. They were just mentioned by N. Papadimitriou, Les femmes de rang impérial et la vie monastique à Byzance, in: *Women and Byzantine monasticism. Proceedings of the Athens Symposium, 28-29 March 1988*, ed. by J. Y. Perreault, E. Koubena and M. Toli [Publications of the Canadian Archaeological Institute at Athens 1], Athens 1991, 67-85, here at 73.

century –particularly the letter exchange between Theoleptos of Philadelphia and Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina and the one between the Metropolitan of Chalcedon and Eulogia– will allow us to outline the characteristics of Sophrosyne's case and decide whether it follows the Byzantine tradition of spiritual direction, even in the aftermath of the Fall of Constantinople.

I. The two letters by Gennadios

We must first briefly recall some biographical facts of George Gennadios Scholarios[2]. He was born in the early fifteenth century, and from the late 1430s until 1447, he was the personal secretary of emperor John VIII Palaiologos. In 1449/1450, he took monastic vows, while continuing to lead the fight against the Union of Florence, as he had chosen to devote himself to that cause. Gennadios entered the monastery of Charsianites[3] in Constantinople, but he stayed in touch with the dignitaries he previously knew, including despot Demetrios Palaiologos, also engaged in the anti-unionist struggle[4]. It happens that the recipient of Gennadios' letters under consideration, Sophrosyne, is none other than the sister of Demetrios' wife, Theodora Asanina[5]. We can deduce her

2. See Fr. Tinnefeld, Georgios Gennadios Scholarios, in: *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. II: *XIII^e-XIX^e s.*, ed. by C. G. Conticello and V. Conticello, Turnhout 2002, 477-549; M.–H. Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios (vers 1400-vers 1472). Un intellectuel orthodoxe face à la disparition de l'Empire byzantin* [Archives de l'Orient chrétien 20], Paris 2008; M. Angold, The Autobiographies of the Patriarch Gennadios II Scholarios, in: *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. by T. Shawcross and I. Toth, Cambridge 2018, 68-90.

3. On the Charsianites monastery, which was probably located in the southwestern area of Constantinople, see H. Hunger, Eine spätbyzantinische Bildbeschreibung der Geburt Christi. Mit einem Exkurs über das Charsianites-Kloster in Konstantinopel, *JÖBG* 7 (1958), 125-140, here at 136-139; R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin. Première partie: Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat œcuménique.* III*, Les églises et les monastères*, Paris [2]1969, 501-502.

4. See his letters to Demetrios at that period: *Γεωργίου τοῦ Σχολαρίου ἐκ προτροπῆς τῆς ἱερᾶς συνάξεως τῶν τοῦ πατρίου καὶ ἀληθοῦς δόγματος ἀντιποιουμένων [πρὸς Δημήτριον τὸν Παλαιολόγον]* (ed. L. Petit, X. A. Sidéridès and M. Jugie, *Œuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, vol. I-VIII, Paris 1928-1936 = Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*), vol. III, 117-136; *Γενναδίου, ἐν τῇ μονῇ τοῦ Χαρσιανείτου. <Λόγος ἐπιστολιμαῖος τῷ δεσπότῃ Δημητρίῳ, ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ>* (ed. *ibidem*), vol. III, 174-178.

5. On Theodora, see *PLP* 1530 and 91379. Just after the fall of Constantinople, Gennadios Scholarios was also directly in touch with her about the treatise of Pletho: *Γενναδίου*

identity by the information provided in the title of one of the two letters: "To my very noble and honourable lady in God and sister of the most excellent *basilissa*, lady Sophrosyne"[6]. The alluded princess (*βασιλίσσης*) refers probably to the wife of a despot, according to the almost exclusive use of this title in the fifteenth century[7]: she is therefore either Theodora Asanina or Caterina Zaccaria, despot Thomas Palaiologos' wife[8]. As the other letter by Gennadios to a nun gives the name Simonis Palaiologina Asanina[9], all scholars make a connection between this Asanina and the *basilissa*'s sister and agree to identify the recipient of these two letters with Simonis/Sophrosyne, Theodora's sister[10].

Gennadios had thus personal connections to the entire family of Asanes, not only to Sophrosyne. On the other hand, we know that, just before the Fall of Constantinople, he kept close ties to some monastic circles of the capital: he seems to have been the "master" of some nuns hostile to the Union of the Churches, like him. When the historian Doukas recalls the popular rejection of the Florentine decree, he mentions "the nuns who had a pure opinion and who engaged in God in Orthodoxy, in accordance with their own opinion and their master Gennadius"[11]. This passage shows that Gennadios played an essential

ταπεινοῦ: ἐπιστολὴ τῇ βασιλίσσῃ περὶ τοῦ βιβλίου τοῦ Γεμιστοῦ (ed. Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*), vol. IV, 151-155.

6. *Τῇ κατὰ Θεὸν εὐγενεστάτῃ καὶ τιμιωτάτῃ κυρίᾳ μου καὶ ἀδελφῇ τῆς ὑψηλοτάτης βασιλίσσης, τῇ κυρᾷ Σωφροσύνῃ τῇ ἐν μοναχαῖς ὁσιωτάτῃ καὶ αἰδεσιμωτάτῃ* (ed. Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*, vol. IV, 234-235 = Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*), 234.1-3. On this letter, see also *ibidem*, xv-xvi; Sp. Lampros, *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, vols. I-IV, Athens 1912-1930, vol. II, 322-324 and λε΄-λς΄; T. Zeses, *Γεννάδιος Β΄ Σχολάριος. Βίος, συγγράμματα, διδασκαλία* [Analekta Vlatadon 30], Thessaloniki [2]1988, 309; Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios* (as in footnote 2), 222-223.

7. See A. Tzavara and T. Ganchou, La *principessa Caterina Paleologina*. À propos des βασίλισσαι de Morée (fin xiv[e]-début xv[e] siècle), *Ἑῶα καὶ Ἑσπέρια* 4 (1999-2000), 67-85, here at 72, especially footnotes 25 and 26, with an analysis how Pseudo-Kodinos and Sphrantzes use this term.

8. See *PLP* 21342.

9. *Τῇ εὐγενεστάτῃ καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς πεπληρωμένῃ ἐκ Θεοῦ τῇ κυρᾷ Σιμωνίδι Παλαιολογίνῃ τῇ Ἀσανίνῃ* (ed. Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*), vol. IV, 502-503 = Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*), here at 502.9-10.

10. See *PLP* 1534.

11. Doukas, *History* (ed. V. Grecu, *Ducas Istoria turco-bizantină (1341-1462)* [Scriptores byzantini 1], Bucharest 1958), 317,12-14 (36,4): *Τότε αἱ δοκοῦσαι καθαραὶ καὶ εἰς Θεὸν ἐν ὀρθοδοξίᾳ σχολάζουσαι μονάστριαι κατὰ τὸ δοκοῦν αὐταῖς καὶ τὸν αὐτῶν διδάσκαλον Γεννάδιον.*

role with one or several communities of nuns. However, it is impossible to say whether Sophrosyne belonged to these anti-unionist nuns, because none of the letters alludes to the Union. If not both, at least one of these letters should be placed in a quite different context.

This correspondence raises certain dating problems that should be mentioned, if not solved here. A single manuscript, which is not autograph, includes both letters of Gennadios, the *Vaticanus Rossianus* 986 (*olim* 16)[12]. The letters can be found on ff. 307r-307v (letter to Simonis) and 308r-308v (letter to Sophrosyne); both are not dated. However, they are followed in the same manuscript by a treatise mentioned in the letter to Sophrosyne, "The first service of God" (ff. 309-333). This treatise is dated in the late 1457 or in 1458 and was drafted in the Prodromos monastery near Serres, after Gennadios' resignation from the Patriarchate (he was in charge from early 1454 to early 1456)[13]. Since Gennadios sent to Sophrosyne that treatise –originally composed for a monk– his letter necessarily should be dated roughly between 1457/1458 and *ca.* 1472, the period of his death. One particular difficulty lies in his signature at the bottom of this letter: "the servant of God's children, Gennadios"[14]. Some modern scholars considered this formula to have been modelled on the papal signing *servus servorum Dei*; they interpreted it therefore as an indication that Gennadios was again Patriarch while writing this letter[15]. However, the loan translation is not accurate, since the Greek text gives *τέκνων* where the Latin repeats *servorum*. Consequently, we should interpret this formula differently, for instance as a monastic signature[16]. Nevertheless, as the debate is not closed,

12. See C. Van de Vorst, Verzeichnis der griechischen Handschriften der Bibliotheca Rossiana, *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 23/11 (1906), 492-508, here at 501-508.

13. *Περὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ Θεοῦ λατρείας, ἢ νόμος εὐαγγελικὸς ἐν ἐπιτομῇ. Αὐτοσχεδίως καὶ εὐλήπτως ἐξεδόθη μοναχῷ τινι φίλῳ ζητήσαντι* (ed. Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*), vol. IV, 236-264 = Gennadios Scholarios, *On the first service of God*). See also *ibidem*, xvi; Zeses, *Γεννάδιος Β΄ Σχολάριος* (as in footnote 6), 308-309. The manuscripts are described by Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*, vol. I, xix, no 18; xxiii-xxiv, no 5; xxxix, no 6.

14. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 235.33: *Ὁ δοῦλος τῶν τέκνων τοῦ Θεοῦ, Γεννάδιος*.

15. See M. Jugie, Introduction, in Petit, Sidéridès, Jugie, *Scholarios*, vol. IV, xi and xv-xvi; cf. also M. Jugie, Les œuvres pastorales de Gennade Scholarios. Précisions sur ses trois patriarcats, *EO* 34 (1935), 151-159, here at 152.

16. See Zeses, *Γεννάδιος Β΄ Σχολάριος* (as in footnote 6), 196-198, 312; Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios* (as in footnote 2), 222-223.

neither the date of the letter can be more accurately defined (placed after 1457/1458), nor the office held by Gennadios when he wrote that letter.

The epistle addressed to Simonis includes no evidence for the date. Gennadios affixed his usual signature as a monk, "the very humble Gennadios"[17] so that the letter can roughly be dated somewhere between 1449/1450 and 1472. However, in the manuscript, this letter precedes the one to Sophrosyne. Moreover, the name of the recipient changed between the two letters suggesting that Simonis, who was probably a novice, had meanwhile taken her vows and adopted a monastic name. Consequently, the letter to Simonis probably predates the one to Sophrosyne, that means it must have been written before 1457/1458, in a period when the young woman was about to become a nun. It may be added that a sufficient time separates the two letters since in the second one Gennadios argued that: "We have not written sooner to your Honour because of the past difficulties of the times"[18]. This somewhat vague sentence may allude to the Fall of Constantinople. Therefore this may have been the first letter he sent to Sophrosyne after 1453, while the other could be dated before the Fall. However, this conjecture remains quite uncertain.

It is not even clear where the protagonists lived. At the end of his first letter to Simonis, Gennadios replied to his spiritual daughter who had expressed her desire to see him, that this was also his wish, but without announcing or absolutely excluding a visit. This suggests that such visitation would have been possible and that no great distance separated the two characters. On the contrary, in the letter to Sophrosyne, it is evident that the correspondents were away from each other: "If it were possible for us to be also near that place, as you wish, we would perhaps even help you in person for your fervour in God; but we do not find ourselves there now, neither you are here"[19]. Had Sophrosyne taken the veil in a monastery in Constantinople, as we would be tempted to believe due to the concentration of nunneries in the capital?[20] If we assume that both

17. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*, 503.22: *Ὁ ἐλάχιστος Γεννάδιος*.

18. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 235.27: *Οὐδὲν προεγράψαμεν τῇ τιμιότητί σου διὰ τὰς παρελθούσας δυσκολίας τῶν καιρῶν*.

19. *Ibidem*, 234.21-24: *Εἰ ἦν δυνατὸν ἐγγὺς εἶναι καὶ ἡμᾶς τοῦ τόπου αὐτοῦ, οὗπερ ἐπιθυμεῖς, ἴσως καὶ ἀπὸ ζώσης φωνῆς ἐβοηθήσαμεν ἄν τῇ κατὰ Θεόν σου προτροπῇ· ἀλλ' οὔτε ἡμεῖς αὐτοῦ χώραν ἔχομεν νῦν, οὔτε σὺ ἐνταῦθα*.

20. We know about fifteen female monasteries, which were still active in the fifteenth century, most of them in Constantinople, but there were of course others, see M. Loukaki, Monastères de femmes à Byzance (XIIe-1453), in: *Les femmes et le monachisme byzantine* (as in footnote 1), 33-42, here at 35.

were in Constantinople at the time of the first letter –probably before the Fall– and if the nun remained in the same monastery, it should be understood that Gennadios was far from the capital when he sent his second letter. However, it can only be mere speculation because of the vagueness of the evidence provided by the texts.

We must, therefore, keep in mind that the two letters were addressed to Sophrosyne, a member of the Asanes family, but they were composed in two distinct periods, the second one after 1457/1458.

II. The contents of the letters

What do these letters tell us about the nun Sophrosyne? Their titles as well as their beginning focus on her aristocratic origin: the first word in each of them is *εὐγενεστάτη*, i.e. "very noble (woman)"[21], a sign of the deference Gennadios paid to his spiritual daughter. She seems to have entered the monastery at a very young age, without having been previously married: "Before being mixed with the storms and troubles of the life of most people, with true wisdom and upright knowledge, you have made the best choice; you have rejected all the emptiness of women who are attached to life; you have given yourself to the real bridegroom, Christ"[22]. The tone of this sentence is the one expected in a letter addressed to a nun, especially the idea often put forward of the renunciation of the joys of human marriage in favour of the union with Christ[23]. The interest of this quotation lies in its temporal dimension: it suggests that Sophrosyne had no life experience before devoting herself to her religious vocation. This passage, together with some others, suggest that the young woman entered the monastery by choice. In the letter to Simonis, Gennadios mentions her "very well-disposed feelings" (*τῇ λαμπρᾷ διαθέσει*) towards piety, "the fruit that (her)

21. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 234.5; Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*, 502.11.

22. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 234.9-12: *Πρὶν ἐμπλακῆναι ταῖς καταιγίσι καὶ ταῖς ταραχαῖς τοῦ τῶν πολλῶν βίου, ὄντως σωφροσύνῃ καὶ γνώσει ἀκεραίῳ ἐξελέξω τὸ κάλλιστον· πᾶσαν ἀπέρριψας τὴν ματαιότητα τῶν προσηλωμένων τῷ βίῳ γυναικῶν· τῷ ἀληθινῷ ἐνυμφεύθης νυμφίῳ Χριστῷ*.

23. See the same idea and quite the same vocabulary (for instance *νυμφίος* for Christ) in the correspondence between Theoleptos of Philadelphia and Princess Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina: Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Letters* (ed. A. Constantinides Hero, *The Life and Letters of Theoleptos of Philadelphia* [The Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources 20], Brookline Mass. 1994), 34-37.

soul bears" (*τοῦ καρποῦ τῆς ψυχῆς σου*) and "the power of God's grace inside (her)" (*τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἐν σοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ χάριτος*)[24]. Despite their partly rhetorical character, these expressions imply her inclination toward religious life, which her spiritual father praised repeatedly. It is also possible that her family have destined her since her childhood for the monastic life; however, Gennadios' letters contain no such indication[25].

The letters barely reflect upon the living conditions of Sophrosyne inside the monastery, but some elements are worth mentioning. Gennadios gave among other the following advice: "Do not neglect the office in the church, but in your cell devote your time to manual work and prayer"[26]. The daily service was naturally one of the main occupations of the nuns; it was also the gathering place of all nuns denoted here in the term "ecclesiastical synaxis" (*τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς συνάξεως*). Obviously, this communal time opposed the time the nun spent alone in her cell. Experts on female monasticism in the Palaiologan period have pointed to the fact that nuns of aristocratic background usually lived in a single cell –as it also seems here to be the case– while the other nuns, according to some *Typika*, slept in dormitories[27]. Sophrosyne would, therefore, enjoy such a privilege due to her rank. However, the reference to "manual work" could be regarded as inconsistent with what we know about the activities of aristocratic nuns, as these were usually exempt from work and material duties for the community[28]. Gennadios did not specify the type of

24. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*, 502.12.15.16.

25. A.–M. Talbot, Late Byzantine Nuns: By Choice or Necessity?, *BF* 9 (1985), 103-117, here at 105-106 (= Eadem, *Women and Religious Life in Byzantium* [Variorum Reprints], Aldershot 2001, XVII).

26. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 235.7-8: *Τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς συνάξεως μὴ ἀμελεῖν, ἐν δὲ τῷ κελλίῳ σου ἐργοχείρῳ καὶ εὐχῇ καταναλίσκειν τὴν ὥραν*.

27. See A. E. Laiou, Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women, *BF* 9 (1985), 59-102, here 76 (= Eadem, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium* [Variorum Reprints], Hampshire 1992, II); C. Galatariotou, Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities: The Evidence of the Typika, *JÖB* 38 (1988), 263-290, here at 267. See especially P. Gautier, Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè, *RÉB* 43/1 (1985), 5-165, text: 19-155 (= Gautier, Typikon Kécharitôménè), here at 41-43, esp. lines 381-396.

28. Laiou, Observations on the Life (as in footnote 27), 90; Galatariotou, Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities (as in footnote 27), 271-273. See also the *Typikon* of Bebaia Elpis (ed. H. Delehaye, *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues* [Mémoires. Deuxième série, tom. 13], Brussels 1921 = Delehaye, *Deux typica*), 18-105, here at 49.18-22 (56); Engl. transl. by A.–M. Talbot, Bebaia Elpis: Typikon of Theodora Synadene for

Sophrosyne's manual work, but he mentioned it thrice using the same term, i.e. *ἐργόχειρον*[29]. The first time was in the above-quoted sentence, the second time as he encouraged Sophrosyne to pray while working, and finally at the end of the letter recommending her the following: "You only have to devote yourself to God every day. And strive for it by leaning on your manual work"[30]. Thus, it should have been a work she could perform daily in her cell. Assuming that manual activity helped Sophrosyne to remain concentrated, this could include any kind of sewing she would make for herself. Nevertheless, the exact nature of her handiwork remains unclear; similarly unclear is whether the monastery should profit or not from it. Since she could produce it in her cell[31], we could also think of textiles, embroidery, or any object that could be sold and contribute to the revenues of the monastery. Gennadios' insistence on manual work is striking, but it is difficult to explain it, as it can also be linked to Sophrosyne's own character[32].

Yet, she was obviously educated. In addition to the social status, literacy was traditionally another reason for an internal division in monasteries between the illiterates and those who could read: the first worked and were restricted to physical labour, while the latter took care of the church and were assigned to hymnody[33]. There is no doubt that Sophrosyne had access to written culture: she initiated the correspondence with Gennadios who both times simply replied to a letter he had received from her[34]. Sophrosyne not only wrote to her spiritual father, but she probably asked him also for reading advice. Gennadios

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the Convent of the Mother of God Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople, in: *BMFD*, vol. 4, no. 57, 1512-1578.

29. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 235.8.11.30.

30. *Ibidem*, 235.29-30: *Ἀρκεῖ ὅτι καθιεροῖς σεαυτὴν καθ' ἡμέραν τῷ Θεῷ· καὶ τοῦτο σπούδαζε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐργοχείρου σου*.

31. Whereas usually the nuns seem to have communally done their work on behalf of the monastery: see Gautier, Typikon Kécharitôménè, 40-43, esp. lines 387-390; 74-75 (esp. lines 995-997).

32. According to Gregorios Sinaïtes, manual work is necessary for the weakest monks, see A. Rigo, Principes et canons pour le choix des livres et la lecture dans la littérature spirituelle byzantine (XIII^{e}-XV^{e} siècles), *Bulgaria mediaevalis* 3 (2012), 171-185, here at 179.

33. Loukaki, Monastères de femmes à Byzance (as in footnote 19), 41; Delehaye, *Deux typica*, 47.29-31 (53).

34. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 234.6; Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Simonis*, 502.11-12.

recommended her two books with the remark that these two should suffice[35]: the first was one of his treatises, while the second was the *Asketikon* by Basil of Caesarea, referred to herein as "the monastic rule" (*ὁ κανὼν ὁ μοναχικός*)[36]. *Asketikon*[37] is indeed one of the founding texts for monastic life. The ascetic writings of Basil were part of the recommended readings in nunneries and the kind of works likely to be available there: Gennadios did not seem to doubt that Sophrosyne could consult the book. As Alice-Mary Talbot noticed, the *Typika* of nunneries regularly quoted Basil the Great; however, it is surprising that Gennadios should limit his advice only to this Church Father[38].

Let us now turn to his treatise, "On the first service of God", which Gennadios recommended and sent to Sophrosyne[39]. Unfortunately, none of the existing manuscripts contains any marginal note indicating that it could have been read by the nun. Gennadios distinguished this "first service", for which he referred to his treatise (written at the request of a monk), and the "second service" that he briefly summarised in his second letter to Sophrosyne in the form of a series of commands. This "first service", or more precisely "first form of divine worship", is also called "evangelical law" in the title given by Gennadios[40]. It focuses on the inner state of mind expected from a monk, as opposed to the external manifestations of piety, the second way to worship God. Gennadios stresses that it is of paramount importance for a monk to understand the message of Christ fully, and this clear understanding should be then reflected on the monk's relationship with God and human beings.

35. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 234.24: *Ἀρκείτω σοι τοῦ Βασιλείου τὸ σύνταγμα καὶ τοῦτο ὃ νῦν σοι πέμπω περὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ Θεοῦ λατρείας.*

36. See previous footnote, and *ibidem*, 234.20.

37. See A. M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great* [Oxford Early Christian Studies], Oxford 2005, which contains also translations of the texts.

38. A.–M. Talbot, Bluestocking Nuns: Intellectual Life in the Convents of Late Byzantium, in: *Okeanos. Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtienth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students*, ed. by C. Mango and O. Pritsak with the assistance of U. M. Pasicznyk = *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), 604-618, here at 608 (about Maximus the Confessor) and 612-613 (about Basil the Great, but also Gregory of Nazianzus) [= Eadem, *Women and Religious Life* (as in footnote 25), XVIII].

39. See *supra* footnote 13.

40. Gennadios Scholarios, *On the first service of God*, 236.1-3: *Περὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ Θεοῦ λατρείας, ἢ νόμος εὐαγγελικὸς ἐν ἐπιτομῇ. Αὐτοσχεδίως καὶ εὐλήπτως ἐξεδόθη μοναχῷ τινι φίλῳ ζητήσαντι.*

Compared to it, "the second (worship) is inferior; it consists of prostrations, prayers, psalmodies and this kind of things"[41]. The "evangelical and spiritual law", as defined by Gennadios who relies here on the content of the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, means observing God's commandments with fear and love, in order to find the happiness prepared by God for human beings[42]. He insists on the foremost spiritual law of Christ, superior to all other laws, that of nature as well as that of Moses. This treatise aims at explaining the core of Christian teaching, which the monk should put into practice in his own life with faith, love, charity and compassion. Therefore, by sending a work authored by him, Gennadios sought to develop the moral conscience of his spiritual daughter, emphasising the correct understanding of the spirit of Christianity.

Gennadios thus sent to Sophrosyne a treatise written for a monk, a friend of his. He mentioned this fact in his letter and recommended her to focus within his treatise on what concerned her as a woman: "Read it and comply with it for what concerns you; because there are also therein some points that apply only to men; but after picking out what is yours, comply with it and keep it"[43]. That means that Gennadios considered that there were differences between the male and female experience of monastic life, without naming them; yet, he also believed that a woman could read such a text and have by herself enough discernment. More generally, spiritual fathers did not point out a major differentiation within male and female monastic culture as it is also proven by the use of Basil's "rule", written for men but also applied to nuns[44]. However, the reading lists for women were much shorter than the ones for men, while the writings of the spiritual father himself seem to have been considered much

41. *Ibidem*, 236.9-10: *δευτέρας δὲ καὶ ἐλάττονος, τῆς ἐν προσκυνήσεσι καὶ εὐχαῖς καὶ ψαλμῳδίαις καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις*. This dinstinction was borrowed from Thomas Aquinas, *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII edita*. Tomus IX, *Secunda Secundae Summae theologiae: a quaestione LVII ad quaestionem CXII*, Romae 1897, p. 213 (quaestio 84, articulus 2: "Utrum adoratio importet actum corporalem").

42. Gennadios Scholarios, *On the First of God*, 236.11-13: *περὶ τῆς πρώτης καὶ ἀναγκαιοτάτης λατρείας τοῦ Θεοῦ λέγομεν πρῶτον ἐν ἐπιτομῇ ἅμα καὶ σαφηνείᾳ τοῖς ἐν τῷ ὄρει τοῦ Κυρίου λογίοις ἀκολουθοῦντες, ἃ νόμος ἐστὶν ὁ εὐαγγελικὸς καὶ πνευματικός*. See also the whole beginning of the treatise, *ibidem*, 236.5-237.12.

43. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 234.18: *Αὐτὸν ἀναγίνωσκε καὶ τήρει ἐν τοῖς ἀνήκουσιν· εἰσὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀνδράσι μόνοις ἁρμόττοντα· ἀλλὰ τὸ οἰκεῖον σημειουμένη, τοῦτο τήρει καὶ φύλαττε*.

44. See A. Basilikopoulou, Monachisme: l'égalité totale des sexes, in: *Les femmes et le monachisme byzantin* (as in footnote 1), 99-110.

more important in the case of nuns, often even the almost unique reference, as showed by A. Rigo[45]. Gennadios was no exception.

In his letter to Sophrosyne, Scholarios then summarised the "second form of worship", that is to say, everything that fell within the ascetic practices of the nun. This passage is worth quoting: "On the other hand about the second worship, I tell you briefly: do not strive to fast for the sake of abstinence from food and drink, but for the sake of restraint. Such restraint is to put it briefly: First, eat only once a day in the winter, and if possible all year round; Second, do not eat expensive food, but something cheap and easy to find; Thirdly, (eat) not to satiety; Fourth, (eat) without pleasure; Fifth, (eat) without hypocrisy; Sixth, do not overlook the love for God and for the neighbour for food preparation"[46].

Regarding fasting and genuflections[47], Gennadios did not set a specific standard to his spiritual daughter, but he advised her to regulate them based on her own strength[48]. Once again, the spirit of the rule had to override the letter: asceticism was regarded neither as an end in itself nor as a feat to achieve. It was much more meant to get closer not only to God but also to the neighbour – the latter was never forgotten in this advice.

In this letter and in chapter 31 of his treatise, Gennadios explained to Sophrosyne how she should pray[49]. Within his treatise he did not much emphasise on the prayer's form, giving more specific guidance in this regard

45. Rigo, Principes et canons (as in footnote 32), 171-179; cf. also the contribution of A. Rigo in this volume, 283-300.

46. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 234.26-235.4: *Περὶ δὲ τῆς δευτέρας λατρείας συντόμως σοι λέγω· νηστείαν μὴ σπούδαζε τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀποχῆς τῶν βρωμάτων ἢ ποτῶν, ἀλλὰ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἐγκρατείας. Ἐγκράτεια δὲ τοιαύτη ἐστὶ συντόμως εἰπεῖν· Πρῶτον, ἐσθίειν ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐν τῷ χειμῶνι· εἰ δὲ δυνατόν, καὶ ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ ἔτει· δεύτερον, μὴ ἐσθίειν πολυδάπανα ἀλλ' εὔωνα καὶ εὐπόριστα· τρίτον, μὴ εἰς κόρον· τέταρτον, μὴ μεθ' ἡδονῆς· πέμπτον, μὴ μεθ' ὑποκρίσεως· ἕκτον, μὴ ἀμελεῖν τῆς ὀφειλομένης τῷ Θεῷ ἀγάπης, ἢ τῷ πλησίον, διὰ τὴν τῆς τροφῆς ἑτοιμασίαν.*

47. *Ibidem*, 235.12-14.

48. James of Chalcedon gave the same kind of spiritual advice to his spiritual daughter in the end of the fourteenth century, see V. Laurent, La direction spirituelle des grandes dames à Byzance. La correspondance inédite d'un métropolite de Chalcédoine, *RÉB* 8 (1950), 64-84, here at 78-79. Antonio Rigo prepares a critical edition of this correspondence, a translation of which he has already published, see A. Rigo (ed.), *Mistici bizantini*, Torino 2008, 593-604, here at 598-599, 601, 603.

49. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 235.8-17; Gennadios Scholarios, *On the first service of God*, 258-259.

in his letter: "Let this be your prayer: 'my God, have mercy on me, a sinner, and save me'. Say these words as one prayer and repeat them again, sitting, standing and doing your manual work. And let your tongue say this prayer profusely, and let your intelligence (*διάνοια*) be consistent with your tongue, not aimless"[50]. Gennadios encouraged the nun to continuous prayer or "pure prayer", not to the hesychastic method, but not that far from it. He did not propose her any breathing techniques, he did not recommend that she should pray sitting rather than straight up, and did not suggest that she should say the Jesus prayer[51]. What Gennadios proposed was slightly different, it was an intermediary form of that prayer without the invocation to Jesus' name; nonetheless, the method of constant repetition was apparently part of the ascetic tradition. We should recall that the Metropolitan of Chalcedon, who kept up an extensive correspondence with the nun Eulogia, tried much more explicitly to discourage her from devoting herself to hesychastic practices, as he considered them dangerous: "Do not launch forth into the prayer of the heart, with a narrowed mind! Many people without this asceticism became great and miracle-working. Your own way, weak and powerless as you are, is rather that of greater simplicity and humility"[52].

Gennadios was also cautious. On the other hand, he appreciated his spiritual daughter's prayer so that in the end of his letter he asked her to pray for him.

Conclusions

Despite its shortness, the correspondence between Gennadios and Sophrosyne demonstrates how long lasting the Byzantine tradition of spiritual guidance for aristocratic nuns was. The living conditions of the nuns worsened after the

50. Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Sophrosyne*, 235.8-12: *Ἔστω σοι δὲ εὐχὴ αὕτη· ὁ Θεός μου, ἐλέησόν με τὴν ἁμαρτωλὸν καὶ σῶσόν με. Ταῦτα ὡς μίαν λέγε εὐχήν, καὶ πάλιν ἐπανέρχου καὶ καθημένη καὶ ἱσταμένη καὶ τὸ ἐργόχειρον πράττουσα. Καὶ ἡ μὲν γλῶττά σου βρυέτω ταύτην τὴν εὐχήν, ἡ δὲ διάνοιά σου ἀρεμβάστως συμφωνείτω τῇ γλώττῃ σου*.

51. The formula of Jesus prayer, which had become traditional in the fourteenth century and was recited by the hesychasts was: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (*Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλόν*). About this formula, see the introduction by Olivier Clément in: O. Clément and J. Touraille, *Philocalie des Pères neptiques*, Paris 1995, 24.

52. Laurent, La direction spirituelle des grandes dames (as in footnote 48), 83; Rigo, *Mistici bizantini* (as in footnote 48), 599, and see also 602.

Fall of Constantinople, and the presence of a spiritual father, both physically and through letters, was scarce, but the monastic tradition was perpetuated. The advice given by Gennadios as a spiritual father remained in line with what is known about the fourteenth century. We can just emphasise his moderate recommendations and his concern for the sound Christian faith of the nun. As a spiritual father, Gennadios seemed not to be inclined to ascetical and mystical speech: he led his spiritual daughter towards traditional coenobitic monasticism and persuaded her to avoid any form of ascetic excess.