

THE VISITS OF JOHN V PALAEOLOGUS, EMPEROR OF BYZANTIUM, TO THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

The lives of two 14th century monks contain interesting information on the sojourns of Emperor John V Palaeologus (1341–1391) on Mount Athos. In both cases the information comes from the dubious middle ground between legend and history. This is largely a consequence of the fact that hagiographies belong to a peculiar literary genre. Namely, the principles of hagiographic literature require their authors to concentrate on eternity and to pay greater attention to the ascetic deeds of saints, to their spiritual self-abnegation, to the miracles worked by them and generally to the universal questions of the relationship of man to God, than to the facts of a broader historical importance.

The two lives of the Athonite monk Maximos Kausokalybites – one written by his younger contemporary and disciple Niphon, a monk living in the 14th century, and the other compiled by Theophanes, the abbot of Monastery Vatopedi and, from 1381, the metropolitan of the town of Peritheorion in Thrace – contain interesting accounts of the visit of two emperors of Byzantium to Mount Athos. John V Palaeologus and his father-in-law John VI Cantacuzenus came to Mount Athos in order to ask this monk, renowned for his prophetic gift, to predict their future. Maximos Kausokalybites satisfied their curiosity

and prophesied that John Cantacuzenus would take religious orders, and that the reign of John Palaeologus would be long and arduous. The prophecies came true. This visit of the two Byzantine emperors to Mount Athos could have taken place only in the latter half of 1350 – provided, of course, that the whole story is a reflection of some authentic events.

The encomium composed by Grigorij Camblak for the Turnovo Patriarch Euthymios (1375–1393) contains an interesting account of another visit of John V Palaeologus to the Holy Mountain. Once, while the Bulgarian monk was mortifying his flesh in the Great Lavra of St Athanasius, the basileus from Constantinople came to visit him. Allegedly, the emperor's intention was to take from Euthymios the great treasure the monk was rumoured to possess. Wrathful because he found no treasure, John V Palaeologus banished the slandered monk to the island of Lemnos in the Aegean, but he relented shortly afterwards, and allowed Euthymios to return to Athos. This visit might have taken place in 1365 or in the period from the middle of 1367 to the middle of 1369.

Both episodes, the one preserved in the biography of Maximos Kausokalybites and the other found in the encomium of the Turnovo Patriarch Euthymios, contain some dubious elements and have the features of a *locus communis*. Nevertheless, it is possible that they represent at least a faint echo of actual events.