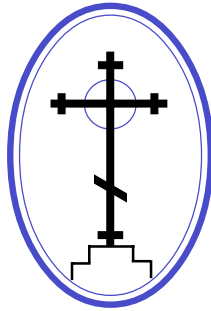


ΗΩΗΛΕΙΟΝ

WESTERN RITE
MONASTERY
OF MT. ATHOS

A MONOGRAPH
WITH NOTES & ILLUSTRATIONS

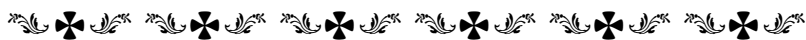


Fr. Hieromonk Aidan Keller

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ἈΜΑΛΦΙΟΝ

WESTERN RITE MONASTERY OF MT. ATHOS



TRANS-NATIONAL ORTHODOXY

Nothing can unite men of good will so closely as the bonds of brotherhood born from sharing the same genuine Orthodox Christian Faith. In a deeply Orthodox heart, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek,¹ there is no East nor West. This truth is beautifully exemplified in the history of the Western Monastery of Amalfion, a beacon shining from Mount Athos—the Holy Mountain—for some 300 years, beginning in the late tenth century and enduring nearly to the close of the thirteenth. Speaking more broadly, this truth is no less attested by the very character of the Holy Mountain in earlier times, in its golden years when monks of all nations, tribes, and tongues gathered to worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the beauty of holiness, in a fully trans-national community under the benevolent protection of the Byzantine Emperor and the Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

INTRODUCTION TO AMALFION

To the pilgrim travelling today upon the Holy Mountain, the relics of the Western monastery are striking: from a height on the eastern coastline there rises up, straight and majestic, the old square tower. It looks out over an enchanting bay demarcated by the promontories of Kosari and Kophos, about halfway between the monasteries of Great Lavra and Karakallou.² Of the cloister that stood here—where Italian monks struggled in asceticism and prayer according to the rule of the wonder-working St. Benedict of Nursia—this tower is all that now remains, it and the cemetery, and shards of the southwest wall, and just a little of the old slipway down by the shore. The bygone monastery's original name, Amalfion or Amalphinou, ἡ μονὴ τῶν Ἀμαλφηνῶν, survives today as “Molphinou” or “Morphonou.”

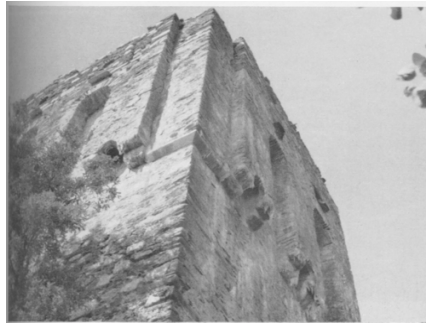
¹ Galatians 3:28

² Karakallou was formerly a monastery dominated by Albanians.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Remaining Tower of Amalfion (above & below)



Amalfi, Italy

AMALFION: HUB OF A FOUR-SPOKED WHEEL

The story of Amalfion is bound up closely not only with Amalfi and the Greek fathers of Athos, but also with the Amalfitan enclave at Constantinople—and also the great Abbey of Monte Cassino, whence Greek culture and spiritual instruction radiated across Italy. These four centres of activity both spiritual and economic buttressed the monastic foundation at Amalfion and benefitted in turn from its prayerful influence.

AMALFI & CONSTANTINOPLE

Amalfi, now a small Italian town on the spectacularly beautiful coastline south of Naples, was in the tenth century a formidable maritime republic ruled by doges, its preëminence among Italian powers sanctioned by chrysobulls from Eastern Emperors Basil and Constantine. Amalfitans were among the first Westerners to establish economic colonies in the Near East, and also Constantinople, where their commercial port of call was situated next to the Monastery of St. Anthony, on the east shore of the Bosphorus. There they had a cloister, with a church called “The Latin Church of the Deipara¹ Mary, of the Amalfitans.” The observance there was Benedictine.² There was another Amalfitan monastery in the Great City, of some other observance, dedicated to the Holy Saviour; upon both communities the Byzantine emperors lavished privileges and protections. These Amalfitan foundations at Constantinople are in evidence as early as 944.

AMALFITANS AT JERUSALEM

At Jerusalem in 1020-1023 the old haven for Western pilgrims there was refurbished by Amalfitans as a Benedictine monastery known as “St. Mary of the Latins” (to distinguish it from the Greeks’ church of St. Mary). The tale of this Amalfitan cloister, which has much in common with the tale of Amalfion itself, is an interesting one. St. Gregory I of Rome sent Abbot Probus to Jerusalem to erect a hostel to assist Western pilgrims. It was finished in 603 but apparently the

¹ Latin for Theotokos, i.e., Bearer of God, Mother of God.

² ‘Benedictine’ I use loosely to mean ‘relating to the culture of St. Benedict’s Rule’—not to imply that there yet existed a ‘Benedictine Order’ in the modern sense.

Persians destroyed it in 614. Prior to 800, Charlemagne entered into negotiations with Caliph Haroun al-Raschid (the caliph of the Arabian Nights), with the result that the hostel was renewed and entrusted to a Benedictine monastery of St. Mary of the Latins. (Monk Bernard, a pilgrim to the Holy Land in 870, describes it in his journal.) In 1010, it seems, St. Mary's was destroyed together with the Church of the Holy Resurrection,¹ on orders of the zealot Caliph Hakem Biamrillah (el-Hakim). Only ten years later the Amalfitans, through intense negotiations with Egyptian Caliph Mustesaph, re-established Benedictine monks there to look after Latin pilgrims.² It should come as no surprise, then, that Amalfitans planted upon the cliffs of Athos a community bearing their name, later in time than the Constantinopolitan foundation but prior to the re-foundation at Jerusalem.

ATHOS—THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

What was the Athos that greeted the Latin monks when they disembarked? Then, it was a forested wilderness populated more by hermits than by monastery-dwellers. The iconoclastic persecutions drove a number of Greek hermits to settle on Athos in the eighth and ninth centuries, and by the time St. Athanasius founded his lavra in the tenth century, eremitic life was Athos' established paradigm. The Athonite controversy in that tenth century was not ethnic: the hermits disapproved of St. Athanasius' rash of coenobia with their great buildings and towers. They reckoned that large coenobia would eclipse their own way of life, and they complained keenly to the Emperor. In 972 Emperor John Tzimisces ended the controversy once and for all. He decided in favour of the coenobitic monasteries by means of his Typicon nicknamed *The Goat*, written on goatskin. It subjected Athos' independent dwellers to the authority of the large, organised monasteries. Because of this legislation Amalfion, when it entered the Athonite scene, did so as one of those protected coenobia which were very much in the ascendant.

¹ Commonly known to English speakers as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

² There were two more hostels for Western pilgrims at Jerusalem. The one erected for women had a chapel dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene, the additional one for men a chapel dedicated to St. John the Almoner (Almsgiver), Patriarch of Alexandria.



Looking down upon the Amalfitan coast



Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem
(formerly the Amalfitan St. Mary of the Latins)

WESTERN AND ATHOS-DWELLING

What was it like there, for the Latin monks who arrived as part of the entourage of St. Athanasius? They found themselves surrounded by monks whose overall reputation was sterling, men known for true holiness of life. By all accounts, the Athonites of those days merited the description given by St. Sava of Serbia in after-years: “Having visited the Holy Mountain, I have seen illuminators and incarnate intelligences. I have seen earthly angels and heavenly creatures.” By all accounts too, Westerners were then as welcome on Athos as any other group. Early documents of the Mountain reflect no ethnic frictions; the impression we receive is one of magnanimity and common purpose. Still, Latins did not arrive on Athos in any notable way till invited by St. Athanasius. He was the first to draw to himself—as to a powerful magnet—a multitude of monastic strugglers of many ethnicities. They were Romans, Hispanics, Calabrians, Amalfitans, Armenians, and Georgians, as well as Greeks.

OTHER ITALIANS ON ATHOS

Many Italians not of Amalfi dwelt on Athos. St. Athanasius’ *Vita* says the monk Nicephorus the Unclothed came from Calabria—with his elder, Phenton, who died before Nicephorus reached Athos—and settled near Athanasius. The names of certain monasteries are linked to the arrival of many Italian hermits: Klavros, Chiliados, Sikelos, and others. This last-named was a 10th century monastery, called ‘of the Sicilian’ or τοῦ Σικελοῦ; in the 12th century there flourished the Italo-Greek Monastery of St. Basil, called ‘of the Calabrian’ or τοῦ Καλαβροῦ. Generally, Greek was the language used by these communities; it was then the dominant language of southern Italy, which was under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, not of Rome. In any case, monks from Italy and Sicily, both Greek and Latin by culture, continued to arrive on Athos until the 14th century, and among them were many of the most famed of Athonite fathers: Nicephorus the Unclothed, and the St. Hesychius whose holy life is described by St. Gregory Palamas.

EARLIEST DESCRIPTION OF AMALFION

George the Hagiorite, in his Georgian-language biography of Sts.

John and Euthymius of Iviron, written in about 1045, says there came to Athos in the lifetime of St. John one pious Leo, brother of the Duke of Benevento, with six disciples. He says also that they built the Amalfitan cloister with the aid of the fathers at Iviron. He describes Leo's foundation on Athos as

“A delightful monastery... in which he assembled a great many brethren.”

In another place the same writer says of Amalfion:

“That monastery is held on the Holy Mountain even to this very day, by Romans who lead lives of discretion and good observance,¹ on the pattern of St. Benedict's rule and teachings; his life is described in the Dialogues.”²

GREAT LAVRA—AMALFION'S 'MOTHER'

Between these Italian monks and the Great Lavra of St. Athanasius there existed the closest bonds of affection, as George the Hagiorite tells us at great length (he also dwells on the good relations between St. Athanasius and the Iberians or Georgians). The *Vita* of Athanasius also mentions the Amalfitans, and attests their fast friendship with the Saint. Great Lavra was even in some sense a mother-house for the Amalfitans, since it was their home until they could build their own. By foot, Amalfion and Great Lavra were only two and one-half hours apart, and the signatures of Amalfitan fathers commonly appear on important Lavriote documents. In a deed from December 984 wherein St. Athanasius made a donation to St. John the Iberian as Hegumen τοῦ Κλήμη (later, Iviron), we find that two monks signed their names in Latin: *Ego Jo(hannes) monachus testis sum*, and *Ego Arsenius ...uro indignus monachus testis sum*.³ We know that in 984 the founding of Amalfion had not yet occurred; the *Vita* of St. Athanasius says the founding occurred after the endowment was made to St. John.

¹ ... *qui probe et rite vitam agunt*.

² It is known that St. Euthymius of Iviron translated the Dialogues of Pope St. Gregory I of Rome into the Georgian tongue for his Athonite brethren.

³ *I, Monk John, am a witness* and *I, Arsenius, ... unworthy monk, am a witness*.



From Ravello, looking down the coast to Amalfi



The coastline of Mount Athos

GREAT LAVRA

What of Amalfion's "mother," Great Lavra? It was founded between 961 and 965 by Emperor Nicephorus Phocas, in consultation with St. Athanasius. This emperor was the nephew of the Abbot Michael Maleinos of Kyminas, who was St. Athanasius' spiritual father, and St. Athanasius was in turn Nicephorus' spiritual father. Nicephorus had vowed to become a monk if he defeated the Saracens, but after his stunning victory over the Arabs at Crete (March 961) he failed to keep his vow. Great Lavra, then, was his vehicle of expiation.

IVIRON

As for Iviron, an early sister-house to Amalfion, it was founded in 980 by St. John the Iberian, not far distant from the monastery τὰ Κλήμεντος, dedicated at first to St. John the Baptist, later to the Theotokos. We know St. Athanasius reposed between 997 and 1011, St. John of Iviron about 1006, and St. Euthymius of Iviron about 1028. But from more precise data found in Greek and Georgian documents and in the Chronicle of Monte Cassino, we may be sure that the monastery of the Amalfitans was established between the years 985 and 990, after the Amalfitans had spent several years at Great Lavra as part of Athanasius' international beehive of monastics.

A WITNESS: LEO OF OSTIA

Leo of Ostia's Cassinese Chronicle sheds some light upon Amalfion, indirectly, in one engaging narrative. We are told that in 986 there occurred a scandal: the 28th Abbot of Monte Cassino in Italy was intruded by an act of nepotism, without the election by the monks which the Rule of St. Benedict requires. His name was Manso, a kinsman to the powerful Capuan Duke Pandulf.¹ Abbot Manso gave further scandal by his loose living, whereat a number of monks departed from Cassino—including a John of Benevento, a Theobald, a Liutius, and five other monks whose names are not recorded. The first three went to Jerusalem, the other five into "Lombardy" (probably Calabria). John of Benevento later made his way from Jerusalem to Mount Sinai, dwelt there for six years, then set his face

¹ Leo, the Founder of Amalfion, was Duke Pandulf's own brother.

towards Greece, sojourning “upon the mountain which is called *Agionoros*,” where he dwelt at Amalfion, among his countrymen. And there it was that St. Benedict appeared to him in sleep, ordering him to return to Monte Cassino to be elected abbot. He did return, and—Manso having died in 997—he was chosen to be John III, 29th Abbot of Monte Cassino.

AMALFION'S SECOND LEADER

Dom Rousseau, in his article on Athos in «Revue liturgique et monastique», 14 (1929), concludes that John of Benevento (John III) found himself on the Holy Mountain about 993. Now apparently, by the time John III was sojourning in self-exile at Amalfion, it was no longer under the direction of its holy founder Leo, but of a certain Hegumen John. For we find, amongst the signatories of a land grant drawn up in 991, a John who subscribed in Latin: *Ioh(annes) monachus [et] higoumenos inter test(es) manu mea scripsi*—that is, “John, monk and hegumen; among the witnesses I have signed in my own hand.”

PIONEER OF ATHOS

Amalfion therefore, as one of Athos' first several monasteries, blazed the trail of coenobitic life on the Mountain (together with Great Lavra, Iviron, and the monastery almost exactly contemporaneous with Amalfion—Vatopedi). It should be borne in mind that of the 20 Athonite monasteries operating today, only four were in existence by the death of St. Athanasius:¹ Great Lavra, Iviron, Vatopedi, and (some say) Esphigmenou. Amalfion ranked variously as the second, fourth, fifth, or sixth, in importance among these monasteries.

SUMMARY

Now let us summarise our gleanings about early Amalfion. Its founder was that great friend of St. Athanasius of Athos, Leo of Benevento, a monk with a reputation for piety. Around 980 he came to Athos with six disciples, at the time when the Georgian lavra of Iviron was just being built. From 980 to 984 he stayed at Great Lavra with St. Athanasius, and with him were two fathers named

¹ The repose of St. Athanasius was sometime from 997 to 1011, probably after 1000.

John and Arsenius. Leo the Founder erected his own coenobium between 985 and 990, with substantive aid from Sts. John and Euthymius of Iviron. About 991 the superior was no longer Leo the Founder but a certain John (very likely one of the six disciples), and it was during this John's hegumenate that another father John of holy life dwelt there—from 993 to 996 or 997—namely, the future Abbot John III of Monte Cassino, a worthy successor to St. Benedict the Great.

Leo the Founder might have received a formation at Monte Cassino—certainly he is described as “from Roman lands”—but he got to Athos from Constantinople, and there is no indication that his six disciples were connected with Monte Cassino; they are described as “Romans from the Royal City and from other cities.”

REVERSE EXAMPLES: GREEKS IN THE WEST

It may possibly strike the reader as singular that on Athos, renowned as a stronghold of Eastern monastic traditions, there should have thrived a Latin monastery following Western traditions. This is why the two Amalfitan monasteries at Constantinople and the one at Jerusalem were mentioned, and we find many other examples-in-reverse upon Latin soil—especially when Italo-Greek monks began migrating farther north on the Italian peninsula after the Saracens' devastating attack on Calabria in 942. Let us seize on three useful examples of Greek settlements which were mirror-images of the Amalfitan settlements in the East.

Valleluce. The Greek St. Nilus of Rossano came to Monte Cassino when the pious Aligernus was Abbot. Aligernus gave St. Nilus and his companions a king's welcome, and insisted they perform their Divine service in Greek in the main church. After the service, the Greeks gave a talk on the Eastern rite as compared to the Western. Aligernus persuaded St. Nilus and company to settle on Cassino's estates, at Valleluce; there Nilus, head of a Greek monastery, wrote a hymn in Greek to honour St. Benedict. Abbot Aligernus reposed in 984 (then the impious Manso was installed, followed by the pious John III). St. Michael's at Valleluce remained Greek-rite until 1014—well after the departure of St. Nilus and his followers.



Map of Italy and the Byzantine Empire in 910 A.D.
Note the Duchy of Benevento in purple



Mt. Athos—Serb Monastery of Hilandar

St. Boniface'. In Rome, Pope Benedict VII (974-983) gave the monastery of St. Boniface on the Aventine to Archbishop Sergius of Damascus, who fled to Rome in 977 with a group of Greek monks. Later known as Sts. Boniface and Alexis (today's San Alessio), this monastery was dual-ritual. During the reigns of its first two abbots, Sergius (977-981) and Leo (981-999), it comprised two brotherhoods, one Greek, one Latin, united under a single Abbot. The Greeks followed Eastern rite and monastic practice, the Latins their Western rite and Benedictine observance. In the last quarter of the tenth century, St. Boniface' became the most distinguished monastery in Rome, and was showered with privileges by Popes and German emperors. Its second abbot, Leo, became Archbishop of Ravenna in 999—one of a number of Italo-Greeks who attained high office in the Latin Church at this time. It is notable that Italian people often preferred the Greek monks over the Latin, since they laboured more with their own hands and excelled in asceticism.

Grottaferrata. For a third powerful example of Greeks flourishing in the Latin world, we need only turn our gaze towards Grottaferrata, a beacon of holiness in Italy founded for St. Nilus of Rossano by Count Gregory I of Tusculum. One of Grottaferrata's abbots, St. Bartholomew the Younger, was spiritual father to Pope Benedict IX, and in fact convinced him to abdicate the Papal throne in 1044.

WHEN SHOULD ONE'S RITE BE LEFT?

Greek monks settling in the West acclimated according to one of four patterns, which I have outlined below since the same contours are seen in reverse wherever Latin rite monks settled in the East.

- (a) They lived individually, as hermits.
- (b) They easily became members of a Latin rite community.
- (c) They made up the half of a dual-ritual community, such as the half-Greek, half-Irish monastery founded by St. Gerard, Bishop of Toul, France.
- (d) They constituted a Greek rite monastery under the canonical oversight of the local diocese.

These four patterns assume prevailing conditions of peace and welcome. It was not until the harsh centralisation efforts of Pope

Gregory VII, in the late 11th century, that non-Roman rites (including Latin rites other than Rome's) were marked for extermination, and that Greek monks began to be unwelcome in Latindom. Interestingly, by the tenth century the Greek and Latin rites had each become so well-fixed in its sphere that the presence of Greeks on Latin soil, and vice versa, produced no instance of compenetration of one rite into another. But now let us return to the subject of the Holy Mountain.

THE RANKING OF AMALFION

With the passage of time, Amalfion kept its Latin orientation; often the signatures of monks from this monastery were the only instances of a foreign language in signatures on Athonite documents. Amalfion was a chief monastery of Athos, and its Abbot John—probably that same John who appeared as Abbot in 991—signed many documents: a decision of the Protos¹ Nicephorus in April 1012 (*Johannes, monachus*, the fifth signature, just after Euthymius of Iviron); an accord between two Hegumens in February 1016 (*Johannes, monachus et abbas*, in the sixth position after George of Iviron); a land dispute resolution of May 1017, etc. This last document is notable in that the Latin Abbot's signature immediately follows that of the Protos of Athos. In April 1035 when the Protos named a monk Basil as Hegumen of the monastery of St. Nicholas "of the Rudavians," [?] the fourth signature was that of *J(o)h(annes) hum(ilis) mo(na)chus Amalfitanus*—appearing just after the signature of George of Iviron. Special privileges were awarded Amalfion in the Second Athonite Typicon of 1045.² That document is notable for granting Amalfion the privilege—which ran counter to the accepted custom—of keeping a large boat. Such a boat was especially needful for the Amalfitan fathers since they relied on supplies shipped from Constantinople's Amalfitan colony.

THE POST-SCHISM YEARS

Now we enter the period following the Schism of Rome from the Orthodox Patriarchs in 1054. Remarkably, we see no evidence that

¹ Protos—the superior chosen for all of Athos.

² This was an imperial constitution issued by Emperor Constantine Monomachus.

the Schism had any direct effect on Amalfion's monks. Certainly they remained in communion with the Greek fathers. A letter was sent from Italy to Amalfion in 1070, attempting to ensnare the fathers in a discussion about unleavened bread. The reply, if there ever was one, is not a matter of record. Although there are indications the Amalfitans at Constantinople sided with the Papal party, those on Athos were in league with the Greeks.

It is curious that although the Papal party prevailed in the Latin Church in Italy—fatherland of the future monks who would come to Athos to perpetuate Amalfion—the fathers of Amalfion were in no wise on the defensive, nor on the decline. Far from it; in 1081 a deed from the monks of Kosmidion gave concessions to a certain Benedict, “monk and superior of the Imperial Monastery of the Amalfitans.” From this it is clear that Amalfion had received the august and protected status of an Imperial Monastery. Oddly, in chrysobulls from Alexis I Comnenus that same year, and in other imperial rescripts, Amalfion is never referred to as Imperial. This could be because the status was short-lived, it might reflect a deteriorating political situation at the capital—we do not know. We do know that back in 1052 Constantinople's Western rite churches, which served the City's colony of some 60,000 Westerners, had been closed by Emperor Constantine IX. Usually conciliatory, the emperor was retaliating in kind for the Normans' closure of Eastern rite churches in Greek Italy. Despite such setbacks for Westerners in general, we continue to see evidence that Amalfion itself occupied a high position among Athonite communities. In fact, in a decision of the Protos Sabbas in 1087 concerning the Chaldos Monastery, the Amalfitan superior's signature figures in the second position, as it had in 1017. This signature was in Greek expressed in Latin characters: [*Biton*] *monachos ke kathigoumenos tis monis ton Amalfinon ikia* [sic] *chiri ypegrapsa*. Two further signatures of the late 11th century, one dated in 1083, were made by “Hegumen Demetrius of the Amalfitans.”

TWELFTH CENTURY

In about 1108, the same Vito ('Biton') as above, or another of his name, signed a deed—in the fifth position—as “Vito, monk and

hegumen of the Amalphinou Monastery.” There was a chrysobull or deed, no longer extant, in which Emperor John II Comnenus gave the Amalfitans territories about Serrai and Zichnai some time between 1118 and 1143. The land donation does give one the impression that Amalfion continued to flourish throughout the 12th century. Certainly in 1169, in a decision promulgated by the Protos John and the Holy Community, the monastery called ‘of Thessalonica’ was awarded to the Hegumen of Xylourgou (the now-vanished house of Kievan Rus’). On that document, after the Protos and the Hegumens of Lavra, Iviron, and Vatopedi, appears the signature of Amalfion’s superior: *Ego M() p(res)b(yte)r et mo(nachus) et abb(as) s(an)cte Marie cenobii Amalfitanorum me subscripsi* [sic]. This is the first time that we see the community’s full name. It was St. Mary of the Amalfitans, the same name as the older monastery at Constantinople. Perhaps we may detect, in Amalfion’s sinking to fifth place among the great monasteries, a bit of a reversal of fortune for the fathers at St. Mary’s. We know that Amalfion relied upon the generosity of the Amalfitans at Constantinople, so the 1186 massacre of Westerners at Constantinople—which took place in the context of Crusader advances—must surely have entailed grave repercussions for their compatriots on Athos. Still, we have no evidence; all is conjecture.

AMALFION—LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

It was the legacy of the Amalfitans, on Athos and elsewhere, to expand the West’s awareness of Eastern Saints through translating Saints’ lives into Latin. The Miracle of St. Michael at Chonæ was translated by a certain monk Leo. His prologue reads, in part, as follows.

“I Leo, least worthy of all, and the least of monks, have been exhorted or rather compelled by all the brethren of the community of the Latin coenobium of Mount Athos, which is otherwise called *Agio Oro* [sic], to unfold this narrative in Latin words. But I, conscious of my lack of skill, as one ignorant and imbued with no literary artifice whatever... instead, obeying their commands—behaving presumptuously in my artlessness—have taken pains to put into Latin letters what I could, as I could, howbeit rustically.”



Cathedral of St. Andrew, Amalfi, Italy



Location of Amalfi, Italy

This Leo goes on to say that he intends to translate not word for word, but sense for sense, “as we find that our forebears also did.” It seems that this Leo flourished at the close of the tenth century. Could he be the same as the Founder Leo of Benevento? It is not impossible.

Going on to the 11th century, we find another Leo, of unknown identity, “humble interpreter betwixt Latins and Greeks,” translating the Acta of Sts. Abibo, Gurias, and Samonas. Two Latin versions come down to us, in fact, and one may be that of an Athonite Leo. Yet a third Leo, who was very likely an Amalfitan monk, translated the life of Sts. Barlaam and Josaphat into Latin while staying at the court in Constantinople “in the sixth year of the holy and triumphal lord Constantine Monomachus Augustus,” that is, 1048 or 1049.

Lastly, at the very end of the 11th century, we find many translations made by a monk John the Amalfitan who calls himself “the least of all monks and priests.” He put in Latin the lives of St. George, St. Nicholas, St. John the Almsgiver,¹ St. Irene,² and St. John the Kalybite, as well as the *Book of Miracles*. This John may have been one of the two Johns who were Abbots of Amalfion (the one from 991 to 1017, the other in 1035). Toward the end of his life he left Athos and made his abode at Constantinople.

DECLINE OF AMALFION

In 1198 St. Mary of the Amalfitans is referred to in a chrysobull of Emperor Alexis III; after that, it is impossible to trace its history definitively, but it is likely that the community waned gradually as the 13th century wore on. The causes for this are not difficult to imagine: the ever-widening estrangement between the Orthodox East and schismatic Rome; Amalfi’s political decadence; its demise as a republic in 1137; the emergence of Venice as a superior power (already in 1081, the Amalfitans at Constantinople were made

¹ St. John the Almoner (Almsgiver), it will be remembered, was the patron of one of the two Amalfitan hostels for male pilgrims at Jerusalem.

² This Latin version was conceived when the translator visited the sickbed of a fellow Amalfitan in Constantinople to cheer him. Their talk turned to St. Irene, and both agreed it was a pity that the story of a Saint so loved by the populace, who had her famous church there in the City, should not be circulated amongst the Latins.

tributaries of the Venetians); finally, to crown all, the anti-Latin sentiments which reached a fever pitch in the East after the Atrocity of 1204 when Western armies desecrated Christendom's greatest city. During those ominous years Pope Innocent III wrote two letters to the monks of Athos, but made no clear reference to the Benedictine monastery. It is possible—but this much is merely conjectural—that this silence was part of a trend whereby pro-Papal churchmen in Italy shunned mention of Amalfion. Certainly the influential Papal partisan Peter Damian, writing in about 1060 to the superior of the Amalfitan Monastery of the Holy Saviour at Constantinople, to praise the community for its loyalties to the Papacy, made no mention in his letter of the Amalfitans on Athos—though in this context we might hope to see something on that score.

In 1223 Pope Honorius III sent a letter to the Crusaders of Negroponte, inveighing against the monks “of the Holy Mountain, disobedient to the Apostolic See, and rebellious.” Was he identifying the Greek monks of Athos primarily? Or did he intend to implicate the Benedictines of Athos with them? This we do not know.

AMALFION CEASES TO BE LATIN

We do not know the exact state of St. Mary of the Amalfitans as the 13th century progressed. It appears in 1287 as practically defunct. It is quite likely that, even before 1287, it lacked a community capable of materially and spiritually maintaining it. For in that year of 1287, the Athonite Protos John, at the request of Great Lavra, made Amalfion over to the monks of St. Athanasius' Lavra. This transfer was confirmed both by a *gramma* of Patriarch Gregory II of Constantinople and by a *prostagma* of the Emperor Andronicus II Palæologus. The former of these documents, the original of which is extant, states that since the monastery “of the Molphini” has become dilapidated, “neglected and entirely bereft of fitting stability, sustenance, and direction... and [since] even the church and kellia of the monastery... are quite in shambles,” and since there is no one left to make repairs or “to intone, in an orderly way, pious prayers in behalf of our most mighty, holy Emperor and of the whole Christian people,” it is decided, all Hegumens agreeing, to deed it to Great Lavra—under the condition that the Lavriotes vow to repair

it and place it in the keeping of a brotherhood “that can ensure, amidst all the things monks must do, that the devout Offices are carried out, and that prayers and supplications are said in behalf of our most mighty and holy Emperor, and of the whole Christian people.” The most noteworthy thing about this transfer document is that there is nothing to imply any confessional motivation: no sign of hostilities, tensions, or controversy surrounding the faith or loyalties of the Amalfitan monks, even though such peaceableness is altogether out of keeping with the venomous Schism of 1054.¹

It has often been asserted that Amalfion was closed in 1287 due to anti-Latin sentiment, but this appears to be incorrect on two counts: (a) it was not closed but transferred in 1287, and (b) there is no evidence of accompanying inter-confessional or inter-cultural strife.

FAREWELL TO AMALFION

On the face of it, we now arrive at the conclusion of our little history. Of course Amalfion lost its Latin character in 1287, but far more than that befell it, seeing that it disappeared entirely from among the number of the monasteries. Was that a purposeful outcome, belying the peaceful words of the transfer charter of 1287? There seems to be no reason to think so. If we are scouting a candidate for Amalfion Death-Knell, we need look no further than the pirate raids of 1307, the bloodiest chapter in Athos’ history. Mercenaries from Spain (who had been dismissed from service by the Emperor for their uncontrollable rapacity), plundered the Mountain for several years, killing systematically, strangers to all mercy. So deadly were their attacks that of the 200 monasteries Athos had in the 13th century, only 25 survived the 14th century. Amalfion vanished, silently.

Sad parting, for Saints built its stone walls and towers, and fixed its spiritual legacy, praised so glowingly by the pious Greeks of an earlier

¹ Perhaps the answer is found in Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s *Liber insularum archipelagi* of 1420, of which several manuscripts survive. Next to the island maps and schematics which are his book’s topic, Buondelmonti pauses to marvel at the Athonite fathers in rare and striking words: *Horis stabilitis Deum laudare conantur, et pax vere in eis regnat sempiterna*. “At the appointed times, they exert themselves in praising God, and a peace reigns among them that is truly eternal.”

age. Amalfion is becoming better known today as having been a sort of “wildlife preserve” where in the bosom of Byzantine Orthodoxy the Latin liturgy thrived for well over 200 years in holiness and true monastic struggle. And its story does bear keen witness to our opening words about the unity of brethren in the Truth of Orthodoxy. Here we see no “Jew nor Greek,” no East nor West.

FINAL FAREWELL, OR NO?

Is Amalfion simply the figment of a mist-shrouded past? This writer cannot think so. Granted, of the catholicon of Amalfion next to nothing remains. The imposing square tower, crenellated, rare and marvellous among Athonite towers, blazoned with a heraldic eagle¹—that, and some fragments of the southwest wall, and a bit of the cemetery and of the slipway where sea vessels once disgorged their Constantinopolitan cargoes—only these are left to whisper their tale to those who might pause and listen. Nowadays only a few scattered hermits represent a human presence along the bay, and in the spot where old Amalfion once stood, a dense population of snakes has staked its own claim.

Students of Amalfion may hope that some day its ruins can be studied, excavated. Orthodox Christians, having outlasted the bloody assaults which the 20th century rained down upon their Faith, can rejoice in the indestructibility of Holy Orthodoxy—the real force which raised Amalfion up from the cliffs in olden times. But there are a couple of other points to ponder as well.

A TEMPLATE FOR TODAY

First, it is true that in the Orthodox world today a liturgical restoration is underway, of Orthodoxy’s Western heritage. As those seeds are re-sown in the fallen West, those of us whose hearts are inspired not only by the Amalfitan Athonites’ right faith but by the majesty of their liturgical rite, may hope that success will crown the restorative efforts of their spiritual posterity through their prayers.

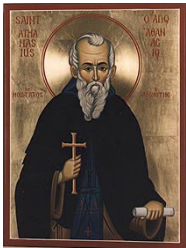
¹ This emblem is carved in white marble near the tower’s summit. The eagle is single-headed, wings spread wide, head turning rightward. It may or may not be an emblem particular to Amalfion or Amalfi.



Eastern Roman Empire—Mt. Athos is here



Coastline of Athos. The tower of Amalfion is here



St. Athanasius of Athos—Holy Transfiguration Monastery

As for our Western Rite brethren, may they perpetuate the spiritual testament of Amalfion. May they look always to Orthodoxy's holiness and transforming asceticism—and not to mechanisms of the fallen West's consumer culture—as the true key to success in rejoining Westerners to their Orthodox birthright. Without that genuine spirituality, numerosity is of scant value. After an overlong winter, may the Orthodox of the Western rite thrive again like springtide crocuses, which always pierce the dense snow-blanket timidly at first. And in summertime, if God is so pleased, may they be revealed as a rich flower-bank in the meadow of the Church.

Second, it is not unthinkable that Amalfion could be refounded in the future as a Latin rite monastery, re-built and re-populated by monastic fathers of Western observance and Benedictine living. As Archpriest John Shaw of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has conclusively demonstrated, Western rite liturgy was absent from the Orthodox Church at no time in history.¹ Such a blossoming of traditional Latin liturgical life, therefore, would be not an innovation but a *summum argumentum* that the Orthodox Faith is the universal—not a local—manifestation of the Truth of Christ.

Given the snake infestation, a latter-day St. Patrick would be helpful.



¹ Greek and Athonite-Slav manuscripts from the 11th and later centuries testify to the preservation, as an occasional special celebration, of the Canon Missæ of St. Gregory I of Rome, in a form called the Liturgy of St. Peter [the Apostle]. Russian Old Believers dwelling in Turkey kept the Western Canon Missæ alive in that form until the year 1963. Since 1963 Orthodox communities for which Western rite is a daily observance have carried the torch of Latin Orthodoxy into the 21st century.



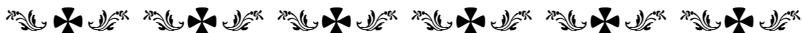
Amalfitan coast, Italy



Church of the Holy Wisdom
Constantinople
(minarets added by Turks who now hold the church)

NAVES

OF MONKS & ABBOTS OF, OR CONNECTED WITH, AMALFION



Attested Name & Other Information

- Dec. 984 John and Arsenius, still at the Lavra of St. Athanasius
- c. 985-990 Leo, brother of Duke Pandulf II of Benevento, founds the monastery with six disciples and help of the Georgians
- c. 986-993 Arrival of John of Benevento, of the monastery of Monte Cassino, future Abbot John III of Cassino, who after living on Athos returns to Monte Cassino in 997
- Nov. 991 John the Amalfitan is Abbot of St. Mary of the Amalfitans
- Apr. 1012 A John is Abbot (signs document in 5th place)
- Feb. 1016 A John is Abbot (signs in 6th place)
- May 1017 A John is Abbot (signs in 2nd place)
- Apr. 1035 Another Amalfitan John is Abbot (signs in 4th place)
- July 1081 Benedict is Abbot of the Imperial Monastery of Amalfion
- 1083 Demetrius is Hegumen of Amalfion
- Aug. 1087 Vito is Abbot (signs in 2nd place)
- Sept. 1108 Vito (II?) is Abbot (signs in 5th place)
- Aug. 1169 'M.' is Abbot (Manso? Mauro?) and signs in 5th place
-
- c. 1198 Mention is made of Amalfion
- Aug. 1287 Disappearance of Amalfion; its holdings are deeded to Great Lavra of St. Athanasius
-

ΜΗΡ

OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN ATHOS & THE OLD AMALFION



ΒΙΒΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΪΑ

☩ FURTHER READING

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The Mother of God of Austin
Protectress of the City of Austin, Texas
Icon in St. Hilarion Monastery—New Amalfion



The Summit of Mt. Athos



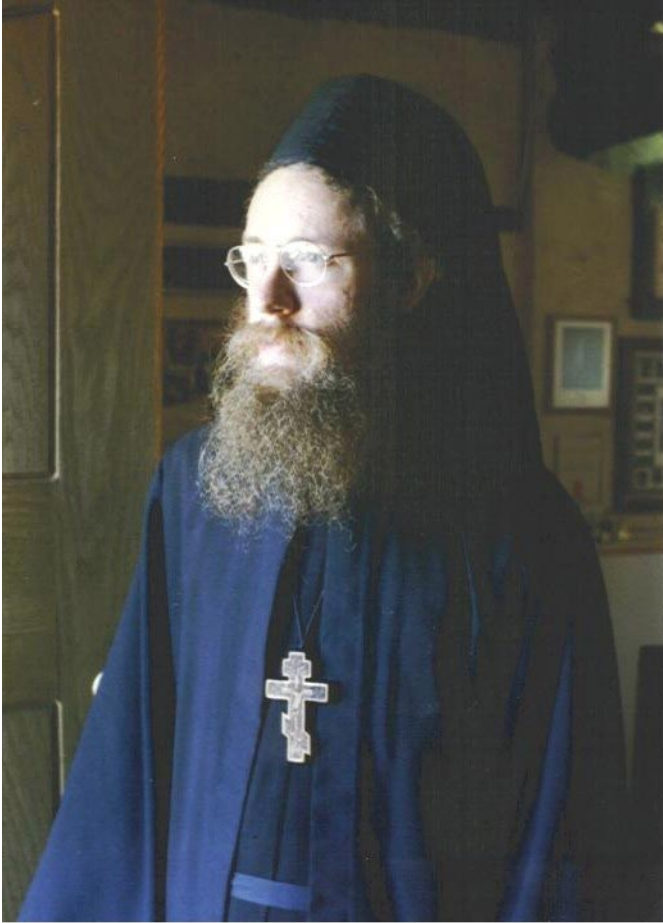
Icon, St. Benedict the Great of Nursia,
Father of Western Monasticism



Another
Icon of
St. Benedict
the Great,
showing the
Abbey of Monte
Cassino in
background.
On the scroll
are words
from the
Holy Rule:
*Auscul-
ta,
O Fili,
Precepta
Magistri,
Hearken,
O Son,
to the Instructions
of thy Teacher*



Another Icon of St. Benedict



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