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Book Review: L. VOISIN, Les monastères grecs sous domination latine (XIIe – XVIe siècles). Comme un loup poursuivant un mouton, Brepols, Turnhout 2021

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L. VOISIN, *Les monastères grecs sous domination latine (XIIe - XVIe siècles). Comme un loup poursuivant un mouton*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2021, pp. 452. ISBN 978-2-503-59131-5

Ludivine Voisin's book entitled *Les monastères grecs sous domination latine (XIIe - XVIe siècles). Comme un loup poursuivant un mouton* [*Greek Monasteries Under Latin Rule (12th-16th centuries). Like a Wolf Chasing a Sheep*], offers a historical analysis of the organization of Greek monasteries under Latin rule and their relations with Latin ecclesiastical and secular authorities during the period from the 13th up until the 16th century, that of the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus. Its structure comprises an introduction, five main chapters, conclusions, as well as the edition of three related documents.

In the Introduction, the author introduces us to the historiography of the topic and does not limit herself to a simple outline of what has been written since the 17th century but presents a rather critical viewpoint of the secondary literature, assisting the reader in understanding how the historical sources were interpreted and, to some extent, why. The presentation is divided into two parts: i) from the 17th century until the first half of the 20th, and ii) the second half of the 20th century, and particularly after the work of Giorgio Fedalto. The author states clearly that the historiography of Greek monasticism under Latin rule has only recently rid itself of misinterpretations and, especially, dominant myths that produced an image of fierce resistance by the Greek monks against the Latins. The introduction ends with the issues that must be tackled regarding the Latin-occupied Greek world and the historical questions that need to be answered.

Chapter One touches upon the structure of the Greco-Latin societies from a religious, social, and legal standpoint, with a particular analysis of the presence of the Latins in the Greek lands, the ecclesiastical organization of the Greeks, common life between Greeks and Latins, as well as the impact of the western feudal system upon the Greeks. The author gives a concise description of the events by

which the Greek mainland and islands fell under Latin rule, which serves both as a necessary framework for anyone not well acquainted with the events, and as a useful recapitulation for those who are. In this chapter, the author also discusses the changes brought to the Church in the former Byzantine lands. In general, we are presented with an image of a rather effective ecclesiastical cohabitation between the Greeks and their Latin rulers, touching upon the main regions of interest, i.e., Palestine, Cyprus, the Frankish Morea, Crete, the Ionian islands, and the Aegean archipelago. These sources are not limited to philological or documentary ones, but also include cultural sources in a wider sense, mainly iconography, through which the author sees an expression aimed at accentuating and, consequently, preserving Greek identity. Finally, Chapter One ends with a study of the way by which Western feudal organization by the Latins impacted the Greek communities. As noted, Latin rule in Greek lands sparks new terminology, such as serfdom. The author gives an account of the variable status of lower ranks of society, which were mostly affected, given that they were more attached to the land and the estates.

Chapter Two focuses on the status and organization of the Greek monasteries with a historical comparison between the Byzantine era and the period of Latin rule. It begins with an overview of the development of Byzantine monasticism concentrating on each region and engaging in an effort to explain the various currents of events that shaped the monastic character of Cyprus, Crete, the Peloponnese, Attica, or the Aegean islands, touching upon aspects regarding movement of monastic population, as well as economic, geographical, and other implications involved. The main question of the chapter is whether there was an institutional rupture in Greek monasticism with the arrival of the Latins. To address this issue, the author concentrates on four main aspects: i) the growth or decline of the number of Greek monasteries in each region before and after Latin conquest as well as the development of new Latin monasteries; ii) whether there were any changes in the phenomenon of cenobitism, the main form of monastic organization during the Byzantine era, and whether it was influenced by western monastic rules, as well as how various forms of monastic cohabitation, such as double monasteries, were affected; and iii) the changes brought to private monastic institutions and whether public authority altered the nature of their autonomy. Chapter Two closes with a study of the internal organization of the monasteries under Latin rule, comprising an analysis of how people actually entered monasteries in those years, if the monastic population was affected and how, and what the role of the *ἡγούμενος* as head of cenobitic monastery was, and how he was appointed.

Chapter Three studies the economy of the Greek monastic establishments. In particular, the author gives an understanding of the means by which the monasteries acquired their wealth, whether by state or private patronage and presents a description of how this wealth is defined in nature, i.e., landed property, movable property, and livestock. An important aspect of wealth governance is the role of dependencies (*μετόχια*), particularly in Cyprus and Crete, and their contribution to produce and hard currency, which was necessary for paying taxes and acquiring new wealth. It is noted how fragile the existence and accumulation of monastic wealth were for most institutions, owing to a large extent to the absence of extensive agricultural domains near the monasteries, with the exception of Mount Athos. Followingly, the author poses the question whether Greek monasteries were indeed wealthy, arriving at the conclusion that within the Latin-occupied Greek areas the sources do not reveal the existence of great monasteries, similar to those in the West (for example, Cluny), perhaps with the exception of the monastery of Patmos. They seem, however, to make ends meet in a way that supported their existence and role.

Chapter Four focuses on the social aspects of the cohabitation of Greek monasteries with the Latins, noting that art and culture offer a window towards understanding the notion of monastic identity, which balanced between tradition and receptiveness. The word that characterizes the cohabitation of the two communities is interdependence. This understanding is developed by two main aspects; the diffusion of Greco-Latin art and the existence of fraternities, which fueled the presence of lay people around monasteries. We are then confronted with the issue of the relationship between the monastic institutions and the secular Church, both Greek and Latin, and the way that the independence of various monastic institutions helped avoid their control by local bishops. The Latin Church is depicted as engaged in a “hunt” for Greek monastic wealth, described as a chase of the sheep by the wolf, a vivid picture that was also applied to the title of the book. The last part of the chapter touches upon the role that written culture played in the survival of the Greek monasteries under Latin rule. Monasteries relied heavily on manuscripts mainly for liturgical reasons and secondarily for the spiritual instruction of monks. However, books alone did not suffice for the survival of Greek in southern Italy, where, as shown, Greek slowly faded from the monasteries’ cultural environs, which succumbed to Latinization. This, though, was not the case in regions of the eastern Mediterranean, with few exceptions, despite the assimilation of various aspects of Western culture.

Chapter Five poses another, important, question concerning the way in which the Greeks in Latin-occupied territories could maintain their religious identity while being subjected to the Pope. The author chooses to address this question by first examining the ecclesiastical and cultural aspects of Orthodox faith. By cultural aspects, emphasis is, again, put on religious iconography, which is seen as an expression of attachment to Byzantine rite. On the other hand, we are also given the framework of the ideology of the papal Church, particularly after Gregory VII, and the goal of creating a universal Church, with Rome as its center, also explaining the main characteristics of papal policy towards the Greeks. Despite official policy, however, the deeds of the Latins during the conquest of the Greek lands were described with a “dire image” (*légende noire*), which depicted the redistribution of monastic wealth, the relocation of monastic communities, and reform. This image is mainly approached by examining events and perceptions in southern Italy, Constantinople, and the Frankish Morea, as well as Cyprus and the Duchy of Athens in the 1240s. Within this scope, the author also examines how the notion of a universal Church was put to practice, and the role that tithes and other mechanisms of intervention played in establishing Papal authority in the East. Finally, the author touches upon the way ‘disobedient’ and ‘rebel’ monasteries were perceived by the Latin Church, as well as the status of female monasteries under Latin rule.

Throughout the book, the historical understanding of Greco-Latin monasticism under Latin rule is mainly understood through the lens of the triptych: frontier –identity– acculturation. The notion of frontiers in monasticism, whether regional, cultural, or ideological, is presented as crucial for understanding the history of the monastic movement during the era examined. Both local and infra-local Greek identities are shaped through the various forms of interactions with the Latins, merging in certain cases the two traditions into a fundamentally new synthesis, which would also manifest resistance through cultural expression, mainly ecclesiastical iconography. As the author notes, the absence of physical resistance by the Greek monastic communities towards the Latins does not mean that they do not forge distinct identities. Yet, the main question here would be why these communities were in such need of forging identities that featured the notion of opposition, resorting at times to myths that were perpetuated. On the other hand, Gregorian and papal identities were also affected by their crossing with Greek culture in the East, sometimes involuntarily, as a result of the new political and cultural frontiers that occurred in favor of Rome.

In the southern part of the Italian peninsula, as the author shows, it was the decline of Greek culture in the wider society that eventually brought the decline of Greek monasticism in the region. This, however, was not the case in mainland Greece, Crete, Cyprus, or the isles, where Greek culture remained dominant. As the author reveals, among the most important, perhaps, aspects of cultural collision within the monastic realm is language, because it is the medium of liturgical practice, a centerpiece of monastic life. Even when no dogmatic issues were involved, different liturgical languages constituted different groups and communities even within a given institution, such as Iviron or the Amalfitan monasteries on Mount Athos.

Among the major advantages of this work is that the author does not only rely on a wide array of written sources, both primary and secondary, but also engages in the effort to understand the phenomenon of cohabitation of the Greeks under Latin rule through a cultural lens as well, touching upon social aspects that are usually not depicted in high-culture texts. Obviously, the topic of the book is so wide and deep, that one work, no matter how meticulous, such as this, cannot exhaust the discussion. Various aspects remain open to further analysis. For example, when discussing Byzantine monasticism, it would perhaps also be useful to study the role of the great monastic centers per se after the 9th and 10th centuries, such as the Black Mountain near Antioch, Mount Olympus, and Kyminas in Bithynia, Latros or Mount Athos, which was crucial in shaping monastic ideology and practice. These centers attracted prominent figures who created and maintained – in many cases very close – ties with the Byzantine Imperial Court and became cradles of monastic leadership, training monks who later left to settle and found monasteries in various regions. This could help better understand the roots and the currents that flowed throughout, shaping the various traits of Greek monastic reaction towards Latin rule. Furthermore, one could also stress the importance of the spiritual effect of the dependencies (*μετόχια*) at a local level, apart from their economic attributes. Dependencies played not only a role in providing wealth for the monastery, but also created indirect spheres of influence through an attachment with the local populations, from where new monks were expected to man the main monastic complexes.

In all, *Les monastères grecs sous domination latine (XIIe – XVIe siècles)*. *Comme un loup poursuivant un mouton* is a long-awaited work. Ludivine Voisin has scrupulously studied an immense number of sources, both primary and secondary, in a multitude of languages, an enormous task on its own. Furthermore, it is important to stress that without trying to escape the legacy of existing literature on

various regions and characteristics of monastic life under Latin rule, the book offers a fresh historical understanding of the topic, introducing aspects that will not only spark fruitful discussions, but will also become a starting point and reference book for new studies on the topic.

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