The Location of the Monastery of Chryse Petra

KOUNTOURA-GALAΛE
Eleonora

https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.860

To cite this article:

doi:https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.860
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 mountain. 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 foundation, the Myrelaion, 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 century, inclusive of the monastery of Chryse Petra. However, this monastery was left out of the second grant.

1. καὶ τῇ Χρυσῇ κατονομαζόμενῃ πέτρα. Theophanes Continuatus (Bonn), 418-419; Pseudo-Symeon, 744 (Bonn), (without any reference to the names of the monasteries); Georgios Monachos Continuatus, 910 (Bonn); Theodore Metanephotus, 229-229 (Tafl); Leon Grammaticus, 319-320 (Bonn).


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 VIe siècle à la fin du Xe siècle, Byzantion 61, 1991, 357-358.

4. In the Vita of St. Athanasios (601-1620), p. 30, ed. J. Noiret, Vitae duae antiquae Sancti Athanasii Athoniatus; Turnhout - Luwvain 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 (Βαραχαΐον ορός according to Theodosius Melitenus) is to be identified with the Brachianos mountain and is located at the area of Mycale, close to Mount Latros, where monastic houses start to appear in the sources from the ninth century. The monastic community of Kyminas is mentioned by Genesios together with those of Olympos, Athos and Ida as taking part in the restoration of Orthodoxy in 843. Kyminas is connected with the figure of Michael Maleinos, but its precise location is still problematic; perhaps it was on the borders of Bithynia and Paphlagonia.

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

6. THEODOSIUS MELITENUS, 229.
9. GENESIOS, IV, 431-31 (Anne Lefevre-Weinier - I. Thurn, p. 58). It seems that some monastic nuclei existed in those mountains; see DENISE PAPACHRYSSANTHOU, ‘Ο Άθωνικός Μοναχισμός. Αρχές και οργάνωση, 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.
twelfth century. St. Nikon originated in Πολεμωνιακή χώρα παρά τὸ θέμα τὸ Ἀρμενικὸν κειμένη from an illustrious and quite wealthy family τῶν λίαν λαμπρῶν καὶ περιβλέπτων καὶ πλούτων κομώντων. καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτοῖς πολλὴ ἡ καὶ πανοδαπὴς ἡ ἔργασις. 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 Petra. 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 Armenian 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 Parthenios (today Bartin Suyu, near Amastris). 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 foundation.
According to the editors of the Vita of St. Nikon, the exact place of the monastery of Chryse Petra is unknown\textsuperscript{18}, while Belke in the corresponding volume of Tabula Imperii Byzantini is cautious about its location\textsuperscript{19}. There is a theory based on unclear information about an ancient Byzantine church at the area of Cakalli, 25 km south-west of Amisos\textsuperscript{20}. Another point of view is that Chryse Petra was at Hamide Boghazy, 45 minutes from Turkhal, where an inscription was found. A part of this misread inscription has the following legend: Χρ(ιστε) β(οήθει) Δαμηα(νω) τω (μοναχ(ω)) της Πέτρ(ας)\textsuperscript{21}. The mention of Petra has led to the view that the monastery was located there\textsuperscript{22}. 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 church\textsuperscript{23} and a number of monks (τη καλλίστη xopeig των αδελφών\textsuperscript{24}) offering a variety of diakoniai to the monastery. So, the identification of Chryse Petra with Hamide 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 υψηλή καί περίκρημνος κατερρωγυΐα επί τον ποταμον which constituted a part of the natural defence of Amaseia and it was connected with the city from its internal part by a bridge: κατά γῆν τῆς γέφυρας ταύτης ἀπολήγει το ορός το της πέτρας ύπερκείμενος\textsuperscript{25}. After the rock, Strabo continues, the banks of the river Iris are...
narrow and, ἐπεὶ πλατύνεται καὶ ποιεῖ τὸ Χιλιόκωμον πεδίον. 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 Mauropos, 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 καλούμενης πέτρας (οὔδ' 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: είτε διὰ τὸ σκληρὸν τοῦ τόπου καὶ ἀνικμὸν καὶ οἰονεί χρυσίζον τῷ σφοδρῷ τοῦ ἀπόχρηματος27. The tradition of the name Chryse Petra (= Golden Rock) seems to be really ancient and even prior to the eighth century, as Chrysa Petra is mentioned by the so-called Apocalyptic Narration of Daniel (a text of the eighth century). The eighth century Chrysa 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

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 (κόμης)\textsuperscript{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 Chilokomon being situated near Amaseia, which according to the Mauropous’ hornily 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 μονής τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἡλίου τῆς Χρυσῆς Πέτρας\textsuperscript{31}.

30. αὕτη καλεῖται καί νῦν ἡ Χρυσή Κόμανα, τῆς Ὀρέστου κόμης ἑπώνυμος οὖσα: PROCOPIUS, Bell I, 179-20 (J. HAURY - G. WIRTH)

31. J. NESBITT - N. OIKONOMIDES, 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... του Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου εἰς Ἀκρόπολιν (οὔτω γαρ προσαγορεύεται ὁ τόπος τῆς ἐν Ἀμασείᾳ 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.
Έλεωνόρα ΚΟΥΝΤΟΥΡΑ-ΓΑΛΑΚΗ, Η τοποθεσία της μονής της Χρυσής Πέτρας

Η μονή της Χρυσής Πέτρας, άφιερωμένη στον Προφήτη Ηλία, είναι γνωστή από τις δωρεές του αυτοκράτορα Ρωμανού Λακαπηνού και μαρτυρείται στον Βίο του οσίου Νίκωνος τού Μετανοείτε και στον Βίο του οσίου Δωροθέου τού Νέου. Η παραστά έργασία προσπαθεί να δείξει ότι η μονή βρισκόταν πολύ κοντά στην Άμασεια, στις όχθες του ποταμού Ιριδώς και έλαβε την προσωνυμία Χρυσή (όπως και τα γειτονικά Κόμανα) από τις αντανακλάσεις των άκτινων του ήλιου που έπεφταν στα νερά του ποταμού Ιριδώς, καθώς ο υπεδάφος του ποταμού και όλη της περιοχής, ιδιαίτερα στην αρχαιότητα, ήταν πλούσιο σε άσημι και χαλκό.