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THE LOCATION OF THE MONASTERY OF CHRYSE PETRA

The monastery of Chryse Petra is mentioned for the first time, as far as we know, in the narrative sources by Theophanes Continuatus, when emperor Romanus Lecapenus in 933 made annual contributions (*ρόγα*) to the monasteries of Olympos, Kyminas, Chryse Petra and the Barachaion mountain¹. The text of Theophanes Continuatus returns to the same matter when discussing the will of the emperor: he ensured the salvation of his soul by donating an annual payment of one nomisma from the income of his monastic foundation², the Myrelaion³, per monk of Olympos, Kyminas, Athos, Barachaion and Latros.

From these passages we could say that we have a kind of list of the most important Byzantine monastic centres of the tenth century⁴, inclusive of the monastery of Chryse Petra. However, this monastery was left out of the second grant⁵.

1. *καὶ τῆ Χρυσῆ κατονομαζομένη πέτρα*. THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS (Bonn), 418-419; PSEUDOSYMEON, 744 (Bonn), (without any reference to the names of the monasteries); GEORGIUS MONACHUS CONTINUATUS, 910 (Bonn).- THEODOSIUS MELITENUS, 228-229 (TAFEL); LEON GRAMMATICUS, 319-320 (Bonn).

2. THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, 430. See Rosemary MORRIS, *The Origins of Athos*, in: A. BRYER-Mary CUNNINGHAM eds., *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, Aldershot 1996, 43-44.

3. THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, 404. This monastery belonged to the Romanus Lecapenus' family probably since 920; see C. STRIKER, *The Myrelaion (Bodrum Camii) in Istanbul*, Princeton 1981, 6; M. KAPLAN, *Maisons impériales et fondations pieuses: réorganisation de la fortune impériale et assistance publique de la fin du VIIIe siècle à la fin du Xe siècle*, *Byzantion* 61, 1991, 357-358.

4. In the *Vita of St. Athanasios* (6017-18.22, p. 30, ed. J. NORET, *Vitae duae antiquae Sancti Athanasii Athonitae*, Turnhout - Louvain 1982) we have also another 'list' with almost the same great monastic centres of Kyminas, Olympos, Athos, where Chryse Petra is not included.

5. The monastery of Chryse Petra is absent from the second grant and is substituted by the monasteries of Athos and Latros. It is difficult to explain why the monastery of Chryse Petra is not

Apart from the monastic centres of Olympos, which saw a remarkable revival especially after the first period of Iconoclasm, we have no satisfactory knowledge of the other monastic centres referred to in these passages before the beginning of the tenth century. Barachaion (*Βαραχάϊον ὄρος* according to Theodosius Melitenus⁶) is to be identified with the Brachianos mountain and is located at the area of Mykale, close to Mount Latros⁷, where monastic houses start to appear in the sources from the ninth century⁸. The monastic community of Kyminas is mentioned by Genesis together with those of Olympos, Athos and Ide as taking part in the restoration of Orthodoxy in 843⁹. Kyminas is connected with the figure of Michael Maleinos¹⁰, but its precise location is still problematic; perhaps it was on the borders of Bithynia and Paphlagonia¹¹.

Our knowledge about the monastery of Chryse Petra comes basically from the Vita of St. Nikon 'Metanoeite'. The first part of this hagiographic text was written about 1025, the second some years later and the third part about the middle of the

included in this list. Is it omitted because the emperor wanted to grant it in a special manner, since the monastery of Chyse Petra is located in the Armeniakon theme, from which the emperor originated? (his birthplace, Lacape, was in this theme; see St. RUNCIMAN, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign. A Study of Tenth-Century Byzantium*, Cambridge 1963, 63, note 1). Could it be that the monastery of Chryse Petra is not mentioned because the second passage of Theophanes Continuatus (p. 430) does not speak of individual monasteries, but of mountainous monastic centres?

6. THEODOSIUS MELITENUS, 229.

7. *Vita of St. Paul the Younger*, ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita S. Pauli Iunioris in monte Latro cum interpretatione latina Iacobi Sirmondi S. I.*, *An. Boll.* 11, 1892, 2, p. 22, 8, p. 33. See Rosemary MORRIS, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118*, Cambridge 1995, 39-40.

8. Since the reign of Theophilus monastic foundations are referred to in the mount of Latros: THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, 137. See P. L. VOKOTOPOULOS, *Λάτρος*, *ΕΕΒΕ* 35, 1966-1967, 69-106.

9. GENESIOS, IV, 421-23 (Anni LESMUELLER-WERNER - I. THURN, p. 58). It seems that some monastic nuclei existed in those mountains; see DENISE PAPACHRYSSANTHOU, *'Ο Ἀθωνικὸς Μοναχισμὸς. Ἀρχαὶ καὶ ὀργάνωση*, Athens 1992, 82-83. However, the historian of the tenth century could project his own personal knowledge about the mountainous monastic centres to the narration of the facts of the ninth century.

10. M. KAPLAN, *Les grands propriétaires de Cappadoce (VIe-Xie siècles)*, in: C. D. FONSECA (ed.), *Le aree omogenee della Civiltà Rupestre nell' ambito dell' Impero bizantino: la Cappadocia*, Atti del quinto convegno internazionale di studio sulla civiltà rupestre medioevale nel mezzogiorno d'Italia, Galatina 1981, 147; IDEM, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIIIe siècle*, *Byzantina Sorbonensia* 10, Paris 1992, 301, 302.

11. R. JANIN, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin, II: Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins*, Paris 1975, 116-117.

twelfth century¹². St. Nikon originated in *Πολεμωνιακὴ χώρα παρὰ τὸ θέμα τὸ Ἀρμενιακὸν κειμένη* from an illustrious and quite wealthy family *τῶν λίαν λαμπρῶν καὶ περιβλέπτων καὶ πλούτῳ κομώντων. καὶ γὰρ ἦν αὐτοῖς πολλή τις καὶ παντοδαπῆς ἢ ὑπαρξίς*¹³. St. Nikon abandoned his rich motherland and after some time wandering on foot 'through roads difficult of access and waterless places' he reached Pontus and approached the mountain on the borders of Pontus and Paphlagonia, arriving to the monastery called Chryse Petra¹⁴. The fact that the Vita refers to Pontus (a place-name which is probably considered the eparchy of Polemoniacus Pontus) could mean that St. Nikon was still in the area of Polemoniacus Pontus, on the borderlands with Paphlagonia, on the Armeniac theme's side.

The hagiographic text says that St. Nikon, trying to flee from his father, who wanted to drive him back home, left the monastery of Chryse Petra and being guided by divine grace walked for one day till he came to the river Parthenios¹⁵ (today Bartın Suyu, near Amastris)¹⁶. The narration about the saint's flight is full of supernatural features, as for example in the case where the Mother of the Lord appeared and gave to him a staff with which he managed to pass through the river quite dry, a common *topos* of the hagiographic texts. The anonymous author of the Vita of St. Nikon in using this supernatural element, seems to have the intention of spiritualizing the abilities of the saint; so, we do not know whether the information that he came to the Parthenios river in one day reflects the reality or not.

In the Synaxarium there is a reference to the monastery of Chryse Petra without any information as to the location of the foundation¹⁷.

12. *Vita of St. Nikon*, ed. Od. LAMPSIDES, *Ὁ ἐκ Πόντου ὁσιος Νίκων ὁ Μετανοεῖτε*, Athens 1982, (= *Vita of St. Nikon*) 357-380 (commentary). See also D. F. SULLIVAN, *The Life of Saint Nikon*, Brookline, Massachusetts 1987, 3-7.

13. *Vita of St. Nikon*, 1634-36, 1638-10.

14. ... κατέλαβε τὸν Πόντον καὶ τῷ ὄρει προσέγγισεν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἐν μεθωρίῳ Πόντου τε καὶ Παφλαγονίας, ἐν ᾧ καὶ μοναστήριον ἰδρυται, ὅπερ καὶ Χρυσὴ Πέτρα ...: *Vita of St. Nikon*, 2021-24, 16436-1654. See Eleonora KOUNTOURA-GALAKE, St. LAMPAKES, T. LOUNGHIS, A. SAVVIDES, Vassiliki VLYSSIDOU, *Η Μικρὰ Ασία τῶν θεμάτων. Ἐρευνες πάνω στην γεωγραφικὴ φυσιογνωμία καὶ προσωπογραφία τῶν βυζαντινῶν θεμάτων τῆς Μικρᾶς Ασίας (7ος-11ος αἰ.)*, Athens 1998, 190.

15. *Vita of St. Nikon*, 3611-16, 17318-23. Cf. A. P. KAZHDAN, *Hagiographical Notes*, *Byzantion* 54, 1984, 188-192.

16. K. BELKE, *Paphlagonien und Honorias*, Wien 1996 (= TIB 9), 259.

17. H. DELEHAYE, *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae (Propylaeum ad AASS Novembris)*, Brussels 1902, 254.

According to the editors of the *Vita* of St. Nikon, the exact place of the monastery of Chryse Petra is unknown¹⁸, while Belke in the corresponding volume of *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* is cautious about its location¹⁹. There is a theory based on unclear information about an ancient Byzantine church at the area of Cakalli, 25 km south-west of Amisos²⁰. Another point of view is that Chryse Petra was at Hamidie Boghazy, 45 minutes from Turkhal, where an inscription was found. A part of this misread inscription has the following legend: *Χρ(ιστε) β(ορίθει) Δαμνα(νω) τω (μον)αχ(ω) της Πέτρ(ας)*²¹. The mention of Petra has led to the view that the monastery was located there²². But the scholars who were researching the area *in situ* described the place where the inscription was found as a very confined place carved out of a rock, an 'enkleistra', where two monks could hardly live. This description, on the other hand, does not remind us at all of the monastery of Chryse Petra as it is depicted in the *Vita* of St. Nikon, which speaks about a fully organised monastic community with a church²³ and a number of monks (*τῆ καλλίστη χορεία τῶν ἀδελφῶν*²⁴) offering a variety of diakoniai to the monastery. So, the identification of Chryse Petra with Hamidie Boghazy, as well as the other imprecise one with Cakalli cannot be retained.

In an attempt to locate the Monastery of Chryse Petra, we turn to the geographer of the first century Strabo, born in Amaseia. Strabo, describing his homeland, says that along the Iris river (Amaseia is situated there) there was a *πέτρα ὑψηλὴ καὶ περὶ κρημνοῦ κατερρωγυῖα ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν* which constituted a part of the natural defence of Amaseia and it was connected with the city from its internal part by a bridge: *κατὰ γὰρ τὴν γέφυραν ταύτην ἀπολήγει τὸ ὄρος τὸ τῆς πέτρας ὑπερκείμενον*²⁵. After the rock, Strabo continues, the banks of the river Iris are

18. See the comments of LAMPSIDES, *Vita of St. Nikon*, 398. It has not been identified by the other editor; see SULLIVAN, *The Life of Saint Nikon*, 276.

19. TIB 9, 184-185.

20. A. BRYER - D. WINFIELD, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, Washington 1985, 95, note 44.

21. J. G. C. ANDERSON- F. CUMONT- H. GRÉGOIRE, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines du Pont et de l'Arménie*, *Studia Pontica*, III, Brussels 1910, 254-255.

22. Germaine DA COSTA-LOUILLET, *Saints de Grèce aux VIIIe, IXe et Xe siècles*, *Byzantion* 31, 1961, 350, note 1.

23. *Vita of St. Nikon*, 222-4, 16519-21.

24. *Vita of St. Nikon*, 2217-18.

25. P. KAROLIDES, *Στράβωνος Γεωγραφικῶν τὰ περὶ Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας μετὰ σημειώσεων ἐρμηνευτικῶν*, Athens 1899, 54.

narrow and, *ἔπειτα πλατύνεται καὶ ποιεῖ τὸ Χιλιόκωμον πεδῖον*. From this information it is obvious that the plain of Chiliokomon is not far from Amaseia, nor from the high and abrupt rock of the city.

A homily, which is written in the form of a Vita by John Mauropus, metropolitan of Euchaita, on St. Dorotheos the Younger, gives the information that the monastery of Chryse Petra was not very far from Chiliokomon (the plain with a thousand towns, today Sulu - ova = the plain of the waters) where St. Dorotheos had restored the ancient monastery of Holy Trinity and had received the typikon of the monastery of Chryse Petra: *...καὶ τῆς χρυσῆς καλουμένης πέτρας (οὐδ' ἐκείνη δὲ πόρρω)*²⁶. This short reference reveals that the monastery of Chryse Petra was near Chiliokomon, and in a wider sense, near the Iris river.

The Vita of St. Nikon says that the monastery of Chryse Petra has received its appellation from an ancient tradition and the author explains the meaning of the name as follows: *εἴτε διὰ τὸ σκληρὸν τοῦ τόπου καὶ ἄνικμον καὶ οἶονεὶ χρυσίζον τῷ σφοδρῷ τοῦ ἡλιακοῦ ἀμαρύγματος*²⁷. The tradition of the name Chryse Petra (= Golden Rock) seems to be really ancient and even prior to the eighth century, as Chrysia Petra is mentioned by the so-called Apocalyptic Narration of Daniel (a text of the eighth century). The eighth century Chrysia Petra is obviously the same as the tenth century Chryse Petra²⁸.

We could conjecture that the Iris river, on the banks of which Amaseia was built, was thus called from the reflections of the sunbeams as they fell on the water of the river showing a golden sparkling: the ground of this area was extremely rich, especially in ancient times, in silver and copper²⁹. The evidence of the Vita of St. Nikon that Chryse Petra received its name “on account of its glowing because of the sunbeams falling upon it” could be connected with the origins of the name Iris. It would be reasonable to suppose that Petra also received the surname of Chryse

26. *Vita of St. Dorotheos the Younger*, ed. P. DE LAGARDE, *Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae quae in codice vaticano graeco 676 supersunt*, Abhandlungen der historisch-philolog. Classe der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, 28/1, 1882, 214. I will examine the location of the monastery of Holy Trinity and the personage of Dorotheos the Younger in a forthcoming article.

27. *Vita of St. Nikon*, 2024-26.

28. *Διήγησις περὶ τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου τὸ πῶς μέλλει γενέσθαι καὶ περὶ τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*, ed. K. BERGER, *Die griechische Daniel-Diegese*, Leiden 1976, 12 and comments, 53.

29. Sp. VRYONIS, The Question of the Byzantine Mines, *Speculum* 37/1, 1962, 4, 9 (= *Byzantium: its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World*, London, 1971, no. VI). It is significant that Asterios, bishop of Amaseia (IVth c.), knows the mining activities: PG, 40, 276.

from the golden sparkling which was reflected as the sunbeams fell upon the water. Furthermore Komana, through which the Iris passes, had received in ancient times the surname Chryse, a name which was connected with the myth about Orestes' golden hair (*κόμη*)³⁰, but it could be attributed to the gold reflections upon the water of the Iris river with the 'golden' bed.

If this is put together with the description of the area by Strabo, who talks about 'high and abrupt Petra' and about 'the mountain overlooking Petra', and about Chiliokomon being situated near Amaseia, which according to the Mauro-pous' homily was close to Chryse Petra, we are led to the fascinating identification of the monastery of Chryse Petra with Petra near Amaseia mentioned by Strabo, or somewhere very close to it. A lead seal dating from the eleventh century informs us that this monastic foundation was dedicated to the Prophet Elijah: *Σφραγίς μονῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Ἡλίου τῆς Χρυσῆς Πέτρας*³¹.

30. αὕτη καλεῖται καὶ νῦν ἡ Χρυσῆ Κόμανα, τῆς Ὀρέστου κόμης ἐπώνυμος οὕσα: PROCOPIUS, *Bella* I, 1719-20 (J. HAURY - G. WIRTH)

31. J. NESBITT - N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, 4, Washington 1999, 14.1. The *Vita of Eutychios Patriarch* (552-565, 577-582), PG 86/2, 2337C who was exiled in Amaseia refers to τὸ μοναστήριον ... τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου εἰς Ἀκρόπολιν (οὕτω γὰρ προσαγορεύεται ὁ τόπος τῆς ἐν Ἀμασειᾷ μονῆς). If the Acropolis of the *Vita* is identified with the Petra of Amaseia, then we can suppose that either we have a second monastery there, or that the ancient monastery of the sixth century was renovated and dedicated to the Prophet Elijah.

Ἐλεωνόρα ΚΟΥΝΤΟΥΡΑ-ΓΑΛΑΚΗ, Ἡ τοποθεσία τῆς μονῆς τῆς Χρυσῆς Πέτρας

Ἡ μονή τῆς Χρυσῆς Πέτρας, ἀφιερωμένη στόν Προφήτη Ἡλία, εἶναι γνωστή ἀπό τίς δωρεές τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ρωμανοῦ Λακαπνοῦ καί μαρτυρεῖται στόν Βίο τοῦ ὁσίου Νίκωνος τοῦ Μετανοεῖτε καί στόν Βίο τοῦ ὁσίου Δωροθέου τοῦ Νέου. Ἡ παρούσα ἐργασία προσπαθεῖ νά δείξει ὅτι ἡ μονή βρισκόταν πολύ κοντά στήν Ἀμάσεια, στίς ὄχθες τοῦ ποταμοῦ Ἰριδος καί ἔλαβε τήν προσωνυμία Χρυσῆ (ὅπως καί τά γειτονικά Κόμανα) ἀπό τίς ἀντανεκλάσεις τῶν ἀκτίνων τοῦ ἡλίου πού ἐπεφταν στά νερά τοῦ ποταμοῦ Ἰριδος, καθώς τό ὑπέδαφος τοῦ ποταμοῦ καί ὅλης τῆς περιοχῆς, ιδιαίτερα στήν ἀρχαιότητα, ἦταν πλούσιο σέ ἀσήμι καί χαλκό.