

Introduction

Virtually hidden in a ravine on Mt. Menoikeion, northeast of the city of Serres in northern Greece, the monastery of Agios Ioannis Prodromos (St. John the Forerunner) remains a paradigm of the resilience of Byzantine monastic tradition (Fig. I.1). The monastery's long history, setting and architectural development demonstrate the diverse and strategic role of monastic institutions in Byzantium, their transition and continuity through time. Moreover, the monastery's traditions contain and reflect the history as well as the socioeconomic and cultural life of the broader region of Serres from the Byzantine period to the present. The monastery is also known as "Timios (honorable) Prodromos," or simply as "Prodromos." This shortened version of the monastery's name is also used as a *toponym* in the area of Serres, a fact that highlights its local fame and recognition.¹ Its proximity to the city of Serres was and still is a key aspect of its identity, as the monastic community and the society of Serres have retained a close relationship that is evident to the present day. Locals refer to Prodromos simply as 'the monastery', in an expression of their allegiance and close connection to it.²

Prodromos monastery is widely recognized as one of the chief examples of late Byzantine monastic art and architecture. Yet the study of this important monastery is far from being complete. Although previous scholarship has addressed aspects of its history, literary tradition and art, a detailed study of the organization of its monastic life and its architectural development is still lacking.³ This book responds to this gap in scholarship with a focus on the foundation of the monastery and its growth in its broader historical and cultural context with a particular focus on the Byzantine period as well as on key chapters of its post-Byzantine development. In this context, the book's chapters discuss aspects of the architectural and archaeological topography of the monastery of Agios Ioannis Prodromos. They also engage with facets of the communal, cultural, and sociopolitical making of a monastery in Byzantium.

Although monastic tradition situates the monastery's establishment in the last decades of the thirteenth century, we now know that the founding actions of monk Ioannikios, celebrated as Prodromos' first *ktetor* (founder) were effectively the refoundation of an earlier monastic institution.⁴ Still clouded in mystery on the particular

conditions that framed the monastery's renewal, the refoundation of Prodromos is closely related to the lives of its two *ktetors* (monastic founders) Ioannikios and his nephew Ioakeim, who led its growth and secured its status. Until the commencement of Ottoman rule in 1383, the monastery had established its leading role in the broader Serres area and beyond. Through the Ottoman period, the community continued to be a central cultural reference for the Orthodox populations of the region. The twentieth century was a particularly volatile time for the Balkans and the region of Serres. Ethnic and national tensions, conflicts and wars transformed the region and deeply affected the monastery. The community suffered looting raids and economic stresses, which led to its sharp decline and near abandonment in the difficult decades after WWII. In 1986, the arrival of a small community of nuns under the guidance of Abbess Fevronia revived Prodromos monastery and have since restored its growth and spiritual role (Fig. I.2).

Relying on systematic onsite fieldwork, on the extant textual sources and secondary literature, this book is organized in five chapters, which address different aspects of the monastery's rich traditions. Chapter One provides a historical overview aiming to offer concise discussions of key events and contexts that framed the monastery's development through time. For example, it's important to consider the historical context of the refoundation of the monastic institution during the turbulent period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The actions of Ioannikios and Ioakeim did not happen in a void but were shaped by contemporary developments in the strategic region of Serres. The monastery's growth was supported by Byzantine emperors and the court of the Palaiologoi, high officials, and by members of the Serbian royal court. Prodromos continued its growth after the arrival of the Ottomans, navigating times of difficulty and pressure all the way to the twentieth century when national tensions, war and looting seriously challenged its existence. Its revival and transformation into a nunnery in 1986 have signaled a major new chapter in Prodromos' history.

Chapter Two explores the monastery's setting on the slopes of the Menoikeion and discusses the existence and making of a sacred topography in the monastery's rural surroundings. Hagiographic traditions connect physical remains to the mountainous landscape thus maintaining narratives of ascetic struggle that link the present community with the memory of its founders and refounders. Beyond the fact that texts like the monastery's *typikon* (monastic charter) or the more recent

¹ The monastery is also known in scholarship with different names such as "St. John Prodromos" and "St. John the Forerunner" or simply identified by Mt. Menoikeion where it is located.

² Kaphtantzis 1995, 69.

³ See the detailed bibliographies included in Paschalides and Strates 1996, 395–302, and Katsaros and Papastathis 1992, 209–212. See also Soustal 2022, 496–498.

⁴ The foundational deeds of monk Ioannikios, mentioned as first *ktetor* by Abbot Christophoros in his *proskynetarion* (see Demetriades 1904, 19) are estimated between 1270 and 1275. This timeframe was supported by the dating of archival documents by André Guillou (Guillou 1955, 7) and

Lisa Benou (Benou 1998, 27–29), which is now extensively revised in the work of Marc Verdure, Kostis Smyrliis, Otto Kresten and Martin Schaller and Christos Malatras, who have convincingly shown that Ioannikios was a refounder and that the monastery is an earlier foundation dating at least the end of the twelfth century.

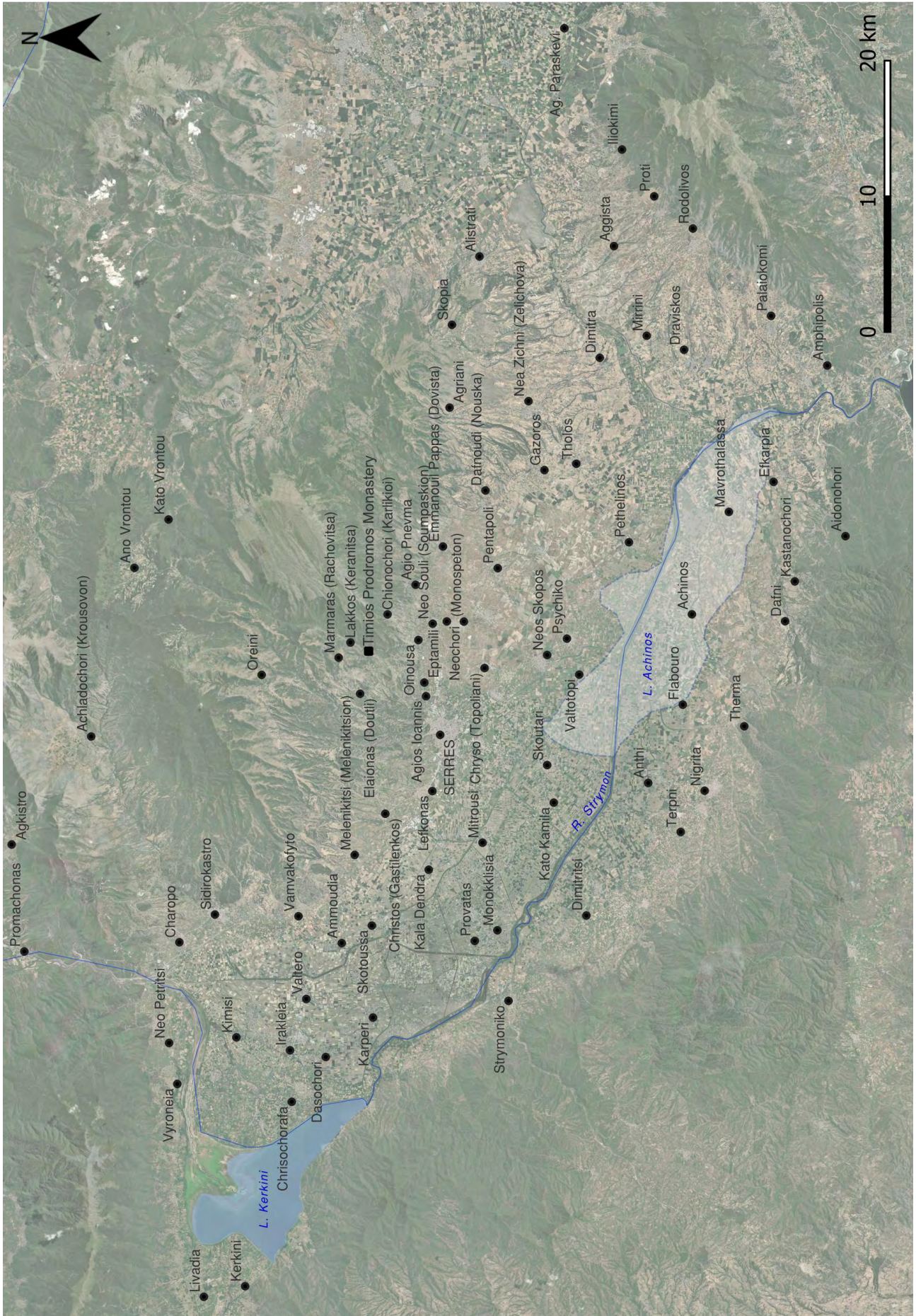


Figure I.1. The region of Serres and the Strymon river valley. Map by Andreani Papageorgiou.



Figure I.2. Prodomos monastic complex in 2004, view from the east. Archive of the Holy Monastery of Timios Prodomos, Serres.

proskynetarion (a form of pilgrims' guidebook) are filled with literary *topoi*, their narratives are of crucial importance to understand the ways traditions were embedded in the rural landscape. The topography of the slopes surrounding Prodomos monastery embraced the community providing a complete economy of buildings and people that supported and framed the daily habits of monastic life.

Chapter Three of the book addresses aspects of the organization and building evolution of the monastic

complex. A palimpsest of building phases follows events and transitions in Prodomos' long history. The monastery's development mirrors the evolving needs of its community as well as the prosperity of Prodomos and its patrons. The restoration of existing structures, including that of a presumably abandoned church, by its refounder Ioannikios and the ensuing expansion of Prodomos monastery under his successor Ioakeim, provide an invaluable resource for a closer look into the ways Byzantine monastic institutions reinvented themselves revived following periods of crisis.

It's also important to look at post-Byzantine structures and to consider the monastic complex as one, ever evolving, architectural entity. The extensive building projects of the nineteenth century were built on top of earlier structures continuing and updating previous functions and uses. At the same time, these works underline the community's wealth and its aspirations to update and to renew the monastic complex.

The final two chapters address the two most important remnants of the monastery's Byzantine past, the *katholikon* church and the fortified tower. Chapter Four discusses the architecture and the building history of the *katholikon* complex, whose multiple building phases dating from the Byzantine and later periods. The core of the church appears to be earlier than previously thought, with a suggested date in the twelfth century. Such a date is important as it agrees with the revised dating for the monastery's early documents, which suggest that the institution existed in the beginning of the thirteenth century. The *katholikon's* architectural typology, structural observations and a critical rereading of monastic sources, including the narrative of the monastic *typikon*, suggest that this was the church structure that Ioannikios found at the site and proceeded with its restoration. As the monastic community and its influence grew, the church expanded accordingly. This architectural growth around the *katholikon's* early nucleus reflects the care of as well as the prominent status of the monastery's patrons. The analytical description of the church's architecture and its spatial configuration are enhanced through comparisons in the broader context of late Byzantine architecture.

Chapter Five focuses on the buttressed tower occupying the southwest corner of the monastic enclosure. The tower is mentioned in the monastic *typikon*, which was written by Ioakeim thus making it a key component of the building evolution of the architectural complex. Through its long building history and transformations, it served a variety of roles as it housed a chapel, monks' cells and provided protection for important visitors and patrons. Onsite observations on the opportunity of the tower's restoration along with textual references and visual representations help to unlock the secrets of the building's evolution and its role in the life of the community. Its last use dates from 1876, when its transformation into a library is linked with the dramatic events of its looting, twice, by the Bulgarian army in the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century. These actions had the most traumatic impact on the community for it was violently deprived of its precious and irreplaceable documents and treasures.

The book proposes a holistic approach to Timios Prodromos monastery and its long tradition manifested in texts and images (Fig. I.3). It provides methodological perspectives that help to frame the monastic experience on the slopes of Mt. Menoikeion beyond the limitations of more traditional approaches to the architectural histories of Byzantine monasteries. For example, chronological periodization and typological comparisons offer a better

understanding of the history and the building evolution of monasteries but cannot fully capture the continuous, organic growth of an architectural complex defined by the repeating cycles of monastic life. New layers of use and construction updated or replaced earlier, Byzantine phases thus rendering their study almost impossible. Yet these renewed layers of use can help us to better understand the cycles of practice and experience that framed these complex histories as well as to trace or simply to connect with their Byzantine past. Such challenges are common in the examples of living monasteries, like Prodromos, meaning institutions that have been continuously used for centuries.

Moreover, the methodical dating of structures, paintings as well as documents and archival sources does not effectively address the significance or the meaning of monastic and hagiographic traditions, which are frequently dismissed in scholarship as being unreliable. In my opinion, this is a quite limited and frankly uninspiring approach to complexity and the cultural wealth of monastic tradition. It is true that the establishment of foundational narratives drawing on legacies and literary *topoi* is frequently selective in the formulation of such accounts. Still, the making of these narratives is never random but conceals choices and strategies that can reveal important social, political and cultural dynamics. Furthermore, the role of these traditions in the life of monasteries should not be underestimated as they provide points of reference for the development of collective memory and identity. In effect, foundational narratives serve as the lore connecting communities together.

Frequently, the Byzantine phases of living monasteries can only be partially sketched through fragmentary material and textual evidence. Nonetheless, the incomplete picture of the Byzantine past remains an invaluable resource in the broader scheme of monasteries' long histories as it sets the foundation for the layered growth of these institutions. In the case of Prodromos, the Byzantine monastery can be traced through extant documents, the strong foundational narrative of the monastic *typikon* and the surviving structures from the period, such as the *katholikon* church and the tower. Implementing a broader, more nuanced methodological approach can significantly improve our understanding of the long histories, the layered topographies, and the cultural complexities of monastic institutions. The methodological and theoretical schemes of cultural geographies and cultural topographies can further enrich our approach to the diverse body of evidence related to the study of Byzantine monasteries. For example, looking at the architectural history of institutions like Prodromos in the context of the cultural landscape of Mt. Menoikeion offers a dynamic research perspective that captures the centuries-long interaction of the natural environment and the monastic community, which, in turn, shaped the making of a sacred topography outlining as well as instructing monastic practice. This is exactly where the concept of a sacred landscape on Mt. Menoikeion can serve as a methodological tool that can help us frame the making and remaking of the monastery



Figure I.3. Print representation of Timios Prodromos monastery and its surroundings, 1761. Archive of the Holy Monastery of Timios Prodromos, Serres.

of Agios Ioannis Prodromos near Serres. The research framework of sacred landscapes engages key aspects of the monastic experience and can help to better contextualize the physical remnants of the past in relation to the cultural values and the religious habits of monastic life. Being able to address the *hierotopical* dimension of the architecture of the monastery of Prodromos enhances our perspective on the historical development of the monastic complex over time. The theoretical discourse on *hierotopy* sacred space in Byzantium and its traditions provides important research perspectives for the study of Byzantine monasticism.

Returning to the present realities on Mt. Menoikeion, it's impossible to ignore the fact that Prodromos monastery is a living monument that continues to be actively used (Fig. I.4). As a result, the book's views on the history and architectural legacy of Prodromos monastery on Mt. Menoikeion have been meaningfully informed by the ongoing presence of the community of nuns, who, since 1986, have assumed the responsibility to continue the monastery's tradition. As such, the study of a living monastic monument has been an inspiring reminder of the role and the central importance of the existence of monks, and now nuns, on the slopes of Mt. Menoikeion. After all, a deserted complex is only a shadow of a monastery, as it is missing the daily human presence which effectively keeps its monastic world together. The daily life realities at Prodromos necessitate the inclusion of socio-anthropological perspectives on monastic life looking at how the present community continues to define the development of an institution in the context of

a sacred landscape shaped by a strong cultural tradition. Oral traditions and collective memory further strengthen the cultural cohesion of the monastic community, and thus, can provide invaluable insights into the daily life of a monastery (Fig. I.5). Moreover, religious life, pilgrimage, local customs and festivals like on the feast day of the monastery on August 29, which commemorates the Beheading of Agios Ioannis Prodromos, retain close ties with local communities.⁵ The current presence of the sisterhood, led by Abbess Fevronia, has effectively revived and at the same time contributed to the perpetual cycle of monastic tradition on Mt. Menoikeion.

Continuing to be one of the chief Orthodox monastic centers of the southern Balkans, the monastery of Agios Ioannis Prodromos is a precious paradigm of the attributes and qualities of monastic life in Byzantium. Unlike the monasteries on Mt. Athos, which are physically isolated on a remote peninsula, Prodromos embodies the precarious monastic balance between spiritual isolation and social interaction. Rural but at the same time well-established in the secular reality of the region of Macedonia, the monastery provides a key example for the study of Byzantine monastic culture. On the whole the study of Prodromos' sacred landscape and architecture revealed a monastic community in a balanced symbiosis with its natural setting and the society of Serres. This relationship continues to this day and is reaffirmed daily

⁵ See the description of the festival (*panegyris*) in Kountiades 1922, 44-47.



Figure I.4. The monastic community in front of the *katholikon* church in the 1920s. Archive of the Holy Monastery of Timios Prodromos, Serres.



Figure I.5. The monastic community harvesting the monastery's olive trees. Archive of the Holy Monastery of Timios Prodromos, Serres.

by the incessant cycle of daily chores and the persistence of monastic tradition.

Before the more focused discussion of the monastery's history, sacred topography and architecture in the following chapters, it is useful to provide a historiographical overview of scholarly interest in the monastery of Agios Ioannis Prodromos. Visitors to the region of Serres and Mt. Menoikeion as well as local scholars and educators provided histories of the monastery as well as descriptions of the architectural complex, its archives and artistic treasures. These accounts reflect the growing interest in the monastery's cultural legacy in the context of political, economic and social developments in Serres and the broader Southern Balkans region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The most important early reference to the monastery dates from 1831 and the publication, in Paris, of the two-volume *Voyage dans la Macedoine* by Esprit Marie Cousin ry, French ambassador in Thessaloniki.⁶ The book concerned the travel accounts of the French diplomat during his two terms (1773–1793 and 1814–1819) of appointment in the city and the region of Macedonia, which he explored with extensive tours and visits. In August 1815 (or possibly in 1816) he visited Serres and its area. During his stay he climbed the slopes of Mt. Menoikeion to the mountainous valley where the monastery of Prodromos is located. His visit took place in the last days of the month since, according to his description, he was there on the monastery's feast day, which falls on August 29th, the day commemorating the memory of the death and beheading of Agios Ioannis Prodromos. The account of Cousin ry's visit preserves invaluable insights into the life of the monastery at the end of the eighteenth century. Guided by members of the monastic community, he was shown some of the artistic and documentary treasures of the monastery, which he described in his text. Among the highlights of his visit, mentioned in his account, was the fresco representation of the Serbian King Stefan Dušan and his family on the southern wall of the *katholikon's* exonarthex. Cousin ry also noted that during his visit at the monastery he met with Emmanuel Pappas, an influential local merchant and banker, who a few years later led the unsuccessful 1821 Greek uprising against the Ottoman Empire in the region of Macedonia. The testimony of the French diplomat is quite valuable as it proves the close relation of the monastic community with Pappas, consequently pointing to the active role of the monastery in contemporary political developments and Greek aspirations for independence from Ottoman rule. Overall, Cousin ry's visit to Prodromos marks the growing importance of the monastery, both in terms of its political influence as well as its cultural significance.

In 1841, Minas Minoidis, director of the Serres School, visited the monastery and prepared the first catalogue of manuscripts in the monastic library, thus highlighting the

significance of the collection.⁷ The production of copies of the monastery's codices led to the publication of a series of its documents by Konstantinos Sathas in 1872 and Franz Miklosich and Josef M ller in 1887.⁸ Sixteen years later, Ioannis Demetriades, a well-educated young man from Serres studying in the Theological School of the Chalke in Istanbul, prepared a short history and description of Prodromos monastery.⁹ His writings have been preserved in one of the codices containing the work of the Chalke School's students. Demetriades' description of the monastery dates from the 14th of October 1857 and offers an outline of the history and the foundational narrative of Prodromos along with a discussion of the monastic complex and its rural surroundings in the broader area of Mt. Menoikeion. This description provides valuable information on the monastery and its traditions in the middle of the nineteenth century. Ioannis Demetriades' account seems to draw from personal memories and experiences, as he had visited and spent time at the monastery, but also from his notes and access to documents and written accounts related to the foundational narrative of Prodromos.

Actually, the writings of Ioannis Demetriades relate to the rich descriptions, narratives and traditions included in the Prodromos monastery *proskynetarion* published in 1904.¹⁰ Its author was Christophoros Demetriades (no known family relation to Ioannis Demetriades), a prominent elder of the monastic community, who served as abbot between 1892 and 1904.¹¹ An earlier version of the *proskynetarion* was published in 1864 in St. Petersburg pointing to the existence of an established historical narrative for the monastery which drew on sources kept in the codices of the monastic library.¹² An established scholar and teacher, Christophoros was one of the great spiritual leaders of the community. His *proskynetarion* is a most important source on the monastery's history as it is based on direct access to documents included in two important codices, Codex A, also known as "κτητορικός" (of the *ktetors*), and Codex B; both were later looted from the monastic library.¹³ Notably, Christophoros' work encapsulates the established foundational narrative for the community, which as discussed later provided a curated recollection of events and places. In addition, as a member of the community, he provided a thorough overview of the monastery's history, its natural setting and provided valuable information on the relations of the monastic community with the town Serres and the surrounding region. Belonging to the long tradition of pilgrims' guides to monasteries and cult sites, the *proskynetarion* also offers a holistic perspective of Prodromos and its monastic legacy. History and artistic

⁷ Papazoglou 1991.

⁸ Sathas 1872, 201–242; Miklosich and M ller 1860–1890, vol. V, 88–134, 432–439. See Outsou 1999, 31–40, for an overview of the early history of the monastery's archives.

⁹ Glavinas 2018, 520–64.

¹⁰ Demetriades 1904. On Christophoros Demetriades, see Ispyrides 1995, 181–191.

¹¹ Xydias 1988, 82–83.

¹² Demetriades 1864.

¹³ Demetriades 1904, 3–6

⁶ Cousin ry 1831 and Nikolaou 1982.

traditions mix with religious practice and hagiographies providing an instructive view of monastic life.

The Greek population of Serres was actively engaged with the city's history and culture, with a particular focus on issues of Hellenic identity, education and heritage. A prominent example of these local efforts in the early years of the twentieth century came in the work of Evangelos Strates who was the director of the Greek high school and one of the civic leaders of the city.¹⁴ In 1909, he published a history, which was printed in Istanbul by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Strates had deep knowledge of historical sources and local folklore traditions. Moreover, he knew well all the surviving antiquities, monuments and sites in the broader region. The monastery of Prodomos was extensively discussed in his work pointing to his familiarity with its history, its library and its traditions. In many respects, his history mirrors the perspective and the information included in Christophoros Demetriades' *proskynetarion*, thus further confirming the hypothesis that at the turn of the twentieth century, Prodomos monastery's history and cultural legacy had found their firm place in the broader historical narrative of Serres and its region.

During the same period and in the context of major political and socioeconomic developments in the Balkans directly mirroring the foundation and growth of competing national entities, the history and archaeology of Serres received the increased attention of scholars. In 1894, Petros Papageorgiou, one of the pioneering scholars of Byzantine studies in Macedonia and Thrace, published an extensive study of Serres and its region in the third volume of *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*.¹⁵ He began his account on the monastery of Agios Ioannis Prodomos commenting on the lack of scholarly studies on the rich cultural tradition of the monastery.¹⁶ His essay is effectively the first extensive scholarly study of Prodomos and the first introduction to the art, architecture but also the library of the monastery in the framework of Byzantine studies. Papageorgiou's descriptions of the *katholikon*, liturgical objects and furnishings, as well as his recording of key documents, the dedicatory inscriptions on monastic buildings provide an invaluable resource since his work precedes the monastery's gradual decline in the following decades.

As mentioned, the growing interest in Prodomos monastery from Greek and other Balkan scholars in the beginnings of the twentieth century is directly related to the rise of ethnic tensions in the region of Macedonia, which would eventually lead to the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). In 1905, Georgios Lampakis, general secretary of the *Christianike Archaialogike Etaireia* (Christian and Archaeological Society) in Athens, visited the monastery of Prodomos during his thorough archaeological survey throughout

Macedonia.¹⁷ His account includes detailed descriptions of the monastic complex and its belongings; it also offers the earliest photographs of the monastery. One year later, in 1906, Ivan Ivanić published in Belgrade the account of his travels through Macedonia.¹⁸ The Serb diplomat was interested to locate, map and study the remnants of Serbian presence and legacy in the region, with Serres being one of his key stops. As expected, he also visited the monastery of Prodomos, being familiar with its important Serbian legacy. Ivanić also referred to the wealth of the monastic library expressing his admiration for its collections. A few years later, in 1909, Nikodim Kondakov published his work *Makedonija* reporting the extensive results of his voyages in the region.¹⁹ He provided a detailed report of the monastery with a short description of the *katholikon* and its furnishings, including the famous *artophorion*, now in the Benaki Museum in Athens.²⁰ Kondakov produced the first plan of the *katholikon* and published a few photographs of the monastic complex. Only a few years later, in the summer of 1913, Konstantinos Zesiou visited the monastery and the broader region at the behest of the *Christianike Archaialogike Etaireia* immediately after Serres came under the control of the Greek Army ousting Bulgarian forces and incorporating the city into the Greek State. His visit to Prodomos provided an important record of the monastery's status during a crucial period at the end of the Balkan Wars and the eve of the outbreak of WWI.²¹ Zesiou described the monastery, its art and architecture and transcribed dedicatory inscriptions on buildings and objects, thus securing their documentation during a volatile period. At the same time, his mission to this contested region of the southern Balkans highlights the close relation of scholarly interest in the monastery and its cultural legacy with political events and the national priorities of competing Balkan states.

Directly related to these tensions, the monastery's library was looted by the Bulgarian army on June 27 and 28, 1917. These events sparked an increased scholarly and political interest in the monastery driven by the urgent need to restore its traumatized heritage and to return what was stolen. A significant number of the stolen documents and the artifacts were retrieved by the Greek government as part of the 1919 Neilly Treaty between Greece and Bulgaria. In the following decades several items gradually appeared in various collections, archives and libraries sparking scholarly interest, as scholars attempted to reconstitute catalogues of the looted library's manuscript collections drawing on early listings.²² Abbot Christophoros Demetriades published a catalogue of the monastery's manuscripts in three parts in 1920, 1921 and 1922.²³ Among the first scholars to study the documents

¹⁷ Lampakis 1905, 73–84.

¹⁸ Ivanić 1906, 57–86.

¹⁹ On the role and the work of the Russian Byzantinist, see Kleinbauer 1995, 637–643.

²⁰ Kondakov 1909, 163–68.

²¹ Zesiou 1914, 44–67.

²² Paschaelides and Strates 1996, 381–383.

²³ Demetriades 1920–1922.

¹⁴ Strates 2000. See the introduction to the edition on the life and work of Evangelos Strates by Petros Samsaris. Also on Prodomos monastery, Strates 1956, 3–14.

¹⁵ Papageorgiou 1894, 1–105.

¹⁶ Papageorgiou 1894, 84–85.

from Prodomos monastery were Nikolaos Vasikyros (1923), Linos Politis (1931), Alexander Solovjev (1934, 1936), Franz Dölger (1935) and Martin Jugie (1937), with their efforts attempting to record the history of the monastery's dismantled library and to reconstruct key parts of its collections and its two key codices, also known as Cartulary A and Cartulary B.²⁴

A second wave of pillaging came in August 1942.²⁵ Responding to the resulting challenges, Archimandrite Gabriel Kountiades published a short history and description of the monastery in 1922 and later an historical overview in 1956.²⁶ His intend was to offer an outline of the Prodomos' history, reiterating its foundational traditions but also to provide dates for various buildings and properties of the monastery. More importantly he described the looting of the monastery's library and treasures providing information and the numbers of the stolen items.

Nevertheless, the scholarly interest and study of the monastery's documents continued with Andre Guillou publishing *Les archives de Saint Jean-Prodrome sur le mont Ménécée* in 1955.²⁷ His work dealt with the reconstruction of the two key codices that were taken by the Bulgarians, along with the publication of a selection of Prodomos' early documents including its monastic *typikon*.²⁸ Work on the looted monastic library continued by scholars like Ivan Dujčev, Nicoara Beldiceanu, Irène Beldiceanu-Steinherr, Elizabeth Zachariadou and Evangelia Balta, whose publications further advanced the study of the monastery's documents from the Byzantine and Ottoman periods.²⁹ Dujčev, in particular, worked on Cartulary A from the monastic library, with a facsimile publication appearing in 1972.³⁰

In 1990, a large set of the vanished documents, codices and books from the Prodomos' library were presented to the academic world as part of the collections of the newly founded Ivan Dujčev Institute in Sofia, Bulgaria. Axinia Džurova, Krasimir Stančev, Vasilis Atsalos, Vasilis Katsaros, Charalambos Papastathis, Giorgos Papazoglou, Leonidas Mavrommatis and Dorotei Getov, among others, pursued the study and publication of the recovered documents.³¹ The 1998 publication of Cartulary B from the monastic library by Lisa Benou and Paolo Odorico has provided an invaluable source of information on the monastery's organization, properties, and socioeconomic

exchanges and transactions.³² The edited translation of the *typikon* of Prodomos by Timothy Miller in the publication of Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents by John Thomas and Angela Constantinides-Hero further enriched scholarly work on the monastery's charter viewed in the comparative context of other *typika* in Byzantine monasticism. However, the paleographic study and dating of the early documents of the monastery by Lisa Benou, who largely followed the work of Andre Guillou, have been extensively revised and redated in a series of recent studies by Marc Verdure, Kostis Smyrlis, Otto Kresten and Martin Schaller and Christos Malatras.³³ These important revisions have convincingly shown that the monastic institution is much older than previously thought and that the presumed foundation of Prodomos monastery by Ioannikios and his nephew Ioakeim, narrated in the *typikon* compiled by the latter, was effectively the refoundation of an earlier monastic institution.

Besides the monastic library and the study of its documents and codices, the art and architecture of Prodomos monastery also received systematic scholarly attention from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. In 1966, Horst Hallensleben published a detailed study of the monastic *katholikon* placing the church in the context of late Byzantine architecture in the Balkans, pointing to links with the architectural traditions of Thessaloniki.³⁴ In 1973, Andreas Xyngopoulos published his study of the *katholikon's* wall paintings discussing them in the context of late Byzantine artistic developments.³⁵ Additional studies by scholars like Gojco Subotić, Sotiris Kissas, Ivan Djordjević and Evangelos Kyriakoudis, Vojislav Djuric, Xanthi Savopoulou-Katsike, Angeliki Strati and Nikolaos Bonovas have further enriched research various aspects of the art and architecture of Prodomos monastery.³⁶

It is important to make special reference to the contribution of local historians and scholars in Serres who have significantly enriched the study of the monastery's history in the context of the history and cultural life of Serres and its region. The work of Giorgos Kaphtantzes stands out, as his profound knowledge of local history have provided unique insights into archives and traditions that help us to better understand the socioeconomic and cultural networks of Serres society and its close links with the Prodomos community.³⁷ Moreover, local scholars like Petros Pennas, Nikos Nikolaou, Petros Samsaris, Kyriakos Papakyriakou, Vasilis Tzanakaris, and Charalambos Vouroutzides, among others, have contributed numerous

²⁴ Vasikyros 1923; Politis 1931; Politis 1989; Solovjev 1934; Solovjev 1936; Dölger 1935; Bees 1937; Jugie 1937.

²⁵ Paschaelides and Strates 1996, 378.

²⁶ Kountiades 1922; Kountiades 1978. On Kountiades: Bengos 1989.

²⁷ Guillou 1955 and Guillou 1956.

²⁸ Guillou 1994, 219–238.

²⁹ See Dujčev 1958; Beldiceanu 1975; Beldiceanu-Steinherr 1965; Beldiceanu-Steinherr 1967; Zachariadou 1969; and Balta 1995.

³⁰ Dujčev 1972.

³¹ The edited volume of conference proceedings on the study of manuscripts at the Ivan Dujčev Institute is especially relevant; see Katsaros and Papastathis 1992; Džurova, Stančev, Atsalos, Katsaros and Papastathis 1992; Katsaros 1998; Papazoglou 1990; Atsalos and Katsaros 2002.

³² Benou 1998; Odorico 1998a.

³³ See Verdure 2002; Smyrlis 2006; Kresten and Schaller 2010; Malatras 2023.

³⁴ See Hallensleben 1966.

³⁵ Xyngopoulos 1973.

³⁶ Indicatively: Subotić and Kissas 1975; Djordjević and Kyriakoudis 1993; Kissas 1998; Kyriakoudis 1995; Djurić 1998; Savopoulou-Katsike 1992; Savopoulou-Katsike 1993; Savopoulou-Katsike 1998a; Savopoulou-Katsike 1998b; Strati 1983; Strati 1993; Strati 1994; Strati 1995; Strati 1996–97; Strati 1998; Strati 1999; Strati 2007; Bonovas 1998; Anagnostopoulos 2015; Anagnostopoulos 2021.

³⁷ Kaphtantzes 1967; Kaphtantzes 1972; Kaphtantzes 1996.

articles and publications on various topics related to the history, the traditions, the art and the archaeology of Prodromos monastery, Mt. Menoikeion, Serres and its region.³⁸ These authors were active in local journals and periodical publications like *Serraika Chronika*, *Serraika Symmeikta*, *Serraika Analekta* and *GIATI (ΓΙΑΤΙ)*, which significantly enriched scholarly life in Serres. Overall, the city of Serres and its ecclesiastical, municipal and economic leadership have been instrumental in the

promotion of the study of the monastery of Timios Prodromos on Mt. Menoikeion. Indicatively, the 1992 organization of a scientific conference on the monastery of Prodromos and the publication of its proceedings in 1995, provide an important collection of studies, and also mirror the timely decision of local authorities draw attention to the monastery's cultural legacy after the launch of the Ivan Dujčev Institute in Sofia and the installation of a sisterhood of nuns at Prodromos in 1986.³⁹

³⁸ Pennas 1966; Nikolaou 1964; Nikolaou 1989; Samsaris 1988; Tzanakaris 1991–1994; Vouroutzides 1996; Vouroutzides 2002; Papakyriakou 1995; Papakyriakou 2004.

³⁹ Demetriades 1864.