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AN ARMENIAN PILGRIM TO THE HOLY LAND
IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE ERA

It is appropriate to honour Archbishop Norayr Bogharian with a study relating to the Armenians in the Holy Land. His learned presence has been an ornament of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, embodying its great traditions, embellishing its learning and cherishing its treasures. To him and the tradition of scholarship he represents we dedicate this study of the first documented Armenian pilgrim to the Holy Land.

The oldest source known to us which mentions Armenian pilgrimage is to be found in Epiphanius of Salamis' composition *Against the Heresies* in chapter 40 (291a, 292a-b). In this section he discusses a gnostic group called the "Archontics"¹. He tells in the passage of the foundation of the heresy by a certain "old man" called Petros. Petros lived at Capharbaricha which is in the territory of Eleuthero-polis (Beit Guvrin) and Jerusalem, three miles beyond Hebron². From him the heresy was acquired by an Armenian named Eutaktos. Eutaktos had arrived in the Holy Land, having set out from an area of Armenia Minor near Satale/a and having been, in the interim, in Egypt. The Archontic heresy, Epiphanius tells us, spread back to Armenia, both Major and Minor, when Eutaktos returned home. All these events took place, according to the text, towards the death of Constantius.

This document is very important for the study of Armenian pilgrimage from a number of points of view. First, it tells the story of an Armenian traveller, Eutaktos, from Armenia Minor who arrived in Palestine from Egypt. It is not a far reaching assumption to view Eutaktos as a pilgrim. He had come from Armenia to the Holy Land. Admittedly, Epiphanius does not mention his visiting Jerusalem or the dominical holy places, but then it should be borne in mind that Eutaktos and his doings are merely incidental to Epiphanius' text and

¹ I am indebted to my colleague Dr G. Stroumsa who first drew my attention to this passage.

² On the district of Beit Guvrin and its borders, see M. AVI-YONA, *Historical Geography of Palestine from the End of the Babylonian Exile up to the Arab Conquest* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1963) s.v. (in Hebrew). His description jibes with the datum of Epiphanius.

purpose. Epiphanius is interested in the origins of the Archontic heresy, not in the travels of Eutaktos. Consequently he tells us of Eutaktos only as much as touches on his relationship with the Archontic heresiarch. In Palestine he encounters an "old man" (a technical term for an ascetic monk) in a holy place and absorbs a certain doctrine from him³. He has arrived from Egypt and it seems to be reasonable to assume that in Egypt, too, he visited the monks of the desert who were well established by the early fourth century⁴. The fact that he went to Egypt illustrates something of the nature and character of his pilgrimage — he undoubtedly came to the Holy Places but, like other fourth-century pilgrims⁵, he also had a great interest in seeing holy men. Eutaktos forms one of the group of early pilgrims to whom we may attribute this motive.

This leads to the question of date. Epiphanius dates the incident "in the time of Constantius, about the time of his death". Now, Constantius died in 361 C.E., so we can assume that Eutaktos came to Palestine towards the end of the 50's of the fourth century. Epiphanius' own dates and lifespan strengthen this conclusion. He was himself born around the year 317 near Eleutheropolis. In his youth he spent a number of years in Egypt and returned and settled in a monastery not far from Eleutheropolis around 337 and lived there for some decades, until he was appointed Bishop of Salamis in 367. He wrote his work against the heretics about 375. Thus, when he reports on the doings of Petros at Capharbaricha in the territory of Eleutheropolis shortly before the death of Constantius, he is talking of events which happened not far from where he lived and during the time he lived there. This is a first-hand report. It seems quite assured, then, that our Armenian, heretic though he became, was in Capharbaricha in the 50's of the fourth century⁶.

³ Capharbaricha will be discussed below.

⁴ For a general introduction to this subject, with a wealth of information, see D. J. CHITTY, *The Desert a City* (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1966).

⁵ See on this matter E. D. HUNN, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) who adduces, for example, much information on travel from the Holy Places of Jerusalem to the Egyptian desert and back in the latter part of the fourth century (p. 180-202). Obviously, also, a good part of Egeria's pilgrimage was devoted to holy men as well as holy places. See J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels* (rev. ed.; Jerusalem: Ariel, 1981) 13-15, 21-26. He cites other examples as well.

⁶ According to H.-Ch. PUECH, "Archontiker", *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, I. 634 Epiphanius himself excommunicated Petros between 335 and 367. His

The fact that he visited a *geron* at Capharbaricha is also worthy of our attention. As already indicated, we tend to see this as a technical term for an ascetic monk. That such a monk was at Capharbaricha already in the 350's is of very considerable interest⁷. The site is apparently that of the village of Bani Na'im (coordinates 165 120), still known to some people in C.W. Wilson's time (c. 1887) as Kefr Bareka⁸. This was the site traditionally associated with Abraham's looking down at Sodom in the company of the three angels. It is still bound up with those traditions since, to this day, one of its central sites of Moslem veneration is connected with Lot⁹. It was visited by Paula in 386 C.E. (Jerome, *Ep. 108 ad Eustochium* written in 404).

Cyril of Scythopolis mentions the site in the *Life of Euthymius* (23.21) and the *Life of Sabas* (99.20ff., 124.15ff.). He reports that a monastery was built there after 483 C.E. by Severianus and that a certain Abba Paul, having governed the New Lavra for six months against his will, fled first to 'Arabia' and then came to Capharbaricha where Severianus was building a coenobium. This took place in 514. When Abba Paul left the New Lavra, Agapet who was Sabas' disciple, received the position of higoumen and proceeded to expel diverse sorts of heretics, chiefly Origenists and Manicheans, who had been admitted to the New Lavra by Abba Paul. According to Cyril of

source for this is *Haer* 40.1.6. That article gives much information about Petros and Eutaktos, without highlighting the importance of the incident for the history of pilgrimage.

⁷ The ancient information on this place is conveniently summarized by J. WILKINSON, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Jerusalem: Ariel, 1977), "Gazeteer", s.v. Caphar Barucha, p. 154. See also M. AVI-YONA, *Gazeteer of Roman Palestine* (Qedem 5; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, 1975) 45. His being a monk is rendered even more probable by the continuation of the text of Epiphanius which relates that he was expelled by the bishop Aetius from the position of presbyter (*Haer* 40.1.8).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Much information of the present village and its history is to be found in S. BEN YOSSEF, *Bani Na'im: A Village on the Edge of the Desert* (Nature Protection Society, Mt. Giloh Field School, 1980), (Hebrew). On the site and traditions of Nabi Lot, see particularly p. 11-14. I. Hirschfeld, who is conducting archaeological research on monasteries in the Judean desert, has kindly informed me of the discovery of the remains of five monastic buildings, one of which forms a centre for the others. These are around Bani Na'im, with the central building, which is a coenobium, closest to the village. He would identify this central building with the coenobium of Severianus (see below). It should further be noted that "Caphar Baricha" is apparently an Aramaic form, while "Caphar Barucha" (the form used by Jerome) seems to be Hebrew, in spite of the final -a.

Scythopolis, Abba Paul was quite innocent in the whole matter, being a simple and ingenuous person (*V. Sabae* 124.2ff.). It is intriguing that Abba Paul, in whose time the heretics (including some dualist or gnostic ones) had been admitted to the New Lavra, ended up in Capharbaricha where, a century and a half earlier, Petros had been teaching a gnostic heresy.

A considerable period of time, of course, elapsed between these two individuals, even though both were at the same place and both had some connection with gnostic heresies. Yet, there is another further striking parallel between them — Petros, according to Epiphanius, after he had been removed from the position of presbyter, fled to 'Arabia' to a place called Kochabe (? = Astra) where there were Ebionites and Nazareans¹⁰. As noted, Abba Paul also fled to 'Arabia' before coming to Capharbaricha. Does this indicate the active cultivation of dualistic doctrines in Trans-Jordan during this whole period? In any case, the coincidence is striking.

There is no literary evidence for monastic building at Capharbaricha before the activities of Severianus, about 150 years after the events related by Epiphanius. Nonetheless, we do know of a pattern of the settlement of single holy men at particular sites which preceded the building of monastic centres for them. A prominent example is Mount Sinai; the earliest monks attested there are the Syrians Julian Saba and Symeon the Ancient and they were there about the middle of the fourth century. Egeria, too, found monks living in cells there and a church built (3:1; Wilkinson, p. 93)¹¹. All this was well before Justinian built the Monastery of St. Catherine in the middle of the sixth century¹². Consequently, what is in any case an obvious development, is here witnessed in the documents. Monks, even eremites, were sometimes drawn to a particular spot because of its associations. Or

¹⁰ The significance of Petros' relations with Judaeo-Christians is being studied in detail by G. Stroumsa. PUECH, "Archontiker", speculates that the bishop involved was Aetius, bishop of Lydda who participated in the Council of Nicea.

¹¹ A recent study of monastic cells in Sinai is U. DAHARI, "Sinai Monasticism in the Byzantine Period in Light of the Archeological Excavations", *South Sinai Researches 1967-1982* (Tel-Aviv: Nature Protection Society and the Sinai Administration, 1982) 36-48 (Hebrew). He describes groups of monastic cells and chapels at a number of sites throughout the high mountain region of southern Sinai and a notable part of them he sets before the middle of the fifth century.

¹² See M. E. STONE, *Armenian Inscriptions from the Sinai* (Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies, 5; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1982) 26 and further references there.

alternatively, they would be attracted to a particular location by its characteristics, such as its isolation, and with time sacred traditions came to be associated with it. Then, once a number of monks became centred at a given place, the construction of a monastery or a coenobium was a natural next step. So it was also at Capharbaricha. And, it might be speculated, there may have been some sort of tradition of heresy among the monks there and perhaps an ongoing relationship of some kind with the area of 'Arabia', across the River Jordan. Certainly Peter, the "old man" encountered by Eutaktos was a heretic, and Severianus' buildings were not the foundation of monasticism at Capharbaricha, but rather a stage in its development.

A number of points of interest are to be gleaned from this text about matters Armenian. One is that Eutaktos came from Armenia Minor. The next pilgrims mentioned, a group of 400, visited Eutymius soon after 428 C.E. Their exact place of origin is not mentioned, but Euthymius himself came from Melitene¹³. Another Armenian, from Zomeri near Sebastia in Cappadocia-Pontica is mentioned by Cyril of Scythopolis as succeeding Theodosius at the head of his monastery somewhat later than the events we are discussing (529 C.E.)¹⁴. These early pilgrims from the pre-Chalcedonian period are probably not easily compared with those from after the time that the Armenian Church rejected the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon.

So Armenians from the area under Byzantine control figured prominently among early monks and pilgrims to the Holy Places. Moreover, at a slightly later period, these were presumably largely Chalcedonian rather than anti-Chalcedonian Armenians¹⁵. Such, at least,

¹³ *V. Euthymii* 27.8ff. (FESTUGIÈRE, 3.1, p. 81). Euthymius lived from 377 to 473 and the event here related took place soon after he founded his Lavra in 428. K. HINTLIAN, *History of the Armenians in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: St. James, 1967) 7 says that the 400 were from Melitene. This does not seem to be stated by Cyril of Scythopolis, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ See CYRIL, *V. Theodosii* 240.1ff. (FESTUGIÈRE, 3.2, p. 61). His relatives had a great career in the imperial service, *ibid.* Evidence for Greek-speaking Armenian pilgrims of the later period may be derived from certain of the Sinai inscriptions; see M. E. STONE, "The Greek Background of Some Sinai Armenian Pilgrims and Some Other Observations", *Medieval Armenian Culture* edd. M. E. STONE and T. J. SAMUELIAN (University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies, 6; Chico: Scholars Press, 1984) 194-202.

¹⁵ In *V. Sabae* 117.20-118.10 (FESTUGIÈRE, 3.2, p. 44) we find the matter of the Armenians who had their own chapel at the Great Lavra but were moved, in 501, to the main church and forbidden to say the Mass itself or the Trishagion in Armenian since they introduced some Monophysite formulae into them. So the Chalcedonian issue was very much alive also among Armenians in the orthodox monasteries of the Holy Land. The general question of Armenians in early Palestinian monasticism is not the subject of the present paper, but it is surely a more intense form of the same urges that produced pilgrimage. There was another Armenian-language chapel at the monastery

is the picture provided by the sources but, of course, for the earliest pilgrims these sources are themselves Greek. From the moment that information becomes available in Armenian, there is relatively ample reference made to anti-Chalcedonian Armenian pilgrims and to those coming from Armenia Major. Thus the view that Armenian pilgrims of the earliest period were exclusively Chalcedonian or from the Byzantine empire does not follow. This may have been the case, but this might also be an optical illusion created by the character of the sources surviving. After all, the evidence from epigraphy indicates that pilgrimage traffic continued in spite of changes of political authority¹⁶. Moreover, Eutaktos himself is said to have had wide connections in Armenia Major, although he stemmed from Armenia Minor.

Eutaktos came, as we have said, from Armenia Minor, from near Satale/a; a city that had always belonged to Armenia Minor and to the Byzantine empire. He returned there and nothing more is told of his activities but that he spread the heresy in Armenia Minor and in Armenia Major as well. He is, albeit a heretic, the first recorded Armenian pilgrim.

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of St. Theodosius at Deir Dossi. This is discussed in the *Life of St. Theodosius* by Theodore of Petra, 45.10-15 (FESTUGIÈRE, 3.3, p. 127). There too the distinction found at Mar Saba existed and the Mass itself was said only in Greek in the main church, while the other parts of the liturgy were said in Armenian. It is a witness to the number of Armenians that they are specifically given their own chapels in two of the most important Palestinian monasteries. If the colophon cited by N. Akinian is genuine, then the *Life of St. Anthony the Great* was translated into Armenian in Jerusalem in the mid-fifth century; see N. Akinian *Die klassisch-armenische Sprache und die Wiener Mechitaristen Schule* (Vienna: Mechitarists, 1932) 70 (Armenian). This would provide some further insight into Palestinian Armenian interest in monasticism. There are, however, some problems with the synchronizations in the colophon, and it may be a pious fraud.

¹⁶ See STONE, *Armenian Inscriptions* 52.

P.S. CYRIL OF SCYTHOPOLIS in his *Vita Sancti Euthymii* reports that, some time before 428, after various wanderings in various deserts, the saint came to the desert of Ziphon. He founded a monastery in that area, between the village of Aristoboulias and Kapharbaricha (*Vit. Euthym.* 22-23, FESTUGIÈRE, I. 76-77). There, Cyril continues, not only did he heal the sick, but he converted and baptized some of the Ziphians who were previously Manichees. It is not certain what relationship this monastery has to the building constructed by Severianus towards the end of the fifth century. Cyril indicates nothing about this. Nonetheless, this document not only strengthens the evidence for monasticism in the general area of Caphar Baricha, but it also provides a further witness to the cultivation of dualistic heresy in that area. This helps to bridge the chronological gap between Petros in the 350's and Severianus in the 480's.

THE PEREGRINATIO PAPHNUTIANA AND JERUSALEM MS 285

Students of medical history will probably be intrigued by the following description: "... he plunged his fingers into my side and clove it as with a sword, drew forth my liver — and it hurt greatly — and he showed me the sores which were upon it, blackened and infected, and he cleaned it with his hand ... and he approached me and set my liver once more into its place completely cured¹".

The narrative of this exciting surgical procedure which was executed in the middle of the Egyptian desert is only one of the many events relayed by a monk St. Paphnutius about another strange monk, St. Timothy by name, who chose to spend his life in the inner desert in the company of a herd of buffalos. This remarkable event is important not only for its intrinsic interest, but also because it is part of the experiences of the monk St. Paphnutius, himself an ascetic living in the same desert.

One day he decided to set out and see what other strange individuals he could find in the desert. His personal diary is included in manuscript no. 285 of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, containing the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, dated 1430, from the Crimea².

On looking into the manuscript as if it were a picture album, we discover that it contains illustrations of many personalities in different poses and scenes. Each picture has its own heroes, but among them one group of five pictures is particularly noteworthy (see Plates 1-5). In these a single individual appears repeatedly. He is bearded, holds a cane and is wearing monastic habit and a cloak. From an examination of the stories told in the manuscript it emerges that all five pictures illustrate a single literary piece that was translated into Armenian in the twelfth century and eventually entered our fifteenth century document³.

¹ Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, manuscript no. 285, p. 573.

² N. BOGHARIAN, *Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts* (Jerusalem, 1967) 2.107-112 (in Armenian).

³ Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, manuscript no. 285, p. 591; *Haranc' Vark'*, (*Lives of the Fathers*, Constantinople, 1720) 431, col. 1.