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DESERT AS HEAVENLY JERUSALEM:  
THE IMAGERY OF A SACRED SPACE IN THE MAKING

In Christian thought and practice the *desert* is a complex phenomenon carrying a broad and ambiguous meaning. Isolated from the world, it is a space for ascetic endeavour — the contemplation of God and overcoming of all earthly limitations. It therefore is a harsh and dangerous zone replete with demonic temptations. But it is also a sacred space, the scene of divine visions and revelation which offers the possibility of spiritual conversion and calls to complete devotion to God. Some of the major biblical figures such as Moses, the prophet Isaiah and St John the Baptist acted in such a setting, and Christ himself began his mission and experienced his first temptation by demons<sup>1</sup>. At a deeper level of meaning, the *desert* is much more than just a “place”. It is a path, a way of ascent, and a powerful symbol of man’s spiritual space<sup>2</sup>. The *desert* is also a metaphor for the heavenly abode, and consequently, an important eschatological category. It is the seat of the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (51: 3): “For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord...” Like Abraham, a true Christian, and especially an ascetic, is a stranger in this world<sup>3</sup>, and thus seeks abode in “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11: 10). It is in the light of the view of Heavenly Jerusalem as his true homeland that

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<sup>1</sup> *Guillaumont A.* La conception du désert chez les moines d’Égypte // Aux origines du monachisme Chrétien. Paris, 1979, p. 67–87; *Goehring J. E.* Ascetics, Society and the Desert // Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism. Harrisburg, PA, 1999, p. 73–87.

<sup>2</sup> *Chryssagvis J.* In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Bloomington, 2003, p. 33–36.

<sup>3</sup> *Lanne E.* La “*xeniteia*” d’Abraham dans l’œuvre d’Irénée. Aux origines du thème monastique de la “*peregrinatio*” // Irénikon 47 (1974), p. 163–183; see also *Guillaumont A.* Le dépaysement comme forme d’ascèse dans le monachisme // Aux origines du monachisme Chrétien, p. 89–116.

should be understood the phrase “my home” of Clement of Alexandria<sup>4</sup> and the message of Ephrem Syrus: “Be fond of desert abodes, in that way you shall attain heaven”<sup>5</sup>.

Functionally and semantically, the concept of *desert* requires a broad framework of research and a flexible enough definition. If it is a *locus* of contact between the earthly and the heavenly, and a metaphor for the “city above”, locales and contents such as *mountains* and *caves* should be included in the same category<sup>6</sup>. Ascetical literature had since earliest times described them as integral parts of the monastic environment. A good example in that respect is the story of Elijah, a recluse of the Thebaid Desert, recorded in the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*: “He was famous for having spent seventy years in the terrible desert. No description can do justice to that rugged desert in the mountain where he had his hermitage, never coming down to the inhabited region ... He had his seat under a rock in a cave, so that even the sight of him was very impressive”<sup>7</sup>. That the concepts of *cave*, *desert*, and *mountain* not only are close to one another in meaning but indeed interchangeable is confirmed by numerous examples recorded in the *Lausiac History*<sup>8</sup>, *Apophthegmata Patrum*<sup>9</sup>, and many other compositions of a later date. Needless to say, natural features such as deserts, caves and mountains usually formed part of a single landscape even in reality.

Such locales should therefore be interpreted on the same semantic level, historical as well as hierotopic. As for the historical, well known is their importance in the sacral topography of the Judaic, and subsequently Christian, Jerusalem and Holy Land. Points of demarcation between the upper and nether worlds, between the luminous and demonic realms, caves were considered particularly suitable for contact with the transcendent<sup>10</sup>. As a result,

<sup>4</sup> Thraede K. Jerusalem II (Sinnbild) // Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum 17 (1995), p. 718–764.

<sup>5</sup> Святой Ефрем Сирин. Творения. Том V. Москва, 1995, p. 213.

<sup>6</sup> The problem of forms of ascetic spaces has been methodologically well delineated by Kiknadze Z. Tre volti dell’ascesi // Studi sull’Oriente Cristiano, Miscellanea Metreveli 4/2 (2000) 29–40; see also: Гагова Н. Шпадијер И. Две варијанте анахоретског типа у јужнословенској хагиографији. Теодосијево Житије светог Петра Коришког и Јевтимијево Житије светог Јована Рилског (Two versions of the anchoritic type in the South-slavic hagiography, Teodosije’s *Life of St Petar of Koriša* and Eythimios’ *Life of St John of Rila*) // Словенско средњовековно наслеђе / Ed. by З. Витић, Т. Јовановић, И. Шпадијер. Београд 2001, p. 159–174.

<sup>7</sup> The Lives of the Desert Fathers // The *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* / Transl. by N. Russel, Introd. by B. Ward. London–Oxford, 1981, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Palladius: The *Lausiac History* / Transl. and annotated by R. T. Meyer. London, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection / Transl. by B. Ward. Kalamazoo, Mich., 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Daniélou J. Le symbole de la caverne chez Grégoire de Nysse, Mullus, Festschrift Theodor Klauser, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 1, Münster 1964, p. 43–51;

many important biblical events are associated with them, as evidenced by the sacred caves widely distributed over the map of the Holy Land<sup>11</sup>. Of course, the “three mystical caves” enjoyed a special status, those in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and on the nearby Mount of Olives. This sacred “triad of caves”, *memoriae* to Christ’s birth, burial and ascension, distinctively reflected the very essence of Christian faith. A clue to their meaning and function is provided by the epithets attached to them by Eusebius: the “saving cave”, the “holy cave”, and the “most holy cave”<sup>12</sup>. Eusebius also believes that the sepulchral cave at Jerusalem is no mere memorial place, but an affirmation of the reality of Christ’s resurrection. Thus, watching that cave, a believer sees “a likeness of the coming to life of the Saviour ... a visible and clear sign of the amazing things that took place there, bearing witness to the Resurrection of the Saviour”<sup>13</sup>. St Athanasius of Alexandria goes even farther and says that “seeing the holy cave of the resurrection” is comparable with “the excellence of paradise”<sup>14</sup>.

The proximity of Jerusalem was decisive in establishing the illustrious *deserts*. That is what guided Chariton, the founder of monasticism in the Judean Desert. The same thinking and motivation can be found in his followers such as Euthymius the Great, explicit in his desire to pray in the desert that abuts onto the holy city. The most explicit, however, is Cyril of Scythopolis. He labels the Wilderness of Judea “the desert of Jerusalem” or “the desert of the holy city”, identifying it with the environment the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist and Christ himself acted in. Cyril’s view of the

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see also: Ćurčić S. Cave and Church. An Eastern Christian Hierotopical Synthesis // Hierotopy, The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia / Ed. by A. M. Lidov. Moscow, 2006, p. 225–236.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor J. E. Christians and the Holy Places. The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins. Oxford, 1993, p. 157–179.

<sup>12</sup> Walker P. W. L. Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century. Oxford, 1990, p. 184–217; Wilken R. L. The Land Called Holy // Palestine in Christian History and Thought. New Haven and London, 1992, p. 88–91 (with sources and bibliography).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 90. This possibility of, by touring Jerusalem’s holy places, “renewing the image of what had happened, that is, re-presenting the saving events of the past in the present,” was the true motivation of Holy Land pilgrimage movement. From the ample literature, I point to: Hunt E. D. Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–460, Oxford, 1982; The Blessings of Pilgrimage / Ed. by R. Ousterhout. Urbana and Chicago, 1990; Bieberstein K. Die Hagia Sion in Jerusalem. Zur Entwicklung ihrer Traditionen im Spiegel der Pilgerberichte // Akten des XII Internationalen Kongresses für Christliche Archäologie, Teil I, Münster 1995, p. 543–551; Talbot A.-M. Byzantine Pilgrimage to Holy Land from the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century // The Sabaitic Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present / Ed. J. Patrich. Leuven, 2001, p. 97–110.

<sup>14</sup> Frank G. A. The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrimage to Desert Ascetics in the Christian East during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries / Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard 1994, p. 74.

Judean Desert as the seat of Isaiah's above-quoted prophecy (51: 3) had particularly significant, ideological, implications<sup>15</sup>. In that way a concrete and "historical" eremitic space assumed a timeless, eschatological dimension and became part of the "Zion" programme.

Inseparable components of the sacred topography of Jerusalem are also holy *mountains*, from early times thought of as places charged with divine energy and as symbols of spiritual ascent<sup>16</sup>. Many biblical quotations — such as, for example, Psalm 125: 1–2 ("They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever"), Psalms 81 and 87, Isaiah 40: 9, Hebrews 12: 22 etc. — clearly show that Jerusalem was seen as the "City on the mountain". The view rested on actual fact. Golgotha, Mount Zion, the Temple Mount, the Mount of Olives were points of the highest order, and each had its special place and meaning in evoking Sacred History<sup>17</sup>. A symbol of particular power and aura among them was the holy mount of Zion, David's city. It contained many associations to the life of Christ such as the Last Supper, and Christ's trial before Caiapha, believed to have taken place somewhere there. And yet, the most important event associated with Zion was Pentecost, which pointed to the action of the Holy Spirit, and to the life and mission of the church<sup>18</sup>. What strata of meaning Zion contained is evidenced by allegorical interpretations found in patristic literature: the heavenly city of the living God, the gospel word and God's church on earth, but also an individual righteous soul<sup>19</sup>. At any rate, Zion functioned as a widespread synonym for Jerusalem, both the earthly and heavenly<sup>20</sup>.

As has already been said, the phenomenon of the *deserts*, *mountains* and *caves* of the Holy Land and their meaning should be viewed not only from the historical but also from anagogical perspective. Not only concrete locales with sacral properties, they were also "icons" of and metaphors for "things

<sup>15</sup> Wilken R. L. *Loving Jerusalem Below: The Monks of Palestine // Jerusalem, its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* / Ed. by L. I. Levine. New York, 1999, p. 240–250 (with sources).

<sup>16</sup> Bernbaum E. *Sacred Mountains of the World*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art* / Ed. by B. Kühnel. Jerusalem, 1998; Talmon S. *The Signification of Jerusalem in Biblical Thought*, p. 1–12; Limor O. *The Place of the End of Days: Eschatological Geography in Jerusalem*, p. 13–22.

<sup>18</sup> Walker P. W. L. *Op. cit.* p. 285–307 (with sources and literature).

<sup>19</sup> Rousseau D. O. *Quelques texts patristiques sur la Jérusalem céleste // La vie spirituelle* 85 (1952) p. 378–388.

<sup>20</sup> On the complex, dual nature of the relationship between the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem, see Schmidt K. L. *Jerusalem als Urbild und Abbild // Eranos Jahrbuch* 18 (1950) p. 207–248; Kühnel B. *From the Earthly to Heavenly Jerusalem: Representations of the Holy City in Christian Art of the First Millennium*. Roma–Freiburg–Wien, 1987, p. 17–59.

higher". Telling in that respect is the attitude of John Damascene. Writing about the holy places of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and about the relics associated with Christ, he treats them, terminologically and in terms of meaning, as "holy images". According to him, Christ's burial cave, Zion, the Mount of Olives, and other sacred places and objects, ought to be "honoured and venerated" as "God's holy temples" and "receptacles of divine power"<sup>21</sup>. In other words, they were the image of paradise and earthly reflections of Heavenly Jerusalem.

*Translatio Hierosolymi*, seen as a possibility for the symbolical transfer of sacredness and its *renovatio* on other sites, rested on the belief in a mystical tie between the prototype and its "copy". Numerous and outstanding are medieval examples that reveal mechanisms for setting up the sacral topography of Jerusalem in other parts of the world. In architecture, this was achieved mostly through a combination of select designs and appropriate observances, and in painting through the employment of "Zion" programmes<sup>22</sup>. Much the same developments are consistently observable in examples of medieval monastic deserts, an issue that has not been addressed or interpreted in an integrated manner by modern scholarship. From what we know at present, it seems plausible that such a "reproduction" of Jerusalem was effected in two basic manners. One may be described as typological association, i. e. the evocation of sacredness by means of recognizable physical structures such as caves and mountains. The other is abstract, has great associative potentials, and essentially amounts to the spiritualization of the idea of the Holy Land, or: if true Jerusalem is transcendent, in an immanent reality it may be "actualized" virtually anywhere. Such a view had far-reaching consequences, leading not only to the creation of new sacred areas but even to the reidentification of some peoples as the "new Israel"<sup>23</sup>.

The purpose of the following examples, distributed across the Byzantine world, is to demonstrate the vast potential for different interpretations of the monastic *desert* as Heavenly Jerusalem. Their careful choice from various types of sources, from literary-liturgical to documentary and artistic, is intended to show that the different languages and means employed were to convey one and the same basic message. It goes without saying that my considerations have no pretensions to presenting the material in an exhaustive

<sup>21</sup> Wilken R. L. *Loving Jerusalem Below*, p. 246 (with sources).

<sup>22</sup> Лидов А. М. Образ Небесного Иерусалима в восточнохристианской иконографии // Иерусалим в русской культуре / Сост. А. Баталов, А. Лидов. Москва, 1994, p. 15–25; The Real and Ideal Jerusalem: Ousterhout R. *Flexible Geography and Transportable Topography*, p. 393–404; Lidov A. *Heavenly Jerusalem: The Byzantine Approach*, p. 340–353.

<sup>23</sup> On the issue of the translation of Jerusalem, methodologically very inspiring observations are put forth by Stroumsa G. G. *Mystical Jerusalem // Jerusalem, its Sanctity and Centrality*, p. 349–370.

and systematic manner, even less to arriving at definitive conclusions. They are intended as an analysis of “relevant patterns” and should be understood as a small contribution to the attempt at establishing the research framework for a highly complex and absorbing but as yet insufficiently studied topic.

To begin with, attention will be focused on some of the holy mountains in the Byzantine world<sup>24</sup>. Highly revered among them were the monastic mountains in Asia Minor such as Ida, Latros, Kyminas, Auxentios and Olympos. Recorded in the sources as early as the beginning of the tenth century, they were traditionally considered a legacy of Holy Land monasticism<sup>25</sup>. Mount Auxentios is a good illustration of the importance attached to them by the contemporaries. According to the *Life* of St Stephen the Younger, “on that sacred mountain ... the fathers who, successively, inhabited the mountain and shut themselves in the sacred cave, found paradise as their last abode”; the place is compared with the pre-eminent of all mountains, those biblical — Horeb, Carmel, Sinai, Tabor — and the account goes on towards an explicit conclusion: “It is there, in fact, where a place of salvation shapes conduct in anticipation of salvation, that the true Jerusalem really is”<sup>26</sup>. Famous Mount Olympos in Bithynia was seen in the same way. To Michael Psellos who visited it, it is a *locus amoenus* and convincing proof of spiritualized created Nature. Moreover, says Psellos, Olympos “is Zion and Hermon itself, which contains unutterable sources, the joys of Heavenly Jerusalem”<sup>27</sup>. One hardly need emphasize that the most highly revered of all, the *great desert*, the Holy Mount of Athos, has for centuries been thought of as not only a “holy mountain” but also as “Heavenly Jerusalem”<sup>28</sup>. By extension, this notion applied to its dwellers. A characteristic description in that sense can be found in the *Life* of St

<sup>24</sup> The most complete study so far: *Talbot A.-M.* Les saintes montagnes à Byzance // Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident, Etudes comparées / Ed. par *M. Kaplan*, Paris 2001, p. 263–318; see also, *Bakirtzis N.* The Creation of an *Hierotopos* in Byzantium: Ascetic Practice and its Topography on Mt. Menoikeion // *Hierotopy*, p. 126–149.

<sup>25</sup> *Morris R.* Monks and Laymen in Byzantium 843–1118. Cambridge 1995, p. 22–23 (with sources and literature).

<sup>26</sup> *Auzépy M.-F.* La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre // Aldershot 1997; p. 195; cf. also *Talbot A.-M.* Op. cit., p. 269. For Mount Auxentios, see *Pargoire J.* Mont Saint-Auxence. Etude historique et topographique, *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, ser. I, 8 (1903) 15–31, 240–279, 426–458, 550–576; see also, *Belke K.* Die Mönchsberge Bithyniens: Auxentios-Berg // *Bithynischer Olymp und Kyminas*, Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies, vol. II, London, 2006, p. 218–219.

<sup>27</sup> *Beyer H.-V.* Der “Heilige Berg” in der byzantinischen Literatur I // *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* B. 30 (1981) p. 185. For Olympos of Bithynia, see *Menthon B.* L'Olympe de Bithynie, Ses Saints, Ses Couvents, Ses Sites. Paris, 1935; *Auzépy M.-F.* Les monastères // *La Bithynie au Moyen Age* / Ed. par *B. Geyer* et *J. Lefort*, Paris 2003, p. 431–457; *Belke K.* Loc. Cit.

<sup>28</sup> *Talbot A.-M.* Op. cit., p. 268–270 (with hagiographic sources).

Euthymius the New, where the ninth-century Athonite ascetics John Kolobos and Simeon are described as “holy men worthy of Upper Zion”<sup>29</sup>. The pre-eminence of Athos, evidenced by medieval sources and rooted in centuries-long tradition, rests on the well-known legend: when the stormy sea cast Virgin’s ship ashore on the coast of Athos, fascinated with the beauty of the place she asked Christ to give it to her as a gift, and he replied: “Let this place be your legacy and your garden, paradise and the heaven of salvation, for all those seeking salvation”<sup>30</sup>. That this belief has survived virtually unchanged till this day is confirmed by contemporary Athonite monks. They think of their locale as a holy mountain and their heavenly homeland, a temple not-made-by-man and the gate of heaven, the earthly image of Heavenly Jerusalem and “foretaste of Paradise”<sup>31</sup>.

In contrast with the written sources and their multitude of eloquent examples illustrating the concept of the monastic *desert* as Heavenly Jerusalem, the concept is much more difficult to recognize in its materialized form. This adds weight to the information provided by the famous and well-preserved Enkleistra of St Neophytos in Paphos founded in 1159<sup>32</sup>. Owing to St Neophytos’ own writings and the hesychasterion’s excellent state of preservation, his design can be traced to the last detail. It has been shown recently that the Enkleistra, dedicated to the True Cross, was conceived and materialized on the model of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, undoubtedly as a result of Neophytos’ pilgrimage to the Holy Land<sup>33</sup>. Another important influence apparently came from monastic shrines in the Judean Desert which inspired him to shape his hesychasterion as a cave complex. The belief in caves as sacred places and dwellings of holy men found its full expression in his panegyrics honouring the True Cross and St Sabbas of Jerusalem<sup>34</sup>. At an important point in his life Neophytos established a small cell on the very top of the Enkleistra and named it “Upper Zion”. He explained the undertaking

<sup>29</sup> *Панахрисанту Д.* Атонско монаштво, почеци и организација. Београд, 2003, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Gothóni R.* Paradise within Reach. Monasticism and Pilgrimage on Mt Athos. Helsinki, 1993, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> *Cavarnos C.* Anchored in God. Life, Art and Thought of the Holy Mountain of Athos. Athens, 1959, p. 168–209; *Grassi E.* Monte Athos. Itinerario alla montagna degli ascetici. Milano, 1981, p. 129–159; *Gothóni R.* Op. cit., p. 137–169; *Speake G.* Mount Athos. Renewal in Paradise. New Haven–London, 2002, p. 17–21, 173–181, 195–232.

<sup>32</sup> *Galatariotou G.* The making of a saint. The life, times and sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse. Cambridge, 1991 (with sources and all earlier literature); *Congourdeau M.-H.* L’enkleistra dans les écrits de Neophitos le Recluse, Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance. Textes, images et monuments / Ed. par C. Jolivet-Lévy, M. Kaplan, J.-P. Sodini. Paris, 1993, p. 144–147.

<sup>33</sup> *Teteriatnikov N.* The Relic of the True Cross and Jerusalem *Loca Sancta*: the Case of the Making of Sacred Spaces in the St. Neophytos’ Enkleistra, Paphos // Hierotopy, p. 422–433.

<sup>34</sup> *Galatariotou G.* Op. cit., p. 106.

by his propensity for ascent, believing it to be the result of God's plan: "It was, I believe, the decision of God first, and then of myself, to move higher up on the precipice, to ascend, with God's help"<sup>35</sup>.

The epithet "New Zion" was conferred on yet another highly revered cave church, the Mega Spelaion in the Peloponnesus. Tradition has it that it was founded in the fourth century by two brothers, Simeon and Theodore, who had paid several visits to the Holy Land, enthusiastically journeying across the Judean Desert. The cave they found was a snakes' den overgrown with ivy, but they turned it into a house of God after having discovered in it a miraculous icon of the Virgin known as Mega Spelaiotissa<sup>36</sup>. According to tradition, it was in that cave that the apostle Luke wrote his gospel. Hence its comparison with St John's cave in Patmos, whereby the idea of apostolic mission, its continuity and succession, was underlined<sup>37</sup>. About the means employed there in support of the *translatio Hierosolymi* idea speaks not only the fact that the Mega Spelaion was regarded as "a type of God-receiving cave", but also that the nearby miraculous springs were considered a "New Siloam"<sup>38</sup>. Such explicit evidences for a "Zion" connotation of certain cave shrines, verifiable on a concrete site, open up the possibility of interpreting similar phenomena unrecorded by the sources. Let me mention, in that context, the upper cells of monks' dwellings in Cappadocia<sup>39</sup> or, for instance, the renowned hermit dwelling known as the *stylos* or Holy Spirit on top of a pillar-like rock at Meteora<sup>40</sup>.

Medieval Georgia provides a remarkable wealth and diversity of examples. This is not surprising given that the "Jerusalem" or "Zion" idea was the cornerstone of Georgian state ideology and of the building programme mate-

<sup>35</sup> Idem., p. 99; Congourdeau M.-H. Op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> The Lives of the Monastery Builders of the Great Cave (Mega Spelaion). A translation and compilation from Greek of the Great Synaxarists of the Orthodox church and Mega Spelaion sources, Pamphlet No. 4, Buena Vista, Colorado, 1992, p. 9–46. The power of the cult of the Virgin Spelaiotissa in the Balkans is evidenced by her painted and signed image in the apse of the cave church of the Ascension in the village of Višna in the Struga area, Macedonia, Жура Г. А. Пештерните цркви во Охридско-преспански регион — Р. Македонија, Р. Албанија, Р. Грција (The Cave Churches in the Ohrid-Prespa Region) Струга 2004, p. 87–89.

<sup>37</sup> It is hardly a coincidence that the apostle Andrew's missionary work in the area about the Black Sea has been related to a cave shrine, the monastery of St Andrew near the village of Ion Corvin in the district of Constant, Dobruja, Romania, see Атанасов Г. Скалните култови паметници в Добруджа, светилища, храмове, манастири. Силистра, 2004, p. 18–19.

<sup>38</sup> The Lives of the Monastery Builders of the Great Cave (Mega Spelaion), p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Rodley L. Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia. Cambridge, 1985, p. 190–191; Jolivet-Lévy C. La Cappadoce médiévale. Images et spiritualité. Paris, 2001, p. 29–30; Thierry N. La Cappadoce de l'antiquité au moyen âge. Turnhout, 2002, p. 201–203.

<sup>40</sup> Chatzidakis M., Sofianos D. The Great Meteoron, History and Art. Athens, 1990, p. 22; on pillar hermits or stylites in a broader sense, Galatariotou C. Op. cit., p. 104–105; Morris R. Op. cit., p. 38–39 and passim.



rialized at Mtskheta.<sup>41</sup> As early as the sixth century it played an equally important role in the formation of the concept of monastic *desert*. The founders of Georgian monasticism John Zedazneli and his brethren explicitly declared themselves “strangers in this world” and specified Heavenly Jerusalem as their true homeland. Accordingly, they built no dwellings, not even churches, but lived in deserts, mountains and caves, explaining that their mission was spiritual rather than material construction.<sup>42</sup> The radical ascetic Šio thought of his dwelling in much the same way. To him, the deep cavity where he resided was at the same time a cell, a grave and a *stylos* — which reached into the depths.<sup>43</sup> It was this life lived in darkness, motionless, and in daily recollection of death that made Šio’s cave become “Jacob’s ladder leading to heaven, towards the undying light”<sup>44</sup>.

It is impossible to pass over the case of Davit, the founder of the “Georgian Thebaid”. He began his ascetic endeavour on the sacred mountain M’tacmindia near Tbilisi. Later on, he established monasticism in the impressive landscape of the Gareji Desert, and thus gave impetus to many cave churches, hermit cells and sketes that emerged in the area in the following centuries.<sup>45</sup> Davit’s *Life* identifies his eremitic ideal — St Elijah, and the ultimate purpose of the eremitic way of life — “to attain the promised land of heavenly Jerusalem”.<sup>46</sup> It is not surprising that Davit, as many other Christian ascetics, made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and its entire environs, but it certainly is remarkable that he undertook an unusual form of *translatio Hierosolymi*. Namely, he returned from the Holy Land with a stone, as a eulogia, and laid it in the Gareji Desert, thereby making that place into a source of never-ending and diverse miracles<sup>47</sup>. The theme of Zion in the painted programmes of Georgian churches deserves to become the object of a separate study, but in the context discussed here, attention will be drawn to a characteristic example:

<sup>41</sup> Кекелидзе К. К вопросу об Иерусалимском происхождении грузинской церкви // Studies in Old Georgian literature IV. Tbilisi, 1957, p. 358–363; Siradze R. Svet’icxoveli, Santa Sofia e Sion // Studi sull’Oriente Cristiano, Miscellanea Metreveli, 4/2 (2000), p. 19–27.

<sup>42</sup> Kiknadze Z. Op. cit., p. 30–31.

<sup>43</sup> On ascetic practices, techniques and the ultimate purpose of meditation, Dodel F. Das Sitzen der Wüstenväter. Eine Untersuchung anhand der Apophthegmata Patrum. Freiburg, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Житіе преподобнаго Шио Мгвимскаго чудотворца, покровителя Грузинскаго царства // Полное жизнеописание святых грузинской церкви. Часть первая / Составил и перевёл М. Сабинин. С.-Петербург, 1971, p. 113–115; Петрова Т. Пещерные монастыри как явление русской духовной культуры // К свету, 17, p. 90–115.

<sup>45</sup> Чубинашвили Г. Х. Пещерные монастыри Давид-Гареджи. Очерк по истории искусства Грузии. Тбилиси, 1948.

<sup>46</sup> Житіе преподобнаго Гареджійскаго чудотворца, основателя грузинской Тивадиы // Полное жизнеописание святых грузинской церкви. Часть первая, p. 126, 128.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, p. 137–138. Throughout the Middle Ages rocks and stones brought from the sacred mountains and caves of the Holy Land were believed to possess mystical and saving powers, see Testa E. Le mitiche rocce della salvezza e Gerusalemme. Jerusalem, 1997.

the Ananauri church (13th c.), part of the monumental cave complex at Vardzia. That small cave shrine — itself part of a complex that includes a rock-cut two-storey shelter and a passageway ensuring connection with the church — was built on the western and highest point of the Vardzia complex<sup>48</sup>. That some special design was behind the choice of such a site seems to be suggested by the partly surviving painted programme on the eastern narthex wall, executed in two registers. Above the Deesis in the lunette over the portal, the founder's portrait north of the portal and three unidentified saints in the south part of the lower register, there is the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, shown in an unusual place<sup>49</sup>. As we shall see, this illustration of the greatest festival of Zion<sup>50</sup> is a common element in the painted programmes of cave shrines and *deserts*.

The pattern's communicativeness or the recognizability of the means employed to express the concept of monastic *desert* as Heavenly Jerusalem is evidenced by a representative example on the opposite, western end of the Christian world: the Shrine of St. Michael at Monte Gargano. The "angelic caverns", where the archangel Michael had appeared and left his footprints, were considered an allusion to the cave of Christ's burial and a replica of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. Hagiographic sources describe the landscape of Monte Gargano with its cliffs and caves, forests and miraculous springs, as a symbol of heaven and evocation of Heavenly Jerusalem, lost for mankind after Adam's fall. That the true meaning of this place is not open to controversy is unambiguously shown by the well-known inscription of 1395 in the portico of the church: *terribilis est locus; iste hic domus dei est et porta coeli* (impressive is this place; here is the house of God and the gate of heaven)<sup>51</sup>.

The pattern's wide distribution and effectiveness is additionally attested by many examples from the Balkans. The essence and real purpose of a *desert* had already been well known to the founders of eremitic monasticism in the region. Thus, the first among them, John of Rila (10th c.), reiterates every hermit's fundamental *topos* — that his true homeland is Heavenly Je-

<sup>48</sup> Гагиндашвили Г. Пещерный ансамбль Вардзиа. Т. 2. Тбилиси, 1960, p. 104–106.

<sup>49</sup> Кляндашвили А. Г. Роспись западного придела церкви Ананаури в Вардзиа. Ктиторийский портрет // Georgian Caves. Speleological Translocations. Tbilisi, 1988, p. 61–70; *Ead.* The Wall Paintings from the West Annex of the Ananauri Church at the Rock-cut Monastery of Vardzia, *Analecta Iberica* 1 (2001) p. 91–99.

<sup>50</sup> On the "Zion" redaction of painted programmes in the Byzantine world, Лидов А. М. Образ небесного Иерусалима, p. 21–22; Тодич Б. Н. Тема сионской церкви в храмовой декорации XIII–XIV вв. // Иерусалим в русской культуре, p. 156–158; *Id.* Српско сликарство у доба краља Милутина (Serbian Medieval Painting. The Age of King Milutin) Београд, 1998, p. 156–158 (with exhaustive bibliography).

<sup>51</sup> Arnold J. C. Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem: Angelic caverns and Shrine Conversion at Monte Gargano // *Speculum*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (2000), p. 567–588 (with sources and literature).

rusalem<sup>52</sup>. Important and interesting information has been preserved in the *Life* of Joachim of Osogov (11th–12th c.). For example, the close relation between the concepts of mountain desert and cave is illustrated in the biographer's account that Joachim had come to the "Osogov Mountain desert area" and settled in a cave where he embarked on the ascetic life. Praising the saint, he says that Joachim, having driven away demons, infused the mountains and caves of Osogov with knowledge of God. Referring to Cyril of Scythopolis' famous syntagm, he goes on to say that Joachim converted the desert to a city. All these accomplishments — his ascetic deeds in the first place, and then the sacralization of a space and the conversion of a demon-ridden wasteland to a monastic *desert* — earned him "eternal families and the Jerusalem above"<sup>53</sup>. Allusions to Heavenly Jerusalem in the biographies of Balkan hermits may not be as explicit, but they are none the less clear. A good example is the Service to St Prohor of Pčinja (11th c.). It says that this recluse, who "began to emanate light in the caves" and "adorned the desert, up there, and all the caves", has settled with Christ in heaven, where he contemplates the Trinity<sup>54</sup>. Such a notion of the *desert* was a long-standing phenomenon in the Balkans. Its continuity is evidenced by the example of Paroria, one of the most respected monastic habitations in late medieval times<sup>55</sup>. In the *Life* of St Romil it is elatedly described as an eremitic paradise, a place of joy, which "elevates our mind towards knowledge of God" and replicates some of the landmarks of the Holy Land — "Elijah's Carmel, John's desert and Jesus' mountain"<sup>56</sup>.

The concept of *desert* as Heavenly Jerusalem received, in this context, its transpositions in architecture and wall-painting. Particularly interesting examples have survived in cave complexes in present-day Bulgaria. One of

<sup>52</sup> Иванов Й. Български старини из Македония / Под редакцията на Б. Ангелов и Д. Ангелов. Фототипно издание. София, 1970, p. 375.

<sup>53</sup> *Idem*, p. 407–408, 412. On the syntagm of Cyril of Scythopolis (conversion of desert to city), see *Patrich J. Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism // A Comparative Study in eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries*. Washington D.C., 1995, p. 353.

<sup>54</sup> Трифуновић Ђ. Служба светом Прохору Пчинском // *Источник*, год. VI, бр. 24 (1997) p. 31–47.

<sup>55</sup> On monastic deserts, including Praoria, and their way of life, *Laiou-Thomadakis A. E. Saints and Society in the Late Byzantine Empire // Charanis Studies, Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis / Ed. by A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis*. New Brunswick, 1980, p. 84–114; *Delikari A. Ein Beitrag zu historisch-geographischen Fragen auf dem Balkan: 'Paroria'. Neue Angaben zur Lokalisierung des Klostergebietes von Gregorios Sinaites // Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, vol II, p. 219–220.

<sup>56</sup> Монаха Григория Житие преподобнога Ромила. Сообщение П. А. Сырку // *Памятники древней письменности и искусства*, CXXXVI (1900), p. 14. The reference to the cave of the prophet Elijah, the desert of John the Forerunner and the mountain of Christ may be a paraphrase of Ephrem Syrus' well-known words: "Elijah dwelled in a cave, Elisha on the summit of a mountain, John in a desert", *Святой Ефрем Сирин. Творения*. Том V, p. 211.

the most important among them, shaped under the patronage of the Bulgarian rulers, is the Laura of St Michael near the village of Ivanovo (Ruse district).<sup>57</sup> A chapel added to one of the cave churches of this remarkable monastic community, the so-called Curkvata (14th c.), contains a distinct fresco programme which evokes the sacral topography of the Holy Land. It includes scenes from the life of St Gerasim, a disciple of St Euthymios the Great and founder of one of the eminent Judean Desert lauras. In this case, the evocation is literal, as the background shows the walls of Jerusalem and the rotunda of Christ's tomb. Its function is quite clear: the monastic community at Ivanovo was to follow the patterns established in the desert of the Holy City.<sup>58</sup> Similar messages may be conveyed in different ways, less explicitly, but in a familiar language. To judge from the surviving monuments, in the cave churches of Balkan *deserts* the theme of Zion was usually communicated by the depiction of the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, shown in a prominent or unusual place in the church. This is the case in the so-called Ruined Church at Ivanovo<sup>59</sup>, and in two churches of the remarkable cave complex at Karlukovo known as the Skete of St Marina (second half of the 14th c.) and the Skete of St Nicholas (14th–18th c.), with eremitic themes featuring prominently in their painted programmes<sup>60</sup>. The same idea guided the author of the painted programme in the cave church of the Ascension (15th c.), today on the Greek side of Lake Prespa, where the Descent of the Holy Spirit occupies the eastern apsidal wall<sup>61</sup>.

Finally, let me mention a quite remarkable visual transposition of the "Zion" idea, so far inadequately interpreted by scholarship. It is associated with a little-known monastic community perched on an inaccessible cliff on the road between the town of Provadia and the village of Krivina (Varna district, Bulgaria). In the fourteenth century three of the cave cells were inhabited by Georgian hermits who formulated their ascetic credo in both image and text written in their native language. In the eastern cell, above the central

<sup>57</sup> *Мавродинова Л.* Ивановските скални църкви, Българският принос в световното културно наследство. София, 1989, p. 171–192.

<sup>58</sup> Стенната живопис на скалните църкви в лаврата „Архангел Михаил“ при Иваново // Годишник на Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“. Т. 82/2 (1988), p. 189–190; see also, *Бакалова Е.* Принос към изследоване на царската идеология в средновековна България. Стенописите в църквата „Св. Архангел Михаил“ край Иваново (Contribution to research on the ideology of Kingship in medieval Bulgaria); on the Laura of St Gerasim, *Hirschfeld Y.* The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period. New Haven and London, 1992, p. 28–29, 31, 147, 180–183 and passim; *Patrich J.* Op. cit. p. 28–29 and passim.

<sup>59</sup> *Мавродинова Л.* Op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>60</sup> *Ead.* Скалните скитове при Карлуково (Les chapelles rupestres sainte-Marina et saint-Nicolas près Karloukovo). София, 1985.

<sup>61</sup> *Жура Г. А.* Op. cit., p. 178–180.

of three niches on the northern wall, a pictogram is engraved — twelve circles, each inscribed with a dot and surmounted by circles and an explanatory inscription: “These are the saint apostles”. This programme of profound spirituality but utterly simple means of expression — a rough rock drawing, is supplemented with another two elements: the engraved text of the hesychast prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us, amen”, and the reduced depiction of a church, undoubtedly the Zion temple, the final destination of every *desert dweller*<sup>62</sup>.

Finally, I shall take a look at the Serbian material, a regional but distinct and interesting sample<sup>63</sup>. The reception of the idea of Heavenly Jerusalem, in the service of creating a “new Israel”, was reflected in the notion of monastic *deserts* at the time of founding an independent Serbian state (late 12th — early 13th c.). The credit for setting the conceptual framework for such a programme goes to St Sava of Serbia. This prince and monk of the house of Nemanjić, named after St Sabbas of Jerusalem, had authentic and profound experiences of a *desert* at an early date. His monastic habitus was shaped on Mount Athos, where he spent an important phase of his life, and he travelled to the East twice, making pilgrimage, among other places, to the illustrious shrines of the Egyptian, Judean and Sinai deserts<sup>64</sup>. To St Sava of Serbia the Holy Mount of Athos was a metaphor for the Jerusalem Above or, according to his biographer Domentijan, “a luminous and extraordinary place, adorned with all manner of beauties on the model of paradise”<sup>65</sup>. In his account of Sava’s sojourn on Athos in company with his father Simeon (the former Serbian grand *župan* and now a monk), of their pious practices and their activity as ktetors, the same writer quotes Cyril of Scythopolis in order to emphasize that they “turned deserts into cities”. Referring to Simeon and Sava as “desert citizens”, Domentijan says that they “adjoined their fatherland to the Holy Mountain ... restoring its luminous path to Jerusalem as they had before”<sup>66</sup>. This is a significant programmatic statement to the end of defining Hilandar, the Athonite foundation of the Nemanjić, as a new Zion, the site of

<sup>62</sup> The basic material, with no interpretations, has been published by Ханджинский А. Обители в скалах (Rock Monasteries). София, 1985, p. 19, 47; on the role of the Jesus prayer in hesychast spirituality, see Guillaumont A. La Prière de Jésus chez les moines d’Egypte // Aux origines du monachisme Chrétien, p. 127–134; Wagenaar C. Das Beten der Wüstenmönche. Zur Geschichte des Jesus-Gebiets // Geist und Leben 59 (1986), p. 93–103.

<sup>63</sup> Popović D. The *Deserts and Holy Mountains* of Medieval Serbia: written sources, spatial patterns, architectural designs (forthcoming).

<sup>64</sup> Поповић Д. Пустиножителство светог Саве Српског (Hermitism of St Sava of Serbia) // Култ светих на Балкану II / Ed. М. Детелић. Лицеум 7 (2002), p. 61–85.

<sup>65</sup> Доментијан. Живот светог Саве и живот светог Симеона / Приредила Р. Маринковић. Београд, 1988, p. 96.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 197, 313.

theophany and symbolic seat of salvation for the Serbian people<sup>67</sup>. At the same time a much more concrete translation of the Jerusalem pattern was undertaken, which was instrumental in organizing the monastic life in medieval Serbia. Namely, on Sava's initiative, round the earliest foundations of the Nemanjić — Hilandar, Studenica and Mileševa — hesychasteria-hermitages were founded, thereby instituting the eremitic way of life alongside cenobitic monasticism<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, modelled as monumental cave structures, the hermitages of Studenica and Mileševa resembled in form those Sava had seen on his pilgrimage to the Judean Desert<sup>69</sup>. Their meaning and function is documented by a record describing the Mileševa hermitage as "St Sava's desert"<sup>70</sup>.

Even later, throughout the Middle Ages, the concept of the *desert* as monastic paradise and of eremitism as a path to the "city above" was a strong presence in the Serbian environment. Athonite in its origin and inspiration, it was particularly outspoken in the fourteenth century, an epoch when religious beliefs and outlook were significantly marked by hesychast spirituality<sup>71</sup>. A striking example is the literary work of the Athonite Teodosije (Theodosius), based on his masterly knowledge of the Orthodox ascetical tradition. An accomplished and inspired rendition of the *desert* as heavenly abode can be found in his compositions devoted to the veneration of St Peter of Koriša (13th c.), a renowned Serbian hermit and adherent to extreme ascetical practices<sup>72</sup>. In Peter's *Life* he labels Mount Koriša, where Peter lived his solitary life, a *holy mountain* and *desert*, and describes the scenery as a "beautiful abode God made for hermits". Peter's dwelling, a barely accessible cave, seemed "as if prepared by God", and after the hermit's triumph over the demon, it became "ablaze with great light in an un-

<sup>67</sup> Марјановић-Душанић С. Хиландар као Нови Сион Немањиног отачаства (The Zion Symbolics of the Monastery of Hilandar) Осам векова Хиландара // Историја, духовни живот, књижевност, уметност и архитектура / Ed. В. Кораћ. Београд, 2000, p. 17–24.

<sup>68</sup> Popović S. Sabaitic influence on the Church of Medieval Serbia // The Sabaitic Heritage in the Orthodox Church, p. 385–407.

<sup>69</sup> For the hermitage of Karyes, see Живојиновић М. Историја Хиландара I (History of Hilandar I, From its foundation 1198 to 1335). Од оснивања манастира 1198. до 1356. године. Београд, 1998, p. 79–84; for the Studenica hermitage, Темерински С. Горња испосница у Савову код Студенице // Осам векова Студенице. Београд, 1986, p. 257–260; Станић Р. Споменици градитељства од XIII до XVII века у околини Студенице // Благо манастира Студенице. Београд, 1988, p. 256–258; for the hermitage of Mileševa, see the preliminary research report by Поповић Д. Пећинске цркве и испоснице у области Полимља. Досадашњи резултати и правци истраживања (Cave churches and hermitages in the area of Polimlje) // Милешевски записи бр. 5 (2002), p. 47–60.

<sup>70</sup> Стојановић Љ. Стари српски записи и натписи, књ. 1. Београд, 1982, No 399.

<sup>71</sup> Богдановић Д. Историја старе српске књижевности. Београд, 1980, p. 164–189.

<sup>72</sup> Popović D. The Cult of St Petar of Koriša // Stages of Development and Patterns, Balcanica XXVII (1997), p. 181–212 (with earlier literature).

terable vision”, imbuing him with the feeling of “being in heaven”<sup>73</sup>. Even more explicit is Teodosije in his Service to St Peter of Koriša. “Impassable mountains, caves and chasms,” where Peter had settled, he compares with heaven, and states that the hermit, in virtue of his ascetic deeds, was graced with “being able to see the Jerusalem above from his desert”<sup>74</sup>. Various spiritual metaphors for the Jerusalem above can also be found in hymnographic and hymnologic compositions of other writers such as Marko of Peć (late 14th — early 15th c.), and recognizable in formulas such as the “spiritual city”, “upper city”, “divine paradise”, “sinless mountain”<sup>75</sup>. In parallel to these literary transpositions, there was an obvious trend towards building cave shrines in select natural landscapes in order to reproduce the hallowed *deserts*, *holy mountains* and *caves* in the local environment. Many of these sites, especially in Metochia and Macedonia, have remained quite exceptional, extraordinary places. Not only natural reserves, these sites possess a powerful aura of sacredness and lend a sense of reality to one’s aspiration for ascent<sup>76</sup>.

The concept of the *desert* as Heavenly Jerusalem found its supreme expression in the early fifteenth century, owing to despot Stefan Lazarević<sup>77</sup>. This sagacious and extraordinary Serbian ruler had two cities built on the model of Jerusalem, as specified by his biographer Constantine the Philosopher. One, historical, was his capital: Belgrade<sup>78</sup>. The other, eschatological, had a “path to the Jerusalem above and a resemblance to it”. This “city” was the monastery of Resava, the despot’s foundation and funerary church enclosed with massive walls that give it the appearance of a fortress<sup>79</sup>. Construction of Resava obviously was part of a meticulously designed project. First of all, an appropriate site for founding a monastery was carefully

<sup>73</sup> Теодосије. Житија / Приредио Д. Богдановић. Београд, 1988, р. 270–271, 282.

<sup>74</sup> Теодосије. Службе, канони и Похвала / Приредила Б. Јовановић-Стипчевић. Београд, 1988, р. 228–229.

<sup>75</sup> Шест писаца XIV века / Приредио Д. Богдановић. Београд, 1986, р. 166, 168, 172, 177 and passim.

<sup>76</sup> On eremitic environments in medieval Serbia, Поповић Д. Монах-пустињак // Приватни живот у српским земљама средњег века / Ed. С. Марјановић-Душанић, Д. Поповић. Београд, 2004, р. 576–585 (with earlier literature); see also Смолчић-Макуљевић С. Сакрална топографија манастира Трескавца (The Sacral Topography of the Monastery of Treskavac) // Balcanica XXXV (2004), р. 285–322.

<sup>77</sup> On the personality and literary work of despot Stefan, see the study by Трифуновић Ђ. Деспот Стефан Лазаревић // Књижевни радови, Београд, 1979.

<sup>78</sup> Ердељан Ј. Београд као Нови Јерусалим. Размишљања о рецепцији једног топоса у доба деспота Стефана Лазаревића (Belgrade as New Jerusalem. Reflections on the Reception of a Topos in the Age of Despot Stefan Lazarević) // Зборник радова Византолошког института 42 (2005), forthcoming.

<sup>79</sup> Тодић Б. Манастир Ресави (Monastère de Resava). Београд, 1995; Манастир Ресави, историја и уметност // Зборник радова (Resava Monastery, its history and art) / Ed. В. Ј. Ђурић. Деспотовац, 1995.

sought for. To that end despot Stefan walked “mountains and fields and deserts looking for a place to build up the desired community, a hesychasterion”. “Aware that silence is predestined to steer everyone towards the great honour of being able to see and know,” he established his foundation, and with a purpose, in a setting that had all the properties of a *desert*. That the despot’s reasons and motives are not subject to doubt is testified by Constantine the Philosopher’s reference to his “desire to talk with hermits and his eagerness to spend time with them.” Further corroboration is the information that Resava was supposed to surpass “the great distinguished monasteries of Mount Athos” in the beauty of its decoration and furnishings<sup>80</sup>. Finally, and not at all by chance, Resava was consecrated on the day of Pentecost, the greatest festival of Zion, “when the Holy Spirit had descended with fiery tongues upon the holy disciples of the Logos and God”<sup>81</sup>. Such an emulation of Heavenly Jerusalem, which employs ritual in addition to hierotopic means, must have been a credible proof that there was a piece of the Holy Land in Serbia too.

I shall conclude this contribution with an example that is apt, on the one hand, to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the means employed to shape a monastic *desert* as the Jerusalem above and, on the other, to remind of the broad and fresh interpretative potentials of a hierotopic approach to the subject. I have in mind a complex of hermitages on the site of Uljarice (Metochia), presumably of a late medieval date<sup>82</sup>. It is situated in the canyon of the Miruša River which in its lower course, with its thirteen waterfalls and lakes, creates a remarkable corner of pristine nature with precipices, chasms, caves, and rare or even endemic plant and animal species. Formed in limestone rock sparkled with quartz particles, the cave complex, which consists of two churches, monks’ cells, paths and vistas, stands in the narrowest part of the canyon, on precipitous cliffs up to 200 metres high. This scenography, colossal in size and dramatic by the feeling it excites, radiates with extraordinary beauty and serenity. In the Middle Ages it must have been seen as God’s amazing creation and a metaphor for paradise inspiring the hermit to ascetic deeds and bringing him closer to God. The arrangement and topography of the caves in such a setting has nothing random about it and conforms

<sup>80</sup> Константин Филозоф. Повест о Словима. Житије деспота Стефана Лазаревића / Приредила Г. Јовановић. Београд, 1989, р. 103.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., р. 103–104.

<sup>82</sup> Ивановић М. Испоснице Уљарице и остаци српских цркава у сливу реке Мируше, средњовековне Љубижде (Ermitages à ruches et vestiges d’ églises serbes dans le basin de la Miruša, la Ljubižnja médiévale) // Саопштења XIX (1987), р. 199–210; Поповић Д. Средњовековне пећине-испоснице у призренском крају — претходна истраживања (Medieval cave-hermitages in the region of Prizren) // Историјски часопис књ. XLIV (1998), р. 150–152.



to a symbolic, hieratic notion of space. From the dwelling cells to the caves intended for sacral, worship purposes, a path runs upwards and eastwards. As it gets ever narrower, to enter the main church known as “Little Church”, at the end of the road, not only requires physical skills but also a readiness to take risks. The surviving fragments of frescoes reveal the scene of the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles in a shallow-cut recess on the southern cave wall. The examples cited above lead us to understand it as a coded and yet fluent message pointing to the “Zion” idea as underlying the programme of this eremitic community.

One of the reasons for choosing Uljarice as an *exemplum* of a sort to conclude with is the fact that this cave complex is completely unknown to the scholarly community. It contains all the elements of an elaborate and well-informed programme the architects of which must have belonged to the hesychast-oriented monastic elite. It may therefore be seen as a sublime and timeless expression of the Orthodox ascetical ideal and a convincing materialization of the concept of *desert* as Heavenly Jerusalem.

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ПУСТЫНЯ КАК НОВЫЙ ИЕРУСАЛИМ:  
СТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ОБРАЗОВ САКРАЛЬНОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА

В теории и практике христианства *пустыня* означает пространство аскезы, отделенное от мира и полное дьявольских искушений. Но это также священное пространство, сцена божественных откровений, мифологизированное пространство, где действовали библейские персонажи, включая самого Христа. Помимо «исторического» измерения, *пустыня*, в качестве метафоры небесной обители, является эсхатологической категорией. Она существует во исполнение пророчества Исайи (51: 3): «Так, Господь утешит Сион, утешит все развалины его, и сделает пустыни его, как рай, и степь его, как сад Господа...». Именно в свете образа Небесного Иерусалима, как истинного дома и родины христианина, предсказанного в Книге Откровения (21: 1–5), следует понимать слова Ефрема Сирина: «Возлюбите пустынные жилища, таким образом вы достигнете небес».

Функционально и семантически концепт пустыни заслуживает широкого исследования и достаточно гибкого определения. Если пустыня — это *локус* контакта земного и небесного, к той же категории относятся и такие понятия места, как *гора* и *пещера*, в источниках зачас-

тую подпадающие под более широкий концепт *пустыни*. Такие места обычно образуют уникальную естественную среду даже в реальности. Следовательно, их нужно рассматривать на одном и том же семантическом уровне, как историческом, так и иеротопическом. Что касается исторического, важность его известна по сакральной топографии иудаизма, а затем и христианства, в отношении Иерусалима и Святой Земли. «Три таинственных пещеры», места рождения, захоронения Христа и Его первого Богоявления на Елеонской горе, имеют эпитеты «спасительная пещера» или «святейшая пещера» (Евсевий). Близость святого города придавала особый статус отшельникам Иудейской пустыни, называвшим себя «населенниками Иерусалима» (Кирилл Скифополит). Святая гора Сион, город Давида и место Сошествия Святого Духа на апостолов — все это мощные символы и общепринятые синонимы Иерусалима. С другой стороны, на аналогичном уровне эти святые места являлись «иконами» и «метафорами высших понятий». Иоанн Дамаскин размышлял о них как о «святых храмах Господа» и «вместилищах божественных сил», иначе говоря, как о земных отражениях Небесного Иерусалима.

*Translatio Hierosolymi*, воспринятое как возможность символического переноса святости и ее *renovatio*, обновление на других местах, является безошибочным проявлением иных примеров средневековых монашеских *пустыней*. «Воспроизведение» Иерусалима в этом смысле совершалось двумя принципиальными способами. Один можно описать как типологическую ассоциацию, т. е. воскрешение в памяти святости посредством узнаваемых физических структур, таких как пещеры и горы. Другой — абстрактный, обладающий ассоциативным потенциалом, это многочисленные попытки спиритуализации идеи Святой Земли: ведь если истинный Иерусалим трансцендентен, в непосредственной реальности он может быть «актуализован» виртуально где угодно. Такой взгляд имеет далеко идущие последствия, которые ведут к созданию новых священных территорий и реидентификации некоторых народов как «нового Израиля».

Немногие примеры из Византийского мира могут продемонстрировать потенциал различных интерпретаций монашеской *пустыни* как Небесного Иерусалима. Несомненно, самым известным примером является Энклистра св. Неофита на Пафосе, оформленная, как модель Святого Гроба в Иерусалиме. Сам создатель описал ее верхнюю камеру как «Новый Сион», добавив, что это было «полное воплощение Божественного провидения». Эпитет «Второй Сион» как тип пещеры, принимающей Господа, также применялся в отношении Мега Спелайон — высоко почитаемого пещерного святилища на Пелопоннесе. Более того, расположенные поблизости чудотворные источники назывались «Но-

вым Силоамом». Грузия также предоставляет изобилие подобных примеров. Основатели грузинского монашеского движения, Иоанн Зедзели и его товарищи-отшельники, неоднократно объявляли себя гражданами Небесного Иерусалима, не строили жилищ, обитали в пустынях, на горах и в пещерах. Их миссия состояла больше в духовном, чем в материальном строительстве. Радикальный аскет Шио воспринимал свое жилище таким же образом. Он считал глубокую пещеру, в которой обитал, лестницей Иакова, ведущей прямо на небеса, и из темноты пещеры он видел открывающийся путь к немеркнущему свету. Широкое распространение модели и ее соотношение с другими программами подтверждается существованием знаменитого пещерного комплекса на другой, западной, периферии мира: истинное значение «ангельских пещер» Монте Гаргано недвусмысленно раскрывается в широко известной надписи: «Впечатляющее это место. Здесь дом Господа и врата небес». Нет необходимости подчеркивать, что самой прославленной и почитаемой из всех была *великая пустыня* — Святая Гора Афон, которую постоянно описывали как сад Богоматери и даже «врата небес» или «предвкушение рая».

Наконец, обратимся к сербскому материалу, представляющему ясный и весьма любопытный пример. Восприятие идеи Небесного Иерусалима для построения образа «Нового Израиля» отражалось в упоминании монашеских *пустынь* во время создания независимого Сербского государства (в начале XIII в.). Концептуальная основа была заложена св. Саввой Сербским. Согласно его биографу Доментиану, Савва в своих трудах *пустынножителя* «присоединился к отечеству Святой Горы... восстанавливая светлый путь в Иерусалим». Идея эта получила замечательное материальное выражение. Стараниями Саввы была основана монументальная община пещерных отшельников вокруг королевских монастырей Студеница и Милешево, по форме все это напоминало те поселения, которые он видел в ходе путешествия по Иудейской пустыне. Та, что возле Милешево, известна как «пустыня св. Саввы». На протяжении средних веков взгляд на *пустыню* как рай, а на отшельничество как на путь в «высший град», в сербском пространстве был крайне устойчив. Такие духовные метафоры Небесного Иерусалима были особенно частыми в гимнологии и агиографии, и это фиксируется в таких выражениях, как «духовный град», «небесные врата», «скиния в пустыне», «святая гора», «пещеры в пустынях». В параллель с этими литературными ассоциациями существовала очевидная тенденция к обустройству пещерных святынь в избранных природных ландшафтах с целью переноса *пустыней, гор и пещер* в местную среду. Инициатива была узаконена поучениями, утверждавшими присутствие мистической связи между прототипом и его «копией». Некоторые из

этих святилищ (Кориша, Улярице, Матос) сохранили мощную ауру святости, переводя реальность в источник для вознесения духа. Упомянутая выше программа достигла высшей точки развития при деспоте Стефане Лазаревиче в начале XV в. Этот проницательный выдающийся сербский правитель выстроил два города по образу Иерусалима. Один, исторический, стал столицей Белградом. Другой, эсхатологический, представлял собой «путь в высший Иерусалим и подобие его». Деспот основал этот «град» — монастырь и поминальную церковь в Ресаве — в *пустыне*, насельники которой были его частыми и дорогими товарищами и собеседниками. Совсем не случайно он выбрал для освящения этой «исихастрии» день Пятидесятницы, величайший праздник Сиона. Такое подражание Небесному Иерусалиму, имевшее не только иеротопическое, но и ритуальное значение, должно было служить убедительным доказательством того, что и в Сербии была частица Святой Земли.



1. Judean Desert



2. Shiomgvime Monastery



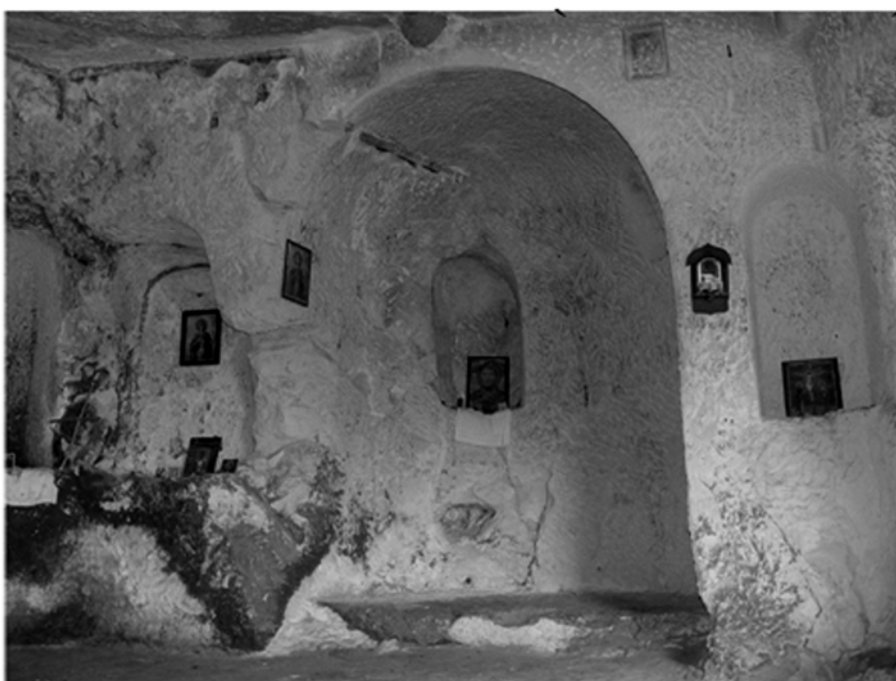
3. Gareji Desert



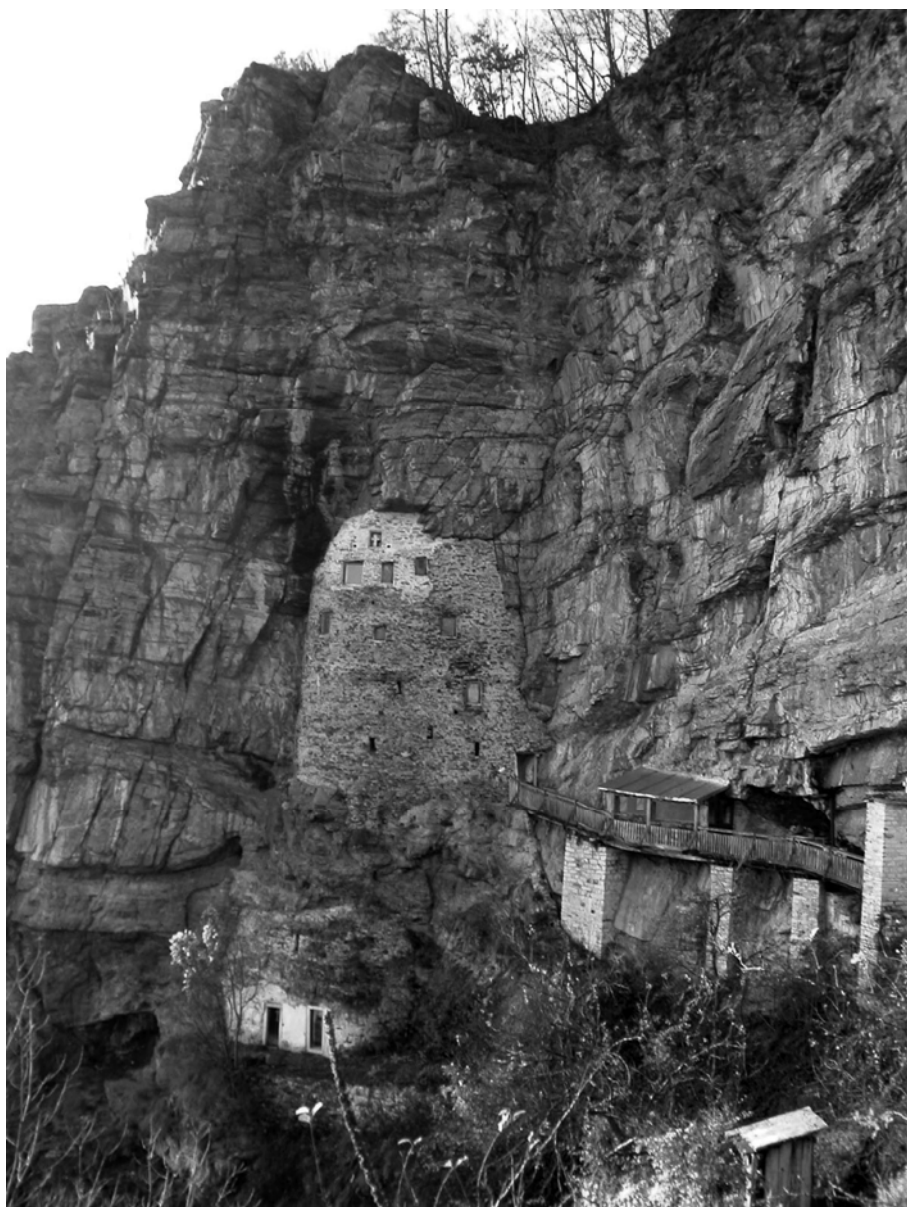
4. Vardzia, cave complex (drawing after A. G. Kldiashvilli)



5. Ivanovo Village (Ruse), so-called Ruined Church (after A. Handjynski)



6. Osmar Village (Shoumen), The Rock Monastery



7. Studenica, Hermitage of St Sava





8. Koriša (Metochia), Monastery of St Peter of Koriša



9. Uljarice (Metochia), cave complex