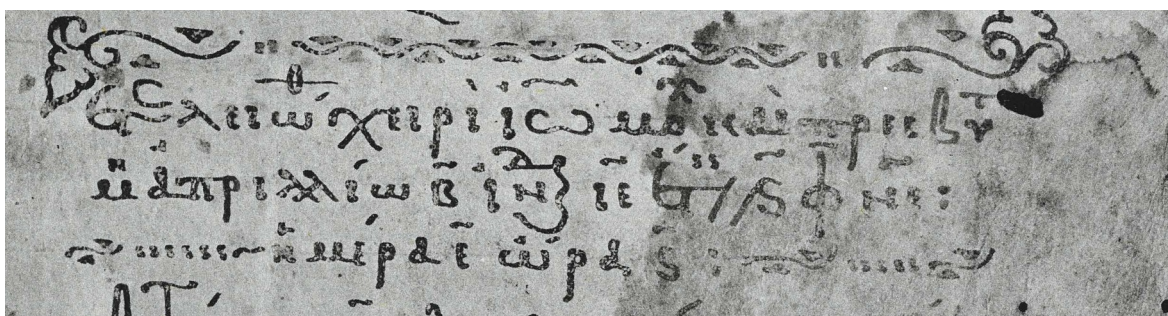


John the Presbyter in Documentary Sources

A source-critical and textual study of Greek documents and manuscripts from the tenth and eleventh centuries

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PhD



Detail of the colophon of 1047 • Megiste Lavra Γ19 (259), Lake III, pl. 180

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Abbreviations: BnF, Bibliothèque nationale de France; PmbZ, Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit; DBBE, Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams; BAdW, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Abstract and principal findings

Abstract

This study brings together eight dossiers in which the personal name John is associated with the Greek ecclesiastical title presbyter. The evidence comprises colophons, Athonite acts and subscriptions dated between 954 and 1066. Documents of 984 and 985 receive separate attention to distinguish John the Iberian, John Tornike and other monks bearing the same name.

Principal finding

The conjunction of the name John and the title presbyter is attested in the historical documentary tradition. Each attestation nevertheless requires its own assessment of identity, date, transmission and documentary function. Agreement in name and title does not by itself establish that two records concern the same person, or connect either person with the legend of the priest-king Prester John.

Documentary basis

The plates reproduce five source objects: the copied colophon and restoration note in Paris gr. 668; the Ivron acts of 984 and 1015; the colophon of 1047 in Lavra Γ19 (259); and the colophon of 1066 in Paris gr. 289. Greek extracts are accompanied by English translations and critical commentary.

For other acts, the presbyter formulas are documented through references to their editions and quotations in PmbZ. Photographs of those particular subscriptions were not examined. This study therefore covers all eight dossiers in the selected corpus, but does not claim to provide a complete new palaeographical edition of every signature.

Scope and method

The corpus consists of eight dossiers identified within this investigation. It is not a comprehensive prosopography of every cleric named John in every period and region. Nor do eight dossiers necessarily represent eight demonstrably distinct people: brief records without further identifiers do not always allow their subjects to be joined or separated with confidence.

Three stages of source criticism

The first question is what the text actually supplies: a name, an ecclesiastical title, a monastery or a relationship to another person. The second concerns its material transmission: an autograph, a copy, a recopied colophon or a modern edition. Only then can one ask whose biography the record belongs to.

Evidence category	Meaning in this study
Facsimile and edition	A photograph has been obtained and compared with the relevant text. Where letters remain faint, dependence on the edition is stated.
Quoted edition	PmbZ supplies the Greek formula and refers to a critical edition, page and line. The photograph of that act has not been checked here.
Control document	The source helps distinguish namesakes; the John concerned need not be called presbyter in the formula under discussion.

Transcription conventions

Round brackets () mark the expansion of an abbreviation in the edition; square brackets [] mark editorial restoration; [...] marks an omission in the present extract. Normalised texts regularise accents, word division and, where necessary, spelling. They are not presented as exact graphic reproductions of the manuscript.

Most complete formulas printed here are expanded readings derived from editions. Observations made from photographs are stated separately. No on-site examination of the originals, ink analysis, parchment examination or multispectral imaging forms part of this study.

No letters in the illustrations have been generated or reconstructed. The figures use unchanged portions of published photographs and page images. Enlargement cannot recover information absent from the source image.

Register of the corpus

ID	Date and person	Source	Basis of verification
J01	954 John the scribe	Paris gr. 668; Lake IV, no. 139	Facsimile and edition; colophon recopied in the twelfth century
J02	972 Signatory of the Tragos	Prôtaton no. 7, l. 164	Edition quoted by PmbZ 23110
J03	985–998 Abbot of Xerokastron	Iviron no. 7; Lavra nos. 9, 12; Vatopédi no. 2	PmbZ 23158; presbyter occurs in the formula of 991
J04	1010 Witness at Hierissos	Iviron no. 16, l. 56	Edition quoted by PmbZ 23353
J05	1012 Disciple of Euthymios	Lavra no. 17, l. 46; cf. Iviron no. 17	PmbZ 23354; the two acts numbered 17 must be distinguished
J06	1015 and 1020 Abbot of the Archistrategos and grammatikos	Iviron nos. 21 and 24	1015 facsimile and edition; title in 1020 through PmbZ 23356
J07	1047 Scribe of a Lavra manuscript	Lavra Γ19 (259); Lake III, no. 104	Facsimile and edition
J08	1066 Scribe of a Paris lectionary	Paris gr. 289, f. 159v; Lake IV, no. 173	Facsimile and edition

The corpus includes both manuscript colophons and legal acts. In a colophon, “by the hand of John the presbyter” identifies the scribe; in an act, the same name may designate a witness, an issuer or the document’s writer. Combining these attestations without distinguishing their functions risks creating a false biography.

Control group: John the Iberian, founder of Iviron (PmbZ 22942); John Tornike (22926); and John the calligrapher, writer of the act of 984 (23154). Their inclusion does not imply that the formulas considered here attest the title presbyter for these men.

Title name and chronology

The meaning of presbyteros

In the Athonite and scribal formulas examined here, πρεσβύτερος denotes priestly rank. Μοναχός means monk; ἡγούμενος or καθηγούμενος means a monastic superior. One person may hold all three positions, but the occurrence of one title does not establish the others. The distinction between a monk and a priest-monk is particularly important.

Greek formula	English meaning	Critical observation
Ἰωάννης πρεσβύτερος	John, presbyter or priest	Personal name and ecclesiastical rank
Ἰωάννης μοναχός	John, monk	This formula does not establish priesthood
μοναχὸς καὶ πρεσβύτερος	Monk and presbyter	Both statuses are expressly stated
ἡγούμενος τοῦ Ξηροκάστρου	Abbot of Xerokastron	Monastic affiliation supplies a further identifier
τοῦ γραμματικοῦ	Of the grammatikos or learned scribe	A functional designation; treating it as a surname requires evidence

Checking the dates

The Byzantine year of the world begins on 1 September. Conversion normally subtracts 5508 for dates from January to August and 5509 for September to December. The indiction identifies a year within a fifteen-year cycle; by itself it does not supply an absolute date.

Year and month in the source	Conversion	Result
6463 / October	6463 – 5509	954; indiction 13
6555 / April	6555 – 5508	1047; indiction 15
6574 / July	6574 – 5508	1066; indiction 4
6650 / month unspecified	Full September–August year	1141/1142; indiction 5

Day and month dates follow the sources' historical Julian calendar. They have not been converted to proleptic Gregorian dates.

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 668

J01 John the scribe in 954

The manuscript contains John Chrysostom's homilies on Matthew. According to Lake, its last two leaves were supplied by a restorer who recopied the old colophon and added a record of his own restoration. The notice dated 954 therefore concerns an earlier John, but its surviving written form is not a specimen of that scribe's own hand. [1, no. 139; 2]

Normalised reading of the colophon

Ἐπληρώθη σὺν θεῷ ἡ ἱερὰ αὕτη βίβλος μηνὶ Ὀκτωβρίῳ κζ', ἰνδικτιῶνος ιγ', ἔτους κόσμου ,ζυξγ', γραφεῖσα διὰ χειρὸς Ἰωάννου ἐλαχίστου πρεσβυτέρου.

"With God's help this sacred book was completed on 27 October, in the thirteenth indiction, in the year of the world 6463, written by the hand of John, the most humble presbyter."

The complete reading follows Lake IV and PmbZ; it is not a new diplomatic edition. PmbZ quotes πρεβυτέρου, whereas Lake's printed text has πρεσβυτέρου. The normalised form is adopted above. The relevant part of the photograph is faint, and this image does not finally resolve the presence or absence of σ.

Observations on the facsimile

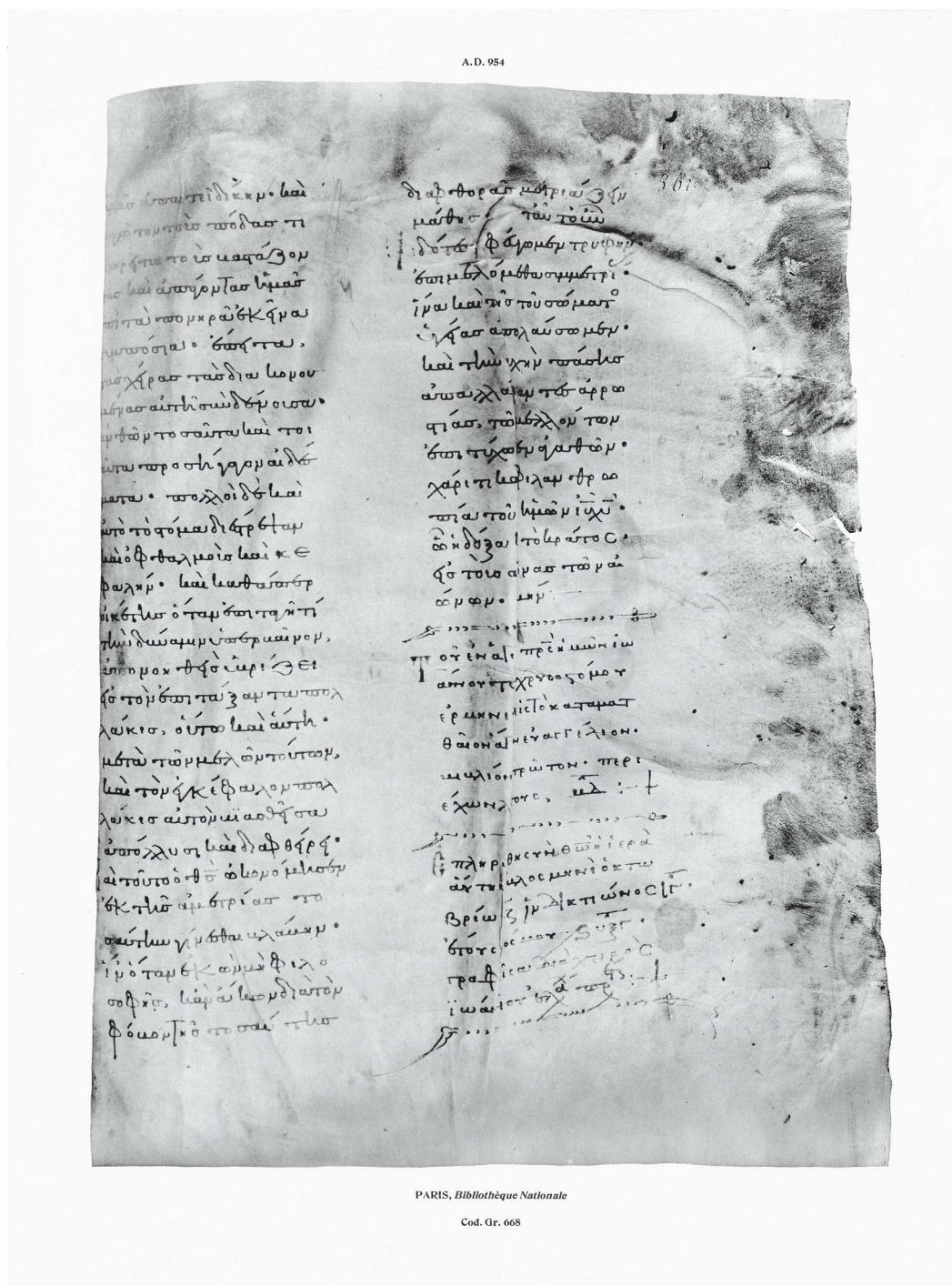
Plate 237 brings together the end of the text, its heading and the colophon on one page. The completion notice appears in the lower right column. Its opening and part of John's name are visible, but the date and title are worn and damaged. The position of the notice agrees with the description in the edition; the photograph alone cannot restore every letter.

Assessment of the witness

The notice of John the presbyter is documentary evidence transmitted by a later copyist. The date reported by the earlier colophon, 954, must be distinguished from the surviving material witness. Describing this facsimile as "John's autograph of 954" would be inaccurate.

References: Lake IV (1935), p. 10, no. 139, pls 236–238; PmbZ 23085; Omont (1891), p. 1, description of pl. V: second column of f. 361, with the restoration notice on the verso. This description places the copied earlier colophon on f. 361r. [1–3; 22]

Plate I The witness to the notice of 954



BnF, grec 668. Lake IV, pl. 237. The lower right column contains the later copy of the earlier colophon. Digital source: Pyle. The photographic content is unchanged.

The date of the surviving copy is distinct from the completion date of 954 that it records. The restorer's note, discussed on the following page, establishes this distinction.