History in High Places: Tatarna Monastery and the Pindus Mountains

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Abstract

Monasteries and the records they produced are a promising source base for writing a history of the mountains of the western Balkans. These mountains are, by and large, absent from accounts of the Ottoman presence in the Balkans and, as with mountainous areas more generally, are often considered to exist outside of the main historical narrative. Using the example of a monastery that was founded in the Pindus mountains in 1556, I argue that the monastery's beginnings are best understood within the context of the Ottoman sixteenth century, even as due regard for Byzantine precedent must also be made. In addition, I pay close attention to the monastery's location, for two reasons. First, this opens up a new set of questions for the history of monasteries during the Ottoman period; to date most studies have focused on taxation, land ownership and the relationship to the central state. Second, the monastery's location offers a way into the environmental history of these mountains at the Empire's western edge. This article aspires to extend the nascent field of Ottoman environmental history into mountainous terrain.

Keywords

mountains – monasteries – Ottoman – environment – Balkans – roads

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The history of Evrytania was not written only with the sword
and the gun.

MARKOS GIOLAS, 1999

Introduction

In 1556 a monk named David (Δαυίδ), together with Methodios (Μεθόδιος) and several other brothers, founded the monastery of Theotokou (Θεοτόκου), more commonly known as Tatarna, near the Aspropotamos river in the Pindus mountains of western Greece, in what is today the province of Evrytania.¹ It is still standing today, although in the 1960s the monastery was relocated slightly southwest of the original location. Its founding and subsequent history raise several questions and can open up new areas of inquiry within the general framework of the Ottoman Empire. One of those areas is the Pindus mountains themselves. Seemingly a remote and unimportant corner of the Empire, the Pindus are absent from accounts of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and this silence extends into the subsequent centuries. They come into view only during the period of the famous Ali Pasha of Tepedelenli (1740–1822), in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, but even then the mountainous terrain ruled over by the “Lion of Ioannina” is not the focus of the many studies that have been written on this subject. The history of Tatarna provides a way in to the history of the region as the founding or refounding of a monastery produces documentation in places where it is relatively scarce, at least in relation to other areas of the Empire.

The founding of the monastery is known to us because the *typikon* (τυπικόν) survives.² It has been published several times and is well-known, at least within a certain small group of scholars.³ Nevertheless, these studies are writ-

- 1 Daniel and Methodios were actually hieromonks (ιερομόναχοι), that is, monks who had been ordained to the priesthood and were thus permitted to celebrate the liturgy. Hieromonks enjoyed a higher rank than ordinary monks which is likely why they were so named, while the rest of the monks were not. The Aspropotamos river is also known as the Acheloos (Αχελώος) river. Theotokos is a term widely used in eastern Christianity to refer to Mary.
- 2 A *typikon* is best understood as the rule of the monastery: “The *typikon* in this sense was a document containing a set of rules in accordance with which the particular monastery to which the document applied was expected to be administered and its monks lives to be regulated,” C. Galatariotou, “Byzantine Ktitorika Typika: A Comparative Study,” *Revue des Études Byzantines* 45 (1987): 77.
- 3 There are two general studies of the monastery both of which include the text of the *typikon*. See Ιωάννης Κουμουλίδης, *Το μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας: Ιστορία και Κειμήλια* (The Monastery of Tatarna: History and Relics) (Athens: Εκδοτική Ελλάδος, 1991) and Π. Βασιλείου, *Το μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας* (The Monastery of Tatarnas) (Athens: Εδικοσεως Επιστημονικης Εταιριας Ελληνικων Γραμματων ‘Παπυρος’, 1973.) It was also published much earlier in a collection of documents

ten in a hagiographic mode and no attempt is made to connect the typikon (and the monastery's history more generally) to a larger context, whether that be the Pindus mountains themselves, or the Ottoman sixteenth century. Here I aspire to give this valuable document its due.

In so doing, I am able to benefit from the wealth of scholarship that has accumulated, mostly in the last several decades and mostly in the Greek language, on the founding and re-founding of monasteries on the Greek peninsula and in the islands in the sixteenth century.⁴ Tatarna was just one of many such monasteries. This aspect of the Ottoman sixteenth century, while well known to Ottoman and post-Byzantine scholars working in Greece, is not generally appreciated or understood by the larger community of Ottoman scholars. The lapse is due mostly to the fact that the literature focuses on the great monastic centers – Mount Athos, the Meteora and St. Johns on the island of Patmos – that pre-dated the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, and the mechanisms of their survival. If anything, the sixteenth century is associated with the gradual retraction of privileges for the sultan's Christian subjects.⁵

While not incorrect, this makes the burst of monastic building during the same period especially interesting. Thus far, however, no study has moved from

from the region of Evrytania, which is where the monastery is located. Π. Πουλιτσας, "Επιγραφαί, Ενθυμήσεις και Σιγίλλια εξ Ευρυτανίας." (Inscriptions, Souvenirs and Sigilla from Evrytania) *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 3(1926): 280–7.

- 4 The literature is extensive. See Σοφία Λαιου, *Τα Οθωμανικά Εγγραφα της Μονης Βαρλααμ Μετεωρων 16^{ος}–19^{ος} Αι* (The Ottoman Documents of Varlaam Monastery, Meteora, 16th to 19th Centuries) (Athens: 2011); Φωκίων Κοτζαγεωργής, "Τα μοναστηρια ως οθωμανικές τοπικές ελίτ" (The Monasteries as Ottoman Local Elites). In *Μοναστήρια, Οικονομία και Πολιτική: Από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεότερους χρόνους* ed. Ηλίας Κολοβός (Herakleion: Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης), 2012; Ι.Χ. Αλεξανδروπούλος, "Τα Οθωμανικά Τουρκικά Εγγραφα της ιερας μονης Δουσικου: η μονη ως το μεσα του 16^{ου} αιωνα" (The Ottoman Turkish Documents of the Holy Monastery of Dousiko: The Monastery up through the Middle of the Sixteenth Century") *Τρικαλίνα* 14 (1994): 101–119; Δ.Σ. Σοφίανος, "Ο Άγιος Βησσαρίων Μητροπολίτης Λαρίσης (1527–1540) και Κτίτορας της Μονης Δουσικου" (Saint Vissarion: Metropolitan of Larissa and Founder of Dousiko Monastery) *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά* 4 (1992): 177–282; Σοφία Λαιου, *Η Σαμος κατά την Οθωμανική περίοδο* (Samos During the Ottoman Period) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2002).
- 5 As the Ottomans conquered the majority Christian Balkan lands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they practiced "istimalet" or accommodation, both in terms of a favorable tax regime and the retention of pre-existing customs and practices. By the sixteenth century this was abandoned, it is generally agreed, in favor of the centralization and standardization of Ottoman rule, see Heath Lowry, *Fifteenth Century Ottoman Realities: Christian Peasant Life on the Aegean Island of Limnos* (Istanbul: Eren, 2002) which traces the practice, and then the withdrawal, of istimalet. But see M. Greene, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768: The Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015): 83 for the argument that, in the interests of standardization, this policy was applied equally to Muslims and Christians.

monasteries in the plains and the islands to one in the mountains. Just as the Pindus are absent from the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, they are equally absent from the steadily growing literature on the revival of monastic life in the sixteenth century. No doubt this is due, in part, to the unfortunate paucity of documentation, relative to that produced in gentler topographies, although it probably also owes something to the general idea of mountain isolation.⁶ Whatever the case may be, this too makes the typikon of Tatarna monastery particularly valuable. Using the typikon as a starting point, I shall develop two arguments. First, the very founding of the monastery suggests that the Pindus mountains were not isolated from trends occurring elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Balkans. Second, the information in the typikon allows us a limited, but precious, window into the mountain environment, including the relationship between a monastery and its environment. This, too, has been little explored in Ottoman historiography. In both arguments the physical location of the monastery is key.

Before discussing the typikon, it is worthwhile to identify a larger source base that, going forward, offers great promise in terms of writing a history of the Pindus mountains during the Ottoman period. Monasteries, whose archives typically include numerous Ottoman documents, are key. The monastery of Christ the Savior, of which more will be said later on in this article, is located in the eastern foothills of the Pindus mountains, at the edge of the Thessalian plain. A number of Greek historians have done valuable work, in the form of articles, on the history of the monastery during the Ottoman period but none have addressed the monastery's relationship to the mountain world that rises just behind it.⁷ As I will suggest further on in this article, even

6 In his study of Alpine communities, Pier Paolo Piazzo has called this 'the Alpine paradox.' The paradox is that Alpine communities have traditionally been considered as socially and economically closed, but the work of historians and ethnologists is showing that they have been open societies since the Middle Ages. P.P. Piazzo, *Upland Communities: Environment, Population and Social Structure in the Alps since the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 142.

7 See the following, among others, on the monastery, also known as Dousiko after the nearby village of the same name: Αλεξανδρουπουλος, "The Ottoman Turkish Documents,"; Δ.Σ. Σοφianos, "Ο Άγιος Βησσαριων Μητροπολιτης Λαρισης (1527–1540) και Κτιτορας της Μονης Δουσικου" (Saint Vissarion: Metropolitan of Larissa and Founder of Dousiko Monastery) *Μεσαιωνικα και Νεα Ελληνικα* 4 (1992); Δ.Σ. Σοφianos, "Οι Νεοφυτοι Λαρισης του 16^{ου} Αιωνος: Συμβολη εις την Εκκλησιαστικην Ιστοριαν της Μεταβυζαντινης Θεσσαλιας." (The Neofytoi of Larissa in the sixteenth century: a contribution to the ecclesiastical history of post-Byzantine Thessaly." *Επετηρις του Μεσαιωνικου Αρχαιου* 15/16 (1965–1966):86–124.

from the relatively limited research that has been done so far, there is good evidence that the monastery was deeply involved in its mountainous hinterland.⁸

Moving on from the monastery of Christ the Savior, there are the monasteries in the mountains themselves. The large number of monasteries in the Pindus mountains is generally unrecognized and underappreciated. In the province of what is now Evrytania (Ευρυτανία), covering the southernmost extension of the Pindus mountains, we have evidence of twenty four monasteries over the course of the Ottoman period, and this in an area of only 1870 square kilometers.⁹ Not all have left documentation behind – historians of the area are correct in emphasizing the tremendous destruction the area suffered starting in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the Greek revolution of 1821 – but some have. In addition to the typikon from Tatarna, the monastery of Prousou (Προυσου), also still surviving, has preserved a property register from 1815, which has been published. Although described as a property register (*κτηματολογιον*) it also includes documents from the Patriarchate in Istanbul.¹⁰

Prousou was among several monasteries in the Pindus mountains to have connections to the Patriarchate. This suggests that research at the Patriarchate in Istanbul might also yield information about this region that while, seemingly remote, did maintain relationships with the imperial capital.

1 Founding of Tatarna

The opening lines of the typikon, which dates to 1556, are of a general nature: they declare that nothing is as pleasing to those living in accordance with God's wishes as the coenobitic or common life. The apostles shared everything and possessed nothing of their own, and several exemplars of monastic life are listed.

Whereupon, the founder David declares that, he and Methodios and “others from the brothers,” wishing for the hermetic and quiet life, desired to found a

8 From the valuable study by the Ottoman historian John Alexander, we learn that the monastery holds about 1740 Ottoman documents, of which roughly 400 are from the sixteenth century. The majority are *fermans* (sultanic orders) and *hüccets* (legal records of property transactions), which is typical of the types of Ottoman documents that are to be found in Greek Orthodox monasteries. A *ferman* from 1569 lists all of the monastery's holdings, village by village. This document could be invaluable in assessing the connections between the monastery and the mountain world. Αλεξανδροπουλος, “The Ottoman Turkish Documents,” p. 119.

9 Μαρκος Γκιολιας, *Ιστορία της Ευρυτανίας στους νεότερους χρόνους 1393–1821* (History of Evrytania in Modern Times 1393–1821) (Athens: Poreia, 1999): 366.

10 *Το Κτηματολογιον της Μονης Προυσου Ευρυτανίας* (The Property Register of the Monastery of Prousou in Evrytania.) ed. Γεωργίου Τ. Κολια and Παναγιώτου Χριστοπουλου (Athens, 1970).

monastery in the name of the Virgin Mary. After a fairly lengthy description of the monastery's location and boundaries (to be discussed shortly), the *typikon* then moves on to an enumeration of the donations, both in land and in objects, that the monastery has received. The nearby villages of Peniana donated the land and unspecified support, while the notables (ἀρχόντες) of the village of Palaiokatouno (Παλαιοκατούνο) also contributed funds to the endeavor.¹¹ The end result, the document states with satisfaction, is that a monastery was built where there had never been one before.¹² Villagers from other nearby villages, too, donated a wide variety of objects from holy books to silver objects. Other property in the village of Antinonos (Αντίνονος) was also donated as a dependency of the monastery (μετόχιον); in the village of Tatarna, from which the monastery would eventually take its name, they were given a mill and a millstone, as well as its proceeds in perpetuity. With all of these donations, they conclude, the monastery has been built and will be able to thrive.¹³

In her study of Byzantine *typika*, Galatariotou distinguishes between aristocratic and non-aristocratic founding documents. Unlike the former, the latter invariably lay out the landed property held by the monastery; out of a concern that they would not be taken over by wealthy outsiders, they had to ensure in some way their economic survival. And yet, anxious to not be seen as exploiters, these *typika* would emphasize that land was given to them by pious persons for spiritual reasons. Monks, not outside elites, were at the center of the endeavor and the history of the monastery's founding was typically given, again in distinction to aristocratic *typika*, since it was this act that distinguished the otherwise anonymous monk or monks, as opposed to membership in an illustrious family or some other mark of high status.¹⁴

Tatarna's *typikon* fits very well into Galatariotou's category of a non-aristocratic *typikon*; this would appear to be a monastery, sustained by local support, that belonged first and foremost to its monks. This makes sense, given that, although the Ecumenical Church had survived, the Byzantine aristocracy had disappeared. Despite this dramatic break, it is striking that, in a seemingly

11 The villages are described as a specific collective – it was the people “of Penianiton” (των Πενιανιτων) who gave the land. The reference is most likely to a collection of villages known as the Peniana (Τα χωριά Πενιανά.) Γκιολιας, *Ιστορία της Ευρυτανίας*, p. 389. But see p. 275 in Πουλιτσας, “Επιγραφαι” where he identifies a specific village, called Πενιάννα.

12 ουκ εγένετο ποτέ μοναστήριον εν τω τόπω αυτώ.

13 Two of the commentators on this founding document translate millstone (πῶρος or πωρόλιθος) as a raft or some sort of device for crossing the river, which would have been the case if the spelling were πόρος. Given that the word in the document is πῶρος, not πόρος, and that the spelling in the text is error free, it must be a millstone, not a raft, that is meant. I thank Sophia Laiou and Nicholas Panou for discussing this word with me.

14 Galatariotou, “Byzantine Ktitorika *Typika*”: 125–6 and p. 134.

remote corner of the Empire, the usual procedures for constituting a monastery of the humbler sort – the donation of land and objects – continued to operate. And in good Byzantine fashion, the typikon is careful to note that the donations were motivated by spiritual concerns and it was for the reason that the monastery flourished: “Because the Christians there donated both property and things for their salvation the monastery grew in wealth and advanced every day.”¹⁵ The important role played by the village of Palaiokatouno should be underlined. The notables of the village were singled out in the document and the relationship between the monastery and the village proved to be a very enduring one. Between the years 1675 and 1707 Palaiokatouno donated 1000 stremmata to the monastery. The village boasts a Byzantine church which dates from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. All of these facts suggest that Palaiokatouno was a place of some importance which was able to retain its significance across the Byzantine/Ottoman divide.¹⁶

The labors of anonymous monks, drawing sustenance from villagers high in the Pindus mountains, might well at first glance seem like a purely local endeavor. This framing is encouraged by the tendency, in the historiography of the Ottoman Balkans, to frame the mountains as the place of Christian flight and retreat from Ottoman rule.¹⁷ In fact, it is highly likely that Tatarna was connected to a much larger imperial project.

In the very same month that the typikon was issued, another document (a σιγγίλιον) was issued in Istanbul in which Patriarch Dionysios V recognized

15 Πουλιτσας, «Επιγραφαί», 285. The document also explains the monastery's good fortune as a result of the monks' commitment to the coenobitic or common life.

16 Βασιλείου, *Το μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*: 35. Γκιολιας, *Ιστορία της Ευρυτανίας*: 389. For the Byzantine church see A.K. Ορλανδου, “Βυζαντινά Μνημεία της Αιτωλοακαρνανίας – Ο εν Ακαρνανία Βυζαντινός Ναός της Παλαιοκατούνας” (Byzantine Monuments of Aitolioakarnania: The Byzantine Church of Palaiokatouna in Akarnania). *Αρχαίον των Βυζαντινών Μνημείων της Ελλάδος* Θ' (1961): 38.

17 For the classic statement of this thesis, see A. Vakalopoulos, “La Retraite des Populations Grecques vers des Régions Éloignées et Montagneuses Pendant La Domination Turque.” *Balkan Studies* 4 (1963): 264–76. In 1998 a conference on mountain spaces in the Balkans was convened and these tropes were held up for examination, among them the nationalist framing of the as “καταφύγιο των κλεφτών και κιβωτός του ελληνικού πολιτισμού” (the refuge of the freedom fighter and the container of Greek civilization) Βασίλης Νιτσιακος, and Χαράλαμπος Κασίμης “Introduction.” in *Ο Ορεινός χώρος της Βαλκανίας* (Balkan Mountain Spaces) (Athens: Πλέθρον, 2008): p. 15. Bulgarian and Albanian historiography is very similar in this regard. See N. Antov, *The Ottoman Wild West: the Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017): p. 133 and various articles in *Light and Shadow: Isolation and Interaction in the Shala Valley of North Albania*, Editors Michael Galaty, Ols Lefe, Wayne E. Lee and Zamir Tafilica (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archeology Press, 2013).

the monastery and also declared it to be *stavropegion*.¹⁸ This status, very well-known to Byzantinists but little discussed for the Ottoman period, secured a monastery's independence from the local bishop's control and put it directly under the Patriarchate in Istanbul.¹⁹

In the Byzantine period, *stavropegiako* status testified to a monastery's wealth and importance while, in turn, providing the Patriarchate with a valuable source of income.²⁰ Very little has been written on how *stavropegiako* status functioned in the Ottoman period but there is some evidence that such monasteries continued to have a privileged status, relative to other monasteries. Writing in the second half of the sixteenth century, the powerful Greek notable Michael Kantakouzenos advocated for joining the small and previously abandoned monastery of St. Anastasia (in today's Bulgaria) to the *stavropegiako* monastery of St. John the Baptist, as this would assure its survival. In a letter confirming the transfer, Patriarch Jeremias II said that the monastery of St. John the Baptist "is managed in a sound way and it is not deprived of material wealth, being able to provide the necessary needs to those who live a monastic life in it, and is in a position to care about St. Anastasia."²¹

Stavropegiako status was also traditionally desired as a way of freeing the monastery from other local authorities, particularly but not only the local bishop.²² This kind of independence, too, seems to have been pursued in the Ottoman period. The monastery of Varlaam at Meteora, at the foot of the Pindus mountains, sought and attained *stavropegiako* status at the beginning of the seventeenth century in order to strengthen its hand vis-à-vis a neighboring monastery. The two were engaged in an ongoing struggle over control of a spring.²³

18 πούλιτσας, «Επιγραφαί, »: 285.

19 The term derives from the practice of the planting of a cross in the foundation of the monastery at the moment of its foundation. This was normally performed by the local bishop but if the monastery was to be an imperial monastery, the ceremony was done in the name of the Patriarch, see M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni 1081–1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1995): 338.

20 Writing on the Byzantine period Angold observes that "The patriarchal administration had strong material incentives in the shape of the right to collect kanonika from stauropegial foundations." The kanonika was a tax, see Angold, *Church and Society*: 345.

21 T. Papademetriou, *Render unto the Sultan: Power, Authority and the Greek Orthodox Church in the early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 209.

22 In the Byzantine period patriarchs were not invariably in favor of granting *stavropegiako* status to monasteries. Some thought the local bishop should play more of a role. Whether this continued to be a consideration in the Ottoman period is an entirely unexplored question, Angold, *Church and Society*: 388.

23 Σοφία Λαίου, *Τα Οθωμανικά Εγγράφα της Μονής Βαρλαάμ Μετεωρων 16^{ος}–19^{ος} ΑΙ* (The Ottoman Documents of Varlaam Monastery, Meteora, 16th to 19th Centuries) (Athens: Κέντρον Ερευνής του Μεσαιωνικού και Νέου Ελληνισμού της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών, 2011): 51.

In the Ottoman period the granting of *stavropegiako* status could have another motivation, namely the extension and deepening of Ottoman administration. The settlement of populations in underdeveloped areas – either through the forced migration of *sürgün* or through the granting of incentives – was an essential part of this state policy. Sophia Laiou's work on the island of Samos during the Ottoman period has uncovered the vital role of the Patriarch in helping the sultan populate the island in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.²⁴ In a patriarchal sigillion (σιγιλλιον) dated 1585 the Patriarch explicitly referenced the need for ecclesiastical order on the island as a result of the increased population. For that reason, he declared the entire island as a *stavropegon*, meaning that it would be under the authority of the direct representative of the Patriarch, an exarch, rather than a bishop.²⁵ A Patriarchal Exarch was appointed not only for Samos, but for three other islands in the vicinity, thus demonstrating that the role of *stavropegon* in encouraging the settlement of Christian populations was not limited to Samos only.²⁶ In addition, in the short span of just seven years (1586–1593) three monasteries were founded on the island, all of them *stavropegiako*.²⁷

Returning back now to Tatarna, it is my contention that *stavropegiako* status in this case, too, was also meant as encouragement, but encouragement of a different sort. There is no mention in the sigillion of population settlement or increase (although we can assume that this was always desired) and other sources suggest that the ecclesiastical organization of this area of the Pindus had taken place prior to the foundation of Tatarna.²⁸ Instead, material and textual evidence suggests that the monastery was intended, at least in part, to assist in the extension of infrastructure across this mountainous terrain, with the goal of facilitating communication and mobility. Such a project was, after all, avidly pursued elsewhere in the Empire in the sixteenth century, including

24 The following section draws heavily on Sophia Laiou's 2002 study of Samos during the Ottoman period. Although here I am discussing only the ecclesiastical documentation, Laiou has thoroughly documented the settlement program on the Ottoman side as well. See Laiou, *Η Σαμος*: 23–46.

25 “ονομασας την νησον πατριαρχικον σταυροπηγιον,” Laiou, *Η Σαμος*: 40. Laiou also notes that the Patriarch's involvement was seen as a guarantee of religious freedoms, Laiou, *Η Σαμος*: 41.

26 Patriarchal exarchs were responsible for the supervision of *stavropegiako* monasteries within a certain area. See Angold, *Church and Society*: 340. Laiou also makes the argument that *stavropegiako* was better for the local population than being under a bishop, and was desired by them. But that is beyond the scope of this article.

27 Laiou, *Η Σαμος*: 41.

28 We know from the records of the monastery of Dousiko that already in the first half of the sixteenth century there was a bishop of Litzas and Agrafa – the mountainous territory where Tatarna is located, see Σοφιανός, “Ο Άγιος Βησσαρίων”: 198.

in the western Balkans.²⁹ The role of dervish zaviyes or tekkes in establishing or strengthening towns and routes in the Ottoman Balkans is well-known.³⁰ Monasteries may have played a similar role in Christian majority areas.³¹

2 Locating the Monastery

The English traveler and classicist William Woodhouse visited the monastery at the very end of the nineteenth century and remarked on its strategic location: "... it completely commands the western route from North to South Aetolia, as well as that which crosses North Aetolia from east to west."³² This east-west road was the road that began in Lamia in Thessaly, climbed to Karpenisi and then traversed several river valleys to end in Arta on the western coast. This, Woodhouse, said, was "the great route, or pack-road, that in ancient as in modern times led across Greece from by way of Karpenisi to Arta or Karvassaras on the north and south of the Ambrakian gulf."³³ Writing three quarters of a cen-

29 See G. Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005): 71–4, for the boom in road building and infrastructure across the Empire in the sixteenth century. Most Ottoman roads have been little studied, especially outside the major centers of Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul where sultanlic patronage was concentrated. A major exception is *The Via Egnatia under Ottoman Rule 1380–1699* ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1994). See also the recent dissertation which is the first study we have focused on a road through the mountains of the western Balkans, see J. Howell, *The Ragusa Road: Mobility and Encounter in the Ottoman Balkans (1430–1700)* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Harvard University 2017). See also M. Kiel, *Art and Society of Bulgaria in the Turkish Period* (Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1985) for numerous examples of road development in the Balkans in this early period.

30 Ö.L. Barkan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda bir Iskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Vakıflar ve Temlikler I: İstila devirlerinin kolonizatör Türk dervişleri ve zaviyeleri." *Vakıflar Dergisi* 2 (1942): 279–386.

31 Both Sophia Laiou and Phokion Kotzageorgis have suggested that Christian monasteries performed a similar role, see Ph. Kotzageorgis, "Haric ez defter and hali an el-reaya villages in the kaza of Dimetoka (15th–17th c.)." In *The Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, the Greek Lands: Toward a Social and Economic History in Honor of John C. Alexander*, ed. I. Kolovos, Ph. Kotzageorgis, S. Laiou and M. Sariyannis (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2007): 251 and Λαίου, *Η Σαμος*: 42. Laiou writes: "The policy of the Sublime Porte was consistent. Its goal was the economic development of all the areas of the Empire. It cared little whether it was dervishes or monks who promoted this." (translation mine)

32 W. Woodhouse, *Aetolia: Its Geography, Topography and Antiquities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897): 35.

33 Ibid.: 37. A recent study of the province of Evrytania, which covers much of the southern Pindus, identified this road as the most important mule path in the region. Γκιολιάς, *Ιστορία της Ευρυτανίας*: 40.

tury later, the British classicist N.G.L. Hammond, who spent World War II in the mountains of Greece working with the Greek resistance, remarked on the route as well.³⁴ He also makes several more general, interesting observations. Routes running from west to east across the Balkans, he writes, were historically almost as important as those running from north to south but were less visible to foreign travelers. European travelers considered them too daunting but “they have been accepted as tolerable by Balkan traders who used caravans of pack-horses.”³⁵ Both Hammond and the late nineteenth century German traveler Alfred Philippson agreed on the local nature of the routes (including the Lamia to Arta road) south of the Zygos Pass, as the well-traveled road between Thessaly and Epirus was known. The Zygos pass started at Kalambaka and ended at Ioannina. South of the pass, Philippson wrote, the traveler who wanted to cross from Thessaly to Arta had to traverse the deep valley of the Aspropotamos river and further down the river valleys of the Agrafiotis and the Tavropos were more difficult still. For this reason, Philippson tells us, “... almost all travelers have chosen to cross by way of the Zygos Pass, while the southern section of the Pindus has remained unexplored.”³⁶ Hammond highlights two moments when the more southerly routes were important: the period of the Roman invasions of Greece and from 1831 to 1912 when the border between the new state of Greece and the Ottoman Empire ran from Arta to Volos, right through the Pindus mountains.³⁷

His disregard of the Ottoman period is not unexpected, given the general disinterest in the Ottomans, particularly amongst classicists of his generation, but the founding of Tatarna suggests that this route was actually revived in the early modern period. Nor were the monks the only ones to assign it importance. A kanunname from 1569, just thirteen years later, referred to the road that ran from Lamia, in the plains of Thessaly, to Karpenisi and then Karli ili on the west coast of Greece as a public road – *tarîk-i âm*.³⁸ In the same document three villages along the road were assigned the job of derbends, or guardians of the passes, and were expected to keep the road open and to serve

34 N.G.L. Hammond, *Migrations and Invasions in Greece and Adjacent Areas* (Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1976): 31–2.

35 Ibid.: 29.

36 A. Philippson, *Θεσσαλία και Ἡπειρος. Ταξίδια και εξερευνήσεις στην Βόρεια Ελλάδα* (Thessaly and Epirus: Travels in Northern Greece) (Translated from the original German) (Trikala: Δεσποινά Κυριακίδη, 2014): 214. The Tavropos is also known as the Megdovas (Μέγδοβας) river, see Philippson, *Θεσσαλία και Ἡπειρος*: 214.

37 Hammond, *Migrations*: 31.

38 J. Alexander, *Toward a History of Post-Byzantine Greece: The Ottoman Kanunnames for the Greek Lands, circa 1500–circa 1600*. (Athens: 1985): 134. Karli ili was a sancak or province on the west coast of Greece, whose capital was Angelokastro, near today's town of Agrinio.

as guides, in exchange for tax exemptions. The establishment of derbend villages in and of itself shows that the Ottomans considered this route to be an important one. The Ottomans even anticipated travel in the winter:

In wintertime the roads are closed due to the abundance of snow and, in case the travellers are unable to pass, the populace of the said village open a path on the roads and they serve as guides.³⁹

The development of the area did not stop with the monastery. Soon after, although we do not know the exact date, a bridge was erected over the Aspropotamos river.⁴⁰ Its connection to the monastery is clear from its name; until it disappeared under the waters in the 1960s, a victim of a massive hydroelectric project, it was known as the bridge of Tatarnas. It is very unfortunate that no study of the bridge appears to have been done prior to its submersion, but here again Woodhouse has left us a valuable reminiscence.⁴¹ He writes:

This bridge crosses the Agraphiotikos almost on a line with that of Tatarna over the Acheloos. This line, if produced to the north-east, strikes the river at Megdhova at a point immediately below Kerasovon, and at that point we find a third bridge. These there are, in fact, all upon the great route, or pack-road, that in ancient as in modern times led across Greece from by way of Karpenisi to Arta or Karvassaras on the north and south of the Ambrakian gulf.⁴²

The line that Woodhouse discerned, formed by a series of bridges across all three of the major rivers of Evrytania, with the bridge of Tatarna being the westernmost point, strongly suggests that it was not only a monastery that

39 Ibid.: 134. The village charged with this responsibility was Laspi, which means mud.

40 This according to the Archimandrite of the Monastery who published a history of the monastery in 1985. See Gefyria.blogspot.com/2008/11/blog-post_2218.html.

41 In 1966, in their yearly survey of work done, the Greek Archeological Service included a brief reference to "Bridges over the Acheloos." Π. Λαζαριδης, "Τέφυραι Αχελώου." *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 21 (1966): 275. Λαζαριδης wrote "The study of these bridges was undertaken by the Greek Archeological Service architect Char. Boura, who will give more information of a technical nature." (translation mine.) No such report, however, ever seems to have been published.

42 Woodhouse, *Aetolia*: 37. The bridge over the Agraphiotis (Αγραφιωτης) river (which Woodhouse renders as Agraphiotikos) is the bridge of Manolis, which is still visible on a seasonal basis. It too was submerged as a result of the hydroelectric project in the 1960s but during the dry season it re-emerges and can be seen.

was founded in 1556; so too was the first node in a major route that would be further developed over time. At some point, unfortunately it is not at all clear when, Tatarna monastery also owned a han, as rest stations across the Ottoman Empire were known. Situated right next to the monastery, it was a substantial complex relative to other hans in the area. The han was actually three buildings: the first, a two story structure, provided food and drink as well as rooms for travelers, in the second travelers could house their animals while a blacksmithery, also an essential service for travellers, was in the third. Tatarna farmed out the actual running of the han to private individuals.⁴³ The connection between the monastery and the bridge is further suggested by the fact that the monastery built a small church, Agia Paraskevi, at the foot of the bridge; it was a dependency (μετοχίον) of the monastery.⁴⁴

Turning to the textual evidence, it is brief but suggestive. Besides identifying him as the founder, the typikon tells us just two other things about David: he was a hieromonk (ιερομόναχος), that is, a monk who had been ordained to the priesthood and was thus permitted to celebrate the liturgy and, two, he had previously served at a monastery known as Christ the Savior.⁴⁵ The Patriarchal sigillion also notes his previous service at the monastery of Christ the Savior.⁴⁶ The only other monastery in the area at that time was the monastery of Prousou (Ιερά μονή Προυσού Ευρυτανίας.) Further afield, in the plain of Thessaly at the eastern edge of the Pindus mountains, was the famous complex of Meteora with its several monasteries. None, however, bore the name of Christ the Savior. This leaves only one monastery, then, as the obvious candidate, the monastery of Christ the Savior, better known as Dousiko, after the eponymous nearby village. Dousiko also sits at the edge of the Pindus mountains, slightly to the south of the Meteora complex. Its full name was (and is) the monastery of Christ the Savior of the Great Gates (*Μονή του Σωτήρος Χριστού των μεγάλων πυλών.*) This is a reference to its physical location, a place at the base of the Pindus mountains, where the peaks come together to form the shape of a gate.

Unlike Tatarna, we know a great deal about the monastery of Dousiko, in large part due to its famous founder, Saint Vissarion (Αγίος Βησσαρίων)

43 Although Evrytania is a small province at some point it boasted 17 hans, a number which, as the author of a study of the hans writes, was “surprisingly large, given the size of the territory.” Π.Κ. Βλάχος, “Τα Χάνια της Ευρυτανίας” (The Hans of Evrytania). In *Πρακτικά Γ’ Ευρυτανικού Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου, Καρπενήσι, 17–19 Μαΐου 1996*: 388.

44 Αρχιμ. Δοσίθεου, *Ιερον Τριπτυχον* (Athens: Εκδοτική Παραγωγή Επταλόφος, n.d.): 124.

45 “Προηγούμενος της σεβασμίας μονής του σωτήρος χριστού.” In Κουμουλίδης, *Το μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*: 24.

46 Πουλιτσας “Επιγραφαι”: 284.

(1490–1540) who is still commemorated today. Vissarion, who was born in a nearby village, was appointed the metropolitan of Trikala, in 1526. Subsequent to that, between 1527 and 1534, he refounded the Byzantine monastery of Christ the Savior of the Great Gates. Vissarion was renowned for many things. Most pertinent for us is his tremendous activity as a builder of roads and bridges. Because he became a saint, we have several accounts of his life, some written within decades of his death, all of which emphasize his bridge building activity. Paper icons of him show a bridge in the background.⁴⁷ He is associated with four or five bridges, the most famous being the bridge known as the bridge of the raven (γέφυρα του κοράκου).⁴⁸ Built around 1520 over the Aspropotamos river, the bridge united Thessaly and Epirus. It was the largest stone bridge in Greece and lasted until 1949, when it was blown up during the Greek Civil War.

The late 17th century cleric and intellectual Athanasios Gordios visited the monastery twice in the 1680s and wrote a eulogy of the saint while he was there. In it he wrote that Vissarion built “many bridges and roads in all of Thessaly. Some were pre-existing that he strengthened, others he built from scratch.”⁴⁹ Two centuries later, the great historian Spiros Lambros also wrote about Saint Vissarion and noted his “care for road construction in Thessaly and all the way to Epirus.” He built many bridges, he continued, which “opened up” the road between Epirus and Thessaly.⁵⁰ Woodhouse, too, learned of the association between the saint and the monastery on the one hand, and the bridge on the other, when he traveled through the area in the late nineteenth century.

the bridge of St. Bessarion, commonly called that of Korako or Koraki. This bridge, which is on the route from Trikala to Arta, forms the only communication between the two banks of the Aspro in that part of the country when the river is swollen. It was built at the expense of the monastery of Dusikon in Kotziaka.⁵¹

47 Δημητριος Καλουσιος, *Ο Άγιος Βησσαριον Μητροπολιτης Λαρισης (1527–1540): Θεραπευτης και Γεφυροποιος* (Saint Vissarion: Metropolitan of Larissa, Healer and Bridgebuilder) *Ηπειρωτικα Χρονικα* 41 (2007): 261.

48 Saint Vissarion and his bridge-building activities are the focus of a separate article that I am currently preparing. John Alexander references Ottoman documentation (without being more specific) in Dousiko monastery on Vissarion's road and bridge building activity, another example of how research in the monastery's archive will be invaluable for understanding the connection between the monastery and the Pindus mountains, Αλεξανδρουπουλος, “The Ottoman Turkish Documents”: 110.

49 Σοφιανος, “Ο Άγιος Βησσαριων”: 276.

50 Ibid.: 179–80.

51 Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*: 269.

Tatarna, was not founded until sixteen years after Vissarion's death. However, the abbot of the monastery of Dousiko, who was serving at the time of Tatarna's founding, was closely connected to Vissarion. Neofytos the Second was Vissarion's nephew and is described in the documents as co-founder of the monastery. Like Vissarion as well, he was also the Metropolitan of Trikala, for which he received a berat from the sultan (as Vissarion had before him.)⁵² Thus it is very plausible that David, having served as a monk at a monastery which had launched a series of road building projects in the Pindus mountains, was either sent or took it upon himself to extend that by founding a monastery of his own in the mountains. This is admittedly speculative but when we consider, on the one hand, the monastery's location, its stavropegiako status, the documented role of the institution of stavropegiako in extending Ottoman rule elsewhere in the Empire and, on the other hand, the role of Dousiko monastery in extending and strengthening routes of communication across the Pindus mountains at this time, it is, I think, a speculation that rests on solid foundations.

Although scholars (as well as his contemporaries) have noted Saint Vissarion's bridge building activities, the broader question of Dousiko's relationship to the mountain world has not been posed. Letters from Dousiko's archives provide evidence, admittedly fragmentary, that the monastery's engagement with the Pindus was not limited to bridge and road building. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, dispute resolution and property holdings all drew the monastery into the world of the mountains.

As mentioned earlier, both Saint Vissarion and Neofytos the Second served, not only as abbots of Dousiko monastery, but also as metropolitans of Trikala. Both men had authority over the vilayet of Trikala, which included the territory where Tatarna was located. In the words of the berat: "Everyone, the great and the small, should obey him, the monks and the priests of this place must accept his leadership."⁵³ Amongst the documents still preserved in the monastery is a berat (a letter of appointment issued by the sultan) from the first half of the sixteenth century, for the bishop of Litzas and Agrafa, a bishopric high in the Pindus mountains which includes the area where Tatarna was built.⁵⁴ The bishop of Litzas and Agrafa was the signatory to a letter, also in the monastery's archives, from the 1540s, concerning the establishment of the boundaries of another bishopric, this one to the east of Dousiko, in the plains of Thessaly.⁵⁵

52 Σοφριανος, "Ο Άγιος Βησσαριων": 195. He served from 1550 to 1568/9. From 1540 to 1550 another Neofytos, unrelated to either Vissarion or to Neofytos the Second, served as both abbot of the monastery and metropolitan of Trikala, Σοφριανος, "Οι Νεοφυτοι Λαρισης": 96.

53 Σοφριανος, "Ο Άγιος Βησσαριων": 200.

54 Ibid.: 198.

55 Σοφριανος, "Οι Νεοφυτοι Λαρισης": 94.

In addition to this formal authority, authority which they enjoyed thanks to the Ottoman berat, we know that Neofytos, when he was the Bishop of Staga (near Meteora), adjudicated a quarrel between the monks and the notables of the village of Pyrra (Πυρρα), a village at an elevation of 3500 feet in the Pindus mountains.⁵⁶

It is striking that, in the summer of 1558, the monks of Dousiko, together with the monks of the monastery of Meteora (at Meteora) and all the bishops of the area – in short, a gathering of the region's ecclesiastical hierarchy – came together to resolve a dispute over an olive press in the village of Osdina (Οσδινά). Osdina, now known as Five Churches (Πεντε Εκκλησιες) is in the far northwest corner of today's Greece; then and now a trip over the Pindus mountains would be necessary to reach it from Thessaly. The monks of Meteora monastery stood accused by Neofytos of inflicting some kind of damage on an olive press, in Osdina, that belonged to Dousiko. He assembled them together to swear that they would not do so again; shortly after that Neofytos wrote to the priests and the notables of Osdina to inform them of the illegitimate, as he saw it, meddling of the other monastery in Dousiko's property.⁵⁷ Perhaps the monks or, anyway, their representatives, ran into each other in this distant village because the monks of Meteora monastery also held property in Osdina. We know that the founders of Varlaam monastery at Meteora donated property in the village to their new monastery.⁵⁸ Why this village, of all the possible villages, has left such a trail in the archives is at this point entirely unclear. But Osdina was in Epirus and there is other evidence that the founders of Varlaam monastery, who came from Ioannina, continued to have ties to Epirus. In addition to holding property in Osdina, they converted a monastery in the vicinity of Ioannina into a nunnery for their mother and sisters.⁵⁹ We can now appreciate more fully Spyridon Lambros's comment that Saint Vissarion's endeavors "opened up" the road between Epirus and Thessaly. The saint was from Thessaly but some of the leading members of the community at Meteora were from Ioannina.⁶⁰ The monasteries at the edge of the Thessalian

56 Ibid.: 101. According to google maps, the village is today just 59 kilometers (36 miles) from Trikala. Prior to becoming the metropolitan of Trikala in 1550, Neofytos was the bishop of Staga, "ἐπισκοπος Σταγών." Ibid.: 90.

57 Σοφριανός, "Οἱ Νεοφυτοὶ Λαρίσης": 110–1.

58 Λαίου, *Τὰ Οθωμανικά Εγγράφα τῆς Μονῆς Βαρλαάμ*: 35.

59 Ibid.: 35. See D. Nicol, *Meteora, The Rock Monasteries of Thessaly* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1963): 134–40 for the biography of the founders of Varlaam monastery.

60 The brothers who founded the monastery of Rousanou in the middle of the sixteenth century were also from Ioannina. See Nicol, *The Rock Monasteries of Thessaly*: 143–7.

plane looked east to Istanbul but they also looked west to Ioannina. Retaining those western ties meant that they would have to traverse the Pindus.

3 A Monastery in the Mountains

Let us return to the *typikon*. Another aspect of its value is the information in it which allows us to connect the monastery to its natural environment, a subject which has not yet been explored in Ottoman historiography. And, since Tatarna was founded in the Pindus mountains, we also have a document that allows us to see the challenges, and the possibilities, of living in this very particular environment.

The *typikon* describes where the monastery was located. They founded this monastery, we are told, at a place called πλάτανος or plane tree, near the Aspropotamos river. The document goes on to give the four boundaries of the monastery, three of which are also descriptors of natural features of the landscape. On one side was a red cliff, the red being the color of the dirt.⁶¹ The word used for cliff is non-standard and appears to be a local usage. This would imply either that David and perhaps some of the other monks were from the area, or that they drew on local knowledge in describing the place.⁶² Next the *typikon* describes a grove of trees, Kotzoupia (Κοτζούπια) which are judas trees. The third boundary were grazing grounds; the word used is again a colloquial one.⁶³

With the final boundary the people from the villages known as Peniana, mentioned earlier, appear. The monastery was next to “the pass of the Penianiton” (διασέλου πενιανιτων) and “next to the places of the Penianiton” (πλησιον των Πενιανιτων των τοπων.) We will recall that it was those villages, the villages “of the Penianiton” that donated the land for the monastery. This additional reference, which puts them in close physical proximity to the monastery, shows that they were the community whose fortunes were most closely bound up with those of the monastery.⁶⁴

61 του κοκκινου στεφανιου. I thank Christos Tsampras of Karpenisi and the Abbot of the Monastery of Tatarna who, in a personal interview in the summer of 2019, explained the meaning of these terms to me.

62 The word used for cliff is στεφανι, which normally means crown. The word for cliff is γκρεμος. I thank Christos Tsampras and the abbot of the monastery for this information.

63 Βουβιαρια rather than the standard βοσκοτοποι.

64 The use of the word διασέλου rather than περασμα for pass, as well as other words, such as the toponym Παλαιοκατουνο, speaks clearly to the heavy Vlach presence in the area of the monastery. This topic, however, is beyond the scope of the current article.

Locating next to the Aspropotamos river was certainly a key consideration. With its rushing waters, the monks would be able to make the best use of the mill and the millstone that they had been given.⁶⁵ No doubt, too, the particular spot along the river was carefully chosen to be at the narrowest point in the general vicinity where the flow of the water would be especially strong.⁶⁶ This would also make it an excellent spot for a bridge because bridges were also built at the narrowest spot. In the case of a bridge the rushing waters were a detriment; they made building the bridge an even more laborious task and continued to threaten the bridge even after it was standing. But the advantage was greater; if the crossing was narrow enough then a one arch bridge would suffice. This made for a sturdier bridge that was also easier to construct.⁶⁷ People, of course, were crossing the rivers of the Pindus valleys before bridges were built. Such a crossing was always risky and it makes sense that they would choose the narrowest point to cross. A medieval Greek chronicle which details the battle zone that was western Greece in the second half of the fourteenth century, had this to say about the conquest of a tower built by an Albanian lord along the same river as the monastery, the Aspropotamos, although at a point much further downriver:

With the conquest of the tower of Katochi, the passage over the Aspros (another name for the Achelos) in order to attack and plunder Angelocastro would be very easy. The river is immense and fording it in other spots is not possible, whereas the passage (over the river) from this spot is short and can be done at any time.⁶⁸

It seems likely, then, that the spot which the monks chose along the Aspropotamos river was already a crossing point.

65 The eminent Greek folklorist from the interwar period, Dimitris Loukopoulos, whose many works focused on the Pindus mountains, wrote that mills were everywhere in these mountains and were built along the edges of rivers or at streams coming from springs. See Δ.Λουκοπουλος, *Ποιμενικά της Ρούμελης* (Pastoralism in Rumeli) (Athens: I.N. Σιδερης, 1930): 287.

66 Κουμουλίδης, *Το μοναστήρι της Τατάρας*: 14. In a 2007 general study of the rivers of Evrytania, Ευάγγελος Καρράς notes that water mills were always built at the narrowest point for this reason. Ευάγγελος Καρράς, "Υδάτινοι Δρόμοι στο Φυσικό Περιβάλλον της Ευρυτανίας" (Waterways in the Physical Environment of Evrytania). In *Η Ευρυτανία στις περιγραφές Ελλήνων και ξένων Περιηγητών*. Ed Κλεομένης Κουτσούκης (Karpenisi: Ευρωπαϊκό Κέντρο Ευρυτανικών Σπουδών και Ερευνών, 2008): 556.

67 Γεωργιος Τσοτσος, *Μακεδονικά Γεφυρία* (Bridges of Macedonia) (Athens: University Studio Press, 1997): 23 and Καρράς, "Υδάτινοι Δρόμοι": 556.

68 Anonymous, *Το Χρονικον των Τοκων της Κεφαλληνίας* (The Chronicle of the Tocco of Kefalonia) (Thessaloniki: Ant. Stamoule, 2008): 237.

Tatarna monastery was also built close to Mardacha (Μαρδάχα), one of the largest springs along the Aspropotamos.⁶⁹ Visitors to the monastery consistently took notice of the spring's importance. When Woodhouse visited the monastery at the very end of the nineteenth century it was still hosting a fair (πανηγύρι) which, he said, was the largest in northern Greece. The Mardacha was vital to its success:

It is pretended that so great is the throng at the time of the Panegyris that the river barely suffices to supply the needs of men and animals, and that it would in fact fail entirely were it not for these springs.⁷⁰

Water was a seasonal resource; if rushing swollen waters made crossing rivers dangerous in the winter, the scarcity of water was a vexation of the summer. Due to the Mardacha, Tatarna had water all year round.⁷¹

Tatarna's founders, then, were shrewd readers of the landscape and they chose a spot with tremendous natural advantages, advantages which would then translate into social and economic power.

Conclusion

Whether as a source of water and energy or a strategic point of crossing, the Aspropotamos river is an essential part of the story of Tatarna monastery. We do not always think to pair rivers and mountains but the two are inseparable in the Pindus. Within the still nascent field of Ottoman environmental history, rivers are just starting to get their due. Given that, it is not surprising that navigable rivers have received the most attention so far. In the Balkans the Danube figures prominently as well as the Maritsa, although to a lesser extent.⁷² Navigable rivers connect to state-centered themes of trade and war.

69 Γκιολιας, *Ιστορία της Ευρυτανίας*: 20.

70 Woodhouse, *Aetolia*: 36.

71 William Leake, another English traveler who passed through the area in 1809, made a point of noting which rivers had water in the summer, amongst which was the Aspropotamos, see W.M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece* vol. 4 (London: J. Rodwell, 1835): 1–2 and 270.

72 See the pioneering two edited volumes *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller* (Rivers and Lakes in the Ottoman State), ed. Prof. Dr. Şakir Batmaz and Doç Dr. Özen Tok (Kayseri: Not Yayınları, 2015.) The volumes are the end product of a symposium that was held at Erciyes University in May of 2013. In the Balkans the Danube figures very prominently amongst the articles, as does the Maritsa river, which flows south from Edirne to the Aegean sea. The turbulent rivers of the western Balkans do not appear in the volume.

But seemingly more marginal rivers raise equally important issues of local use and perceptions of the environment. For example, although systematic studies have not yet been done, material evidence from other areas of the Pindus suggests the same connection between monasteries and river narrows that we see at Tatarna. The Aoös river (Αωός/Vijose) river runs from northwestern Greece into southern Albania, emptying out in the Adriatic. Three monasteries sit in a gorge alongside the river near its southern beginning. All three stand at dangerous crossings of the gorge and one, the monastery of Stomiou (very close to the city of Konitsa), founded in the late sixteenth century, took its name from the narrowness of the river at that point.⁷³

Slightly further to the south, along the Voidomatis river, the monastery of Spiliotissa and the monastery of the Anargyroi Saints, built in 1665 and 1658 respectively, are a short walk from a bridge which was an historic crossing point. Although the current bridge dates from 1853, there are records of a bridge at that spot as early as the Byzantine period.⁷⁴

The Byzantine precedent raises an important point. We may remember that, writing in the 1680s, Athanasios Gordios wrote that Saint Vissarion both created new roads and bridges and strengthened existing ones. Tatarna was a new monastery but churches were not new to the area. In the mid 1960s the construction of a massive hydroelectric dam in the area drew archeologists' attention to a Byzantine church that came to be known as "Episkopi of Evrytania."⁷⁵ Just to the east of the Aspropotamos, it sat along the banks of the Megdovas (Μεγδοβάς) river, over which was constructed one of the three bridges that Woodhouse crossed in the late nineteenth century. The church has been dated to the 9th or 10th century and its iconostasis, now in the Byzantine Museum in Athens, was decorated, most probably in the seventeenth century.⁷⁶

In other words, one could say that in Tatarna we have a project that has both a Byzantine and an Ottoman context. I have argued that Tatarna's founding was, at least in part, motivated by the extension of infrastructure that was

73 This whole area is called, locally, Στομιο (Stomio) which refers to the narrowness of the river at this point. Stomio is the diminutive of the ancient Greek στομα. I thank Nicholas Panou for explaining the etymology of stomio to me. See Νίτσιακος, Βασίλης και Αραπογλου, Μιχαήλς, *Τα Ποταμια της Ηπείρου* (The Rivers of Epirus) (Athens: Οδυσσεας, 2004): 23.

74 Ibid.: 44–5.

75 *Επισκοπή Ευρυτανίας*. The name Episkopi suggests that it functioned as an episcopal church at some point. See the exhibit in the Byzantine museum in Athens and Ορλάνδου, "Βυζαντινά Μνημεία της Αιτωλοακαρνανίας": 3.

76 A short notice in the *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 21 (1966): 274 dates it to the first half of the 9th century. In the much longer article by Ορλάνδος, published five years earlier, he dates the church to the first quarter of the 10th century. See Ορλάνδος, "Βυζαντινά Μνημεία της Αιτωλοακαρνανίας": 19.

so characteristic of the Ottoman sixteenth century.⁷⁷ At the same time, the church known as Episkopi of Evrytania tells us that the Byzantines, too, had in their own time sought to extend their reach into these mountains, at a location very near to where Tatarna came to be. The proposed date of the church's construction makes sense; the Byzantine imperial project to take back control of the Greek peninsula from the Slavic invaders began in the late eighth century and lasted through the tenth. The church along the Megdovas river would have been part of that effort. Whether the monks of Tatarna or Dousiko were aware of this earlier Byzantine presence is an open question. Finally, Tatarna also had an environmental context. Like the Episkopi church and many other monasteries in the Pindus, the monks chose to build their monastery alongside a raging river. This suggests a deeply entrenched and enduring pattern and perspective on how to best live in this challenging landscape.

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77 In Bosnia-Herzegovina over the course of the sixteenth century “232 inns, eighteen caravanserais, thirty two hostels, ten bedestans and forty two bridges were built,” see H. Inalcık, *The Classical Age 1300–1600* (London: Phoenix, 1973): 148.

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