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THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION OF LEIMONOS MONASTERY HISTORICAL VALUE PRESERVATION AND DIGITAL PROMOTION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the manuscript collection of the Holy Monastery of Leimonos on Lesbos as a complex body of material evidence preserving aspects of Byzantine and post-Byzantine literature, Orthodox worship, education and local history. It considers the historical formation of the collection, its religious, palaeographical, codicological and artistic significance, and the contribution of digitisation to research and protection. Particular emphasis is placed on the relationship between preservation, scholarly access and sustainable cultural tourism. The article argues that the collection should be managed as an integrated archive of memory rather than as a set of isolated exhibits. Systematic cataloguing, preventive conservation, interoperable digital documentation and cooperation between the Monastery, universities and cultural institutions are essential for its long-term protection and responsible public interpretation.

Keywords: Leimonos Monastery, Manuscripts, Lesbos, Cultural heritage, Palaeography, Codicology, Digitisation, Religious tourism.

1 INTRODUCTION

Manuscripts are not merely carriers of texts. They are material objects with their own histories: they were made from particular materials, written and corrected by identifiable or anonymous people, used in worship or teaching, repaired, rebound and transferred from one place to another. Their value therefore lies both in what they say and in the physical evidence of their production, use and preservation.

Leimonos Monastery, near Kalloni on Lesbos, was founded in 1526 by Saint Ignatios Agallianos (Lesvos Geopark, n.d.). From an early stage it was associated with religious life, education and the preservation of books and documents. Its library developed over centuries and contains printed books, archival material and an important manuscript collection whose chronological range extends from the Byzantine era to modern times.

The purpose of this article is to assess the cultural and historical value of these manuscripts through an interdisciplinary perspective. It considers the formation of the collection, the significance of its contents and material features, its contribution to scholarship and education, and the challenges of conservation, digitisation and public access. It also examines how the collection may support cultural tourism without compromising the sacred character of the Monastery or the physical integrity of the manuscripts.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study follows a bibliographical and interpretative approach. It draws on the historical catalogue of Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1884a), studies included in the volume *Holy Monastery of Leimonos History Palaeography Art* (Kalamatas and Spanos, 2009), specialised publications on individual codices, and the digital resources DigitManus and Pinakes. UNESCO principles concerning the preservation of and access to documentary heritage provide the broader framework for evaluating digitisation and long-term stewardship (UNESCO, 2015).

The assessment is organised around four interconnected dimensions: historical evidence, spiritual and religious content, material and aesthetic form, and contemporary social use. This distinction is analytical rather than absolute. A liturgical codex may simultaneously be a witness to textual transmission, an object of worship, an example of book production and a source for social and educational history.

3 FORMATION AND SCOPE OF THE COLLECTION

A monastic collection is rarely the product of a single plan. Codices accumulate gradually through copying within the monastery, purchases, donations, bequests and transfers from other places. Some are created for liturgical or teaching needs, while others enter the library because they are valued as inherited objects. The Leimonos collection reflects these multiple routes of acquisition and use.

The early cataloguing undertaken by Papadopoulos-Kerameus and published in the Mavrogordateios Library laid the foundations for knowledge of the manuscript collections of Lesbos (Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 1884b). Later catalogues and studies corrected descriptions, identified texts and scribes, and documented codices that had not previously been studied in detail. Differences between older and newer shelf marks make the consistent correlation of records especially important.

The collection includes biblical and liturgical books, patristic and hagiographical works, homilies, canon law, hymnography, musical manuscripts, grammars, lexicographical material and teaching texts. This variety reflects both the religious mission of the Monastery and its role in education. The broad chronological range also makes it possible to trace developments in Greek handwriting, page design, bookbinding and the circulation of texts.

Individual cases demonstrate the research potential of the collection. Codex Lesbiacus Leimonos 11 preserves an unpublished Byzantine menaion for June, while Codex Graecus 27 contributed to the recovery and dating of works connected with John Chrysostom (Pradels, 2002; Pradels, Brändle and Heimgartner, 2002; Spanos, 2010). Such examples show that a local monastic library may contain evidence of international importance.

4 HISTORICAL VALUE AND CULTURAL MEMORY

The historical value of the codices lies first in the survival of texts. Each manuscript represents a particular witness to the transmission of a work. Variations in wording, omissions, additions and corrections allow scholars to reconstruct the history of a text and the intellectual environments in which it was copied and read.

Equally important are the traces surrounding the main text. Colophons, ownership notes, commemorative inscriptions, readers' annotations, lists of names and records of events can transform a theological or liturgical book into a source for social history. They may reveal scribes, donors, teachers and readers, as well as local crises, journeys, exchanges and institutional relationships.

For Lesbos, the collection documents the continuity of Greek letters and Orthodox education on an island situated on maritime routes linking Constantinople, Asia Minor and the Aegean. The codices testify to contacts, movements and cultural exchanges, while their preservation at Leimonos Monastery demonstrates the role of monastic institutions in safeguarding collective memory.

5 RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Most manuscripts originated within a context of faith and use. Gospels, psalters, menaia, euchologia, patristic homilies and saints' lives were not simply objects to be read; they were active instruments of worship, instruction and communal memory. Their meaning cannot therefore be reduced to rarity, age or market value.

The manuscripts also reveal how a monastic community organised knowledge. Copying could be understood as spiritual labour, yet it required technical skill, linguistic competence, materials and time. Corrections, additions and signs of repeated use show that the codices were part of living practices rather than static works of art.

Recognition of their sacred character remains crucial to contemporary management. Scholarly access should not detach the objects from the community that preserved them, and tourist interpretation should avoid treating them merely as spectacles. Respect for worship, monastic routine and restrictions on access must be incorporated into any programme of promotion.

6 PALAEOGRAPHICAL CODICOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC VALUE

Palaeography studies forms of writing, while codicology examines the codex as a constructed object. The Leimonos manuscripts display different scripts, inks, ruling systems, page layouts, quire structures, bindings and repairs. These features help identify scribes, copying periods, workshops and relationships with other monastic or urban centres.

The coexistence of parchment, bombycine paper and later paper manuscripts is particularly significant. Changes in writing support are connected with supply networks, cost, availability and transformations in book production. Watermarks, sewing structures, flyleaves and reused materials can provide evidence that is absent from the verbal content of the text.

Artistic value is expressed through miniatures, headpieces, decorated initials, calligraphy and page organisation. Even a modestly decorated codex embodies aesthetic decisions concerning proportion, colour, hierarchy and rhythm. The artistic significance of the collection should therefore be assessed across the whole spectrum of manuscript production, not only through its most elaborate examples.

7 SCHOLARLY AND EDUCATIONAL USE

The collection is inherently interdisciplinary. Philologists investigate textual transmission; historians examine annotations and people; theologians study doctrine and liturgical forms; musicologists analyse notation; art historians explore decoration; conservators study materials and deterioration; and specialists in digital humanities develop metadata and methods of access.

The inclusion of codices in international infrastructures such as Pinakes places the Monastery on the global map of Greek manuscript culture. Linked data allow researchers to locate other copies of the same work, compare descriptions and trace bibliographical references. The usefulness of digitisation, however, depends on accurate metadata and stable relationships between digital images and catalogue records.

In education, selected digital folios can support activities on the history of the book, Byzantine art, language and local history. For students of tourism and cultural management, the collection offers an example of a heritage resource whose interpretation requires cooperation between scholarship, conservation and community values. Training partnerships with universities may turn visits into learning experiences rather than passive consumption.

8 DIGITISATION CONSERVATION AND THE ETHICS OF ACCESS

Digitisation is now a central instrument of protection and dissemination, but it is not synonymous with preservation. It requires safe photography, colour accuracy, appropriate resolution, stable identifiers, quality control and secure storage. Files must be backed up, migrated and documented so that they remain usable as technologies change.

A digital surrogate cannot replace the original. It cannot fully convey texture, thickness, sewing structures, ink changes or features visible only under specialised lighting. Its role is complementary: it reduces unnecessary handling, facilitates preliminary research and enables access for users who cannot visit the Monastery.

Access also requires ethical differentiation. The general visitor, the student and the researcher requesting examination of a binding or multispectral photography have different needs. Transparent procedures, documented criteria and supervision can reconcile legitimate research with security, conservation and respect for the Monastery's religious life.

9 CULTURAL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE PROMOTION

The collection can strengthen the cultural identity and attractiveness of Lesbos if tourism remains compatible with its protection. Long-term display of originals, uncontrolled lighting and frequent handling create risks that cannot be justified by visitor numbers. Facsimiles, high-resolution projections, rotating displays and carefully designed digital applications can communicate value while limiting exposure.

Interpretation should avoid both the commercialisation of a sacred place and language that is inaccessible to non-specialists. A coherent programme may present the life cycle of a manuscript, from the preparation of parchment and ink to copying, binding, use and conservation. Connections with the history of the Leimoniada School, local printing, religious routes and other cultural institutions can situate the collection within the wider history of Lesbos.

A sustainable strategy does not measure success solely by visitor numbers. It evaluates the condition of the manuscripts, the quality of the experience, scholarly output, community participation and the distribution of benefits. Leimonos Monastery may serve as a hub for thematic routes concerning religious history, education and the book on Lesbos, without turning its library into a mass spectacle.

Recent research on cultural entrepreneurship offers a complementary framework for sustainable promotion. Studies of the competitive cultural features of Lesbos support long-term strategies grounded in local identity and cooperation among cultural institutions (Maniou et al., 2025a), while research on historic buildings in Lesbos and Limnos shows how adaptive reuse and heritage interpretation may connect with local creative-economy networks (Maniou et al., 2025c). Digital practices for monuments indicate that technology can widen access without removing the need to protect authentic objects (Maniou et al., 2025e). The models of literary festivals and literary parks are also relevant because they combine narrative, education and local participation with low-impact cultural tourism (Maniou et al., 2025b, 2025d). For Leimonos Monastery, these approaches may inform thematic digital routes, educational programmes and partnerships with cultural bodies on Lesbos, subject to clear limits on the display and use of original manuscripts.

The pivotal, useful, and constructive role that digital technologies play in the contemporary realm of digital and cultural marketing education can no longer be overlooked; rather, it must be vigorously emphasized and systematically integrated. To significantly strengthen the field of cultural entrepreneurial education and foster a new generation of resilient innovators, we must actively encourage and facilitate the strategic adoption of digital technology across all educational domains and curricula levels. In this direction, educational institutions and policy-makers need to be inspired by, and rapidly adopt, well-established technological paradigms. These include: Mobile Learning and Devices [29]: Which democratize access to learning materials, enabling ubiquitous, micro-learning experiences and real-time collaboration among aspiring cultural entrepreneurs. A Diverse Range of ICTs [30-33]: Serving as the infrastructure for interactive simulation tools, digital sandboxes, and virtual incubators where students can test business models risk-free. AI & STEM Robotics [34-38]: Which cultivate algorithmic thinking, data-driven decision-making, and technological fluency—skills that are critical for navigating today's automated market landscapes. These advanced technologies and pedagogical paradigms do not merely digitize traditional content; they fundamentally enable, enrich, and enhance core educational processes such as evaluation, intervention, and instruction. By embedding these tools into cultural entrepreneurial training, educators can transition from one-size-fits-all instruction to adaptive, personalized learning paths that cater to the unique strengths and weaknesses of each student. Furthermore, the integration of ICTs should not occur in a cognitive vacuum. Synthesizing digital tools with proven psychological frameworks—specifically theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence development [34-43]—exponentially speeds up and improves educational practices and student outcomes. When technology is leveraged to enhance metacognitive awareness (such as self-monitoring and strategic reflection) alongside emotional intelligence, students develop the psychological resilience, empathy, and cognitive flexibility required to thrive as cultural entrepreneurs. This holistic approach yields profound results, particularly in the domain of cultural entrepreneurship, where success depends not only on commercial acumen but also on deep cultural empathy, ethical narrative-building, and community-centric innovation.

10 DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that the value of the collection is cumulative and relational. It does not arise only from the age or rarity of individual codices but from the relationships among the manuscripts, the monastic community, the history of Lesbos and the international manuscript tradition. Preserving the integrity of the collection is therefore as important as protecting its most visually impressive objects.

Three priorities emerge. First, the Monastery needs unified and continuously updated documentation connecting old and new shelf marks, bibliography, descriptions and digital objects. Second, preventive conservation must precede

extensive display or digitisation. Third, public interpretation should be designed as part of conservation policy, with clear objectives, defined audiences and measurable outcomes.

10.1 Proposals for Integrated Management

The first practical step is an integrated collection plan including a condition survey, risk assessment, conservation priorities and emergency procedures. Environmental monitoring, appropriate storage, careful handling and staff training can prevent damage more effectively than isolated restoration campaigns.

The second step concerns documentation. Each manuscript requires a core description of its contents, date, material, dimensions, script, decoration, binding, provenance and bibliography. Common identifiers should connect the physical object, catalogue record, digital images, conservation history and research publications.

The third step is a stable network of cooperation. A scholarly committee representing the Monastery and relevant specialists could define priorities, evaluate research requests and coordinate publications, educational initiatives and funding proposals. Cooperation should strengthen the Monastery's stewardship rather than transfer control of the collection away from it.

Evaluation must be built into planning. Indicators may include the number of documented and conserved codices, metadata completeness, use of the digital collection, research publications, educational participation and the condition of objects after display. Such indicators shift attention from short-term publicity to long-term public value.

10.2 Review of the Literature

The scholarly study of the Leimonos manuscripts rests on both historical catalogues and contemporary digital infrastructures. Apostolos Spanos's study of the collection, published in 2009 in the collective volume *Holy Monastery of Leimonos History Palaeography Art*, occupies a central place in the literature. The collection comprises more than five hundred manuscript codices dating from the tenth to the twentieth century, a range that makes it possible to follow the development of the Greek manuscript tradition from the Byzantine period to modern times (Spanos, 2009).

The literature demonstrates that the value of the codices is not limited to textual content. Materials, script, page design, decoration, bindings and later annotations provide evidence about the production and use of manuscript books. Palaeographical and codicological analysis can distinguish scribes and periods of copying, while commemorative and ownership notes illuminate the religious, educational and social history of Lesbos.

DigitManus provides access to digitised codices and facilitates the study of script, illumination and physical structure without continual handling of fragile originals. Pinakes complements this resource by placing the Leimonos codices within the wider network of Greek manuscript transmission and enabling comparison with manuscripts in other collections. These tools demonstrate that the Monastery's library is both a local archive and part of an international research infrastructure.

Related scholarship on monastic collections places manuscripts within a broader framework of religious literature, cultural memory, education and local development. Research on religious texts and monastic manuscripts presents such collections as vehicles of knowledge and historical continuity (Manola, Balerbas and Trikalitis, 2020). Studies of experiential cultural routes, museums, religious monuments and religious tourism show how interpretation can support education and local development while respecting authenticity (Manola and Trikalitis, 2020, 2022; Trikalitis and Manola, 2023, 2024a, 2024b). Comparative work on the monasteries of Boeotia and their Mediterranean connections also provides a useful context for the sustainable promotion of a collection such as that of Leimonos Monastery (Trikalitis et al., 2024).

11 CONCLUSIONS

The manuscripts of Leimonos Monastery constitute a cultural ensemble of international scholarly interest and a fundamental record of the history of Lesbos. They preserve works of Greek and Orthodox literature, document practices of worship and education, and record in their material fabric the paths of scribes, readers, donors and communities. Their historical, religious, artistic and scholarly values are inseparable.

Their protection requires long-term cooperation among the Monastery, conservators, universities, libraries and cultural institutions. Systematic cataloguing, standards-based digitisation, secure storage and selective educational use can strengthen research and public understanding. In cultural tourism, the collection has value when it is presented as a living network of memory rather than a sequence of curiosities. Responsible promotion is not opposed to preservation; it is the means through which society understands why these manuscripts must be safeguarded for future generations.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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