

Monastic Manuscripts of Boeotia: Perceptions of Monks on Their Religious, Cultural, and Touristic Significance

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Abstract: This study explores the cultural, religious, and touristic significance of monastic manuscripts preserved in the monasteries of Boeotia, Greece. Focusing on the role these texts play in shaping religious identity and promoting cultural heritage, the research investigates how monks perceive the value of the manuscripts and their relevance to visitors. Using a structured quantitative questionnaire distributed to 161 monks across various monasteries, the study analyzed responses regarding religious, historical, and cultural perceptions, as well as attitudes toward public engagement and digital dissemination of the manuscripts. Findings reveal that the majority of monks recognize the spiritual, historical, and educational importance of the texts, with 87.6% stating that religious significance is a primary motivation for monastery visitors. However, statistical analysis also identified significant age-related differences in attitudes, with monks aged 48–58 less likely to support visitor interaction or public awareness initiatives. These results suggest a generational divide in how monastic heritage should be presented to broader audiences. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for balanced heritage strategies that respect monastic traditions while promoting sustainable public access, reinforcing the dual identity of monastic manuscripts as both sacred artifacts and instruments of cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: monastic manuscripts, cultural heritage, religious literature, Boeotia, monastery tourism, heritage preservation, digital dissemination

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1 Introduction

This research study examines the contribution of the monastic manuscripts of the Holy Monasteries of Boeotia to religious literature, cultural heritage, and the development of cultural tourism. Through the analysis of these texts and their connection with the wider cultural trends of the region, the research aims to recognize the value of monastic manuscripts as bearers of spiritual and cultural tradition.

2 Theoretical Framework

According to Korka [1], cultural heritage can be defined as the legacy from tangible objects, but also from intangible characteristics of a group or society. These characteristics have been passed down from previous generations and are preserved in the present while being transmitted into the future, for the benefit of future generations. Karavia [2] supports that the term cultural heritage includes tangible culture, such as

landscapes, buildings, monuments, works of art, and books, as well as intangible culture, which includes language, folklore, knowledge, and traditions. There is also the "natural" heritage, which includes important cultural landscapes and biodiversity. The planned effort to preserve cultural heritage from the present for the future is called preservation or conservation. As unique and irreplaceable, Cultural Heritage enriches modern culture with its preservation and safeguarding, which is a lifelong obligation. For the safeguarding of the cultural reserve, successful efforts have been made to preserve the "future heritage" of many nations. In this purpose of preserving Cultural Heritage, lay organizations and the important specialized international UN body UNESCO have acted as allies, according to Garantzoti [3]. These organizations received necessary support from states and other bodies for the realization of their mission. The connection of cultural heritage with monastic tradition and its written texts is

deep and unbreakable, as monasteries have functioned as custodians of religious, spiritual, and cultural heritage for centuries. Primarily in terms of preserving and disseminating the cultural (and spiritual) heritage of Hellenism. Monks not only composed religious texts but also copied manuscripts from antiquity, preserving valuable works of theology, philosophy, and history. The written texts produced and maintained by the monks rendered monastic spaces centers of knowledge and spirituality[4]. Monasteries were centers of education and culture, where monks cultivated writing and literature. The texts preserved in them include hagiographies, theological and philosophical works, which shaped the religious and secular life of future generations. These works reinforce collective memory and highlight the values, ethics, and knowledge of past generations. The cultural and educational contribution of Monastic Manuscripts is recognized and visible in all historical phases of Hellenism [5].

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Participants

The present study aims to investigate the interest in monastic texts among monks. The research will focus on understanding the level of interest, preferences, and factors that influence the reading or study of monastic texts. The research sample consists of 161 monks living in various monasteries. The sample size was calculated for a 95% confidence interval, 8% margin of error, and population proportion equal to 50% [6]. This means that the sample is representative of the population. They were selected via convenience sampling from various monasteries in Greece to ensure diversity both geographically and theologically. Their participation in the research will offer valuable insights into how important monastic texts are to their daily life, religious practice, and spiritual guidance. The questionnaires were distributed through the abbeys of the monasteries, which ensured the participation of the monks. The questionnaires were anonymous and completed by hand.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Monks

Age Group	N	%
18–28	26	16.1
28–38	40	24.8
38–48	20	12.4
48–58	24	14.9
58+	51	31.7
Total	161	100.0
Years at Monastery	N	%
1–5 years	4	2.5
6–10 years	19	11.8
10–15 years	31	19.3
15+ years	107	66.5
Total	161	100.0

3.2 Measures and Analysis

The questionnaire for monks includes quantitative questions. It contains closed-ended questions to collect quantitative data for statistical analysis. The construction of the questionnaires was done through the study of relevant literature. Specifically, material related to monastery visitors and their interests was studied, which was modified to include the dimension of religious manuscripts and was accordingly adapted for the monks [7–9].

4 Results

The following table presents monks' responses on a series of questions concerning their own engagement with monastic texts, the perceived importance of these texts (religious, historical, and cultural), and their views on visitors' interests and motivations. Most monks view the texts as religiously (77.6%), historically (71.4%), and culturally (78.3%) significant. A large majority also believe that the religious significance of the monastery is a key motivation for visitors (87.6%). Just over half (54.7%) support making monastic texts available online.

Table 2. Monks' Perceptions and Visitor Engagement Regarding Monastery Texts and Significance

Question	Yes (N)	Yes (%)	No (N)	No (%)
Studied monastery texts	112	69.6	49	30.4
Religious significance	125	77.6	36	22.4
Historical significance	115	71.4	46	28.6
Cultural significance	126	78.3	35	21.7
High visitor traffic	98	60.9	63	39.1
Year-round visitors	79	49.1	82	50.9

Foreign visitors	91	56.5	70	43.5
Visitors' religious motive	141	87.6	20	12.4
Visitors' historical motive	130	80.7	31	19.3
Visitors' cultural motive	118	73.3	43	26.7
Visitors' interest in texts	101	62.7	60	37.3
Inform visitors about texts	95	59.0	66	41.0
Visitors show interest	97	60.2	64	39.8
Visitors should engage	113	70.2	48	29.8
More awareness needed	114	70.8	47	29.2
Support online publication	88	54.7	73	45.3

Fig 1. Monks Positive Responses

The chi-square analyses in Table 3 confirm that age is a significant factor influencing monks' attitudes toward the monastery's texts and their dissemination. Notably: Monks aged 48–58 were less likely to agree that visitors are motivated by the monastic texts themselves. This suggests a generational divergence in understanding visitors' intentions or a more reserved stance in this age group. The same age group also showed significantly lower agreement in informing visitors or observing their interest in the texts. This could imply a degree of reticence or perhaps limited interaction with visitors in those age brackets. Furthermore, monks aged 48–58 were less supportive of the idea that visitors should engage with the texts and that more public awareness is needed, reinforcing a pattern of conservatism or caution toward public access and education regarding the monastic heritage. These results point to a potential intergenerational divide within monastic communities on how monastery manuscripts should be positioned in relation to external audiences.

Table 3. Chi-Square Test Results for Age Differences Across Key Questions

Question	χ^2 (df = 4)	p-value
Q13. Visitors' motive: monastery texts	11.12	.025
Q14. Inform visitors about texts	13.64	.009
Q15. Visitors show interest in texts	13.22	.010
Q16. Visitors should engage with texts	9.97	.041
Q17. More public awareness of texts	14.85	.005

Fig 1. Significant Chi Squares

As shown in Table 4, the statistically significant correlation between having studied monastic texts and recognizing their religious significance ($\rho = .261$, $p = .000$) supports the idea that deeper personal engagement enhances appreciation. Monks who

have read the texts are more likely to regard them as spiritually important, highlighting the role of lived experience in shaping perceptions of religious value. Conversely, the weak and non-significant correlation between supporting visitor engagement with the texts and favoring their online publication ($\rho = .116$, $p = .144$) suggests that these two forms of access are perceived differently. While some monks endorse direct interaction through visits, they remain hesitant about the broader implications of digitization—likely due to concerns over context, reverence, or loss of control.

Table 4. Spearman's Rank Correlation for Key Variable Relationships

Variable Pair	ρ (rho)	p-value	N
Studied texts & Religious significance	0.261	.000	161
Visitor engagement & Online publication	0.116	.144	161

5 Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that monastic manuscripts play in shaping both the spiritual and cultural identity of the monastic community in Boeotia. Nearly 90% of participating monks affirmed that the primary motivation of visitors to their monastery is its religious significance. This reflects the enduring spiritual pull that sacred spaces and their associated texts continue to exert in the modern world, in line with broader analyses of religious tourism across Europe [10,11]. Furthermore, 8 out of 10 monks agreed that visitors are motivated by the historical significance of the monastery, that the monastic manuscripts possess important cultural value, and that these texts hold deep religious significance. These findings echo the assertion of Karavia [2], who emphasized that cultural heritage encompasses not only physical structures and artifacts, but also intangible elements such as theological narratives, rituals, and recorded spiritual experiences, which form a bridge between the past and present. Approximately 70% of the monks also believed that visitors are drawn to the monastery for its cultural relevance, that the texts have notable historical value, that more

public awareness should be raised about these texts, and that visitors should engage with them during their stay. The monks' emphasis on the cultural and spiritual education of visitors aligns with the view of Korka [1] and Duffy [5], who both stressed the role of monasteries as educational institutions that preserve, interpret, and transmit theological and philosophical knowledge across generations.

In addition, 6 out of 10 monks stated that visitors are motivated by the manuscripts themselves, that the monastery experiences high visitation, and that visitors express interest in the texts. Many of them also claimed that they actively inform visitors about the manuscripts. These observations reinforce Geanakoplos's [4] argument that monasteries have historically functioned not only as spiritual sanctuaries but also as intellectual repositories, where sacred and scholarly traditions coexist.

More than half of the monks reported that the monastery attracts international visitors, that they are open to the online publication of manuscripts, and that the monastery experiences year-round visitation. However, the finding that monks aged 48–58 were significantly less likely than their younger or older peers to agree with statements regarding visitor interaction with the manuscripts, visitor interest, and public awareness initiatives suggests a generational divide in attitudes toward public engagement and dissemination. This conservative stance may reflect a heightened sense of custodianship

or concern for preserving the sanctity of these texts, as noted by Barthel7 Bouchier [12], who highlighted the tensions between preservation and accessibility in heritage management.

The reluctance of this age group to endorse broader access initiatives, such as informing visitors or supporting digital dissemination, may also point to the monks' internal debate between maintaining the traditional spiritual function of manuscripts and adapting to contemporary cultural consumption patterns. As scholars such as Earl [13] and Fowler [14] have argued, digitization and heritage tourism can coexist productively with preservation, but only when guided by ethical and culturally sensitive frameworks.

Therefore, these findings not only reaffirm the significant symbolic and educational role of monastic manuscripts within the Orthodox tradition, but also signal important

areas of intergenerational tension regarding their future visibility and accessibility.

The evidence suggests that while many monks are supportive of public engagement, including digital initiatives, a sizable portion—particularly those within the 48–58 age range—exhibit reservations that must be addressed through thoughtful dialogue and policy design. Such discourse should be grounded in both theological integrity and heritage conservation principles to ensure the sustainable use and reverence of these texts for future generations [3,12,15].

6 Conclusion

Ultimately, this research reinforces the dual identity of monastic manuscripts—as sacred heritage and as instruments of cultural diplomacy—and calls for a renewed commitment to preserving their spiritual depth while making them accessible in ways that honor their religious context. Future studies may deepen this line of inquiry by exploring visitor perceptions and by evaluating the impact of digital platforms on the interpretation and appreciation of sacred manuscripts. Through such multidimensional approaches, the legacy of Boeotia's monastic texts can be safeguarded and shared with reverence and responsibility.

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