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THE CREATION OF AN *HIEROTOPOS* IN BYZANTIUM:
ASCETIC PRACTICE AND ITS SACRED TOPOGRAPHY
ON MT. MENOIKEION*

During his ascetic wanderings in the second half of the 13th century, the Athonite monk Ioannikios established an *hierotopos* on Mt. Menoikeion near Serres in Greece (fig. 1). Ioannikios' actions sanctified the rugged mountainous environment, thus preparing the landscape for the subsequent foundation of the monastery of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos in 1270–1275¹. Remains of this *hierotopos* (= sacred place) are preserved today in the monastery's surroundings. This archaeological evidence is complemented by textual data and visual culture that allows an examination on the process and the construction of sacred space in anticipation of a monastic foundation.

In 1986, the monastery was transformed into a nunnery in an attempt to avert its decline. This effort was successful and today monastic practice flourishes on Mt. Menoikeion under the direction of Abbess Fevronia. Prodromos monastery and the broader locality of Mt. Menoikeion present a unique exam-

* Author's note: This essay draws from various aspects of my dissertation field research, conducted during the summers of 2002, 2003 and 2004. I want to thank my advisor Prof. Slobodan Ćurčić and Prof. Peter Brown for encouraging my work on the monastic landscape of Mount Menoikeion. I also appreciate to the support and advice of Dr. Alice-Mary Talbot, Prof. Elka Bakalova, and to Alexei Lidov who embraced my participation in the conference on '*hierotopoi* and the making of sacred space in Byzantium'. Also, I want to acknowledge Pandelis Xydias and Olga-Maria Bakirtzis for generously helping me to map Ioannikios' monastic experience through their wonderful plans. Xenophon Moniaros and Heather Grossman made invaluable comments on my text. Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank the monastic community of the Holy Monastery of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos under Abbes Fevronia, who warmly fostered me during the course of my work on Mt. Menoikeion.

¹ For a historical outline and an extensive bibliography on the monastery of St. John Prodromos see: *Paschalides S. A. and Strates D. Τα μοναστήρια της Μακεδονίας*. Thessalonike, 1996, p. 355–402 (from now on: *Μοναστήρια της Μακεδονίας*). Also, *Katsaros V. and Papastathis Ch. Ο «Νέος Μέγας Κώδικς» της Μονής Προδρόμου Σερρών* // *Σερραϊκά Ανάλεκτα* 1 (1992), p. 209–212.

ple for the study of monastic *hierotopoi* in Byzantium and their direct relation with monastic founders. The case of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos shows how the broader natural landscape has been sacralized since the monastery's foundation through the continuous interaction of monks with the natural environment. Ioannikios' early ascetic steps were recorded in the written monastic sources and can be traced physically in the topography of its well-preserved environs (fig. 2). During his *ascesis* on Mt. Menoikeion, the holy man followed a circular pattern in the movement of his wanderings. According to the location of the three cave-*kellia* he occupied, Ioannikios carefully encircled the site of the subsequent monastic foundation and thus defined the limits of Prodromos' *hierotopos*.

As it can be traced today, the monastery's *hierotopos* physically comprises a monastic landscape which like the main architectural complex is also concentrically organized around the *katholikon* church, which is the focal point of all monastic life. This landscape consists of various elements that have religious and secular uses. The topography of landmarks such as caves, *kellia* (cells), chapels, gardens and workshops forms a sacred perimeter zone that encompasses the main monastic complex. This topography allowed the community to make sense of the natural environment surrounding it and to formulate it around its presence².

This essay addresses the creation of Menoikeion's *hierotopos* through the comparison of the textual description of the landscape with the remaining archaeological evidence. The sources employed vary from the written to the visual and archaeological. The written sources include the *typikon* of the Monastery of Prodromos, compiled in the beginning of the 14th century by Ioannikios' nephew and successor Ioakeim and the 1902 *Proskynetarion* of Abbot Christophoros, which preserves data from the lost codices of the monastery³. The visual sources include a detailed print from 1761 that highlights both the

² For an anthropological perspective on aspects of landscape, topography and memory, see: Tilley Ch. A Phenomenology of Landscape. Places, Paths and Monuments. Oxford-Providence, 1994, p. 11–34. Also, Stewart P. J. and Strathern A. Introduction // Landscape, Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives / Eds. P. J. Stewart and A. Strathern. London and Sterling, 2003, p. 1–16; Layton R. and Ucko P. J. Introduction: gazing on the landscape and encountering the environment // The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape / Eds. P. J. Ucko and R. Layton. London and New York, 1999, p. 1–18.

³ Τυπική διάταξις // Guillou A. Les archives de Saint Jean-Prodrome sur le mont Ménécée. Bibliothèque Byzantine — Documents 3. Paris, 1955, p. 163–76 (from now on: Τυπική διάταξις). Translated by, Miller T. Menoikeion // Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents / Eds. J. Thomas and A. Constantinides-Hero. Dumbarton Oaks, 2000, vol. 4, no. 58, p. 1579–1612 (from now on: Miller, Menoikeion). Also see the invaluable work of Abbot Christophoros, see: Christophoros. Προσκυνητάριον της εν Μακεδονία παρά τας Σέρρας ιεράς και σταυροπηγιακής και πατριαρχικής μονής του Τιμίου Προδρόμου συνταχθέν παρά Χριστοφόρου ιεροδιδασκάλου και ηγουμένου αυτής. Leipzig, 1904 (from now on: Christophoros, Προσκυνητάριον).

importance of the surrounding environment and the vitality of the monastic community⁴. The archaeological and topographical data presented in this essay are the preliminary results of an intensive field survey of the broader area of Prodromos' environs.

In Byzantium, the formation of such *hierotopoi* was common practice and was related with the ascetic legacy of monastic *ktetors* (monastic founders) who allowed the exploration and the acclimatization of the natural environment. The ascetic activities of monastic founders were narrated in monastic *typika*, saints' lives and other written sources that established the literary monastic tradition⁵. Monks, from the Greek word *monachos*, which literally means alone, pursued spiritual salvation and perfection by withdrawing from the secular world and isolating themselves in a hostile natural environment⁶. The *eremos* of nature presented the ultimate challenge and *ascesis* for their human existence. The monastic principle of the departure into the wilderness is preserved today as a core value in Orthodox monastic tradition. The primal human struggle for survival within the natural world is an important aspect of the ascetic ideal. According to the writings of the abbot of the monastery of Simonopetra on Mt. Athos asceticism presents a model for the balanced relation between man and the natural world⁷. Nature's *hesychia* (peacefulness) is the result of divine *Oikonomia* (care) and thus, it is an essential precondition for the continuity of monastic life. The search for *hesychia* was one of the key values of ascetic life. Together with the rejection of secular life, the absolute obedience to their spiritual father and the elimina-

⁴ The print was published in, *Papastratou D.* Paper Icons: Greek Orthodox religious engravings 1665–1899 / Transl. by J. Leatham. Athens, 1990, vol. 2, p. 498–499, pl. 535 (from now on: Paper Icons).

⁵ On monastic *typika* see: *Manaphes K. A.* Μοναστηριακά Τυπικά, Διαθήκαι (Μελέτη φιλολογική, Διδακτορική Διατριβή Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, Φιλοσοφική Σχολή), Συγγράμμα Περιοδικών της εν Αθήναις Επιστημονικής Εταιρίας — Σειρά Διατριβών και Μελετημάτων. Athens, 1970; *Galatariotou C.* Byzantine Ktetorika Typika: A Comparative Study // *REB* 45 (1987), p. 77–138, and, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* / Eds. J. Thomas and A. Constantinides-Hero, 4 vols // *Dumbarton Oaks*, 2000, vol. 1, p. 1–42.

⁶ *Talbot A.-M.* An Introduction to Byzantine Monasticism // *Illinois Classical Studies* 12.2 (1987), p. 229–241.

⁷ On the relation between the monk and the natural world, see: *Papagiannis Th. and Simonopetritis Elisaios.* Φυσικός χώρος και μοναχισμός. Η διατήρηση της Βυζαντινής παράδοσης στο Άγιον Όρος. Athens, 1994. On Holy mountains, see: *Talbot A.-M.* Les Saintes montagnes à Byzance. Le sacré et son inscription dans l' espace à Byzance et en occident / Ed. M. Kaplan // *Byzantina Sorbonensia* 18. Paris 2001, p. 263–276. For a short discussion of the geographical aspects of Byzantine monasticism, see: *Koder J.* Der Lebensraum der Byzantiner. Historisch- geographischer Abriss ihres mettelalterlichen Staates im östlichen Mittelmeerraum // *Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber* 1. Graz, 1984, p. 109–112 (from now on: *Koder*, Der Lebensraum).

tion of selfishness constituted the essential preconditions for ascetics' desired spiritual goals⁸.

For the most part, the study of Byzantine art and architecture has neglected this essential component of monastic existence, and confined its exploration to within the precinct walls of monastic complexes. In many cases only the main monastic churches have received scholarly attention. The *hierotopical* aspects of the monastic experience within but also beyond the enclosures of monasteries need to be systematically studied for they can reveal a new understanding of religious and secular life in Byzantium.

IOANNIKIOS' ASCENT ON MT. MENOIKEION

Ioannikios' arrival and early activities on Mt. Menoikeion were narrated in the *typikon* of Prodromos monastery and follow the literary *topos* regarding monastic foundations⁹. In 1260, Ioannikios, then a monk on Mt. Athos, received the sad news of the death of his brother and sister-in-law¹⁰. He returned to his hometown of Serres and adopted their orphaned two-year old son, Ioakeim. His new responsibilities did not keep him from achieving his spiritual goals. With his small nephew in tow, Ioannikios retreated to Mt. Menoikeion. Besides the obvious difficulties of raising a child on an isolated mountain, this was in contradiction to the monastic ideal of total severance with family and social life¹¹. However, I think that the ascetic upbringing of Ioakeim symbolically strengthened the planned foundation of Prodromos monastery. The little boy, the chosen successor of his uncle, grew up an ascetic, becoming thus one with the *topos*, the embodiment of monastic presence at Menoikeion¹². Prodromos' monastic ancestry and heritage were secured even before its building foundation.

⁸ For the ethical values of anachoretism and monastic life, see the entry by, Tzogas Ch. Μοναχισμός // Ηθική και Θρησκευτική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, vol. 9. Athens 1966, p. 18–35.

⁹ Talbot A.-M. Founders' Choices: Monastery Site Selection in Byzantium, to appear in the proceedings of the 1998 Belfast conference on *Founders and Re-founders of Byzantine monasteries* (forthcoming). I am indebted Dr. Talbot for giving me a copy of her upcoming essay.

¹⁰ About Ioannikios' life, see: Τυπική διάταξις, 163–164. Also, see: *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, 17–20. Also, Guillou A. Les archives de Saint Jean-Prodrome sur le mont Ménécée // Bibliothèque Byzantine — Documents 3. Paris, 1955, p. 7–9 (from now on: *Guillou*, Les archives).

¹¹ *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, 18, 21. On the relations of monks with family, see: Talbot A.-M. Monastic Experience of Byzantine Men and Women // *Byzantine Saints and Monasteries* / Ed. N. W. Vapori. Brookline, 1985, p. 1–20. Also, *idem*, Family and Monastery // DOP 44 (1990), p. 119–129.

¹² See how Ioakeim in his *typikon* (Τυπική διάταξις, p. 164, ll. 44–51) describes his own monastic upbringing.

The memory of this story is also preserved in the artistic tradition of the monastery of Prodromos. A reliquary dating from 1903, now in the treasury of the monastery of Prodromos, features an interesting *repoussé* figural composition (fig. 3). Ioannikios is represented leading the small boy to the mountain. He holds his nephew's hand as they are about to enter the mountainous landscape of the Menoikeion, where the monastery already exists. The message carried by this composition is clear: the monastery was foreshadowed upon the holy man's arrival in the region. It is important to note that the iconography of the reliquary follows a known model from Byzantine iconographic cycles of the life of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos representing the child Ioannis lead by an angel into the wilderness¹³. In the case of the monastery of Prodromos, Ioannikios acted and was represented according to the models of archangels and saints, and in particular as the patron saint of the monastery.

THE CHAPEL OF THE AGHIOI ANARGYROI IN CHIONOCHORI

The *typikon*'s reference on Ioannikios' early adventures starts by stressing his ascetic inclination and his need to depart from the secular world to pursue his spiritual goals.

[Ioannikios had] no affection for the world at all. He sought to find some small cell so that he could settle there alone and speak purely with God... Traversing the rough and more deserted places about the mountain of Menoikeion, he happened upon a small monastery. He found a very small *kel-lion*, completely neglected and unadorned, only an oratory named after the holy *Anargyroi*, Kosmas and Damian¹⁴.

The site of the referred in the *typikon* 'oratory' of the Aghioi Anargyroi can be identified in the present-day village of Chionochori (Karlikioi) located approximately 4 km to the northeast of the monastery of Prodromos¹⁵. A cave chapel accessed through a small door in the western wall of the Aghioi Anargyroi village church preserves remains of early monastic use

¹³ A wall painting from the monastery of Aghios Kyrillos at Aghia Triada in Kiev from circa 1170; a panel from the cupola of the Baptistery of Parma dating and a detail from the *vita* icon of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos from the monastery of Aghia Aikaterini on Mt. Sinai dated to the beginning of the 13th century are only a few of the comparable examples. My good friend and colleague Ludovico Geymonat generously shared with the related parts from his dissertation: *The Pictorial Program of the Parma Baptistery*. I want to thank him for his help. Also, see: *Katsioti A. Οι σκηνές της ζωής και ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος του Αγίου Ιωάννη Προδρόμου στη Βυζαντινή Τέχνη*. Athens, 1998, p. 85–92.

¹⁴ Miller, "Menoikeion", p. 1591–1592.

¹⁵ *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 18.

(see № 1 in fig. 2, figs. 4–5)¹⁶. According to Christophoros but also to local folklore tradition, Ioannikios resided in this chapel carved into the natural rock. The village church bears the same dedication as the ‘oratory’ Ioannikios’ inhabited. This fact supports the identification of the cave chapel as the first ascetic retreat of Ioannikios and his nephew¹⁷. Archaeological remains in the broader area suggest that the region was an active monastic center during the late Byzantine period¹⁸.

The chapel of the Aghioi Anargyroi is cut in the natural rock and can be accessed from the east. Past the threshold, a narrow corridor leads to the main space of the cave. The roughly rectangular interior space of the chapel measures approximately 5.5 to 4 meters. The chapel’s uneven ceiling has a maximum height of 2.5 meters height and is lit by a small opening cut at the ceiling of its southeast corner. The space is divided in two aisles by two hexagonal marble columns topped with marble basket capitals that are decorated with a motive of sculpted floral crosses, anthemias and roundels. The rock-cut surfaces of the chapel preserve wall paintings that belong to different painting cycles and dates. Unfortunately, their poor state of preservation and the lack of written and inscriptional evidence prevent a firm date. The earlier examples are preserved on the northern side of the entrance corridor. Their iconographic attributes are barely visible. From left to right they can be identified as: Aghios Ioannis Prodromos, an unidentified male saint with a short beard dressed in a red robe and Aghios Nikolaos. The depictions of the Aghioi Anargyroi and of Aghios Demetrios on the northern side of the chapel appear to be of a later date.

The small sanctuary space (1.5 m × 1.5 m) is separated from the main space with an *iconostasis*. Three marble panels comprise the base of the *iconostasis* and three marble colonettes support the post-Byzantine icons of Christ and the Theotokos topped with a marble lintel. All marble pieces bear decorative floral and geometric patterns, anthemias, crosses and roundels. The decoration of the iconostasis is similar to that of the basket-case capitals of the main chapel space. Although crude in its execution the sculpture of the chapel is very close to middle-Byzantine models¹⁹. The interior of the sanctuary is

¹⁶ On the monastery of the Aghioi Anargyroi, Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou E. Άγιοι Ανάργυροι, p. 577–578. Also, Paschalides and Strates, Μοναστήρια της Μακεδονίας, p. 261–265.

¹⁷ Christophoros, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 21. Also, see p. 79 of the liturgy of Peloponnesios M. Ακολουθία του Οσίου και Θεοφόρου πατρός ημών Ιωάννου, μεγαλοσχήμου μοναχού γενομένου, πριν δε Ιωακείμ Μητροπολίτου Ζιχνών, Κτίτορος της Ιεράς ημών Μονής, preserved in: Christophoros, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 71–83.

¹⁸ Samsaris P. Αγνώστη βυζαντινή τοιχογραφία στην περιοχή των Σερρών // Βυζαντινά 14 (1988), p. 399–412.

¹⁹ The courtyard of the 13th century metropolitan church of Serres dedicated to the Aghioi Theodoroi is now used as a depository of 12th and 13th century marble spolia that present useful

decorated with wall paintings executed in oil paint and possibly executed over an earlier painting cycle. Although no inscription on their date survives, the paint used and the style of the paintings suggests a 19th century date, possibly contemporary with the foundation of the village church in 1865.

The village of Chionochori and the chapel of the Aghioi Anargyroi serve as a point of reference for the monastic community. They exhibit the continuity of monastic practice and tradition. The physical evidence of early ascetic and monastic tradition present a model of asceticism that functions as a source of inspiration.

THE *KTETOR*'S CELL

Ioannikios and Ioakeim did not stay long at Chionochori. Only a few years later they departed for the most rugged areas of Menoikeion. According to the *typikon* Ioannikios bequeathed his cell to an elderly monk²⁰. There are several possible explanations for their departure. Ioannikios may have faced difficulties with the monks of the Aghioi Anargyroi monastic community, who were probably hesitant to accept his leadership. It may also be that Ioannikios felt strongly that he had to conquer the wilderness in order to attain his spiritual goals. He was followed by his nephew, who now was his disciple.

In this second phase of his journey into the mountainous wilderness of the Menoikeion, according to Prodromos' *typikon*:

He [Ioannikios] reached the very rough and trackless regions of the mountain, [where] he happened upon a harsh cave, which was even difficult to enter. Fixing his residence in the cave, [Ioannikios] remained there for some time²¹.

Like the Aghioi Anargyroi chapel, the cave Ioannikios occupied can also be identified on Mt. Menoikeion, known in monastic and local tradition as the *ktetor*'s cell (see № 2 in fig. 2, fig. 6). It is situated close to the crest of the mountain at an approximate height of 1,250 meters and can be accessed from the east, following a path from Chionochori at ap-

evidence of sculptural production from Byzantine Serres. The sculptural decoration of the late 10th century *iconostasia* of the monastery of Vatopedi and of the Protaton on Mt. Athos presents comparable examples, see: Pazaras T. N. Το μαρμάρινο τέμπλο του καθολικού της μονής Βατοπεδίου // DChAE 18 (1995), p. 15–32, and, *idem*, Byzantine Sculpture // Treasures of Mount Athos. Exhibition catalogue. Thessaloniki 1997, p. 262–277. The sculpture at the *katholikon* of the Nea Moni in Chios dating to the 10th–11th centuries is another example, see: Bouras Ch. Nea Moni on Chios: history and architecture / Transl. by David A. Hardy. Athens, 1982, p. 182–184.

²⁰ *Τυπική διάταξις*, p. 164, ll.14–16: “...ἐπὶ τὰ ἕτερα μέρη τοῦ ὄρους ἐχώρει ἔχων μεθ’ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ὄν σύνθετος καλὸν μαθητὴν.” *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 18.

²¹ *Miller*, Menoikeion, p. 1592.

proximately three kilometers in distance. Ivan Ivanić during his visit to the monastery in the beginning of the 20th century was pointed to the cave of Prodromos' founder located high on the mountain²². This specific cave is depicted in the 1761 print of the monastery and its environs²³. Labeled as the *ktetor's* cell (η σκήτη του κτήτορα), the cave is shown with topographical accuracy to the northeast of the monastery on the steep slopes of the mountain.

The *ktetor's skete* is a wide yet shallow alcove in the natural rock, approximately 25 m. wide, 10 m. deep and 7–8 m. high, facing to the south-west. The location offers a commanding view of Prodromos' monastic complex, the western slopes of the Menoikeion and all the way the city of Serres. The northwestern corner of the alcove preserves traces of rubble walls and cuts in the rock, evidently signs of temporary human presence. Unfortunately, these remains are not sufficient to suggest the ascetic use of the cave. A careful archaeological investigation could shed more light into the matter. A water spring, also noted in the 1761 print, is located about thirty meters to the northwest of the cave. For the inhabitants of Chionochori and other villages of the Menoikeion, the location was traditionally used as a resting place for shepherds and their flocks²⁴.

Nonetheless, the significance of the site in relation to the topography of the Menoikeion and especially to the monastery of Prodromos must be stressed. Used by Ioannikios or not, the specific location dominates the landscape from above. Thus, it embodies the founding myth of the monastic community's *ktetor*. Ioannikios reached the top of the mountain to underline his spiritual and physical ascendance towards heaven before he moved down to establish his monastery. His cave cell remains the visible reminder of his ascetic achievement.

THE CHAPEL OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

The existence of one more cave chapel in the proximity of the monastery on the steep western slopes of Mt. Menoikeion is one more component of the topography of Prodromos' *hierotopos* and stresses the planned intervisuality of the whole of the sacred landscape of the Prodromos community (see № 3 in fig. 2, fig. 7). The chapel's dedication to the Transfiguration is significant. It

²² *Ivanić I. Makedonija i Makedoniči*, vol. 1. Belgrade, 1906, p. 71. The event took place during his visit to the chapel of Aghia Paraskevi, located next to the water stream running along the mountainous ravine.

²³ *Papastratou*, Paper Icons, p. 498–499, pl. 535.

²⁴ This is according to the testimony of my friend, Stergios, a local from Chionochori who was kind enough to guide me to the cave's impenetrable location. I want to thank him for all his help.

stresses the ascetic deeds of the men inhabiting the mountainous environment, a tradition initiated by the community's leader. Christophoros referred to the Transfiguration chapel in his *Proskynetarion*. He suggested that the chapel of the Transfiguration and the other deep, unexplored caves in its proximity could also be identified as the *skete* of Ioannikios mentioned in the *typikon*. Yet, Christophoros' suggestion is opposed by the accuracy of the 1761 print, folklore tradition and the physical relation of the ktetor's skete to Chionochori. Christophoros did not give the date of the foundation of the chapel or the date of its last usage by ascetics²⁵. Yet, his account can be taken as a *post ante quem*: by the end of the 19th century the cave chapel was not used.

Access to the chapel is difficult due to the steepness of the terrain that requires an actual climb to reach the narrow plateau in front of the chapel's entrance. Carved into the hillside, the cave chapel was once decorated with fresco paintings, of which only faded remains survive today. The cave's opening was blocked with a rubble wall pierced by a short doorway. The cave's interior measures 9 by 2 m. and its ceiling has a variable height of 2.5 to 3 m. The cave's northern end was partially cut to form the sanctuary space, separated from the nave by a rubble wall presumably functioning as a base for an iconostasis. To the south of the chapel's entrance, a wall built against a shallow niche in the natural rock created a small cell. I want to propose that the chapel and the small cell comprise an ascetic unit inhabited by an elder monk and his disciple. This arrangement follows the usual model of ascetic life and of course, Prodromos' founding tradition of Ioannikios and Ioakeim.

The cave's physical location offers a magnificent view of the monastic complex and its immediate environs. The archaeological remains of early ascetic use suggest a link to the legacy of the mountainous wonderings of Ioannikios and his nephew. The close distance to the main monastery allowed visual contact between the hermits and the monastic community. During night the trembling light of candles or oil lamps from the cave reassured and reminded the monks at Prodromos monastery of the living example of ascetic practice.

THE SITE OF THE MONASTIC FOUNDATION

According to the *typikon*, Ioannikios spent considerable time in the cave before he decided to move to his final stop on Mt. Menoikeion (see № 1 in fig. 2):

When his health had suffered considerably as a result of the constant moisture in the cave, he left there and came among the spurs of the mountain-this was, however, totally in accord with the divine plan as I know²⁶.

²⁵ Christophoros, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 18.

²⁶ Miller, Menoikeion, p. 1592.

Prodromos' *ktetor* challenged his physical existence for almost a total of fourteen years until he finally reached the end point of his wandering: the site of a deserted church. Occupying this area presented harsh difficulties (fig. 8):

It was narrow and close, a country of precipices, difficult to enter or leave...almost completely impassable, totally veiled with all kinds of wild plants and briars. It had but one church crumbling with age and roofless, a home only for wild animals and creeping things; The most important task for him was to clear all the area from the existing brushwood to build a roof for the church, and to tend for it about everything and to restore it to a more fitting state... There, each day he put forward effort by effort and pain by pain, he gave neither sleep to his eyes nor rest to his temples until, with God's collaboration through the services of the revered prophet John the Forerunner and Baptist, he had built monastic cells for monks wishing to live with him²⁷.

Ioannikios had reached his final destination, the site of his monastic foundation. According to the narration of the monastic *typikon*, he overcame physical difficulties, the dangers presented by wild animals, the impenetrable location and the harsh geography to accomplish his task. Ioakeim's *typikon* reference to the monastic foundation stresses the importance of his uncle's achievement: 'A city on the mountain cannot be hidden' (fig. 9)²⁸. The mountain had been conquered and sanctified through the establishment of a monastic community.

Choosing the right location for the foundation of a monastery was a task of utmost importance for its founder²⁹. The location had to meet the goals of the founder but also the spiritual and the daily life needs of the monastic community. Matters of security were taken seriously into consideration, given that the monastery had to survive on a daily basis, as it fulfilled its symbolic, eternal dedication to prayer and spiritual salvation.

The site Ioannikios chose is virtually hidden in a ravine on Mt. Menoikeion, approximately 15 km to the northeast of Serres³⁰. The location

²⁷ Τυπική διάταξις, p. 164, ll. 19–34: "Καὶ περὶ τοὺς πρόποδας τοῦ ὄρους γεγόμενος..."

²⁸ Τυπική διάταξις, p. 164, l.39: "...μὴ δύνασθαι πόλιν ἐπάνω ὄρους κείμενην κρυβῆναι".

²⁹ On the process of choosing an ideal location for a monastic establishment, see: *Talbot, Founders' Choices* (forthcoming), and, *idem*, *Byzantine Monastic Horticulture: The Textual Evidence // Byzantine Garden Culture* / Eds. A. Littlewood, H. Maguire and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn. Dumbarton Oaks, 2002, p. 37–41.

³⁰ On the geographical location and the natural environment of the monastery of Prodromos, see the very interesting description of *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 9–12. Also, see the brief reference of *Zesiou K. Μακεδονίας Χριστιανικά μνημεία*. Athens, 1914, p. 44.

provides safety but also abundant water resources and a healthy climate. The steep ravine runs through the southern slopes of the mountain all the way to the plain of Serres and the valley of the river Strymon³¹. The proximity to Serres is also important. The mountain and the city are the external limits of the monastic landscape but also the two symbolic poles between which monastic life struggles to find its balance. The secular, earthly world of the city is in contrast to the isolated, inhospitable wilderness of the mountain and physical movement between the two stresses the spiritual ascendance of monks and pilgrims closer to heaven.

During the early years of the Prodomos monastery's life, Ioannikios, the founder of the community, worked steadily to assure its prosperity through the acquisition of land property. One of the earliest documents preserved in Prodomos' codices, dated to 1278, records the purchase of grapevines by Ioannikios in the proximity of Serres³². The maintenance of Prodomos' *hierotopos* had also practical aspects and concerns. According to Stelios Papadopoulos, the written confirmation of land property was of the utmost importance for monastic communities, since it provided them with legal papers³³. This concern on the part of Ioannikios and his successors proved to be invaluable in times of dispute, when the community faced several real-estate disputes. This process continued through Prodomos monastery's history until today³⁴.

PRODROMOS' MONASTIC LANDSCAPE AFTER IOANNIKIOS DEATH

Ioannikios died in the year 1300 bequeathing the monastery to his nephew Ioakeim, Bishop of Zichna³⁵. Mt. Menoikeion had been conquered and monastic life had been established. But what happened to Prodomos' *hierotopos* after the death of its creator and how did the monastic community relate to it?

The 1761 engraving provides an important view of the matter (fig. 10)³⁶. The work was commissioned in Vienna by Chatze-Petkos Spandones, bene-

³¹ On the geography and the natural landscape of the Eastern Balkan Peninsula and Macedonia, see: Koder, *Der Lebensraum*, p. 22–24; Geyer B. *Physical Factors in the Evolution of the Landscape and Land Use // The Economic history of Byzantium from the Seventh through the fifteenth Century* / Ed. A. E. Laiou. Washington D.C., 2002, p. 32ff.

³² Guillou, *Les archives*, p. 22, folio 3–4. Also, see: *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 19.

³³ Papadopoulos St. *Ο χώρος // Σιμωνόπετρα* / Ed. St. Papadopoulos. Athens, 1991, p. 30–45.

³⁴ *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 27, speaks of the actions of the successor of Ioannikios, Abbot Ioannikios Kaloudes. On the property of the monastery of Prodomos, see: Kaphtantzis G. *Ιστορία της πόλεως των Σερρών και της περιφέρειας της, τόμος τρίτος: Βυζαντινή περίοδος-Τουρκοκρατία, Νεώτεροι χρόνοι*. Thessalonike, 1996, p. 70–79.

³⁵ Guillou, *Les archives*, p. 8.

³⁶ *Papastratou*, *Paper Icons*, p. 498–499, pl. 535.

factor of the monastery from Serres³⁷. The founders and patrons of the monastic community, as well as scenes from the cycle of the life of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos are depicted in the upper half of the engraving panel. The monastery is depicted accurately in the center of a defined environment featuring a visually detailed, but also verbally labeled representation of its different topographical components. The monastic community in procession is presented exiting the open gate thus embracing its immediate surroundings. The engraving makes it clear that the spiritual and symbolic boundaries of the monastery's life extended outside the confines of the monastic enclosure and embraced the surrounding landscape. The *hierotopos* of Prodromos monastery is defined by the topography of its immediate environs.

Seven rural chapels dating as early as the 14th century surround the monastery and have served a variety of usages through the centuries (fig. 11). They mark monastic property and signify the external parameters of the monastery. At the same time they have an apotropaic role keeping evil and danger at bay. The monastic cemetery and ossuary preserve not only the remains of monks since the foundation of the monastery, but also display the continuity of monastic tradition on Mount Menoikeion.

Gardens and olive groves provide the essential economic means for the community while fulfilling the symbolic role of the monastery as a reflection of the heavenly garden³⁸. Monastic vegetable gardens are considered a model of systematic agricultural cultivation and production preserv-

³⁷ Depictions of monasteries in prints, drawings, wall paintings and icons present similar views of monastic landscapes and comprise an invaluable source of visual information and should be studied closely. Although they lack photographic accuracy, they reveal the landscape and environmental aspect of monastic existence. For example the drawings of the Russian monk Vasilii Barskii who traveled extensively in the Balkans in the 18th century give a valuable view of the world of Byzantine and post- Byzantine monasticism. His drawings depict monasteries within their immediate rural surroundings and the natural landscape, stressing the importance of monastic outer limits, see: *Grigorovich-Barskii V. Τα θαυμαστά μοναστήρια του Αγίου Όρους Άθω, έτσι όπως τα είδε ο ευλαβής οδοιπόρος μοναχός Βασίλειος Γρηγόροβιτς Μπάρσκι όταν περιηγήθηκε την ιερή πολιτεία του Άθω το έτος 1744* / Ed. A. N. Tachiaos. Thessaloniki, 1998. On monastic prints, see the introduction of the very important two-volume work of *Papastratou*, *Paper icons*, vol. 1, p. 17–35, and especially vol. 2, p. 337–530 on prints of monasteries; *Nedić O. Grafičke pretstave srpskih manastira kao izvorni podaci pri konzervatorsko-restuaratoskim radovima* // *Zbornik Zaštite Spomenika Kulture* 9 (1958), p. 17–38. A very interesting essay on the depictions of monasteries in prints and the ways they represent the monastic world is given in: *Papadopoulos St. Οι χάρτινες εικόνες. Μια διαφορετική προσέγγιση* // *Ανθρωπολογικά — Μουσειολογικά. Μικρά Μελετήματα* / Ed. St. Papadopoulos. Athens, 2003, p. 472–77. Also in the same volume of collected essays, *idem*, *Ο χώρος ως τόπος άγιος. Μία ανθρωπολογική προσέγγιση*, p. 516–521.

³⁸ *Talbot*, *Monastic Horticulture*, passim. On monastic gardens in Russia and Western Europe, see: *Lichachev D. S. Poeziia sadov: k semantike sadovo-parkovykh stilei: sad kak tekst*. St. Petersburg, 1991, p. 39–26.

ing old traditional methods. Even today, when access to the market of Serres is a matter of minutes, almost all the ingredients of the daily monastic menu of Prodromos come from their own vegetable garden thus maintaining the monastic 'autarkeia,' self-sufficiency. The presence of gardens at Prodromos has been and still is the ultimate proof of the community's taming of the wilderness of Menoikeion. Being able to cultivate the harsh mountainous terrain, to make the steep rocks produce vegetables, flowers and olives attests to the triumph of monastic spirit and labor.

The 'sub-monastic' environment of Prodromos monastery and its economy was supported by a network of stone bridges, aqueducts and paved paths. The management of water resources was crucial for the irrigation of gardens and plantations but also to provide power for the monastic mills. The network of paths and paved roads guaranteed communication with nearby villages but also to the major urban center and market of Serres³⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

On the slopes of Mt. Menoikeion the key physical remainders of Prodromos monastery's *hierotopical* tradition are the rural cave-cells and chapels located in the monastery's surroundings. Their location preserves and proves the information given in written and visual monastic sources.

The presence of ascetic cells in proximity to organized, cenobetic monastic communities has been related to the occurrence of a previous *lavra* (cluster of cells or caves for ascetics with a common church, with a church and sometimes a refectory at the center). This issue has been long debated among scholars in relation to the evolution of monastic practice from *lavra* to organized monastery, and the antagonism or the co-existence of the two systems of monastic practice⁴⁰. I believe that the presence of ascetic cells in the surroundings of monasteries in Byzantium, should be also understood as the indispensable components of the *hierotopoi* of monastic establishments. The key example of the Megiste Lavra on Athos has been surrounded by five *kellia* since its foundation by Athanasius of Athos in 963⁴¹. As at the Prodromos, the ascetic struggles of the spiritual fathers of the community can still be traced on the slopes of Athos, in the vicinity of the monastery. Multiple other examples of this system are extant. At the 10th century monastery of Rila in Bulgaria, a similar mountainous sacred land-

³⁹ *Christophoros*, Προσκυνητάριον, p. 7–9.

⁴⁰ *Popović S.* Sabaite Influences on the Church of Medieval Serbia // *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* / Ed. J. Patrich. Leuven, 2001, 385–407.

⁴¹ See the entries on Athanasios of Athos and the monastery of the Great Lavra in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. New York and Oxford, 1991.

scape records the early steps of its founder John of Rila⁴². The monastery of Trescavac in the F. Y. R. O. Macedonia preserves comparable examples of rural kellia and cave-chapels in its surroundings⁴³. The monastery of Kosinitza (Eikosifinissa) on Mt. Pangaion is another comparable case⁴⁴. Monastic centers such as Mt. Papikion in Thrace and Mt. Latros in Asia Minor, present interesting cases of mountainous regions transformed into holy mountains by monastic presence⁴⁵.

The application of the same concept to urban monasteries offers a challenging comparison to rural examples. Urban monasteries such as the Chora in Constantinople, or the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki to name two well known examples certainly had their own sacred surroundings. The outer limits of the *hierotopoi* of urban monasteries could be perhaps identified in their urban metochia, towers and property holdings. Further consideration of the matter could certainly help a better understanding of urban landscapes and *hierotopoi* in Byzantium.

Monastic life has tussled with Mt. Menoikeion ever since the ritual arrival of Ioannikios in 1260. As the monastery's first *ktetor* he transformed of the rugged countryside into sacred monastic landscape. His fourteen year-long ascetic adventure defined the sacred limits of the monastery's *hierotopos* and asserted the community's monastic mythology. Continuously inhabited until today, the monastery's surroundings sustain its long *hierotopical* tradition making Prodromos monastery an important example of the practice in Byzantium.

⁴² Hristov K., Stojkov G. and Mijatev K. The Rila Monastery. Sofia, 1959.

⁴³ Smolčić-Makuljević S. The Sacral Topography of Treskavac Monastery // *Balcanica* 35 (2004), p. 285–313.

⁴⁴ On the monastery of Eikosifinissa, see: *Paschalides and Strates*, Μοναστήρια της Μακεδονίας, p. 63–105.

⁴⁵ On Mt. Papikion, see: *Zekos N.* Mount Papikion, Archaeological Guide. Komotini, 2001; *idem*, Αποτελέσματα ανασκαφικών ερευνών στο Παπίκιον Όρος // Proceedings of the First International Symposium for Thracian Studies, “Byzantine Thrace” Image and Character / Ed. Ch. Bakirtzis. *ByzF* 14, 1 (1989), p. 677–693. On Mt. Latros: *Peschlow-Bindokat A.* Der Latmos. Eine undekannte Gebirgslands an der türkischen Westküste. Mainz, 1996; *Kirby A. and Mercangöz Z.* The monasteries of Mt. Latros and their Architectural Development // *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis* / Eds. M. Mullet and A. Kirby. *BTT* 6.2 (1997), p. 51–77.

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СОЗДАНИЕ «ИЕРОТОПОСА» В ВИЗАНТИИ:
АСКЕТИЧЕСКАЯ ПРАКТИКА И ЕЕ САКРАЛЬНАЯ
ТОПОГРАФИЯ НА ГОРЕ МЕНИКЕОН

Уход от светского мира в пустыню в поисках духовного спасения — сущностный идеал монашества. Монахи — от греческого *монахос*, буквально «один», — живут окруженными враждебной природой, выживание наедине с которой — ясное свидетельство их жажды духовного совершенства. Присутствие монахов, преодолевавших все телесные потребности и всех демонов, укрощает природу, создавая сакральный ландшафт, на фоне которого протекает их физическая и духовная борьба.

Сотворение сакрального ландшафта, окружавшего монашескую жизнь, было обычным для Византии, тесно связанной с жизнью основателей монашества. Их действия, положившие начало монашеским институтам, описываются в монашеских типиконах и других письменных источниках, положивших начало монашеской литературе. В то же время пещеры, кельи и храмы вокруг монастырей хранят следы ранней монашеской жизни, создавая реальную топографию сакрального ландшафта. Например, монастырь Великая Лавра был окружен пятью *кельями* с момента его основания Афанасием Афонским в 963 году. Духовное напряжение, накал жизни монашеского сообщества могут быть прослежены на склонах горы Афон, поблизости от монастыря. В болгарском Рильском монастыре X века похожий горный пейзаж хранит следы его основателя Иоанна Рильского. Еще одним примером для сравнения может послужить монастырь Косиница (Eicosifinissa) на горе Панагион. Такие центры монашеской жизни, как гора Папикион во Фракии и гора Латрос в Малой Азии, представляют интересные примеры трансформации скалистых мест в святые горы, созданные монашеским присутствием. Аналогичным образом могут быть проанализированы и городские монастыри, иеротопическая практика которых должна быть сопоставлена с обителями, находящимися в сельской местности.

Изучение византийского искусства и архитектуры по большей части пренебрегало этим важным компонентом монашеской жизни, ограничиваясь изолированным пространством внутри монастырских стен, а зачастую внимание ученых привлекала лишь главная церковь.

Моя статья посвящена изучению сакрального ландшафта, окружающего монастырь Св. Иоанна Предтечи на горе Меникеон рядом с Серрами в северной Греции. Превращение гористой местности в са-

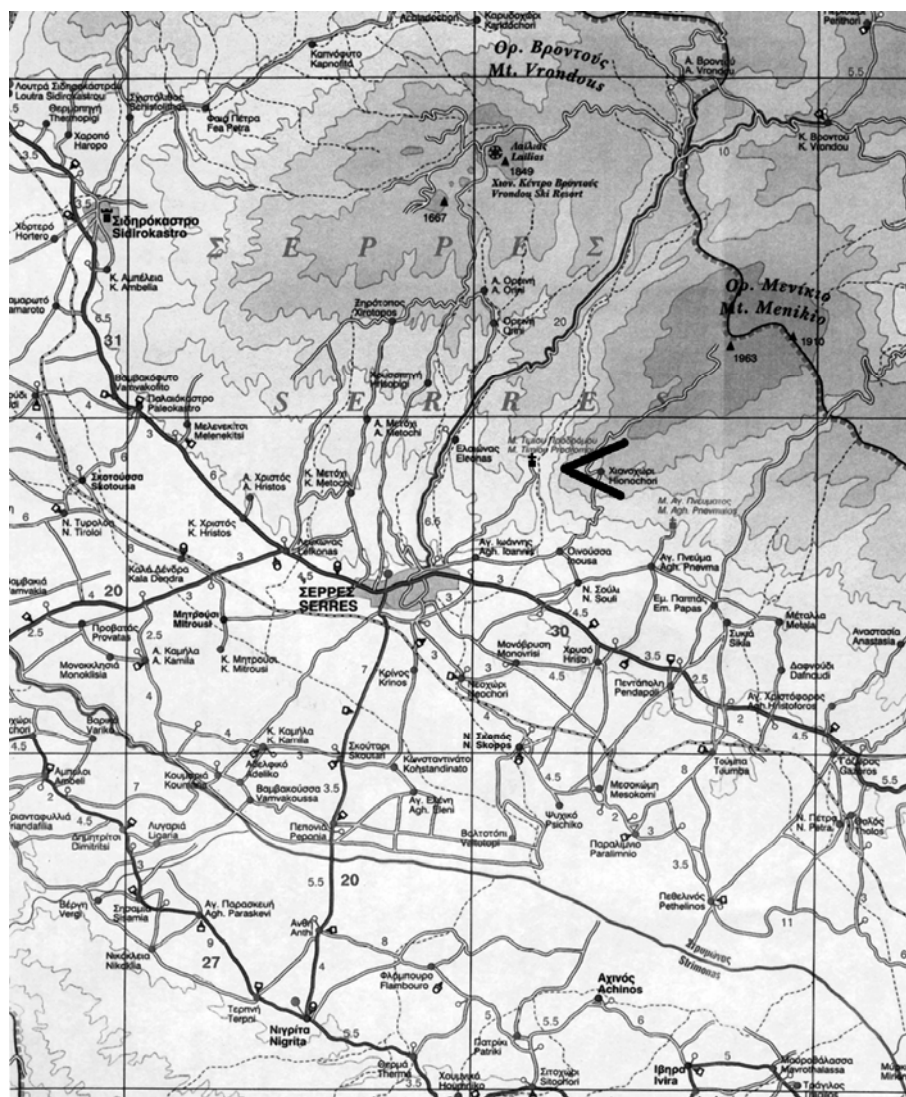
кральное пространство напрямую связано с основателем монастыря Иоанникием, который в 1261 г. прибыл в Серры с горы Афон. Его активное пребывание на склонах Меникеона привело около 1275 г. к основанию монастыря Иоанна Предтечи. *Типикон* монастыря, составленный в начале XIII века племянником и продолжателем Иоанникия Иоанном, рассказывает о деяниях основателя монастыря. Первые аскетические подвиги Иоанникия определили сакральное пространство монастыря и в то же время заложили основы преданий монашеской общины.

По прибытию в Серры Иоанникий удалился на склоны горы Меникеон, не имея «вообще никакой привязанности к миру, и не желал быть поглощенным мирским». Настойчиво следуя своим духовным целям, он бродил по горным склонам, все дальше удаляясь в «очень суровые и непроходимые районы горы» и испытывая до предела свои телесные возможности. После 12 лет скитаний по горе Меникеон Иоанникий наконец достиг места, где должен был быть основан его монастырь. Обжить это место оказалось очень трудно, так как оно было узким и замкнутым, полным обрывов, трудным для входа и выхода, почти полностью непроходимым, сплошь покрытым всеми видами диких растений. Там была лишь одна церковь, развалившаяся от времени и не имевшая крыши, служившая пристанищем лишь диким зверям и ползучим тварям. Основатель и первый ктитор монастыря Иоанна Предтечи освятил и в то же время покорил горную пустыню. Как ясно из сохранившихся источников, он должен был не только преодолеть физические препятствия и выжить в необитаемом горном районе, но и одержать верх над предшествующей монашеской традицией. Ради достижения своих целей Иоанникий должен был победить и приручить «пустыню» умов и душ отшельников, населявших склоны святой горы.

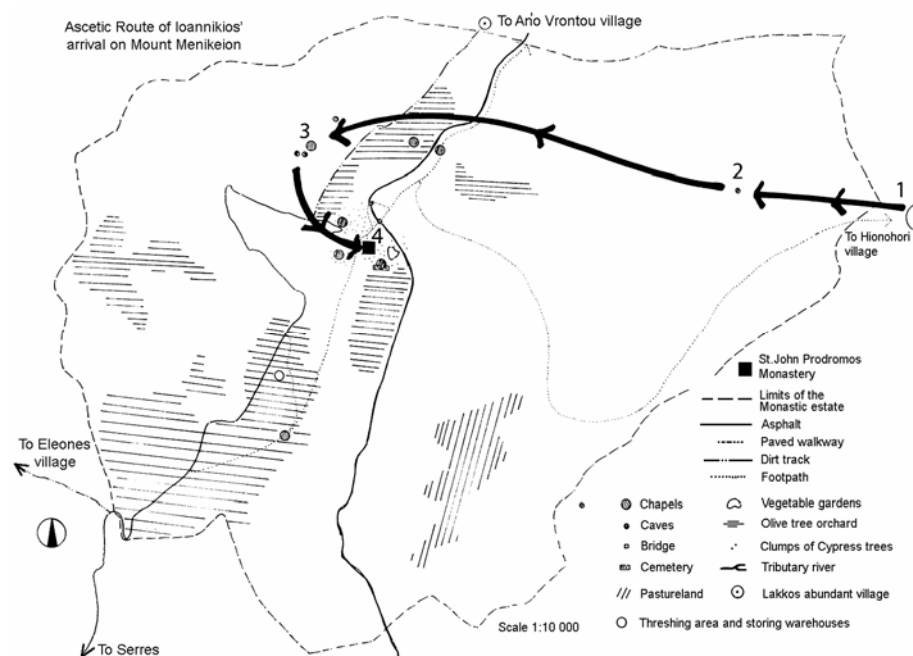
Центром монастыря был кафоликон, вокруг которого концентрировались все монастырские постройки и окружающие их элементы монастырского комплекса. Это окружение, состоящее из различных архитектурных и природных элементов, служило внешним ограждением, поддерживающим, но вместе с тем и направляющим монашеское существование. Сохранившиеся в пещерах фрески и следы древней монашеской жизни порождают рассказы о деяниях основателя братства Иоанникия, дошедшие до нас в монастырских рукописях и в устной традиции. Фрески XV в. в окрестных сельских часовнях свидетельствуют об их давней принадлежности монастырю. Они одновременно отмечают границы монастырских земель и служат апотропеями, охраняющими от зла и опасностей. Монастырское кладбище и оссуарий не только хранят останки монахов с момента основания монастыря, но и свидетельствуют о преемственности монашеской традиции на горе Меникеон. Сады и

оливковые рощи, имеющие для монастыря экономическое значение, вместе с тем играют важную символическую роль, закрепляя за монастырем образ райского сада.

Населенный сегодня небольшой общиной сестер, монастырь Св. Иоанна Предтечи является показательным примером византийской монашеской традиции. Протекающая в сакральном ландшафте повседневная монастырская жизнь одухотворяет гористую пустыню Меникеона, превращая ее в рай на земле, где в духовных и физических подвигах расцветают души монахинь.



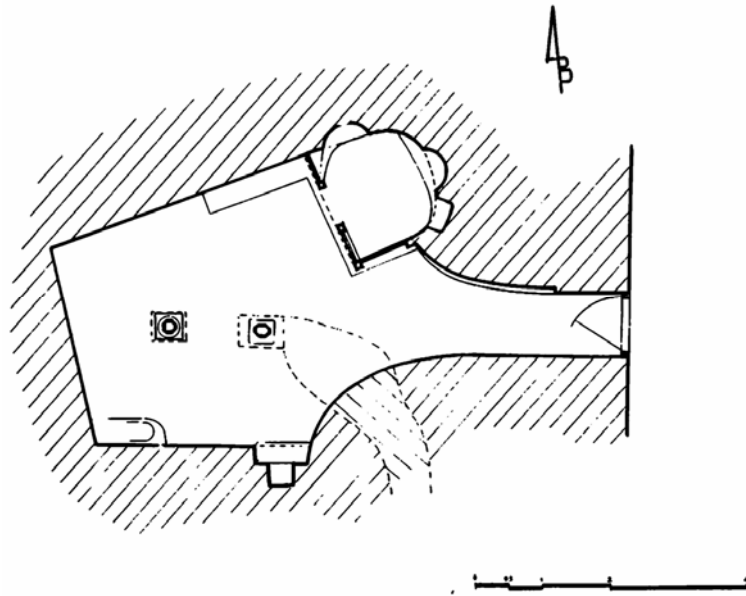
1. Map of Serres and its vicinity (Municipality of Serres)



2. Mt. Menoikeion, the environs of the monastery of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos, topographical plan indicating the route followed by Ioannikios between 1260 and 1270/75 (by Olga-Maria Bakirtzis)



3. Aghios Ioannis Prodromos monastery, silver reliquary, detail depicting Ioannikios leading his boy nephew Ioakeim to Mt. Menoikeion, 1903 (photo: author)



4. Mt. Menoikeion, Chionochori, Aghioi Anargyroi cave-chapel, plan (by Pandelis Xydias)



5. Mt. Menoikeion, Chionochori, Aghioi Anargyroi cave-chapel, interior (photo: author)



6. Mt. Menoikeion, the cell of the *ktetor*, view from the southwest (photo: author)



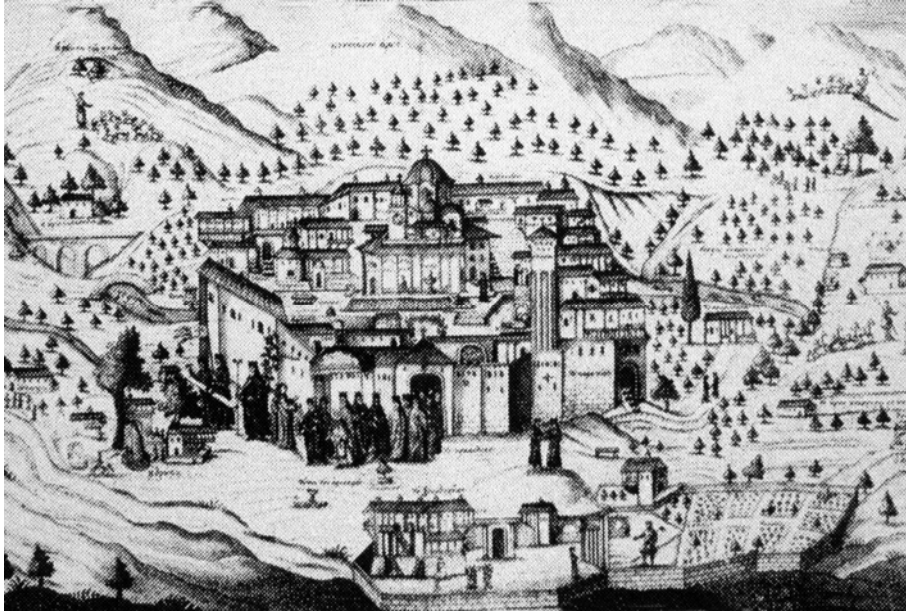
7. Mt. Menoikeion, the Metamorphosis chapel, view of the entrance (photo: author)



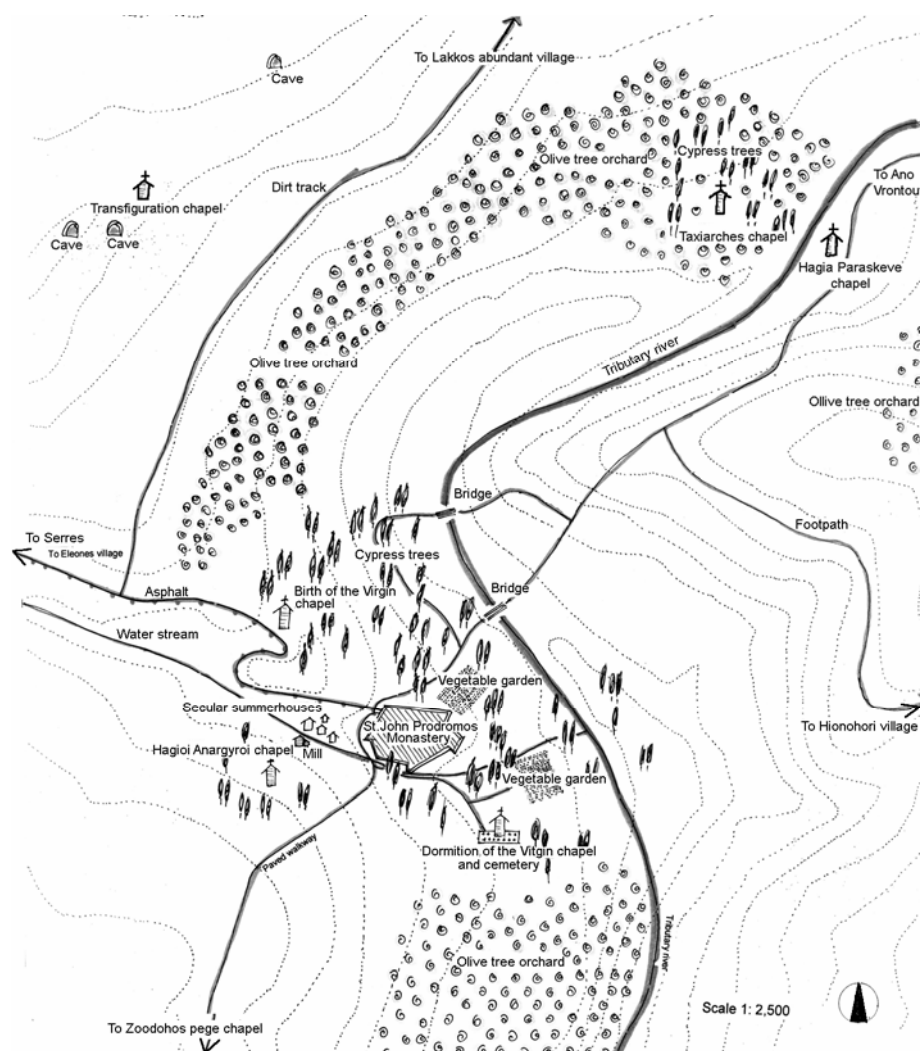
8. Mt. Menoikeion, the natural landscape in the vicinity of Prodromos monastery (photo: author)



9. Aghios Ioannis Prodromos monastery, bird's eye view (photo: author)



10. Aghios Ioannis Prodromos monastery, print depicting the monastery of Prodromos, its surrounding landscape and scenes from the life-cycle of the Saint, Vienna, 1761 (from the archives of the monastery of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos)



11. Mt. Menoikeion, the environs of Prodhomos monastery, topographical plan (by Olga-Maria Bakirtzis)