Life in the Rupestrian Landscapes of Byzantine Thrace: Rock Tales of the Strandzha Mountains

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Archaeology and History of Art

February 28, 2025

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Rock Tales of the Strandzha Mountains

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Aileme

ABSTRACT

**Life in the Rupestrian Landscapes of Byzantine Thrace:
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This dissertation examines the life of Byzantine rural communities in the Strandzha region in Thrace, focusing on their interactions with and transformations of the bedrock. At the heart of this study is a group of rock-cut sites and multilayered rupestrian landscapes, extensively surveyed and documented in a three-year-long fieldwork. In earlier scholarship, rock-cut spaces in Byzantium have been frequently described as devoid of creativity and merely imitating masonry architecture. They were almost exclusively associated with monastic communities and often with an inferior way of living. Recent archaeology-oriented studies of rock-cut environments gradually reverse this historiographic fallacy. In line with this growing body of literature, this dissertation demonstrates complex living environments with different levels of investment into the rocky material. Another major and no less important contribution is the theoretical discussion and thorough assessment of Byzantine rock-cut architecture.

The geographical focus is the Strandzha region, a densely wooded, undulating region in Thrace characterized by the homonymous mountain range that runs parallel to the southwestern coast of the Black Sea, now extending between Turkey and Bulgaria. The mountainous region occupied a prominent position in the Middle Ages, being in the extended hinterland of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, and neighboring the Empire's ever-changing and permeable northwestern frontier. The surviving Byzantine masonry monuments in the Strandzha region are limited to two churches in Bizye (Vize) and Gehenna (Kaynarca) and some hilltop fortifications. This study of rock-cut spaces, which constitute a significant portion of surviving Byzantine material evidence in the region, complements our understanding of settlement patterns, human-altered landscapes, and the living conditions of its medieval inhabitants.

Despite their flat representation in the literature, the close examination of rock-cut sites in the Strandzha region reveals a diverse set of functions integral to the daily life of monastic and lay communities. Each rupestrian monastery examined in this dissertation displays a different settlement organization. What is common in all three case studies, though, is the control over local landscapes and natural resources. Asmakayalar is a sizable *lavra*-type monastery located in a rocky valley in the immediate vicinity of Bizye. The carving and painted decoration, albeit fragmentarily preserved, indicate the presence of experienced carvers and painters and imply

patronage from the nearby urban center, intervisible with the core of the monastic settlement. The monastery built on top of a rock pillar called Gemikaya outside Soğucak village suggests a smaller, more isolated community dominating its local landscape. Lastly, the rock-cut hermitage near Kuzulu village functioned as a dependency of the nearby fortified monastery, providing a secluded place for the experienced monks who wished to pursue a more solitary practice not far from the monastic center. The site marks the landscape and occupies the place to manipulate the direction of flowing water, imposing the monastery's control over the water and lands it reached.

Rock-cut architecture was by no means limited to monastic space-making. Rupestrian outlying churches drew the boundaries of settled areas in the Strandzha region. These monuments marked places that medieval communities considered important, organizing the landscapes where they lived and engaged in production, including stone quarries, pastures, agricultural fields, and forests that were exploited for timber and firewood. Rock-cut winemaking installations in the area shed light on vinicultural activities recorded in Byzantine and Ottoman sources. Displaying a rather unusual way of living for the region, the rupestrian complex in Gehenna (Kaynarca) is the only rock-cut house in Thrace. A centrally located longitudinal hall and a large kitchen arranged in front of an open area present a spatial layout comparable to Cappadocian courtyard complexes, and the site can be similarly identified as an aristocratic residence. The preference for a rock-cut living space in a predominantly masonry-built environment may be indicative of the way the medieval inhabitants of the complex wanted to represent themselves, perhaps showcasing their connections to a region where such houses were markers of elite status.

Byzantines attributed sacredness to rupestrian landscapes and cave spaces because of their central role in Christ's earthly presence, their appearance in biblical stories as places of theophanies, or their association with other holy figures in monastic contexts. In addition, some extraordinary rock formations and caves were considered sacred by the local communities, attracted pilgrims, and were sometimes transformed with architecture. The rupestrian site outside Medeia (Kıyıköy) is an extensive complex arranged to accommodate a pilgrimage activity related to the cult of holy water. Architecture and carved and now-lost painted decoration manipulate the movement through a circular corridor around the basilica, providing controlled access to three points of veneration: the funerary chamber, domed *hagiasma* space on the lower level, and the southeastern corner room of the sanctuary. The pilgrimage shrine at Medeia stands out in Byzantine rock-carved architecture with its elaborate design, craftsmanship, decorative program, and *champlevé* sculpture. This points to the importance and scale of investment the pilgrimage site received and the connections of Medeia, a busy harbor city on the medieval maritime routes north of Constantinople, with the Byzantine capital and beyond.

The dissertation further discusses the reasons for carving rather than building and Byzantine perceptions of rock-cut spaces and rupestrian landscapes people inhabited. In addition, the coexistence and combination of different architectural media and the relation among rock-cut, masonry, and wooden architecture are explored. Rock carving is a primary way through which Byzantines engaged with their surrounding environment and transformed landscapes in line with their specific needs and belief systems. Moreover, the study engages with new materialist approaches in archaeological theory and examines Byzantine rock-cut architecture within the broader framework of entanglements between humans and other beings. It acknowledges that

rock-cut architecture is never exclusively human-made. Instead, rock-cut space-making manifests a collaboration between humans and non-human agents, particularly rock and water. The material qualities of the living rock affect the space carved within, whereas the flowing water is often responsible for karst formations in carbonate rocks. Three main space-making strategies are defined according to the Byzantine approaches to rocky material, showcasing different levels of appreciation of other-than-human agency. *Carving spaces out of the rock* privileges human-altered elements over the natural, using a shared vocabulary with masonry architecture. *Building spaces on the rock* entails constructions over rock-carved foundations and walls. *Using spaces in the rock* refers to human interventions in cave spaces, where the human-altered and nature-made elements are in dialog, and more often than not, the natural characteristics of the caves are partially retained. The discussions of material agency and the threefold model briefly introduced above are time and again referred to in the dissertation to interpret rock-cut space-making practices in the Strandzha region. This theoretical model applies to much broader geography in Byzantium and beyond and can expand our understanding of what rock-cut architecture refers to.

Keywords: Rock-cut architecture, medieval landscapes, Byzantine Thrace, rural communities, human/ nonhuman interactions

ÖZETÇE

Bizans Trakyası'nın Kayalık Peyzajında Yaşam:
Yıldız Dağlarında Kayaya İşlenmiş Hikayeler

Görkem Günay

Arkeoloji ve Sanat Tarihi, Doktora

28 Şubat 2025

Kayaya oyma mekânlar Orta Çağ'ın yapılı çevresinin ayrılmaz bir parçasıdır. Son yıllarda kayaya oyulmuş yapılı çevreyi inceleyen araştırmalardaki artış heyecan verici bir ivmede olmakla birlikte, Bizans çalışmalarının odaklandığı coğrafyanın merkezindeki pek çok kayaya oyma mekân henüz keşfedilmeyi beklemektedir. Bizans kayaya oyma mimarisi, geleneksel olarak yaratıcılıktan uzak, sadece ihtiyaçlara karşılık veren ya da yığma yapıların detaylarını bilinçsizce kopya eden ve görece alt düzey bir mekân yapma pratiği olarak temsil edilmekte ve ağırlıklı olarak keşişler ve manastır faaliyetleriyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Arkeolojinin yöntemlerini kullanarak malzemeyi titizlikle inceleyen güncel araştırmalar ise bunun aksini kanıtlar niteliktedir. Bu tez çalışması, Trakya'da Yıldız Dağları'nı içine alan bölgede benzer şekilde göz ardı edilmiş bir grup Orta Çağ kayaya oyma yapı grubunu incelemekte ve bölgenin Orta Çağ'daki sakinlerinin hayatına ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Yıldız Dağları, Karadeniz'in güneybatı kıyılarına paralel uzanan ve günümüzde Türkiye ve Bulgaristan arasında kalan bir dağ sırasıdır. Bizans'ın başkenti Konstantinoupolis'e komşuluğundan dolayı merkezi, imparatorluğun değişken ve geçirgen kuzeybatı sınırına olan yakınlığından dolayı çeperde oluşu, bölgeyi ve genel anlamıyla Trakya'yı imparatorluk için ayrıcalıklı bir konumda tutmuştur. Buna karşın, bölgenin Bizans maddi kültür elemanlarının azımsanamayacak ölçüde büyük bir kısmını oluşturan kayaya oyma yapı grupları bugüne kadar göz ardı edilmiştir. Bölgedeki Bizans yapı stokundan biri Vize biri Kaynarca'da olmak üzere sadece iki kilise ve çok sayıda farklı ölçek, hiyerarşi ve işlevde kale yerleşimi günümüze ulaşmıştır. Bu tez kapsamında gerçekleştirilen alan çalışması ise bölgenin Orta Çağ'daki yerleşim dokusu ve tarihi peyzajı hakkındaki yazılı kaynaklara ve kısıtlı sayıdaki mevcut yapıya dayalı bilgileri tamamlayıcı niteliktedir.

Tezde ele alınan kayaya oyma alanların manastır yerleşimi, mezar kilisesi, üretim işliği, konut ve hac merkezi gibi çeşitli işlevleri barındırdığı tespit edilmiştir. İncelenen manastır yerleşimlerinin her biri birbirinden farklı mekânsal düzenlemeleri, çevre ilişkilerini ve inziva pratiklerini işaret eder. Vize gibi büyük bir yerleşim merkezinin çeperindeki kayalık bir vadiye yerleşen Asmakayalar, *lavra* tipi bir manastırdır. Bu manastır yerleşiminin Vize ile olan yakın ilişkisi, patronaj bağlamında alanda açıkça okunabilmektedir. Soğucak Köyü'nün dışında Gemikaya diye adlandırılan kaya kütlesinin üzerine inşa edilen manastır ise daha izole görünmektedir. Son olarak,

Kuzulu Köyü'nün dışındaki vadi içinde yer alan kayaya oyma keşiş kompleksi, aynı tepedeki müstahkem manastır merkezinin çevresiyle ve suyla olan ilişkisini düzenlemektedir.

Tezde incelenen bir diğer yapı grubu, sivil yerleşimlerin çeperinde yer alan kayaya oyma kiliselerdir. Yerleşim yerlerinin dışında, meskûn alanın sınırlarını işaretleyen bu tip yapılar, bölgedeki yerleşimlerin ölçekleri hakkında fikir vermenin ötesinde, bölgenin Orta Çağ sakinlerinin çevrelerindeki dünyayla, taş ocaklarıyla, hayvanlarını otlattıkları meralarla, işledikleri tarlalarla, hammadde ve yakacak elde ettikleri ormanlarla ilişkilerini ortaya koymaktadır. Kayaya oyma şarap üretim işlikleri, bölgede Bizans ve Osmanlı kaynaklarından da bilinen bağcılık faaliyetlerini göstermektedir. Ayrıca Kaynarca'daki kayaya oyma yapı grubu, Kapadokya'nın avlulu konut komplekslerine benzer şekilde bir aristokrat aile konutu olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Böylece, Kaynarca'daki alan, kayaya oyma konut tipinin Kapadokya dışındaki bilinen ilk örneğini oluşturmaktadır. Trakya'da, ağırlıklı olarak yığma yapılardan oluşan bir Orta Çağ yerleşimi içinde kayaya oyulmuş bir konutun varlığı konut sakinlerinin kişisel tercihlerine ya da Kapadokya gibi belirli bir coğrafyayla ilişkilerini vurgulama çabalarına işaret ediyor olabilir.

Bizans'ta birtakım doğal kaya oluşumlarına ve mağaralara kutsallık atfedilmiştir. Benzer şekilde, Yıldız Dağları'ndaki Orta Çağ toplulukları, kayaya oyma mimariyi, yaşam ve üretim alanları oluşturmanın yanı sıra, bazı inanışlarla ilişkilendirdikleri kayalık alanları hac merkezlerine dönüştürmek için de kullanmışlardır. Kıyıköy'ün hemen dışında Aziz Nikolaos Manastırı adıyla bilinen yapı grubu, sağlık ve kutsal su kültleriyle ilişkili kayadan oyulmuş bir hac merkezidir. Yapının odağında, kutsal suyun toplandığı havuzu barındıran, kubbeli bir ayazma yer almaktadır. Hacıların ana kaya içerisindeki hareketi kiliseyi çepeçevre dolaşan bir rotayı takip eder. Ayrıca, yapının mimarisi ve bezemeleri, bu rota boyunca hac faaliyetinin merkezindeki mezar odası, ayazma ve rölik şapeline kontrollü erişim sağlayacak şekilde düzenlenmiştir. Kıyıköy'deki hac merkezi işçilik, mekânsal düzenleme, bezemelerindeki detay ve teknik kullanımıyla Bizans kaya oyma mimarisi içinde özel bir yerde durmaktadır. Bu durum hem yapıya ve bölgedeki kayadan çıkan kutsal su kültüne verilen önemi gözler önüne sermekte hem de banisinin geniş kaynaklarını vurgulamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, Orta Çağ'da önemli bir liman kenti olan Kıyıköy'ün başta Bizans başkenti olmak üzere imparatorluğun geri kalanıyla güçlü bağlarını göstermektedir.

Tez çalışmasının, literatüre en az eşit derecede önemli bir diğer katkısı da Bizans kayaya oyma mimarisine dair detaylı bir değerlendirmeyi içermesidir. Bizans'ta oyulabilir özellikte kaya barındıran her bölgede bir şekilde kayaya oyma mimarinin varlığından söz edilebilir. Kayaya oyma mimari, Bizans toplumunun çevresiyle ilişki kurma ve doğayı inanç ve ihtiyaçları doğrultusunda dönüştürmesinin temel araçlarından biri olarak görülmelidir. Bu çalışmada, Bizanslıları mekânlarını inşa etmek yerine kayaya oymaya iten olası nedenler ve üzerinde yaşadıkları kayalık peyzaja yaklaşımları tartışılmıştır. Kayaya oyma, yığma ve ahşap mimarinin birlikteliği ve birbirlerini besleyen karşılıklı ilişkileri ele alınmıştır. Tüm bunların ötesinde, arkeoloji teorisindeki yeni materyalist yaklaşımlardan ilhamla Bizans kayaya oyma mimarisinin tanımı genişletilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, kaya oyma mimari pratikleri içerisinde dönüştürücü etkisi olan kaya kütlesi ve su gibi insan dışı maddi varlıklar ve onların aktif rol aldığı doğal süreçler göz önünde tutulmuştur. Böylece kayaya oyma mimarinin insanlar ve insan olmayan, diğer varlıkların ortak bir ürünü olarak tanımlanması önerisi getirilmiştir. Bu iş birliğinin Bizans kayaya oyma mimarisindeki yansımaları ise Bizanslıların mekân oluştururken kayalık malzemeye

yaklaşımları çerçevesinde üç alt başlıkta gruplandırılmıştır. Bunlar, yekpare kaya kütlelerinin içinden mekânlar oymak, kayaya oyulmuş temeller ile duvarlar üzerine mekânlar inşa etmek ve kayadaki mevcut mekânları bazen doğal mağara etkisini de kısmen koruyarak dönüştürmek şeklinde sıralanabilir. Söz konusu tanımlamanın, tez boyunca Yıldız Dağları'ndaki kayaya oyma yapı gruplarının değerlendirilmesinde göz önünde bulundurulduğu gibi başka coğrafyalardaki benzer projelerde de uygulanması ve kayaya oyma mimari çalışmalarının kapsamını genişletmesi öngörülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kaya oyma mimari, Orta Çağ peyzajı, Bizans Trakyası, kırsal yerleşimler, insan ve insan olmayan etkileşimi

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a dissertation is a long and winding road with many ups and downs along the way. It is not a lonely journey, though, even if, from time to time, one feels that way. In the past six and a half years, a lot of people helped me first conceptualize and then realize my doctoral project on Byzantine rock-cut spaces and rural landscapes in the Strandzha region. First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my advisor, Nikos Kontogiannis, for granting me the freedom to formulate and implement this research project and for supporting and gently guiding me back on track when necessary. This dissertation would have been a very dry text without his encouragement to look at the material differently, be assertive in my ideas, and strive for constant improvement. I am also deeply grateful to Fotini Kondyli. Our long conversations and discussions—whether on a bus journey across Thrace, in Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice, on an afternoon walk in DC, or during a virtual meeting—helped me structure my disorganized thoughts and reminded me of the true value of the research I was doing. Next, I would like to thank my two core committee members, Ivana Jevtić and Tolga Uyar, who patiently read several earlier versions of the dissertation chapters once every six months for the last four years and always offered me the most helpful reviews. I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to Bilge Ar, my former Master's supervisor, colleague, friend, and constant source of support in all my academic endeavors.

The core material upon which my interpretations in the following pages largely rely was collected during three years of fieldwork conducted between 2020 and 2022, with necessary permissions obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. I thank İlknur Yaz from the Kırklareli Archaeological Museum and Umut Doğan from the Edirne Archaeological Museum for their help and support. The survey project was generously funded by the doctoral grants of Sevgi Gönül Center for Byzantine Studies (GABAM) and Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture. Fortunately, at an early stage of the fieldwork, I proved myself wrong in thinking that I could manage everything on my own. Many people, besides me, put a great deal of time and energy

into this project. First, I thank my parents, Zeki and Nazire Günay, for their emotional and logistical support and, above all, for letting me take their car to the Strandzha Mountains for extended periods during three successive summers. I thank Anıl Türktaş from Mergen 3D for conducting the terrestrial laser scanning survey and Öykü Bahar Balcı and İdil Malgil for taking aerial pictures of the study areas and helping me with the photogrammetric models. I am indebted to Seda Ongun, Gizem Köroğlu, and Batur Ecer for their help in the preparation of technical drawings. Additionally, Seda and Gizem worked on digitizing the hand-drawn images, saving me a lot of time, which I then dedicated to further developing and refining my interpretations. I also would like to thank my dear friend Ece Konuk for putting the wheels in motion during a time of crisis in the 2022 fieldwork, both literally and metaphorically.

One of the sites examined in this dissertation, Kuzulu, was documented earlier in 2017 as part of the Polos Kalesi/ Yoğuntaş Survey, in which I also participated. I thank the members of our small team in Kuzulu: Jesko Fildhuth, Stephanie Pastwa, and Asya Ece Uzmay. I especially cherish the memory of working in the flooded rock-cut hermitage with Asya, standing in yellow rubber boots in the freezing water.

Throughout these years, several researchers shared my enthusiasm about what I had encountered and recorded in the field and took their precious time to talk about different aspects of the survey material. I thank Mustafa Hamdi Sayar for going through the catalog of pilgrims' graffiti at Medeia, Martin Dennert and Flavia Vanni for sharing their expertise on architectural sculpture, Stefania Skartsis, Galina Grozdanova, and Nikos Kontogiannis for evaluating the ceramic finds, Nilüfer Peker for deliberating on production areas and winemaking installations, Georgios Makris for our discussions on monastic centers in Byzantine Thrace, and Angeliki Delikari for our conversation of Paroria and related monastic literature.

My participation in ANAMED's Cappadocia in Context Summer School in 2019 shaped my view of Byzantine rock-cut architecture at an early stage of my doctoral studies. The seminars led by the late Bob Ousterhout and Tolga Uyar, the busy schedule with many site visits, and the discussions among our cohort were instrumental in helping me get to know this specific type of archaeological material and the debates it generated.

The BRIA project also had a great impact on my work, and I would like to extend my

heartfelt thanks to all members of the BRIA team. I am fortunate to be part of this inclusive academic community dedicated to the study of Byzantine Thrace. In particular, the field trips to my study areas gave me the opportunity to share my preliminary thoughts with an interested group of scholars with a wide range of expertise and discuss with and learn from them.

This dissertation first took shape in the form of field notes and was further developed in my office at Istanbul Technical University. It was then rewritten and restructured in my corner of the library at Dumbarton Oaks in DC and revised and partly rewritten back in Istanbul. I thank my colleagues, friends, and professors in the history of architecture division at Istanbul Technical University and the 2023-2024 fellows' cohort at Dumbarton Oaks, where I spent an academic year as a junior fellow in the Byzantine Studies Program. I am also very grateful to the Archaeology and History of Art Department at Koç University for providing an intellectually stimulating academic environment and to the Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities for all their hard work ensuring things run smoothly throughout my journey.

Dimitra Sikalidou, my partner in crime in the field of Byzantine Studies, deserves a separate mention for reading and commenting on parts of this dissertation from early on and her assistance with Greek sources. I also would like to thank Adil Özgün Özenç for arranging the figures in the text and helping me stay positive during times of distress in the final stages of the dissertation. Finally, I thank all my friends for their support and motivation and my extended family, both of origin and of choice, for their unconditional love.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

For most of us living in the twenty-first century, natural caves and rock-cut spaces correspond to unfamiliar and uncanny locations, but they are by no means absent in our imaginations, even if we have not seen or been to any. The former bear witness to a distant, geological past, while the latter contain the marks of now-gone dynamic cultural interactions and traces of human intervention in the bedrock. This dissertation focuses on a group of rock-cut spaces in the Strandzha region and argues that rock-cut architecture was part and parcel of the system in which the Byzantine inhabitants of the land transformed and made sense of their living environment.[1] Within a broader theoretical framework of interactions between humans and other beings, the study explores previously untold stories of rural communities from Byzantine Thrace and how people were entangled with rocky landscapes in the region.

The Strandzha region is a mountainous part of the historical region of Thrace, extending along the southwestern Black Sea coast (fig. 1.1). In the heartland of the Byzantine Empire, this well-connected, prosperous region had a unique geographical standing between its paramount center, Constantinople, and the everchanging northwestern frontier in the Balkans. Better resistant to destruction, rupestrian structures constitute a weighty sum of surviving Byzantine material evidence in this region. Drawing mainly from the information produced in the extensive field survey, my discussions in the following pages reveal highly complex rock-cut spaces and living conditions of people who created, used, restored, and eventually abandoned them. There is a special emphasis on the overlapping historical landscapes and the role of rock-cut architecture in their formation. Furthermore, the dissertation sets out to redefine and theorize rock-cut space-making in Byzantium.

Rock carving was a major way through which Byzantine society engaged with their surroundings and co-fabricated landscapes with other beings. It was in constant dialog

[1] I use the terms “rock-cut,” “rock-hewn,” “carved,” or “hewn-out” interchangeably to define the spatial product. In its adjectival form, “carved” is a neutral and inclusive term that also encompasses small-scale alterations. The phenomenon is termed “rock-cut architecture,” “carved architecture,” or “rupestrian architecture.” “Cave-like” and “speluncar” specify the characteristics of natural caves, referring to relatively less-worked rock surfaces and amorphous forms of some carved spaces.

with other space-making practices, often reflecting the same spatial concepts with built architecture in an inherently different medium. It was not always the predominant mode of architecture in a region, yet it was, in any case, a primary place-making tool in Byzantium, accommodating a diverse set of functions and meanings; as such were the rupestrian complexes in the Strandzha region. Rock-cut architecture can only be applied to specific landscapes where the geological processes created the necessary rock formations. The spatial result was not exclusively human-made since the rock to be carved had agency. The deliberate human interventions to carve out an intricate space, form rock foundations to build upon, or alter a natural cave were adaptive to and limited by the characteristics of the rocky material.

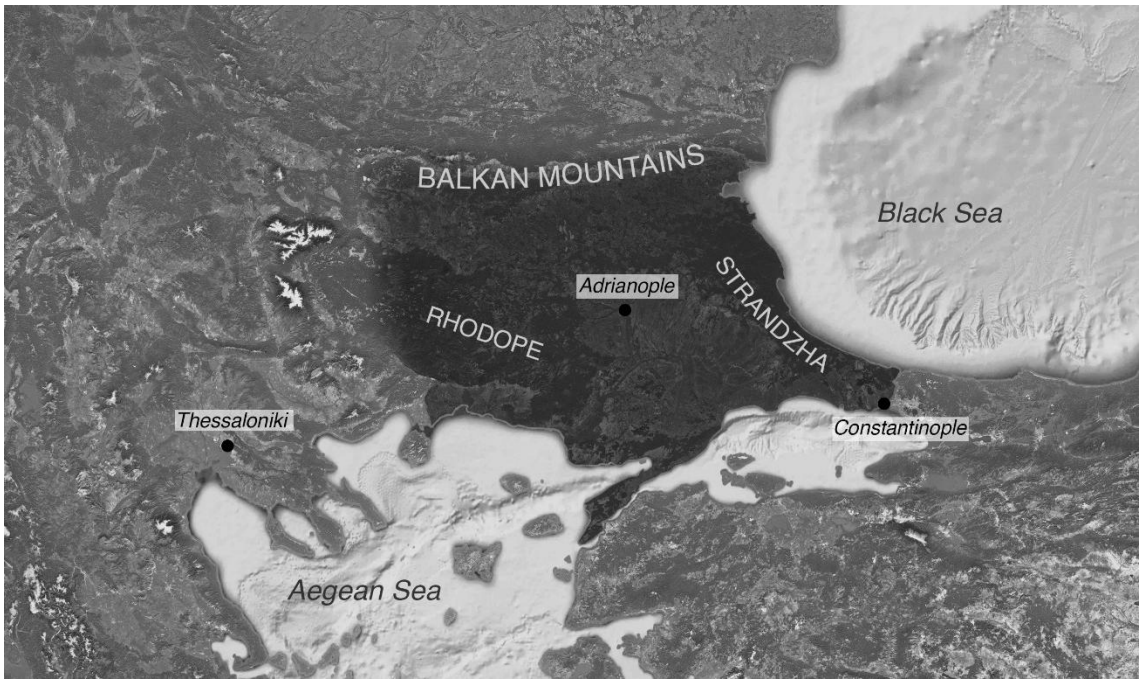

Figure 1.1: Satellite image of the historical region of Thrace.

The discussions below make it clear that the rock-carved sites, whether a single-standing church or a settlement area predominantly hewn out from the living rock, were not isolated spaces used and visited only by a few in pursuit of extreme asceticism. Neither were they the products of mere necessity nor lack of technical knowledge. Instead, the presence of rock-cut architecture in Byzantine Thrace showcases a preference, responding to a variety of purposes: to enhance a natural phenomenon that was perceived as sacred, to create commemorative and highly visible landscapes, to differentiate one's residence in a built environment, to mark borders and define settlement areas. Whether in a religious or secular context, these sites were almost invariably connected to the road and settlement networks.

This introductory chapter provides background information for the dissertation. The first section presents an overview of the Byzantine history of the Strandzha region, pointing out its particular position within Thrace, the broader imperial territories, and beyond. Next is a brief literature review of the study material. This is followed by the methodology section, in which I explain the related fieldwork, procedures for selecting and documenting surveyed sites, and the challenges of conducting research on Byzantine Thrace. In the final section, I highlight some of the contributions and review the thesis structure to guide the reader through the dissertation.

1.1. Byzantine History of a Mountainous Region in Thrace

The historical toponym of Thrace is loosely applied to an area in the southeastern Balkan lands, currently divided among three modern states: Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece. It refers to the territory south of the Balkan (Haemus/ Stara Planina) Mountains, bordered by the Nestos (Mesta/ Karasu) River in the west, the Aegean and Marmara Seas in the south, and the Black Sea in the northeast. In the past, the limits of the geographical term were often subject to administrative changes in the wider region.[2] Regardless of its territorial extent at any given time in the Middle Ages, Thrace maintained a prominent position neighboring the administrative, economic, cultural, and religious center of the Byzantine Empire: Constantinople. As the stage of numerous historical events, it found its way again and again to the writings of several Byzantine historians and chroniclers, such as Procopius, Theophanes the Confessor, Niketas Choniates, George Akropolites, John VI Kantakouzenos, Nikephoros Gregoras, and Doukas.

The foundation of Constantinople in the 4th century marked the region's transformation into the hinterland of the imperial epicenter. This gradual and dynamic process granted

[2] For the administrative limits of the early imperial Roman province, see Sayar, "Thrace in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," esp. 56. The Late Antique Diocese of Thrace partially incorporated the imperial province of Moesia Inferior. In contrast, the northwestern lands of the former Provincia Thracia were transferred to the Diocese of Dacia. See Dumanov, "Thrace in Late Antiquity," 91. The Byzantine Theme of Thrace was established at the end of the 7th century and encompassed a much smaller area, roughly corresponding to the southern and eastern territories of the Late Antique diocese. By the 9th century, the earlier administrative region was divided into three units: the themes of Strymon, Macedonia, and Thrace. The term "Macedonia" was eventually applied to the whole area, traditionally known as Thrace. See Dapergolas, "Problems Concerning the Administrative Organization of Byzantine Thrace," 411–13. For the problems related to the definition of borders of the Themes of Thrace and Macedonia, also see Laiou, "Introversion and Extroversion, Autarky and Trade," 16–18.

Thrace a crucial role in the protection and provision of the Byzantine capital. For example, the Long Wall of Thrace (Anastasian Wall) constituted the westernmost line of defense of Constantinople since its construction in the 5th century (fig. 1.8). Although bitterly criticized by Procopius, this fortification line, cutting through the region from the Marmara Sea to the Black Sea, successfully withstood numerous attacks and raids in the 6th and 7th centuries.[3] Moreover, Thrace was an important grain producer of the Empire and one of the main suppliers of Constantinople, especially after the loss of Egypt in the 7th century and Sicily in the 9th century.[4] The long water supply line extending as far as the region around Bizye (Vize) provided the people of the capital with fresh water from the southeastern outskirts of the Strandzha Mountains (fig. 1.8).[5] Initially built in the 4th century under Constantius II (337-361) or Valens (364-378) and further extended, probably in the early 5th century, resulting in a system more than 590 km long, the Thracian water supply line was maintained until the end of the 12th century, except for the one-and-a-half-century interval following the Avar siege of Constantinople in 626.[6] Additionally, the Thracian forests supplied the constant demand in the city for firewood and timber for construction and shipbuilding.[7]

The transportation network in Byzantine Thrace was structured around three major roads inherited from the Roman system, all three merging in Constantinople, the southeastern tip of the Thracian peninsula (fig. 1.2).[8] The *Via Militaris/ Diagonalis* (A1) passed across the Thracian inland into the central Balkans. In the southern Thrace, the *Via Egnatia* (C1) roughly followed the coastline of the Northern Aegean, terminating in Dyrrachium on the Adriatic Sea. The third was the coastal road (A4) running along the Black Sea littoral to the northwest. Additionally, the northern road (A3), roughly parallel to the *Via Diagonalis* (A1), defined another transportation axis on the southern foothills of the Strandzha Mountains.[9] This was also the shortest route

[3] It was breached only on three occasions during this time: by the Bulgarians in 540, the Kutrigurs in 558/559, and the Avars in 626. After the 7th century, the Long Wall was mentioned only as a topographical reality in the narrative sources, indicating that it no longer served a defensive purpose. See Crow, "The Long Walls of Thrace"; Crow and Ricci, "Investigating the Hinterland of Constantinople."
[4] Magdalino, "The Grain Supply of Constantinople," 36.
[5] The Eocene karst water reservoirs in the Strandzha region, the farthest source in the system, retain the highest hydraulic potential of Thrace. Bono, Crow, and Bayliss, "The Water Supply of Constantinople," esp. 1330.
[6] Crow, Bardill, and Bayliss, *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople*, 26–27, 103–7.
[7] See chapter 4.2.
[8] Külzer, "The Byzantine Road System in Eastern Thrace," 179–80, 184–86.
[9] *Ibid*., 183–84.

from Constantinople to Pliska, the first capital of the Bulgarian State, between the late 7th and the end of the 9th century.[10] In Eastern Thrace, these four thoroughfares were bridged by the roads in the north-south direction, going across the region from the shores of the Marmara Sea to the Black Sea. Furthermore, the transportation through the rivers, such as the Evros/Meriç/Maritza and Ergene Rivers, connected the coastal areas to inland Thrace. The correlation between the Byzantine settlement centers and the road network comes as no surprise. It is also worth noting that rock-cut complexes are almost exclusively found in the close vicinity of the first-rank local centers or on the roads running between them.

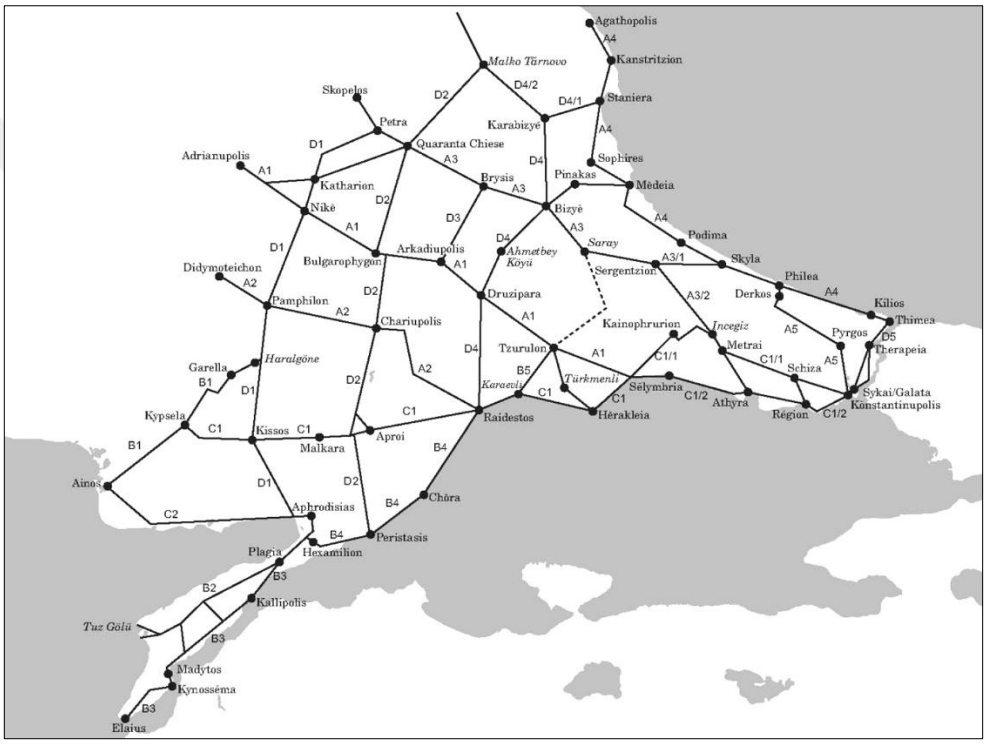

Figure 1.2: Byzantine road network of Eastern Thrace. (Külzer, "The Byzantine Road System in Eastern Thrace.")

The primary geographical focus of this dissertation is the Strandzha Mountain range, where the rock-cut study areas, though rather sparsely distributed, reveal a substantial assemblage of archaeological material illustrative of the living conditions and landscape transformations of the Byzantine communities. This is a mid-Mesozoic orogenic belt in the northwest-southeast orientation.[11] It runs roughly parallel to the

[10] Soustal, *Thrakien*, 144.

[11] The massif is correlated with the Variscan orogen of the Balkans in the west and the Pontides in the east, bordering the Tertiary Thracian basin in the south. Okay et al., "The Tectonics of the Strandja Massif," 217–18.

Black Sea littoral, extending beyond the modern state border between Bulgaria and Turkey. The topography rises in the central-northwestern section, reaching the highest peak (Mahya Dağı, 1031 m) near Demirköy (Karabizye/Malak Samokov), and it loses the mountainous character already around Vize (Bizye) in the southeast.[12] The mountain chain is carved through numerous river valleys, whose waters either drain into the Blacks Sea in the north or join the Ergene River, a tributary of the Evros/Meriç/Maritza River flowing into the Northern Aegean.

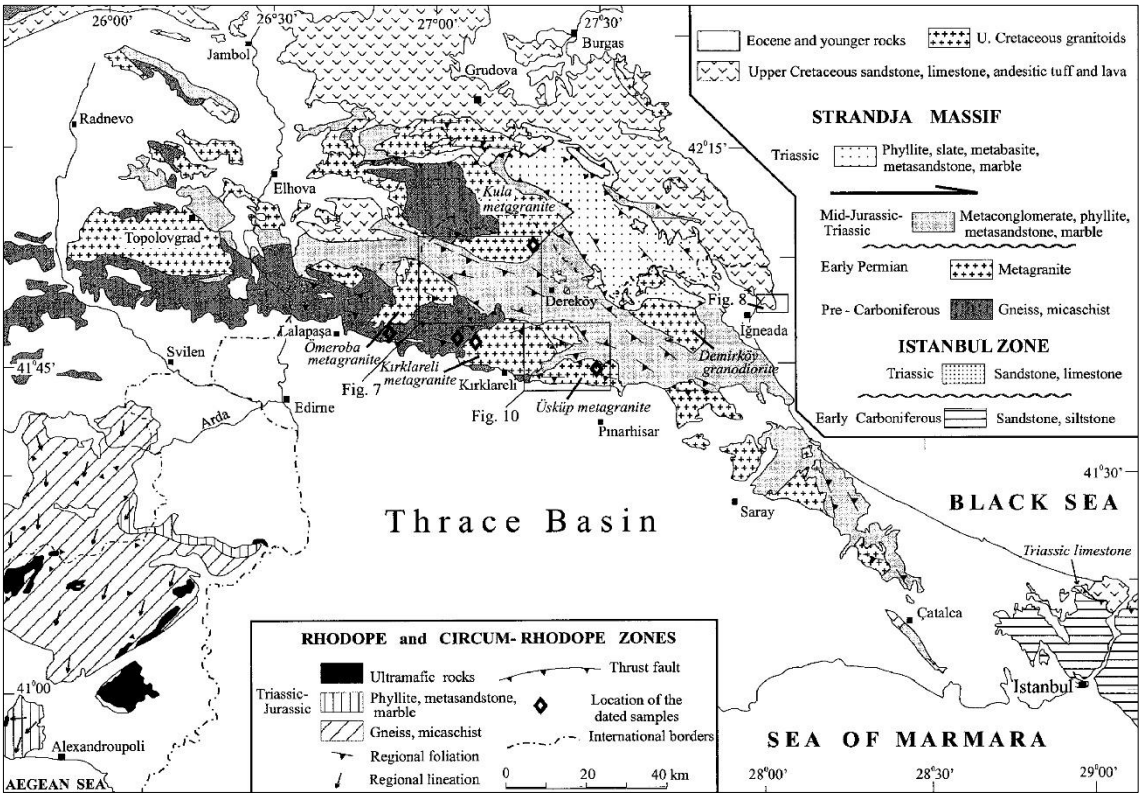

Figure 1.3: Geological map of the Strandzha Massif. (Okay et al., "The Tectonics of the Strandja Massif.")

The Strandzha Massif, broadly defined, consists of a Paleozoic basement of gneiss, migmatite, and granite, uncomfortably overlain by a Lower Mesozoic metasedimentary cover (fig. 1.3). In the Middle Jurassic-Early Cretaceous eras, these units were regionally deformed and metamorphosed in greenschist facies.[13] In this geological sequence, karst formations naturally occur either in the Eocene limestone or the Jurassic marble; the former runs along the massif in the south, whereas the latter is

[12] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 64.
[13] Okay et al., "The Tectonics of the Strandja Massif," 219, 231; Natal'in et al., "Tectonics of the Strandja Massif."

exposed on the ground in the northwest.[14] As expected, the positioning of rock-cut complexes is in excellent agreement with the distribution of carbonate rocks.

The Byzantine settlements on the southern foothills of the Strandzha Mountains bordering the Ergene plain were larger and more prosperous, including Bizye (Vize), Brysis (Pınarhisar), and Skopelos (Yoğuntaş) on the northern road (A3) parallel to the *Via Diagonalis* (figs. 1.2, 1.8).[15] Other primary centers were located on the Black Sea coast, such as Medeia (Kıyıköy) and Agathopolis (Ahtopol).[16] The former served as a particularly important anchorage in the maritime transportation network in the Black Sea, noted as the first stop of the ships after Therapia (Tarabya) on the Bosporus in a 16th-century itinerary.[17] Little is known about Karabizye (Demirköy), the major settlement in the inner mountains in the north-central section, connected to the harbor town of Staniera (İğneada).[18] Lastly, in the western limits of the mountainous topography, Probaton (Sinanköy) and Bukelon (Matochina) on opposite sides of the Tundzha River valley provide a line of defense in the northern approach to Adrianople, together with lesser fortifications in the villages of Dombay and Vaysal.[19]

In addition to first-rank local centers, the large number of hilltop fortifications in the mountainous region demonstrates the imperial efforts not only to secure the northern borders of the Byzantine Empire but also to ensure the protection of its capital against the threats coming from the Balkan lands (fig. 1.8).[20] Proximity to Constantinople was

---

[14] Ekmekçi, "Karst in Turkish Thrace."

[15] Dirimtekin, "Vize (Bizyhe, Bizye)"; "Pınarhisar"; Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler"; Pralong, "Remarques sur les fortifications"; Kaya, "The Byzantine Fortresses of Yoğuntaş, Keçikalesi and Pınarhisar"; Beygo, "The Historical Topography of a Provincial Byzantine City"; "The Topographical Research History of a Provincial Byzantine City in Thrace: Vize (Bizye)"; Fildhuth and Ar, "Preliminary Report of the First Survey-Campaign at Skopelos"; "Polos Kalesi/ Yoğuntaş Yüzey Araştırması 2015."

[16] Soustal, *Thrakien*, 168–69; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 519–22. For Medeia, also see Dirimtekin, "Midye Surları ve Aya Nikola Kilisesi"; Pralong, "Remarques sur les fortifications"; Kocaaslan, "Kıyıköy Monografyası."

[17] Papageorgiou, "Ὁδοιπορικὸν Ἰακώβου Μηλοίτη," 636.

[18] Soustal, *Thrakien*, 299, 458.

[19] Soustal, 222–23, 415–16; Kurtuluş, "Edirne İl Sınırları İçindeki Kalelerin Tespit ve Değerlendirilmesi," esp. 751.

[20] İsmail Hakkı Kurtuluş conducted an extensive survey on the military structures in Kırklareli province in 1995. In his later book, published in 2014, he provided a short description and plan sketches of each site. See Kurtuluş, *Kırklareli'nin Bilinmeyen Trak-Roma-Bizans Kaleleri*. Andreas Külzer reviewed a total of thirty-seven hilltop fortifications in the Strandzha region, many presenting archaeological evidence for activities in the Roman and Byzantine periods. See "Byzantinische Festungen im Grenzgebiet der thrakischen Provinzen Eurōpē und Haimimontos." More recently, a GIS-based landscape archaeology analysis cataloged forty-four castles in the Kırklareli province; thirty-seven of them were identified with a medieval phase: Pastwa, "Analyse der antiken und byzantinischen Bebauung in der Region Kırklareli."

a significant determinant in the formation of Byzantine settlement structure of this dissected and difficult-to-control region. Moreover, the concentration of fortified sites in the north-central section of the massif can also be explained by the intensive mining activities. The fortresses in the landscape around Karabizye (Demirköy), in particular, may have been intended to protect the mining settlements and rich iron deposits in the thickly forested area, whose exploitation continued at an industrial scale until the late 19th century.[21]

Avars and different Slavic groups raided the Strandzha region and the wider Thrace in the 6th and 7th centuries, with some eventually settling and mixing with local populations around the first half of the 7th century.[22] By the foundation of the First Bulgarian Empire in 681, the mountainous region became the immediate borderland with one of the most formidable enemies of the Empire for centuries to come. It received imperial patronage in the 8th century, partly related to the increasing military campaigns against the Bulgarians. After a long period of disuse following the Avar siege of Constantinople in 626, Constantine V (741-775) finally restored the Thracian water supply line in 765/766.[23] At this period, the transportation network must have been well maintained for the passage of the army, as evidenced by an inscription from Bizye (Vize) commemorating the restoration of a bridge during the reign of Constantine V.[24]

In the 8th century, new walled settlements were founded, some preexisting towns were fortified or refortified, and populations from the Eastern provinces were moved to populate the region.[25] Along these lines, the walls of Brysis (Pınarhisar) were also reconstructed during the reign of Constantine V, as recorded in a now-lost inscribed limestone block documented in 1896.[26] Alongside fortification works to strengthen imperial authority in the region neighboring Constantinople, new episcopal sees were established in Thrace to secure its loyalty to the patriarchate amid the Iconoclastic controversies (ca 726-787 and 815-843). Consequently, the number of Thracian

[21] Ermiş, "Demirköy'deki Geç Antik Çağ Kaleleri." For the excavations in the Late Ottoman iron foundry, see Danışman et al., "Demirköy-Samakocuk Iron Foundry"; Yazıcı Metin, "Trakya'da Bir Osmanlı Sanayi Tesisi."
[22] Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," 22.
[23] Crow, Bardill, and Bayliss, *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople*, 19–20.
[24] Inscription no. 50: Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, 246–48.
[25] Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," 24–25.
[26] Inscription no. 49: Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, 243–45.

bishoprics increased by 170% in the *Notitia* 3, the so-called *Notitia* of the Iconoclasts, compared to the 7th-century Pseudo-Epiphanios.[27]

The Bulgarians interrupted the Byzantine control in parts of the Strandzha Mountains in the 9th and 10th centuries. Khan Krum (803-814) captured much of Eastern Thrace in 813/814, including major settlements such as Debeltos, Adrianople, and Bizye. At that time, people of Anchialos, Probaton, Nike, and some other *kastra* abandoned their settlements and ran away for fear of being attacked.[28] Leo V (813-820) concluded a peace treaty with Omurtag (814-831), the successor of Khan Krum, in 815/816 and initiated the mass rebuilding of Thracian cities, plundered and heavily damaged by the Bulgarian army.[29] Around a century later, the Bulgarians under Tsar Simeon (893-927) once again invaded Eastern Thrace following the Byzantine defeat in the battle of Boulgarophygon (Babaeski) in the summer of 896. The border between the two major powers in the Balkans at the time was moved as west as Medeia, apart from the cities on the western Black Sea coast where Byzantine rule was maintained.[30]

Dated to the early 10th century, *Notitia* 7 (901-907) represents an almost complete departure from the earlier lists of episcopal sees in the Strandzha region, which become more or less stable in the following registers. As such, it provides a key to understanding the church hierarchy and primary local centers. Accordingly, the broader mountainous region was marked by three suffragans of the metropolis of Herakleia (Medeia, Sergentzion, and Metrai) and six others under that of Adrianople (Sozopolis, Agathopolis, Debeltos, Bukelon, Probaton, and Skopelos).[31] Besides, the lists include four archbishoprics in the Strandzha region: Bizye, Brysis, Derkos, and Karabizye. Bizye was one of the earliest episcopal sees and occupied the highest place in the lists of archbishoprics starting from the *Notitia* 7, a position that it maintained until the promotion to a metropolitan rank in the 14th century.[32] In the fall of 924/925, Bulgarian troops captured Bizye after a five-year-long blockade.[33] The inhabitants

[27] Kountoura, "New Fortresses and Bishoprics in 8th Century Thrace."
[28] Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," 26.
[29] Beshevliev, *Die protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte*, 258, 276.
[30] Gjuzelev, "Il Mar nero ed il suo litorale," 17.
[31] Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 269–88.
[32] For the position of the archbishopric of Bizye, see *Notitiae* 1^{41}, 2^{44}, 3^{57}, 4^{42}, 5^{46}, 7^{52}, 8^{66}, 11^{86}, 12^{92}, 14^{73}, 15^{127}, 16^{84}: Darrouzès, 205, 217, 232, 250, 265, 273, 293, 344, 351, 376, 384, 389. Also see Asdracha, "La Thrace orientale et la Mer Noire."
[33] Külzer, "Zur Geschichte der ostthrakischen Stadt Vize/Bizyē," 201; Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 276–77.

burned down the houses and left their city to take refuge in Medeia.

Eastern Thrace returned to the Byzantine Empire with the peace treaty of 927, sealed with the marriage between the successor of Simeon, Peter I of Bulgaria (927-969), and the granddaughter of Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944).[34] It took, however, another fifty years for the complete restitution of the Byzantine control over Thrace. John I Tzimiskes (969-976) conquered the eastern half of the Bulgarian territories, including the capital, Veliki Preslav, in 971.[35] With the Byzantine military victories of the early 11th century and the final blow to the Bulgarian State in 1018, political stability was finally established in the Southern Balkans, lasting for almost the next two hundred years. During this time, the settlements in Thrace experienced economic and demographic growth, fully benefitting from the location at the heartland of the Empire neighboring Constantinople.[36] In a similar vein, Arab geographer Muhammed al-Idrisi portrays a prosperous region in the mid-12th century, describing Bizye as a well-fortified commercial city in a fertile valley and Medeia as a flourishing settlement by the sea.[37] Surviving circular towers in the citadel of Brysis, solidly built with recessed brick courses according to the state-of-the-art military architecture during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180), manifest the high degree of attention from the central authority (fig. 1.4).[38]

Figure 1.4: Northwestern corner tower of the citadel of Brysis/Pınarhisar.

[34] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 117.
[35] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 72–73; Gjuzelev, "Il Mar nero ed il suo litorale," 17–18.
[36] Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," 30, 36.
[37] Al-Idrisi, *Géographie d'Edrisi*, 2:2: 382, 385; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 290, 520.
[38] For similar conclusions, see Kaya, "The Byzantine Fortresses of Yoğuntaş, Keçikalesi and Pınarhisar," 104.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1204, in the *Partitio Regni Graeci*, piecemealing the territories of the Byzantine Empire, Mikra and Megale Bryseis and Gehenna were included in *pars prima* allotted to the Crusaders (*Peregrinorum*), together with much of Eastern and Western Thrace and the Thracian Chersonese. The immediate hinterland of Constantinople, Tzurulon, Bizye, Medeia, and the coastal Black Sea until Agathopolis constituted the *pars prima* under the newly established Latin Empire.[39] However, the resistance against the Latin rule persisted locally in parts of Thrace, for example, in Bizye, whose inhabitants did not surrender for another year.[40] As a result of the Mongol invasion of Kyivan Rus', Cumans crossed the Danube River and raided Thrace in 1237; they seized many fortresses and sold the captives in large settlement centers, such as Adrianople, Didymoteichon, and Bizye.[41] Having conquered extensive lands in Thrace, John III Doukas Vatatzes (1222-1254), emperor of Nicaea, concluded a peace treaty with the Bulgarian Tsar Michael II Asen in 1246. In the summer of the following year, allied with the Bulgarians, he seized Derkos, Tzurulon, Bizye, and Medeia, which were under Latin rule for the last four decades.[42] Following a victorious battle against the Bulgarians at Bizye in 1263, Byzantine general Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes restored the walls of Brysis and advanced further to the northwest to take Skopos, Petra, Skopelos, Agathopolis, Sozopolis, Debeltos, and Anchialos.[43] Consequently, Byzantine rule was re-established also in the central and northern sections of the Strandzha region not long after the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople.

In the later 13th century, new provincial military units, called *megala allagia*, were established in the European lands of the Empire with administrative centers in Thessaloniki, Serres, and Bizye. The *Bizyeteikon mega allagion*, maintained until the early 1360s, comprised a large territory, outlined by the suburbs of Constantinople, Arcadiopolis (Lüleburgaz), the coastal Black Sea as far north as Mesembria (Nesebar), and the inland city of Sliven.[44] In the 14th century, numerous bishoprics and

[39] Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte*, I:473–74, 480–84.
[40] In the course of these events, Geoffrey of Villehardouin, French chronicler of the Fourth Crusade, described Bizye as "a strong and well-fortified city." Külzer, "Zur Geschichte der ostthrakischen Stadt Vize/Bizyē," 202.
[41] Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 199.
[42] *Ibid*., 245–46.
[43] *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, II: 242–44; Trapp, *PLP*, 27504.
[44] Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, 193–95.

archbishoprics in Thrace rose in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, resulting in a previously unprecedented concentration of metropoleis disproportionate to the extent of the land. In the wider Strandzha region, the episcopal sees promoted to the metropolitan rank include Bizye, Brysis, Skopelos, Probaton, Medeia, Sozopolis, and Derkos.[45]

Fortified centers served as shelters and safe refuge areas for rural communities during times of crises, whether from external attacks or internal conflicts arising from civil wars. In the Late Byzantine period, on certain occasions, people actively manifested their agency in the affairs of their region, engaging in combat rather than waiting behind protective walls. In the early 14th century, the area between Bizye and Rhaidestos (Tekirdağ) was taken over by the Catalan Company, initially hired as an army of mercenaries to fight against the Bulgarians. When they united forces with Turkish troops and laid a heavy siege on Bizye in 1307, the civilians convinced the military commander to confront the enemy, which resulted in them giving great losses in a battle outside the city walls.[46] Tragically similar were the events that unfolded near Skopelos in 1342 when the Mongols (Scythians) raided and plundered the Thracian countryside, already suffering from the civil war. In a public upheaval, the people of Skopelos put their governor in prison and forced the soldiers stationed in the city to fight with them against the Mongolian army camped in the vicinity, only to be devastatingly crushed in the open plain south of the Strandzha Mountains.[47]

Thrace was a battleground in the Byzantine civil wars in the 1320s and again in the 1340s. In both episodes, the rivaling powers with a claim to the Byzantine throne fiercely fought over the immediate hinterland of the capital and made efforts to maintain connections with the local aristocracy. For example, after an unsuccessful attempt to take Adrianople in 1344, John VI Kantakouzenos (co-emperor in 1347-1354) directed his army to Bizye and ravaged the lands surrounding the city. The inhabitants first refused to surrender yet eventually unanimously decided to hand over their city; the former governor fled to Constantinople, and John VI appointed Manuel Komnenos Raul Asanes to the position, his brother-in-law who was a military

[45] Asdracha, "La Thrace orientale et la Mer Noire." Many listed as such in the *Notitia* 17 and later: Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*.
[46] Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, 293; Külzer, "Zur Geschichte der ostthrakischen Stadt Vize/Bizyē," 204.
[47] Fatouros and Krischer, *Johannes Kantakuzenos (Buch III)*, 195–96; Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, 293–94.

commander in Thrace with strong family connections in the region.[48] In a much later episode, after John V Palaiologos (1341-1376, 1379-1391) deposed and forced John VI to tonsure in 1354, much of Thrace remained under the control of his son, Matthew, until 1357, who also used Bizye once to launch an attack on Constantinople.[49]

Eastern Thrace was one of the last pieces of land in which Byzantine control was maintained in the final centuries of the Empire. Still, parts of the region suffered from military conflicts and changed hands between Byzantium and medieval Bulgarian and Serbian states until it was eventually annexed by the Ottoman Empire. Tzympe on the Thracian Chersonese was the first stronghold in the European territories of the Byzantine Empire to fall to the Ottomans, likely taken by the Ottoman troops crossed the strait to side with John VI Kantakouzenos in 1352 or bestowed as payment for their services during the Byzantine civil wars.[50] Two years later, Ottomans conquered Kallipolis after an earthquake, a larger and more significant fortified settlement that they restored immediately and used as a base for later military campaigns.[51] In the next two decades, the Ottoman rule rapidly expanded to much of Thrace, with Adrianople becoming their capital city in the 1360s. The Byzantine control was lost to a series of fortified centers north and northwest of Adrianople before 1365, such as Bukelon and Probaton.[52] Then, the conquest of major settlements on the southern outskirts of the Strandzha Mountains came about, including Petra, Skopos, Gehenna, Brysis, and Bizye.[53] In contrast, Skopelos provided a safe harbor for the Byzantine population before it finally fell in 1373, only after a devastating earthquake.[54] Lastly, the initial occupation of Bizye continued until 1403, and the city changed hands several times until the final Ottoman conquest shortly before the fall of Constantinople in 1453.[55]

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[48] Fatouros and Krischer, *Johannes Kantakuzenos (Buch III)*, 322–25; Trapp, *PLP*, 1506, 21448.
[49] Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, II*, 287–88; Külzer, "Zur Geschichte der ostthrakischen Stadt Vize/Bizyē," 205.
[50] Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte, Fünfter Teil*, 173–74; Vogiatzis, "Die Anfänge der Türkenherrschaft in Thrakien," 32–33; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 428.
[51] Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, II*, 283; Vogiatzis, "Die Anfänge der Türkenherrschaft in Thrakien," 145–46.
[52] Kurtuluş, "Edirne İl Sınırları İçindeki Kalelerin Tespit ve Değerlendirilmesi," 233.
[53] Vogiatzis, "Die Anfänge der Türkenherrschaft in Thrakien," 53–54; Liakopoulos, "The Ottoman Conquest of Thrace," 77–79.
[54] Vogiatzis, "Die Anfänge der Türkenherrschaft in Thrakien," 174–75; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 446.
[55] Külzer, "Zur Geschichte der ostthrakischen Stadt Vize/Bizyē," 205–6.

1.2. State of the Previous Research

As the above survey highlights, the region's written history primarily revolves around the first-rank settlements. Despite its historical importance throughout the Middle Ages, many aspects of Byzantine Thrace are yet to be discovered. In particular, rock-cut architecture faces total neglect, as it usually does in the distant regions of the Byzantine Empire. The rock-cut sites examined in this dissertation broaden our understanding of daily life and experiences, neither separate from nor limited to the walled centers. These spaces are often excluded from the general narratives of the history of art and architecture, no matter how complex and sophisticated they are. As one might expect, the previous literature on rupestrian sites in the Strandzha region is very limited, mainly consisting of catalog entries and short descriptive notes.

The historical geography of the mountainous region has been treated in two volumes of *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* (TIB): the sixth volume edited by Peter Soustal on the Roman provinces of Thrace, Rhodope, and Haimimontos, and the twelfth volume by Andreas Külzer on Eastern Thrace.[56] Together, they make a massive corpus of historical information about the settlements and sites in Byzantine Thrace. The TIB project also presents a review of earlier archaeological surveys and excavations, often combined with on-site observations. The two volumes provide diachronic discussions of political history, administrative changes, and economic activities with an all-inclusive approach. Given the extent and overall scope, the rupestrian complexes in the Strandzha region are usually mentioned in passing, if at all, in the related entries of nearby localities.

With the exception of two sites, no archaeological excavations have been yet conducted in the carved spaces of Eastern Thrace. Yarımburgaz Cave, north of the Küçükçekmece basin, became subject to scientific explorations as early as the late 19th century.[57] Notwithstanding the long research history, the focus remained mainly on the pre-historic occupation layers, while the Roman and Byzantine phases, albeit conspicuously visible in the present landscape, have been somehow overlooked up to this day. Moreover, in the north-central section of the Strandzha region, the Edirne

[56] Soustal, *Thrakien*; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*.
[57] For a succinct research history of the cave, see Aydıngün, "Yarımburgaz Mağarasında Son Durum," 217–19. See also chapter 3.

Archaeological Museum initiated an excavation project in Probaton (Sinanköy) in 2015 under the scientific supervision of Engin Beksaç and Özkan Ertuğrul from Trakya University. In addition to the trenches in the citadel, the team excavated the cemetery area west of the main rock-cut complex on the western slope of the settlement hill, *Probaton church no. 1*.[58] Unfortunately, only a short preliminary report of the first campaign has been published, even though the excavations continued until 2019.[59]

The only rupestrian site in the Strandzha region that enjoys a certain familiarity among Byzantinists is the pilgrimage complex outside Medeia (Kıyıköy), rather erroneously known as a Late Antique monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas. Due to the sophisticated design and elaborate decoration, it found a place in the general surveys of Byzantine architecture in Thrace and the larger Balkans.[60] French geographer Xavier Hommaire de Hell visited the site in 1846 and made its earliest known description.[61] Shortly after his visit, the inhabitants of the nearby town restored the complex and founded a monastery, the origin of the later attribution. During the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), when the Eastern Thrace was under the Bulgarian occupation, archaeologist Karel Škorpil published a fundamental work and introduced the site to the Byzantine scholarship.[62] His plan drawing continued to circulate with minimal revisions until today. Five more decades passed before the rupestrian monument attracted the attention of Turkish art historians; the writings of Feridun Dirimtekin and Semavi Eyice reintroduced the site to the wider academia.[63] Shortly after, the article written by Semavi Eyice and Nicole Thierry in 1970 presented a detailed examination with a lengthy description, stylistic comparisons, and chronological arguments.[64] In the 1990s, Volker Eid reevaluated the cult of the holy water at Medeia, its reflection on the iconographic program, and the pilgrimage activity in general.[65] Several other Byzantinists included the diverse set of materials from the rock-cut complex in their

[58] See chapter 4.1.2.
[59] Beksaç, Ertuğrul, and Karakaya, "Sinanköy Çalışmaları."
[60] Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 145–46; Ousterhout, "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace," 490–91.
[61] Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, I: 146–49, IV: 374–76, Planche XIII.
[62] Škorpil, "Археологически бѣлѣжки отъ Странджа-Планина."
[63] Dirimtekin, "Midye Surları ve Aya Nikola Kilisesi," 53–55; Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 339–46.
[64] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye."
[65] Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers."

discussions.[66] Among those who found their way to Medeia were also Cyril Mango and Ihor Ševčenko; their photographs are now kept in the Dumbarton Oaks Image Collection and Fieldwork Archives, which I had a chance to consult for the present study (fig. 1.5).

Figure 1.5: Hagiasma in the pilgrimage complex at Medeia, looking south. (C. Mango, Byzantine black & white mounted photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C., L69.37)

Two other rupestrian sites in Eastern Thrace were published in a couple of short articles. The extensive *lavra*-type monastery northeast of Bizye displays a high level of patronage and strong connections to the nearby urban center. In the 1960s, Feridun Dirimtekin wrote a brief account, focusing only on the southern cluster of rock-cut spaces.[67] In his 1969 article, Semavi Eyice described the settlement area and provided

[66] Natalia Teteriatnikov commented on the carved church furniture in Teteriatnikov, *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia*, 61–64. The non-figurative painted composition in the apse was remarked on in Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Pour une problématique de la peinture d'église byzantine a l'époque iconoclaste," 324; Niewöhner, "The Significance of the Cross before, during, and after Iconoclasm," 199. Moreover, Catherine Asdracha published the apse inscriptions and some pilgrims' graffiti: *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, I: 250–51, II: 249–52, III: 316–18. The biblical inscription in the apse is also mentioned as a comparative material in Maranci, "'Holiness Befits Your House' (Ps. 92 [93]: 5)." Additionally, a master's thesis on Kıyıköy, submitted in 2000 at Trakya University, devotes a chapter to the rock-cut site, merely recycling a poor Turkish translation of the previous literature. Kocaaslan, "Kıyıköy Monografyası."

[67] Dirimtekin, "Rock Church at Vize."

a sketchy plan drawing, the inaccuracies of which he attributed to the amorphous carved surfaces.[68] Later, Nazan Yavuzoğlu dedicated a chapter of her undergraduate thesis to the valley, written under the supervision of Eyice, which was later turned into an article.[69] The last site is the multicentered, multilevel rock monastery in the Karasu Valley at İnceğiz, about which Dirimtekin published a short report in 1957.[70] His sketchy plan and section drawings do not represent the carved spaces accurately.

Beyond this handful of publications, Byzantine rock-cut architecture in the Strandzha region has been addressed only in some survey reports and inventory catalogs. One of them is Özkan Ertuğrul's extensive survey of Roman and Byzantine Thrace in 1995. Sadly, the results have been published in a single report, where the visited sites were listed with short descriptions.[71] A more systematic and long-term survey has been conducted by Engin Beksaç, almost without interruption, between 2004 and 2017: *Early Rock (Rock-cut and Megalithic) Monuments and Cult Places in Northwestern Anatolia and Thrace*.[72] The annual reports contain his observations and preliminary interpretations of medieval elements he encountered in the survey area, yet the primary interest of Beksaç lies in the ancient Thracian past. The same lack of interest in the medieval past persists also in the Bulgarian side of the Strandzha Mountains, where archaeologists tend to prioritize the Iron Age material.[73] Lastly, three inventory projects include the rock-cut sites in the region in their catalogs: Archaeological Settlements of Turkey (TAY), Kırklareli Cultural Assets Inventory (Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri), and Edirne Cultural Inventory (Edirne Kültür Envanteri).[74]

In 2015 and 2017, two years of fieldwork were carried out in Skopelos (Yoğuntaş) and its close environs as part of an archaeological project co-directed by Jesko Fildhuth

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[68] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 333–36.
[69] Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'deki Bizans Eserleri"; "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi."
[70] Dirimtekin, "İnceğiz Mıntıkasındaki Mağara-Manastır ve Kiliseler."
[71] Ertuğrul, "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması."
[72] The annual reports of *Kuzey Batı Anadolu ve Trakya'da Erken Kültistik Kaya (Kaya-Oyma ve Megalitik) Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları Projesi* have been published in the relevant volumes of the Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantıları (Research Results Meetings) between 2006 and 2019, available on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. See https://kvmgm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-44761/arastirma-sonuclari-toplantilari.html
[73] Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," 12.
[74] Akyürek et al., *Türkiye Arkeolojik Yerleşmeleri, 8 (Bizans-Marmara)*. TAY project's online database can be accessed at http://tayproject.org/veritabeng.html. The complete inventory list and database of cultural assets in Kırklareli are also available online: https://kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr/. For Edirne, visit https://kulturenvanteri.com/tr/bolge/turkiye/marmara-bolgesi/edirne/.

and Bilge Ar, in which I also took part as a newly graduated architect.[75] The focus was on documenting the walls of Skopelos (Yoğuntaş), a first-rank local center founded in the 8th century, and the network of lesser fortifications in the area. In the 2017 campaign, our work in the rupestrian hermitage in Kuzulu, located on the outskirts of a fortified hill, ignited my interest in Byzantine rock-cut architecture as an alternative place-making tool to transform and control Thracian landscapes (fig. 1.6).[76]

Figure 1.6: Architectural team takes measurements in the rock-cut hermitage at Kuzulu village, Polos Kalesi/Yoğuntaş Survey, 2017 campaign. (photo by J. Fildhuth)

The previous publications primarily consist of short reports, rarely offering little more than field descriptions. They mostly fall flat in interpreting diverse functions of carved spaces and fail to capture spatial organizations and landscape relations. A small number of rock-cut sites in the region have been documented, albeit inaccurately, whereas the majority remain unstudied and unpublished to date. Only a few articles achieve more than providing descriptive notes, yet the published sites, too, need to be revisited with new theoretical approaches and interpretative frameworks. In all cases, a holistic view is missing—one that integrates the sites into the natural and human-altered environments, which I seek to accomplish in this dissertation.

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[75] Polos Kalesi/ Yoğuntaş Survey was a collaboration project between the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul (DAI) and Istanbul Technical University (ITU). For the preliminary reports, see Fildhuth and Ar, "Preliminary Report of the First Survey-Campaign at Skopelos"; "Polos Kalesi/ Yoğuntaş Yüzey Araştırması 2015"; Fildhuth, "Skopelos, Türkei. Surveyprojekt im byzantinisch-bulgarischen Grenzgebiet in Ostthrakien."

[76] In Kuzulu, the survey team consisted of the project's co-director, archaeologist Jesko Fildhuth, architects Asya Ece Uzmay and me, and landscape archaeologist Stephanie Pastwa.

1.3. Methodology

The discussions in the following chapters heavily rely on the data collected during the fieldwork between 2020 and 2022. I have used an extensive archaeological survey as a principal method to identify and record the sites for further interpretations. Having reevaluated the earlier project reports and inventory catalogs, I made preliminary visits to numerous localities in the Eastern Thrace, often accompanied by local guides or got lost in the fields and forests in their absence. Time and again, I consulted local knowledge not only to locate the sites of "Byzantine" activities but also to discern landscape affordances and continuities (fig. 1.7). Being also a native of Thrace myself, I promoted a local understanding of the landscape.

Figure 1.7: Conversation with a shepherd in Asmakayalar at the end of a workday. (photo by İ. Malgil)

Following the first campaign, during which I conducted an initial reconnaissance in the mountainous region, I have decided on eight study areas carved out from the carbonate rock series of the Strandzha Massif for a more focused analysis and detailed architectural documentation: Kıyıköy (Medeia), Balkaya, Asmakayalar near Vize (Bizye), Soğucak, Erenler, Kaynarca (Gehenna), Kuzulu, and Sinanköy (Probaton) (fig. 1.8). These were selected as the most representative of Byzantine entanglements with the rocky terrain and the most illustrative of how the inhabited landscapes in the Strandzha region were defined and operated. Initially, Yarımburgaz Cave and İnceğiz Rock Monastery were also planned to be documented in detail; however, the

limitations in time and budget compelled me to exclude them from the architectural survey. Although embedded in the same massif, these two make a geographically separate group closer to the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Consequently, I accept the Long Wall of Thrace as the eastern limit of the survey area. Still, I visited these two sites several times and included them in the general discussions, together with other rupestrian landscapes in the broader Thrace.

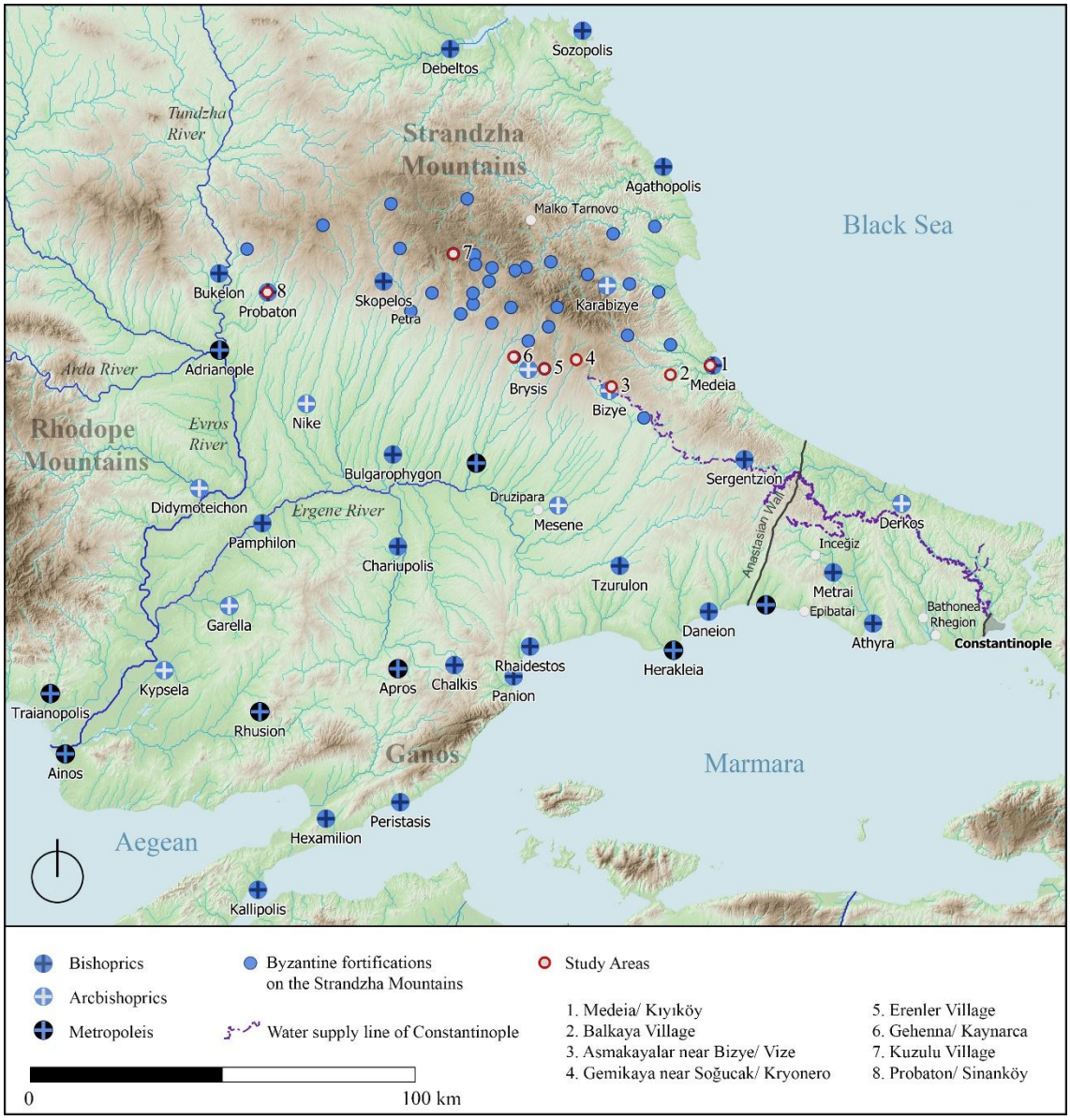

Figure 1.8: Map of Eastern Thrace showing the study areas and the episcopal centers at the end of the 12th century.

I completed the remainder of the fieldwork in two successive summer campaigns with the permission of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Under the inspection of the local archaeological museums in Kırklareli and Edirne, I was allowed to document architectural remains and small finds on the surface using nondestructive

methods of archaeology. My permission did not cover, though, surface cleaning or clearing vegetation to reveal features for documentation, removing artifacts from the site for further study, or taking samples for analysis. The necessary funding for the survey was obtained from the grants awarded by Sevgi Gönül Center for Byzantine Studies (GABAM) and Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture, with additional support from the Koç University, Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities.

I dedicated considerable time to studying spatial layouts and documenting architecture at each site, trying to understand the functioning, meanings, and chronology of carved spaces. This included in-person examination of the sites, taking meticulous notes, recording graffiti and fragmentary wall paintings when available, collecting surface ceramics, and conducting interviews with the locals. I paid special attention to topographic relations and sites' positioning in human-altered landscapes and medieval settlement networks. The detailed work in the field yielded ample information about the changing and sometimes retained uses of the surveyed sites in their long occupation history.

My major line of inquiry follows a scrupulous examination of the spatial realities: architecture, carved and painted decoration, topography, and relations to nearby landscape elements. To this end, digital models and conventional architectural drawings have been prepared at each surveyed site as part of the standard documentation procedure. Three-dimensional documentation appears to be the optimum way to capture the amorphous rock-cut interiors, which hardly display any well-defined geometries. Even in a neatly carved interior, the outlines of the rock formation continue to display irregular forms that cannot be fully represented with traditional orthographic images.[77]

Depending on the site-specific conditions, the models were generated either using Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) or photogrammetry. TLS provides highly accurate digital models in a relatively short time for analysis and archival purposes, yet it continues to be a high-cost data acquisition technique that is not extensively employed

[77] For the inadequacy of traditional architectural survey techniques to represent carved spaces, see Tedeschi, "Analisi Tecnica del Monumento," 263–64.

in every project.[78] Photogrammetry is more affordable and widespread, and its accuracy has long been acknowledged for the documentation of artifacts, archaeological stratigraphy, and architecture.[79] However, image-based modeling is not equally applicable in every condition. In particular, in the rupestrian spaces, the technique presents difficulties because of unevenly lit or completely dark interiors. The drastic changes in light inside and outside a carved space decrease the software's ability to match points and reconstruct a model from the images.[80] Furthermore, complete photographic coverage, necessary to generate an uninterrupted model, is not always possible in miniature spaces common in the rock-cut medium. By contrast, laser scanners can perform equally well in most environmental conditions, including bright exteriors and the complete darkness of caves.[81]

I employed both volumetric data acquisition techniques for different study areas in the Strandzha region to achieve the optimum results in a time- and cost-efficient manner. I prioritized the TLS inside rock-cut complexes for better results in recording their shadowy, dimly lit interiors. Trimble X7 Scanner was used to scan the features in five study areas. Agricultural installations and quarries on the outskirts of the fortified hill in Erenler village and the monastic settlement on top of a rock mass outside Soğucak village were documented instead with image-based modeling using Agisoft Metashape software. Moreover, scaled and georeferenced models of larger surroundings of rupestrian sites were generated from the images taken from an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). Aerial photogrammetry was employed in selected areas where the forest did not fully cover the features of interest on the land. In order to minimize the error, the scale and orientation of aerial images were controlled with reference points, measured separately with a total station. Lastly, it was not an option to use a laser scanner for some hardly accessible rock-cut units, which were documented with a handheld camera, such as the small painted church connected to an isolated cell high on the sheer cliffside in the Asmakayalar valley near Bizye (fig. 5.11). These images were then

[78] Arav et al., "Use of Terrestrial Laser Scans for High-Resolution Documentation"; Lercari, "Terrestrial Laser Scanning in the Age of Sensing."
[79] Olson et al., "The Tel Akko Total Archaeology Project"; Quartermaine, Olson, and Killebrew, "Image-Based Modeling Approaches to 2D and 3D Digital Drafting in Archaeology"; Brandolini et al., "SfM-Photogrammetry for Fast Recording of Archaeological Features in Remote Areas."
[80] Olson et al., "The Tel Akko Total Archaeology Project," 259.
[81] Lercari, "Terrestrial Laser Scanning in the Age of Sensing," 6–7, 16–17.

processed to create photogrammetric models.

The brief review of the publications in the previous section illustrated that Byzantine rock-cut architecture in the Strandzha region lacked proper documentation. Thus, the three-dimensional, digital copies of rock-cut complexes contribute to their analysis, interpretation, and preservation. This is particularly important considering the ongoing risks these sites face due to natural erosion, illegal excavations, and invasive quarrying activities. In addition to the archival value for future research, the digital models also facilitated the architectural documentation. I exported orthographic images to be used as templates in the preparation of conventional architectural drawings. As such, the selected plans and sections were hand-drawn at the site, incorporating detailed on-site observations, and later digitized for representational purposes (fig. 1.9).

Figure 1.9: G. Köroğlu working on the plan drawing of Direkli Mağara near Balkaya village.

Such close in-person examination was necessary because of the limited nature of the literature on rock-cut architecture in Byzantine Thrace. I systematically photographed and prepared architectural descriptions, taking detailed notes of the spatial characteristics of carved units, their topographical setting, traces of built architecture, decoration, furnishing, and graffiti, as well as natural and human-altered features in the immediate surroundings. These were later complemented by archaeological interpretations of aerial and satellite imagery, whose careful reading proved helpful in recovering historical land use and understanding how people navigated in, organized, and controlled their landscapes. The initial ideas for the arguments presented below emerged from the architectural descriptions and preliminary interpretations, written down looking at or being in the objects of discussion: rock-cut spaces and rocky

landscapes. During my fieldwork, I have spent a lot of time in the region and now have access to material that is not easily accessible to the wider academia. As expected, this material is diverse and diachronic, and only a small portion of the work done in the field made it to the final manuscript.

On a broader scale, my discussions include the particular positioning of human interventions in rupestrian landscapes and their role in the life and death of Byzantine inhabitants of the Strandzha Mountains. For further interpretations at the regional level, I uploaded the geographic coordinates of architectural elements and landscape features to QGIS (fig. 1.8). Furthermore, I overlapped this map with Byzantine settlement patterns, fortification networks, and roads in the region for further spatial analysis. The results of GIS-based visibility and cost-surface analyses are presented and discussed in the relevant chapters below. This enabled me to comment on site selection criteria and specific conditions that may have led to the creation, maintenance, abandonment, and reuse. Rock-cut architecture in the region often marks valuable resources in proximity to the living and production areas of medieval communities, almost invariably connected to the transportation network.

As someone born and raised in Thrace, my interest in its past goes back a long way. Growing up, I traveled the roads trodden since antiquity, connecting settlements with ancient and medieval predecessors. My first encounter with Byzantine rock-cut architecture in the region, however, happened during the 2017 field campaign of the Polos Kalesi/ Yoğuntaş Survey, which gradually led me to the writing of this dissertation (fig. 1.6). Two other research projects on Byzantine Thrace in which I was involved during my doctoral studies have also become influential in the writing of this dissertation: BRIA and KosMoLand. Both projects explore ways to tackle research problems stemming from the current political dissection of the historical region.

Due to its present status as a border region, some parts of Thrace are highly militarized, depopulated, and difficult to navigate. The borders do not only separate the communities that lived together for centuries for the sake of "ethnically and culturally homogeneous" states but also create divisions in the study of Thrace. The preliminary reports of excavations and survey projects are mostly in local languages and often inaccessible to the broader academia. It also happens that Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek scholars usually have better connections with their colleagues and institutions in Western academia rather than among each other. Consequently, most publications

on Byzantine Thrace have an isolated, narrow focus, considering only the material within the borders of one of the three nation-states, which has nothing to do with the reality in the Middle Ages.[82]

To overcome such problems and examine continuities in the historical landscapes of Byzantine Thrace beyond national borders, a group of Byzantinists working in Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece recently joined forces for a multidisciplinary initiative called the BRIA Project: The Landscape and Rock-cut Architecture of Byzantine and Medieval Thrace.[83] The name derives from the suffix *bria*, meaning town in the ancient Thracian language, retained in some toponyms in Thrace, such as Mesembria and Selymbria. The project members traveled together across three countries and made research visits to medieval sites in Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek Thrace in 2022 and 2023 (fig. 1.10). The project has now evolved into a series of annual workshops to produce scholarship on Byzantine Thrace in a collaborative and intellectually challenging environment.

Figure 1.10: BRIA team having an on-site discussion in front of Gemikaya near Soğucak village, a Late Byzantine monastery built on top of a rock pillar. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

[82] Some remarkable exceptions to this model are Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*; Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace."
[83] For further information, visit https://bria.ku.edu.tr/.

This experience furthered my understanding and appreciation of Byzantine rock-cut architecture and transformed my perspective on Thrace. Thanks to the BRIA project, I visited several sites in Western and Northern Thrace for the first time, some hardly accessible, poorly studied, and not well known to the wider community of Byzantinists. I became more familiar with the scholarship produced on Byzantine Thrace in Greece and Bulgaria. The project also gave me the opportunity to connect and collaborate with scholars from all three countries and beyond. Even more valuable, though, is to build and be part of a network in which all three components of Thrace are equally represented, and scholars work together for a historical narration not interrupted by the modern borders.

The KosMoLand, short for Kosmosoteira Monastic Landscape, is a survey project focusing on the extensive landscape centered around the renowned monastery founded by Isaac Komnenos in the mid-12th century in Feres, Greece.[84] In contrast to the earlier scholarship, the project examines the spatial setting outside the catholicon and what lay beyond the monastic enclosure, combining survey archaeology with textual and environmental data. It further investigates how the imperial monastery maintained its control over the roads, rivers, woodlands, agricultural fields, and other landscape elements in the wider region through numerous dependencies listed in the *typikon.* The Kosmosoteira Monastery is one of the major construction projects in Byzantine Thrace that fundamentally transformed the environment in which it was built.

The site is by the Evros/Meriç/Maritza River, now separating the modern states of Greece and Turkey; however, the monastic landscape recognizes no such border. Parts of this landscape are under military control and not accessible to the researchers. The scholars working on the two sides of the river are hardly aware of each other's work. Due to the population movements in the 20th century, local knowledge is largely lost, which could have been helpful in the reconstruction of historical landscapes and contributed to the discussions of affordances and environmental change. I acknowledge and work with similar challenges in the Strandzha region, which is also divided

[84] The project directors are Fotini Kondyli (University of Virginia) and George Makris (University of British Columbia), and the team includes Dimitra Sikalidou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), Justin Anthony Mann (Dumbarton Oaks), and myself. The project results are planned to be published in a multiauthored research article in *DOP* in 2025, entitled *Beyond the Katholikon of the Kosmosoteira Monastery: The Interplay of Architecture, Environment, and Power*.

between two modern states, Bulgaria and Turkey, and afflicted by the demographic changes in the last century. The survey methodology and type of questions asked to reveal landscape relations in the KosMoLand inspired me in my own research. Consequently, my participation in both projects enhanced my knowledge and understanding of the region and paved the way for the discussions in the dissertation.

1.4. Contributions and Thesis Structure

Social sciences and humanities experienced a conceptual change, especially from the 1990s on, that regards space as an essential parameter in the production and transformation of cultural notions.[85] Henri Lefebvre's ideas, in particular, became the most influential in the study of spatial paradigms in premodern societies.[86] Accordingly, each society creates its own peculiar space. Here, the notion of space does not refer to a static physical reality but a fluid cultural production continuously transformed by social interactions. Spatial turn reintroduced the spatial discourses into social theory and invalidated the earlier subordination of space to time in history writing.[87] As a result, Byzantine studies, too, have gradually become more engaged with spatial issues, regarding space as a constantly reshaped and reimagined dynamic entity.[88] This scholarly framework contributed to the expansion of research outside the artistically significant single-standing monuments and museum artifacts. Along these lines, the last few decades have also witnessed a renewed interest in hewn-out spaces and rupestrian landscapes, embracing new interpretative approaches in studying medieval rock-cut architecture in Cappadocia, Laconia, Southern Italy, and others.

My doctoral research is in line with the growing literature on rupestrian art and architecture, and it partakes in the scholarship on Byzantine landscapes. I examine spatial relations in rupestrian landscapes and discuss rock carving and related space-making practices in the Strandzha region. The study contributes to the discussions of settlement types, pilgrimage activities, living conditions of rural communities,

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[85] Warf and Arias, "Introduction: The Reinsertion of Space," esp. 1-4.
[86] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Also see Cassidy-Welch, "Space and Place in Medieval Contexts," 1.
[87] Soja, "Taking Space Personally," 12.
[88] Recent projects that combine the methodologies of survey archaeology and textual studies display compelling results in reconstructing Byzantine lived spaces and understanding spatial practices. For a critical assessment and general overview of the related scholarship, see Veikou, "The Reconstruction of Byzantine Lived Spaces."

agricultural production, religious landscapes, and relations between monastic and lay populations with a group of previously neglected material from a historically remarkable region. In the interpretations below, I regard rock-cut space-making not as a mere result of human intentionality but as a collaboration with nature that provides material to carve or build upon and manipulates the spatial result. In doing so, I engage with ongoing new materialist discussions in archaeological theory, which have not yet been explored in Byzantine studies.[89]

The structure of this dissertation follows four principal chapters dedicated to the contextualization of rock-cut architecture and the reconstruction of medieval landscapes in the Strandzha region. The first chapter, *Listening to the Stone-Deaf*, lays the foundation for later discussions and provides the much-needed theory for Byzantine rock-cut architecture. This is an overarching chapter where I introduce my main arguments about rock-cut space-making and present what this particular type of material offers archaeologically. I first survey the motivations behind the creation, use, and transformation of solid rock masses and caves and examine their standing in the Byzantine way of thinking. I also analyze the close affinity between rock carving and construction to establish the former's legitimacy as a primary space-making practice through which Byzantines entangled with their environments wherever the necessary formations were available.

In the final subchapter, I put special emphasis on the involvement of other-than-human beings in rupestrian space-making and promote rock-cut architecture as a collaborative act of space production among humans, rock formations, and bodies of flowing water. I introduce three strategies adopted by the Byzantines to form their particular spaces out of the rock. The examples to explain this theoretical model are purposefully taken from Byzantine Thrace in order to display the variety of spatial solutions and diverse approaches to the rocky material in the broader historical region. The first corresponds to heavily transformed rock-cut interiors for which careful planning and execution are required. *Carving spaces out of the rock* reproduces similar forms with stone-built and wooden structures or their variations in the rock-cut medium. By contrast, the second strategy refers to the architecture constructed on rock foundations and walls. Usually

[89] See, for example, Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms." For a detailed discussion, see chapter 2.3.1.

dismissed as a simple, pragmatic choice, *building spaces on the rock* demonstrates a preference since the lower rupestrian levels are often enhanced and made visible on the façades or built interiors. Human-altered natural caves constitute the final category, in which human interventions, whether carving, plastering, painting, or construction, do not exhaust the speluncar interior but are put into dialog with the amorphous karst formations. As such, *using spaces in the rock* is a spatial manifestation of collaboration between humans and other beings in rock-cut space-making.

In the following three chapters, the focus shifts to the life of rural communities in the Strandzha region and the spatial creations of Byzantine inhabitants on the rocky terrains. The third chapter, *Praying in the Deep*, is about the pilgrimage activities to the rupestrian landscapes. The miracle stories and sacredness attributed to some caves and conspicuous rock outcrops transformed them into places of significance in the medieval mind. They attracted pilgrims and became places where locals came together and built a sense of community. Several pilgrimage sites received monumental architecture to accommodate a large number of visitors and related cult practices, whereas others were retained as they naturally were and only arranged with minimal interventions. The pilgrimage complex immediately outside Medeia is treated extensively in this chapter, which displays a specific design to manipulate the pilgrims' movement and guide them through the bedrock, giving controlled access to certain points of veneration. Architectural sculpture and painted decoration complement the spatial experience, all subtly referring to the source of the holy water at the center of the pilgrimage activity. The site was likely commissioned by the episcopal authority in the nearby town, probably in the 9th century. It continued to be visited for centuries and underwent several restorations, the last major one being in the mid-19th century.

The final two chapters are concerned with settlement areas of lay and monastic communities. Distinguishing settlements as lay or monastic is not always possible through archaeological material. Both communities inhabited and made a living from the same landscapes. They were in symbiotic relations and, more often than not, partly dependent on one another. As a result, these two chapters complement each other, and together, they present a fuller picture of the rural life in the region's rupestrian landscapes. Those who lived in the villages and urban centers, worked in the fields, cut wood from the forest, extracted stone in the quarries, and processed grapes in rock-cut winemaking installations are at the forefront in the fourth chapter, *Inhabiting the Lay*

Settlements. I examine how people employed rock-cut architecture to mark the inhabited lands and other activity areas central to village life. The chapter also investigates the economic activities Byzantine inhabitants occupied themselves with and agricultural production areas engraved on the rocky terrain. The discussion ends with a rupestrian house in Kaynarca (Gehenna), the only rock-cut example in Byzantine Thrace identified with a residential function. The structure must have stood out among the built houses in the medieval town, where a masonry Middle Byzantine church partially stands. The rock-cut house seems to have held a representational value for its residents, who chose not to live in any village house but the one carved from a sheer rock formation in a dominant position opposite the fortified settlement.

The last chapter before the conclusion, *Seclusion and Control*, focuses on the activities of monastic communities and their living spaces. The three case studies presented here showcase the physical realities of settlement areas of three different styles of monasticism. Asmakayalar is a *lavra*-type settlement unevenly spread in a valley landscape. The core area of the monastery, with a communal church, commemorative spaces, and possibly a refectory, is located close and visually connected to the nearby urban center, Bizye. Gemikaya displays a much smaller yet nucleated settlement built on top of a rock pillar, whereas the rock-cut hermitage outside the walls of the monastic center in Kuzulu suggests a hybrid monastic landscape. The drastic differences in settlement organization aside, all three monasteries occupy strategic locations, overlooking fertile lands and critical water sources, affording opportunities for communities to control and exploit the landscapes. Rock monasteries in the Strandzha region not only coexisted with lay settlements but also were often positioned according to them. The survey reveals, time and again, their reliance on relationships with the laity, especially the local elites and secular authorities.

Altogether, these chapters illustrate how Byzantine rural communities were entangled with rupestrian landscapes in the Strandzha region, defining inhabited lands and other places of significance, whether for agricultural production, exploitation of natural resources, navigation, spiritual salvation, or divine protection. Other than the remains of fortification walls, the only Byzantine buildings preserved in the mountainous region are the Hagia Sophia church in Bizye (Vize), the former cathedral of the city with an unusual domed basilical design at an imposing scale, and the small cross-in-

square church in Gehenna (Kaynarca) (figs. 1.11, 4.23).[90] Consequently, rock-cut architecture now constitutes a considerable portion of the *in-situ* Byzantine archaeological evidence, even though rock carving was not the dominant space-making practice in the Strandzha region. Seamlessly one with the landscape, the surveyed rupestrian sites provide invaluable information to reconstruct landscape relations and living conditions of people, as the stories of individuals and communities remain inscribed on the rock. Throughout the thesis, rock-cut architecture presents dynamic, playful spatial solutions that show the potential to enrich and significantly alter our understanding of Byzantine architecture. My research further contributes to scholarship that gradually counters biases against rock-cut space-making, stemming from the lowly status unjustly associated with rupestrian sites and the general neglect of archaeology within Byzantine studies. Furthermore, the dissertation aims to put the Strandzha region firmly on the map of Byzantine studies, whose medieval past remains yet largely unexplored.

Figure 1.11: Hagia Sophia Church (now Süleyman Paşa Mosque) in Vize. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

[90] For the church of Hagia Sophia, among others, see Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 327–33; Ötüken and Ousterhout, "Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace," 138–42; Ruggieri, *L'architettura religiosa nell'Impero Bizantino*, 132–35; Bauer and Klein, "Die Hagia Sophia in Vize"; "The Church of Hagia Sophia in Bizye (Vize)." For Panagia Church in Gehenna, see Mamaloukos, "Ο ναός της Παναγίας στη Γέννα"; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 334.

Chapter 2

LISTENING TO THE STONE-DEAF

For millennia, rocky landscapes provided shelters for humankind in the depths of the earth, almost wherever the geology of an area was appropriate. Carved spaces, whether hewn out from a solid rock mass or nested in a natural cavernous void, were used as temporary or permanent dwellings, burial grounds, and ritual places. Such landscape elements, with or without substantial human intervention, nurtured the imagination of our kind with mythical stories and divine revelations they had staged or simply as entryways to the underworld in religious cosmologies.[91] Byzantium was no exception. Rock-cut architecture is ubiquitously found in the core lands of the Empire and beyond in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Caucasus, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Latmos, Laconia, Thessaly, Dobruja, Moesia, Southern Italy, Sicily, Cyprus, Palestine, Egypt, Ethiopia, and, of course, Thrace, which is the main focus of the present study. In this chapter, my aim is to provide neither an exhaustive bibliography nor a literature review of Byzantine rock-cut architecture, which would be an extremely ambitious undertaking considering its temporal and geographical range. Instead, I set out to theorize Byzantine rock-cut architecture and discuss the phenomenon as comprehensively as possible to establish its legitimacy as a primary space-making practice and a landscape-making tool in Byzantium.

Rupestrian spaces may appear to be stone-deaf, carved out on inaccessible cliff sides, within exposed rock outcrops on smoothly rising hills, on top of massive rock pillars, or in karstic cave systems. In fact, they can speak of the past very clearly if we know how to listen. The first step in this process is no other than piecing together the meanings attached to them by past societies. In the following pages, bringing the Byzantine perspectives on carved spaces under the spotlight, I survey the practical reasons and sacred associations that may have motivated their creation, use, and transformation. The second section focuses on the potentials and inherent problems of the study of rock-cut architecture as a particular type of material evidence. I analyze the relationship between rock-cut and masonry architectural traditions and promote

[91] Brady and Ashmore, "Mountains, Caves, Water"; Lucero and Kinkella, "A Place for Pilgrimage"; Harmanşah, *Place, Memory, and Healing*, esp. 120–25; Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 145–202.

rock carving as an equally valid alternative space-making practice, despite its frequent portrayal as a kind of underdog in the scholarship. The last section is dedicated to the question of how Byzantines actually engaged with rupestrian landscapes and incorporated the rocky material into their spatial creations. I present and discuss the strategies employed to adopt rock formations and natural caves and suggest three main categories: *carving spaces out of the rock*, *building spaces on the rock*, and *using spaces in the rock*. This interpretative model yields a more holistic view of rock-cut architecture as a collaboration between people and things in human-altered rocky landscapes.

2.1. Motivations for Carved Architecture in Byzantium

Whether featuring natural caves or not, rocky landscapes in Byzantium were almost invariably enhanced by artificial carvings and transformed to correspond better to the spatial needs of their inhabitants. The insistence on carving out spaces almost wherever the qualities of available rock outcrops are adequate indicates a preference over alternative construction media. Expectedly, both practical reasons and cultural associations can be credited for this choice.

2.1.1. Practical Reasons

The unavailability or inconvenience of alternative construction materials, at least in theory, can be accepted as a driving force for the creation of hewn-out spaces in some regions. For instance, the abundance of rock-cut monuments in Cappadocia is generally explained in terms of a necessity in a region with suitable geological conditions and limited timber resources. It is also suggested that the soft ignimbrite, the most common rock formation in the volcanic landscape of Cappadocia, can be carved rather easily, but it is not very resistant to the elements. The properties of the rock in the region are, therefore, more fitting to create self-supporting carved spaces than to build masonry walls.[92]

That being said, the paucity of alternative construction materials as an all-encompassing reason for rock-cut architecture should be dismissed. After all,

[92] Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*, 10; Öztürk, "Rock-Cut Architecture," 149; Lamesa, "Rock-Cut Tombs and Churches in Cappadocia," 79.

Byzantine carved spaces can hardly be defined as exclusively rock-cut, but they are more often than not found together with built elements. The scarcity of timber resources may have indeed played a role in the choice of rock-cut architecture, yet it is not uncommon for a rupestrian site to incorporate wooden structures as a part of its spatial arrangement.[93] Timber is needed in most cases for the scaffolding to carve and decorate rupestrian monuments higher than 2,25 m.[94] The argument also falls short of explaining the existence of carved complexes in timber-rich regions, some located within the forestlands proper, particularly in the Balkans. Moreover, many others have been hewn out in the vicinity of ancient and modern stone quarries in the regions with well-established masonry architectural traditions.[95]

The relatively stable microclimate in rock-cut interiors is recognized as yet another motivation for carved architecture since the surrounding rock mass functions as a thick layer of insulation.[96] This may hold true for the harsh winters and hot summers of Central Anatolia or even more so in the extreme conditions of the hot and arid climate of Egypt. For the same reason, explorers of Pharaonic Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries inhabited the ancient hewn-out spaces close to the excavation sites for the thermal comfort that the rock provided. Among them was British Egyptologist William Flinders Petrie, who lived in a three-room rupestrian dwelling in Giza for

[93] Among others, the cave church complex in the Monastery of St. Theoktistos in the Judean desert is accessed through a six-story tower with wooden floors abutting the cliffside. Goldfus, Arubas, and Alliata, "The Monastery of St. Theoctistus," 252–56. Simpler arrangements exist in the living cells, such as the wooden flooring in the *hesychasterion* of St. Sabas outside the same monastery. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, 126. In Cappadocia, the church at Zindan Monastery near Göreme appears to have been covered by a timber roof. Timber floors are attested in the church in Eğri Taş Cemetery Complex and the transverse hall of the Direkli Kilise Complex, both in Peristrema, see Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 374–76, 385; Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 85–87. In Southern Italy, the survey in the valley of Madonna della Scala in Massafra suggests abundant use of wood for the construction of adjacent structures and furniture inside hundreds of carved units, see Dell'Aquila, "Evoluzione delle fasi di escavazione ed elementi architettonici degli insediamenti rupestri," 53.

[94] Öztürk, *Rock Carving in Cappadocia from Past to Present*, 55. In order to reach and work on the upper levels of rock-cut spaces, the carvers may have also used the rubble accumulated on the floor. In any case, however, the carved or painted decoration on the ceilings must have been applied after regularizing the wall surfaces, which would also require the clearance of the debris and the construction of a scaffold. Lamesa, "Methods for Rock-Hewn Worksite Analysis," 35.

[95] Zindan Monastery in Cappadocia was founded at an ancient stone quarry near Göreme. Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 385. In Dobruja, the 10th-century rock-cut monastery at Basarabi (Murfatlar) was carved out in a medieval chalk quarry, which was exploited for the construction of the nearby Stone Dyke. The chronological relationship between the two functions is not entirely clear. Curta, "The Cave and the Dyke," 145; Atanasov, "Le monastère rupestre de Murfatlar." Likewise, several rock-cut spaces in the Strandzha region examined in this dissertation are currently at risk due to invasive quarrying activities, being next to still-functioning quarries or cement factories.

[96] Öztürk, "Rock-Cut Architecture," 149.

around two years in the early 1880s, originally two adjacent rock-cut tombs merged together. He remembered and longed for the favorable conditions of his "tomb" in the later years he spent in Egypt, living either in a built house or a tent.[97] However, the question remains whether this practical aspect was equally effective or even relevant everywhere in Byzantium.

Lastly, the relative security provided by the somehow hidden subterranean spaces is pertinent to the discussion of practicality. A plethora of rock-cut sites in Byzantine Cappadocia feature secondarily carved refuge areas accessed via narrow tunnels secured by heavy doors.[98] More puzzling are the so-called underground cities. These are complex multilevel settlements with several winding corridors blocked by rolling stone doors, many equipped with wells and ventilation shafts.[99] Although more than forty such sites are known, their dating and historical context remain rather obscure. Often associated with the Arab incursions, especially between the 7th and 9th centuries, these subterranean redoubts, probably serving various purposes year-round, must have been used as temporary shelters in times of turmoil by those who lived on the ground.[100]

The above-listed practical reasons neither entirely apply to the vast geography where we find Byzantine rock-cut architecture nor are sufficient to explain the preference for carved architecture over built-one in a particular setting. In many cases, the choice for carved architecture can be better related to Byzantine mentalities. The following subsection concentrates on the Byzantine perceptions to reconstruct the spatial paradigms through which Byzantines defined and made sense of their surrounding cavernous landscapes.

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[97] Petrie, *Ten Years' Digging in Egypt*, 11–12. Also see Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt*, 285–86.

[98] For Çanlı Kilise settlement, for example, see Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*, 103–5, 204–5.

[99] Bixio, *Cappadocia*, 61–63, 85–109, 138–46; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 345–49.

[100] Cooper and Decker, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*, 31–42. For the historical context of Cappadocia as the eastern borderland of the Empire, see Haldon and Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier."

2.1.2. Mentalities

The meanings the Byzantines assigned to carved spaces and the ways they described them are essential for understanding Byzantine rock-cut architecture. Interestingly, though, the human-made elements in rupestrian landscapes find nearly no place in the Byzantine literary production. The negligence of human interventions is to such an extent that even the preexisting rock-cut monuments were sometimes represented as no different than natural caves. For example, the funerary landscapes of Pharaonic Egypt were rearranged for monastic habitation in the Late Antique period. Although carved with much toil to commemorate the deceased and impress the living, the rock-cut tombs were simply conceived and referred to as caves by their monastic users.[101]

Rock carving in Byzantium is by no means limited to ecclesiastical and monastic spaces; however, rock-cut architecture in secular contexts is almost fully absent from the texts. Monastic literature provides the overwhelming majority of the written evidence for carved architecture, usually referring to sacred spaces. Nevertheless, archaeological material reveals numerous other ways in which the Byzantines made use of rupestrian landscapes, such as rock-cut agricultural installations, on which the livelihood of rural populations depended, and courtyard complexes in Cappadocia, houses of provincial magnates with impressive carved façades.[102] Another limitation is the extreme downplay of the human factor in the creation and reception of hewn-out monuments in Byzantine literature. Contrary to the negligence of carvers and their doings, sacred associations of caves are markedly present in literary sources. In this subsection, I present some notions related to the Byzantine perceptions of rupestrian environments, fully acknowledging the restricted nature of the evidence. A narrow focus on the texts can easily lead to a distorted image of rock-cut space-making practices and what it meant for people to carve out their spaces from the rock. Therefore, the next section, *Assessing Rock-cut Architecture*, is reserved for the contribution of archaeology to achieve a broader picture.

Veronica Della Dora emphasizes the evocative character of natural *topoi*, referring to biblical stories and saints' lives, which transformed the entire surface of the earth into

[101] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt*, 134, 286–87.
[102] See footnotes 450 and 471.

"a living icon."[103] Whether completely formed by nature or human-altered, the extraordinary rock formations and caves on the crust of the earth were essential elements in this complex system. In this framework, the sacredness of caves originated either in the biblical stories they had staged or in their relationship with holy persons in monastic contexts. Their sanctity was almost invariably highlighted with anthropogenic carvings, painted decorations, or constructions.

Biblical caves

In the Judeo-Christian context, the holiness of caves derives, above all, from the lives of the Old Testament prophets and Christ himself. Caves are referred to as places of revelation where encounters with the divine took place; they also respond to more practical needs in biblical stories as burial places or hidden shelters to take refuge inside.[104] Eastern Christianity further associates cave spaces with the decisive events of Christ's life on earth: He was born in a cave at Bethlehem, buried in a cave in Jerusalem, and ascended to heaven from another one on the Mount of Olives. In fact, the New Testament bears no reference to such a model. "The triad of caves" was formulated by Eusebius of Caesarea (ca 265-339/340), who linked the three events of paramount importance for Christianity with cave spaces.[105] The tradition that Christ was born in a cave at Bethlehem was already established by the 2nd century, and the site probably became the center of a local pilgrimage.[106] In the case of the other two, Eusebius himself related Christ's Entombment and Ascension to the sacred caves.[107] The Gospels suggest a rock-cut tomb rather than a natural cave for the former, and the cave on the Mount of Olives was formerly linked to Christ's teaching, not the Ascension.

The sites of the caves of Christ's Nativity, Sepulcher, and Ascension were remodeled with the construction of large basilicas as part of the Constantinian building projects in the Holy Land, to which Eusebius' writings provided ideological and spiritual grounds.[108] Already during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Constantine's mother

[103] Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 1–2, 58–60.
[104] *Ibid*., 176, 190.
[105] Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?*, 184–94.
[106] Bacci, *The Mystic Cave*, 26–34.
[107] Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?*, 189–92.
[108] Ćurčić, "Cave and Church," 217.

Helena initiated the construction of Christian basilicas at Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. These sacred caves were officially recognized and embellished with major 4th-century Christian shrines: the Churches of the Nativity, Holy Sepulcher, and Eleona.[109] Around the same time, numerous other cave spaces in the Holy Land were also put on the map as sites to relate the present to the biblical past.[110] In this way, caves arguably assumed a function similar to that of Christian martyria, and very much alike, they were gradually annexed to the ecclesiastical buildings or arranged to house the Christian liturgy themselves.[111]

Figure 2.1: Mosaic image of the Nativity of Christ in the catholicon of Hosios Loukas Monastery. (photo by N. Kontogiannis)

As prominent stages of biblical stories, caves occupy an important place in Byzantine iconography.[112] In line with the threefold meaning of caves, in Byzantine images representing the Nativity of Christ, the spatial setting is a speluncar interior (fig. 2.1).

[109] Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 29–30. For a recent monograph on the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, also see Bacci, *The Mystic Cave*.
[110] Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 186, 189.
[111] Slobodan Ćurčić observes that the cave-and-church formula prevailed in Byzantine architecture and had a significant peak later in the 13th and 14th centuries, especially in the Balkans. "Cave and Church," 218–21.
[112] Foltz, "Nature Godly and Beautiful," 138; Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 180–81.

In the compositions of the Resurrection, Christ is often depicted ascending from a cave-like underworld. In the scenes representing the Baptism of Christ, the banks of the Jordan River assume a cave-like appearance, and in the images of Christ's Crucifixion, a small cave on the Golgotha Hill represents the tomb of Adam. The caves mark the surrounding space or elaborate the scene in the depictions of certain miracle stories, such as the raising of Lazarus. Finally, in the Late and post-Byzantine icons of the Pentecost, apostles are represented seated around the personification of the world before Christianity, surrounded by darkness in the form of a cave-like pit.

Owing to their perceived sanctity in relation to Christ's life, caves were related to the most sacred part of a Byzantine church: the sanctuary area. Byzantine church space was loaded with symbolic meanings, and each spatial compartment represented another *topos* in which biblical stories took place. In line with its semi-circular space and the mystery formed around the restricted accessibility, the apse of a church was identified with two defining events of Christ's earthly presence: the caves in which he was born and ultimately buried. 8th-century *Historia Mystagogica*, attributed to Patriarch Germanos (715-730), eloquently formulated the relationship between the apse of a church and two holy caves.[113]

> The conch is after the manner of the cave of Bethlehem where Christ was born, and that of the Cave where He was buried as the Evangelist saith, that there was a cave "hewn out of the rock, and there laid they Jesus."[114]

The cave analogy of sanctuaries persisted until the last centuries of Byzantium. In the 15th century, Symeon of Thessaloniki (d. 1429) identified the *prothesis* with the cave of Christ's Nativity in Bethlehem, isolated and not far from the church's altar that accordingly signified the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.[115] By this means, the biblical caves were symbolically associated with the familiar space of the church, present in the people's everyday lives.

In addition to the caves related to the earthly presence of Christ and others mentioned

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[113] Ćurčić, "Cave and Church," 216.

[114] Ἡ κόγχη ἐστὶ κατὰ τὸ ἐν Βηθλεὲμ σπήλαιον ὅπου ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστός, καὶ κατὰ τὸ σπήλαιον ὅπου ἐτάφη, καθώς φησιν ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς ὅτι ἦν σπήλαιον λελατομημένον ἐκ πέτρας καὶ ἐκεῖ ἔθηκαν τὸν Ἰησοῦν. Retrieved from Brightman, "The 'Historia Mystagogica,'" 258. Translated excerpt from Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 142.

[115] PG 155: 348A-B. For an English translation, see Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople*, 32, 117.

in biblical stories, the compositions of two texts central to the Christian faith were linked to a cave space on Patmos: the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. At the time when St. Christodoulos of Patmos founded the renowned monastery of St. John the Theologian in the late 11th century, the entire island was already recognized as where evangelist John saw the visions of the Apocalypse and dictated the Book of Revelation to his disciple Prochoros; however, the exact place of the event was yet unmarked on the landscape. The cave of the Apocalypse was identified and received wall paintings in the late 12th century, including a depiction of the writing of the Book of Revelation.[116] An earlier tradition points to Ephesus for the writing of John's evangelical work, yet this event, too, was later associated with Patmos, which gradually became an important pilgrimage destination. From the early 14th century on, the cave on Patmos started to appear frequently in the representations of the evangelist, even though there is no text whatsoever relating the writing of the fourth Gospel with a cave space.[117] In the local tradition, small cavities, cracks, and protrusions on the cave walls are also integrated into the story, believed to be where John leaned his arm, rested his head, saw the divine visions, and heard the voice dictating the Gospel.[118] Consequently, due to its connection to the saint, the cave on Patmos changed in perception, reality, and representation.

Non-biblical caves

Caves that were not connected to biblical stories sometimes acquired sacred meanings in monastic contexts through their contact with holy persons. The confining nature of their interiors made them fitting places for the eremitic way of life. Living in the wilderness of a cave was a much-frequented path in the ascetical practice, signifying the ascension of two rungs of the Ladder of John Climacus.[119] As a result, the deliberate choice of the saints to seclude themselves in caves for a significant period of their lifetime became a common motif in a sheer number of hagiographies (fig. 2.2).

[116] Kollias, *Patmos*, 36–37.
[117] Ševčenko, "The Cave of the Apocalypse."
[118] Papadopoulos, *Patmos*, 3; Talianis and Hatzifotis, *Patmos*, 110, 122.
[119] Talbot, "Caves, Demons and Holy Men," 710; Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 198. For a recent text-driven analysis of the life of Byzantine recluses and the cave cells in which they enclosed themselves, see Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience*, 113–16, 134–47.

For the Byzantine ascetics who emulated the Old Testament prophets and Christ's earthly presence, caves were ideal settings for spiritual resurrection to imitate Christ's triumph over death.[120] In the context of monasticism, a major practice related to this notion was the seclusion in one's own eternal resting place.[121] As a result, many holy men were buried inside their former cave cells, which eventually became commemorative places for their followers. The Christian use of caves and rocky grounds as burial places and commemorative sites is a longstanding one. Christian catacombs were hewn out into underground tufa outside the city limits of Rome starting from the early 3rd century; similar Early Christian subterranean cemeteries also developed in Naples, Syracuse, and Alexandria, among other places. In 4th-century Rome, as elsewhere in the Empire, Christian basilicas were built at these sites containing the venerated tombs of the protomartyrs.[122]

Figure 2.2: The icon of the Dormition of St. Sabbas, late 16th-early 17th century. (Benaki Museum)

[120] Ćurčić, "Cave and Church," 217–18; Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 195.
[121] Talbot, "Caves, Demons and Holy Men," 712.
[122] Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 30–35; Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 7–9, 14.

In a similar manner, at Ephesus, the catacomb on the eastern slope of Panayırdağ became one of the major pilgrimage attractions of the city, known to and visited by believers from distant regions.[123] This early Christian necropolis was identified as the site of the miraculous awakening of seven young men, who were put into a two-century-long sleep inside a cave where they had been left to die because of their Christian faith during the persecutions of Decius (249-251). The rock-cut cemetery was, indeed, established in the 3rd century, and according to tradition, a church was built there by Theodosius II (408-450) shortly after the miracle. The site contains numerous graffiti in Greek, Latin, and Armenian dated between the 13th and 15th centuries, as well as later examples indicating the continuity of the pilgrimage activity. The funerary association of caves and their perception as stages for resurrection persist beyond the Christian imagination, as illustrated by the Koranic parable of the Companions of the Cave (*Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*), which recreates the story of the Seven Sleepers. In both Christian and Islamic contexts, the story bears eschatological references, evoking the rise from the underworld on the Day of Judgment, represented here with an underground cave space.[124]

The dual role of caves in the life of ascetics as living and eternal resting places was present since the very emergence of the eremitical ideas in Egypt. According to the *vita* of St. Paul of Thebes, regarded as the first Christian hermit who lived in complete isolation for around one hundred years, St. Antony the Great was urged by God to find the cave-dwelling of the holy man in the Egyptian desert and bury his soon-to-be-dead body in a tomb, later excavated there by two lions.[125] A similar encounter was narrated in the 6th-century life of St. Sabas the Great. Led by divine guidance, the saint found an elderly hermit in a hardly accessible cave on the western bank of the Jordan River. He was in confinement in the same cave for thirty-eight years, and shortly after his first encounter with the saint, he passed away. Sabas buried him there and walled up the entrance.[126] In the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, several other recluses expressed their wishes to be buried inside their cave dwellings, and some even prepared

[123] Pülz, "Christian Pilgrimage in Ephesus," 244–49; Zimmermann, "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesos."
[124] Pancaroğlu, "Caves, Borderlands and Configurations of Sacred Topography," 264–65.
[125] Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 196–98.
[126] *Life of St. Sabas the Great*, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 116–17.

their burial grounds themselves.[127]

The anchorite saints' combats and, at times, peaceful encounters with wild animals in the gloomy darkness of caves and their expulsion of demons are commonplace in the hagiographies.[128] These holy figures were believed to have changed uncanny environments with their presence and unceasing prayers.[129] The foundational myth of the monastery of Mega Spelaion near Kalavryta is a case in point.[130] According to the tradition, after a shared dream vision, Sts. Symeon and Theodore of Thessaloniki traveled to the northern Peloponnese to find St. Euphrosyne, a shepherdess who discovered there the icon of Theotokos painted by the Apostle Luke. Euphrosyne guided them to a spacious cave, where the icon was hidden. The holy men decided to burn the overgrown bushes at the entrance, yet the fire disturbed a monstrous snake lurking in the lower part of the cave. As it tried to escape, lightning struck from the icon of the Virgin and killed the beast.[131] In memory of the discovery of the miraculous icon and the victory over the monster, the saints rearranged and consecrated the cave and established a monastery at the site in 362, allegedly the earliest monastic settlement in Achaea.

As in the above story, caves, just like mountains and deserts, functioned as natural elements by which holy men's interventions and, subsequently, the extent of their monastic establishments were rendered visible in the landscape.[132] As the former living cell or burial place of a venerable hermit or simply functioning as a God-made church, a cave often constituted the core of the monastic sacred space.[133] On many occasions, being directly associated with the lives of holy men, these caves, in a way similar to

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[127] Talbot, "Caves, Demons and Holy Men," 713.
[128] *Ibid.*, 715–17.
[129] Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 201.
[130] Although it potentially relies on a Byzantine tradition, the story can only be traced back to the 17th century. It derives from the life of the two founder saints that has been significantly altered. The earliest known manuscript possibly copied a 14th-century *vita* of Sts. Symeon and Theodore, following an even earlier local tradition. This chronological argument for the composition of the original manuscript also corresponds to the restoration of the monastery during the reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328), recorded in a *chrysobull* issued for the monastery by John VI Kantakouzenos in 1348: Anagnostakis, "Από την εικόνα της μοναχής Ευφροσύνης στον Βίο των οσίων του Μεγάλου Σπηλαίου," 150–52, 157–58, 193. Also see Lampropoulou et al., "Μνήμη καί λήθη τής λατρείας των άγιων τής Πελοποννήσου," 283–84.
[131] *The Lives of the Monastery Builders of the Great Cave*, esp. 28–41. A Byzantine icon of the Virgin, called Panagia Megaspelaiotissa, made in wax and mastic relief and identified with the miracle-working icon in the local tradition, is now kept in the monastery of the Great Cave, for which Alexei Lidov suggests a date between the 11th and 13th centuries. "Icons Made of Relics," 99–100.
[132] Bakirtzis, "Locating Byzantine Monasteries," 131–32.
[133] Popović, "The Byzantine Monastery," 166–67.

the relics, attracted pilgrims and obtained economic significance for the monastic communities.[134] This rhetorical pattern conforms well with the role of holy men in the transformation of inhospitable rugged terrains into inhabitable landscapes: "the wilderness *topos*" in the monastic foundational stories.[135]

As a related point, the Byzantine appreciation of beyond-human agency in the formation of natural caves enhanced their perceived sanctity. Time and again, caves were defined as *Theoktistos* (Θεόκτιστος): God-made landscape elements or God-erected spaces in the form of churches or abodes for the use of anchorites. Such an understanding of rupestrian landscape is comparable to *acheiropoieta*[136]—holy icons brought into being miraculously rather than made by human hands. It is commonplace in the saints' lives that God reveals natural caves in suitable conditions to dwell in or arrange as churches with minor adjustments. The foundation story of the Monastery of St. Theoktistos in the Judean desert unfolds in a similar manner in the life of St. Euthymius, written by the 6th-century monk Cyril of Scythopolis.[137] On their journey in the desert around the year 411, Saints Euthymius and Theoktistos encounter an impassable gorge that houses "a marvelous cave," as if it was "prepared for them by God." They seclude themselves there and transform what used to be "a lair of wild animals" into a church, which later attracts followers and eventually becomes the core of a *coenobium*.[138] Similarly, the *vita* of St. Sabas the Great, penned by the same hagiographer, narrates the divine revelation of a cave church in the gorge of the Great Lavra with "an apse made by God" in the east.[139] The cave held a central role in the life of the saint and the monastic community he established in Mar Saba. He lived in a rock-cut cell above the cave church, and when he died at the age of ninety-four, he was buried not inside the cave but on the spot where he had the vision showing him the God-made space.

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[134] Bakirtzis, "Locating Byzantine Monasteries," 117.
[135] Talbot, "Founders' Choices," 50–52.
[136] The idea ascribes authenticity and miraculous powers to such images. Twelve *acheiropoieta* are listed in The Letter of the Three Patriarchs, a document now accepted to date from the period shortly after Iconoclasm. See Carr, "Acheiropoieta"; Vassilaki, "Icons," 761.
[137] *Life of St. Euthymius*, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 11–12.
[138] The cave church complex on the northern bank of Wadi al-Muqallek consists of an entrance tower abutting the cliff, a church, an underground burial chamber, and some secondary spaces, either used for seclusion or storage. Goldfus, Arubas, and Alliata, "The Monastery of St. Theoctistus."
[139] *Life of St. Sabas the Great*, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 110–11. Also see Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*.

Most of the time, the initial transformation of a cave into a functioning church in Byzantium required minimal intervention, despite the skillfully carved and painted details of numerous rock-cut chruches. In the *typikon* of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross in Cyprus, St. Neophytos recorded the foundational story of his monastic establishment.[140] In 1159, after an unsuccessful attempt to travel to Mount Latmos, the saint decided to pursue the solitary life he desired on his native island. He then began to alter a natural cave in a mountain valley near Ktima that would later become the core of his Enkleistra. The initial project followed a very simple scheme: He widened the cave, carved away the precarious parts, excavated his tomb inside, and set an altar dedicated to the Holy Cross. As the Enkleistra gained the support of the bishop of Paphos, the monastic foundation expanded along the entire cliff from 1170 onwards and received painted decorations in 1183.[141] St. Neophytos was not an experienced carver, and he chose to benefit from a preexisting space naturally formed in the rock. After he finally decided on a suitable cave to settle in, it was initially enough to enlarge the interior a little, regularize the walls, and set up an altar.

The distinction between a cave and a church space is more ambiguous in the life of St. Petar of Koriša, composed by Teodosije of Chilandar around 1310, almost a century after the saint's death. Having driven out a demonic snake, Petar secluded himself in a cave in the Koriša River valley and started to "venerate the snake's cave like a God's church," which would later become his eternal resting place.[142] The hagiographer did not specify its transformation into a functioning church during the saint's lifetime, yet already in the 13th century, the cave received its first painted decoration. Later, in the mid-14th century, a larger masonry church incorporated the cave space as a side chapel.[143] Once a natural cavity inhabited by wild creatures, the snake's cave acquired sacred meanings and played an essential role in the formation of a monastic community.

To sum up, some caves received sacred associations as stages on which the biblical stories unfolded. Among them, three caves in the Holy Land associated with Christ's life on earth held an esteemed position that shaped the reception of caves in Byzantine

[140] *BMFD*, 1350–52.
[141] Mango and Hawkins, "The Hermitage of St. Neophytos," 124, 205–6.
[142] Popović, "The Cult of St. Petar of Koriša," 186–89; Ćurčić, "Cave and Church," 222–23.
[143] Popović, "The Cult of St. Petar of Koriša," 197–98, 205–6.

imagination. Interactions with saintly figures sanctified other cave spaces, which were then regarded as integral elements of monastic landscapes on which interventions of holy persons and founders were rendered visible. In these processes, caves provided ideal grounds for asceticism and performing miracles, including having victory over chthonic beasts and demons. Byzantine texts frequently described cave churches as God-erected, miraculously found in the untamed nature. The relatively easy conversion of a natural cave into a church manifested the perceived similarities between the two spaces since minor alterations often sufficed for the initial transformation.

2.2. Assessing Byzantine Rock-cut Architecture

The above survey of sacred caves and their representation in texts is essential to visualize the Byzantine perception of rupestrian landscapes. However, rock-cut architecture does not require a preexisting cave to be applied, nor is it confined to religious space-making. The material evidence presents a more diverse picture, which deserves a separate discussion. What difference did it make for the Byzantines to carve out their spaces from the living rock rather than to construct, and what does it mean for us to study these remains now? In this section, I first focus on the workmanship involved in the making. This is followed by a value assessment of rock-cut architecture as a particular type of archaeological material and a discussion of methodological problems involved in its interpretation.

2.2.1. An antithesis or alternative to construction

The creation of a rupestrian space is, in essence, different from other space-making practices, whether this implicates enlarging natural caves or carving out solid rock formations. In built architecture, construction materials are assembled together to set a space apart from a larger, unified whole, whereas carved structures are seamlessly integrated into the surrounding rock mass and landscape.[144] Rock-cut architecture requires a process of subtraction rather than building over; hence, it is occasionally referred to as negative architecture, as in negative space.[145]

The ethnoarchaeological studies and analyses of overlapping tool marks on rock

[144] Crouch and Johnson, *Traditions in Architecture*, 107.
[145] Masini, "Metodologie di Rilievo e di Analisi della Cultura Costruttiva dell'Architettura Ipogea," 98.

surfaces shed some light on the operational chains and how carvers may have worked in the past.[146] Expertise in rock types, awareness of potential failures, and careful selection of the job site to avoid hidden cracks and unexpected falls are, by all means, prerequisites for realizing a project in the rock-cut medium. The craftsmen have to adapt their designs according to the rules set by the rock in which their creations are nested. They find ways to work with harder inclusions, cracks, and stratification joints that the material potentially hosts. These limitations are not always predictable yet sometimes may appear as carving proceeds into deeper layers and impose a change in the initial design or even the abandonment of the project.[147] The spatial outcome is the result of the agency of the rock, as much as the carvers' ability to implement the design, a theme that I will return to later. Additionally, the hardness and workability of the rock inevitably affect the level of detail that can be achieved. Despite the unmatched scale of investment in the volcanic landscapes of Byzantine Cappadocia, the carved ornamentation in the soft ignimbrite remains rather simple when compared to the detailing of many rupestrian monuments executed in limestone, such as the ancient Lycian funerary façades or the pilgrimage site at Medeia on the Black Sea littoral of Thrace, which I discuss thoroughly in the next chapter.

The complexity of carved spaces and relief decoration suggests a professional involvement in many cases, although rarely attested in written evidence. One such instance is found in Southern Italy, in the life of St. Elias Speleotes (d. 960), written probably a generation after the saint's death. When the number of monks increased in the monastery founded by the saint, God revealed a spacious cave to the brethren through the movements of a colony of bats. The cave was "a church prepared for them by God," yet it was not illuminated well enough. The complexity of the project perplexed the monks, and eventually, God sent a certain Cosmas, who was experienced in these matters. Having examined the site carefully, Cosmas hired stonecutters to

[146] For traditional carving techniques in Cappadocia, see Öztürk, *Rock Carving in Cappadocia from Past to Present*. For a reconstruction of operational chains in carved spaces, see Lamesa, "Rock-Cut Tombs and Churches in Cappadocia"; "Methods for Rock-Hewn Worksite Analysis." Lastly, for a stimulating and thought-provoking ethnoarchaeological study of the living tradition of carving tombs out of rock outcrops in Sulawesi, Indonesia, related rituals, and its economy, see Guillaume and Adams, "Creating a Rock-Cut Tomb in Traditional Tana Toraja."

[147] Lamesa, "Methods for Rock-Hewn Worksite Analysis"; Bessac, Lamesa, and Sciuto, "The Archaeology of Quarries and Rock-Cut Sites," 4.

carve a large opening on the southern wall.[148] The monks needed an experienced carver to supervise and stonecutters to implement the project, and only after that were they able to use the cave space embedded in the rock properly. It is also worth noting that the first thing that Cosmas did was to inspect the rock closely to figure out its affordances. Once again, the level and character of human intervention are determined by the limitations of preexisting landscape elements as much as the users' needs.

The structural functioning of spaces created in negative fundamentally differs from those built by assembling construction materials. Rock-cut walls and ceilings are supported by the rock mass surrounding the excavated space instead of columns, piers, and buttresses. Created by the removal of the rock beneath, a rock-cut dome, for example, is, in effect, "weightless" (fig. 2.3).[149] Nonetheless, these self-supporting interiors frequently mimic the elements of built architecture. Columns, piers, pilasters, arches, vaults, domes, and many other structural elements are crammed into rock-cut spaces, most of the time, without responding to the practical necessities that their conventional forms suggest.[150]

In Byzantium, the particular structural system of carved spaces afforded greater experimentation compared to built ones.[151] This freedom enabled carvers to create distinctive, often unique, compositions, hand in hand with adaptations of details from masonry architecture. In many cases, the overuse of structural elements in rock-cut interiors with certain deviations from masonry forms accentuated the architectonic character of the carved environment.[152] Moreover, carved furniture in rock-cut churches explicitly marked the liturgical space, very exact in detail. Despite their reduced scale, at times too small to be functional, the emphasis on the structural details and liturgical furniture bespeaks the symbolic and commemorative role that carved architecture played.[153] Along these lines, the complex arrangements of these

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[148] *Life of St. Elias Speleotes*, AASS Septembris III, 864–65 par. 42–43. For the English translation of the passage, see Epstein, "The Problem of Provincialism," 43–44.
[149] Among others, as formulated by Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 224.
[150] For imitations of masonry structural elements in Cappadocia, see Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 10. and in Phrygia, see Uçkan and Evcim, "Phrygia in the Byzantine Period." In his recent book, Mikael Muehlbauer reevaluates the three late-11th-century rock-cut cross-shaped churches in Tigray, Ethiopia, in the framework of the revival of Late Antique masonry forms and places them within the context of contemporary architectural production of the Mediterranean basin. See *Bastions of the Cross*.
[151] Tedeschi, "Analisi Tecnica del Monumento," 260.
[152] Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 483–84.
[153] *Ibid*., 484–89.

impractical elements are interpreted as an indication of the creativity of carvers, making their interventions distinctively "civilized" in an otherwise rugged, rocky environment.[154] Nevertheless, I argue that such rhetoric attributes little to no importance to the agency of other-than-human beings. It also fosters the nature-culture divide and conveys a hierarchy between different space-making practices in rupestrian landscapes, the subject of the final subsection of this chapter.

Figure 2.3: The "weightless" central dome floating over the naos without vertical supports in Ayazin Church A, Phrygia.

The painted decoration inside rock-cut spaces enhances the verisimilitude achieved with carved imitations of built forms. In Cappadocia, for instance, red linear paintings replicating a masonry appearance or simply highlighting the carved details constitute a widespread decorative program in rupestrian interiors.[155] By the same token, painted panels that look like marble revetments are found in a large number of rock-cut churches in distant geographies of the Empire. Similar faux marble panels and imitations of regular masonry (whether painted or incised on plaster) are common decorative elements in the built structures as well. These shared preferences indicate similar concerns in the decoration of both modes of architecture.

[154] Öztürk, "Rock-Cut Architecture," 152.
[155] Öztürk, 152; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 191–98.

Rock-cut spaces incorporate the spatial concepts of masonry building traditions into new designs without adhering to specific built models or aspiring to produce slavish imitations. The deviations from the masonry forms signify the carver's extensive knowledge of the material and aptitude for variation. The notion of the image paradigm conceptualizes the essence of this creative mimesis that formulates the multiple relations between rock-cut and masonry space-making. Weighty with "literary and symbolic meanings and associations," image paradigms function as image ideas that are reproduced and recreated in material culture.[156] Seen in this way, each imitation includes a creative process by its nature.

Byzantine rock-cut churches display an outstanding manifestation of this intended imitation. The carvers and painters of these monuments transform rock formations to project the spatial characteristics of ecclesiastical buildings. Carved architecture rematerializes the church space in an alternative medium, as it was defined in the medieval mind. For example, the three-dimensional quality of the vaulting system of a cross-in-square design, an essential element of this particular church type, is abandoned when carved out from the bedrock.[157] This can be interpreted as an adaptation in response to the natural light laterally entering a space embedded in a rock mass. While the central dome in a masonry church building is a lofty space, well-illuminated from the windows around the dome drum, it generally constitutes the darkest part of an elaborately carved chapel. In order to cope with the problem, the hierarchical order of the vaults is discarded in the rock-cut cross-in-square churches, and in many cases, shallow drum-less domes are applied, if not flat ceilings. The design, therefore, is reconfigured for the present conditions, maintaining, at the same time, the spatial concept, the "image paradigm" of a cross-in-square church.

As I tried to explain in this subsection, the architectural elements and spatial properties of masonry structures were often reinterpreted in carved spaces. By this means, Byzantines established a close affinity between rock-cut and built monuments. This perceived similarity is also manifested in visual representations of architecture. By contrast to the frequent appearance of sacred caves in religious iconography, references to the physical realities of rupestrian architecture are rare in Byzantine images. Even

[156] Lidov, "Hierotopy," 42–43. Also see Simsky, "Image-Paradigms."
[157] Ousterhout, "The Ecumenical Character of Byzantine Architecture," 220–21.

the patrons of carved churches are sometimes depicted holding masonry models in donor portraits (fig. 2.4).[158] The substitution of masonry architecture for carved one can be read as an evenness between—hence the interchangeability of—the two space-making practices in the Byzantine perception. Rock-cut and masonry architecture are two inherently different expressions of the same spatial ideas, symbolically and physically related to one another.

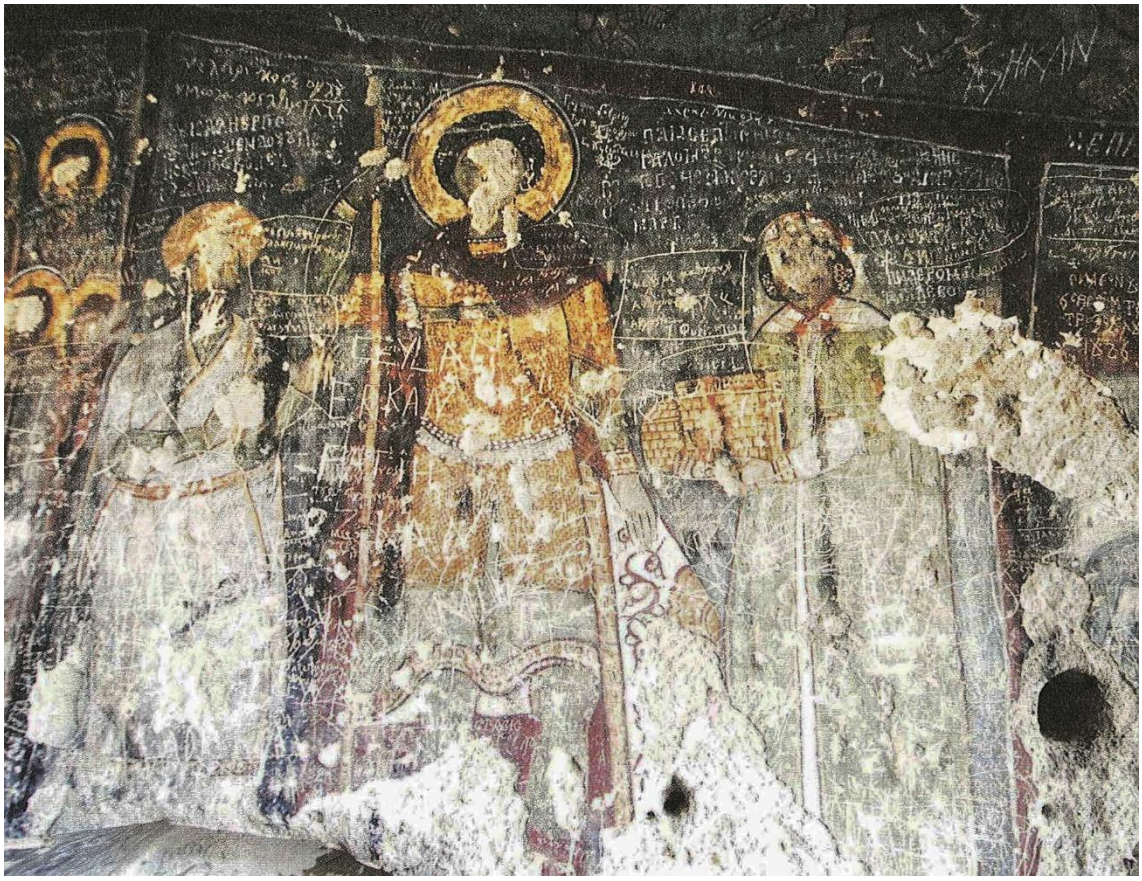

Figure 2.4: Donor portrait in Kırkdamaltı Church in the Peristrema valley. (Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*.)

[158] In the late-13th-century Kırkdamaltı Church at Peristrema, the female donor, Lady Tamar, is portrayed presenting a masonry model to St. George that bears no reference to the amorphous form of the carved space containing the donor portrait. See Kalas, "Rock-Cut Architecture of the Peristrema Valley," 154–55; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 241–42. About the image and female donors in 13th-century Cappadocia, also see Karamaouna, Peker, and Uyar, "Female Donors in Thirteenth-Century Wall Paintings in Cappadocia," 239–42. Two remarkable exceptions exist in the rock-cut churches of Ivanovo in Northern Bulgaria. Here, Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) is depicted in the narthex of Tsurkvata, holding the model of a rock outcrop with some architectural details. Similarly, the female donor in the so-called demolished church carries a rock on which a series of carved spaces are represented. Velmans, "Les fresques d'Ivanovo et la peinture byzantine à la fin du moyen âge," 381–82; Handjiyski, *Rock Monasteries*, 22–23.

2.2.2. Pearls and pitfalls of the study of rock-cut architecture

Regardless of the wide contextual variation of Byzantine rock-cut architecture, certain potentials and challenges remain constant in its study. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect is the fact that carved spaces tend to survive in better condition than their built counterparts. Nevertheless, the traditional methodologies of archaeology often remain inefficient, if not completely ineffective, in deciphering the histories of rupestrian sites. This is mainly because human interventions in carved spaces do not accumulate occupation layers in the same way as in assembled structures. Instead, in rock-cut architecture, more recent activities disturb and even erase underlayers on rock surfaces, presenting, therefore, patchy *strata* that replace their predecessors.

Normally, a small number of religious structures survive as isolated monuments from once predominantly masonry-built Byzantine settlements, including the large urban centers of the Empire. Either continued to be used for the Christian liturgy or converted into new functions, churches are usually the only extant structures of larger architectural complexes once they belonged to. The history of Byzantine architecture, relying on this available material, is heavily concerned with stylistic and typological discussions of ecclesiastical buildings that the discipline traditionally prioritized. Comparatively, rock-cut spaces are more resistant to both nature- and human-induced destructions. Due to their distinct structural system, carved walls and ceilings have a greater chance of survival. Additionally, the stone blocks, bricks, and revetments of most masonry buildings in the former Byzantine lands are almost invariably reused in new constructions when the needs of the society changed. On the contrary, rock-cut monuments, essentially formed through subtraction, do not provide precious construction material to spoliate easily. Consequently, their study complements our fragmented image of Byzantine lived spaces and admits of a more nuanced understanding of daily life, economic activities, liturgy, and beyond.

As they preserve their fundamental integrity over time, many carved spaces are converted to new functions. They are transformed both in reality and perception and used beyond their contexts of creation. In Byzantium, people utilized rock-cut monuments of the past as readily available spaces. The monastic habitation of the *necropoleis* of Pharaonic Thebes provides an excellent example, as Late Antique monastic communities repurposed centuries-old rock-cut tombs as their living

spaces.[159] Change of function does not necessarily require such a long time after the establishment of a rupestrian site. An illustrative example of the medieval reuse of a carved interior for whatever function the community deemed necessary at the time comes from the rock-cut monastery near the village of Krepcha in Bulgaria. A 10th-century inscription at the entrance of the funerary church, where the "blessed father Anthony" was buried, ends with a curse addressed to whoever attempts to use the church space as a granary.[160] The text is so specific about the conversion, suggesting that the practice is not without precedent, even at the expense of the desecration of a religious space. It also demonstrates conflicting claims over and reuses of human-altered rocky landscapes.

In many regions of the former Byzantine Empire, people living in rupestrian landscapes and their needs have gradually changed, yet centuries-old rock-cut monuments still stand. As a result, regardless of their original context, several carved monuments in Cappadocia are later repurposed to function as wine production areas, storages, stables, dovecotes, etc. Likewise, most of the hewn-out spaces in the Strandzha region eventually ended up being sheepfolds and used as such before their registration as heritage sites under the protection of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (fig. 2.5). Sadly, adaptations to new functions usually cause a loss of evidence. Moreover, later interventions on the rock surfaces are sometimes hard to distinguish unless they create a recognizable irregularity.

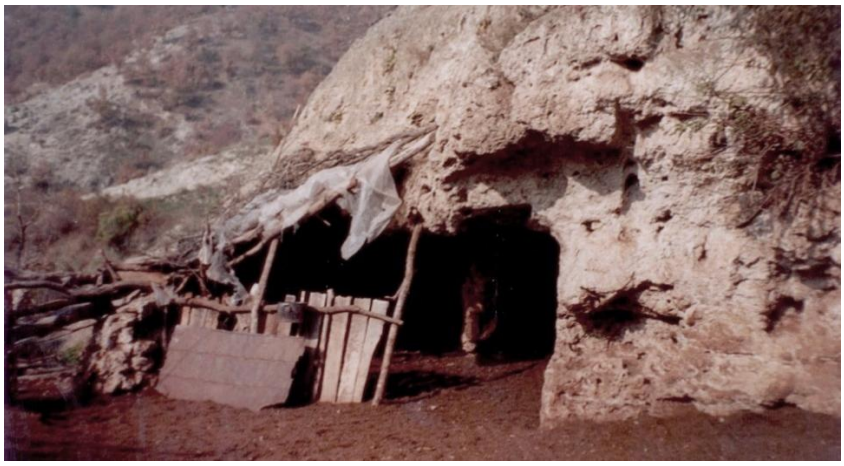

Figure 2.5: Rock-cut hermitage in Kuzulu used as a sheepfold. (Archive of the Edirne Regional Board for Conservation of Cultural Assets)

[159] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt*, esp. 237–45.
[160] Handjiyski, *Rock Monasteries*, 14–15; Kostova, "Скалният манастир при с. Крепча."

The state of preservation at rupestrian sites may shed light on rather less-explored phenomena in Byzantine archaeology. For instance, rooms specifically designed for cooking are easily recognizable in rock-cut form thanks to their distinctive elevation, which can hardly be preserved otherwise. Many examples are identified as such in the courtyard complexes of Byzantine Cappadocia.[161] Curiously enough, these aristocratic residences have no dining halls with carved furniture as opposed to the rock-cut tables and benches in the monastic refectories. It is suggested that these kitchens may have been used to cook not only for the household but also for larger communities, perhaps occasionally for the military camps, as the unexpectedly large scale of some implies.[162]

Other utilitarian spaces preserved in the rock reveal the economic activities that people occupied themselves with and, at times, contribute to our reconstruction of how they organized their society and living environments. In medieval rock-cut stables, for example, the height and articulation of mangers indicate which type of livestock was kept inside.[163] Furthermore, their size and design inform us about the number of animals, the owners' wealth, and pastoral activities at large. Along these lines, the concentration of stables with high mangers attached to aristocratic courtyard houses in Açıksaray points to a group of wealthy landowners whose primary occupation was horse breeding, possibly to supply the military cavalry.[164]

A series of other agrarian facilities, exceptionally well-preserved in rock-cut form, allows further contextualization of economic activities and everyday life. Among them, rock-cut winemaking installations are characterized by two interconnected basins in the most basic layout: a treading floor that can also be used as a press bed and a smaller collecting vat at a lower level to drain the grape must. During the survey at Erdemli in Kayseri, forty-four winemaking installations are documented around the so-called Saray Monastery. This three-leveled rock-cut complex, presumably the residence of a large landowning family, seems to have controlled the agricultural production of the

[161] Veronica Kalas lists twenty-three rock-cut kitchens in Cappadocia. These are separate rectangular rooms equipped with shelves, mushroom-shaped ovens, and *tandır* ovens (circular cooking pits on the ground), typically roofed by conical or pyramidal vaults that terminate with a smoke hole. "The Byzantine Kitchen in the Domestic Complexes of Cappadocia."

[162] Öztürk, "The Unusual Separation of Cappadocian Refectories and Kitchens."

[163] Tütüncü, "The Land of Beautiful Horses"; Tütüncü-Çağlar, "Tracing the Hoof-Prints of Byzantine History."

[164] Öztürk, "A Comparative Architectural Investigation"; "Açıksaray 'Open Palace.'" For a recent analysis of Açıksaray and the living spaces of different interdependent social groups in the settlement, see Öztürk Büke, "Byzantine Settlements in Cappadocia."

nearby village, the primary economic activity of which was viniculture.[165] Another illustrative case is the medieval agrarian settlement in the Mavrucan valley, Southern Cappadocia, where thirty-five winemaking facilities are clustered mainly in two large production areas in Ağaçlık and Çörtarım on the southeastern bank.[166] An earlier estimation, considering a smaller number of then-known winepresses, calculates the annual production roughly as 17000 liters of wine if each collecting vat was filled only once a year.[167] The large-scale production indicates an economy based on viniculture, possibly related to the wine trade in the region and the provisioning of the army.

Likewise, the study of religious place-making can benefit from the material preserved in the rock-cut form. The furniture in built churches, made of either perishable or precious materials, is simply removed from its original context, leaving almost no trace behind, whereas those in the carved churches are often hewn out from the bedrock. Even after destruction, they leave traces on the rock walls, indicating former arrangements. Therefore, rock-cut benches, water basins, altars, *ambones*, and many others are instrumental in reconstructing Byzantine church interiors and understanding the regional variations in the liturgy.[168] Similarly, rock-cut *templa* in Cappadocia and Southern Italy provide plenty of evidence for the discussions of the form and evolution of Byzantine sanctuary barriers.[169]

Such potentials and similar directions in the study of rock-cut architecture continue decentralizing the field of Byzantine archaeology and art history at a steady pace. However, this particular assemblage of archaeological material also presents inherent problems that complicate a historical interpretation, above all complex chronologies. Most of the rupestrian sites are in rural areas, and except for a few fortunate cases, directly related written evidence is absent. For example, the textual sources about Cappadocia almost fully fade out for the period after the Late Antiquity, to which most

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[165] Çorağan Karakaya, "Erdemli Vadisi'ndeki Bizans Dönemine Ait Sosyal İçerikli Yapılar," 151–52; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 313–17.
[166] Peker and Uyar, "The Mavrucan Valley."
[167] Peker, "Agricultural Production and Installations in Byzantine Cappadocia," esp. 56, 60–61.
[168] Wallace, "Liturgical Planning in Some Cappadocian Churches"; "Byzantine Cappadocia"; Teteriatnikov, *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia*; Lemaigre Demesnil, *Architecture rupestre et décor sculpté*, 151–56; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 169–75.
[169] Epstein, "The Middle Byzantine Sanctuary Barrier." For a comprehensive study of the sanctuary barriers in Cappadocian churches, see Asutay-Effenberger, *Templonanlagen in den Höhlenkirchen Kappadokiens*. For the *templa* in the rupestrian churches of Southern Italy, see Dell'Aquila and Messina, "Il Templon nelle chiese rupestri dell'Italia Meridionale."

of the extant carved monuments are dated. In the absence of datable inscriptions, the chronology largely relies on stylistic comparisons of wall paintings, carved decoration, and architecture, none of which can provide firm results.[170] Even though a relative chronology can be suggested in some cases, it is often difficult to estimate the time intervals between different layers and even more complicated to date the initial project. Monastic literature may afford historical information to understand how some rock monasteries and hermitages were established and functioned, yet the sources of Byzantine history are completely silent regarding rock-cut architecture in lay settlements, for which archaeological evidence is plentiful.

The traditional methods of archaeology do not reveal much when it comes to Byzantine rock-cut architecture. Along with artifact analysis, micromorphological studies (microscopic examination of thin sections prepared from undisturbed blocks of sediments) are applied in prehistoric caves to detect occupation layers and understand the paleoenvironment and post-depositional history of a site.[171] By contrast, undisturbed archaeological stratigraphy is rare in Byzantine carved spaces where the methodology has never been applied. It has been previously remarked that rock-cut architecture does not provide actual stratigraphy but merely post-occupation accumulations.[172] Although cave archaeology is a well-established field, only a few among the Byzantine rupestrian sites became the subject of archaeological excavations and systematical documentation of stratigraphy.[173]

A comparative analysis of carving techniques is considered helpful in determining subsequent layers on rock surfaces. Certain surface treatments may also indicate a rough chronology, albeit far from being definite.[174] François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and colleagues argue that the stratigraphy of rock-cut monuments can be analyzed through the carving phases, the presence or absence of the sedimentation layers, and deposits of the removed rock.[175] They establish a relative chronology for the rock-cut

[170] Öztürk, "Rock-Cut Architecture," 151.
[171] Karkanas, "Cave Sediment Studies in Greece."
[172] Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 271.
[173] For example, the following edited volume on the methodological advancements in the archaeological research of cave spaces in Modern Greece mentions Byzantine use of caves only in passing. See Mavridis and Jensen, *Stable Places and Changing Perceptions*.
[174] For example, marks of tooth hammer (*bretture* in French), frequently used in Cappadocia in the Hellenistic and Roman monuments, completely disappear in the Byzantine period. Lamesa, "Rock-Cut Tombs and Churches in Cappadocia," 81.
[175] Fauvelle-Aymar et al., "Rock-Cut Stratigraphy."

churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia, although it is not possible to give precise dates for any of the phases with the material at hand. To a similar aim, Anaïs Lamesa adopts a "traceology" approach complemented by ethnoarchaeological studies. With a closer examination of the superimposed layers of tool marks on the rock surfaces, she defines negative stratigraphic units and constructs a Harris matrix for the carving phases of Göreme church 4b.[176] Since overlying layers often erase the earlier tool marks, the method is not equally effective at every rupestrian site, and it is even less so in finely finished examples.

To be sure, the interpretation of layers of past human activity on carved walls requires a methodology different than the one employed for built architecture. The imprints on a rock surface, resulting from the removal of rocky material, offer keys to identifying a relative chronology and analyzing the life at a rupestrian site. "An autoptic reading" is, therefore, essential to observe the uniformities and detect particular irregularities on the rock, distinguishing, at the same time, the marks of natural and anthropogenic origin.[177] According to Nicola Masini, the interruptions and disturbances on carved elements indicate interfaces between carving phases. Seen in this way, the analysis of successive layers on a rock-cut wall is similar to the archaeological interpretation of aerial imagery, for it, too, identifies ruptures, anomalies, and continuities in certain patterns to reconstruct the interwoven layers of activity.[178]

An archaeology-oriented approach is responsible for a change in the interpretation of several rupestrian landscapes in Byzantium, in which rock-cut spaces served both the religious and secular needs of past societies. Gradually growing corpus of systematically documented rupestrian sites and the prominence given to the contextual data and topographical settings of rock-cut monuments, previously by and large studied in isolation, result in a paradigm shift in the scholarship on Byzantine Cappadocia and Southern Italy, two regions that were traditionally assumed to be almost exclusively occupied by monastic communities.[179] Accordingly, many rupestrian sites, formerly

[176] The design of the church has been changed during the carving process due to an unforeseen harder inclusion in the rock and left partly unfinished, resulting in an illustrative case to apply the methodology. Lamesa, "Methods for Rock-Hewn Worksite Analysis."
[177] Tedeschi, "Analisi Tecnica del Monumento," 261.
[178] Masini, "Metodologie di Rilievo e di Analisi della Cultura Costruttiva dell'Architettura Ipogea," 99, 106.
[179] For Byzantine Cappadocia, see, for example, Ousterhout, "Questioning the Archaeological Evidence"; *Visualizing Community*; Kalas, "Challenging the Sacred Landscape"; Öztürk, "Transformation of the

considered to be unquestionably monastic, are better interpreted as lay settlements inhabited by the military aristocracy, landlords, farmers, shepherds, artisans, and beyond. The related research trajectory culminates in a more nuanced picture of everyday life and demonstrates that the concentration of monasteries in these regions was not notably denser than elsewhere.

In conclusion, relatively less exposed to the natural elements, rock-cut interiors need to be considered as complex stratigraphic accumulations. The careful reconstruction of each natural and anthropogenic layer—whether sedimentation, rockfall, erosion, carving, plastering, painting, repainting, maintenance, or any other residues of past use—contributes to our understanding of the former lives of a rupestrian site. Thus far, I have traced the reception of natural and human-altered caves in Byzantine thinking and the centrality of rock-cut architecture to Byzantine place-making. I have also discussed what carved spaces have to offer archaeologically and how we can make sense of this material. I now turn my attention to spatial realities and examine the ways in which Byzantines actually engaged with the rocks. Adopting a new materialist approach to Byzantine rock-cut architecture, I propose a trifold model to explain the different space-making strategies in rupestrian landscapes in collaboration with other-than-human agents.

2.3. Rock to be Carved

Rock-cut spaces embody complex interplays with nonhuman entities. Human interventions on rocky material are highly dependent on and adaptive to the inherent but by no means static characteristics of landscapes that do not necessarily result from human engagement. Rock-cut architecture involves human-nonhuman collaborations, and therefore, its study requires an acknowledgment of multiple agents involved in the formation of such spaces. In the following pages, having briefly introduced some recent object-oriented approaches in archaeological theory, I discuss how rupestrian landscapes are shaped beyond human intentionality. In my interpretations, I distance myself from the exclusively anthropocentric view of the past yet never neglect nor

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'Sacred' Image of a Byzantine Cappadocian Settlement." For a critical historiographic review, see Jolivet-Lévy, "Byzantine Settlements and Monuments of Cappadocia." For a succinct overview of the scholarship on rupestrian settlements in Southern Italy, Fonseca, "Non Solo Chiese, Non Solo Grotte"; Martin, "Un problema storiografico e storico"; Dalena, "Dalla Civiltà in Grotta alla Civiltà del Vivere in Grotte."

reduce the role of humans. I examine Byzantine-specific responses to rocky environments and how people, rocks, and water are entangled in Byzantium. As discussed below, this is not a new approach in anthropology but is still in its infancy in Byzantine archaeology and art history. The threefold theoretical model promoted here provides a framework for rupestrian space-making strategies and a broader definition of what Byzantine rock-cut architecture encompasses.

2.3.1. Material agency in rupestrian space-making practices

The complete detachment of humans from present landscapes and exclusion of all anthropogenic traces, if such a thing is even possible, would leave little to discuss archaeologically. The opposite is equally dismissive: We cannot simply reduce landscapes to something exclusively man-made and label them as human products.[180] Throughout this dissertation, I focus on the specific ways in which medieval inhabitants of the Strandzha Mountains redefined their living environments through rock carving, constructing on the rocks, and beyond. This does not mean carved spaces came into being solely by human hands, nor is it to say that rock-cut architecture is detached from the material world and entirely results from human imagination and ability.

Rocky landscapes in the Strandzha region or elsewhere were already in becoming before human interventions, and they are still so long after the abandonment or conversion of carved spaces into new functions that are way beyond their intended use.[181] Rather than being culturally emerged, landscapes are co-fabrications of multiple actors, human and otherwise. The presence of humans is not even a prerequisite in certain processes involved in the formation of rupestrian landscapes. In this context, two nonhuman entities stand out: the rock itself through which rock-cut architecture is materialized and the water, especially the bodies of flowing water, carving through the rocky *strata* and actively transforming the land.

The new materialist approaches focusing on interactions between and entanglements

[180] Plumwood, "The Concept of a Cultural Landscape," 125–26; Whatmore and Hinchliffe, "Ecological Landscapes"; Given, "Commotion, Collaboration, Conviviality," 5–6.

[181] The choice of wording as "human-altered" rather than "humanized," "human-made," or "human-created" is intentional to acknowledge the material existence of landscapes independent from people and recognize nonhuman agencies.

among humans and beings of other kinds urge us to change how archaeological data is interpreted and how the past is understood and narrated.[182] Nonhuman agency and its application in archaeological interpretations have been extensively treated in the literature on archaeological theory.[183] The discussions of material agency and whether we can conceive agency beyond human intentionality attributable to other living beings and inanimate matter fundamentally change how we define archaeology. Is it truly a discipline of things, or is it more concerned with the study of the human past and historical forms of humanness through material culture, however defined?[184] The recent object-oriented approaches, despite harsh and sometimes oversimplifying criticisms that they receive, broaden the subject of study and acknowledge people as one of many actants in the complex accumulations of the past, even though a privileged one in archaeological interpretation.[185]

Here, the definition of material agency is critical. Alfred Gell, one of the first scholars who brought object agency into anthropological discussions, places particular emphasis on intentionality and attributes only secondary agency to things by their association with people.[186] Nevertheless, recognizing agency of other-than-human beings as not derivative but primary and, at times, independent from human subjects is commonplace in new materialist approaches.[187] Intentionality is not a *sine qua non* for action. In reality, not all happenings that create disturbances and change the environment are intentional, nor do actual outcomes of intentional actions necessarily follow the desired results. Restriction of agency within the narrow realm of

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[182] For example, Olsen, *In Defense of Things*, esp. 5–6; Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms"; Pétursdóttir, "Climate Change?"; Govier, "Pre-Critical Archaeology."

[183] Among others, Gell, *Art and Agency*; Knappett and Malafouris, *Material Agency*; Jones and Boivin, "The Malice of Inanimate Objects."

[184] Olsen et al., *Archaeology: The Discipline of Things*; Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms," esp. 223; Olsen and Witmore, "When Defense Is Not Enough," 69–70; Barrett, "Humanness as Performance."

[185] They are often criticized for claiming a flat ontology and symmetry between humans and other beings, which may, accordingly, lead to the disempowerment of people as political agents. The proponents of symmetrical archaeology and entanglement theory consider such criticism a common misconception. Olsen, *In Defense of Things*; "Symmetrical Archaeology"; Witmore, "Symmetrical Archaeology: Excerpts of a Manifesto"; "Archaeology and the New Materialisms"; "Symmetrical Archaeology"; Hodder, *Entangled*; "The Asymmetries of Symmetrical Archaeology"; Hodder and Lucas, "The Symmetries and Asymmetries of Human–Thing Relations"; Olsen and Witmore, "When Defense Is Not Enough." For a recent opposition to object-oriented ontologies in archaeology, also see Çilingiroğlu and Albayrak, "To Burn the Blanket for a Flea."

[186] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 16–17.

[187] Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms," 203–4; Hodder, *Entangled*, 215–16; "The Asymmetries of Symmetrical Archaeology," 228.

intentionality omits many ways, often unpredictable, in which people, other living beings, and materials make an impact on each other.[188] Taking intentionality out of the equation allows us to see past the prevalent anthropocentric approach in archaeology.[189] Along these lines, I adopt the relational definition of agency. Accordingly, any entity capable of a perceptible difference within the system of relations in which it is enmeshed holds agency.[190] Thus, the agency is not an innate property but emerges from spatiotemporal relations and material engagement: There can be no actors unless there is an action.[191]

Interestingly, human engagement with rocky material is already at the center of discussions of object-oriented archaeological theory. Prehistoric rock art is frequently cited to illustrate material agency and collaboration between people and things. The microtopography of rocks on which the art is applied partakes in the emergence of images. In that way, cracks, fissures, ledges, and outlines of stones are complemented by human-made carvings and added pigments to co-create figures.[192] In many other cases, irregularities on the rock represent landforms and complex landscapes on which humans and animals are depicted.[193] In these examples, the rock surface is never a blank canvas.

Similarly, in rupestrian place-making, the landscape is not a passive background for people to interact with and project their intentional creativity.[194] In this respect, two nonhuman entities exercise their agency more manifestly than others: the rock and the bodies of flowing water. The agency of rock is multifold. Above all, it provides the

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[188] Olsen, "Symmetrical Archaeology," 215; Given, "Commotion, Collaboration, Conviviality," 12–13; Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms," 211; Sørensen, "Hammers and Nails," 116–17; Pétursdóttir, "Climate Change?," 192–95.

[189] New materialist approaches do not necessarily dismiss the central role of humans in archaeological reconstructions of the past. According to the peri-anthropic stance, the things and their assemblages become subjects of archaeology because of their relations to humans. Hodder and Lucas, "The Symmetries and Asymmetries of Human–Thing Relations," 122.

[190] Gell, *Art and Agency*, esp. 16–22; Law and Mol, "The Actor-Enacted," 58; Sørensen, "Hammers and Nails," 118; "Agency (Again)," 96–97.

[191] Lambros Malafouris uses the metaphor of a "dance between equal partners" to explain the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies in a particular action. Who is leading the dance changes in different sequences, but this does not imply that the two partners do not have any differences or that one is enough to carry out the action at any given time. "At the Potter's Wheel," 23–25, 34.

[192] Olsen, *In Defense of Things*, 85–87; "Symmetrical Archaeology," 221–23.

[193] Keyser and Poetschat, "The Canvas as the Art"; Helskog, "Landscapes in Rock-Art"; Gjerde, "'Cracking' Landscapes."

[194] For the inherent problems of defining landscapes as cultural, see Plumwood, "The Concept of a Cultural Landscape," esp. 119–22. Also, see Olsen, *In Defense of Things*, 10; "Symmetrical Archaeology," 208–9.

substance to carve, and its material properties are formative for the space carved within. Mineral structures set parameters for the available outcrop and, hence, for the rock-cut space. The carbonate content of the rock determines whether cavities and caves naturally occur inside. The scale and the level of detailing that can be achieved in a hewn-out space largely depend on the hardness and workability of the material. The stratification of the rock, its form, scale, positioning in the terrain, and relations to other landscape elements do not dictate but encourage certain forms of engagement. The cracks and harder inclusions the rock mass holds affect the spatial outcome, and if unexpected, they may cause a change in design, partial collapse, or complete abandonment of the project.[195]

Similarly, the presence or absence of water alters a landscape fundamentally. In the karst topographies, in particular, water sculpts the carbonate rock formations and forms caves, valleys, and sinkholes, among other landforms. Water not only extracts material but also acts as a builder. The calcareous water deposits calcites on the surfaces it runs over and builds speleothems, such as stalactites, stalagmites, and flowstones.

Nature is more than a provider of material in carved spaces. There is no place for intentionality in the hydrogeological processes resulting in natural caves, which may attract human interventions as readily available landscape elements and receive artificial carvings and constructions. The work of carvers who shape elaborate spaces from the living rock and that of underground water that carves caves out of carbonate rock formations are more similar than they are different. In the first case, people act on the rock as water does in the latter, while the shape and characteristics of the rock delimit both actions and afford only certain changes. This reveals an example of entanglements between people acting on things and things acting on people and other things.[196]

No matter what, human interventions in rupestrian landscapes remain embedded in otherwise solid rock masses or cave spaces formed by nonhuman agents. When considered as a whole, a rock-cut structure always retains something untouched by human hands, visible at a corner of a carefully shaped interior, on the outer edges of

[195] Lamesa, "Methods for Rock-Hewn Worksite Analysis," 41–43; Bessac, Lamesa, and Sciuto, "The Archaeology of Quarries and Rock-Cut Sites," 4.
[196] Entanglement can be simply defined as the complex codependences of people and things and the combination of affordances and limitations they allow for or impose on each other. Hodder, *Entangled*.

an elaborately carved façade, or the irregular outlines of a rock outcrop containing a hewn-out space. In the long afterlives of things, the same beings that attracted human activities in the first place may take over once again. By its nature, the rock surrounding the "human creation" cannot be fully tamed. It cracks and sometimes falls, in some cases even causing damage beyond repair or making maintenance completely unfeasible.

The water that initially formed caves in the carbonate rocks may fill the human-altered spaces and flow over and wear out the regularized rock surfaces. Moreover, calcite-rich waters may build cave depositions on the rock walls shaped by people. The rupestrian hermitage near the village of Kuzulu in the Strandzha region is an excellent example of such multi-layered, complex entanglements, particularly well-represented on the eastern wall of the burial chamber (fig. 2.6).[197] This rock-cut funerary room was once a small cavity formed by the flowing water within the carbonate rock. It was then transformed into a commemorative space by human hands, partly retaining the amorphous, cave-like interior. When the site was abandoned and no longer maintained as before, the water flowing through the space and dripping from the rock walls began to carve away the neatly cut edges and create speleothems covering human-altered elements.

Figure 2.6: Three-niched wall in the burial chamber at the hermitage in Kuzulu, later covered by calcite cave deposits.

[197] For a detailed discussion of the site, see chapter 5.3.

This is all to say that other-than-human beings are ever-present in rupestrian spaces. Acknowledging multiple agents in rock-cut architecture, without losing focus on people, enriches our understanding of place-making processes and landscape formation in Byzantium, among other things. The conscious efforts of people to transform and adapt rocky landscapes to whatever use they see fit operate together with nonhuman entities. Therefore, rock-cut architecture is not exclusively human-centric but a clear manifestation of human intervention in nature and collaboration among people and things.

2.3.2. Rock-cut space-making strategies in Byzantium

The above observations and arguments hold true for rupestrian landscapes, past and present. In this final subsection, I return to Byzantine rock-cut architecture and examine how medieval inhabitants of the Eastern Mediterranean approached the rocky material to define their particular spaces. The agency of other-than-human beings in the formation of carved spaces was not irrelevant to Byzantine thinking. For example, natural caves existed in vast karst topographies of the Empire. As noted earlier in this chapter, these readily available landscape elements were commonly described as *Theoktistoi* in monastic literature, meaning God-erected. They were often perceived as made by God for the use of anchorites, who then enhanced them by carving and construction to accommodate a variety of functions. The notion of caves already in a suitable condition to dwell in or be used as church spaces signals the Byzantine appreciation of more-than-human involvement in rock-cut space-making. Such an understanding of the environment also denotes the emergence of architecture without builders and carvers, in a way mirroring the idea of *acheiropoiesis*. The cave churches and cells are, accordingly, artifacts in rupestrian landscapes without human artisans.

How visible are, then, the human-nonhuman collaborations in Byzantine rock-cut architecture? To what degree was material agency meant to be visible, if ever? Surviving Byzantine carved spaces demonstrate a wide variation when it comes to the appreciation of other-than-human beings. The degree of human intervention in rock-cut architecture differs significantly at each site, and so does the type of relationship between human-made and those resulting from nonhuman entanglements. As established earlier, carving is not the only way to transform rocky landscapes. More often than not, masonry and wooden architecture complement rock-cut spaces. Built

structures generally work together with hewn-out spaces or natural caves whose walls and ceilings are not always exhaustively carved.

Without overlooking geographical and functional diversity, I discuss spatial approaches to rocky landscapes in Byzantium under three main categories: *carving spaces out of the rock*, *building spaces on the rock*, and *using spaces in the rock*.[198] In addition to the Strandzha region, examined in detail in the following chapters, I turn to the larger geographical entity of Thrace in order to explain the theoretical model. I choose my examples from Byzantine Thrace, even though this classification can be applied to a wider geography. Rather than making a comprehensive survey of rock-cut architecture in the region, I address a few illustrative cases to elaborate on different Byzantine rock-cut space-making strategies.

Carving spaces out of the rock encompasses what Byzantine rock-cut architecture traditionally brings to mind. The practice underlines human interventions in rupestrian landscapes, as the final spatial outcome looks remarkably human-made. The most illustrative example in Thrace is the pilgrimage site outside Medeia on the Black Sea coast, a skillfully carved three-nave basilica surrounded by an ambulatory corridor with a domed *hagiasma* space, source of holy water (fig. 1.5).[199] The interior presents a composition of familiar masonry forms re-rendered in rock caving, rather freely arranged without structural concerns. The quality of sculptural decoration is unprecedented in rock-cut architecture, especially in the *hagiasma* that appears to be the center of the rupestrian complex and the related pilgrimage activity. Much humbler in decoration and scale is the South Church in Asmakayalar valley near Bizye (fig. 5.5).[200] It displays an unusual combination of two plan types widespread in the masonry form: single-nave and triconch. Covered with semi-domes and barrel vaults, the interior features fourteen decorative carved-out crosses on the ceilings and walls. Adjacent to a larger cave church with amorphous rock walls, the carefully planned and executed South Church is a spectacular manifestation of human agency in the rocky gorge.

As discussed in comparison with built architecture, in such rupestrian interiors, the

[198] The central idea behind this contextualization of rock-cut architecture emerged from the on-site discussions and wrap-up meetings of the BRIA project in the summer of 2023. See https://bria.ku.edu.tr/.
[199] See chapter 3.1.
[200] See chapter 5.1.

elements formally pertaining to masonry and wooden structures are often recreated in the rock-cut medium. The material properties of the rock continue to affect the carving process and its outcome, and the carvers still need to consider and accommodate the cracks, inclusions, and cavities hidden in the rock. However, all the ways in which material agency is exercised stay in the backdrop, whereas the carved interior is intended to appear as a product of human ingenuity. The outer façades from which the elaborately carved interiors are accessed remain usually the only interface between the unworked nature and heavily reshaped rock.

This is also the primary attitude towards the rock in Byzantine Cappadocia, where natural caves are virtually nonexistent and widely available volcanic rock is relatively easy to carve. In the earlier scholarship, surviving Byzantine rock-cut complexes were indifferently identified as monastic. The misconception stemmed from an imagined naturally cavernous landscape that allegedly dictated sacred associations and attracted monks. As explained in the previous section, the recent paradigm shift in Cappadocian studies gave way to a more balanced picture where lay people and monks from different levels of medieval society are equally represented. In order to challenge the earlier misconceptions, the scholarship on Cappadocia maintains its focus almost solely on human-made at the expense of the formative role of beings of other kinds. Nevertheless, this interpretative outlook may easily lead to an overcorrection, where rock-cut spaces are viewed as artificially crafted on an inert landscape entirely devoid of agency.[201] Such a perspective glosses over the agency of other-than-human beings and implies a hierarchy through the nature-culture divide. The overemphasis on the human element affects how Byzantine rock-cut architecture is conceptualized, as effectively captured in Fatma Gül Öztürk's assessment of the achievements of Cappadocian carvers.

> The creativity of the carvers who applied their skills to making the rock-cut architecture appear as "real" as built architecture, and defining a boundary between the "civilized" world of the patrons and the "wilderness," between the "architecture" and the "cave," is remarkable (emphasis in the original).[202]

[201] Veronica Kalas, for example, defines the rock-carved spaces in Cappadocia as "almost entirely man-made… stand as important testimonies to an incredible architectural and engineering accomplishment… almost always misunderstood as caves; that is, naturally formed spaces that can be used for shelter." "Challenging the Sacred Landscape," 153.
[202] Öztürk, "Rock-Cut Architecture," 152.

This view of rock-cut space-making may work, to some extent, for a particular region like Cappadocia. However, it falls flat in explaining various other ways in which Byzantines transformed their rupestrian environments. Rather than seeing a carved interior as a tame piece of nature and a foil of the wilderness of a cave, I suggest looking beyond and next to what appears to be human creation. My aim is not to negate the human capacity to alter landscapes or undermine the creativity of carvers. However, I intend to achieve a broader picture of rock-cut architecture, regarding rupestrian landscapes as co-productions of humans and other-than-human beings.

Figure 2.7: Late Byzantine church dedicated to St. Catherine in the citadel of Didymoteichon. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

Another mode of engaging with rocky landscapes in Byzantium is *building spaces on the rock*. This strategy does not refer to the carved interiors embedded in rock masses but predominantly built architecture standing on rock-cut foundations and walls. It is usually dismissed as a mere practical choice to construct on rocky grounds and not even considered under rock-cut architecture *per se*. In fact, building on rock foundations demonstrates a major way in which Byzantines made use of what was available to them in the landscape and how they integrated the bedrock into their architectural productions. In many cases, it is clear that carving the lower levels of the walls of a building is more than an economical choice. In the fortified town of Didymoteichon in Western Thrace, Greece, the mid-14th-century funerary church, now dedicated to St. Catherine, stands above rock-cut foundations (fig. 2.7).[203] The

[203] Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*, 102–11.

alternating brick and stone exterior of the small church features shallow niches, setbacks, ceramic rosettes, radially laid bricks, and other brickwork patterns. Whereas every corner of its façades is heavily decorated, the bedrock is left exposed on the lower level in the west. Visible from the entrance to the naos, the rock-cut wall partakes in the elaborate ornamentation of the exterior rather than being an unpleasant result of a practical decision.

On the other side of the Evros/Meriç/Maritza River, the rocky promontory southeast of Enez has been identified as Skaloti Monastery. The sherds of Mikro Pisto ware found at the site indicate a Late Byzantine phase for the monastic settlement that remained functioning until the early 20th century.[204] The rock mass is arranged in two terraces and carved to constitute foundations and lower levels of the rooms, originally complemented by masonry walls and wooden superstructures. In that way, the rock formation was incorporated into monastic spaces that were partly hewn-out and partly stone-built and timber-roofed.

Figure 2.8: Combination of rock-cut and masonry-built elements in the atrium of Church no. 4 in Peperikon. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

An even more illustrative example is preserved in the mountainous region of Eastern Rhodopes in Bulgaria, where an entire city was founded on the carved rocky ground. The ancient and medieval city of Perperikon, which demonstrates multiple settlement

[204] Contrary to my observations at the site, earlier scholarship argues that the monastery is, in fact, a 17th-century establishment devoid of a medieval settlement layer. Ötüken and Ousterhout, "Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace," 132–35; Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*, 44–46. For a detailed discussion and other comparable monastic sites from Thrace, see chapter 5.2.

layers almost uninterruptedly until the 15th-century abandonment, sits on a dominating hill west of the Perperek River.[205] Numerous residential and public buildings with overlapping layers of history rise on the bedrock, connected by a network of rock-cut streets and external staircases, including several Late Antique and medieval churches in and around the fortified acropolis (fig. 2.8). As a rule, these churches are engraved on the rocky ground, and the masonry walls stand on the carved foundations. The rock is carefully shaped following the building layouts. It is often exposed on the walls and *atria* floors or used to form liturgical furniture, such as *synthrona*.

Figure 2.9: Detail from the ceiling of Vehtata Tsarkva near the village of Ustrem—The central depiction of the Virgin in orans is on the left. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

The third and last strategy corresponds to human interventions in natural cave spaces, whether carving, flattening, plastering, painting, or construction. In this case, the collaboration of people and things are intentionally rendered visible. The human-made elements communicate with and elevate what resides in the rock. Accordingly, *using spaces in the rock* is more representative of multiple agents in action in rupestrian space-making. The final product is a human-altered space partly preserving its overall cave-like appearance. A striking example is Vehtata Tsarkva near the village of Ustrem in the Sakar region, a few km northwest of the present border between Turkey and Bulgaria (fig. 2.9). Its name means old church even though its identification as a functioning church is questionable. Vehtata Tsarkva is a hollow on a rocky slope in the

[205] Ovcharov, *Perperikon*; Ovcharov et al., *Античният и средновековен град Перперикон*.

vicinity of the Holy Trinity Monastery, with no visible artificial carvings or building remains. The wall paintings directly applied on the rock surfaces are sufficient to transform the small interior of the overhanging cave into a place of significance for visitors.[206] The figures are rendered with shadings of a single ochre color and are organized according to the relief of the rock. The image of the Christ Pantokrator is depicted on a higher depression on the cave ceiling in the east, and the Virgin in *orans* is under the central cave dome. The lower levels are reserved for the representations of archangels, saints, and church fathers. Just like that, the natural depressions on the cave ceiling are decorated and treated like the complex vaulting system of a church interior. The skillful brushstrokes of the artist appreciate the physical properties—one may call God-made features—of the cave and reveal the imagined "church" space hidden in the rock.

Figure 2.10: Cave church of Hagioi Theodoroi near Avantas.

[206] The painted decoration is argued to have been applied by a *hesycast* monk in seclusion in the Sakar region who knew how to paint. A date in the Middle Byzantine period, specifically in the 11th and 12th centuries, has been suggested on stylistic grounds. Ovcharov and Toteva, "Към въпроса за скалната средновизантийска живопис (XI-XII в.)"; Ovcharov, "Peintures murales moyen-byzantines inconnues de la région de la montagne Sakar."

The interventions in Vehtata Tsarkva are minimal yet enough to redefine the cave interior. In many cases, *using spaces in the rock* entails more concrete changes in the fabric of the caves through carving and construction. The Cave of Hagioi Theodoroi near Avantas in Western Thrace is a small church located high on a rocky cliff on the southeastern foothills of the Rhodope Mountains (fig. 2.10). Inside, a built chancel screen defines the sanctuary area at the eastern end of the cave. The masonry constructions attached to the uneven cave walls provide flat surfaces in the naos to receive at least two layers of wall paintings, the earlier one dating to the end of the 11th century and the later to the late 12th or early 13th century.[207] The efforts to regularize rock surfaces and paint and repaint the interior are what made the hardly-accessible cave a church space. However, the ceiling covering the human-altered interior and the entrance corridor to the naos seem to have retained their cave-like appearance at all times. In this way, construction and painting complement a preexisting space nested in the rock without exhausting or fully concealing its physical properties. Visitors to the Cave of Hagioi Theodoroi are constantly reminded of being immersed in a space predating human intervention where the final form is essentially the result of a collaboration with nature.

Whereas human agency is expressed through construction and painting in the Cave of Hagioi Theodoroi, carving is the primary way to work with rocky material and rearrange cave spaces for specific purposes. The practice does not exclude the adaptation of natural caves, nor does it imply a complete erasure of what existed in the landscape in favor of carved surfaces. Yarımburgaz Cave stands as a witness to a distant geological past in the Thracian suburbs of Constantinople. Even though it sheltered different human activities since the Lower Paleolithic, the most visible occupation layer is from the Byzantine period when a church was hewn out close to the mouth of the upper gallery, and an extensive religious complex was established with now-lost constructions outside the cave system (fig. 3.3).[208] The eastern cave wall is crisply carved, displaying a high level of craftsmanship. The scale of the rock-cut apses, arranged side by side, is impressive. Despite the attention given to the sanctuary area, human intervention neither extends to the opposite rock wall nor the depths of

[207] Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, "Το σπήλαιο των Αγίων Θεοδώρων."
[208] See chapter 3.

the cave. Therefore, the human-altered space is attached to the immersive and captivating cave interior intentionally retained, to a large degree, as it was.

The theoretical model presented here offers a necessary tool for appreciating how human interventions are interwoven with non-human entities in rocky environments. The three strategies do not exclude one another. On the contrary, they can be employed in adjacent spaces in response to site-specific problems, availability of natural caves, properties of the rock, and preferences of communities and patrons. The same landscape may contain rupestrian spaces whose every little corner is minutely worked, masonry constructions standing on rock-cut foundations, and natural caves adjusted for human activities. Considered together, these three approaches to rocky material lead us to a more comprehensive understanding of Byzantine rock-cut architecture and a more elaborate and nuanced definition of what it refers to.

2.4. Conclusion

The theoretical framework provided here will assist the reader to engage with the later discussions in the dissertation. In this chapter, I reconstructed the Byzantine perceptions of carved spaces and the motivations behind their creation, use, and reuse, as much as the available historical and archaeological material permitted. I argued that the "emptied" rupestrian architecture created through a process of material removal is, in fact, replete with meanings and associations. Despite the large geographical and temporal distribution, I presented the advantages and possible shortcomings prevalent in the study of rock-cut sites as a particular assemblage of archaeological material. I maintained that carved spaces, without which our understanding of Byzantium is destined to be incomplete, have much to contribute to the discussions of daily life, settlement organizations, landscape-making practices, ecclesiastical and secular architecture, monastic space, liturgical and mortuary practices, artistic and architectural production, and entanglements among humans and other beings. Finally, having reviewed the object-oriented approaches in archaeological theory and their relevancy for rock-cut place-making, I introduced a threefold model to explain different approaches to the rocky material in Byzantium.

Rock-cut architecture faces total neglect in many regions of Byzantium, remaining undocumented, unstudied, and overlooked despite the richness of surviving archaeological data these spaces shelter. The rupestrian sites in densely wooded

landscapes of the Strandzha region, which this dissertation focuses on, have been thus far treated similarly. Contrary to the flat representation of a small number of published rock monuments in Thrace, my research reveals diverse functions within complex living landscapes and examines how people interacted with and inhabited the land. Along these lines, the following chapters deal with several examples of rock-cut space-making in pilgrimage sites, lay settlements, and monastic landscapes in the Strandzha region.

Chapter 3

PILGRIMAGE TO THE ROCK

Pilgrimage sites are places with sacred associations and religious significance where people come together and build a shared sense of belonging. These places respond to basic psychological needs and nurture hopes for salvation, purification, recovery, and redemption. In spatial terms, pilgrimage sites may vary from a naturally formed phenomenon to an artfully constructed sanctuary housing objects of veneration or enclosing a *locus sanctus*. What makes a site attractive to pilgrims, regardless of the distances they need to cover for the visit, is the culture-specific stories and rituals. In other words, what defines a pilgrimage site is not the place itself but the particular beliefs and actions differentiating it from the surrounding environment.[209] These do not necessarily leave archaeologically detectable traces, and once they are lost, the site of a past pilgrimage activity may become almost unidentifiable.

In its complexity, past pilgrimage activities are not always easy to spot and almost impossible to reconstruct fully in the absence of written evidence, which is often the case for Byzantine Thrace. In this chapter, I examine pilgrimage activities in the Strandzha region and how they have resulted in the formation of particular places of significance in the rocky landscapes. Following a value assessment of the available archaeological material and acknowledgment of the ephemeral character of past pilgrimage activities, I present and briefly comment on the Byzantine use of Yarımburgaz Cave outside Constantinople. Then, I introduce and discuss in detail the rupestrian complex at Medeia, where pilgrimage transformed the living rock through architecture, sculpture, and painted decoration.

I would like to open the discussion with an archaeological predicament that invites the reader to question the limits of our knowledge of past pilgrimage activities. To be sure, the sacred association of caves and peoples' desire to attach meanings to them are beyond geographical and temporal limits. Similarly, the natural caves in the Strandzha Mountains appealed to the believers and received prayers for centuries. Some still do

[209] The space becomes non-homogeneous for a religious person who differentiates the sacred from the profane. See Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, esp. 20–21. Alexei Lidov uses the biblical story of Jacob to explain the process of creating a sacred space, in which setting and anointing a stone, renaming the site, and taking special vows sufficed for the *hierotopical* project. "Hierotopy."

so. At an early stage of my fieldwork in the Strandzha region, I visited Şükrüpaşa village in the forestland on the national border between Turkey and Bulgaria. Hoping to find a cave monastery in the vicinity, preferably a Byzantine one, I talked to a group of village women who then instructed me to follow an earth path along the valley of a tributary of Rezovska Reka/ Rezve Deresi (Mutludere), which is in part constitutes the frontier.[210] It was promising for me to hear them referring to the locality as "kilise," meaning the church. As I arrived at the "kilise," I sadly found nothing but an open area in the forest, roughly defined by wall-like rock formations with small overhanging cave spaces, some partly filled with water (fig. 3.1). The ground was fully covered with a thick layer of decaying forest material. There was neither a clear human intervention on the rocks nor any *in-situ* remains of a construction. The only evidence of human activity was a couple of glazed Ottoman pottery sherds and some coarse roof tiles. Leaving the site empty-handed, I had difficulty understanding what might have made this place a "kilise" in the local tradition.

Figure 3.1: So-called cave monastery outside Şükrüpaşa village.

[210] The site is registered in the Kırklareli Cultural Assets Inventory (Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri) as Şükrüpaşa Mağara Manastırı (Şükrüpaşa Cave Monastery). For the online database of the inventory project: https://kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr/

Three years later, the research visit to the Cave of Sveta Marina near Slivarovo on the northern side of Rezovska Reka/ Rezve Deresi reminded me of the time I was in Şükrüpaşa.[211] It is a natural cave on a valley bottom where a water stream emerges. The site is reached by going down to the riverbed and climbing up again to enter the cave. The calcite-heavy water dripping from the cave ceiling continuously alters the interior with depositions on the rock surfaces, creating, at the same time, a repetitive sound that captivates the visitor. Today, a large wooden cross and a round sandbox for candles stand at the center of the cave. Many icons and small votive offerings are placed in the cavities on the walls, and cups are left on the ground to collect the water (fig. 3.2). All these elements gradually become one with the cave, immersed in the calcite deposits. Some pieces of old clothes are hung on the walls or carelessly left on the ground next to an opening inside the cave, hardly large enough for one person to fit in.

Figure 3.2: Votive offerings, icons, water containers, and clothes that pilgrims left behind in the Cave of Sveta Marina near Slivarovo. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

[211] I visited the site in the second excursion of the BRIA Project in 2023. The journey to the cave requires a long drive from Malko Tarnovo in the Strandzha forest with off-road vehicles.

The site plays a central role in the local cult of Sveta Marina, much revered in the Strandzha region, especially by the Nestinari, performers of Nestinarstvo—a fire-dancing ritual as a form of veneration to the saints.[212] The cave becomes a meeting point for people living in nearby villages one day before the saint's feast on the 17th of July.[213] On that day, women place containers on the cave floor to be filled with the water dripping from the ceiling, which is believed to have curative properties. The pilgrims spend the night at the site for purification and healing. On the feast day of the saint, they wash themselves with the water collected in the containers placed inside the cave the day before. Those seeking recovery from a sickness enter from the mouth of the cave, leave their old clothes, and come out through the small hole at the corner. After the rituals are over, the faithful feast together, eating the sacrificial meat and loaves of bread and cheese.

Neither of the two briefly-introduced caves presents any evidence of activities in the Middle Ages. These natural formations, albeit in a ceaseless process of transformation through hydrogeological processes, do not seem to have been radically altered by people by means of carving or construction. Still, they have acquired sacred associations and attracted communities from the nearby settlements on account of their spatial properties, connection to the water sources, and relation to their respective landscapes. In the north of the modern national border, the Cave of Sveta Marina is part of a living culture, still functioning as a pilgrimage site for the local population. The knowledge of site-specific religious practices is key to deciphering and reading the story archived in this cave. Only then do the water dripping from the ceiling, the cups laid on the ground, the clothes thrown around, and the hole that opens to the outside find a voice and start telling the fragmentary story of those who came for benedictions and healing without them being present. Once the people are gone, it will not take long for the human traces indicating a different activity at each corner of the

[212] Nestinarstvo marks the culmination of celebrations on the 3rd of June, the feast day of Sts. Constantine and Helena. Nestinari, the spiritual leaders of village communities, hold icons and walk on burning embers in a trance to get into contact with the saints and express their will. The ritual was formerly performed around thirty Bulgarian and Greek villages in the Strandzha region, although the tradition is now mainly kept alive in the village of Bulgari. It was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. See "Nestinarstvo, Messages from the Past," UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage: https://ich.unesco.org/.

[213] My knowledge about the ritual practices in the Cave of Sveta Marina derives from a guided tour to the site on the 6th of June, 2023, as a part of the research trip of the BRIA Project and the display in the Historical Museum in Malko Tarnovo.

cave to disappear completely.

If the pilgrimage activity to the Cave of Sveta Marina dies out now, within the next hundred years, the wooden cross and sandbox will be dragged out by the water; the cloths will decompose; the icons and votive offerings will be covered entirely by the calcite cave deposits and eventually swallowed by the rock. Located in the larger valley system of the same river, can it be what happened in Şükrüpaşa, which may have well housed similar practices once that are now impossible to reconstruct, at least with the surface material? For people inhabiting a land, all landscape elements in their surroundings carry meanings specific to the ways in which they choose to engage with a certain place in a certain period of time.[214] Nevertheless, most past human interactions with landscapes leave little or no visible traces to identify the type of activity or what it meant to them to use a particular piece of land in a particular way. This especially holds true for the pilgrimage. In ways fitting to their significance, many places visited by pilgrims are marked with architecture, carved or built, and periodically hosted rituals to be activated. However, as the above examples reveal, past pilgrimage activities may also be ephemeral and, at times, hard to detect archaeologically on present landscapes. Even a coincidental event of falling to one side of a modern border or another may profoundly affect our perception of a site and the very character of the archaeological material we are trying to contextualize. My aim is not to give an apologetic introduction for my interpretations but to acknowledge the limitations of survey archaeology and the inevitably fragmentary character of our reconstructions.

Even though some cave spaces are used as they naturally are, rock carving is still the primary way to leave permanent marks on and adopt rupestrian landscapes for various uses. A site where human intervention clearly manifests itself is Yarımburgaz Cave in the immediate hinterland of Constantinople, a mid-Pleistocene cave formation on the eastern bank of the Bathynias (Sazlıdere) River north of Küçükçekmece Lake.[215] The prehistoric settlement layer of Yarımburgaz presents an uninterrupted stratigraphy from the Lower Paleolithic up until the Late Chalcolithic periods, which became the

[214] For a detailed discussion of Byzantine-specific sacred associations of landscape elements, see Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*. Also see Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred*.
[215] Yarımburgaz has been identified as Schiza in the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*: Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 632–33.

subject of many scientific explorations since the late 19th century and the prime focus of later archaeological excavations.[216] Although it failed to spark much scholarly interest, the medieval layer of the cave is highly visible. The large-scale Byzantine remodeling with rock-cut and now-lost masonry elements transformed the cave into an extensive religious complex, possibly to accommodate pilgrims.

The reports of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums' excavations in 1986 briefly describe a three-aisle basilica and a marble-clad water reservoir outside the cave, as well as a masonry-built apse rising on rock-cut foundations between the upper and lower galleries of the cave system.[217] On the one hand, the masonry additions and structures are all lost, except for a few stone blocks of the basilica's northern wall. On the other hand, yet-overlooked carved features render the Byzantine occupation layer the most prominent at present in Yarımbugaz Cave (fig. 3.3). These are primarily concentrated in the upper gallery, a large hall running over 50 m deep into the Eocene limestone. The marks on the exterior indicate timber-roofed structures once stood at the entrance. Inside, the cave ceiling is roughly shaped to emphasize three domical vaults, the southernmost one springing in front of the sanctuary area. On the eastern wall, close to the cave entrance, the main apse is equipped with a three-stepped *synthronon* and a central *cathedra*. A smaller apse is hewn out immediately north. On the south, a side chamber is connected to the room in front of the main apse through a passage in the rock wall. The carving of the apses is crisp, displaying right-angled corners; however, most of the cave interior retains uneven rock walls and amorphous forms. The surfaces become rougher in the areas away from the sanctuary as if creating a transition from the human- to God-made. A simple grave pit is found at the far end of the cave, whereas two burial chambers are hewn out from the outcrops on a higher terrace on the hillside, accessed via an external rock-cut staircase.

The above description is far from complete yet sufficient to illustrate the complexity of the space created in and outside the cave group. Unfortunately, the activities of treasure hunters and invasive set arrangements of the Turkish film industry severely

[216] Among others, Bousquet, "Les grottes de Yarem-Bourgaz"; Hovasse, "Yarımburgaz Mağarası [La grotte de Yarım Bourgas]"; Özdoğan and Koyunlu, "Yarımburgaz Mağarası, 1986 Yılı Çalışmalarının İlk Sonuçları ve Bazı Gözlemler"; Özdoğan, "Yarımburgaz Mağarası 1986 Yılı Kazı Çalışmaları"; "Yarımburgaz Mağarası"; Arsebük and Özbaşaran, "Yarımburgaz Mağaraları Pleistosen'den Bir Kesit"; Aydıngün et al., "The Resurgence near Yarımburgaz Cave."
[217] Özdoğan, "Yarımburgaz Mağarası," 375–77.

damaged the cave and its surroundings more than ever in the last five decades.[218] The gradual destruction of stratigraphy and former masonry structures and almost total neglect of the Byzantine occupation layer in the excavation campaigns leave us with limited archaeological data to reconstruct the much-neglected medieval history of the site.

Figure 3.3: Yarımburgaz Cave, eastern wall of the upper gallery. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

For Yarımburgaz Cave, Ernest Mamboury suggests an identification with the church of St. Theodore of Bathys Rhyax (Βαθὺς Ῥύαξ), meaning the deep stream, which he associates with the Bathynias (Sazlıdere) River accordingly.[219] This argument is not widely accepted; instead, the church of St. Theodore is usually placed closer to Constantinople based on topographical information in historical sources.[220] In the

[218] Dinçer et al., "Yarımburgaz Mağarası'nın 'Muhteşem' Yok Oluşu"; Aydıngün et al., "Yarımburgaz Mağarası Hasar Raporu 2015"; Aydıngün, "Yarımburgaz Mağarasında Son Durum." Today, the most worrying is that even the very existence of the cave and the surrounding archaeological site are threatened by the irrational channel construction project. The Channel Istanbul is expected to affect 17 million m^2 of archaeological and natural protected area, including Yarımburgaz Cave. See "Kanal İstanbul Çalıştay Raporu."

[219] Mamboury, *Istanbul touristique*, 573.

[220] Raymond Janin identifies the church of St. Theodore in Rhesion (Ῥήσιον) with that of Bathys Rhyax and favors a location around Hebdomon. "Les églises byzantines des saints militaires," 62–63; *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, 150–51. Semavi Eyice argues for a misspelling in the place name of Rhesion and places the church to Rhegion (Küçükçekmece). Eyice, "Tarihde Küçükçekmece," 62–

context of a Pecheneg attack reaching as far as the close surroundings of Constantinople in 1091, Anna Komnene describes the church of St. Theodore as a site of religious importance, receiving a flock of pilgrims from the Byzantine capital every Sunday.[221] Probably too far away for the crowds from Constantinople to visit once a week, there is no point in insisting on the identification of Yarımburgaz Cave with any monument known from the textual sources. Regardless, the material at Yarımburgaz reveals a substantial church complex with rock-cut and masonry elements developed in and around cave spaces. The interventions on the rock walls confirm the sacred associations of this human-altered natural phenomenon.

Figure 3.4: Landscape south of the Yarımburgaz Cave, looking towards the Küçükçekmece Lake. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

Rearranged to function as a religious complex in the Middle Ages, the site, easily accessible by sea and land routes, may have been visited by pilgrims as part of the extensive religious landscape around the Byzantine capital. The cave is in a prominent location at the southern end of a river network between the Marmara Sea and the Black Sea (fig. 3.4). It overlooks the Bathynias (Sazlıdere) valley, where the river joins the Küçükçekmece Basin. Today, the outstanding rock formations on the eastern bank and the spacious entrance of the cave attract immediate attention despite being surrounded by a densely built neighborhood on the outskirts of an overgrown metropolis. Together with the now-lost masonry structures, the Byzantine complex must have been a

63. Whether the toponyms Rhesion and Bathys Rhyax refer to the same place remains open. Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 619, 283.

[221] Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, VIII, 3: 241.

conspicuous landmark in the hinterland of Constantinople, whether seen traveling through the river or from the inland road passing north of the Küçükçekmece basin, connected to the two major thoroughfares in Thrace: *Via Egnatia* and *Via Diagonalis*. The particular positioning must have rendered the site more accessible and appealing to visitors, possibly contributing to its fame as a pilgrimage center. In this respect, the topographical setting of Yarımburgaz Cave is similar to the rock-cut complex at Medeia on the coastal Black Sea, which is the protagonist of this chapter. It is likewise well-connected to the land and sea routes, located outside an urban center and close to a navigable river. Unique when it comes to the sculpted details, the carved monument broadens our understanding of pilgrimage sites in the Strandzha region.

3.1. Holiness Befits Thine House at Medeia[222]

Perhaps the most sophisticated example of rock-cut architecture in Byzantine Thrace, if not the whole Empire, is the pilgrimage complex outside Medeia, now called Kıyıköy. The monument stands out with its sculptural decoration, which is rarely encountered in such fine detailing in the rock-cut medium. In line with the high level of workmanship, this is the only rupestrian site in the Strandzha region that has been discussed in a number of articles.[223] However, the meticulous survey and documentation undertaken as part of this dissertation project promote a revised and much more nuanced narrative than the one previously presented in the scholarship.

The rock-cut site at Medeia has been traditionally identified as a Late Antique monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas. Instead, I argue for a date in the early Middle Byzantine period with a *terminus post quem* in the 9th century for the main carving phase. I reevaluate architectural sculpture and epigraphic evidence and bring some previously overlooked material into discussion. More importantly, based on the spatial layout, among other things, I suggest that it was established primarily to accommodate a pilgrimage activity rather than hosting a monastic community. At Medeia, a three-aisle basilica is at the core of the complex, surrounded by an ambulatory, which offers

[222] The title is inspired by the now-lost apse inscription at Medeia, recording Psalm 92 (93): 5.
[223] Among others, Škorpil, "Археологически бѣлѣжки отъ Странджа-Планина," 243–49; Dirimtekin, "Midye Surları ve Aya Nikola Kilisesi," 53–55; Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 339–46; Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye"; Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers."; Ousterhout, "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace," 490–91.

visual and, at times, physical access to the *foci* of the pilgrimage (fig. A.1). The architectural design revolves around the *hagiasma*, the source or container of the holy water, whose central role is also reflected in the decorative program and, more explicitly, in the now-lost apse inscription (figs. 1.5, 3.14). Two other places of veneration define important stops in the pilgrims' route, namely the funerary chamber in the northwest and the specialized southeastern compartment of the sanctuary.

The extensive complex is hewn out from the living rock on the densely wooded southern bank of the Pabuçdere River valley, approximately 600 m west of the Vize Gate on the walls of Medeia.[224] The fortified town is on the maritime route along the Black Sea littoral of Eastern Thrace. The coastline connecting Constantinople to the Danube Delta and further north to the Crimean Peninsula was famously inhospitable, providing only a few relatively safe anchorages in the ancient and medieval world; Medeia held an important position among them.[225] Moreover, the settlement was at the intersection of two main land routes in Byzantine Thrace: the coastal road along the Black Sea (A4) and the D4 that connected other local centers to Medeia, such as the nearby Bizye and Rhaidestos on the Sea of Marmara (fig. 1.2).[226] Additionally, transportation on the two rivers must have facilitated communication with the hinterland, Pabuçdere in the north and Kazandere in the south.[227] Immediately outside a fortified settlement center where the land and sea routes met, the pilgrimage site must have been easily reached from the Black Sea, as well as from the inland Thrace through land roads and riverways (fig. 3.5). Probably on account of the close connection to the sea, in the Late Ottoman period, it became a custom for the sailors at the port of Medeia to visit the complex and offer olive oil for a safe journey.[228]

The rupestrian shrine archives interwoven layers of past human activities, just like the *palimpsest* of graffiti on its rock walls, testifying to not a few personal stories. The brief description of the French geographer Xavier Hommaire de Hell, who visited Medeia together with painter Jules Laurens in 1846, constitutes the earliest written

[224] The city is often identified with ancient Salmydessos, either referring to a district or a settlement. Stronk, "Conditions for Colonization"; Portalsky, "Salmydessos Reconsidered."
[225] Schaffer, *Landeskunde von Thrakien*, 71–72; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 209–10.
[226] Külzer, "The Byzantine Road System in Eastern Thrace," 179–80, 196–97.
[227] Stronk, "Conditions for Colonization," 101; Portalsky, "Salmydessos Reconsidered," 42. In particular, the northern river, Pabuçdere, where the rupestrian complex is carved out, was suitable for the passage of riverboats in the direction of Bizye until the construction of a dam in 2000.
[228] Stamoule Sarante, "Ἁγιάσματα τῆς Θράκης," 287.

account of the monument, back then long abandoned and in a ruinous state.[229] Only a decade after their visit, a major transformation took place, and the Greek community living in Medeia reinvented the site. As such, the Byzantine monument was restored and reopened as a monastery in 1856 with a name referring to the uncovering of the "God-made" church embedded in the rock, Keratheoktistos (Κεραθεόκτιστος).[230] The restoration work entailed the clearance of the debris partly blocking the entrance and the replacement of the fallen rock façade with masonry extensions.[231] Additionally, nine chambers (δωμάτια) and thirty-two cells (κελλία) were built for the use of the resident monks and visiting pilgrims.[232] Furthermore, two hundred and fifty hectares of forestland (2500 στρέμματα) and eighty fields with grapevines and fruit trees were bestowed to the newly established monastery.[233]

Figure 3.5: Landscape in the immediate north of the city walls of Medeia, image taken from the mouth of the Pabuçdere River, looking towards the west. The rupestrian complex is located just behind the small bridge on the river. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

[229] Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*. He also left a memory of his visit in the *hagiasma*, inscribing his name and the year, like many other visitors after the 18th century. Semavi Eyice followed the custom and wrote Eyice 1961 under the signature of Hommaire de Hell on what I would like to term the "historiographical" wall.

[230] Lakides, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐπαρχίας Βιζύης καὶ Μηδείας*, 102. "Θεόκτιστος," meaning God-erected, is an attribution commonly attached to the rupestrian churches on account of their relation to natural rock formations. According to a 19th-century local legend, the long-forgotten monument was rediscovered in 1847 with the guidance of dream visions of a seventeen-year-old girl from Medeia, Katina Anagnosti Albani, who was urged by a white-bearded man to find the rock-cut church and hidden sign of the cross outside the city. Stamoule Sarante, "Ἁγιάσματα τῆς Θράκης," 282, 287.

[231] Lakides, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐπαρχίας Βιζύης καὶ Μηδείας*, 102: footnote 137; Schaffer, "Archäologische Beobachtungen," 66; Škorpil, "Археологически бѣлѣжки отъ Странджа-Планина," 343.

[232] Stamoule Sarante, "Ἁγιάσματα τῆς Θράκης," 282.

[233] *Ibid*., 282.

The monastic complex at Medeia later acquired the dedication to St. Nicholas, mythicized with the discovery of a marble relief icon of the saint under the holy altar.[234] It functioned until around the time of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1922-23. Nearly half a century after the abandonment of the Late Ottoman monastery, the rock-cut monument was again in a dilapidated state in the 1960s, with the masonry extensions and other monastic structures almost entirely gone.[235]

3.1.1. Architectural Description: A Space for Pilgrimage

The rupestrian site offers a diverse set of archaeological materials that allows a reconstruction of the pilgrims' movement and a vivid picture of the pilgrimage activity and beyond. In this subsection, I present a description of and discuss the architecture, sculptural decoration, wall paintings, and medieval graffiti. The rock-cut interior is entered from the north, where the masonry vaults of the 19th-century restoration, replacing the former rock façade, are very fragmentarily yet still preserved (fig. 3.6). At the center of the complex, the church is a three-aisle basilica. The oblong narthex in the west provides a visual connection to the funerary chamber in the northwest, directs the visitor to the *hagiasma* at the southern end, and gives access to the ambulatory corridor surrounding the naos (fig. A.1).

Figure 3.6: Outer façade of the rupestrian complex at Medeia. From left to right, the openings in the bedrock lead to the eastern ambulatory corridor, sanctuary, north aisle of the basilica, and narthex.

[234] *Ibid*., 282.
[235] During his site visit in 1961, Semavi Eyice noted some archaeological remains that he associated with the monastic auxiliary structures or the enceinte wall. "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 340.

Much attention has been paid to the carving and decoration of the narthex and *hagiasma*. As reflected in the high concentration of medieval graffiti invocations (90%), these areas must have been where pilgrims spent most of their time. The narthex is a barrel-vaulted hall connected to the naos through three door openings. A simple ovolo cornice runs on the springing level of the vaulting. The lateral walls are enlivened with a row of blind arches resting on impost blocks, rhythmically arranged to frame the special viewpoints and entries (fig. A.2 sec.1). These arched niches are decorated with carved imitations of parapet slabs that display a variety of designs.

The area in front of the central door leading to the nave is marked by a cross vault and a rectangular window above the projecting lintel. A rather curious inscription (Ins. no. 3) is incised flanking the doorway, reading ΔU|ΜΗ on the left and ΘΑ|ΚΑЄΡΟ|CΗC on the right-hand side (fig. 3.21). Although more carefully executed compared to the graffiti on the rock walls, this encrypted inscription has a sketchy appearance that does not fit well into the finely carved and decorated interior. It can be dated to the 9th-10th centuries based on letterforms.[236] The meaning of the text cannot be fully reconstructed, which probably has abbreviated forms and mixed order of letters. Still, possible references to the cult of holy water can be singled out, such as δύναμις (power) and κάθαρσις or καθαρσέως in the genitive case (cleansing, purification).

The main entrance to the naos is further emphasized by symmetrically arranged relief decorations: a three-legged candlestick and a parapet slab featuring a spoked wheel (*Speichenrad*) and a concentric diamond motif on each side (fig. 3.7). The wheel motifs evoke eight-armed Christograms, a familiar element in the architectural sculpture of Byzantine churches in the nearby Bizye.[237] The *candelabra* are often associated with funerary contexts in Byzantine iconography, encountered in the painted decoration of

[236] The *delta* stands on a thin base, and its diagonal bar on the right follows a large curve. At the apex of the letter, a serif extends downwards to the left. The oblique bars of the *mu* intersect at a downward angle and form a capital Y, touching the baseline. The *epsilon* has a round form, while the *theta* and *omicron* are slightly compressed. Although earlier examples also exist, the above-described letter forms fit well into the 9th and 10th centuries or later. Moutsopoulos, "La Morphologie des inscriptions byzantines et post-byzantines," 332–33. The final *sigma* has sharp corners with acute angles, resembling the square alphabet, which is rare but not completely abandoned after the 6th century. Mango, "Byzantine Epigraphy," 244.

[237] Similar motifs are found on one of the reused parapet slabs in the western gallery of Hagia Sophia Church in Bizye (D-13) and the marble parapet of an *ambon* platform (E-1), now in Tekirdağ Archaeological Museum: Çavdar, "Kirklareli Vize'den Geç Antik-Bizans Dönemi Mimari Plastik Taş Eserler," 101, 132.

Early Christian tombs to honor the deceased or as a symbol of eternal light.[238] The burning candles on candlesticks are likewise incorporated into the painted decoration of the northwest chapel of the catholicon of Hosios Loukas (second quarter of the 11th century) and the 13th-century paintings of the south aisle of Acheiropoietos Basilica in Thessaloniki, in both cases related to the commemoration of the dead.[239] Unlike these examples, though, the ones at Medeia are unlit and carry no candles. Alternatively, these decorative elements may reflect the placement of actual candleholders at two sides of the door, more than necessary to illuminate the dimly lit, rock-cut interior.[240] In a similar way, the depictions of *candelabra* in the bema of the 12th-century church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi mirror the use of actual objects during the liturgical services, often placed on two sides of the sanctuary.[241] Lastly, the small, cross-shaped recess carved above the candlestick on the right-hand side further underlines the devotional significance of the naos door. The now-gone inlaid cross could be approached and kissed only by kneeling and facing the sanctuary.

Figure 3.7: Medeia, parapet slab on the eastern wall of the narthex, on the right of the main entrance to the naos.

[238] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 70; Bouras and Parani, *Lighting in Early Byzantium*, 22–23. The painted *candelabra* decorate the tomb no. 4 in the necropolis of Serdica, dated to the 5th century, and two sides of the entrance to a 4th-century burial chamber in Silistra. See, Miateff, *La peinture décorative de la nécropole de Serdica*, 23–35; Dimitrov, "Le système décoratif et la date des peintures murales du tombeau antique de Silistra."

[239] Chatzidakis-Bacharas, *Les peintures murales de Hosios Loukas: les chapelles occidentales*, 110–11; Fundic, "Art and Political Ideology in the State of Epiros during the Reign of Theodore Doukas (r. 1215-1230)," 239–40.

[240] Such portable candlesticks appear to have been essential elements in the illumination of narthexes, particularly necessary at the entrances for practical reasons. In some cases, the *typika* instructed the lamps in the narthexes to be lit continuously at night, as in the main church of Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople. Stanković, "At the Threshold of the Heavens," 321–28. For lighting in Byzantine churches, see Nesbitt, "Shaping the Sacred." Also, note that candles became increasingly popular in place of lamps from the 7th century onward. Taft and Kazhdan, "Candles."

[241] Sinkević, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi*, 30–32.

On the western wall of the narthex, a window opposite the north aisle opens into the funerary chamber in the northwest corner (fig. A.2 sec.1). It displays a rather unusual form: The opening expands with curvilinear sides and provides a broader view of the interior for someone standing in the narthex (fig. 3.19). It also allows pilgrims to touch the *sarcophagus* lid in the eastern *arcosolium*, likely belonging to a prominent individual. The traces under the lintel indicate a now-gone window grill, which would limit pilgrims' movement and control their access to the funerary room.

Figure 3.8: Medeia, the western wall of the narthex.

The parapet slabs on the west wall are decorated with concentric diamond and rectangular patterns, chevron motifs, and a cross on a plain background (fig. 3.8). The central carved panel facing the main naos door has a specialized composition with an encircled "Maltese" cross between two stylized cypress trees.[242] Cypress motifs displaying different levels of abstraction decorate several Middle and Late Byzantine *sarcophagi*.[243] A strikingly similar example, however, is found on a parapet slab in the Basilica of San Marco in Venice with an encircled six-armed Christogram between

[242] These motifs were previously identified as fishes and read as a symbolic representation of the faithful. Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 72; Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 126.

[243] Pazaras, *Ανάγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι και επιτάφιες πλάκες της μέσης και ύστερης Βυζαντινής περιόδου στην Ελλάδα*; "Τα βυζαντινά γλυπτά του καθολικού της Μονής Βατοπεδίου," 250, figs. 9–10. Also see *sarcophagus* no. 2 from the Church of the Dormition and *sarcophagus* no. 4 from the Church of Hagia Sophia in Kyiv, both dated to the 11th century: Grabar, *Sculptures Byzantines du Moyen Age*, II:86–88, Pl. LVI and LVIII.

stylized cypresses, dated to the second half of the 11th century.[244] At Medeia, together with the *candelabra* on the opposite wall, they signify a funerary program, possibly in connection to the burial chamber and four grave pits in the narthex.

Figure 3.9: Medeia, the mid-19th-century lithograph of the *hagiasma* by Jules Laurens, published in Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*. (Byzantine black & white mounted photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C., Neg: D.O. 71.4.4)

The decorative blind arches on the west wall make a transition into an open arcade in the south, leading to the *hagiasma* through a carved staircase (fig. A.2 sec.1). In the mid-19th century restoration, the already-broken columns and parapet slabs at the southern end of the narthex were removed and replaced with a wider, rather clumsy arch (fig. A.2 sec.3). Prior to that change, the visitors, entering from the north, would have immediately found themselves in a long, arcaded hall, terminating with a tripartite arched opening that overlooked the *hagiasma* on the lower level (fig. 3.9).[245] This is a domed space containing the basin where the holy water was collected.[246] The

[244] Despite the finely carved surfaces, André Grabar considers the parapet unfinished, probably because of the lack of detailing on the cypress motifs, almost identical to the ones in Medeia. *Sculptures Byzantines du Moyen Age*, II:78, Pl. XLV.
[245] The original arrangement is recorded in the drawings of Jules Laurens.
[246] Although not visible under the debris today, the basin was noted by Hommaire de Hell in 1846 and recorded in the illustrations of Jules Laurens. *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, I: 147. In the mid-19th century, a brick wall was built around the water basin. Schaffer, "Archäologische Beobachtungen," 66; Škorpil, "Археологически бѣлѣжки отъ Странджа-Планина," 247.

positioning in the overall layout, architectural details, and elaborate decoration promote this room as the prime focus of the pilgrimage site.

Six rock-cut steps at the southwestern corner provide access to the *hagiasma*, 1.90 m below the narthex floor. The entrance seems to have been controlled by a door, judging from the marks on the rock surfaces. The recessed western wall is articulated with blind arches that stand above brackets following the descent of the stairs. The staircase is covered by cross vaults at the two ends, and a shallow dome rises from a flat ceiling above the central compartment. Behind a corbelling lintel, the *hagiasma* consists of an anteroom and a larger domed canopy. The flat ceiling of the former rests on three corbels on the west wall, the central one with an eagle *protome* with semi-folded wings (fig. 3.10). The wall recesses back and forms three arches on the lower level. The left bracket supporting the middle arch has a relief decoration of a bird perched on an ivy branch under the Greek letter Α. Although worn out, the one on the right-hand side may have expectedly had a similar composition with the letter Ω. In front of the stairs, the parapet slab on the south wall features a carved Latin cross with splayed arms on a pedestal (fig. A.2 sec.2).

Figure 3.10: Medeia, view of the *hagiasma* from the narthex, looking southwest.

The central *hagiasma* space has a two-level façade arrangement, divided by an ovolo cornice. The lower register has a simple triconch design, whereas tripartite arched niches with elaborate parapet slabs articulate the upper level of the walls (figs. 1.5,

3.9–10). At the corners, four massive columns with double rings on the necks run the entire height of the interior. These corner columns are topped with impost capitals with beveled edges (*Kämpferkapitelle mit abgeschrägten Kanten*). The cut corners of the capitals are left plain, except for the one at the southeastern corner, featuring an incised cypress tree on the triangular field (fig. 3.11). The larger trapezoidal sides are finely decorated with a variety of carved designs raised from the background. The carving has a two-dimensional quality, executed in the *champlevé* technique. The chiseled-out background may have been originally painted or inlaid with a vitreous paste, creating a polychromic high-contrast effect to render the motifs more conspicuous in the dark rupestrian space.

Figure 3.11: Medeia, column capital at the southeastern corner of the *hagiasma*.

The carved decoration is in dialog with the architecture. The western pair of column capitals display relatively simple images on the sides looking towards the anteroom with *kantharoi* (drinking cups) and ivy leaves. The facing sides of the same capitals frame the passage to the domed compartment with Christograms in central medallions flanked by birds perched on disks (figs. 1.5, 3.10). In the domed core area of the *hagiasma*, the decorative program denotes the life-giving character of the holy water, with spiraling grapevine and ivy foliage, either growing from a vase or branching off from a single trunk and accompanied by peacocks, birds, and other animals (figs. 3.10–11).[247] Within the arched niches on the side walls, the relief designs on the parapet

[247] Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 132.

slabs are similar to those in the narthex, containing concentric frames, diamond patterns, and chevron motifs. The central panel on the eastern wall, divided into four square regions, has a more specialized iconography (fig. 3.9). Two facing deer—or a deer and a doe—are carved on the upper two fields, while a disk with a central radial motif, possibly a sun symbol, is preserved on the lower left corner. The panel symbolically provokes the idea of the life-giving spring, as the facing deer depictions have been interpreted in relation to Psalm 42: 1, reading: *As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants toward You, O God*.[248]

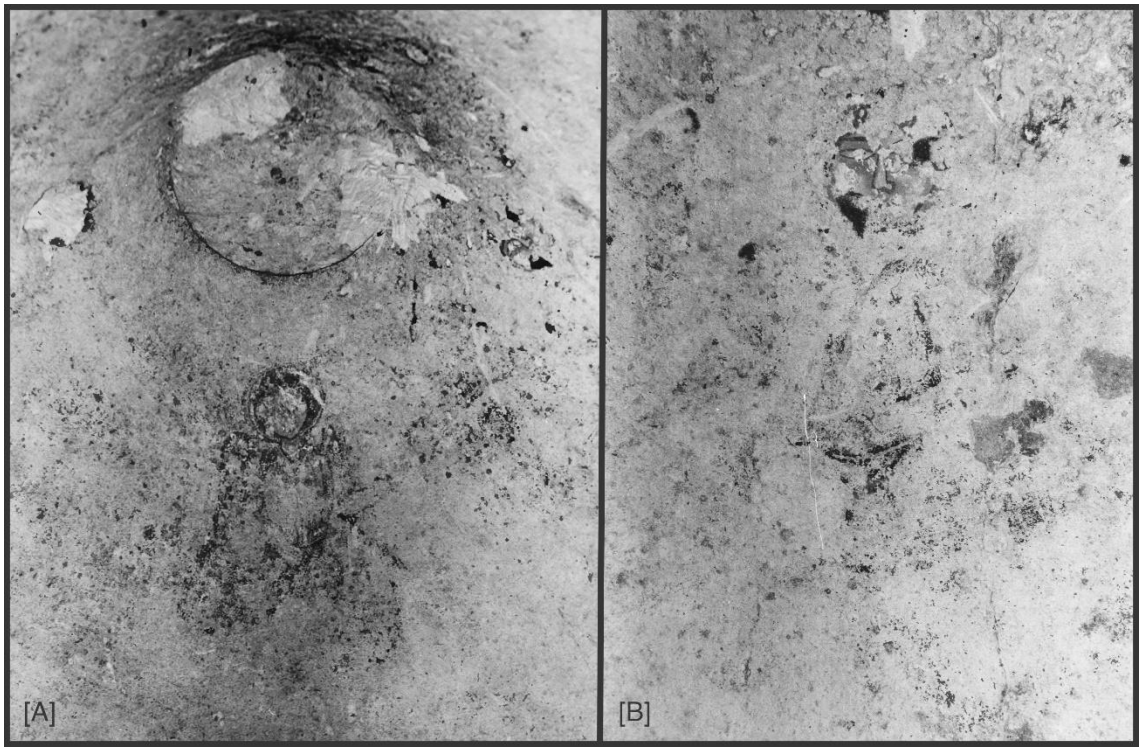

Figure 3.12: Medeia, painted figures under the *hagiasma* dome. (Byzantine black & white mounted photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C., northern figure on the left [A]: C. Mango, A69.107 and eastern figure on the right [B]: L69.87)

The *hagiasma* dome rises from a flat ceiling standing on corner columns without transition elements. Two isolated haloed figures are painted on the eastern and northern sides of the dome. Now hardly discernable, the painted images are in a better condition in a group of earlier photographs in the Dumbarton Oaks Image Collection and Fieldwork Archives (fig. 3.12).[249] Both appear to be beardless but are too fragmentarily

[248] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 68–69; Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 132.
[249] Byzantine Black & White Mounted Photograph Collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.: Identifiers: L69.65, A69.107, and L69.87.

preserved to be recognized. The lower portion of the northern figure is missing, and the face is too worn out to reveal facial characteristics. Nothing but the face is preserved from the eastern figure, slightly turned towards the one in the north. The second figure's eyes, eyebrows, and nose are underlined with strong linear brushstrokes.

The *hagiasma* is the farthest from the outer façade and receives sunlight from quite a lateral angle, if any. Consequently, the conical dome remains relatively dark, especially close to the apex where the two painted figures are applied. They can be easily passed unnoticed with a portable light source held in hand, so they must have been in Jules Laurens' drawings of the *hagiasma* (fig. 3.9). Most likely, a lighting fixture was hung from the dome to illuminate the dim interior and render the paintings visible. Despite the visual connection between the narthex and *hagiasma*, these figures can only be seen after climbing down the stairs and coming closer to the source of the holy water (fig. A.2 sec.1). The water collected in the basin would provide a reflective surface and mirror the images under the dome.

Figure 3.13: Medeia, general view of the sanctuary area.

Also entered from the narthex, the three-aisle naos is articulated by three massive piers on two sides (fig. A.1). Rectangular panels are carved on the middle pier in the south, possibly to frame now-lost icons or inscriptions (fig. 3.15). On the western wall, rock-cut benches flank the entrance door. The barrel vault above the nave rests on thick arches on the short sides and three-stepped corbelling supported by brackets on the long sides. These brackets must have been originally eight in number, yet the eastern

pair seems to have been destroyed at a later phase, probably to insert a high chancel screen. Symmetrically arranged in pairs, they are originally decorated with the relief images of the four living creatures in the Book of Ezekiel: man, lion, ox, and eagle, often depicted on the pendentives as symbolic representations of the Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).[250] The barrel-vaulted side aisles do not have extant furniture or much decoration except for the ovolo cornice running on the springing level.

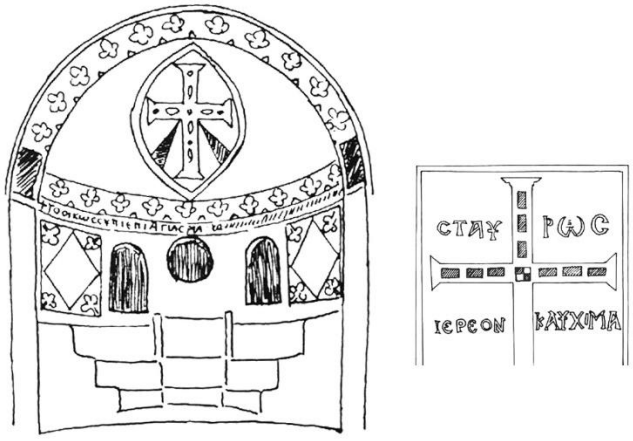

Figure 3.14: Medeia, illustrations of now-lost apse decoration (on the left) and the painted panel outside the apse (on the right), published in Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler."

At the eastern end, the sanctuary has an elevated ground, ca 35 cm higher than the naos floor. The original chancel screen appears to be a semi-open rock-cut barrier under the large transverse arch before the sanctuary, although only a few traces survive today (fig. 3.13).[251] The *templon* parapets must have been roughly 1.50 m high, according to the broken surface left on the rock at the southern corner. The fragmentary evidence on the lower level suggests a 1.10-m-wide opening at the center. This open arrangement was replaced by a high *iconostasis*, probably during the 19th-century restorations.[252]

Behind the chancel screen, the church has a tripartite sanctuary (fig. A.1). The extended bema terminates with a semicircular apse occupied by a three-stepped *synthronon*. At

[250] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 69.
[251] In 1961, Semavi Eyice noted the removal of the then-extant parts of the chancel screen by the locals to reuse as construction material. "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 342.
[252] Visiting Medeia in the early 1910s, Karel Škorpil describes a solid barrier with a central door and flanking narrow windows that "walls up" the eastern arch of the nave, also recorded in his plan drawing. "Археологически бѣлѣжки отъ Странджа-Планина," 248.

the center, the *cathedra* still gives a monumental impression, albeit worn-out. Above the *synthronon*, three windows on the rear wall open into the eastern ambulatory corridor: an *oculus* and two arched windows. The *oculus* on the central axis is apparently placed to provide the clergyman sitting on the *cathedra* with a nimbus effect (fig. 3.13).

The wall paintings on the apse conch, almost completely disappeared, are known to the scholarship thanks to the sketches and descriptions published by Semavi Eyice (fig. 3.14).[253] Accordingly, large diamond motifs imitating marble revetments adorned the sides of the triple window arrangement, a common decorative element in rock-cut and masonry churches. Four-petalled flower motifs, alternatively interpreted as stylized Greek crosses, were applied in the triangular fields at the corners of the diamonds, as well as around the apse vault, framing the central composition. The vaulting was decorated with a large gemmed Latin cross in a *mandorla*, from the center of which two rays of light emanated. The monumental radiating cross in the apse can be interpreted as a non-figurative representation of the Transfiguration of Christ. Under the cross depiction, a painted inscription was running on the base of the semi-dome (Ins. no. 1).[254] It was a quotation from Psalm 92 (93): 5, which also inspired the title of this section.

> +ΤѠΟΙΚѠϹ<u>Ο</u>ΥΠΡ<u>Є</u>ΠΙΑΓ̄ΑϹΜᾹ:Κ<u>ЄЄ</u>ΙϹΜ[ ][255]
> τῷ οἴκῳ σου πρέπει ἁγίασμα : Κ(ύρι)ε, εἰς μ[ακρότητα ἡμερῶν]
> *Holiness befits Your house, Lord, for the length of days.*

There was another smaller painted panel on the north wall outside the apse, displaying a Latin cross with splayed arms inlaid with precious stones. It was accompanied by a two-line inscription (Ins. no. 2).[256] The last two letters of the first line fragmentarily survive, directly applied on the rock wall without an underlayer.

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[253] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 342–43; Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 56.
[254] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," fig. 40; Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 55; Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, II: 249–51.
[255] Only two-thirds of the inscription was still legible when Semavi Eyice visited the site in 1961. He erroneously recorded some of the letters that were probably already barely visible: ΤѠΟΙΚѠϹϹΥΠΡЄΠΙΑΓ̄ΑϹΜᾹ:ΚᾹϹΙϹΜ[ ]. "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," fig. 40.
[256] Eyice, fig. 41; Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 56; Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, II: 251–52.

ϹΤΑΥΡΩϹ | ΙЄΡЄΟΝ ΚΑΥΧΙΜΑ
σταυρὸς ἱερέων καύχημα
Cross, pride of the priests.

The painted images and inscriptions present explicit references to the architectural sculpture and pilgrimage activity in the rupestrian complex. The cross is a prominent symbol in the iconographic program of both painted and carved decoration of the monument. In particular, the type of cross painted outside the apse is almost identical to the rock-cut parapet slab on the south wall of the *hagiasma*, facing the staircase leading to the holy water.[257] More interestingly, the content of the biblical inscription adheres to the architecture that pivots around the source of the holy water. At Medeia, the holiness (ἁγίασμα) befitting the Lord's house verifies itself and confirms the identification of the domed southwestern room as an *hagiasma*. The lettering in the inscription no. 1 is arranged in such a way as to centralize "ἁγίασμα," even though the letters succeeding the word outnumber those preceding it. The word "ἁγίασμα" is placed under the monumental cross image in line with the central axis of the church. In that way, it multiplies the sacred meaning, bearing a clear reference to the holy spring, in other words, the *hagiasma*.

Figure 3.15: Medeia, south aisle of the basilica, looking to the east.

[257] As also observed by Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 128.

The bema is connected to the side chambers via arched passageways framed by pilasters with banded profiles (figs. 3.13, A.1). The large round niche on the eastern wall between the apse and the northern chamber, approximately a meter above the floor level, can be identified as the *prothesis* niche.[258] What is preserved from the northern flanking room is mainly of 19th-century reconstruction, built with brick masonry following a triconch design.[259] Whereas the northern side chamber is directly linked to the bema, the southern rooms are rather isolated and compartmented. Large beam holes and further articulation of the pilasters in the south indicate a screen between the southern flanking room and the bema. The entrance from the naos is controlled by *templon* parapets, whose traces are barely visible at the eastern end of the south aisle (fig. 3.15). The importance of this passage and the southern rooms of the sanctuary is marked with an inlaid cross placed above the rock-cut parapet wall, the most elaborate example in the rupestrian complex (fig. 3.16). The carved recess is in the form of a processional cross with splayed ends and a tang under the extended lower arm. On either side of the upper arm, IC̄ and XC̄ are inscribed with tildes above the *nomina sacra*.[260] The serifs, arranged in pairs at the end of each arm and the tang, have circular pinholes to fix the now-gone metal cross.

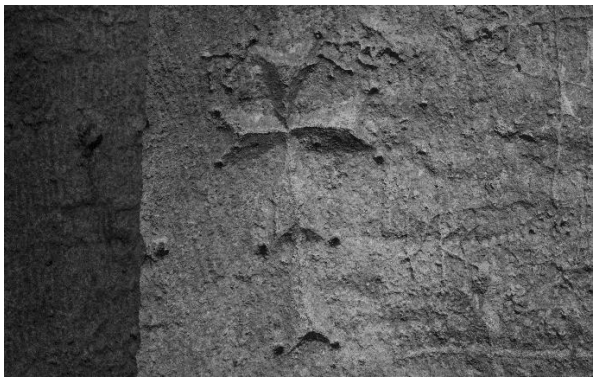

Figure 3.16: Medeia, inscribed cruciform carving for an inlaid cross above the templon in the south aisle.

[258] The *prothesis* niche is similar in dimension and positioning to those in New Tokalı Church in Göreme, Cappadocia.
[259] The northeastern corner of the church was not accessible to Hommaire de Hell because of the rubble filling and not represented in his plan sketch. *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, IV: Pl. XIII. The 19th-century restoration is documented in Škorpil, "Археологически бѣлѣжки отъ Странджа-Планина," 244: figure 141. Natalia Teteriatnikov suggests that this can be a separate chapel, similar to the sanctuary arrangements in Cappadocian rock-cut churches, where every apse is equipped with an altar. *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia*, 62–63.
[260] Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, meaning Jesus Christ.

The southern flanking chamber is a square-like space with a rock-cut bench in the south. An arched door on the east wall gives access to a fully enclosed barrel-vaulted room. The arch above the entrance to this southeastern compartment rests on projecting impost blocks, decorated with a carved imitation of a dogtooth frieze (fig. 3.15). Inside, the rectangular window on the east wall provides a visual and auditory connection to the eastern ambulatory corridor, although the room remains physically inaccessible due to the level differences. Two round niches on either side of the room were previously interpreted as presbyters' chairs (fig. A.1).[261] Not entirely illogical, the argument seems improbable because of their placement in such a small inner room, facing one another. Instead, the identification as a reliquary chapel (*Reliquien-Kapelle*), where the precious possessions may have been deposited in the niches, appears more plausible and better corresponds to the pilgrims' movement.[262] For someone in the eastern ambulatory corridor, the large niches stay within the visual range through the window (fig. 3.17). Thus, the window allows the visitors walking around the church space to lay their eyes on the objects kept in the closed southeastern corner of the sanctuary.

Figure 3.17: Medeia, window in the eastern ambulatory corridor looking into the southeastern corner room of the sanctuary.

[261] Teteriatnikov, *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia*, 63.
[262] Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 126.

Together with the narthex, two corridors in the south and east define the ambulatory encircling the basilica on three sides (fig. A.1). These corridors are somewhat irregular, barrel-vaulted spaces that receive very little natural light because of the positioning in the depth of the rock formation. In accordance with the dimly lit interiors, the usual ovolo cornice is applied only where it would be more visible, considering the direction of the daylight and the flow of pilgrims. The large opening in the southern corridor illuminating the otherwise fairly dark space is apparently an addition from the 19th century.[263] Behind the apse conch, the rock wall shared with the sanctuary makes a recess in the eastern corridor (fig. 3.18). This area is covered by a higher flat ceiling, interrupting the barrel-vault. Above the cornice level, a curvilinear wall surmounted by a dogtooth freeze signposts the location of the apse, even though it does not follow the same curvature. The ambulatory is connected to the sanctuary through the triple window arrangement above the *synthronon* and the rectangular opening in the southeastern corner room (fig. A.2 sec.3). The latter breaks the continuous decorative cornice, indicating a later phase than the carving of the ambulatory itself, although it may have been designed as part of the same project (fig. 3.17). The floor level of the eastern corridor is lower than the southern one, connected with three rock-cut steps. The lowering of the floor may have been intended to render the southeastern room visible yet inaccessible through the rectangular window since it increases the level difference between the two.

Figure 3.18: Medeia, triple window arrangement in the eastern ambulatory corridor behind the apse.

[263] The opening is not documented in the plan sketch of Hommaire de Hell and must be related to the 19th-century restoration. *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, IV: Pl. XIII.

The funerary chamber is a barrel-vaulted rectangular space in the northwest, entered from the outside via a door opening under a shallow arch. As in the nave, the vaulting corbels out on the springing level and stands on profiled brackets. The walls are equipped with seven *arcosolia*: one on each short side, three on the south wall, and two others flanking the entrance at the center of the north wall (fig. A.1). Additionally, a secondary grave pit is dug on the ground at the southwestern corner. A low relief of a Latin cross decorates the *tympanum* wall above the eastern *arcosolium*. This burial place is further distinguished by an apsidal extension with a connection to the narthex (fig. 3.19). The window opening must have allowed visitors in the narthex to touch the *sarcophagus* lid behind and see the interior of the funerary chamber.

Figure 3.19: Medeia, eastern *arcosolium* in the funerary chamber and the window to the narthex.

The small room at the northwestern end has been previously interpreted as a hermit cell (fig. A.1).[264] However, the space itself reveals little to argue for the function, and it is not organically connected to the pilgrimage complex. Although not recorded in his plan sketch, Hommaire de Hell mentioned the room in passing, attesting its existence before the 19th-century restoration.[265] It stands on a higher rock platform accessed through the stairs west of the funerary chamber. Behind the arched passageway, the

[264] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 346; Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 61, 75; Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 124.
[265] Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, I: 148.

room is a roughly carved space. The conch on the east wall features a rock-cut altar on an elevated ground that must have functioned as a small oratory. Two arched niches are carved on the south and west walls. The former seems to have had a rock-cut table and two benches that no longer survive, whereas the latter displays no carved furniture. An *ad-hoc* digging at the southeastern corner opens into the funerary room, clearly a later intervention.

3.1.2. Understanding the Pilgrims' Experience in Medeia

The emotional response, hence the experience, of visiting a pilgrimage site is highly personal and depends on individuals' background, motivations, expectations, and preparations for the encounter with the holy.[266] Architecture may encourage a certain spatial engagement but affords much more than the intended experience. Still, the architectural setting may be instructive in experiencing a pilgrimage site and reflective of pilgrims' experiences in the past. In Byzantium, a distinctive typology for pilgrimage architecture does not exist. The sites associated with such activities display diverse layouts stemming from local decisions in response to the cult and needs of the pilgrims.[267] Nevertheless, providing direct yet controlled access to holy objects and places through a circular movement connected to a church stands out as a common design solution in several Byzantine pilgrimage complexes.[268] Illustrative in this regard are the 6th-century remodeling around the venerable tomb of St. Menas in Abu Mina, Lower Egypt, which defines a route for the visitors through the crypt via two monumental staircases, and the Late Antique pilgrimage basilica in Pamucak, outside Ephesus, where a series of stairs at different levels enables a circular path into and out of the underground chamber.[269] The rupestrian shrine at Medeia presented in the previous subsection shows a site-specific layout that responds to a pilgrimage activity in a similar manner. The monument structures the movement within the bedrock, as the narthex and ambulatory corridors form a circular route going around the basilica (fig. A.1). The architecture directs attention and provides access to three main points

[266] Jackson, "A Pilgrimage Experience at Sacred Sites in Late Antique Anatolia."
[267] Following a general survey of Byzantine pilgrimage architecture, Robert Ousterhout concludes that the designation of a site as a pilgrimage center is usually not self-evident without written sources. "Pilgrimage Architecture," 56–57.
[268] Bangert, "The Archaeology of Pilgrimage," 297–98.
[269] *Ibid*.; Grossmann, "The Pilgrimage Center of Abû Mînâ"; Sewing, "A Late Antique Pilgrimage Church at the Harbor Canal of Ephesus"; "Up, Down, and Around."

of veneration, namely the funerary chamber, *hagiasma*, and southeastern corner room of the sanctuary.

The medieval graffiti at the rupestrian site illustrate the concerns of the pilgrims who incessantly prayed for help and salvation. Their distribution demonstrates which parts of the complex were more accessible and attracted the most pilgrims (appendix B). Most of them are concentrated in the narthex and *hagiasma*, in particular around the staircase leading to the latter. Access to this staircase and the *hagiasma* was controlled by a door, yet this did not prevent them from being frequently visited and becoming a canvas for pilgrims' prayers. In addition, numerous simple cross incisions cover the rock surfaces, especially in the darker areas along the pilgrimage route, such as the ambulatory corridors. More elaborate crosses are carved in the narthex and north aisle, some apparently intended to inlay metal devotional crosses. The graffiti related to the funerary chamber are mainly around the window on the west wall of the narthex. Only a few cross-shaped incisions can be observed near the entrance, yet none are inside, implying restricted access to the burial chamber. Similarly, the rock walls of the western room, known as the hermit cell, are almost completely devoid of graffiti. Not directly connected to the core of the religious complex, it remains outside the pilgrims' usual route.

Seeing the objects of their pilgrimage was of paramount importance in pilgrims' experience of a pilgrimage site. In many cases, the objects of veneration were made visually accessible through designed viewpoints, and others normally kept out of sight were sometimes shown to special guests or, on certain feast days, to the faithful.[270] However, for Byzantine pilgrims who came to the presence of relics, miraculous icons, or holy places, seeing was usually not enough, but the veneration included touching and kissing to receive their spiritual power. Among the three *foci* of the pilgrimage at Medeia, the first is the funerary chamber, accessible to the pilgrims only through the window in the narthex (figs. 3.19, A.2 sec.1). The unusual form of this window expanding into the room would grant visitors an extensive view of the interior. The curvilinear sides must have encouraged the devotees to reach out and touch the *sarcophagus* lid in the eastern *arcosolium*. Additionally, a window grill seems to have

[270] Vikan, "Pilgrims in Magi's Clothing," 98; Maraval, "The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage," 71–73.

closed off the rectangular opening. Such an arrangement would hinder pilgrims from entering the funerary room but allow controlled access from the narthex to the revered tomb. Similar spatial arrangements are not uncommon in Byzantine architecture. For example, in Hosios Loukas Monastery, the miracle-working relics of St. Luke, previously kept in an underground crypt over which the catholicon was built in the first half of the 11th century, were moved to a *proskynetarion* on the ground level accessible to the flocks of pilgrims from the northern transept.[271]

The next highlight of the pilgrimage is the most pivotal: the *hagiasma*, which attracts immediate attention upon entry to the narthex. The sources of holy water with purifying and healing properties constitute a well-known notion in Byzantium, and many such *hagiasmata* received architectural investments in line with related pilgrimage activities. In Constantinople, roughly a hundred km southeast of Medeia, the textual evidence and limited archaeological remains inform us about at least four Byzantine shrines connected to the cult of holy water: The monasteries of Christ Philanthropos and Hodegon at Mangana, the Monastery of Zoodochos Pege outside the city walls, and the Blachernai Church Complex.[272] Interestingly enough, they share notable spatial characteristics with the rupestrian monument at Medeia. Like the rock-cut example on the Black Sea littoral of Thrace, the *hagiasmata* of the former three were located in underground crypts accessed via staircases, whereas the *hagion louma* (holy bath) in Blachernai was probably on the same level as the church.[273] Moreover, the holy water was similarly collected in basins in Constantinopolitan shrines, often enclosed in centrally planned structures with domed ceilings.

The early-14th-century description of the *hagiasma* in the Monastery of Zoodochos Pege (Balıklı Meryem Ana) outside the city walls of Constantinople helps visualize the rock-cut *hagiasma* at Medeia. The *Logos*, written by the ecclesiastical historian Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca 1256-1335), records a mosaic image of the

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[271] Marinis and Ousterhout, "Relics and the Byzantine Church Building," 169; Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 322–24.

[272] Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople"; Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople."

[273] Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople," esp. 171; Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople," esp. 68. According to the *Book of Ceremonies*, having visited the Blachernai Church and the Chapel of Soros, the emperors had a ritual bath in the *hagion louma* every Friday, immersing themselves three times in the pool filled with holy water gushing from the hands of a marble icon of the Theotokos. Moffatt and Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies*, [II.12]: 551–56.

Virgin and the Child above the holy spring. Accordingly, the water flowing to the basin was occasionally stopped to create a still surface on which the holy icon under the vaulting was reflected.[274] Through reflection and multiplication of the image, the miraculous properties of the icon were transferred to the water. The iconographic type described by Xanthopoulos later came to be known as Zoodochos Pege (Life-giving Source), a bust-length representation of the Virgin in *orans* position, usually depicted on a water basin with or without the Christ Child. It was developed in the Palaiologan era, most probably under the influence of the now-lost mosaic icon in the *hagiasma* of the Pege Monastery at Constantinople.[275]

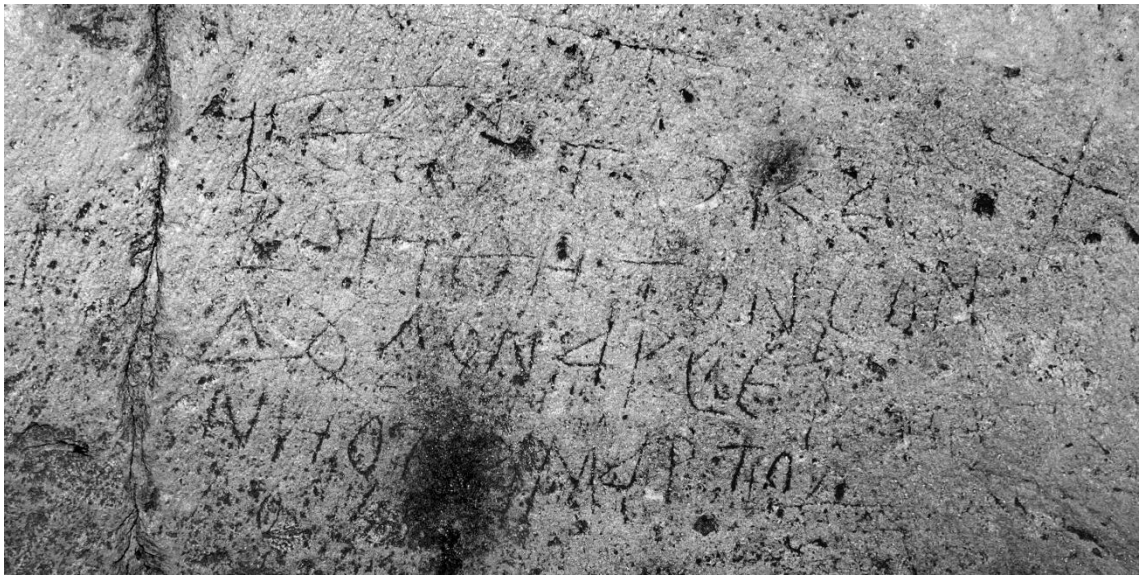

Figure 3.20: Medeia, graffito invocation of Arsenios in the eastern conch of the *hagiasma*.

At Medeia, the wall paintings under the rock-cut dome standing above the water basin speak of a design closely modeled on the crypt at the Monastery of Zoodochos Pege (fig. A.2 sec.1–2). The artificial lighting element suspended from the conical dome would spotlight the vaulting above all else in the otherwise dimly lit interior. The two beardless figures with haloes are difficult to identify (fig. 3.12). However, whether the representation of the Virgin as the Life-giving Source accompanied by an angel or two angels or perhaps other holy images, they would be mirrored on the water collected in

[274] Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople," 169–70; Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople," 74; Kimmelfield, "The Shrine of the Theotokos at the Pege," 307.
[275] The handful of surviving Byzantine examples date from the 14th or early 15th centuries. Starodubcev, "The Cult of the Virgin Ζωοδόχος Πηγή."

the basin, adding to the curative powers of the holy water.[276] These icons and their reflection could be seen only by someone who descended the stairs and entered the *hagiasma* space. The close similarities with the 14th-century arrangement at the Pege Monastery imply the continuation of the cult of the holy water at Medeia in the Late Byzantine period. This is supported by the graffito invocation of Arsenios in the eastern conch of the *hagiasma*, dated to the 14th century or possibly later (appendix B, inv. no. 10) (fig. 3.20).

In Byzantine *hagiasmata*, drinking and washing oneself with holy water were widespread methods for healing. The other objects and substances, such as sand, mud, and oil from the lamps, also acquired curative properties, getting into physical contact with the holy water or simply being kept in these shrines.[277] Moreover, the rite of incubation, dream healing at sacred sites, was a common practice comparable to the ancient tradition associated with the sanctuaries of Asclepius.[278] According to the mid-5th century miracle accounts, visitors to Meryemlik outside Seleucia ad Calycadnum (Silifke) incubated in the naos or atrium of the church dedicated to St. Thecla.[279] In Thessaloniki, the pilgrims to the 5th-century basilica of St. Demetrios, containing the *myron*-exuding tomb of the holy martyr, slept inside the church to be visited and healed by the saint in their dreams.[280] Similarly, people spent nights—or even months—at the healing shrines of Constantinople in the hope of recovery. The 5th-century ecclesiastical historian Sozomen records the incubation practices in the Michaelion, a large Constantinian church complex on the Bosporus at the site of a divine apparition of the Archangel Michael.[281] The miracle stories from Kosmidion (Eyüp) mention dream visitations of Saints Cosmas and Damian, who prescribed the suppliants for their ailments or directly operated on them as they were sleeping in the baptistery, atrium,

[276] In the face of its fragmentary state of preservation, it is not possible to identify the figures with certainty. Semavi Eyice describes them as part of a group of painted angels. "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 344; Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 59.
[277] Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople," 161–62, 167; Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople," 72, 74.
[278] About incubation in Byzantium, see Déroche, "Dream Healing: From Asklepios to the Physician Saints."
[279] von Ehrenheim, "Identifying Incubation Areas," 254–58. The remains of three large churches are preserved in a circa twenty-hectare area at Meryemlik, all built roughly in the second half of the 5th and early 6th centuries. For the architectural history of the site, see Hill, *The Early Byzantine Churches of Cilicia and Isauria*, 208–34. It has recently been suggested that the Cupola Church, with a well-articulated naos area and a sizable porticoed atrium, may have been used for incubation. Balcı, "Ayatekla Kutsal Alanı'nda (Meryemlik'te) Bulunan Kubbeli Kilise," esp. 217.
[280] Bakirtzis, "Pilgrimage to Thessalonike," 191; von Ehrenheim, "Identifying Incubation Areas," 264–65.
[281] Mango, "St. Michael and Attis," 59; Niewöhner, "Healing Springs of Anatolia," 122.

narthexes, south aisle, or even bema of the church.[282] Incubation was the primary healing method in the cult of St. Artemios, which was developed in a basilica dedicated to St. John the Forerunner at Oxeia in Constantinople. The pilgrims were sleeping in the north aisle or, on rare occasions, in the crypt; the areas reserved for those staying in the church were closed at night by movable high screens.[283] The above-mentioned Monastery of Zoodochos Pege, named after the renowned miracle-working spring, presents a well-documented healing shrine where the faithful incubated in the galleries, aisles, narthex, or even the crypt of the 6th-century church.[284] Finally, the Archangelos Monastery near Cemil in Cappadocia provides an example from a rupestrian landscape. The large rock-cut room north of the narthex of the main church is interpreted as a possible incubation space opposite the cave containing the *hagiasma*.[285]

It is challenging to identify the archaeological traces for incubation practices. The above survey reveals that the pilgrims to healing shrines often provided their own bedding and slept in available places rather than purpose-built cells or dormitories. Time and again, their main concern appears to be staying as close as possible to the subjects of their pilgrimage, whether saintly relics or natural elements with sacred associations. It is plausible that the pilgrimage activity at Medeia included a similar rite. The prayers on the rock walls demonstrate that the narthex, ambulatory, and, most of all, *hagiasma* were widely accessible to the visitors. These places could be where those who sought healing through incubation spent the night. The door fittings before the staircase between the narthex and the *hagiasma* may have regulated and occasionally secured access to the holy water. Accordingly, some areas were restricted to the pilgrims at certain times of the day, as in the Martyrion of St. Artemios in Constantinople.[286]

The third and last pilgrimage attraction at Medeia is the southeastern corner room, which seems to have played an essential role in the functioning of the religious complex. Because of its positioning in the sanctuary, the pilgrims could not physically

[282] Talbot, "Constantinople, City of Miraculous Healings," 79–80; von Ehrenheim, "Identifying Incubation Areas," 258–61.
[283] Mango, "Martyrion of St. Artemios at Constantinople"; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles of St. Artemios*, 8–19.
[284] Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople," 167–70.
[285] Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil, "Recherches récentes sur le monastère rupestre de l'Archangélos," 175.
[286] Mango, "Martyrion of St. Artemios at Constantinople," 41–42.

be in this place, but they could see the interior as they walked in the dark eastern ambulatory (fig. 3.17). They would have a glimpse of the objects displayed in the niches, probably accentuated with lamps and candles, yet could not touch them. Here, the architecture limits the pilgrims' engagement with the object of veneration only to the visual aspect, dissimilar from the experience before the window in the narthex and more so in the *hagiasma*.

It was not unprecedented for a healing shrine in Byzantium to house both a holy spring and a venerable relic or a miracle-working icon. Germia (Yürme, Gümüşkonak), for example, was a popular pilgrimage center in Galatia, famous for its mineral waters and fishponds. Additionally, the tunic of Christ was reported to be kept there in the late 6th century, inside the crypt of the church dedicated to the Archangels.[287] In Constantinople, Blachernai Church Complex and Hodegon Monastery at Mangana region, two important healing shrines with *hagiasmata* (referred to as *Hagion Louma* at both sites, meaning holy bath), also held renowned objects of veneration: the robe of the Virgin and the Hodegetria icon, respectively.[288]

The southern flanking room of the sanctuary is somewhat isolated and separate from the bema, unlike its northern counterpart. At the eastern end of the south aisle, the inlaid metal cross embedded on the rock wall above the *templon* further underlines its importance (figs. 3.15–16). Such crosses were inserted in the fabric of Byzantine churches for public veneration.[289] The most illustrative are the devotional crosses in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople: on the bases of the porphyry columns, in the inner narthex, and in the western gallery.[290] Several cross-shaped imprints that once contained metal crosses for public veneration are also found on the column shafts in the Fatih Cami in Enez and Acheiropoietos Basilica in Thessaloniki. At Medeia, the small cruciform recess accessible to the faithful from the south aisle partakes in the same phenomenon. It is placed at an appropriate height to enable pilgrims to kiss the inlaid cross while facing the bema, as in the above-mentioned examples.

[287] Mango, "St. Michael and Attis," 49–50; Niewöhner, "Healing Springs of Anatolia," 110–12.
[288] Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople," 162–64; Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople," 66–71.
[289] Teteriatnikov, "Relics in the Walls, Pillars, and Columns of Byzantine Churches"; also see Lidov, "Icons Made of Relics," 91–95.
[290] Teteriatnikov, "Devotional Crosses in the Columns and Walls of Hagia Sophia."

The cross imagery, prominent in the iconography, seems to have provided guidance and orientation to the pilgrims.[291] Each carved cross marks a threshold along the designed pilgrimage route and points to a transition in the space: one before the window into the funerary room, another opposite the main door to the naos, and still another in front of the entrance staircase of the *hagiasma*. The radiating cross in the apse decoration occupies the architectural focal point of the basilica. Its large-scale and overhead installation must have immediately attracted the viewer's attention once seen from the narthex (fig. 3.21).[292] For a Byzantine beholder, the painted cross was only visually accessible but unattainable because of its placement on the ceiling of the restricted sanctuary area. It must have emphasized the central axis and directed the eye down to the word *hagiasma* at the center of the apse inscription, which evokes the destination of the pilgrimage: the source of the holy water.

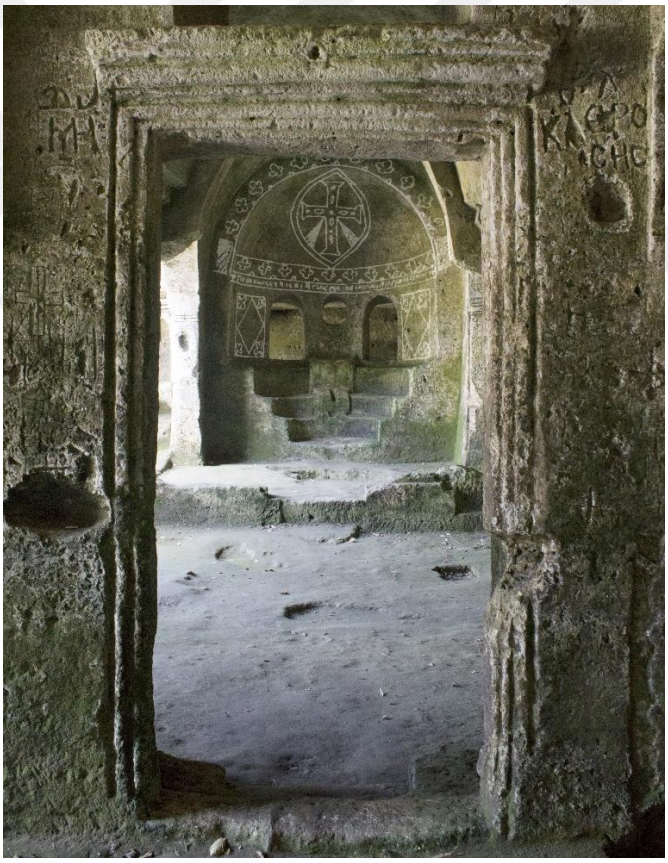

Figure 3.21: Medeia, central door to the naos, looking towards the now-lost apse decoration.

[291] Along these lines, Catherine Vanderheyde notes that a major role of sculptural decoration in churches is to guide the faithful through the space: *La sculpture byzantine du IXe au XVe siècle*, 285.
[292] For similar observations on monumental ceiling crosses in rupestrian churches of Cappadocia, see McMichael, "Rising Above the Faithful."

The decorative program underlines the healing and purifying properties of the holy water and the True Cross. Along these lines, Volker Eid suggests an interpretation of the supremacy of the cross and the water and light symbolism in the iconography as an expression of the hope for redemption and renewal (ἀνανέωσις).[293] Furthermore, many carved details present explicit references to Christ. Such symbolic representation is strongly manifested on the west wall of the *hagiasma* with the projecting eagle *protome* flanked by the letters Α and Ω on the lower brackets (fig. 3.10).[294] Two Christograms decorating the facing column capitals in the *hagiasma* frame the passage to the domed space. Moreover, the wheel motifs on two sides of the central gate denote the eight-armed Christograms, hence the name of Christ (fig. 3.7).

Rock-cut rooms at Medeia contain and connect the points of veneration and, in tandem with carved and painted decoration, channel the pilgrims' movement within the religious complex. The original arrangement of the outer rock façade remains rather obscure. Upon entry to the narthex from the north, the medieval visitors would find themselves in an ornate hall terminating with an open arcade overlooking the *hagiasma* (fig. A.2 sec.1). They could gaze upon the funerary chamber through the window on their right and touch the privileged tomb in the eastern *arcosolium* to receive blessings (fig. 3.19). Back in the narthex, the change in the vaulting system, the symmetrical arrangement of *candelabra* and Christograms, and the encircled cross between two cypress trees emphasize the entrance to the naos. Through the central door, the visitors could see the interior of the basilica and the monumental cross depiction on the apse conch, directing the eye towards the word "*hagiasma*" (fig. 3.21). At the southern end of the narthex, they would find the *hagiasma,* accessed via a rock-cut staircase. Having descended the stairs, they would enter the elaborately carved domed space, at the center of which the holy water was collected in a basin (fig. 3.9). Following the due rituals, the pilgrims would probably take some *eulogia* from the *hagiasma* to have some part of this holiness with them before proceeding to the dark ambulatory corridors. Walking down the three steps at the far end of the southern corridor, they would turn the corner and face the rectangular window into the southeastern corner room of the sanctuary, through which they could admire the precious holdings kept inside (fig. 3.17). Finally,

[293] Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 133.
[294] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 69; Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 132.

they would pass behind the church's apse. The three window openings on the upper level provide an auditory connection to the sanctuary and, during the liturgy, must have allowed the pilgrims to listen to the service on their way out (fig. 3.18).

3.1.3. Pilgrimage Site, Monastery, or Both?

Despite its particular standing in rock-cut space-making, we have no textual sources mentioning the Byzantine monument at Medeia before its abandonment. The travel notes of Hommaire de Hell in the mid-19th century provide the earliest written record of the site. At the time of his visit in 1846, the name and history of what he simply described as "crypts" (*cryptes*) were long lost, unknown to the Orthodox priests in Medeia.[295] Nonetheless, half a century later, the same "crypts," then already restored to be part of the St. Nicholas Monastery, were perceived as artful creations of Early Christian monks.[296] In fact, neither the dedication to St. Nicholas nor the monastic identity can be traced back further than the mid-19th century. The name of St. Nicholas is nowhere to be found in the prayers incised on the walls, as opposed to the later dedication (appendix B). Instead, the name of Christ stands out as the addressee of the medieval graffiti invocations. Furthermore, the graffito that covers the eastern conch of the *hagiasma* is addressed to Theotokos (appendix B, inv. no. 10), while the single medieval graffito observed in the naos includes both *nomina sacra* (appendix B, inv. no. 4).

When it comes to the monastic identification, archaeological evidence remains silent. Rather than a monastic settlement, the spatial layout better corresponds to a pilgrimage complex. Despite the former identification, none of the extant rooms exclusively dictate a monastic use.[297] The site preserves neither living cells for the accommodation of a monastic community nor a refectory nor any other necessary monastic structures. The only evidence for a monastic presence of some sort is the small room at the western end, identified as a single hermit cell in the earlier literature. Whether it was used by a hermit seems irrelevant to our discussion since the carved room is spatially detached

[295] Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, IV: 376.
[296] Lakides, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐπαρχίας Βιζύης καὶ Μηδείας*, 102.
[297] Nicole Thierry considers the funerary room the only surviving monastic structure where the founder hermit and *hegoumenoi* may have been buried. Apart from being entirely hypothetical, the argument is based on the unsound premise that a burial chamber indicates a monastic presence. Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 75–76.

from the rest of the rupestrian monument and the related pilgrimage activity (fig. A.1). It also predates the carving of the larger complex, which will be discussed further in the relative chronology.

The now-lost painted panel outside the apse provides yet another piece of evidence against the monastic identification (fig. 3.14). The inscription arranged on two sides of the cross (Ins. no. 2), reading σταυρὸς ἱερέων καύχημα, refers to priests rather than monks (μοναχῶν) as it would be expected in a monastery. On that note, one should also consider that some members of the monastic communities had both identities, e.g., hieromonks. Still, the lack of any reference to a possible monastic presence in painted inscriptions and graffiti is significant in itself. Additionally, all the names (Arsenios, Joachim, John, Leo, Theodore, etc.) and qualifiers (such as ἁμαρτωλόν and δοῦλον in masculine form) recorded in the graffiti invocations at Medeia belong to men (appendix B). This can be interpreted, at first, as an indication of a male monastic community. However, the lack of female names does not necessarily mean gender segregation since it may be the result of the patterns of literacy in Byzantine society.[298] In this case, whether male or female, the illiterate pilgrims may have drawn the countless cross incisions on the walls as acts of devotion.

What archaeological evidence differentiates pilgrimage activities from monastic living is often not that clear-cut in Byzantium, nor is this functional distinction. Many monasteries famously attracted pilgrims (laypeople, monks, and nuns alike) due to the relics in their possession, often the miracle-working tomb of a hermit or the founder saint.[299] The flow of pilgrims at times affected the church architecture as it did in Hosios Loukas Monastery in the 11th century.[300] Again, in the rupestrian landscape of Cappadocia, the Archangelos Monastery, established around an *hagiasma* near Cemil, later underwent major restoration and expansion to accommodate the needs of the growing number of pilgrims.[301] On the other side of the coin, several sites initially

[298] Female literacy was very low, even among the aristocrats. Oikonomides, "Literacy in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium," 262; Jeffreys, "Literacy," 798.
[299] Talbot, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines," 157; Kotoula, "The Tomb of the Founder-Saint."
[300] Marinis and Ousterhout, "Relics and the Byzantine Church Building," 169; Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 322–24.
[301] Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil, "Recherches récentes sur le monastère rupestre de l'Archangélos"; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 390–95. The chronology of the successive phases is difficult to reconstruct, apart from the 13th-century restoration of the site, dated with an inscription in the wall paintings of the main church to 1217/1218. Uyar, "L'église de l'Archangélos à Cemil."

conceived as pilgrimage shrines later became associated with monastic communities, such as the two Isaurian complexes at Meryemlik and Alahan.[302]

Nevertheless, these patterns are not fully consistent. Not all pilgrimage sites in Byzantium evolved into monasteries. For instance, the extra-urban Christian sanctuaries at Ephesus and Hierapolis are illustrative of non-monastic sites of long-lived pilgrimage activities outside urban centers. The Late Antique church in Pamucak at the harbor canal of Ephesus was the first of many pilgrimage shrines that travelers to the city must have seen from the sea.[303] The most prominent among the pilgrimage attractions of Ephesus was, to be sure, the church of St. John the Evangelist on Ayasuluk Hill, where the holy dust with curative powers, called *manna*, was distributed to the visitors.[304] The rock-cut cemetery on the eastern slope of Panayırdağ, associated with the story of the Seven Sleepers, was another sacred site outside the city that attracted pilgrims from afar.[305] Likewise, the sanctuary of St. Philip the Apostle east of Hierapolis was a renowned center of healing pilgrimage, not directly connected to any monastic communities.[306] The continuous flow of pilgrims was also attested here through archaeological finds, such as *ampullae* and graffiti invocations.

Along similar lines, I argue that the rock-cut complex at Medeia was designed and primarily functioned as a pilgrimage center, where the main attraction was the source of holy water. This is not to say that it did not ever become a monastery in the Middle Ages; however, there is no good reason to insist on the monastic identification either. Theoretically, a monastic community may have settled there at some point in time, yet evidence does not hint at such a transformation before the heavy-handed 19th-century restoration. Whatever the case may have been at Byzantine Medeia, one would expect

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[302] The functional identifications of both sites are disputed. Monastic communities were established near the sanctuary of St. Thecla at Meryemlik and participated in the operation of the healing shrine according to the miracles and pilgrims' accounts. Likewise, the religious complex in Alahan was probably first built as a healing center and then became a monastery at a later phase. See Mango, "Germia: A Postscript," 300; Hill, "When Is a Monastery Not a Monastery?," 139–44; *The Early Byzantine Churches of Cilicia and Isauria*, 68–70; Elton, "Alahan and Zeno," 154.

[303] Sewing, "A Late Antique Pilgrimage Church at the Harbor Canal of Ephesus."

[304] Massive fortification walls surround the hilltop, enclosing the church, baptistery, cisterns, shops, and several other structures. The urban center eventually shifted to Ayasuluk, and the basilica later became the cathedral of Ephesus. Foss, *Ephesus After Antiquity*, 87–92, 135–37; Bangert, "The Archaeology of Pilgrimage," 314–16; Pülz, "Christian Pilgrimage in Ephesus," 230–44.

[305] See footnote 123.

[306] Reached by a processional staircase, the complex consisted of a bath, a monumental martyrion (early 5th century) at the site of the saint's execution, and a basilica with the tomb of the apostle (second half of the 6th century). D'Andria, "Saints and Pilgrims in the Lykos Valley (Asia Minor)."

to find some service structures, at the very least, dwelling units, such as guesthouses for visiting pilgrims or cells for resident monks. In the Late Ottoman monastery of St. Nicholas, the purpose-built cells and the rooms in the house of the *hegoumenos* were available for the visitors to spend the night.[307] Sadly, we lack similar information for the Byzantine period. Arguably, other rock-cut or masonry structures may have existed in the Middle Ages but eventually shared the faith of the now-lost outer rock façade or masonry additions of the 19th century. It is also possible that the pilgrims, other than those who came for incubation, stayed in the nearby Medeia.

Certain parts of the rupestrian complex were not fully accessible to pilgrims due to level differences, narrow openings, window bars, and closed doors. There should have been someone or, more likely, a group of people to regulate the access to these areas. Who then was responsible for running the site and keeping the pilgrimage alive is difficult to answer. Likewise, the patronage remains challenging to reconstruct. The carved details at Medeia are unlike any other Byzantine rock-cut monument. The ambitious design, decorative program, and high-quality workmanship imply a wealthy patron with connections beyond the nearby local center. Only patrons with considerable financial means, for example, could afford the artisans who had the necessary knowledge and skill for the *champlevé* sculpture, emulating the lavish gold and silver enamel church decorations in a relatively less costly manner.[308] Can the episcopal authority in Medeia be held accountable for establishing and managing the pilgrimage site, given its connection to the bishopric center on the Black Sea?

3.1.4. Pilgrimage to the Rock at Medeia Revealed

The material evidence at Medeia presents a long period of use. Still, the overall spatial arrangement is consistent, pointing to a single carving phase, in which the rupestrian complex mostly took its present shape. Rock-cut rooms follow more or less the same alignment except for minor irregularities stemming from the carving process from a solid rock formation. At the core areas, the carving is crisp, and the same decorative cornice runs almost all around the interior (figs. 1.5, 3.8, 3.15, 3.18). The 3D digital models generated from the Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) data and accurate

[307] Stamoule Sarante, "Ἁγιάσματα τῆς Θράκης," 287.
[308] Vanderheyde, *La sculpture byzantine du IXe au XVe siècle*, 154.

architectural drawings that I prepared for the dissertation project capture a previously overlooked discrepancy in the layout.[309] In the funerary chamber, the central niche on the north wall, framing the entrance from the outside, disturbs an otherwise fairly right-angled, rectangular space (fig. A.1). Its positioning does not affect the symmetrical arrangement of the inner façade; therefore, the niche must be contemporary with the initial carving of the rock-cut unit. Nevertheless, its diagonal placement suggests that it postdates some elements on the exterior, including a round niche west of the door opening. The upper half of this niche is razed to form the flat rock façade before the burial chamber. Such chronological sequencing also explains the irrelevance of the roughly carved northwestern room to the rest of the pilgrimage site.

The basilica, ambulatory corridors, *hagiasma*, and funerary chamber appear to have been planned and executed together. The phasing on the carved façade indicates that the possible hermit cell and other rough carvings in the northwest are presumably earlier. This is also supported by the spatial discontinuity and the sharp difference in workmanship. Besides, the northwestern room displays no graffiti other than a doodle of a deer and apparently has no relation to the pilgrimage activity. Regardless of the function and chronology, its presence seems to have played little to no role in the formation of the larger complex and the pilgrims' experiences within.

Initially, the rocky hillside outside Medeia may have housed natural cavities from which the water spring emerged, eventually becoming the center of local pilgrimage activity.[310] An ascetic may have started altering the cave spaces in the northwest and settled there. This must have been followed by the carving and decoration of the larger complex to accommodate the pilgrimage to the holy spring and other objects of veneration, then on, kept in the rupestrian monument.[311] The rectangular window in the narthex, framed by two narrow decorative niches, makes the burial chamber accessible to the pilgrims (figs. 3.8, A.2 sec.1). The rhythmical arrangement of blind niches on the west wall illustrates that the opening into the eastern *arcosolium*, hence the funerary room, was hewn out as part of the same undertaking. The window in the

[309] The earlier plan drawings fail to represent this irregularity, which is hardly perceptible in person.
[310] Schaffer, "Archäologische Beobachtungen," 66.
[311] Along similar lines, Nicole Thierry proposed two principal carving phases in which the "small western hermitage" (*le petit ermitage occidental*) predates the rock-cut complex. Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 75.

southeastern compartment of the sanctuary, however, must have been carved after the ambulatory corridor since it interrupts the decorative cornice under the vaulting (fig. 3.17). Nonetheless, the sanctuary arrangement suggests a preplanning for the corner room. Therefore, the interruption of the cornice may have been simply the result of a miscalculation of levels.

The relative chronology aside, dating the main carving phase is challenging. The individual units in the rupestrian complex follow rather traditional forms, such as the three-aisle basilican plan type of the church. Although centralized spatial layouts gradually became the norm in Byzantine religious architecture from the 6th century onwards, the construction of basilicas—covered with timber roofs or barrel vaults—has, in fact, never been abandoned. Some architectural elements at Medeia neither faithfully follow the masonry models nor correspond to the structural logic that their forms suggest. These include the domes rising from flat ceilings and the corbelling under the barrel vaults (figs. 3.9–10, 3.19). Similar variations of built elements are frequently re-rendered in rock-cut spaces seeking to capture a creative imitation of masonry architecture.[312]

The only securely dated material at the site is a graffito invocation carved on the staircase leading to the *hagiasma*, recording the name *kyr* Theodore Philanthropenos Sagopoulos and the year 1092/1093 (appendix B, inv. no. 8) (fig. 3.22). By its very nature, however, a graffito represents a later phase in the history of a monument, not the initial carving or construction. Consequently, the historical framework relies on stylistic comparisons, in particular, those of the carved decoration. Nicole Thierry proposed a date in the Late Antique period based on assumed similarities of architectural sculpture to some 6th-century monuments in Constantinople and Ravenna.[313] This interpretation is commonly accepted and repeated in later publications without further questioning.[314]

[312] See chapter 2.2.1.
[313] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 67–68, 75.
[314] Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 137; Ousterhout, "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace," 490–91.

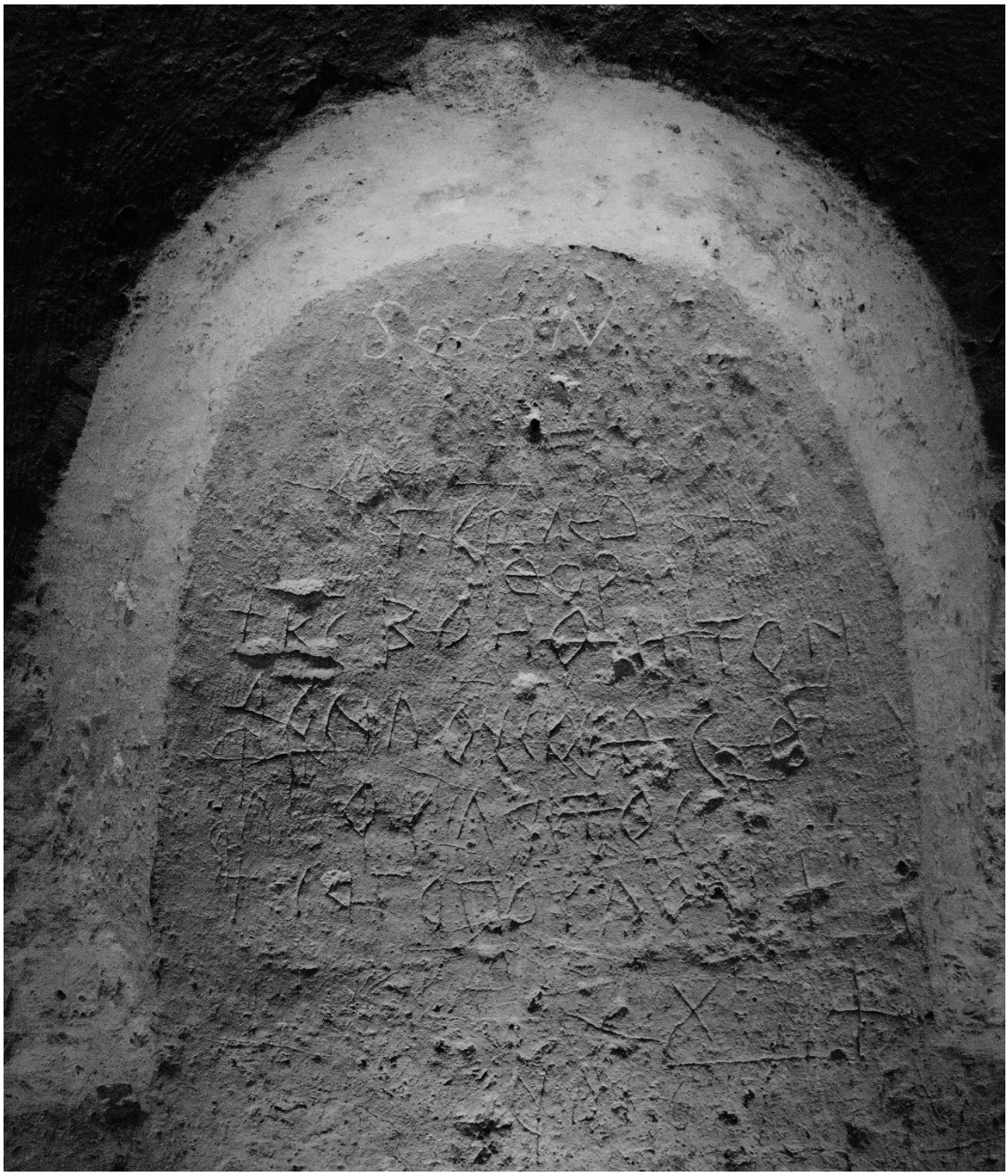

Figure 3.22: Medeia, graffito invocation of kyr Theodore on the back wall of the staircase to the *hagiasma*, dated 1092/1093.

Accordingly, the carving technique of the *hagiasma* capitals has been compared to the 6th-century high-relief sculptures, especially the church of St. Polyeuktos (completed ca 522) in Constantinople.[315] Nevertheless, the technique employed at Medeia is entirely different. These column capitals display flat designs raised on chiseled-out

[315] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 67–68; Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 137.

backgrounds rather than having a three-dimensional quality (figs. 1.5, 3.10–11). In *champlevé* sculpture, the lower fields are painted or inlaid with colored mixtures to underline the decorative patterns, which must have been particularly useful in the dimly lit rupestrian interior. Although well-known from the Early Byzantine period, the inlaid decoration on architecture and liturgical furniture virtually disappeared from Byzantine artistic production after the 6th century to re-emerge in the Middle Byzantine period. The *champlevé* technique then experienced a revival all around the Mediterranean in the 10th century and was continuously applied until the end of the 15th century.[316]

The iconography of carved ornaments at Medeia has been previously interpreted within the Early Christian symbolism, which was then, in addition to the carving technique, referred to as an indication of a Late Antique date.[317] Concentric frames, chevron patterns, central cross depictions on plain backgrounds, Christograms, and stylized vegetal motifs accompanied by birds and other animals are indeed part of the vocabulary of Early Christian imagery. However, they do not dictate a Late Antique date since similar decorative themes and classicizing iconography persist in church decoration throughout the Middle Ages. For example, a parapet slab from the St. John Basilica at Ephesus, dated to the 8th-9th centuries, features a composition recalling the *hagiasma* capitals at Medeia with symmetrically arranged vine branches coming out from a *kantharos* with birds within the scrolls pecking at bunches of grapes.[318]

Two Middle Byzantine churches are of particular interest to our discussion not only because of their decorative program but also because of the extensive use of the *champlevé* technique: Panagia Episkopi Church in Santorini and the Basilica of San Marco in Venice. In a way similar to the carvings of the *hagiasma*, half of the *templon* capitals in the former, dated to the late 11th or 12th century, display central fountain motifs flanked by birds.[319] The Basilica of San Marco presents valuable *comparanda* from the second half of the 11th century. The ionic impost capitals on the engaged

[316] Pedone, "La scultura champlevé negli edifici medio-bizantini," 17, 22; "Il colore scolpito"; "Byzantine Sculpture in Hierapolis"; Barsanti, "Una nota sulla diffusione della scultura a incrostazione," esp. 517; Vanderheyde, *La sculpture byzantine du IXe au XVe siècle*, 149–56.
[317] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 67–73.
[318] Catalog no: 61; museum inv. no: 1594. Büyükkolancı, "Quelques exemples de plaques de parapet des VIIe-XIIe siècles," 72.
[319] Barsanti and Pedone, "Una nota sulla scultura ad incrostazione e il templon della Panaghia Episcopi di Santorini."

columns in the naos are richly decorated with stylized vines growing out of cornucopias, lion heads, and, more significantly, *kantharoi*, all executed in *the champlevé* technique.[320] Additionally, carved candle sticks, encircled Christograms, stylized cypress trees, and vine foliage sprouting from vases are elements of the relief decoration on parapet slabs in Venice, as they are at Medeia.[321]

As illustrated with the above examples, the comparisons forming the basis for the previous chronological argument do not necessarily indicate an early date. The iconography of sculptural decoration has a classicizing program, yet neither the use of similar compositions and motifs nor the carving technique employed at Media is limited to the Late Antique examples. Besides, the rupestrian complex presents some yet-overlooked details that do not fit well into the 6th-century dating but instead suggest a *terminus post quem* in the 9th century. In the literature, the column capitals of the *hagiasma* were considered the same type as the basket capitals of Binbirdirek Cistern in Constantinople and Hagia Sophia Church in Thessaloniki.[322] On the contrary, the ones at Medeia have diagonally cut fields at the corners, resulting in an irregular octagon shape near the base (fig. 3.11). Their form corresponds to the impost capitals with beveled edges (*Kämpferkapitelle mit abgeschrägten Kanten*), the earliest known example of which has been discovered at Derağzı Church in Lycia, dated to the second half of the 9th or early 10th century.[323] In this type of column capitals, like those in Medeia, the larger trapezoidal areas frame a variety of intricate compositions, and the triangular fields at the corners are often decorated with simple geometric or stylized vegetal motifs.[324]

Carved bands imitating dogtooth friezes, a decorative element of masonry architecture executed with bricks placed at a 45-degree angle, provide another chronological indication against the Late Antique dating. At Medeia, such elements decorate the

[320] Buchwald, "The Carved Stone Ornament of the High Middle Ages in San Marco, Venice."
[321] Grabar, *Sculptures Byzantines du Moyen Age*, II:75–80, Pl. XLV, XLVI, L, LI.
[322] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 67.
[323] Dennert, *Mittelbyzantinische Kapitelle*, 135–42; Niewöhner, *Byzantine Ornaments in Stone*, 155. For the example in Dereağzı, see Morganstern, *The Byzantine Church at Dereağzı*, 140–42. I thank Albena Milanova for drawing my attention to this type of column capital during a site visit as part of the BRIA project in 2022.
[324] Dennert, *Mittelbyzantinische Kapitelle*, Catalog nos. 290–307. On a side note, cypress tree motifs, almost identical to the one on the southeastern *hagiasma* capital in Medeia, are incised on the corners of an impost capital of the same type exhibited in the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, ascribed to the 9th-10th centuries.

curvilinear wall behind the main apse and the arched entrance to the southeastern corner room of the sanctuary (figs. 3.15, 3.18). These are rather unusual examples, not only for being rock-cut imitations but also for their application inside the church complex rather than on the outer façades. In masonry tradition, dogtooth friezes, often with recessed courses, articulate the exteriors and outline the arched openings of the churches in the so-called *Helladic school*, whereas, in the region around Constantinople, similar brickwork decorations are almost exclusively found at the uppermost levels of the walls and dome drums.[325] The earliest securely dated example is from the church of the Virgin at Skripou (Orchomenos) in Boeotia, built in 873/874.[326] Many scholars question the authenticity of the present dogtooth roof copings in and around the Byzantine capital; the first known examples are also attributed to the 9th and 10th centuries.[327] Whether following a prototype from Constantinople that is now difficult to pinpoint or confirming a more general architectural trend, this type of brickwork decoration became widely applied in Byzantine architecture from the 9th century onward.

The now-gone wall paintings in the sanctuary also contribute to the discussion of chronology. Whether executed shortly after the carving or much later, the non-figurative composition in the apse vault is an evocative image that transforms the space and experiences within (figs. 3.14, 3.21). Surely, the cross as a prominent figure in church interiors is beyond time limits in Byzantium. On the one hand, the monumental cross motif at Medeia, possibly a symbolic representation of the Transfiguration of Christ, conforms well with the iconoclastic mindset. In the scholarship, this line of interpretation has consequently led to its attribution to the Iconoclastic period (ca 726-787 and 815-843), more specifically to the 9th century, in analogy with the apse mosaic

[325] Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 360, 413.
[326] The decorative band surrounds the building horizontally at a lower level, framing the arched windows. Papalexandrou, "The Church of the Virgin of Skripou," esp. 102–3.
[327] Fatih Cami in Trilye (Zeytinbağı) on the southern coast of Marmara, dated to the early 9th century, features a double dogtooth band below the eaves line of the cylindrical dome drum. Mango and Ševčenko, "Southern Shore of the Sea of Marmara," 236–38. Its originality is disputable. Sacit Pekak attributes the dogtooth decoration to the restoration after the mid-19th-century earthquake. *Trilye (Zeytinbağı) Fatih Camisi*, esp. 138, 141. Myrelaion Church (Bodrum Cami, 920) and the Church of St. John in Troullo (Hirami Ahmed Paşa Cami, late 9th or early 10th century) present the two earliest known applications of dogtooth friezes in Constantinople. Cecil Striker attributes them to the Ottoman repairs without much discussion. *The Myrelaion (Bodrum Camii) in Istanbul*, 21–22. Matthew Savage suggests that dogtooth friezes were part of the original façade decoration in Byzantine churches of Constantinople, even though the later repairs largely affected the present appearance of the exteriors and upper structures. "Dome 'Typology' in Byzantine Constantinople?," esp. 140–41.

of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople.[328] Interestingly, though, even the Iconoclastic character of the aniconic decoration of Hagia Eirene has recently been called into question, and instead, the interim period between the two Iconoclastic episodes has been suggested for the apse mosaic in the Byzantine capital.[329] On the other hand, such a decorative program would not be alien either before or in the period shortly after the Iconoclasm.[330] Along these lines, an alternative interpretation places the apse decoration at Medeia in the 6th century on the premise that the prominent crosses were much more common in the Late Antique churches than represented in the scholarship.[331]

The painted inscriptions in the sanctuary (Ins. nos. 1 and 2) illuminate this point further. The one in the apse vault is a quotation from Psalm 92 (93): 5. The same biblical text appears in the apses of a handful of Byzantine and Armenian churches. Although it cannot be considered alone as a chronological marker, the known examples in the Byzantine context concentrate on the period between the 8th and 12th centuries.[332] The now-lost church of St. George in Selymbria (Silivri) shows a geographically close example in Eastern Thrace, attributed to the Middle Byzantine period.[333] The apse inscriptions at Medeia, as recorded by Semavi Eyive, display round letterforms with extensive use of serifs and decorative bars. The line thickness changes in individual letters, as if written with a calligraphy pen. These characteristics are shared with the 6th-century ornate script that continued to be used with alterations into the 9th and 10th

[328] Eyice and Thierry, "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye," 76; Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Pour une problématique de la peinture d'église byzantine a l'époque iconoclaste," 324.

[329] Dendrochronological analysis suggests a *terminus post quem* in 796±19 for the restoration of the monument, promoting the iconophile Empress Irene (780-802) as the patron. See Kuniholm et al., "Of Harbors and Trees," 62; Niewöhner, "The Significance of the Cross before, during, and after Iconoclasm," 219.

[330] Similarly, several non-figural wall paintings in Cappadocian churches, previously identified as iconoclastic decorations, are now placed in the late 9th or early 10th centuries. Among others, see Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 198–204.

[331] Eid, "Quelle lebendigen Wassers.," 137; Niewöhner, "The Significance of the Cross before, during, and after Iconoclasm," 199.

[332] An early example as part of an apse decoration was painted in the church of Mren (7th century). The biblical quotation was inscribed in mosaic on the triumphal arches in Koimesis Church in Nicaea (before 720s) and the catholicon of Hosios Loukas Monastery in Phocis (ca 1011-1022), as well as on the arch of the southern apse of Martorana Church in Palermo (1143). Maranci, "'Holiness Befits Your House' (Ps. 92 [93]: 5)," 246–51.

[333] The church is only known from the descriptions of John Covel, chaplain of the Levant Company, who visited Selymbria in 1675. Similar to the placement of the apse inscription at Medeia, Covel documents the text "about the skirt" of "the cupola over ἅγιον βῆμα." *Voyages En Turquie 1675-1677*, 52. Paul Magdalino identifies the five illegible characters at each end of the inscription as pseudo-Kufic and argues for a Middle Byzantine date. "Byzantine Churches of Selymbria," 316.

centuries.[334] Other paleographic traits at Medeia favor a date towards the end of this timespan.[335] All things considered, a date in the early Middle Byzantine period, either during the Iconoclastic controversy or after 843, is plausible for the inscriptions and, thereby, the wall paintings in the sanctuary.[336]

To conclude, the rupestrian site at Medeia must have acquired its present form in the early Middle Byzantine period in response to the pilgrimage to the source of holy water emerging from the rocky outcrop by the river (fig. 3.5). The elaborate decorations on the *hagiasma* capitals are executed in the *champlevé* technique rather than high relief sculpture, previously used as a basis for the 6th-century dating (fig. 3.11). Catherine Vanderheyde remarks on the relatively early reappearance of such intricate inlaid decoration in Constantinople and neighboring regions, especially Bulgaria, in the 9th century.[337] The location of Medeia in Eastern Thrace and the influence of the Byzantine capital on its artistic production are important to note in this context. The classicizing iconography, interpreted within the Early Christian symbolism in the literature, also finds comparison in later material. More significantly, the type of column capitals and carved imitations of dogtooth bands indicate a date after the 9th century (fig. 3.18). In this case, the painted decoration in the sanctuary, formerly accepted to be a later intervention in a Late Antique basilica, must be, in fact, roughly contemporary with the carving of the complex (fig. 3.14). Not much distant in time, the first mention of the toponym Medeia in Byzantine chronicles is related to the events of a severe winter in the 8th century.[338] The revised dating of the monument also corresponds to the first

[334] The most representative examples are the inscriptions in the churches of St. Polyeuktos and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople; the same type of writing is also applied in the apse mosaic of Hagia Eirene. Mango, "Byzantine Epigraphy," 244–45.

[335] The letter ι, for example, is written smaller in four instances as if joined together with the two neighboring letters. In πρέπι and καύχιμα, the *iota* hangs between the adjacent characters above the lower line. It is sheltered under the horizontal bar of the *gamma* in the word ἁγίασμα, following an epigraphic tendency that became increasingly frequent towards the 10th century. The *omega* on the first line of the inscription no. 2 is drawn with two curved sides and a center in the form of a majuscule *lambda*, a letterform indicative of the 9th-10th centuries. Mango, 245–46. The *rho* with a long vertical stroke extending above the lobe is an older form that continued to be applied in the 8th and 9th centuries. Mango, "The Byzantine Church at Vize (Bizye)," 13: footnote 14.

[336] Based on the paleographic characteristics of the inscription, both Nikolaos Moutsopoulos and Catherine Asdracha favor a 9th-century date. Moutsopoulos, "La Morphologie des inscriptions byzantines et post-byzantines," 77: Pl. 3; Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, II: 251.

[337] Vanderheyde, *La sculpture byzantine du IXe au XVe siècle*, 151.

[338] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 520. Theophanes the Confessor and Patriarch Nikephoros described the notoriously cold winter in 762-3 when the coastal region of the Black Sea between Mesembria and Medeia froze over. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 600–601; Mango, *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History*, 144–49.

appearance of Medeia as an episcopal see in the *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*.[339]

The exceptional workmanship, elaborate architectural sculpture, and application of the *champlevé* technique demonstrate a high level of patronage. Graffiti invocations on the rock walls testify to a continuous use (appendix B). Their concentration between the 9th and 11th centuries signals the heydays of the pilgrimage, whereas no earlier examples have been yet detected.[340] Until around the mid-10th century, Medeia and its surrounding area were mentioned in historical sources as a borderland with the First Bulgarian Empire.[341] As such, the fortified town became a place of refuge for the inhabitants of neighboring settlements, including Bizye, when it was occupied by the Bulgarians under Tsar Simeon in 924/925.[342] The only securely dated graffito in the complex gives a date from the late 11th century (appendix B, inv. no. 8), more than a century later than the consolidation of Byzantine control in Eastern Thrace (fig. 3.22).[343] It records the name of *kyr* Theodore Philanthropenos Sagopoulos, a man of high social standing with strong family connections.[344]

Three graffiti invocations in the narthex and *hagiasma* are valuable for attesting to the continuous visits by the pilgrims in the last centuries of Byzantium (appendix B, inv. nos. 1, 9, and 10) (fig. 3.20). In this period, the rupestrian complex was partly restored. Following the model of the crypt in the Monastery of Zoodochos Pege (Balıklı Meryem Ana), the *hagiasma* space was redecorated with isolated painted figures under the dome

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[339] Medeia was listed as a suffragan of the Metropolis of Herakleia in the *Notitia* 3 and continuously appeared in the lists as such after the *Notitia* 7 (901-907). In the 14th century, it became an archbishopric and, shortly after that, was recorded as a metropolis without suffragans. See *Notitiae* 3^{169}, 7^{165}, 9^{61}, 10^{61}, 13^{64}, 17^{125}, $18^{145, 153}$, 19^{124}, and 21^{55}: Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 234, 275, 297, 311, 355, 402, 408–9, 414, 420.

[340] More than 65% of the dated pilgrims' graffiti is attributed to the period, mainly relying on paleographic evidence.

[341] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 520. Especially after the Byzantine defeat at Boulgarophygon (Babaeski) in the summer of 896, the Bulgarians expanded their power in Eastern Thrace, and Medeia became a frontier zone. Gjuzelev, "Il Mar nero ed il suo litorale," 17. In the life of St. Euthymios (*BHG* 651), composed between 920-925, Medeia was described as a town neighboring the Bulgarians in the anecdote concerning the accusation of a Paphlagonian hermit named Niketas. Karlin-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP*, 104–7.

[342] *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 700–701. For an English translation, see Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 276–79.

[343] The Byzantine control on the western Black Sea coast was fully reinstated in the second half of the 10th century. John I Tzimiskes (969-976) conquered the eastern half of the Bulgarian Empire, including the Bulgarian capital Veliki Preslav, in 972. Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 72–73; Gjuzelev, "Il Mar nero ed il suo litorale," 17–18.

[344] Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, III 316–17.

in the 14th century or later (fig. 3.12). Accordingly, the restoration reveals an emulation of Constantinopolitan architecture and signifies artistic connections with the Byzantine capital.

The rupestrian shrine must have functioned as a landmark immediately outside Medeia, a primary local center on the Black Sea littoral. Probably after a rockslide, the site was abandoned and remained partly buried for an unknown period of time. The cult of the holy water continued on a more modest scale. Following the medieval graffiti, the earliest date incised on the walls is from the 18th century. In the mid-19th century, the inhabitants of Medeia restored the monument and founded a monastery. The monastic establishment incorporated rock-cut and masonry elements and owned lands to respond to the needs of the monks and visiting pilgrims. It later acquired a dedication to St. Nicholas. Since then, numerous scribbles written in Greek, Bulgarian, and Turkish have covered the rock walls, as a rule, recording the date of execution and name of the person to leave a memory of their visit. Today, the site is a local tourist attraction, popular among newlywed couples for photoshoots. The visitors are welcomed with the davul beats played by its voluntary caretaker for nearly half a century, a Romani-Turkish resident of Kıyıköy, former Medeia/Midye.[345] The monument itself is the only testimony to the flocks of pilgrims and their hopes for recovery and spiritual transformation. Its particular standing in rock-cut architecture represents a pinnacle of the artistic production of Byzantine Thrace and reflects the broader connections of the region.

3.2. Conclusion

Pilgrimage is intangible. What we can study through material evidence are its sporadic remains, such as flasks and tokens produced at pilgrimage sites, graffiti invocations that pilgrims left behind, and spaces themselves created or sometimes rearranged for large groups of visitors. Textual evidence that we lack for the pilgrimage to extra-urban rupestrian shrines in the Strandzha region is occasionally available for the pilgrimage activities in the primary local centers. The life of St. Mary the Younger narrates a local cult formed around the tomb of the holy women in Bizye in the early 10th century. Due

[345] Hamdi Kaya, whose main source of income is the tips given by tourists, maintains and safeguards the site from treasure hunters.

to the posthumous miracles, the saint's body was transferred to a church built by her husband specifically for the purpose. The pilgrimage was initially not connected to a monastic community, and nearly twenty-five years passed after the saint's death for a monastery to be established around the church containing her relics.[346]

The miracle stories in the *vita* are almost exclusively about the population from the close environment of Bizye: the incredulous witnessing a miracle, the sick healed through physical contact with the tomb or the bodily remains of the saint, or those delivered from demonic possessions. The reputation of the miracle-working relics of Mary seems to have been limited to Eastern Thrace, with Rhaidestos (Tekirdağ) on the Marmara Sea being the farthest locality mentioned, 70 km in the south.[347] As in this example, most pilgrimage sites in Byzantium mainly served people living nearby who required only a short trip for a visit rather than appealing to the crowds of long-distance travelers.[348] Even the word that the Byzantines used for pilgrimage, *proskynesis*, simply meant veneration, placing emphasis on the action in the presence of the actual object of the pilgrimage, as opposed to the Latin word *peregrinatio*, which refers to a journey to distant, foreign lands.[349] On the other side of the coin, the landscape relations and connections to the maritime network, riverways, and major land routes indicate easily accessible complexes at Medeia and in Yarımburgaz, attracting not only locals but potentially also those traveling to and from Constantinople. Still, the pilgrimage was mostly a local phenomenon, which also accounts for the wide variation of the sites identified with such activities and the absence of standard typologies for pilgrimage architecture in Byzantium.

The thread that unites the rupestrian shrine outside Medeia with other case studies briefly discussed in this chapter is their reception of sacredness. In their respective local landscapes, these sites present distinguishable, outstanding elements, which made them places of pilgrimage to the rock even before the human alteration. At Medeia, the rock formation has been completely altered to structure the pilgrims' movement. The spatial experience was well-calculated and instructed by the architecture, affording an

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[346] *Life of St. Mary the Younger*, XXVII: *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 702–703; Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 280–81. Also, see chapter 5.
[347] Laiou, esp. 240–41. Other toponyms include Medeia (Kıyıköy), Karabizye (Demirköy), Brysis (Pınarhisar), and Arcadiopolis (Lüleburgaz).
[348] Bangert, "The Archaeology of Pilgrimage," 295.
[349] Maraval, "The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage," 63; Ousterhout, "Pilgrimage Architecture," 52.

engagement with the objects and places of veneration embedded in the bedrock only in certain, controlled ways. Human intervention is almost to a degree of concealing the material in which it was carved out. Such an approach virtually overshadows the agency of nature, although collaboration between humans and other beings is inescapable in rock-cut architecture. On the opposite side of the spectrum is Yarımburgaz Cave in the Thracian hinterland of Constantinople. Here, the human-altered elements and regularized rock surfaces interact with and are complemented by natural cave spaces formed circa one million years before the present, in the Middle Pleistocene era. Despite the stark contrast in the level and nature of human intervention, in either case, it was the people living nearby who defined such places of religious significance as worth remembering and maintaining. The next chapter focuses on how these people carved out their settlements from the rupestrian landscapes and lived, produced, and conducted their daily business in the Strandzha region.

Chapter 4

INHABITING THE LAY SETTLEMENTS

The history of Thrace, now dissected between three nation-states, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece, is one of constant displacements and waves of migration, from which the family history of the author, a native of the region, also takes its share. The current demographics of Thrace have been reshuffled with mass population movements in the early 20th century, a process that culminated in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and population exchange between Greece and Turkey (1922-1924). More recently, during the Big Excursion of 1989, hundreds of thousands of Turks, Pomaks, Romani, and Muslims of other ethnicities from the Northern Thrace and wider Bulgaria left their homes to be resettled in Turkey, mainly in Eastern Thrace. Today, the fluid southeastern border of the European Union goes across the region, witnessing the passage of thousands of irregular migrants every year, hoping for a better future beyond the Thracian borders.[350]

Such demographic changes have afflicted the historical continuity in the region, making it a challenge to benefit from ethnoarchaeology for the reconstruction of the past. Still, the ways in which the present inhabitants of the land engage with their surroundings show affordances of the landscape, suggestive of possible past usages. At times, the places now associated with a specific activity in villages happen to be signposted by Byzantine rock-cut monuments. This reflects an awareness of what that landscape could afford by both past and present societies and implies parallels between medieval and contemporary land use.

Accordingly, whether in monastic or lay settings, Byzantine inhabitants of the land transformed and used what was present in their living landscapes. As such, naturally available rocky material assumed diverse functions in the life and death of rural communities in the region. Though unevenly distributed and fragmentarily preserved, human interventions on rock outcrops show various ways people co-fabricated

[350] For recent statistics on migration movements, see the UNHCR Operational Data Portal. "Mediterranean Situation, Greece." Accessed January 23, 2024. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179; BNR Radio Bulgaria. "Bulgaria prevented about 180,000 illegal entry attempts in 2023." Accessed January 23, 2024. https://bnr.bg/en/post/101936050/bulgaria-prevented-about-180000-illegal-entry-attempts-in-2023.

landscapes with other-than-human beings. Offering insights into the life revolving outside the fortified settlements in the Strandzha region, this yet-overlooked archaeological material complements our understanding of Byzantine Thrace and the living conditions of rural communities in Byzantium at large.

This chapter is about the lay settlements and people who inhabited the rupestrian landscapes of the Strandzha region, whereas in the next one, I examine monastic place-making and community building. A clear-cut distinction between lay and monastic communities is not always possible nor meaningful for Byzantine society. They lived and produced in the same landscapes and positioned themselves according to one another. It is neither possible nor practical to treat them in complete isolation. Therefore, the final two chapters of the dissertation should be considered complementary.

In the following pages, I first discuss how rock-cut architecture became a means to demarcate the limits of inhabited areas, divide lands with valuable resources between village communities, and form commemorative landscapes. Then, I survey the economic activities in the Strandzha region through textual sources and interpret the related archaeological evidence on rocky terrains, particularly stone quarries, underground storage units, and winemaking installations. After the discussions on the settlement level and reconstruction of production areas, the third section is dedicated to the only surviving example of a rock-cut house in Thrace and its representational value in a predominantly masonry-built environment.

4.1. Drawing Boundaries and Carving up Landscapes

Extensive woodlands, the main source of income for many village communities in the Strandzha region, start immediately from the sea level and are bordered by the highly cultivated river plains in the south. The undulating topography and forest dissect the terrain between the coastal and inland areas. In the region' southeast, a hilly, wooded landscape stretches between two primary medieval settlements: the inland city of Bizye (Vize) and Medeia (Kıyıköy) on the Black Sea. The thick vegetation cover makes it almost impossible to see even a few steps ahead in this landscape outside the village centers and modern roads. In such a rough and wooded terrain, the valleys and seasonally wet riverbeds are the only possible paths that would allow those familiar with the landscape to navigate within (fig. 4.1).

Figure 4.1: The valley of a seasonally wet river near Direkli Mağara in the forestland between Bizye (Vize) and Medeia (Kıyıköy).

The *vita* of St. Mary the Younger informs us about the community connections across this landscape in the 10th century. Accordingly, when Bulgarians under Tsar Simeon took Bizye following a five-year blockade in 924/925, the Byzantine inhabitants burned down their houses and left the city to take refuge inside the walls of Medeia, ca 30 km northeast on the coast. Among them, a priest called Niketas Kannakes decided to return to Bizye under Bulgarian occupation to venerate the miracle-working tomb of St. Mary. Yet, he was captured by the Bulgarians somewhere close to the city. After he explained himself and told them about the miracles of the holy women, the head of the Bulgarian garrison stationed in Bizye, Voulias, invited him to stay in the city. However, Niketas did not want to be apart from his kin living in Medeia. Instead, he obtained a special permission to travel back and forth to celebrate liturgy in the church where the saint's relics were kept.[351] The coastal city and its hinterland remained relatively secure when the conflict between the two major powers in the Balkans at the time was the fiercest. Niketas managed to go all the way back to the walls of Bizye without getting caught, which further demonstrates the difficulty of controlling the

[351] *Life of St. Mary the Younger*, XXIII-XXIV: *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 700–701. For an English translation, Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 276–79.

forestland between the two cities. The fact that he decided to travel through the forest each and every time to celebrate the liturgy in the church of Mary in Bizye implies a relatively easy journey across this landscape for someone local and familiar with it.

4.1.1. Balkaya: Landscape of a Medieval Village

Four outlying rock-cut churches around the village of Balkaya (former Apartos), roughly midway between Bizye and Medeia, mark the very landscape trodden by Niketas.[352] Three of them are on the outskirts of the village, in a narrow strip of agricultural fields and open land used for stacking firewood, timber, and burning charcoal, all products of the forest (figs. A.3–6). These liminal areas are confined by the forest on which the village life is heavily dependent. A few km outside, another church complex is carved on a seasonally wet riverbed, which defines a path to move across the forestland (figs. A.7–8). The location also corresponds to the natural border with the neighboring village, Kömürköy (Pinakas). Later alterations and reuse of these rupestrian monuments complicate a chronological argument. Yet, a group of slip-painted ceramic sherds from the two-aisled church in the cemetery area in the southwest, *Balkaya church no. 1*, provides evidence of a Late Byzantine phase (fig. A.9).[353] The clustering of these outlying churches around Balkaya signals a small, unwalled medieval settlement at the site and offers invaluable information about the historical land use.

Byzantine villages had multiple churches serving different purposes. The parish church was usually at a central location, and the family churches were among the houses or agricultural fields connected to family properties. Smaller churches, often with funerary associations, stood at the sites of significance on the peripheries of villages.[354]

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[352] Balkaya churches have been briefly mentioned in previous survey reports and the related TIB volume. Ertuğrul, "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması," 5–6; Beksaç, "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 35; "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2005 Yüzey Araştırması," 197–98; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 253–54. They are also partly included in the two inventory projects: Archaeological Settlements of Turkey (TAY) and Kırklareli Cultural Assets Inventory (Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri).

[353] The group indicates a date between the 13th and 15th centuries. They have a glassy appearance on a brownish orange un-slipped background. The surface decorations include wavy and curved linear designs in pale yellow and dark green, executed with a thick layer of slip. The site also provides post-medieval glazed ceramics and coarse wares. I thank Stefania Skartsis and Nikos Kontogiannis for identifying the ceramic material from Balkaya.

[354] Gerstel, "The Byzantine Village Church," esp. 166; *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 29–30.

Lucia Nixon interprets the latter category as indispensable elements of rural life and in the process of "making a landscape sacred" in her diachronic study of outlying churches (ἐξωκκλήσια) and icon stands (ἐικονοστάσια) in Southwestern Crete.[355] She formulates their primary function as to symbolically mark the roads and resources, preserve the memory of a site, or merely draw the borders of an inhabited land.[356]

The excavations at Kalavasos-Kopetra in Cyprus provide an illustrative example of the demarcation of the territory of a Byzantine village by similar structures. Two basilicas at two extremities of the site outline the unwalled settlement area inhabited by roughly a hundred families between the 6th and mid-7th centuries. Together with a small monastery on a nearby hill, they are interpreted as physical and social markers on the landscape that highlight the primary approaches to the village settlement.[357] In Cappadocia, too, outlying churches are carved in the volcanic cones around the Middle Byzantine settlements in Selime-Yaprakhisar and Açıksaray, drawing a sacred boundary at the fringes of settled areas.[358] Likewise, the outlying churches at Balkaya are at the two ends of the village on the road between Bizye and Medeia (fig. A.8). These monuments partake in the sacred landscape around the medieval settlement and inscribe a territorial border where the settled and cultivated land joins the forest. They also underline certain activities and land resources in the immediate surroundings of the village.

Two rupestrian churches are located southwest of the settlement, in the direction of Bizye (fig. A.3). Here, I have identified a total of ten rock-cut tombs, yet the number may increase with a systematic surface cleaning, which I was not allowed to do during my surveys in 2021. Many are carved on the rocky ground between the two funerary churches, approximately fifty meters apart. The one in the northwest, *Balkaya church no. 1*, is the largest in the immediate surroundings of the medieval village, 6.7 m wide and 7.5 m long (fig. A.4). It also happens to be the only two-aisled church in the region, the southern aisle being as twice as wide as the northern one. The dividing rock wall

[355] Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred*, esp. 2–4.
[356] Athanassios Vionis makes similar observations for Naxos and Cyprus and interprets the village churches in liminal locations as markers of settlement areas, agricultural properties, and other places of significance for the village communities. "The Spatiality of the Byzantine/ Medieval Rural Church."
[357] Rautman and McClellan, "Excavations at Late Roman Kopetra (Cyprus)"; Rautman, "The Villages of Byzantine Cyprus," 456–58; *A Cypriot Village of Late Antiquity*, esp. 147–55.
[358] Kalas, "Sacred Boundaries and Protective Borders"; Öztürk Büke, "Questioning Boundaries in Byzantine Cappadocia"; "Byzantine Settlements in Cappadocia," esp. 98–99.

in between is pierced by at least two arched openings, from which only the eastern one is preserved, connecting the two sanctuary bays (fig. 4.2). A long carving under the arch indicates a door frame controlling the passage. A relief cross with splayed arms decorates the smaller apse conch in the north.[359] Additionally, decorative blind arches articulate the side walls of the northern bay on the upper level, whereas three tiny niches are carved on the back wall of the main apse. The interior is well-equipped for the liturgy. The church furniture includes a sizable underground crypt at the eastern end of the nave, above which the now-lost altar table must have stood, a two-stepped curvilinear bench in the apse, a *cathedra* under the relief cross in the north,[360] a *prothesis* niche on the north wall, and a water basin outside the naos. Three tombs are carved side by side on the protruding rock mass in the southeast beside the church space. These are too small for adults but probably intended for infant burials. The one at the center has an *anthropomorphic* form with a wider western side to outline the shoulders and an indentation for the head, facing east.

Figure 4.2: Balkaya church no. 1, looking towards the southern apse.

The asymmetrical two-aisled layout is rare but not without comparisons. Several churches with double aisles are carved out from the volcanic landscapes of Cappadocia. These are mostly dated after the 9th century, yet earlier examples also exist both in

[359] The earlier survey reports mention fragmentary wall paintings on the ceiling in reddish brown and black, yet no traces are visible today. Beksaç, "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 35; "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2005 Yüzey Araştırması," 197.

[360] Özkan Ertuğrul mistakes the *cathedra* for an altar table, which he describes as severely damaged, see: "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması," 5.

rock-cut and masonry forms.[361] The two-aisled rupestrian churches in Cappadocia are arranged with several burial places, typically concentrated in the northern aisle, while the one in the south, usually wider and more elaborately decorated, is reserved for the liturgy. The aisles often terminate with independent sanctuary areas and are connected by open arcades or arched passages through a solid rock wall. Comparable also is the church in the western necropolis of Lyrbe in Pamphylia, constructed on earlier funerary structures in the first half of the 5th century.[362] The core of the building complex consists of a single-nave naos and a narrow corridor linked to a baptistery in the north, all preceded by a double narthex, later extended to the south of the church. The nave and the north aisle appear to have been initially connected by an open arcade with reused column shafts. As the above examples demonstrate, this rather unusual plan type is associated with a funerary function and applied time and again in cemeteries.

Balkaya church no. 2 is only a little larger than half of the two-aisled church, carved out from a standalone rock mass southeast of the medieval cemetery (fig. A.4). The single-nave interior is roofed by a relatively flat barrel vault, later repaired with cement. The fragmentary remains of the rock-cut chancel screen are preserved on the ceiling in front of the extended sanctuary area. The semicircular apse features a narrow *pseudo-synthronon*. Three niches on the rear wall of the apse are too shallow for a practical purpose, identical to those in the *Balkaya church no.1*. The *prothesis* niche is located at the northeastern corner. In addition to modern graffiti, rock walls display many cross incisions, some featuring splayed arms, others framed in a rectangle or under an arch.

The third outlying church is at the other end of the settlement on the road to Medeia (fig. A.8). Following the rocky terrain, *Balkaya church no. 3* is oriented to the northeast. The barrel-vaulted naos, measuring 7 m^2 area, is accessed through a door on the north wall under an overhanging arch on the rock façade (fig. A.6). A tripartite

[361] Ötüken, "Zweischiffige Kirchen in Kappadokien"; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 29, 45–49, 64–72.

[362] The church complex was excavated and painstakingly documented by Metin Ahunbay in the 1970s and published in 1998 in Ahunbay, "M Yapısı-Mezarlık Kilisesi." More recently, a small team of architecture historians from Istanbul Technical University, including myself, revisited and surveyed the site in 2023, only two years after the devastating forest fire in Manavgat that severely damaged the ancient city. The results of the project are yet to be published. Interestingly, though, the two-aisled plan type is also repeated in the small church in the agora of Lyrbe, incorporating the columns of the northern *stoa* between the nave and the narrower north aisle.

rock-cut *templon* separates the naos from the sanctuary, which cannot accommodate more than one person at the same time (fig. 4.3). The tiny niche on the eastern wall reminds the triple niches in the apses of the other two carved churches in Balkaya. The diminutive size suggests a symbolic value instead of a regularly functioning ecclesiastical space. On the rocky ridge above the church is a winemaking area surrounded by agricultural fields, which I will return to in the following section, *Making a Living from the Rock* (figs. A.5–6). In this case, the church may have functioned as a marker of the arable lands and related agricultural production area on the outskirts of the village by the forest. Marking important resources stands out as a primary function of rural churches in liminal locations. For example, most outlying churches examined in Southwestern Crete are built where the land is arable and the water is abundant.[363] Comparable also are two Early Byzantine basilicas west of Chalki village on Naxos, which characterize a border between terraced fields for cultivation and rough ground used as pasture.[364]

Figure 4.3: Balkaya church no. 3, rock-cut sanctuary barrier.

The religious structures at Balkaya point to an otherwise unknown medieval village. They provide an impression of a self-contained living area and create a protective boundary between the inhabited land and the wilderness. These outlying churches also greet visitors approaching from the two ends of the settlement. Besides, they identify

[363] Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred*, 23–25, 52–53.
[364] Turner and Crow, "Unlocking Sacred Space on Early Medieval Naxos," 93.

different places of significance surrounding the village houses, such as the cemetery in the west and the agricultural production zone in the east. The churches outside settlement centers were generally not intended for daily worship. They may have been visited for occasional private prayers. Yet, the liturgical services were probably limited to the saint's day to whom the church was dedicated, or if it was a funerary structure, to the annual commemoration of the buried individuals.[365] Among the three structures discussed above, *Balkaya church no. 1* is notable for its scale, spatial arrangement, and liturgical furniture and may have been used more regularly as the main cemetery church.

Medieval inhabitants of the village used rock-cut architecture not only to define the immediate surroundings of the settlement but also to engage with the broader landscape. Direkli Mağara, meaning columnar cave, is 3.5 km away from Balkaya in a valley now separating the territories of two village communities and providing a path on the rugged terrain otherwise difficult to cross (fig. A.8).[366] It consists of two interconnected church spaces. The western church is accessed from the riverbed in the south, while the smaller eastern one is on the upper level and entered through the sanctuary of the former (fig. A.7).

Now missing the outer wall and inner divisions, the western church seems to have been designed as a three-aisled basilica terminating with three apses of similar dimensions. The rock-cut separation between the aisles can be partly traced on the ceiling at the northeastern corner; however, the piers that inspired the name *direkli* are now lost (fig. 4.4). The fragmentarily preserved corner of the extensive rock-cut sanctuary barrier displays a tripartite opening in front of the northern apse (fig. A.7 sec.2). The transverse corridor behind the *templon* extends the sanctuary area outside the apses (fig. A.7 sec.1). The *prothesis* niche is set on the north wall of the sanctuary. More symbolic than functional, a small *cathedra* is carved in the north apse, as in the *Balkaya church no. 1*. The large hole between the central apse and southern apse, originally a

[365] The scale of rural churches does not necessarily reflect the size of the congregation, whose presence in the naos, in fact, is not mandatory. People may go in and out, primarily staying outside the church during the service. Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred*, 17; Kalas, "Sacred Boundaries and Protective Borders," 88.

[366] The only mention of Direkli Mağara is found in the brief survey report of Özkan Ertuğrul, who identifies the site as a monastery without further discussing the function and landscape relations. "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması," 6. At the time of my first visit in 2021, the church complex was yet unknown to the museum authorities in Kırklareli.

70-cm-wide vaulted passage, opens into the eastern church, whose floor level is circa one meter above. The east church recreates, in a way, the architecture of the larger western one. Its northern wall features three alcoves resembling the side aisle of a basilican layout. The connection between the western pair is too low and narrow to define a space yet large enough to give the impression of a detached rock pier. Similarly, the curvilinear depressions on the east wall visually imitate a tripartite sanctuary, even though only the southern one is deep enough to be functional. The southeastern conch has an extended sanctuary area with a round apse, formerly separated from the naos by rock-cut parapets.

Figure 4.4: Direkli Mağara, western church, looking towards the northeast.

Several cross-shaped incisions, images of horned quadrupeds (deer?), and linear motifs are scratched on the walls. In addition to more recent Turkish scribblings, the church complex presents some Bulgarian graffiti, for which the letterforms suggest a date after the 15th century.[367] Among them, particularly noteworthy is the graffito above the *cathedra* in the western church, which reads ИСОУСЬ ХРИСТОСЬ, meaning Jesus Christ, accompanied by an image of crowned Jesus on the cross (fig. 4.5).[368] All the same, the execution of a graffito postdates the carving or construction of an

[367] I sincerely thank Kazimir Popkonstantinov and Rossina Kostova for their comments and interpretation of the Bulgarian graffiti in Direkli Mağara.

[368] Another graffito on the same vault records a male personal name, БЕРО (Bero). The image of a rifle between the two Bulgarian graffiti possibly reflects the upheavals and banditry in the area in the 19th and 20th centuries. An undeciphered inscription next to an incised cross under an arch also in the northern apse shows some Bulgarian letters arranged in two lines: ІС·И | РИ.

architectural space, and the two do not need to be chronologically close. In the eastern church, a large deer graffito is found in the southern apse. An *anthropomorphic* tomb covered by a rock-cut vault is carved east of the church complex, partially under the wall featuring the deer graffito (fig. 4.6). Unlike the burial place of the same type adjacent to the *Balkaya church no.1*, this must have belonged to an adult.

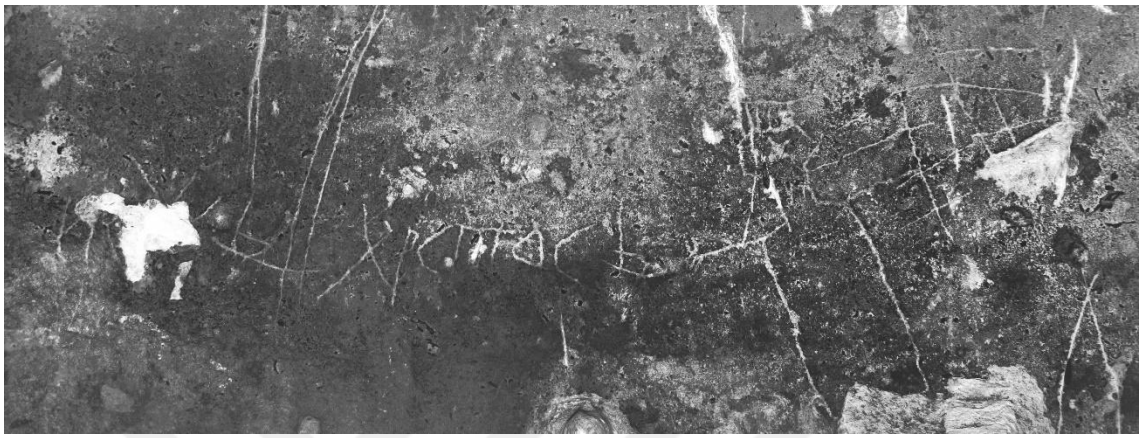

Figure 4.5: Direkli Mağara, western church, detail from the northern apse vault with a Bulgarian graffito and an incised image of crowned Jesus on the cross.

The positioning of Direkli Mağara in the landscape reveals its possible meanings for the medieval inhabitants. To a modern visitor, the church complex may appear in the middle of nowhere, yet no monument exists out of spatial context, as Lucia Nixon rightly notes. The location must have been considered important enough to be sealed with an architectural production, a reference point in the human-altered landscape.[369] Direkli Mağara marks a crossroad in a system of valleys that enables movement across the wooded hilly terrain (figs. 4.1, A.8). Dense vegetation restricts the sight in this thick forest of scrubby oak trees. Travelers who are not familiar with this landscape can easily find themselves disoriented. These very characteristics must have facilitated the escape of the inhabitants of Bizye in the early 10th century and the travels of Niketas as narrated in the *vita* of St. Mary the Younger.[370] At first, trying to follow the instructions of the locals, I, too, failed to locate the site on my own. After two unsuccessful attempts ended with me getting lost in the forest, I managed to find Direkli Mağara in the company of a young man from Balkaya village. Only with the help of my local guide did the landforms that I was supposed to follow and the

[369] *Making a Landscape Sacred*, 7, 86.
[370] See the discussion above in the opening of this section.

conspicuous oak trees locals mentioned as reference points in a land full of oak trees start to make sense. The church complex partakes in this collective mental map of the forestland, which is crucial for those living in that landscape. In everyday language, the "cave" and its "columns" give their names to the site, which continues to be a reference point in the minds of local inhabitants long after it ceased functioning as a religious structure.

Figure 4.6: Direkli Mağara, anthropomorphic tomb east of the church complex.

In the immediate vicinity of Direkli Mağara, the riverbed joins a longer valley running in the north-south direction, the natural border between two villages: Balkaya and Kömürköy (fig. A.8). This valley delimits the areas of economic activities belonging to respective village communities in the forestland. It naturally separates the landscape, whether between rural communities or empires competing to control the region. Three strongholds, built at the time of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, create a defense line stretching between Bizye and Medeia.[371] The best preserved of the three, Osmançe or Ceneviz Kalesi, is intervisible with the site of Direkli Mağara, located on a dominant hill 2.5 km northeast (fig. 4.7). The positioning of the Late Ottoman fortress further highlights the natural border characteristics of the valley where the rupestrian complex is. Accordingly, I identify Direkli Mağara as a roadside shrine on a riverbed that allows movement across the landscape. It also seems to have functioned as a boundary marker

[371] "Akpınar Yoztarla Kalesi," "Kömürköy Osmançe Kale," and "Balkaya Kalesi" in the Kırklareli Cultural Assets Inventory project, available online via http://www.kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr.

separating the territories of rural communities that lived in the same landscape and shared the resources of the forest.

Figure 4.7: View of the landscape from above the Direkli Mağara, looking towards the Late Ottoman castle (Osmançe Kalesi) in the northeast.

4.1.2. Surrounding Probaton: Landscape around a Fortified Settlement

Rural life in Byzantium was never confined to city walls but rather centered around it. Massive defensive structures in prominent locations symbolized safe harbors for those living in open landscapes, often visually dominated by hilltop fortifications. In 14th-century Thrace, Matthew of Ephesus (Manuel Gabalas) described a mass migration of the rural population into the walled area of Brysis (Pınarhisar) due to some rumors of an impending enemy attack.[372] People brought their cattle, horses, dogs, and pigs with them, which accordingly caused very unhealthy conditions within the city. The obvious rhetoric of suffering outside the civilized lifestyle of Constantinople aside, Matthew's letter captured the role of fortified city centers in Thrace as places of refuge for communities in the countryside. Nevertheless, defending a settlement against physical attacks or having fortifications built in a nearby location to take shelter inside at times of danger was usually not enough for medieval people to feel safe. Byzantines relied on divine protection almost as much as the protection provided by solid walls, and the two were often complementary. In Byzantium, services in the churches within or around the settlements, including distant places deemed valuable enough to be marked

[372] Matthew stayed in Brysis (Pınarhisar) as the metropolitan *kat'epidosin* between 1332 and 1337. Letter no. 64: Reinsch, *Die Briefe des Matthaios von Ephesos*, 198–201, 378–83.

with a church, were necessary to ensure the protection of the living, the commemoration of the dead, and the safety of crops, animals, and the land itself.[373] In this manner, outlying churches contributed to the formation of sacred landscapes and inscribed protective boundaries around inhabited lands.

By its nature, delineating parts of a landscape as sacred engenders a non-homogeneous perception of space, in which sacred space becomes referential to make sense of the profane world that lies beyond.[374] In this distinction, the boundary markers are crucial elements to manifest the physical limits on the land. In the Ancient Greek world, the limits of sacred lands belonging to certain deities were drawn by inscribed *horoi* (boundary markers) to prevent unaware acts of sacrilege.[375] As early as the 5th century, the cross sign started to appear on the boundary stones, putting the demarcated site under divine protection.[376] An inscribed boundary stone of a church in Heraklion in Crete further demonstrates the *apotropaic* powers attributed to church buildings and the protective role of sacred landscapes they formed. According to the inscription, the church to which the boundary stone belonged warded off a devil that attacked and attempted to burn down the city.[377] Hence, the church and the lands marked by such boundary stones protected the city and its people.

Figure 4.8: Brick-built outer façade of a standing wall fragment southeast of the citadel of Probaton.

[373] Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred*; Kalas, "Sacred Boundaries and Protective Borders"; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 44–69, 128–69; Kondyli, *Rural Communities in Late Byzantium*, 138–49.
[374] For the origins of the discussion, see Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*.
[375] Horster, "Religious Landscape and Sacred Ground."
[376] Cosentino, "Boundary Marks and Space Organization in Early Byzantine Epigraphy," 98; Decker, "What Is a Byzantine Landscape?," 255.
[377] Kiourtzian, "L'incident de Cnossos"; Cosentino, "Boundary Marks and Space Organization in Early Byzantine Epigraphy," 100–101; "From Gortyn to Heraklion?," 81–84.

Balkaya churches organized the open landscape around the medieval village (fig. A.8). Some had funerary functions; others marked the sites of economic activities. More importantly, they encircled the village houses and placed the land where people lived and produced under divine protection. This was not an alternative or replacement for defensive walls to ensure security, but as already emphasized, both were necessary for the medieval inhabitants of Thrace. Probaton (Sinanköy), a primary administrative, ecclesiastical, and economic center overlooking the Tundzha plain southwest of the Strandzha region, is a case in point.[378] The massive fortification walls enclose a 4.5 ha area on a limestone hill, with an entirely brick-built exterior on the southeastern side (figs. 4.8, A.11).[379] As in the walls of Medeia on the Black Sea coast of Thrace, the purely brick façade in Probaton is a display of wealth on the primary approach to the walled settlement. Medieval fortifications had strong representational values, and as such, they were usually indispensable elements of the image of a city. Rock-cut churches on the outskirts of the fortified hill of Probaton establish a second circuit of protective border (fig. 4.9).[380] Together with fortification walls, these rupestrian monuments demarcate the urban core of Probaton and complement the image of the medieval city, especially for someone approaching from the plain.

[378] For a survey of the settlement in historical sources, see Soustal, *Thrakien*, 415–16. Procopius includes a site named Probinu in the list of fortifications built or restored by Justinian (527-565) in Haimimontos, whose identification with Probaton is not commonly accepted. *De Aedificiis*, IV: 11. The city first appeared in *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* in the 9th century as a suffragan of Adrianople. It was one of the closest episcopal sees to the metropolitan center, frequently recorded in the lists starting from the *Notitia* 7 (901-907), the other being Boukelon (now Matochina in Bulgaria) west of the Tundzha River. As a part of the ecclesiastical promotions in the Late Byzantine Thrace, Probaton became a metropolis in the 14th century. See *Notitiae* 3[590], 7[627-8], 9[501-2], 10[591-2], 13[642-3], 17[130], and 18[153]: Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 241, 286, 305, 329, 364, 402, 409; Asdracha, "La Thrace orientale et la Mer Noire." The surface ceramics found on the fortified hill include Middle Byzantine incised sgraffito wares and Late Byzantine sgraffito wares with concentric circles or wavy bands, as well as glazed wares with slip decoration on the exterior, for which a date range from the mid-12th to the 14th centuries can be suggested. I thank Stefania Skartsis, Galina Grozdanova, and Nikos Kontogiannis for their assistance in identifying and dating the ceramic sherds from Probaton.

[379] For a description of the walls, see Kurtuluş, "Edirne İl Sınırları İçindeki Kalelerin Tespit ve Değerlendirilmesi," 224–86.

[380] Among the carved features on exposed rock outcrops in and around the fortified area are also unidentified rooms, channels, pits, and niches. In the previous literature, these are almost invariably associated with Iron Age cult practices. Beksaç, "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2004 Yüzey Araştıması," 288; Beksaç and Beksaç, "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri Yüzey Araştırması Kaya Sunağı ve Bağıntılı Kült Alanları Çalışmaları," 613; Beksaç, Ertuğrul, and Karakaya, "Sinanköy Çalışmaları," 214–15, 216–17. Without excluding a former Thracian settlement at the site, I argue that several of them may have been repurposed, if not established altogether, in the Middle Ages.

Figure 4.9: General view of the settlement hill of Probaton from the west and outlying churches on the northwestern slope.

Three outlying churches carved on the steep northwestern slope assume an important role in defining the settlement and its landscape (fig. A.12). The two churches in the north are on a higher elevation and relatively difficult to access. Both have single-nave interiors covered by flat ceilings that terminate with three apses in the east. Shallow niches are carved on each apse of the northernmost church, *Probaton no. 3*, where windows would have been expected in a masonry church sanctuary, an arrangement similar to the above-discussed examples in Balkaya. While original floor levels remain hidden, rock-cut grave pits in adjacent alcoves and natural cavities on the rock façade indicate funerary associations for both churches.

At the southwestern end of the rock escarpment, *Probaton no. 1* is the largest and most elaborate of the three outlying churches (fig. A.12). It is on a lower level between the settlement hill and the nearby water stream (Sinanköy Deresi), standing on the way that leads to the brick-built façade on the fortifications, the main approach to the city (fig. A.11). Southwest of the church is an extensive cemetery area unearthed during the recent excavations with at least twenty-two carved burial places (figs. 4.10, A.13).[381] They are arranged in three terraces, connected with rock-cut steps, defining an approach to the church. Most of the tombs are in the form of rectangular pits oriented to the east, some being large enough for multiple burials, possibly intended for the members of the same family.[382] Three tombs are human-shaped, with sides expanding

[381] In 2015, a team from Edirne Archaeological Museum and Trakya University cleared and excavated the cemetery area. Sadly, the trench was left exposed after the project was halted. For the preliminary report, see Beksaç, Ertuğrul, and Karakaya, "Sinanköy Çalışmaları."

[382] A single grave with multiple burials was a common practice in Byzantium, which did not necessarily require a larger grave. In the case of a significant timespan between the two interments, the skeletal remains of the earlier occupant of the tomb were moved to a side to make room for the second burial. See, for example, Gerstel et al., "A Late Medieval Settlement at Panakton," esp. 201; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 100.

towards the west to form the shoulders and an indentation for the head.

On the upper level, roughly following the direction of the rock-cut steps on the cemetery terraces, a staircase with an unusual layout leads into the cavernous side chapel (figs. 4.11, A.13). The stairs slightly turn towards the north and direct the visitor to the naos of the rock-cut church. The discrepancy introduced by its awkward positioning is indicative of multiple carving phases. The staircase obliquely cuts through the rectangular room on the upper level and disturbs two *anthropomorphic* tombs carved on the ground (fig. A.13 plan and sec.2). The partly preserved upper room with apse-like conches was presumably the eastern end of an earlier rock-cut church, similar to the other two outlying churches in Probaton. In line with the easily accessible location and prominent position on the way to the city, the related cemetery area must have grown large enough to justify the carving of the present church northeast of the former, whose sanctuary has been then mutilated to make room for the entrance staircase.

Figure 4.10: Outer rock façade of Probaton church no.1 and the terraced cemetery area in the west.

The church space, partially retaining the cave-like interior, displays a modest manifestation of collaboration between humans and other-than-human beings in rupestrian space-making (fig. 4.12). It is separated from the south chapel by a stone-built wall. The door opening on this masonry wall provides access to the naos, whose threshold is preserved *in-situ* in front of the oblique staircase (fig. A.13). The single-nave naos is covered by a barrel vault. It is interrupted by a sail vault in the middle, introducing a central emphasis in an otherwise longitudinal layout (fig. A.13 sec.1). At

the eastern end, the church space terminates with a large, round apse, complemented by masonry additions, as in the Cave of Hagioi Theodoroi near Avantas in Western Thrace, and similarly covered with plaster and wall paintings (figs. 2.10, 4.12).[383] The *cathedra* on the back wall, equipped with armrests and a footstool, is the only extant piece of liturgical furniture in the sanctuary; unlike other examples in Thrace, though, it is not accompanied by a curvilinear bench or a *pseudo-synthronon*. The apse is flanked by two round niches at the corners, presenting an unusual interpretation of the standard tripartite sanctuary.

Figure 4.11: Probaton church no.1, rock-cut stairs leading to the south chapel.

The western wall of the church is missing, yet the traces on the outer rock façade point to masonry-built entrance compartments covered by a pitched roof (figs. 4.10, A.13 sec.1). Two rectangular rooms are carved on the cliff northwest of the church complex. Further in the north, a curious underground tunnel goes approximately 20 m deep into the bedrock (fig. A.12). At the end of the tunnel is a barrel-vaulted room on the lower level with round inner corners. Its walls are covered with a thick layer of plaster. A large circular shaft rises above the room, now blocked by a massive chunk of stone and mortar, which was likely detached from the city walls and tumbled into the opening on the ground. As strange as it may seem, the arrangement indicates a water cistern, initially accessed from a well on the northwestern slope of the fortified hill. The rock-cut tunnel must have been added later to reach the cistern from the lower level. It is

[383] Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, "Το σπήλαιο των Αγίων Θεοδώρων."

simply too large to be carved merely to collect water. Carving such a wide underground space just to have access to water seems impractical, if not altogether unnecessary, considering that the small river west of the settlement is only a few meters away from the entrance of the tunnel. Instead, the spatial characteristics and its vicinity to the church complex imply a ritual space, probably related to a cult of holy water.[384]

Figure 4.12: Probaton church no.1, looking towards the sanctuary.

The painted decoration of the church, applied on a thick layer of pinkish plaster, is fragmentarily preserved. Although at least two layers of paintings are detected, it is not possible to reconstruct underlayers. Imitations of stone revetments, typical decorative elements in Byzantine church interiors, adorn the lower level of the walls, characterized by parallel straight and wavy lines in blue and red on a white background (fig. 4.12). On the north wall immediately outside the sanctuary, the painted panel with three holy figures, namely, St. Demetrios, Prophet Elijah, and possibly St. Nestor, merits special attention (figs. 4.13, A.13 sec.1). The figures appear to be originally standing in full length, slightly above eye level. The upper limit of the panel is bordered with a thick white contour. The background is divided into two horizontal zones, implying a real space: a plain blue area on the upper level and a yellow-colored one below the shoulders. All three figures are depicted frontally with haloes and well-arranged on the painting surface at equal intervals. The red and white contours around bright yellow haloes add further depth to the image.

[384] The identification as an *hagiasma* remains conjectural. For similar observations by the excavation team, see Beksaç, Ertuğrul, and Karakaya, "Sinanköy Çalışmaları," 216.

The short brown-haired figure on the left-hand side is St. Demetrios, identifiable thanks to the accompanying inscription, which reads [Ἅ(γιος) Δη]μήτριος, inscribed on two sides of the saint's head. The central figure in the composition is a short-haired, beardless saint. The image is hardly recognizable and bears no inscription, yet St. Nestor of Thessaloniki, a faithful companion of St. Demetrios, appears to be a likely candidate since the two holy men are often represented together. The best preserved of the three is the figure closer to the sanctuary, which can be identified as Prophet Elijah based on his facial characteristics and clothing. In Probaton, he is depicted with a long, curly beard, shoulder-length gray hair, and piercing eyes directed at the onlooker. He wears a reddish-brown mantle with a white collar over an orange garment. His image in the rupestrian church brings to mind the cave on Mount Horeb, where Elijah received God's words.[385] In return, the rather amorphous rock-cut interior in Probaton alludes to the sacred cave in the biblical story. Additionally, the Late Byzantine iconography of Elijah in a cave, fed by a God-sent raven, further illustrates the association of the Old Testament prophet with cave spaces in the medieval mind.[386]

Figure 4.13: Probaton church no. 1, painted panel with three holy figures in the naos.

[385] Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 176.
[386] Ćurčić, "Cave and Church," 224.

The overall composition is carefully planned. The figures are equally spaced on the painted panel and rendered with great detail. The preserved upper parts of the figures already suggest elongated proportions. The rendering of the holy men, especially the white highlights on the beard of Prophet Elijah, and distorted bodily proportions are in accordance with Late Byzantine aesthetics; therefore, a date in the 13th or 14th centuries seems plausible.[387] Regardless of the exact date, the high level of artistry demonstrates the attention paid to the interior decoration. The church must have continued to function long after the application of the figurative panel since another layer of plaster on the ceiling, painted in plain blue and now covered with soot, partially overlays the layer with three holy figures. Furthermore, the lower body of St. Demetrios is disrupted by a sizable conch, the carving of which clearly postdates the Late Byzantine wall paintings. The adjacent large alcove in the middle of the north wall shows further modifications related to a functional change, likely a more recent one (fig. A.13 sec.1).[388]

Unlike the medieval village in the forestland between Bizye and Medeia examined earlier in this chapter, the outlying churches at Probaton are directly connected to a first-rank walled settlement. The two churches carved on the upper level display minimal evidence for use. Marking the related burial places, they were probably more symbolic than practical and were only visited occasionally. On a lower level in the south, closer to the water stream and agricultural fields, *Probaton church no. 1* reveals multiple phases of carving and painting and may have been used regularly for liturgical services. Initially the site of a much smaller single-nave church, the complex has been enlarged to form an elaborate ecclesiastical space, possibly connected to a cult of holy water. The preserved wall paintings in the naos indicate the scale of investment the rupestrian church received (fig. 4.13). Located below the city walls, these outlying churches shaped a commemorative landscape on the immediate outskirts of the fortified center, where the due rituals and prayers were necessary for the salvation of

[387] I thank all members of the BRIA team who visited the church in 2023 and engaged in a fruitful discussion about the paintings with me, especially Ivana Jevtić, for sharing her observations and preliminary interpretations at the site. In the previous literature, the wall paintings were mentioned only in passing and placed in the Middle Byzantine period without much discussion. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 416; Beksaç, Ertuğrul, and Karakaya, "Sinanköy Çalışmaları," 216.

[388] The interior was used as a sheepfold until recently, before the registration of the site in 2009. The earlier photographs in the archive of the Edirne Regional Board for Conservation of Cultural and Natural Assets record a rudimentary wall and a wooden fence at the entrance, which are removed later.

the souls of loved ones (fig. 4.9). For the living, they must have been constant reminders of their ancestors and the past. Moreover, they established a sacred boundary around the primary local center, physically protected by massive city walls. Overlooking and visible from the fertile plain, they extended the divine protection from the fortified core to the fields, water streams, and roads on the landscape around Probaton, which remained time and again within the turbulent northwestern borderland of Byzantium in the contested territory of Thrace.

4.2. Making a Living from the Rock

The discussions in the previous section were on the settlement level. I examined the role of Byzantine rock-cut architecture in defining living areas and organizing landscapes, in which production was an essential and indispensable component of life. In this section, I focus on how rural communities drew on the resources of the forests, lands, and waters of the Strandzha region. In doing so, my interest is in what activities medieval peasants occupied themselves with on a day-to-day basis rather than their share in the Byzantine economy or the monetary value of their production and trade. To this aim, I present and discuss related textual and material evidence for quarrying, forestry, animal husbandry, freshwater aquaculture, crop cultivation, and viniculture. Additionally, the current use of landscapes and toponyms, medieval or modern, reveal affordances and what communities living and producing on the same landscape consider to be important.

Quarrying stone is a direct form of exploitation in rocky landscapes as it entails extracting the very material that makes up the land. It is usually a challenge to come up with chronological arguments for a particular quarry since they were often in operation for centuries, and the techniques for stone extraction did not significantly differ until the introduction of heavy machinery and blasting. The billon coin of Manuel I Komnenos from a marble quarry near Malko Tarnovo (struck between 1167 and 1183) is a rare archaeological find indicating the exploitation of marble reserves in the inner Strandzha Mountains in the second half of the 12th century.[389] However, we lack similar datable material for the other quarries in the region.

[389] Milanova and Valeriev, “Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа,” 34.

Today, only the massive fortification walls survive from once-flourishing medieval settlements on the Strandzha Mountains, which nevertheless appear to have had a strong masonry architectural tradition. For the most part, the construction material must have been obtained from the local limestone deposits. The life of St. Mary the Younger frames the activities in a quarry as the first stage of a building project in 10th-century Bizye.[390] Accordingly, following the posthumous wishes of his wife, Nikephoros, the husband of Mary, initiates the construction of a new church to translate the bodily remains of the holy woman from the city's cathedral. He hires a large group of workers and organizes the extraction of stone blocks from a neighboring hill. As they dig deeper, Nikephoros gradually regains his vision, which he had lost for ignoring Mary's request in the first place. The story implies that the church started to materialize with the preparation of the stones in the quarry, not when the first block was laid for the building foundations. It also demonstrates the preference for local stone quarried not far from the job site, even for such a prestigious monument that soon became the center of a local pilgrimage.

The fortifications of Bizye, within which St. Mary spent her final years, and the cathedral church, later came to be known as Hagia Sophia, are still standing, yet neither the structure built to house the miracle-working relics of the saint nor the stone quarry mentioned in the *vita* can be located (figs. 1.11, 5.13). The landscape dominated by the citadel of Bizye features outstanding rock outcrops, ridges, and valleys that may have been where the workers extracted stone blocks for Nikephoros' building project. Archaeological evidence for premodern quarrying activities exists elsewhere in the Strandzha region. Stepped quarry terraces with carved grooves between semi-detached cut-stone blocks point to exploitation areas on Gemikaya, a pillar-like rock formation north of Soğucak village (Kryonero) (fig. 5.16).[391] These small-scale stone quarries possibly provided for the construction of the Late Byzantine monastic settlement on Gemikaya, which was masonry-built on rock-cut foundations and walls.

On the road between Bizye and Brysis, numerous quarry pits testify to the extensive exploitation of the rocky terrain around Erenler village, the broader landscape of which

[390] *Life of St. Mary the Younger,* XVII: *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 698–99. For an English translation, Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 271–72.
[391] See chapter 5.2.

is still heavily quarried. Here, the remains of a fortified settlement cover an area of less than 0.2 ha on a smoothly rising hill, Tavşanhisar (fig. A.19). The ruinous fortifications dominate the surrounding landscape, characterized by vast agricultural lands in the south and exposed limestone deposits in the north. The quarries on the outskirts of the settlement hill are now abandoned, but they were still in operation until the 1980s, some showing traces of heavy machinery and blasting.[392] Among others, the quarry area roughly a hundred meters south of the defensive walls indicates traditional methods for stone extraction (fig. 4.14). It is arranged in five quarry terraces on the slope, and the rock surface displays wedge holes to detach stone blocks.

Figure 4.14: Terraced quarry area southeast of the walled settlement in Erenler village.

The course of the fortification walls can hardly be traced on the ground, yet its outline is better visible in aerial and satellite images (fig. A.19). The small scale and square layout of the enclosed area encourage an identification as a military outpost not far from Brysis. The surface ceramics include fragments of *pithoi*, *amphorae*, and constructional bricks, among which a ceramic roof tile with a smoke hole yields information about the now-lost structures that once occupied the fortified area or its immediate surroundings.[393] Sherds of yellow glazed sgraffito ware with concentric circles (13th century onwards) and Miletus ware (late 14th-15th century) prove activity

[392] Interview with Metin Tunbar, the municipal head of Erenler village, 28th of July, 2022.
[393] Similar terracotta roof tiles with smoke holes are found during the excavations in Panakton. Gerstel et al., "A Late Medieval Settlement at Panakton," esp. 155.

in the Late Byzantine/ Early Ottoman period (fig A.18).[394] A massive Early Ottoman funerary monument in the village, built with the local stone from the quarries mentioned above, commemorates a military leader, Binbir Oklu Ahmet Baba, who, according to the legend, died of one thousand and one arrow shots during the siege of the castle.[395] It demonstrates that the Ottoman State considered the site important enough to be marked with the construction of such a monumental structure in the 14th century. All in all, the evidence in Erenler village reveals an otherwise unknown walled Late Medieval settlement overlooking heavily quarried limestone outcrops, fertile lands, and a major thoroughfare on the southern foothills of the Strandzha Mountains. The connection to the Byzantine road network renders the rich limestone deposits near the surface highly suitable for extracting blocks to be used locally or shipped elsewhere in Thrace.

In addition to quarrying stone, mining activities have exploited the parts of the region rich in metal ores since prehistory, and already with the Iron Age settlements, the north-central section of the Strandzha Mountains became a center of metallurgy. The iron mines remained in operation in the Late Antique, medieval, and modern periods, particularly in the region around Karabizye, whose Turkish toponym, Demirköy, literally means the iron village.[396] Iron slags and furnace fragments found in the surface surveys in the thickly forested inner mountains on both sides of the Turkish-Bulgarian borders bear witness to mining activities in the past.[397] The excavations in the iron foundry outside Demirköy, so-called Fatih Dökümhanesi, revealed a large-scale fortified Late Ottoman metallurgical facility.[398] The Ottoman archives document the state production of iron in Demirköy, Ottoman Samakocuk, already in the 16th century, which continued to supply raw material to the imperial army and navy until the late

[394] I thank Galina Grozdanova and Nikos Kontogiannis for their observations on the ceramic material from Erenler.

[395] Later, a Bektashi tekke was developed around the tomb of Binbir Oklu Ahmet Baba, which gave the village its former name, Tekkeköy. I cannot help but notice the parallels in the story with the martyrdom of St. Sebastian, who also survived death by countless arrow shots. A former Christian cult of St. Sebastian may have inspired the Islamic myth related to the conquest of Thrace and the cult formed around the warrior saint. In this context, it is also worth noting that the saint's popularity in Byzantium increased in later periods, especially in the aftermath of the Crusades.

[396] Danışman et al., "Demirköy-Samakocuk Iron Foundry," 93; Ermiş, "Demirköy'deki Geç Antik Çağ Kaleleri," 945–46.

[397] Danışman et al., "Demirköy-Samakocuk Iron Foundry," 92; Ermiş, "Demirköy'deki Geç Antik Çağ Kaleleri," 945; Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," esp. 29, 35.

[398] Yazıcı Metin, "Trakya'da Bir Osmanlı Sanayi Tesisi."

19th century. The region is particularly suitable for the iron-working industry not only because of its iron ore deposits but also because of the availability of firewood for fuel to smelt the iron and numerous perennial streams to operate the hydraulic systems necessary for industrial iron production.[399] In the Middle Ages, the iron extracted in the Strandzha Mountains was also exported to larger settlement centers. In the first half of the 10th century, for example, the region, then annexed to the Bulgarian territory under Tsar Simeon (893-927), was a primary iron supplier of the Bulgarian capital, Veliki Preslav.[400] In the Ottoman period, the iron to be used in the Royal Arsenal and the Royal Cannon Foundry was shipped to Constantinople from the harbor of İğneada (Staniera) on the Black Sea coast.[401] The same route may have also operated to export iron to Byzantine Constantinople.

In the Strandzha region, forestry is the main economic activity in the villages located between the high elevation of the mountains and the Black Sea littoral.[402] Lumber, firewood, and charcoal from the Strandzha forests are transported by sea and land routes to Istanbul, the former Byzantine and Ottoman capital. Traces of wooden elements, occasionally preserved in rock-cut spaces, demonstrate the use of local forest products in medieval constructions and the integration of built and carved architecture. The beam sockets for roofing systems and floor extensions at Asmakyalar and Soğucak, as well as the imprints of an entrance compartment abutting the rock façade of *Probaton church no. 1*, indicate large-scale timber structures that have long since disappeared.[403] Both primary and secondary products of the woodlands had a significant trade value in the Middle Ages. Timber was a raw material in shipbuilding, construction works, and furniture-making.[404] More importantly, the fuel supply to the urban centers was particularly profitable and constantly needed, as reflected by the Athonite monasteries' exploitation of the woodlands in the peninsula and beyond for firewood to be sold in the markets.[405] Likewise, Thracian forests in the hinterland of

[399] Danışman et al., "Demirköy-Samakocuk Iron Foundry," 93; Yazıcı Metin, "Trakya'da Bir Osmanlı Sanayi Tesisi," 175.
[400] Milanova and Valeriev, "Селищна мрежа и демографска ситуация в Странджа," 29.
[401] Danışman et al., "Demirköy-Samakocuk Iron Foundry," 101–2; Yazıcı Metin, "Trakya'da Bir Osmanlı Sanayi Tesisi," 176–77.
[402] Kurter, "Istranca Dağlarında Köy Hayatına Ait Müşahedeler," esp. 125, 132, 134.
[403] See chapters 5.1 and 5.2 for Asmakayalar and Soğucak and 4.1.2 for Probaton.
[404] For a detailed survey of how Byzantines used and controlled forestlands, see Dunn, "The Exploitation and Control of Woodland and Scrubland in the Byzantine World," esp. 254–57.
[405] *Ibid*., 259–61.

Constantinople were heavily exploited, leading to a general scarcity of wood in the Late Byzantine period.[406]

In the northeastern part of the Strandzha Mountains, many villages' primary source of income is the charcoal trade, which may be rooted in an earlier tradition in the Middle Ages.[407] The villagers cut down trees in designated coppice lands on a twenty-year rotation. The wood is stacked and burnt to produce charcoal in the open lands at the fringes of the settlements surrounded by the forest. The felled trees regrow, and the land becomes a coppice again in the following twenty years.[408] Modern placenames, such as Kömürköy, meaning (char)coal village, reflect the scale and importance of charcoal production in the region.

The forest coverage in medieval Thrace must have been even larger than it is today. In Byzantium, clearing woodlands was commonly practiced to open new areas for cultivation and pasturage. Focusing on the Aegean basin, Alexander Olson observed a negative correlation between the population density and unattended forestlands in Byzantium. Accordingly, agricultural activities intensified after the 10th century, and competition over arable lands and grazing areas increased deforestation in the Middle Byzantine period.[409] On the opposite corner of the Empire, the will of Eustathios Boilas (1059), a provincial magnate in political exile in the Byzantine theme of Iberia, records a woodland clearance "with fire and axe" to create an extensive farmland with meadows, gardens, vineyards, and so on.[410] Zooarchaeological remains from an underground *pithos* in the landscape around Probaton suggest a similar trend at the southwestern limits of the Strandzha region. The bones of squirrels and toads found in the ceramic storage vessel, the installation of which is attributed to the Middle Byzantine period, indicate that the area now covered with agricultural fields and pastures was once a woodland.[411]

Animal husbandry is the second largest economic activity in the mountainous parts of the Strandzha region, especially where the thick forest cover significantly limits the

[406] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 220.
[407] *Ibid*., 220.
[408] Günal, "Odun Kömürü Üretimi."
[409] Olson, *Environment and Society in Byzantium*, esp. 236–37.
[410] Vryonis, "The Will of a Provincial Magnate," 256–66; Dunn, "The Exploitation and Control of Woodland and Scrubland in the Byzantine World," 247–48.
[411] Siddiq et al., "Sinanköy Kalesi Yakınlarında Bulunan Pithos," 14.

cultivable areas. In the villages bordering the woodlands, the animals are often kept close to the forests to be fed with the leaves and shoots of the felled trees, especially in the winter months and early spring.[412] Similar practices also existed in the Middle Ages, and the rural communities of Byzantine Thrace may have likewise obtained fodder from the woodlands.[413] In particular, oak trees, which environmental conditions are appropriate for and now are abundant in Thracian forests, are excellent suppliers of leaf fodder for cattle, sheep, and goats and acorns for pigs.[414] An inscription on a marble boundary marker, dated to the 11th-12th centuries, refers to a pastureland for cattle (εἰς τὰ βουνόμια) between Philea (Karaburun) and Derkos (Terkos) east of the Strandzha region.[415] A couple of centuries later, the letter of Matthew of Ephesus listed cattle, horses, dogs, and pigs brought to the citadel of Brysis (Pınarhisar) by people living in the countryside for protection.[416]

Not mentioned by Matthew, sheep and goats were the most common farm animals in the Mediterranean and supplied the biggest portion of meat consumed in Byzantium.[417] Toponyms referring to ovicaprids signal the importance of this type of livestock in the Strandzha region. Probaton or Probatou Kastron (Προβάτου κάστρον), a primary local center northeast of Adrianople, literally means the fortified settlement of sheep. Not far away is the village of Kuzulu, whose Turkish name describes a place with many lambs. This region roughly corresponds to the location of Paroria, a short-lived yet influential monastic center in the 14th century, to which the donations of Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) include sheep and oxen.[418] Archaeological evidence for where these animals were sheltered is scarce. The only site in Thrace with spaces identifiable as medieval sheepfolds is the rupestrian monastery on the Karasu valley outside İnceğiz village near Metrai (Çatalca). The settlement is south of the river, arranged in multi-story clusters of rock-cut rooms.[419] The ground levels, above which the monks lived in cells and gathered in churches, are reserved for sheepfolds and other

[412] Kurter, "Istranca Dağlarında Köy Hayatına Ait Müşahedeler," 127.
[413] Dunn, "The Exploitation and Control of Woodland and Scrubland in the Byzantine World," 279.
[414] Olson, *Environment and Society in Byzantium*, esp. 56–58, 161–62.
[415] Inscription no. 101: Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, II: 323–25.
[416] Reinsch, *Die Briefe des Matthaios von Ephesos*, 201, 383.
[417] Kroll, *Tiere Im Byzantinischen Reich*, 157–61.
[418] *Life of St. Gregory the Sinaite*, XXII: Delikari, "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 353; Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace," 129. For a detailed discussion, see chapter 5.3.
[419] Dirimtekin, "İnceğiz Mıntıkasındaki Mağara-Manastır ve Kiliseler."

utilitarian spaces with underground storage areas. These sheepfolds are crudely carved rooms covered with barrel vaults or flat ceilings. They feature a series of low mangers and tethering holes on the rock walls.

The abundant water sources in the Strandzha Mountains are suitable for aquaculture, as the small-scale trout farms in Balkaya village, Kaynarca, and Malko Tarnovo bear witness. The medieval inhabitants must have engaged in fishing, if not fish farming, in the region's creeks, rivers, and lakes. The hagiographic evidence related to Paroria illustrates that fishes from the lakes and rivers constituted a substantial portion of the monks' diet. Accordingly, the Bulgarian Tsar donated, among other things, a lake to the monastery, from which the monks could catch "all sorts of fish."[420] Furthermore, the *vita* of St. Romylos of Vidin narrates several incidents of fishing in Paroria and credits the holy man for an innovative way of catching fish in the frozen pools of still water (βηροὶ) in order to sustain an elderly hermit who could eat nothing but fish.[421] Although we lack such textual evidence for fishing and fish farming in Byzantine lay settlements in Thrace, the village communities must have similarly benefited from the rich resources in the local waters for their nourishment.

The scale of arable lands is different on two sides of the mountainous region. Settlements on the southern foothills are larger and have direct access to extensive fields in the Ergene and Tundzha plains. Dense vegetation cover and uneven topography in the northern section confine the cultivable areas to the narrow river valleys and immediate surroundings of the villages. Whether on the plain or in the mountainous terrain, the primary agricultural yield of Byzantine Thrace was cereals, especially wheat and barley, millet to a lesser degree, and possibly oat.[422] Following the loss of grain supply from Egypt in the 7th century and Sicily in the 9th century, the Byzantine capital became more and more dependent on the production of its Thracian hinterland.[423] In the Middle Byzantine period, the population movements from the north brought about a change in agricultural practices in the region: The moldboard

[420] *Life of St. Gregory the Sinaite*, XXII: Delikari, "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 353; Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace," 129.
[421] *Life of St. Romylos of Vidin*, VI: Halkin, "La vie grecque inédite de Saint Romylos," 121–23; Bartusis, Nasser, and Laiou, "Days and Deeds of a Hesychast Saint," 30–32; Rigo and Scarpa, *La vita di Romylos da Vidin*, 90–95.
[422] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 215; "Production and Trade in Late Antique and Byzantine Eastern Thrace," 646.
[423] Magdalino, "The Grain Supply of Constantinople," 36.

plow (heavy plow) was introduced to Thrace in the 11th century by the displaced groups from Moesia. Compared to the scratch plow, which was in general use in the Byzantine Empire, the moldboard plow facilitated deeper tillage, particularly useful in the heavy and poorly drained soil type in Thrace.[424] Consequently, the introduction of moldboard plow expanded grain cultivation in the region to previously uncultivated areas. Due to increased agricultural production, the grain cultivated in Thrace became an export commodity sought after in the Late Byzantine period.[425] Writing in the second quarter of the 14th century, Florentine merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti ranked the grain of Rhaidestos (Tekirdağ), grown in Eastern Thrace (Grecia di Gostantinopoli), as the best quality grain in the Roman lands, sold for a higher price in Constantinople than that of Crimea.[426]

The grain reserved for local consumption must have been processed in the watermills for daily use, which were common elements of Byzantine landscapes by the 10th century.[427] Generally located at the fringes of the settlements and frequently visited by the villagers, mills were places of encounters and idle waiting, inviting gossip or other activities disruptive of the village order.[428] The millers had a certain control over the flowing water, and their job, involving measuring and weighing, made them suspected of dishonesty in Byzantine rural society.[429] Correspondingly, the cheating miller was frequently depicted among the sinners in the Last Judgement images in Byzantine village churches.[430] In the 1960s, watermills were still present in the immediate surroundings of the villages in the Strandzha region.[431] Today, only one is preserved at the southern end of Kaynarca (Gehenna), a fortified settlement in the Middle Ages ca 5 km northwest of Brysis (Pınarhisar).[432]

Large storage facilities in medieval villages, provincial towns, and monastic estates respond to a basic need of rural communities for year-round substance and showcase the productivity of surrounding landscapes. Subterranean *pithoi* or *pitharia* (large

[424] Murdzhev, "The Introduction of the Moldboard Plow to Byzantine Thrace."
[425] *Ibid*., 180.
[426] Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, 42.
[427] Lefort, "The Rural Economy," 235–36; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 215; "Production and Trade in Late Antique and Byzantine Eastern Thrace," 646.
[428] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 126.
[429] Kondyli, *Rural Communities in Late Byzantium*, 43–44.
[430] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 124–27.
[431] Kurter, "Istranca Dağlarında Köy Hayatına Ait Müşahedeler," 127.
[432] See chapter 4.3.

storage vessels), either made of ceramic or constructed with rubble stones, are frequently encountered in domestic contexts in Byzantium.[433] The dimensions of some *pithoi* are too large to pass through the doors, which indicates an installment during the construction, making them integral elements of houses.[434] They are often halfway sunk into the floors, occupying little space while providing ample storage for grain, olive oil, wine, and other agricultural products.[435]

Figure 4.15: An underground storage room in the citadel of Didymoteichon with carved indentations to place ceramic vessels. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

Byzantine inhabitants of Thrace transformed the rocky material on which they built their settlements for the same purpose. Nikephoros Gregoras comments on the underground containers and wells in the citadel of Didymoteichon, carved out on the bedrock, according to him, to collect rainwater, one of which also served as a temporary prison cell for Constantine Palaiologos in 1322, the despot of Thessaloniki.[436] Indeed, the settlement hill of Didymoteichon is replete with subterranean rock-cut units, identified as cisterns, workshop areas, and extensive storage spaces, some articulated with multiple circular depressions to install terracotta *pithoi* (fig. 4.15).[437] Comparable also are the underground storage areas carved on the

[433] Rheidt, "Byzantinische Wohnhäuser," 198–99; Sigalos, "Housing People in Medieval Greece," 204; "Middle and Late Byzantine Houses in Greece," 57; Gerstel et al., "A Late Medieval Settlement at Panakton," 198–99; Kondyli, *Rural Communities in Late Byzantium*, 84.
[434] Rheidt, "Byzantinische Wohnhäuser," 198–99.
[435] Giannopoulou, *Pithoi*.
[436] Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte, Zweiter Teil, 1. Halbband*, 63–64.
[437] Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*, 99–102; Giannopoulou, *Pithoi*, 44.

fortified hill of Probaton (fig. 4.16). Four such *pithoi*, roughly 1.5 m in diameter, are exposed in and around the walled settlement; however, likely many more remain yet buried under the surface soil. They are covered with domical ceilings with circular openings on the ground to be closed by lids. In Didymoteichon and Probaton, people lived on limestone hills, which they carved out and built upon. These fortified settlement centers functioned as the focal points of the local economy, continuously provided by nearby villages. Large storage areas under the living quarters must have supported the people within the massive walls and ensured the protection of the surrounding landscapes' agricultural produce. Furthermore, two ceramic *pithoi* excavated by the museum authorities in distant fields are now exhibited in the nearby village squares in Sinanköy (Probaton) and Soğucak (Kryonero). Rather than storing foodstuff inside, these vessels were probably used as cisterns amidst vast agricultural lands to water the crops.[438]

Figure 4.16: A rock-cut subterranean storage unit in Probaton.

Viniculture has an ancient tradition in Eastern Thrace, where the production and trade of wine are textually and archaeologically documented.[439] For example, Ganos, a thriving monastic center on the hilly topography southwest of Rhaidestos (Tekirdağ),

[438] Giannopoulou, *Pithoi*, 45. The storage capacity of the *pithos* unearthed northeast of Probaton can be calculated as 800 liters with the dimensions provided in Siddiq et al., "Sinanköy Kalesi Yakınlarında Bulunan Pithos."

[439] Kaplan, "La viticulture byzantine (VIIe-XIe siècle)," 168, 193–94; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 215–16; "Production and Trade in Late Antique and Byzantine Eastern Thrace," 645–46.

is well-known for its wine production. The wide distribution of locally-produced Günsenin type I *amphorae* demonstrates the circulation network of the "sweet wine" from Ganos in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea in the 11th and 12th centuries.[440] In the mid-12th century, Arab geographer Muhammed al-Idrisi mentioned vineyards as salient landscape elements around numerous settlements in Eastern Thrace.[441] Later in the 17th century, traveling through the region in 1675, John Covel, the chaplain of the Levant Company, noted vast areas of vineyards and praised the local wine he was served in "almost every village" on his way between Constantinople and Adrianople.[442]

Figure 4.17: Dionysian relief from the Roman theater of Bizye, now displayed in the Kırklareli Archaeological Museum. (U. Mania, German Archeological Institute in Istanbul, D-DAI-IST-2016-01257)

Inspired by the vinicultural activities in the Strandzha region, the decorative program in the rock-cut pilgrimage complex at Medeia, established in the 9th century, features grapevines and *kantharoi* (drinking cups).[443] A few km southwest, a marble panel from the Roman theatre of Bizye, now in the Kırklareli Archaeological Museum, also testifies to the ancient winemaking tradition (fig. 4.17). The relief panel depicts Dionysus reclining on a *kline* holding a *kantharos* in his hand. The god of wine is in the company of four satyrs, two of them pouring wine from a wineskin into a large

[440] Günsenin, "Le vin de Ganos"; "Ganos Wine and Its Circulation in the 11th Century." Thousands of Günsenin type I *amphorae* were recovered during the excavations at the Harbor of Theodosius in Constantinople, indicating the role of the capital not only as a market but also as a distribution center for Ganos wine. Also see, Günsenin, "Ganos Limanı'ndan Portus Theodosiacus'a."
[441] Al-Idrisi, *Géographie d'Edrisi*, 2:292, 298.
[442] John Covel, *Voyages En Turquie 1675-1677*, 38, 40, 88, 92, 94, 98, 118, esp. 116.
[443] See chapter 3.1.

mixing vessel (*krater*). The composition is framed by grapevines with bunches of grapes hanging from above. In a patriarchal *sigillion* of 1366, a vineyard near a monastery dedicated to St. Stephanos in the vicinity of Bizye was included in the list of land donations to Brontocheion Monastery in Mystras.[444] In 14th-century Brysis, among many things that Matthew of Ephesus complained about were the inhabitants of the town, both men and women, all day wandering around drunk on the unmixed wine served by the tavern keepers.[445] Even though his portrayal of the local population behaving like followers of Dionysus is definitely over the top, this exaggerated account bespeaks the production and consumption of wine in the region in the Late Byzantine period.

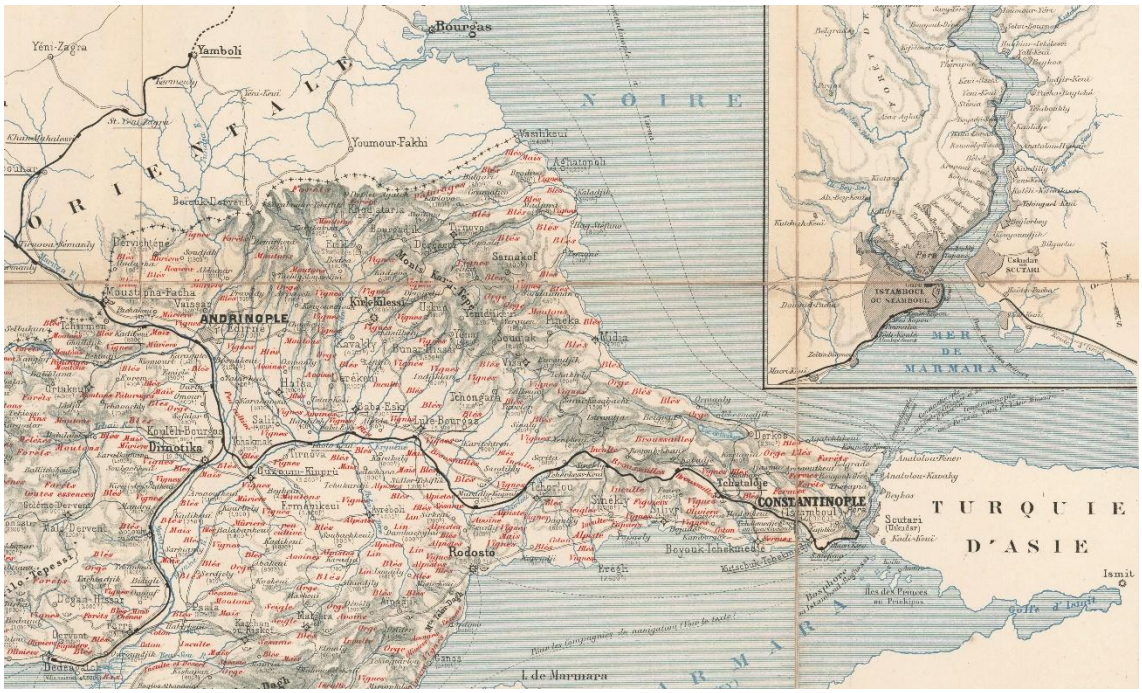

Figure 4.18: Detail from the 19th-century commercial map of Thrace (Bianconi, F. "Carte commerciale de la province de Thrace." Paris: Librairie Chaix, 1885. Retrieved from: https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/7245072#view)

Visiting Thrace in the 17th century, John Covel was less critical of the dietary habits of the locals, which he, too, recorded as including large amounts of wine and grape consumption, especially between the months of August and December.[446] Thrace was

[444] Miklosich and Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, 1:481–82. The argument for a location close to Bizye is based on a letter of Patriarch Isidore I (1347-1350) sent to the metropolitan of Bizye in 1348. Hunger and Kresten, *Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel*, 2:512–13. Also, see Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 216, 661.
[445] Reinsch, *Die Briefe des Matthaios von Ephesos*, 198, 379.
[446] John Covel, *Voyages En Turquie 1675-1677*, 90, 94.

an important wine-producing region of the Ottoman Empire, whose production further increased in the late 19th century. The wine made from the grapes grown in Kırkkilise (Kırklareli), Vize (Bizye), and Midye (Medeia/Kıyıköy) became an export product and even supplied France after 1889, where the phylloxera epidemic had caused great damage to the vineyards.[447] Correspondingly, a commercial map of Thrace published in Paris in 1885 specifies a large concentration of vineyards surrounding Kırkkilise (Kırklareli) (fig. 4.18). The scale of vinicultural activities and the importance of grape cultivation in the local economy are reflected in the Bulgarian name of the city, Lozengrad, meaning the city of vineyards. In addition, the map also marks vineyards along the southern foothills of the Strandzha Mountains and in the undulating topography around Malak Samakov (Karabizye/Demirköy) and Vize (Bizye).[448] The local cuisine bears witness to this long-standing tradition. Besides wine and grape molasses, typical for the region is *hardaliye*, a beverage made of fermented grape juice aromatized with mustard seeds.

Figure 4.19: Çalışkan Çiftliği outside Medeia, agricultural installation no. 1.

In the rupestrian landscapes of the Strandzha region, rock-cut agricultural installations connected to nearby Byzantine settlements provide information about medieval winemaking practices. These are found in clusters in a forest glade west of Medeia in a locality now known as Çalışkan Çiftliği, on the rocky ridge above the outlying church southeast of the Balkaya village, and on the outskirts of the fortified hill in Erenler east of Brysis. Winepresses usually consist of two interconnected basins: a treading floor

[447] Uçan, "Ottoman Kırklareli and Its Hinterland in the 19th Century," 58–59.
[448] Bianconi, "Carte commerciale de la province de Thrace."

or a press bed and a smaller collecting vat on a slightly lower level to facilitate the flow. The bunches of grapes are first piled together on treading floors for a small amount of must to flow down by their own weight. Then, the grapes are trodden by feet, during which most of their juice is extracted. The remaining pulp and skins may be squeezed further with mechanical presses to separate the rest of their juice.[449]

Figure 4.20: Erenler, agricultural installation no. 1.

Winemaking installations in the Strandzha region are on exposed rocky grounds outside settlement centers, much like the open-air examples in Caria, Lycia, Isauria, and Cilicia (figs. 4.19–20).[450] The basins, carved out from limestone outcrops, are similarly left unplastered, whereas, in many other regions, including Cappadocia, they are internally covered with a hydraulic plaster, which may be related to the material qualities of the available rock. 10th-century agricultural manual, *Geoponika*, advises the winepresses to be in well-lit, airy places since they need to be washed thoroughly with salty water and fumigated before and after each operation yet generally kept dry to prevent mold.[451] The placement in the open air and direct exposure to sunlight respond well to these concerns.

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[449] Dalby, *Geoponika*, VI, 11: 155. For the grape juice extraction, also see Frankel, "Presses for Oil and Wine in the Southern Levant," 73–74; Maniatis, "The Byzantine Winemaking Industry," 234–39.

[450] Among others, see Diler, "The Most Common Wine-Press"; "Olive Oil and Wine Production of the Halikarnassos Peninsula in Karia"; Aydınoğlu and Alkaç, "Rock-Cut Wine Presses in Rough Cilicia"; Varinlioğlu, "Trades, Crafts, and Agricultural Production in Town and Countryside in Southeastern Isauria"; Bulut, "Lykia'da Zeytinyağı ve Şarap Üretimi." By contrast, the winemaking installations in Byzantine Cappadocia are almost exclusively sheltered in rock-cut rooms with ventilation holes in the ceiling. Peker, "Agricultural Production and Installations in Byzantine Cappadocia," 49. In the city of Amorium, the complex with three treading floors appears to be semi-open, yet most winepresses are on the lower floors of two-story residential buildings. Tsivikis et al., "Reconstructing the Wine Industry of Byzantine Amorium," 143, 145.

[451] Dalby, *Geoponika*, VI, 1, 10, 13: 149, 155, 156.

In the Strandzha region, the single installation with two rock-cut units connected to one another is *Çalışkan no. 1* (figs. 4.19, A.15). The treading basin has a rather unusual shape with only two straight side walls, whereas its other half is round. The basin is carved on a higher level than the oval-shaped collecting vat, which terminates with a smaller circular hole at the top. The irregularities suggest a change of function, during which both underground units were enlarged. Likewise, the connection between the two, now too large to separate the grape juice from the stalks and skins, must have been widened for secondary use. Despite such discrepancies, this is the sole example of a rock-cut collecting vat yet identified in the region. All other installations consist of rectangular treading floors, apparently functioning with portable vats to collect the must.[452] In this case, wooden containers or ceramic vessels, as instructed in *Geoponika*, may have been used as collecting vats.[453]

Most treading floors are now broken and partially buried, some preserved only as oblong depressions on the ground. The dimensions vary. Apart from the two smallest ones in Balkaya, roughly 0.70 m to 1.30 m, the average width of a basin is 1 m, whereas the length changes between 2 m and 2.5 m.[454] They are often set in the slopes, leaving room for the portable collecting vats to be placed on a lower level. In that respect, the most illustrative is *Erenler no. 1*, a sizable treading floor on an elevated rock outcrop (figs. 4.20, A.20). This rectangular basin is connected to the sloping terrain with a now-broken drainage channel, where a portable collecting vat could have been placed during the operation. Other installations provide less information about how the extracted juice was transferred to the containers. Likewise, the evidence for mechanical presses is very limited in Thrace.[455] Once again, *Erenler no. 1* provides an exception. The 40-

[452] There are many rock-cut winemaking installations without permanent collecting vats in the Lycian and Isaurian landscapes. Varinlioğlu, "Trades, Crafts, and Agricultural Production in Town and Countryside in Southeastern Isauria," 180; Bulut, "Lykia'da Zeytinyağı ve Şarap Üretimi," 688. It is not that unusual to find winepresses without collecting vats in archeological excavations either. For example, in Amorium, only three of eleven excavated winemaking facilities have their collecting vats preserved. Tsivikis et al., "Reconstructing the Wine Industry of Byzantine Amorium," 143.

[453] Dalby, *Geoponika*, VI, 3: 151.

[454] These dimensions correspond well to the similar rock-cut treading floors in Lycia. See Bulut, "Lykia'da Zeytinyağı ve Şarap Üretimi," 688. Those in Cilicia tend to be a little wider. See Aydınoğlu and Alkaç, "Rock-Cut Wine Presses in Rough Cilicia," 280.

[455] For the types of pressing mechanisms, see Frankel, "Presses for Oil and Wine in the Southern Levant." For the use of simple lever-and-weight presses and lever-and-screw presses in Byzantine Anatolia, see Varinlioğlu, "Trades, Crafts, and Agricultural Production in Town and Countryside in Southeastern Isauria," esp. 180–85; Peker, "Agricultural Production and Installations in Byzantine Cappadocia," 48–49;

cm-wide round niche on its longer west wall may have been intended to fix a lever beam (fig. 4.20). Generally, it is difficult to distinguish whether a press was designed for winemaking or olive oil production, and arguably, many may have served both purposes.[456] For the Strandzha region, however, the latter can be excluded altogether since the climate here is not suitable for olive cultivation, in contrast to the southern coasts of Thrace.[457]

Following the treading and pressing of grapes, the third and the most complex process in winemaking is fermentation, which starts naturally even before the juice extraction is completed. Either in the collecting vats or in separate containers, a closed space with stable environmental conditions is preferred for fermenting quality wine.[458] Subterranean carved spaces in wine production areas in Balkaya and Erenler can be where the primary fermentation took place. The former is a round storage unit with a diameter of 3 m east of treading basins on the rocky ridge (fig. A.6). It is covered by a domical ceiling with a now-broken opening on the ground. The latter is a barrel-vaulted underground room next to *Erenler no. 1*, measuring 2.10 m to 3.20 m (fig. A.20).[459] The room is accessed via a vertical shaft, terminating with a 40-cm-wide square hole, originally closed off by a lid (fig. 4.20). Both underground units are surrounded by solid rock masses and sheltered from sunlight and other natural elements, providing favorable conditions for stacking containers filled with grape juice for fermentation.[460] Furthermore, *Çalışkan no. 1* west of Medeia is a former winepress recarved to create two larger enclosed units that could be used for storage (fig. 4.19).[461] It is not clear whether this storage area was related to a later stage of wine production in Çalışkan

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Mitchell et al., "Church Building and Wine Making East of Ankara"; Tsivikis et al., "Reconstructing the Wine Industry of Byzantine Amorium," 135–43.

[456] Varinlioğlu, "Trades, Crafts, and Agricultural Production in Town and Countryside in Southeastern Isauria," 179–80, 186; Bulut, "Lykia'da Zeytinyağı ve Şarap Üretimi," 691–94.

[457] Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 216; "Production and Trade in Late Antique and Byzantine Eastern Thrace," 646.

[458] Maniatis, "The Byzantine Winemaking Industry," 237–38.

[459] Engin Beksaç describes the same underground room as a collecting vat, which is unlikely for it is too large and not connected to the nearby treading basin. See "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 35–36; "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2004 Yüzey Araştıması," 290.

[460] For spaces that may have been used for storage and fermentation of wine, see Peker, "Agricultural Production and Installations in Byzantine Cappadocia," 53; Tsivikis et al., "Reconstructing the Wine Industry of Byzantine Amorium," 153–54.

[461] Amorium presents a similar case of reuse. Many of the excavated winepresses were already out of use before the destruction layer associated with the sack of the city by the Arabs in 838. In some, the collecting vats were repurposed for grain storage; in others, the whole installations were removed to place *pithoi* halfway into the ground. See Tsivikis et al., "Reconstructing the Wine Industry of Byzantine Amorium," 147–48, 154.

Çiftliği while the other treading floors were still in operation.

None of the wine production areas in the Strandzha region are rich in ceramic sherds. *Amphorae* are absent from the surface finds, except for a few broken handles from Erenler. The scarcity of ceramic finds can be explained by the containers made of perishable materials, such as wood and animal skin.[462] In the Middle Ages, besides ceramic vessels, wooden barrels and wineskins were commonly used to transport wine with the added benefit of minimizing the waste due to breakage.[463] According to a 10th-century treatise, the wine for the consumption of the imperial household in military expeditions was likewise carried in wineskins loaded on pack animals.[464] The large and apparently heavy wineskin from which two satyrs pour wine in the Dionysian relief image from the ancient theatre of Bizye illustrates the use of wine containers made of animal skin since antiquity in the Strandzha region, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean (fig. 4.17). Along these lines, the product of the grapes trodden and pressed in the above-discussed installations may have been stored and transported in wineskins or wooden barrels, for neither of which there was a shortage of material.

In order to reduce the transportation cost and the risk of damaging ripe fruits, winemaking facilities were usually, but not exclusively, installed near vineyards.[465] Similarly, all three production areas in the Strandzha region are close to cultivable lands outside settlement centers. In Çalışkan Çiftliği, winemaking installations are approximately 2.5 km west of the fortified town of Medeia, on an elevated rock outcrop at the corner of a forest clearing (fig. A.14). Such open lands in an otherwise uninterrupted woodland are indicative of a past activity different from the immediate surroundings. This piece of land reclaimed from the forest, now a pasturage of 1.25 hectares, can be interpreted as the site of a modest vineyard. The shortest route to Medeia, calculated with a GIS-based least-cost path analysis (LCP), passes near the agricultural installations and roughly corresponds to the modern road that replaced an

[462] The sites in Thrace do not present an isolated case. The number of *amphorae* found in the city of Amorium is unexpectedly low despite the decades-long systematic excavations and well-documented large-scale wine production between the 7th and 9th centuries. See *ibid*., 154–55.
[463] Maniatis, "The Byzantine Winemaking Industry," 244.
[464] *Treatise C*: lines 137-143 and 599-604, see Haldon, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, 102–3, 132–33.
[465] Diler, "The Most Common Wine-Press," 88; Frankel, "Presses for Oil and Wine in the Southern Levant," 73–74; Peker, "Agricultural Production and Installations in Byzantine Cappadocia," 56–57; Tsivikis et al., "Reconstructing the Wine Industry of Byzantine Amorium," 158.

ancient one flanked by funerary monuments (fig. A.17).[466] The grapes cultivated here must have been processed on the rock-cut treading floors in the northwest for the resulting wine to be carried to the Black Sea (fig. A.15). At the opposite corner of the open land, a single-nave rupestrian church with a dominant view puts the vineyard under divine protection (fig. A.16). In the vintage season, the small group of workers may have gathered in the outlying church. The water basin outside the naos is the only extant church furniture. The large alcove on the north wall defines a specialized area in the naos, emphasized with a cruciform carving that may have contained a metal cross.

The wine production area at the southeastern end of the Balkaya village consists of a dozen treading floors and a large *pithos*-like underground storage unit carved on the rocky ridge above the small outlying church (figs. A.5–6).[467] Around the site are strip fields and some larger amalgamated ones. The field boundaries, set by slightly curving, low, and weedy balks, imply a certain time depth for the present landscape and suggest a continuation of historical land use.[468] These arable lands between the settlement and forest cover are marked by the *Balkaya church no. 3*. The winemaking facilities signify vinicultural activities in this area next to the road between the two primary centers in the region: Bizye and Medeia.

Lastly, four treading floors are located on the slopes of the fortified hill in Erenler, close to a major road connecting the settlements on the southern foothills of the Strandzha Mountains (figs. 19–20).[469] The barrel-vaulted underground room next to winemaking installations may have been where the grape juice was fermented, and the

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[466] For the inventory files of these funerary monuments, see *Vezirtepe Tümülüsü, Vezirtepe A Tümülüsü, Vezirtepe B Tümülüsü, Vezirtepe C Tümülüsü, Vezirtepe D Tümülüsü, Vezirtepe E Tümülüsü, Vezirtepe F Tümülüsü, Kıyıköy Mezarlığı,* and *Şarapçı Yolu Kaya Oyma Mezarı* in the catalog of Kırklareli Cultural Assets Inventory Project: http://www.kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr.

[467] These were previously identified as tombs. Ertuğrul, "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması," 5–6; Beksaç, "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 35; "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2005 Yüzey Araştırması," 197–98. Nevertheless, many of them are too shallow and large for burials, more than twice the size of the rock-cut tombs in the cemetery area southwest of the same village.

[468] With reservations for chronological resolution, Jim Crow and Sam Turner suggest a continuation of medieval or early post-medieval field systems for similar strip fields north of Silivri in the Thracian hinterland of Constantinople. See "Silivri and the Thracian Hinterland of Istanbul," 173–77; "Unlocking Historic Landscapes in the Eastern Mediterranean," 225–26.

[469] Close to the agricultural installations is a rock-cut burial chamber of a former *tumulus*, now devoid of earth filling forming the artificial hill. Such monumental funerary mounds, constructed between the Early Iron Age and Roman period, are common elements of Thracian landscapes.

resulting wine was stored. On the broader landscape further south are agricultural lands irrigated by the Ergene River and its tributaries. Large areas of vineyards are still being operated in this landscape by local wineries, such as Arcadia and Chamlija.[470] People living in and around the medieval stronghold exploited and transformed the surrounding rocky terrain with quarrying and agricultural activities. The *kastron* once controlled the eastern approach to Brysis, overlooking a vast area with limestone deposits and fertile lands, where the grapes were cultivated to be processed in the production area below the defensive walls. Such landscape relations demonstrate once again the security concerns and the centrality of agriculture and, specifically, winemaking in the life of rural communities in the Strandzha region.

4.3. No Place Like a Rock-solid Home

This chapter opened with a discussion of rock-cut architecture as a primary way to demarcate lay settlements and transform surrounding landscapes. I then shifted my focus to people populating these landscapes, making a living from the forests, waters, and lands of the Strandzha region. About inhabiting the lay settlements, what remains to be discussed are the spaces in which people lived and conducted their day-to-day business. Elsewhere in Byzantium, some lived in rupestrian houses that now provide ample information for Byzantine domestic spaces. Cappadocian courtyard complexes are relevant to this discussion. Previously attributed to monastic communities, these monuments are now widely accepted as upscale residences of the landed aristocracy, established in the 10th and 11th centuries.[471] In this coherent group of rupestrian sites, courtyards give access to and are defined by surrounding rock-cut rooms. Large longitudinal halls, whether perpendicularly or transversely laid, occupy central positions, whereas churches are rather small and in secondary places. Each complex

[470] "Kırklareli Bağları [Kırklareli Vineyards]," Trakya Bağ Rotası: https://www.trakyabagrotasi.com/kirklareli-baglari.

[471] Among others, for the so-called Hallaç Monastery near Ortahisar, see Mathews and Daskalakis-Mathews, "Islamic-Style Mansions in Byzantine Cappadocia." For courtyard complexes in Çanlı Kilise Settlement, see Ousterhout, "Survey of the Byzantine Settlement at Çanlı Kilise"; *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*. Selime-Yaprakhisar, see Kalas, "Rock-Cut Architecture of the Peristrema Valley"; "The 2004 Survey of the Byzantine Settlement at Selime-Yaprakhisar"; "Cappadocia's Rock-Cut Courtyard Complexes." Açıksaray, see Öztürk, "A Comparative Architectural Investigation"; "Açıksaray 'Open Palace'"; Öztürk Büke, "Byzantine Settlements in Cappadocia." Lastly, for a more recent, succinct assessment of domestic architecture in Byzantine Cappadocia, see Ousterhout, "At Home in Cappadocia"; and for a typological and morphological discussion of courtyard complexes, see Mamaloukos and Anastasiadis, "Some Notes on the Byzantine Houses of Cappadocia."

contains several utilitarian spaces, including kitchens, storage areas, stables, and dovecotes. The only example of rock-cut architecture in the Strandzha region that I identify with a residential function is found in Kaynarca (Gehenna), 5 km northwest of Brysis. The site displays a spatial arrangement comparable to Cappadocian courtyard complexes, similarly on an overlooking location that dominates the landscape around the walled settlement.

The rupestrian complex in Kaynarca, now surrounded by modern village houses, consists of two carved rooms placed side by side on a rock escarpment: a transverse hall and a kitchen (figs. 4.21, A.22). In front of the rock façade, much eroded and altered, is an open terrace that may have functioned as a courtyard around which rock-cut and possibly now-lost masonry rooms were laid out. To be sure, there is no one-size-fits-all typology of Byzantine houses for different levels of society in the large geographic and chronological span of the Empire. Still, some basic design parameters appear to be constant, such as the incorporation of open areas into living quarters. Many Byzantine houses were built with courtyards or loosely defined open spaces, functioning both as central circulation areas and where some household activities took place.[472]

Figure 4.21: Rupestrian complex in Kaynarca, general view from the south.

[472] For Byzantine houses with courtyards, among others, see Bouras, "Houses and Settlements in Byzantine Greece," 343; "Houses in Byzantium," 22; Sigalos, "Housing People in Medieval Greece," 201–2; "Middle and Late Byzantine Houses in Greece," 56; Doğan, "Alanya ve Çevresinde Erken Hıristiyan-Bizans Evleri ve Kırsal Yaşam," 3–4.

The longitudinal hall, measuring ca 8 m to 4 m, is laid out transversely in a central location, accessed from the courtyard (figs. 4.21, A.22). A large portion of the outer wall is lost, where the main entrance is expected to be behind a decorative carved façade looking towards the citadel of Gehenna. The rock-cut room terminates with a round *exedra* at the northern end, featuring a curvilinear bench, later transformed into a manger (fig. A.22 sec.2). On the opposite side, the south wall shows a series of secondary carvings, including an arched door opening into an irregular alcove on the exterior. The hall is covered by a barrel vault with a two-stepped corbelling on the long sides, reminding constructional details of wooden architecture.[473] The southern *tympanum* wall above the aforementioned arched door features an off-the-axis blind arch, centering neither the vaulting nor the door nor the side wall (fig. 4.22). In the north, the ceiling drops to form the vault of the *exedra*, the apex of which is stressed with a conspicuous rock boss resembling a keystone. On the western wall, two pilasters decorated with simple banded profiles are set at the corners. A 120-cm-wide arched door in the middle leads to a smaller, cross-vaulted inner chamber (figs. 4.22, A.22). Its floor level is 30 cm higher than that of the longitudinal hall. Except for the cross-vaulted room, the interior has crisply carved rock surfaces with visible chisel marks, easily distinguishable from the later carving phases. Lastly, three simple cross images are incised in the *exedra*, the largest of which has splayed ends and a longer lower arm, located 1.90 m above the ground level. Undoubtedly later than the initial carving, it remains unclear at what point the rock-cut conch received these cruciform incisions.

In a way similar to Late Antique reception halls, larger oblong rooms are interpreted as the main living spaces in Byzantine houses.[474] In Cappadocian courtyard complexes, such rooms are usually entered from impressive carved façades, yet the outer rock wall of the transverse hall in Kaynarca is largely missing (fig. 4.21).[475] The *exedra* at the

[473] Many single-nave rock-cut churches in Cappadocia, dated to the 9th-10th centuries, have similar corbelled barrel vaults. See Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 58–64. In Thrace, the same detail exists in the rock-cut pilgrimage complex outside Medeia. See chapter 3.1.

[474] Sigalos, "Housing People in Medieval Greece," 202. Simon Ellis notes that large sections of Early Byzantine aristocratic houses are public and mainly designed to convey wealth and power. Although we know of three different types of reception halls for different occasions (*triclinia*, grand dining halls, and audience halls), in many examples, all receptions seem to have taken place in a single apsidal hall. "Early Byzantine Housing."

[475] This is also the case in Cappadocia, as in nearly half of the courtyard complexes, the outer rock façades are too worn out to preserve evidence of carved decoration. See Öztürk, "Negotiating between the Independent and Groups of Courtyard Complexes," 842; Öztürk Büke, "Rock-Cut Façades," 165.

northern end of the longitudinal hall underlines the ceremonial character of the interior, albeit now stripped of its former decoration and furnishing. More than just representational, however, such rooms are often considered multifunctional, used for different purposes with a temporal separation of activities.[476] How were they furnished then to accommodate a range of activities rather than being allocated to a single, designated use? The surviving inventories of Byzantine households illuminate this point further. The almost exclusive omission of furniture in these records implies foldable or demountable arrangements for sitting, dining, entertaining guests, and sleeping.[477] For example, beds are exceptionally rare despite the frequent mention of sleeping equipment that can be quite high-priced depending on the fabric and embroidery.[478] The absence of beds suggests more flexible arrangements: Mattresses and rugs may have been laid on the floors at night and removed by the daytime. Tables and seating units are also rarely made to the lists, whereas the most common type of furniture is chests, which may have been more versatile than being merely used for storage.

Figure 4.22: Transverse hall in Kaynarca, looking towards the south.

Extensive storage places for agricultural produce and food for daily consumption are common elements in Byzantine living quarters, as discussed in the previous section, *Making a Living from the Rock*. In excavated contexts, storage areas are identified with

[476] Sigalos, "Middle and Late Byzantine Houses in Greece," 59–60.
[477] *Ibid*., 59–60. An alternative explanation would be the presence of built-in furniture for multiple purposes, such as long permanent couches for sitting and sleeping. Rheidt, "Byzantinische Wohnhäuser," 199.
[478] Oikonomides, "The Contents of the Byzantine House from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Century."

a concentration of large vessels, particularly *pithoi*, usually sunk into the floors of houses and courtyards.[479] In Kaynarca, the small cross-vaulted room may have been reserved for storage, perhaps for the furniture and textiles used in the multifunctional hall. This inner chamber hardly receives any daylight, and compared to the preceding longitudinal room, little attention has been paid to its execution. Furthermore, the location nested deep in the rock mass provides privacy and security.

North of the longitudinal hall, the kitchen is a 3.5-meter-wide square-like room covered by a conical vault with a ventilation hole, now partially broken and closed with flat stones (fig. A.22 plan and sec.1). Carvings on its walls may be related to former installations for food preparation and storage. The circular pit on the ground under the ventilation hole possibly indicates the location of the hearth. Although this is the only known example in Thrace, similar conical or pyramidal ceilings designed to remove the smoke are characteristics of rock-cut kitchens in Cappadocian courtyard complexes.[480]

In Byzantine archaeology, the identification of parts of masonry houses used for food preparation generally relies on the concentration of some small finds like cooking pots or traces of fire in the hearths. The lack of such diagnostic data in many Byzantine houses has led to the conclusion that most of the cooking may have taken place in the open air.[481] On the contrary, in Kaynarca, a large, separate room designated for food preparation demonstrates a specialization in the domestic space rather than having a single hearth for heating and cooking or simply cooking outdoors. This general layout finds parallels, for example, in the systematically excavated Byzantine neighborhood on the southern slope of the citadel of Pergamon, dated to the period between the 11th and 14th centuries.[482] In relatively larger houses in Pergamon, a separate compartment with a hearth is built next to the main living space, which may have been used for various domestic activities, including dining, sleeping, and entertaining guests.

The rupestrian complex is on an elevated position on the western bank of a smooth valley (fig. A.21). The settlement is rich in freshwater sources and springs, as reflected in both Greek and Turkish place names referring to the springing of water: Γέννα and

[479] For subterranean *pithoi*, see the discussions above in chapter 4.2.
[480] Kalas, "The Byzantine Kitchen in the Domestic Complexes of Cappadocia."
[481] Sigalos, "Middle and Late Byzantine Houses in Greece," 58.
[482] Rheidt, "Byzantinische Wohnhäuser," esp. 199.

Kaynarca, respectively. The earliest written attestation of the settlement comes from the *Partitio Regni Graeci*, the treaty disintegrating the lands of the Byzantine Empire in the aftermath of the Latin capture of Constantinople in 1204.[483] Predating the first known attestation of the toponym Gehenna in the early 13th century is the construction of Panagia Church on an abruptly rising terrain across the valley (fig. 4.23). This church is the only extant example of cross-in-square design in the Strandzha region, attributed to the Middle Byzantine period based on stylistic grounds.[484]

Figure 4.23: Panagia Church in Kaynarca, view from the southeast. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

The name of the street south of the cross-in-square church, Hisar Sokak, implies the presence of a fortified area on the elevated platform where the monument stands. The travel notes of Evliya Çelebi provide further evidence for the now-lost medieval city walls. "At a cannon shot's distance" north of Pınarhisar (Brysis), Evliya visited a town with abundant water sources, called Yene Hisar, identifiable with Gehenna.[485]

[483] Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte*, I:480; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 265.
[484] The sanctuary area is integrated into the nine bays of the cross-in-square design, known in the literature as the *compact inscribed cross* or, rather erroneously, *transitional Helladic type*. Slobodan Ćurčić suggests a date in the 9th-10th centuries and Stavros Mamaloukos in the late 10th or early 11th centuries. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 334; Mamaloukos, "Ο ναός της Παναγίας στη Γέννα."
[485] Kaya, "Evliya Çelebi'de Geçen Bir Yer Adı Hakkında."

Accordingly, the fortifications, enclosing a small, polygonal area, were already in ruins in the 17th century, which were largely demolished following the Ottoman conquest around 1368. I argue that the ruinous walls mentioned by Evliya Çelebi were on the naturally defensible hill now housing the Byzantine church on the eastern bank of the valley. Gehenna controls the western approach to the primary local center, Brysis (Pınarhisar), whereas the fortress in Erenler village guards the landscape to the east. These three fortified settlements overlook the road south of the Strandzha Mountains, rivers, and a large portion of the fertile plain. Positioned in 5 km intervals, they bespeak the resources invested in safeguarding inland Thrace.

Across the valley and the water, the rupestrian site is outside yet turned towards the Byzantine city walls (fig. A.21). It commands a view over the lands irrigated by the water stream, which operates the mill at the southern end of the village. The outer rock façade may have originally been embellished with carved decorations, albeit now worn out. In Cappadocia, rock-cut façades contribute to the "language of power" in aristocratic residential complexes, often laid out on elevated grounds, allowing visual control over extensive farmlands.[486] These decorative exteriors, executed with great detail and at an imposing scale to be seen from afar, give a false impression of monumentality and render the courtyard complexes more conspicuous.[487] The outer rock façade in Kaynarca may have once promoted a similar image, visible from the walled settlement center and the surrounding landscape.

An alternative interpretation of the rupestrian complex in Kaynarca would be that of a monastery partaking in the religious landscape outside the fortified settlement core of Gehenna. In this case, the apsidal hall oriented to the north may have functioned as a refectory. Even though this interpretation is tempting in itself, the site presents no other remains to support such an identification, not even a church, the focal point of any monastic settlement. One may still assume that the monastic church was a now-lost masonry building not far from the rock-cut refectory. Nonetheless, carving out the refectory and the kitchen from the bedrock instead of the church would have been a rather unconventional choice for a monastic community at best. In Byzantine

[486] Ousterhout, "At Home in Cappadocia," 156.
[487] Among others, see Kalas, "Cappadocia's Rock-Cut Courtyard Complexes," 398–99, 403–4; Öztürk, "Negotiating between the Independent and Groups of Courtyard Complexes," 840–42; Öztürk Büke, "Rock-Cut Façades."

Cappadocia, which I once again turn to for comparable material, carved interiors identified as refectories are often furnished with long rock-cut tables and benches.[488] On the contrary, secular halls in courtyard complexes do not have built-in furniture. Even more interesting, though, is the physical separation of the rooms designed for communal meals and food preparation.[489] The centrally-placed transverse hall in Kaynarca does not have permeant furniture for dining, and as such, it is more akin to secular halls in the residential complexes. The *exedra* at the northern end creates a ceremonial setting matching the status of the head of the household.[490] The sizable rock-cut kitchen with a particular roofing system to remove the smoke also agrees with a domestic context since, in Cappadocia, such vaults are almost exclusive to the kitchens in residential courtyard complexes. Consequently, it seems more plausible to me to identify the site as what remains of a house once inhabited by people of high social standing.

As the immediate surroundings are continuously inhabited, the rupestrian complex in Kaynarca has been constantly altered and adapted to the changing needs of the people living nearby. Perhaps this intimate relation inspired its later conversion into something, I argue, not much different from its intended function in the Middle Ages. Until the mid-1980s, the site was occupied by two village houses abutting the rock cliff, inhabited by the members of the Efe family.[491] Parts of the longitudinal hall were separated by walls and used as a private bathing area, storage, and cowshed. The kitchen of one of the village houses shared a wall with the Byzantine kitchen, which was then arranged to keep sheep and, later on, ducks. The "caves," as locals describe

[488] The presence of a refectory does not necessarily indicate a monastic use, as presumed in the earlier scholarship on Byzantine Cappadocia. In Göreme, for example, a large number of refectories are now interpreted in relation to the commemoration of the dead, used for private gatherings in cemetery areas. Ousterhout, "Remembering the Dead in Byzantine Cappadocia," 93–96; *Visualizing Community*, 411–78. For a critical review of this hypothesis, see Jolivet-Lévy, "Byzantine Settlements and Monuments of Cappadocia," 57.

[489] Nearly two-thirds of the courtyard complexes have kitchens but no built-in furniture for dining, while only a few rock-cut monasteries with extant refectories show some rudimentary arrangements identifiable as kitchens, many of which may also be later interventions. Öztürk, "The Unusual Separation of Cappadocian Refectories and Kitchens."

[490] A similar argument is maintained for the alcoves in the secular halls in Cappadocian courtyard complexes. See Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*, 172; Öztürk, "The Unusual Separation of Cappadocian Refectories and Kitchens," 158.

[491] According to the interview with Mustafa Efe, conducted on 29 July 2022, his family migrated to Kaynarca after the Balkan wars (1912-1913), like many other inhabitants of the village. Having found the rupestrian site empty, they built their houses there, where he also lived with his family until the 1970s.

them, were registered as a cultural heritage site in 1994, and the houses were cleared away, leaving an unprecedented empty area in front of the rock-cut rooms. Still, some secondary carvings witness this recent history, such as the roofline visible on the outside, an oven niche embedded in the rock façade, and the mangers in the longitudinal hall (fig. 4.21).

After the younger generation of the Efe family moved out, the grandmother of my local informant, Mustafa Efe, continued to live there as the sole inhabitant of the rupestrian site for another ten years.[492] The unique environment in which she resided seems to have become an identity marker. The villagers still speak of her as the old lady who lived in the "caves," even though none of the living spaces were actually inside rock-cut rooms. This alone demonstrates how a house with adjacent rock-cut rooms stands out in a settlement where the principal mode of architecture is masonry.

It is challenging to reconstruct the physical environment of the rupestrian complex and its relation to the medieval settlement, Gehenna. The longitudinal hall oriented to the north is comparable to the multifunctional rooms in Byzantine houses. Additionally, a separate room for food preparation points to a compartmentalized domestic space. The location on an elevated ground and the possible carved façade communicating with the city walls are architectural elements aiming to impress and display power and status. Moreover, the rupestrian complex has direct access to and possibly control over the water passing through the mill and flowing down to the agricultural fields in the south (fig. A.21).

In the last analysis, I promote an identification as a residential complex of a landowning family whose wealth stemmed from the vast arable lands overlooked by the site. The particular choice of material and living environment provides further insights about its dwellers. The preference for rock-cut architecture over masonry is obviously not a necessity in Gehenna. Instead, it reflects the ways in which the owners wanted to represent themselves through architecture. It perhaps represents a favored way of living, their origins, or connections to a region where rock carving is the prevailing space-making practice. One thing is certain: The rupestrian house must have been seen as remarkable by those living in the predominantly built environment of

[492] Interview with Mustafa Efe, 29 July 2022.

Gehenna, as were its inhabitants.

4.4. Conclusion

In her recent book, Fotini Kondyli reclaims agency for the rural communities in Late Byzantium. She explores the resilience of village societies on the North Aegean islands in the face of crises, closely connected to their multifaceted relationship with landscapes, constantly negotiated and adapted to their changing living conditions.[493] The inhabited landscape in the Strandzha region is a mountainous forestland with patches of exposed rocky ground, boulder mounds, and cliffs. Rock carving is not the only means of engaging with such a landscape, and as expected, rock-cut space-making is never in isolation. The historical sources portray a prosperous region, yet apart from the rupestrian spaces, material remains for its bustling settlements and productive landscapes are rather scarce. Byzantine carved spaces in the Strandzha region provide an essential piece of evidence to reconstruct rural life, considering, in particular, the small number of standing masonry monuments, being far from representative, and the lack of published archaeological excavations.

The focus of this chapter was, first and foremost, on how people made use of and inhabited the rocky landscapes in the Strandzha region. I examined the ways in which rock-cut architecture was instrumentalized to define living environments. Rock-cut outlying churches drew protective boundaries around lay settlements and marked areas of significance for rural societies. To be sure, the region's connection to Constantinople, unquestionably the largest market in Byzantium, affected the local economy and livelihood. Medieval rural communities quarried stone from the rock outcrops, exploited extensive woodlands covering the region, farmed animals, and cultivated crops, including grapes, which they pressed in rock-cut treading floors to extract the juice and produce wine. In the last section, I introduced the single surviving evidence for a rock-cut house in Thrace and discussed the preference for living in a rupestrian complex surrounded by a masonry-built environment. This differs from how most people lived in the region, but it demonstrates a regionally unusual way of engaging with the rocky material available in Thracian landscapes.

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[493] Kondyli, *Rural Communities in Late Byzantium*.

Present landscapes, in any definition, are palimpsests of entanglements among multiple agents, in which past human activities are nothing but one of the processes that occasionally left archaeologically detectable traces. Here, through such human interventions on the rock, I attempted to reconstruct the lives of common people in and around medieval villages and walled settlements, a much-underrepresented group in the historical sources of Byzantium. In dialog with this discussion are monasteries, which shared the same landscape and imposed their control over the resources. Contrary to wilderness *topos* common in their foundation stories, monastic communities were hardly ever established in *terra nullius* yet coexisted and often collaborated with lay inhabitants. In the next and final chapter, I scrutinize the diverse strategies adapted to create monastic spaces in the rupestrian environments of the Strandzha region.

Chapter 5

SECLUSION AND CONTROL IN MONASTIC LANDSCAPES

Monasticism followed two main strands, starting already in the first century of its development in Egypt: solitary and communal traditions.[494] Although both promoted isolation from society, the former praised complete seclusion for meditating and mortifying the flesh, whereas in the latter, monks lived together in well-organized communities under the guidance of a spiritual leader, following a set of rules specific to each monastery in Byzantium. The *lavriotic* system offered a compromise between the two, in which the monks could live in isolated cells either alone or in small groups but regularly came together in the monastic core for communal meals and celebration of the liturgy.[495] Byzantine ascetics often spent different periods of their life alternating between these practices.[496]

The varieties of monastic traditions were often complementary. On the one hand, communal monasteries were established around isolated cells of influential hermits or former *lavriotic* foundations; on the other hand, training in a *coenobium* was necessary to be prepared for extreme asceticism before venturing into a more solitary life.[497] Moreover, not a few foundations offered a combination of different monastic styles, providing living cells within enclosure walls or in the wider monastic landscapes. The surviving monastic foundation documents included instructions to regulate the relations of solitary hermits with communal monasteries on which they depended. Accordingly, experienced monks were allowed to seclude themselves in solitary places under the permission of their *hegoumenoi*, at times, in the cells given to them by the monastery. These *kelliotai* or *hesychastai* were subject to their superiors and expected to join the brethren on certain occasions and do some handiwork in their cells; in return, they were provided with food and clothing from the mother monastery.[498]

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[494] For the emergence and varieties of Eastern monasticism, among others, see Mango, "Monasticism"; Talbot, "An Introduction to Byzantine Monasticism"; *Varieties of Monastic Experience*, esp. 2–8; McGuckin, "Monasticism in the Christian East."

[495] Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, 18–20.

[496] McGuckin, "Monasticism in the Christian East," 30; Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience*, 189–90.

[497] Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium*, I: chapter 2; Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience*, chapter 3.

[498] Such regulations are found in the *typika* of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian in Patmos (1091/93), the Monastery of Mother of God of Machairas in Cyprus (1210), the Great Lavra of St. Sabas

Hybrid monasticism was widely practiced in the holy mountains, marking the heartlands of the Empire from the 9th century onwards, among which undoubtedly the most renowned and influential were Mount Olympos in Bithynia and Mount Athos in central Macedonia.[499] Likewise, hermitages and living cells existed under the auspices of *coenobitic* houses in two renowned holy mountains of Byzantine Thrace, which emerged roughly in the 10th century: Mount Ganos on the northwestern shore of the Marmara Sea and Mount Papikion on the Rhodope Mountains.[500] Both monastic centers were organized under an office of *protos*, the elected head of a monastic confederation, indicating large communities and institutionalized living. Several other monastic foundations in Thrace received patronage from the highest level of Byzantine society, closely connected to the ruling families in Constantinople. Perhaps the most well-known are Petritzonitissa Monastery (Bachkovo) near Philippopolis (Plovdiv), founded by Gregory Pakourianos in the late 11th century, Kosmosoteira in Feres, founded by *Sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos in the mid-12th century, and the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner on an offshore island of Sozopolis, restored by Michael Glabas Tarchaniotes in the late 13th century.[501] Such large-scale foundations owned extensive lands and transformed settlement patterns and road networks in their microregions, functioning as centers of communication and production.

Partaking in this network, the monastic communities that transformed the rupestrian landscapes of the Strandzha Mountains are the subject of the present chapter. Related

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near Jerusalem (12th-century), and the Monastery of the Archangel Michael on Mount Auxentios (1261–1280/81). *BMFD*, 590–92, 1162, 1317, 1227–28.

[499] Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium*, 35–47; Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience*, esp. 103–5.

[500] Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace." For Ganos, also see Günsenin, "Le vin de Ganos"; Külzer, "Das Ganos-Gebirge in Ostthrakien"; for Papikion, see Zekos, "Αποτελέσματα ανασκαφικών ερευνών στο Παπίκιον Όρος."

[501] The *typika* of Petritzonitissa (1083) and Kosmosoteira (1152) provide ample information about their properties and organization of monastic spaces and life, among other things: *BMFD*, 507–63, 782–858. For the Middle Byzantine ossuary chapel of Bachkovo Monastery, restored in the 14th century by Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371), see Bakalova et al., *The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery*; Planchette, *La chapelle médiévale du monastère de Bačkovo*. For the architecture of the catholicon in Feres, see Sinos, *Die Klosterkirche der Kosmosoteira in Bera*; for an overview of the history and monuments, also see Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*, 49–85. For a discussion of the recent archaeological excavations on the island of Sveti Ivan near Sozopol, see Popkonstantinov, Drazheva, and Kostova, "Monastery of St John the Forerunner"; Popkonstantinov and Kostova, "The Relics of St John in the Monastery on the Island of Sveti Ivan"; also see Dimitrov, "I monasteri di Sozopol," 279–81. Lastly, for the aristocratic female donor of the Linos Monastery on Mount Papikion, represented with a crown next to her son in a 14th-century portrait in the narthex of the catholicon, see Makris, "Lay Authority and Meaningful Portraiture."

textual evidence is fragmentary and not diachronically representative. The life of St. Euarestos provides one of the earliest written attestations of the monks in the region.[502] Accordingly, the saint, later the founder and *hegoumenos* of Kokorobion Monastery in Constantinople, started his monastic career in the Strandzha region, initially accompanying Theoktistos Bryennios in his ambassadorial mission to Bulgaria. In Probaton (Sinanköy), on their way to Bulgarian lands in 842, or slightly later, Euarestos learned about anchorites living near Skopelos (Yoğuntaş) and decided to join them. He stayed in a small monastic house in the neighboring Petra (Kayalı) for half a year together with an experienced Bulgarian monk, Ioannes, and another disciple of his before returning to Constantinople to enter the Studios Monastery. The humble community in Petra, consisting of three monks, including young Euarestos, informs us about the presence of such small monastic houses in the region during the mid-9th century, the overwhelming majority of which evidently passed undocumented.

In the southeast of the Strandzha Mountains, the life of St. Mary the Younger demonstrates different monastic groups in the settlement center of Bizye and its surrounding rural landscapes. The saint lived her last years and died in Bizye in the early 10th century, where her miracle-working tomb later became the center of a local pilgrimage. According to the *vita*, among the good deeds Mary did as she moved to Bizye was giving provisions to cave-dwelling monks living near the medieval city, which I relate to the rock-cut *lavra* in the Asmakayalar valley, the subject of the following section.[503] In a much later episode, twenty-five years after she died, the two sons of Mary, one becoming a monk and the other a military leader, founded a monastery in the city around the church containing the relics of their mother.[504]

The Strandzha region assumed a central role in the spiritual life of the Late Byzantine society at a previously unprecedented level due to the activities of the celebrated *hesychast* monk St. Gregory the Sinaite. In the borderland between Byzantium and the Second Bulgarian Empire, his monastic center in Paroria attracted Greek, Serbian, and Bulgarian monks, who then largely contributed to the spread of *hesychasm* in the

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[502] *Life of St. Euarestos*, VII: Van de Vorst, "La Vie de S. Évariste Higoumène a Constantinople," 301–2. Also see Soustal, *Thrakien*, 128, 397, 446.
[503] *Life of St. Mary the Younger*, V: *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 694. For an English translation, Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 259–60.
[504] *Ibid*, XXVII: *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 702–703; Laiou, 280–81.

Balkan lands.[505] Following his second arrival to the region in the first half of the 1330s, he founded a fortified monastery on Mount Katakekryomenon and three more nearby *lavrai*. The monks could also pursue a more solitary life and practice *hesychia* alone or in small groups. Emerged as the project of a single influential holy man, the short-lived monastic center thrived with the support of Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371), an eminent patron of monastic life, art, and literature in 14th-century Thrace and beyond.

Texts have their limitations in the reconstruction of monastic life and spaces, whereas the two standing masonry churches in the Strandzha region, Hagia Sophia in Bizye (Vize) and Panagia Church in Gehenna (Kaynarca), have no apparent connection to monasteries (figs. 1.11, 4.23).[506] On the contrary, the monastic communities left lasting traces on the rupestrian landscapes that can be addressed archaeologically. My discussions in the following pages center around how they engaged with the rocky material to form their particular spaces for seclusion, transform landscapes, and control natural resources in the Strandzha region. The first section focuses on the living environment of a *lavriotic* community in Asmakayalar near Bizye. The settlement displays clusters of rock-cut cells dispersed in a valley landscape and a monastic core with a communal church and commemorative spaces related to the founder. Asmakayalar is at a short distance and visible from Bizye, an advantageous location from which the monks benefited immensely. In the second section, I examine a much smaller, nucleated monastery, predominantly masonry-built on top of a pillar-like rock mass near Soğucak (Kryonero) village. This settlement type finds parallels in the wider Thrace, as well as in Meteora. The subject of the last section is the monastic compound at Kuzulu village, which shares the same geography as Paroria. In Kuzulu, the fortified hilltop monastery and a nearby hermitage not protected by the walls show a spatial arrangement that could accommodate different monastic traditions. Moreover, the rock-cut hermitage stands out as the place to change the direction of the water, making

[505] Among others, Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace," 120–48; Speake, *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth*, 99–104; Nikolov, "Хронология На Исихастките Манастири в Парория През XIV в."

[506] The domed basilica in Bizye is identified as the cathedral of the medieval city, whereas we lack a historical context for the small cross-in-square church in Gehenna (Kaynarca) almost entirely. The fact that it was built without a narthex may suggest a private use rather than a monastic or parish. For the related bibliography, see footnote 90.

it central to the monastery's control and exploitation of the landscape.

5.1. Seclusion at Arm's-length to Bizye

A sizeable monastic community inhabited the rocky landscape north of the fortified town of Bizye, a major hub of trade and military operations and an important ecclesiastical center throughout the Middle Ages.[507] The monastic settlement extends along a valley ca 1 km northeast of the citadel, in a locality known as Asmakayalar, meaning overhanging rocks.[508] Monks transformed these rock escarpments to seclude themselves while keeping a little more than an arm's length distance from the city. The monastic life in the valley thrived under the care of local elites, who presumably commissioned the carving of some monastic spaces and the decoration of others.

Figure 5.1: General view of Asmakayalar I.

[507] For an overview of Byzantine history of Bizye, see Külzer, "Zur Geschichte der ostthrakischen Stadt Vize/Bizyē." The archbishopric see consistently appears in the first place in the lists starting from the *Notitia* 7 (901-907) until its promotion to the metropolitan rank in the 14th century. For its position in the church hierarchy, see *Notitiae* 1[41], 2[44], 3[57], 4[42], 5[46], 7[52], 8[66], 11[86], 12[92], 14[73], 15[127], 16[84] 17[122], 18[113, 153, 156], 19[121], and 20[46]: Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 205, 217, 232, 250, 265, 273, 293, 344, 351, 376, 384, 389, 402, 408, 409, 410, 414, 417. Also, see Asdracha, "La Thrace orientale et la Mer Noire."

[508] To date, the site has remained largely unexplored, mainly known through a handful of short articles published in Turkish in the 1960s and 1970s. Dirimtekin, "Rock Church at Vize"; Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 333–36; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'deki Bizans Eserleri," 22–28; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi."

Asmakayalar is a *lavra*-type monastic settlement developed around a natural cave that served as a communal church (fig. 5.1). Adjacent to the cave, a small yet remarkable rock-cut church is connected to a hermit cell, whose occupant was apparently a prominent member of the community. The cell-church complex, I argue, created a sacred aura woven around the holy man and his memory. This *hierotopical* project materialized the stories connected to the founder hermit and created a stage for his reception by monastics and lay visitors. Outside the monastic core, monks lived in small clusters of rock-cut cells dispersed in the valley (figs. 5.8, 5.11). Pursuing an idiorhythmic life in these hermitages, they must have gathered regularly in the core of the monastery in the south, located closer to and visible from Bizye (fig. 5.13).

Asmakayalar Creek emerges from the underground water reservoirs in the north and runs through the valley. It passes west of Bizye in the south and joins Anadere, a tributary of the Ergene River. Only some cleared pathways, now frequented by goatherds, allow access to the water from the settlement terraces of the monastery because of the steep topography and dense vegetation of the gorge. Communal spaces are clustered on the eastern bank, carved out from a rock escarpment in the south (Asmakayalar I) (figs. A.23–24). Here, rock-cut spaces are laid out on different levels benefiting from the rock formation, at the center of which is a single-nave church transformed from a natural cave.

Figure 5.2: Asmakayalar, sanctuary area of the Cave Church.

The Cave Church provides the largest church interior in the settlement, measuring more than 14 m in length, and therefore, it is suitable to accommodate a relatively large congregation (fig. A.25). The west wall of the cave is missing, yet the remains on the foundation level indicate a built structure, perhaps functioning as a narthex. Inside, the rock surfaces are intentionally left coarse, partly retaining the cave-like appearance with minimal intervention (fig. 5.1). The cave ceiling is fashioned as an uneven barrel vault. The lower eastern half defines the spacious sanctuary area, formerly divided by a high wooden *templon* (fig. 5.2). A one-stepped *synthronon* with a curvilinear footstool is carved on the back wall of the apse. The *cathedra* at the center looks monumental, albeit now largely destroyed. The *prothesis* niche is immediately outside the apse, on the north wall of the sanctuary.

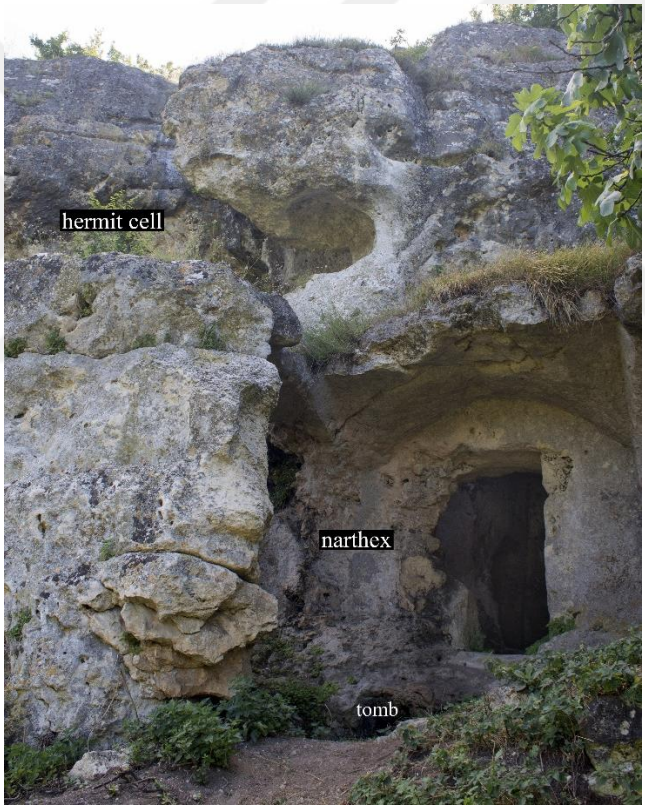

Figure 5.3: Narthex of the South Church in Asmakayalar and the interconnected hermit cell on the upper level.

A rock-cut staircase on the south wall, accessed from the sanctuary area, leads to a small room circa 3 m above the naos floor (fig. A.25). Outside the sanctuary, the large arched niche under the carved steps may have been the place for an *arcosolium*. The upper chamber is a roughly rectangular space, originally with a partial wooden floor (fig. 5.2). The interior is illuminated by a window on the west wall, starting just below the naos ceiling. This room may have been a seclusion cell, perhaps that of the first

hermit, who was attracted to the God-made properties of the cave. It must have become less of a secluded place when the community grew, and the cave was rearranged to function as the communal church. The exclusive access from the sanctuary also suggests a function related to the liturgy. Previously identified as a rough chapel,[509] the upper room may have been used as the *diaconicon* of the Cave Church from then on.

Figure 5.4: South Church in Asmakayalar, looking towards the southern side conch in the naos.

A different space-making strategy is employed in the South Church, situated on a lower level (fig. 5.1). Albeit much smaller in dimensions, it displays a high level of workmanship with crisply carved walls and elaborate decoration. The church has a rather unique design: The single-nave interior is expanded to the sides by two lateral conches (fig. 5.4). Together with the apse conch, it results in a layout that is reminiscent of and easily confused with a *triconch* design (fig. A.25).[510] Similar to the arrangement in the naos, the central square bay of the narthex is flanked by two side conches. Narthexes with lateral apses are generally associated with a Constantinopolitan influence, a common architectural element in the churches of the Byzantine capital and beyond as early as the 10th century.[511] The central bay is covered by a sail vault decorated with a sizable carved-out cross (fig. 5.3). The naos door is a low-arched

[509] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 334.
[510] *Ibid.*, 334; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'deki Bizans Eserleri," 23; "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi," 123.
[511] Byzantine churches in Constantinople having narthexes with apsidal terminations include Myrelaion, North Church of Lips Monastery, Eski İmaret Cami, and Vefa Kilise Cami. A nearby example is the church at Evcik on the Black Sea coast, partly built on the Long Walls of Thrace. The construction of the narthex with lateral conches is attributed to the 11th century, based on recessed brick details, which is a later addition to the earlier centrally planned church. For Evcik Church, see Crow and Ricci, "Anastasian Wall Project 1995."

opening, no higher than 1.7 m, marked by a small cruciform carving. A rock-cut tomb is dug on the narthex floor north of the entrance. Aligned with the door, a window is cut above the narthex. The lintel is inclined inwards, admitting more natural light into the church interior and illuminating, above all, the monumental cross carvings on the ceiling (fig. 5.5).

Figure 5.5: South Church in Asmakayalar, carved-out crosses on the ceiling.

The naos is a tiny square space, separated from the side conches and the sanctuary with a lower floor level (fig. A.25). The only burial place inside is the grave pit in front of the northern conch. This same conch opens into a tower-like vertical shaft connected to a cell on the upper level (fig. 5.7). In order to maintain the overall symmetry, a shallow niche mirroring the entrance to the rock-cut tower is carved on the other side, possibly used to place a portable icon or frame a painted one in the southern conch (fig. 5.4).

The church has a tripartite sanctuary, separated from the naos with an elevated floor and now-gone rock-cut parapets, traces of which are preserved at the northern end. The central apse is equipped with a curvilinear bench and a *cathedra* at the center (fig. 5.6).

Three shallow arched niches framing carved-out crosses are placed on the rear wall of the apse, now mostly destroyed. A single flat ceiling covers the naos and the central bay of the sanctuary, creating a false impression of a longitudinal interior (fig. 5.5). The ceiling has two large carved-out crosses, emphasizing the orientation towards the semicircular apse. The lateral conches flanking the naos and the apse vault are similarly decorated with large crosses (fig. 5.4).

Figure 5.6: South Church in Asmakayalar, central apse.

Immediately outside the apse, two arched doors in the sanctuary lead to the corner rooms (fig. 5.6). Too small to accommodate more than one person at the same time, the corner rooms can also be accessed from the conches on two sides of the naos via barrel-vaulted curvilinear tunnels (fig. 5.4). The passage from the naos is not controlled by a barrier. Instead, the elevated floors and narrow winding corridors must have sufficed for the spatial division. The side conches and corridors seem to have functioned together, creating a continuous circular movement through the sanctuary area (fig. A.25). The sanctuary arrangement with narrow passages from the *exedrae* in the naos is rare yet not without *comparanda*. The church of Panagia Kamariotissa on the island of Chalke (Heybeliada) and St. Nicholas near Pyle on the western shore of Lake Mikri Prespa present the closest parallels.[512] The former has a tetraconch design,

[512] Both churches present some peculiarities in Byzantine architecture, regarded as influences of the architectural practices of medieval Caucuses, most notable among which are the rounded inner corners of

while the latter is a triconch. In both churches, the corner rooms encase the eastern half of the building in a rectangular mass. Similar to the South Church in Asmakayalar, these small spaces can be accessed from the lateral conches of the naos through tunnel-like passages.

The corner rooms of the South Church are arranged differently. The northern chamber, covered by a flat ceiling and decorated with a carved-out cross, contains the prothesis niche, facing the entrance from the central bay of the sanctuary. The eastern half of the room is disturbed by illegal diggings, yet earlier descriptions and sketches indicate an *apsidiole* with no carved furniture.[513] The apse of the southern chamber is larger and contains an altar table. A carved-out cross in a trapezoidal field decorates the front side of the altar. The vaulting features yet another carved cross. Next to the altar table, a 1-m-wide rock-cut bench is set in an arched niche on the south wall. The southern corner room is covered by a sail vault, decorated once again with a cross directed towards the altar.

As appeared repeatedly in the above description, the image of the cross is multiplied in the small church interior, leaving almost no plain surfaces (figs. 5.4–6). A total of fourteen crosses display a rather rare way of sculpting: They are carved out from the rock in negative, not sculpted in relief. Like the rock-cut church itself, these motifs are created by removing the material. An analogous technique is applied in the Alacahisar Church in Lycia, a partly masonry-built and partly rock-cut 6th-century basilica.[514] Each apse vault of its triconch sanctuary is decorated with a processional cross with a tang, all carved in negative relief. Fragments of plaster in the rough lower fields of cross carvings imply a now-lost filling, possibly of mosaic *tesserae*.[515] On the contrary,

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the central naos bay, resulting in an irregular octagon under the dome. Chronology is problematic for both monuments. The church on Heybeliada is traditionally dated to the late 11th century, and the church near Pyle on Lake Mikri Prespa to the late 13th century. For Panagia Kamariotissa, see Eyice, *Son Devir Bizans Mimarisi*, 44–46; Pasadaios, "Η εν Χάλκη Μονή Παναγίας Καμαριωτίσσης"; Mathews and Mango, "Observations on the Church of Panagia Kamariotissa on Heybeliada (Chalke)"; for the Church of St. Nicholas, see Evyenidou, Kanonidis, and Papazotos, *The Monuments of Prespa*, 44–47; Moutsopoulos, *Εκκλησίες του Νομού Φλώρινας*, 63–69; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 608.

[513] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," fig. 17; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi," 122–23.

[514] Harrison, "Churches and Chapels of Central Lycia," 136; Grossmann and Severin, *Frühchristliche und byzantinische Bauten*, 104–11; İşler, "Yeni Bulgular Işığında Antalya'nın Kale (Demre) İlçesi'ndeki Alacahisar Kilisesi."

[515] Grossmann and Severin, *Frühchristliche und byzantinische Bauten*, 109; Ruggieri, "Apologia della mimesis: La Santa Sion," 396; İşler, "Yeni Bulgular Işığında Antalya'nın Kale (Demre) İlçesi'ndeki Alacahisar Kilisesi," 4–5.

the inner surfaces of the crosses in Asmakayalar are smooth and display neither plaster nor holes for inlay crosses.

All carved cross decorations in the South Church are the same type: Latin crosses with splayed arms. Their monumentality, stylistic rendering, and overhead placement recall processional crosses. Presumably, large-scale wooden crosses, carried at the head of processions, sometimes clad with precious metals, were the model for the decoration of the South Church.[516] The overhead placement and large dimensions channel the gaze and movement in the intimate church interior.[517] Multiplied on well-articulated vaulting surfaces, the images of the cross underline the church's focal point. Three large crosses on the same axis above the narthex, naos, and sanctuary are all directed to the apse, whereas smaller ones under the side conches, apse vaults, and arched niches on the eastern back wall stand upright to be seen from the west (fig. A.25). For the supremacy of the cross imagery, Zelve Church no. 1, dated to the late 9th century, presents a comparable example from Cappadocia.[518] Byzantine visitors to both rock-cut interiors must have felt fully immersed in the sacred space, surrounded by the familiar sign of the cross.

As mentioned earlier, there is a seclusion cell on a higher level between the cave and the South Church, belonging to an important member of the community, possibly the founder hermit (fig. 5.1). It escaped the notice of previous scholars and was omitted in earlier publications despite its central position in the spatial layout and formation of the monastic settlement itself.[519] Originally an enclosed space, the cell is now preserved as a semi-open rock-cut room. A sizeable arched niche on the eastern wall spans over a rock-cut bed with a rock-cut pillow (fig. 5.7). The tower-like shaft at the southern corner leads to the side conch of the church below. There are no footholds on

[516] Processional crosses usually had a tang to be attached on top of a pole. More monumental examples without holders were carried by two people by the transverse bar, as represented on a 6th-century silver book cover now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 47.100.36): Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, 619–20. A rare example of crosses of such an ambitious scale is the 6th-century Antioch Cross, silver revetments of a 154-cm-high wooden cross, again in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 50.5.3). Downey, "A Processional Cross."

[517] In a likely manner, Alice Lynn McMichael interprets ceiling crosses in Byzantine Cappadocia as instruments to manipulate spatial perception and attract attention to designed viewing experiences: "Rising Above the Faithful."

[518] Lemaigre Demesnil, *Architecture rupestre et décor sculpté*, 17–19; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 58–60.

[519] The room was only mentioned in passing by Nazan Yavuzoğlu, interpreted as a passage to the Cave Church rather than a hermit cell. "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi," 123.

the sides of the entrance shaft to ease the climb, yet a pair of holes on the back wall, parallel to the ground level, may be indicative of a fixed wooden ladder or ropes.

The spatial arrangement of a living cell above a rupestrian church recalls the Cappadocian hermitages of Niketas in Kızılçukur (late 9th century) and Simeon at Paşabağı (early 10th century).[520] At both sites, an isolated cell is carved on the upper level of a solitary cone above a single-nave church, which received secular patronage for painted decoration if not excavation. The epigraphic evidence shows hermits' inspiration from the ascetical practice of living on top of pillars, as they identified themselves as *stylites*. The staircase in the former no longer survives; however, in the Hermitage of Simeon, a vertical shaft with footholds leads to the living cell from the outside.

Figure 5.7: Hermit cell above the South Church in Asmakayalar, from left to right: rock-cut bed, vertical entrance shaft, and window with a domical ceiling.

Unlike these Cappadocian examples, the hermit cell in Asmakayalar is designed to be entered only from the South Church. This architectural layout recreates a sacred space narrated in the life of St. Sabas the Great. According to the *vita*, St. Sabas, following the divine revelation of a fiery pillar, discovers a cave in the form of a church, then called "Theoktistos," meaning God-erected.[521] The saint carves his own living cell above the Theoktistos Church, which is reached through a tower-like shaft north of the

[520] Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 184–93; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 402–7.
[521] *Life of St. Sabas the Great*, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 110–11.

naos, precisely like in Asmakayalar. Today, the cave church in Mar Saba is dedicated to St. Nicholas of Myra. The sealed shaft in the large northern recess, now an ossuary, connects the tower of Sabas to the church space, as described in the saint's life.[522] The almost identical spatial arrangement implies a purposeful creation of sacred space in Asmakayalar modeled on the *vita*. The shared spatial characteristics of the prototypical space related to the activities of the saint in Mar Saba, its verbal description recorded in the 6th-century saint's life, and reinterpretation in Asmakayalar, therefore, signify a *hierotopical* project.[523]

A small window at the southwestern corner of the living cell illuminates the otherwise dark, enclosed interior and, above all, the entrance shaft from the South Church (fig. 5.7). This opening further elaborates the sacred environment surrounding the recluse. A shallow dome under the overhanging rock mass covers the top of the window instead of a more conventional choice of a flat lintel or an arch. The unusual arrangement seems to have enabled the hermit not only to receive natural light but also to make apparitions to his visitors. As he leaned forward and looked out from the opening, the domical ceiling above the window must have created a halo effect around his head for an observer standing in front of the church narthex (fig. 5.3). The designed view from the narthex and entrance through the vertical shaft suggest a single carving phase for the cell-church complex, like a stage for the reception of the holy man.

The single burial place inside the South Church is apparently related to the same project, most likely to receive the bodily remains of the hermit living in the upper cell.[524] The tomb covering half of the small naos area is carved in front of the northern conch, which opens into the hermit cell (fig. A.25). The façade's northwesterly orientation limits the direct daylight only to the evenings, coming from the window above the narthex. At that time of the day, sunlight hits the north conch, highlighting the burial place. The concentration of cross incisions around the tomb provides evidence of a related pilgrimage activity. Additionally, the slightly deeper carving on the northern rock pier may have been intended for an inlaid devotional cross next to

[522] Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, 72.
[523] For a definition of the interpretative approach, see Lidov, "Hierotopy."
[524] Other cave-dwelling holy men gave precise instructions for their burial places to be prepared in their hermitages, and, in some cases, they even dug their own tombs. Talbot, "Caves, Demons and Holy Men," 713.

the tomb at an appropriate height to be touched and kissed, kneeling and facing the sanctuary.[525]

The cell-church complex is then connected to the activities and memory of the founder hermit. It is at the core of the settlement, in which the members of the *lavra* gathered regularly to celebrate the liturgy, visit rock-cut spaces transformed by the founder, and receive blessings from his venerable tomb. Moreover, communal meals were not only at the heart of *coenobitic* life but were also customary among *lavriotic* communities, even though a space designated for dining is less common in *lavra*-type monasteries.[526] Thirty meters south of the Cave Church, the longitudinal hall running in the north-south direction is the second largest room in the rupestrian settlement, only after the Cave Church (fig. A.23). Although purely hypothetical, the large scale and positioning next to the ceremonial center imply a communal space, possibly the refectory.[527] A large globular niche, with a diameter of 1.5 m, is carved on the outer rock façade between this hall and the cell-church complex. Its form and location do not conform well with the previous identification as a storage unit for grain.[528] Located close to the South Church, the center of a local pilgrimage activity, the niche may have been a place for the visitors to present their offerings.[529]

Figure 5.8: Asmakayalar II, view from across the valley.

[525] For a comparable example in Medeia and a general discussion of embedded crosses on the church walls, see chapter 3.1.2.
[526] Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, 190–91.
[527] Alternative identifications for the rock-cut hall as a cellar or a guesthouse in the direction of Bizye are equally possible. It may have served several purposes since one function does not necessarily exclude others.
[528] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 333; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'deki Bizans Eserleri," 22; "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi," 122.
[529] A similar interpretation has been suggested for the exterior niches at the hermitages of Niketas and Simeon in Byzantine Cappadocia. Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 188, 193.

In Asmakayalar, monks lived in clusters of cells either immediately outside the monastic core or in distant yet connected places in the broader landscape. All living units are large enough for more than one person, an experienced monk and his acolyte at the minimum. As a rule, they are equipped with a small chapel or an eastern-looking niche devoted to private worship. This basic spatial arrangement is typical for the living areas of *lavra*-type settlements and hermitages in hybrid monasteries, called *sketes* or *kellia*.[530]

Figure 5.9: Carved façade outside the living cells in Asmakayalar II. (photo by D. Hendrix)

The living unit closest to the monastic core is northwest of the Cave Church, facing the founder's cell on the opposite side (Asmakayalar I, northern rooms) (figs. 5.1, A.25). This was probably carved and inhabited by the first generation of monks, followers of the founder hermit who changed the valley landscape drastically. It is preserved as a series of interconnected rooms since the rock walls between the individual compartments are later destroyed. Marks on the ceiling at the southeastern

[530] A place for private worship was essential in the living cells of solitaries since cell-dwellers were participating in communal celebrations only at certain times of the week. In the Judean desert, most hermitages have separate prayer rooms or niches, some displaying sophisticated decorations, including mosaic floors, wall paintings, and stuccowork. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, 143–47; Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, 82–105; Patrich, Arubas, and Agur, "Monastic Cells in the Desert of Gerasimus." In Dobruja, in the 10th-century rock-cut monastery at Basarabi (Murfatlar) near Constanța, a group of living cells with small private chapels form a *lavra* in sector B. A larger and more easily accessible church, B-4, was used for communal celebrations by the monks and lay visitors. See Atanasov, "Le monastère rupestre de Murfatlar." In the Monastery of Dečani in Kosovo, each dependent *kellion* contains a small masonry-built or partly rock-cut church, some dating back to the 14th century. See Popović, Todić, and Vojvodić, *The Dečani Desert*.

corner show the main entrance through a door opening. The oblong hall behind the entrance appears to be the central circulation area. On its eastern wall, there is a small prayer niche. A detached rock wall in the west defines a separate room, accessible from a partly preserved rectangular door. Inside, tooth chisel marks are visible on the rock walls. A large window on the broken south wall overlooks the valley below. Arched niches articulate the rock walls, some framed with setbacks. A narrow passage at the northwestern corner opens into a curvilinear tunnel. The tunnel makes a left turn and terminates with an opening on the cliffside, offering an expansive view of the southern end of the valley, the citadel of Bizye, and the landscape around it.

Outside the core of the settlement, Asmakayalar II is a living unit forty meters farther in the north, consisting of a single-nave church, a small funerary chamber, and four adjacent cells (figs. A.23–25). The rock face on the exterior is flattened and decorated with blind shallow niches between the doors leading to rock-cut spaces (figs. 5.8–9). The uniformity of the façade points to a single carving phase for the complex. The beam holes in regular intervals indicate a now-gone timber roof on the exterior, providing shade and shelter from the rain. Others on the ground level are left from a former wooden floor extension in front of the rock façade.

Figure 5.10: Asmakayalar II, northern church, looking towards the northeast from the naos.

The North Church is at the center of the rock-cut complex, preceded by a tripartite narthex that is larger than the naos area (fig. A. 25). The broader arch in the middle of the rock façade emphasizes the entrance to the church. It is flanked by three decorative arches, with the central one on the left being wider, possibly marking the location of a side door. Tooth chisel marks are left visible on the vaulting. The central bay of the narthex is covered by a sail vault, separated from the barrel-vaulted compartments on the sides by thick arches. Two *arcosolia* are placed on the opposite side walls. A third burial place is dug on the ground in front of the southern *arcosolium*. In addition, Semavi Eyice mentions three more rock-cut tombs on the floor, which are completely unidentifiable today.[531] A triple arcade resting on a pair of now-broken rock piers separates the small naos area, a transverse hall covered by a rather flat sail vault (fig. 5.10). The elevated floor level and the change in the vaulting system mark the extended sanctuary in the east. The bema is a narrow, oblong space. At the eastern end, the semicircular apse and small side conches inscribe an irregular triconch layout.

Figure 5.11: Hermitage with a painted church on the sheer cliffside in Asmakayalar III northeast of the valley.

Southwest of the church lies a narrow funerary chamber with two burial places on the ground; one is a rectangular grave pit, while the other is an anthropomorphic tomb (fig. A.25). Some traces of paint, most likely funerary in content, were detected here during the surveys in the 1960s.[532] Five to eight burials in total and a proportionately large

[531] Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 335.
[532] *Ibid*., 335.

narthex indicate a funerary identification for the North Church. In any case, it must have been used also by the monks living in the four adjacent rooms in the north. These are roughly square-planned cells, each accessed from a separate door on the carved façade (fig. 5.9). The rooms are coarsely carved and covered with flat ceilings. They are now connected with *ad-hoc* holes, a later transformation to obtain a unified space, whereas the two northern chambers are fully merged. The doors on the rock façade are partly closed off with rubble. All these changes are probably related to their later use as sheepfolds by inhabitants of the nearby villages.[533]

The rock promontory 350 m northeast of the monastic core splits the valley into two branches. There is a high concentration of rock-cut rooms in the western branch, Asmakayalar III. Many of these are located high on the sheer rock face and remain inaccessible without special equipment, hence their omission in the scholarly literature. During my surveys in the area, I had a chance to examine two such spaces on the eastern hillside that can be identified as small isolated hermitages. Interestingly, one contains a private church where a painted Christological cycle is partly preserved (fig. 5.11). The hermits must have used ropes or ladders to reach the cell on the cliffside, circa 8 m above the ground.[534] A rectangular door on the north wall of the cell opens into the single-nave church with a roughly shaped apse in the east (fig. A.26). The church interior appears to be once fully plastered and painted. Red contours articulate the rock walls and frame the individual holy figures and scenes from the Life of Christ. Additionally, two yellow decorative bands with continuous black spiraling motifs divide the ceiling into three regions.[535] The haloed head of a bearded figure is preserved on the lower register immediately outside the apse, representing a standing saint depicted as an intercessor close to the viewer. On the south wall, two iconographic compositions can be recognized on the upper level: the Baptism of Christ next to the apse conch and the Transfiguration at the southwestern corner. In the former, Christ is

[533] As recorded by Nazan Yavuzoğlu during her visits in the 1970s, see "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi," 124.

[534] I borrowed an extension ladder from the municipality of Vize to be able to access the cell on the 16th of July, 2022. As I climbed, I had to pull the ladder and position it precariously on narrow terraces on the cliff until I reached the rock-cut interior.

[535] Similar non-figural decorative bands emphasize architectural elements in the Cave Church of Hagioi Theodoroi near Avantas. There are two primary phases of wall paintings in the cave church, one dated stylistically to the end of the 11th century and the other to the early 13th century. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, "Το σπήλαιο των Αγίων Θεοδώρων."

depicted with a naked upper body, facing east, between two haloed, fully clothed figures (fig. 5.12). The figure on his right reaches forward to perform the baptism and is identifiable with St. John the Forerunner. In the Transfiguration scene, Christ is at the center in a *mandorla* with radiating rays of light. The partly preserved figure in the upper left corner must be one of the two prophets present in the event, Moses or Elijah. The former is more likely since he appears to be holding the Tablets of the Law. The rest of the painted program presents large *lacunae*. Lastly, the small fragment of an inscription on the north wall, reading ϐAIѠ, can be reconstructed as Βαϊοφόρος, identifying a now-lost representation of the Entry into Jerusalem.[536]

Figure 5.12: The fragmentarily preserved image of the Baptism of Christ in the painted church in Asmakayalar III.

The figures are rendered on a dark blue background with a rich color palette of ochre tones. Clearly, the images were executed by someone familiar with iconographic models and capable of rendering figures with simple, skillful brushstrokes. It is challenging to reconstruct under what circumstances the isolated church in Asmakayalar III received the painted decoration, which seems to be the work of an experienced painter rather than an anchorite who lived in the adjacent cell and held the

[536] I thank Dimitra Sikalidou for our discussion and her help in identifying the scene.

brush for the first and only time. Who, then, hired the painter: the monastic community or an external patron, perhaps from the nearby urban center, Bizye? Regardless, there should be something special about this hermitage since it was favored for the painted decoration over other living cells dispersed in the valley and the monastic core in the south, where the images would have been undoubtedly more accessible to the monks and lay visitors. Carved high on the cliffside, the painted church is not a place for the monks to gather nor for the flocks of pilgrims. Instead, the paintings seem to have been intended primarily, if not solely, for the users of the cell. I suspect that the cell belonged to an important figure, whether a member of the local aristocracy who entered the monastery or a hermit whose memory a local patron or the monks wished to preserve. Whatever the case, the wall paintings in such a hardly accessible rock-cut church imply a story of connectivity despite its remoteness. They also demonstrate the extent of the cultural and economic investment in the valley.

The monks lived in these hermitages in small groups and probably others in now-lost wooden huts, masonry structures, or cave shelters along the valley. Central to life in the *lavra*, the core of the monastery, Asmakayalar I, may have been completed within the lifetime of the founder hermit (fig. 5.1). To be sure, this does not say much about the longevity of the monastic community. As an autochthonous landscape element predating any human intervention in the valley, the cave must have held a special meaning for the monks. It was what landscape offered to the first ascetics who settled there, in addition to rock outcrops that could be carved out or quarried, trees that could be felled for firewood and construction, running water in the valley bottom, and perhaps most importantly, proximity to and visibility from Bizye (fig. 5.13). The cave that the first ascetic found was a God-made space that he could consecrate as a church after driving away any demons and wild beasts that might have dwelt inside. He may have initially settled in the cave, carving out the upper chamber for himself, now connected to the sanctuary area.

Others followed him to the valley. The cells in the immediate northwest were presumably the living spaces of these first settlers. As the monastic community began to take shape, the cave was transformed into a communal church. The cell-church complex was established southwest of the Cave Church, probably after the monastery gained some reputation (fig. 5.3). At the heart of the monastic core, the hermit cell connected to the South Church reveals a deliberate sacred space. It highlights the

spiritual aura surrounding its dweller, most likely the founder who moved here from his former abode inside the cave as the community grew in size. We know nothing about this charismatic leader apart from his ambitious project, modeled on a spatial arrangement described in the life of St. Sabas the Great, much admired and imitated by the Byzantine ascetics. He may have traveled to the Holy Land and visited the monasteries of the Judean desert himself, or he may have found his inspiration from monastic literature. Either way, the conception and exceptional craftsmanship of the South Church is definitely the work of a competent carver (figs. 5.4–6). The unique architectural design and carved decoration imply an involvement outside the monastic community.

Figure 5.13: Landscape north of Bizye, view from the citadel.

The monastic core is the place that greets visitors coming from Bizye, probably accessible also to lay people seeking advice, guidance, and blessings. As such, it may have been the site of encounters between monks and lay people. At the opposite end, the northern section of the valley is more isolated, where the clusters of spaces are identified as hermitages. The regular rock façade extending in front of the North Church signifies a single phase for the entire carved group in Asmakayalar II (fig. 5.9). Similar tooth chisel marks are left as a final finish in the North Church and the northwestern section of the living unit adjacent to the cave, possibly indicating a later extension in the latter. Farther from the monastic core, the private church with an extensive painted program, located high on the rocky cliff in Asmakayalar III, presents an enigma about the identity of the patron, painter, and intended viewers (figs. 5.11–12). This roughly shaped isolated church interior suggests, once again, a connection

outside the community and challenges the supposed isolation and disconnection of the monastic settlement.

In the 19th century, Asmakayalar was described as the site of a Byzantine monastery dedicated to the cross (Μονὴ τοῦ σταυροῦ) in a local historical account, clearly due to numerous decorative crosses in the South Church.[537] Likewise, the scholars of Byzantine studies often turned their attention to the small rock-cut interior to come up with a historical context for the settlement, suggesting either an Early Byzantine date based on stylistic rendering of ceiling crosses or placing the rupestrian site in the Iconoclastic period (ca 726-787 and 815-843) because of the absence of figural representation in the decorative programs.[538] However, painted figures and scenes from the Life of Christ existed in the rupestrian settlement, as described earlier. The painted Christological cycle in the remote hermitage northeast of the valley (Asmakayalar III) was not considered in previous discussions simply because it was not known to the scholarship. Sadly, though, the fragmentary state of preservation hinders a solid chronological argument for these wall paintings. Curiously enough, figurative religious images in this almost inaccessible location without precise dating can be interpreted both in support of and against an activity related to the Iconoclasm. More importantly, a decorative program dominated by the sign of the cross and omission of figural representations, in fact, provide an unreliable base for dating. In many cases, this appears to be a stylistic choice rather than indicative of complex theological controversies, especially before the 10th century. In Byzantium, the prominence given to the cross in church interiors is not limited to the Iconoclastic period. Instead, the tradition is rooted in the early Christian aniconism and persists well after the Iconoclasm.[539]

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[537] Lakides, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐπαρχίας Βιζύης καὶ Μηδείας*, 101–2. Another 19th-century account, published later in 1954, refers to the rupestrian settlement in Asmakayalar as the Hermitage of St. George (Σκήτη τοῦ Ἁγίου Γεωργίου). Here, too, the large cross carvings in the South Church find an explicit mention. Vapheides, "Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐπαρχία Βιζύης," 195–96.

[538] For the Early Byzantine dating, see Dirimtekin, "Rock Church at Vize"; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 293; Teteriatnikov, *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia*, 63, 169. For the Iconoclastic date, see Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Pour une problématique de la peinture d'église byzantine a l'époque iconoclaste," 324, 336; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'deki Bizans Eserleri," 28; "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi," 123. Semavi Eyice fully refrains from proposing a date: "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler," 333–36.

[539] Niewöhner, "The Significance of the Cross before, during, and after Iconoclasm." In Tur Abdin, non-figural representations are traditionally favored in churches. Large relief crosses on apse conches in Northern Mesopotamia are dated between the first half of the 6th and the 8th centuries. Mundell,

Central to the discussions of dating is the brief mention of cave-dwelling monks around Bizye in the hagiographic literature. According to the life of St. Mary the Younger, the saint moved to Bizye in the late 9th century following her husband, who became the *tourmarches* of the city. As she came to Bizye, Mary continued her pious acts as before, among which the anonymous writer listed supplying provisions "to those who immured themselves in caves or small houses."[540] Identifying particular cells where Mary displayed her philanthropy would not be possible; however, rock-cut hermitages in Asmakayalar were probably what the hagiographer had in mind. The *vita* recorded the monastic habitation of rupestrian landscapes around Bizye at the time of its composition in the 11th century, if not earlier, in the 9th century, when events narrated in the saint's life unfolded.[541]

In a broader discussion of monastic place-making with a landscape-oriented approach, the anecdote in the *vita* makes a more valuable contribution than refining the date of the foundation. The presentation of Mary as a patron of monasticism in the rocky landscape demonstrates the strong relationship between the hermits living in Asmakayalar and the elite people of Bizye. It reveals that the monastic life in the valley depended on the support of the urban population, in our case, from the highest level of the provincial society. Even before the posthumous miracles that resulted in a local cult around her tomb, Mary was no ordinary woman but the wife of the highest military commander stationed in the city. Moreover, parts of the settlement exhibit careful planning and skilled artistry, such as the South Church connected to the hermit cell, the ornate rock façade before the North Church, and the painted decorations of the remote hermitage. The works of experienced carvers and painters imply connections beyond the monastic community and probably patronage from the local aristocracy.

"Monophysite Church Decoration"; Keser Kayaalp, "A Newly Discovered Rock-Cut Complex," 271–73. In Cappadocia, a group of 6th-century churches are decorated with relief ceiling crosses, usually placed in roundels or under arches. Such carved crosses and monumental painted ones continued to dominate some church interiors well into the 9th and 10th centuries. Jolivet-Lévy, "De l'aniconisme en Cappadoce"; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, esp. 191. Lastly, Kyriakon in Sille near Konya is a rock-cut cross-in-square church with a monumental sculpted cross on the narthex ceiling, tentatively dated to the late 10th or early 11th century. Sezer, "Sille Kaya Kiliseleri," 22–25, 43.

[540] τοῖς τε ἐν σπηλαίοις καὶ τοῖς ἐν οἰκίσκοις ἑαυτοὺς ἐγκλείουσιν: *Life of St. Mary the Younger*, V: *Acta Sanctorum* Novembris IV, 694. English translation from Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 259–60.

[541] For the composition date of the *vita*, preserved in two late manuscripts (14th-15th century), see Laiou, "Life of Saint Mary the Younger," 242–45.

The rocky landscape north of Bizye became the living environment of a *lavriotic* community and the stage for a *hierotopical* project highlighting the persona of a venerable hermit. The rupestrian valley in the densely wooded hilly terrain must have been incorporated into the transportation network southeast of the Strandzha Mountains. Such landforms facilitated the movement across the region and connected the inland city to the coastal Black Sea. As discussed in the previous chapter, available rock formations in this landscape provided construction material for the building projects in Bizye.[542] Modern stone quarries bear witness to the continuous exploitation of these deposits, one of which is located on the road above the Asmakayalar valley. Last but not least, the monastic site occupies a strategic position to control important freshwater resources. The surroundings of Bizye accommodate numerous creeks identified as *hagiasmata* by the 19th-century inhabitants of the region, associated with rituals, miracle stories, and celebrations.[543] Among them, the *hagiasma* running below the monastic complex in Asmakayalar is reported to have supplied drinking water to the city's thirty-six public fountains at the time.[544] Today, the water reservoirs north of the valley continue to supply the modern town of Vize, which reflects that the landscape around Asmakayalar and its resources still hold importance for the settlement center.

This landscape provided a fitting environment for seclusion but not complete isolation since Asmakayalar is closely positioned to and intervisible from Bizye.[545] The physical proximity between the two sites signposts the relevancy of the monastery to daily life in the city center. The monastic core is approximately twenty minutes walking distance from the citadel. Its southern section offers a view of the fortified city center. In return, the rock escarpments where the communal and commemorative spaces were hewn out are easily recognizable from the acropolis (fig. 5.13). The monastic settlement marks

[542] See footnote 390.
[543] Stamoule Sarante, "Ἁγιάσματα τῆς Θράκης."
[544] Vapheides, "Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐπαρχία Βιζύης," 196.
[545] Despite the dominant wilderness *topos* in the literature, complete isolation is rarely the case in monastic reality. Even the sites chosen for monastic habitation in the desert landscapes of Late Antique Egypt were not inaccessible but near and often visible from the settlements. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt*, 178–79. Similar observations can be made for the Judean desert. It is relatively easy to travel from its center to the settlements, some being major cities. The monastic life in the Judean desert flourished, with the number of foundations reaching up to sixty-five in the early 7th century, owing to the support of the patriarchate of Jerusalem and the constant flow of donations and newcomers from the mass pilgrimage activity to the Holy Land. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, 6–10, 102–4, 236–37.

a visible place in an outstanding landform in the immediate vicinity of Bizye. As a result, the activities of the monks who retreated there were not hidden from the inhabitants of the city. The community seems to have counted on the donations from the lay population, at least partially, for sustenance and possibly clothing. The *hierotopical* project at the southwestern corner of the cave defines designed approaches and viewpoints to the spaces related to the life and death of a holy man, inspired by the *vita* of St. Sabas the Great in keeping with the *lavriotic* style of monasticism. The crosses incised at his tomb in the South Church showcase a related pilgrimage activity. The cell-church complex at the southern end of the settlement was probably visited by the monastics and lay people alike. The hermits may have performed healings and provided spiritual guidance to lay people who came to seek their advice. Perhaps more importantly, their presence and activities at an overlooking yet peripheral location contributed to the divine protection over the city.[546]

5.2. Ship of Faith Anchored in Soğucak

Unlike the *lavra*-type monastery in the Asmakayalar valley, the small monastic community in Soğucak preferred a nucleated settlement on top of a pillar-like detached rock. Gemikaya, meaning ship rock, is the local name given to this outstanding rock formation deriving from its triangular shape and sheer cliffsides resembling the prow of a ship, anchored in a sea of oak, hornbeam, and cornelian cherry trees (fig. 5.14). It is at the end of a 1-km-long valley northeast of the Soğucak village, former Kryonero, in the midway between Bizye (Vize) and Bryrsis (Pınarhisar) and roughly two km inland from the northern road (A3) parallel to the *Via Diagonalis*.

The tiny plateau above Gemikaya was once entirely built (fig. A.27). This extraordinary rock formation apparently received sacred associations already in the Iron Age, if not earlier. It is arranged as a Thracian cult place with a rock-cut altar in the northeast, replete with oval niches and circular pits (fig. A.29). The church at the eastern end of the rock outcrop crowns the most prominent location. Previous publications limited to the survey reports mostly favored the ancient past over the medieval one. In that framework, the Byzantine layer of the site has been mentioned

[546] For a detailed study of rock-cut hermitages in Laconia with similar observations on the relationship with lay settlements, see Bender, *Ermitages et Monastères Rupestres Byzantins de Laconie*, esp. 320–23.

only in passing as a later intervention, if ever.[547] The ceramic evidence shows an increased settlement activity in the Late Byzantine period, to which I attribute the rupestrian monastery (fig. A.30). Gemikaya is distinct from the other monastic sites discussed in this chapter in terms of scale, type of settlement, and mode of architecture. However, it is hardly an isolated case since the physical setting and landscape relations find close parallels in the larger Thrace and beyond, as I will further discuss below.

Figure 5.14: Gemikaya, general view of the landscape from the east.

Thracian sanctuaries usually occupy prominent rock formations in valley landscapes near water resources and cultivable lands. These characteristics coincide with an easily defensible position in Gemikaya.[548] Evidence for Iron Age cult activities at the site of a Byzantine monastery does not necessarily imply a continuation of sacred associations. Instead, the same properties of the landscape may have been responsible for the site selection in two distinct periods. Thus, what makes this detached rock mass a suitable location for the Iron Age sanctuary happens to be desirable also for a Late Byzantine monastery.[549]

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[547] Beksaç, "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2004 Yüzey Araştıması," 289–90; "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 31–33; "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2005 Yüzey Araştırması," 194; Beksaç and Beksaç, "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri Yüzey Araştırması Kaya Sunağı ve Bağıntılı Kült Alanları Çalışmaları," 615.

[548] Beksaç, "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2004 Yüzey Araştıması," 289; "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 32.

[549] Lucia Nixon explains a similar phenomenon in Sphakia in Southwestern Crete as "an overlap in locational grammar" between Minoan peak sanctuaries, Late Roman Basilicas, and Byzantine-Venetian-Turkish outlying churches. See *Making a Landscape Sacred*, 93.

A creek called Çeşme, meaning fountain, passes immediately north of Gemikaya (fig. A.27). It flows through the valley into the Soğucak (Ahmetbey) Creek, along which the modern village settlement is developed in the south, whose Turkish and former Greek toponyms refer to abundant cold waters in the landscape: Soğucak and Κρυόνερο respectively. The villagers cultivate vegetables in the gardens on both sides of the creek. Farther in the northeast, the narrow valley opens into a larger area bordered by sheer cliffs, where it joins other valley systems. At this junction, Gemikaya is the first rock formation from the direction of the village, reached after a short walk in the swampy riverbed. The field of vision on top of the rock mass, rising circa twenty meters from the ground, does not cover far beyond yet provides a dominant view over the nearby landscape with well-irrigated fertile lands.

The primary space-making strategy in Gemikaya is *building spaces on the rock*, combining rock-cut elements with masonry walls and wooden structures. The surrounding landscape offers abundant material for construction. Natural rock formations from which the foundations of monastic spaces were hewn out are also suitable for quarrying. The small-scale exploitation zones at the site are characterized by quarry terraces and deeply carved grooves between unfinished stone blocks (figs. 5.16, A.28). The quarrying activity in Gemikaya is not on an industrial scale. The extracted stone may have been used locally in the construction of the monastery. Moreover, the forest covering the vast landscape is a rich source of timber, which was also exploited for the vernacular architecture of the village.

The rock mass is arranged in three main terraces: the upper eastern terrace with a church, the narrow southern platform in the middle, and the lower western tip of the rock (fig. A. 27). Rock-hewn foundations near the edges and the somewhat vacant area in the middle imply a settlement layout formed around a central courtyard. The terraces on top of the rock are accessed via roughly carved steps on the southern slope, whereas the cliffs on the other sides are too sheer to climb without special equipment.

At the southeastern extremity of the rock, the church is a predominantly carved space (fig. A.29). Its longitudinal, single-nave interior measures 3.4 m to 7 m. Beam sockets preserved on the highest level of the south wall, now 2.5 m tall, indicate a now-gone timber roof construction over the naos. At the southwestern corner, the square hole going into the western naos wall probably corresponds to the lintel of the entrance door. The semicircular apse in the east is equipped with a two-stepped *synthronon* (fig.

5.15). The *ad-hoc* opening on the back wall overlooks the open land below and the rocky plateau in the east. This may be the place of a now-broken window into the monastery's immediate area of control. In front of the *synthronon*, a sizeable crypt is carved on the sanctuary floor, above which the altar table must have stood. Roughly rectangular in plan, the round eastern side of the crypt follows the same curvature as the apse.[550] The *prothesis* niche at the northeastern corner is severely damaged by illegal excavations. A narrow window is cut in the middle of the south wall in the naos. The actual opening is only 40 cm wide, framed by a larger rectangular recess, above an unusually high windowsill. Because of the positioning above the sightline, it does not offer a view of the outside.

Figure 5.15: Sanctuary area of the church on top of Gemikaya, showing the rock-cut synthronon, crypt, and prothesis niche.

The rectangular space west of the church may have functioned as an entrance porch or a narthex. This area must have been enclosed, at least partially, since the south wall projects towards the west, featuring another slit window similarly placed above eye level. On this wall, the square-sectioned hole penetrating the rock suggests wooden reinforcements for former masonry additions. Outside the church, the rock mass is flattened in the south, creating a narrow terrace in front of the southern carved façade (fig. A.29). Three large beam holes on the floor level point to a wooden platform extending the walkable area, probably accessed from the west.

[550] Its placement and overall dimensions are comparable to the crypt in the two-aisled outlying church southwest of the Balkaya village (*church no. 1*). See chapter 4.1.1.

The rupestrian church is not a stand-alone structure but part of a complex that marks a crossroad in a network of valleys. Two roughly carved rooms can be identified as seclusion cells, one located northeast of the church on the upper level and the other on the western terrace next to the small quarry area (fig. A.28). Both are entered from above; the footholds carved at the entrance of the latter facilitate the descent into the hardly accessible cell located high on the cliffside. Below the southwestern corner of the church, there is a rectangular cistern on the middle terrace with a capacity of 2500 liters (fig. A.29). Its walls expand towards the bottom, internally covered with pinkish hydraulic plaster. This basin was closed off by a wooden lid resting on the ledge around the rim. Unfinished cut-stone blocks and the stepped arrangement of the rock mark another quarry area southwest of this cistern (fig. 5.16). Further in the west, a 13-m-long continuous rock wall is carved on the same terrace. Finally, rock foundations on the edge of the lower level possibly belong to enclosure walls, delimiting the settlement area at the western end (fig. A.28).

Figure 5.16: Gemikaya, quarry terraces and semi-detached stone blocks on the southern terrace.

What may have, then, happened to the stone blocks of monastic structures that once stood on these rock-carved foundations? Drystone terrace walls and piles of rubble cluster at the outskirts of the conspicuous rock formation. In accordance with the research agenda of earlier projects, these were previously associated with the ancient Thracian settlement activity in Gemikaya, the main reasoning being the simple

construction technique without mortar.[551] To be sure, such landscape elements are not limited to a single period in human history. Recent activities in the area call for a more diachronic reading of the present landscape. Local testimony indicates that only two decades ago or so, the vegetable gardens of the villagers used to cover a much larger area, including the lands surrounding Gemikaya, now overgrown with vegetation. The current owner of these lands, Adem Erel, identifies the same drystone constructions as retaining walls of agricultural terraces built two generations before him.[552] This alternative history also explains the lack of *in-situ* masonry walls and *debris* of building material on Gemikaya. It is only natural that the villagers cultivating vegetables in the immediate vicinity turned to the long-abandoned monastic settlement to construct the field boundaries and agricultural terraces they needed.

The local stories associated with the site communicate that the monastic presence in Gemikaya is nowhere near being in the collective memory, at least since the 19th century. The prominent rock formation, likened to a pirates' ship in the local imagination, came to be known as a shelter of bandits (haydut sığınağı) to the present inhabitants, many of whom moved to Soğucak from the villages of Ereselli (today Ποντοηράκλεια) and now abandoned Devecili in central Macedonia during the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1922.[553] In return, the former Greek inhabitants of the village, then called Kryonero, were displaced and resettled in Kalampaki on the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains in western Thrace.[554] Interestingly, in a way similar to the local story still in circulation, years later, they remembered Gemikaya as the κλεφταριό, established by the brigands and thieves (ἁρματολοί καὶ κλέφτες) as a hideout on top of the rock.[555] Fearing the Circassian raids in Thrace during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, people of Kryonero took their valuables and hid themselves in caves and rock shelters. One of these places was κλεφταριό outside the village in the northeast, where a large rock-cut room provided enough space for several families to hide. This room was probably the church on the

[551] Beksaç, "Edirne ve Kırklareli İlleri 2004 Yüzey Araştıması," 289; "Kaya Oyma Anıtlar ve Kült Alanları," 32.
[552] The interview was made on the 1st of June, 2022.
[553] Akdağ Sarı, "Tasfiye Talepnamelerine Göre Mübadillerin İskâni," 172.
[554] Krikopoulos, "Πτυχές από το Κρυόνερο," 153, 167.
[555] The stories and traditions of former inhabitants of the village are later compiled and published by Christos Krikopoulos, a second-generation migrant from Turkish Thrace to Greek Thrace. For the story above, see "Το Κρυόνερο της Ανατολικής Θράκης," 172–74.

upper terrace, the only rock-cut space with standing walls in Gemikaya. The story implies a period of abandonment long enough for the 19th-century Orthodox population of Kryonero to fail even to recognize the church yet circulate instead a foundational story related to the concerns of their time to make sense of the human-altered rupestrian space.

The ceramic sherds detected during my survey in 2021 refine the settlement history and attest to the much-neglected medieval occupation layer. As expected, the earliest ceramic finds are attributable to the Early Iron Age (ca 1100-700 BCE), associated with the ancient rock sanctuary.[556] A second large group of datable ceramics are Byzantine glazed wares, indicating a resettlement between the mid-12th and 14th centuries (fig. A.30).[557] Among them is the base of a pale green glazed plate with incised concentric circles, a type found in a wide geographic area from the 13th century onwards. Another base sherd of a pale green monochrome ware can be attributed to the 13th-14th centuries. Two other body sherds are identified as incised sgraffito wares, datable between the mid-12th and mid-13th centuries, one featuring a yellow glaze and the other a cream-colored glaze. In both cases, the glaze is applied over a white slip layer extending to the exterior of the pot. The incised motifs are too fragmentarily preserved to be recognized. Additionally, a group of broken strap-like handles belongs to *amphorae* roughly datable to the 12th-13th centuries. In the final analysis, the ceramic evidence signifies increased settlement activity in the Late Byzantine period, most probably when Gemikaya, the site of a former Thracian rock sanctuary, was rearranged for the use of a small community of monks.

Two monasteries in the larger Thrace present close similarities to Gemikaya regarding space-making and landscape relations: Gloukhite Kamani in the Eastern Rhodopes and Skaloti Monastery outside Ainos (Enez). Below the fortified peak of Sveta Marina, the monastic settlement of Gloukhite Kamani, meaning deaf stones in Bulgarian, overlays an Early Iron Age rock sanctuary, paralleling the settlement history of Gemikaya.[558]

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[556] The pale orange burnished rim and body sherds of black slip wares are the most representative examples of the Iron Age ceramics from Gemikaya. I thank Umut Doğan from Edirne Archaeological Museum for identifying the Iron Age pottery sherds.

[557] I thank Galina Grozdanova, Nikos Kontogiannis, and Stefania Skartsis for their comments on and interpretations of the glazed wares.

[558] Nekhrizov, "Десет години археологически проучвания на скалния комплекс Глухите камъни." Also see Nekhrizov et al., "Gluhite Kamani"; "Скален комплекс 'Глухите камъни' (предварително съобщение)"; Nekhrizov and Tzvetkova, "Скален комплекс Глухите камъни."

On a high elevation in the northwestern sector, a three-nave basilica was first built in the 6th century on rock foundations; it was later reconstructed and continued to function between the late 11th and early 13th centuries. The prominent rock formation north of the basilica is arranged with a sizable rock-cut reservoir and a monumental staircase. In front of the church, the southern rock face is flattened and equipped with a small hewn-out room, previously identified as an ancient burial chamber. Excavators attribute this carved element and many other features on the rock mass to the medieval phase, functionally connected to the adjacent church. The traces of another basilica are preserved on the lower level in the south, as well as a large enclosure wall. The excavation finds reflect intensive activity during the final occupation phase, more or less contemporary with the foundation of the monastery on Gemikaya.

Figure 5.17: Skaloti Monastery near Enez, where now-lost structures once stood on rock foundations and other carved elements, including the apse of the main church on the left.

Unlike these two examples, Skaloti Monastery continued to function until the early 20th century. Its earlier photographs provide a fuller picture of the spatial setting with masonry structures that extensively incorporate rock-cut elements.[559] The monastery is similarly laid out on a rocky promontory overlooking a vast landscape (fig. 5.17). The eastern half of the monastic church is carved from the bedrock, whereas the rest of its walls are constructed. A square room and a chapel can be recognized southeast of the church on a higher level on the same outcrop. An underground cistern with a circular wellhead is carved in the courtyard north of the church. In the earlier scholarship,

[559] Ötüken and Ousterhout, "Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace," 132–35; Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*, 44–46.

Skaloti was accepted as a Komnenian foundation and even confused with the monastery of Kosmosoteira, an early tradition based on an inscribed bronze cross that was once kept in the monastery.[560] More recently, Robert Ousterhout argued for a 17th-century date, recorded in an inscription published earlier by Georgios Lampakes.[561] The dismissal of a possible medieval origin is primarily based on a brief field survey he conducted in 1987 and the lack of surface material that would prove otherwise. During my visits to the rupestrian site northeast of the present Çavuşköy in 2021 and again in 2022, I encountered several coarse and glazed sherds, many attributable to the Ottoman period indeed. However, I have also found two body sherds of Late Byzantine polychrome sgraffito ware, displaying brown and green splashes of paint on pale green and yellow colored glaze (fig. A.31). The type, alternatively known as Mikro Pisto ware, is well distributed in the Rhodope region and wider Thrace from the second half of the 13th century well into the 15th century. Therefore, demonstrating an otherwise unrecorded medieval settlement activity, ceramic evidence puts Skaloti back on the map of Byzantine monasteries in Thrace.

Gemikaya in the Strandzha region, Gloukhite Kamani in the Rhodopes, and Skaloti in the wider Evros area indicate a lesser-known Late Byzantine phenomenon of monastic settlements perched on prominent rock formations. More than the other two examples in Thrace, though, the landscape of Gemikaya evokes the image of one of the most prominent centers of Late Byzantine monasticism in the Balkans: Meteora in the northwest of the Thessalian plain (fig. 5.18). Adopting basically the same space-making strategy as in Gemikaya, Meteorite monasteries, the number of which reached twenty-four in the 16th century, are all constructed on top of sandstone pillars, some rising up to five hundred meters above the valley bottom, hence the toponym meaning suspended in the air.[562] Central to the foundational story of the first and the largest

[560] Mystakides, "Αΐνου Ανέκδοτον Σιγίλλιον"; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Συμπλήρωμα της Δυμοντείου Συλλογής," 9–11; Lampakes, "Περιηγήσεις," 38–39. For the identification with Kosmosoteira, see Petit, "Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosotira près d'Aenos (1152)," 19.

[561] Ötüken and Ousterhout, "Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace," 135; Ousterhout and Bakirtzis, *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meriç River Valley*, 46. For the inscription, see Lampakes, "Περιηγήσεις," 33.

[562] The caves on the rock pillars were already inhabited by solitary monks by the 11th century. This community of hermits was later organized around the Skete of Doupiani, led by a *protos*. In the mid-14th century, Athonite monk Athanasios, fleeing from the attacks of Turkish pirates, came to Thessaly and founded the first *coenobium* on the rock pillars of Meteora. For the history of Meteora, see Nicol, *Meteora: The Rock Monasteries of Thessaly*.

communal monastery in Meteora, Megalo Meteoron, is the gradual ascent of the founder, Athanasios (1305-1383), from a cave cell near the village up to the plateau of the broad rock in the mid-14th century, searching for a quieter, more secluded place secure from the robbers.[563] Because of the rather unusual, almost otherworldly landscape of Meteora and the founder's choice of building his monastery above a high rock pillar, the upward movement with ladders, ropes, and nets, then on, became a reality in the monks' life, on the one hand, carrying them to the angelic life of the monastery and, on the other hand, symbolizing a spiritual ascent to achieve union with God.[564] Although indisputably smaller in scale, a parallel case can be argued for the monastic site near Soğucak, accessed via the steep flight of rock-cut steps south of the settlement (fig. 5.14).

Figure 5.18: Monastery of Roussanou, Meteora. (photo by D. Hendrix)

Gemikaya is the solitary example of a rock pillar in its environment. The monastic complex built atop becomes a conspicuous landscape marker, suspended in the air and visible from the valley below due to the relatively lower proportions of the rock. The outlines of the rock formation confine the terraced settlement area. As such, it could accommodate only a small group of monks, perhaps on the scale of the monastic community in Petra, where St. Euarestos spent half a year in the mid-9th century, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The ceramic evidence shows a heretofore

[563] *Ibid.*, 91–95.
[564] Della Dora, "Mapping Pathways to Heaven," 224, footnote 15.

neglected settlement activity between the mid-12th and 14th centuries. Gemikaya is more isolated compared to other rupestrian sites discussed in the dissertation, monastic or otherwise.[565] Still, the human intervention in the outstanding rock mass must have been markedly visible at this crossroad of valleys, making it a ship of faith and monastic ideals in Late Byzantium.

5.3. Diversion of Monastic Waters in Kuzulu and Paroria

Close to the national border between Turkey and Bulgaria, the forestland in the northwestern section of the Strandzha region presents an illustrative case of how monasteries held strategic locations and created their particular landscapes to control economic resources. A monastic settlement commands the end of a valley north of Kuzulu village (formerly Koyva), situated within the broader area of Skopelos (Yoğuntaş), a walled settlement center established in the 8th century initially to protect the northwestern frontier of the Byzantine Empire.[566] Notably, in the 14th century, this very landscape also became the stage for the activities of an influential hesychast monk, St. Gregory the Sinaite. This was roughly where he founded his short-lived yet renowned monastic center in Paroria. I promote the related hagiographic literature to complement my interpretations of the material in Kuzulu. Such a combined reading of textual and archaeological evidence provides a fuller picture of the monastic presence in the Strandzha region, especially for the turbulent last centuries of Byzantium.

In Kuzulu, a small hermitage is hewn out of the bedrock on the southern slope of a hill, crowned by fortifications that I identify as the protective boundaries of the monastic core (fig. A.32).[567] The proximity of the two sites implies that the monastic community

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[565] The GIS-based cost-surface analysis demonstrates that it takes around 1-1.5 hours on foot from Gemikaya to the main northern road (A3) and the road between Bizye and Karabizye. The average walking time from other study areas to major roads is around 25 minutes.

[566] Soustal, *Thrakien*, 446–47; Fildhuth and Ar, "Preliminary Report of the First Survey-Campaign at Skopelos"; "Polos Kalesi/ Yoğuntaş Yüzey Araştırması 2015." The episcopal see was listed first as a suffragan of Traianoupolis in the *Notitia* 3^{558}, then under Adrianople in the *Notitiae* 7^{629}, 9^{503}, 10^{593}, 13^{644}, and later in the 14th century as a metropolis in the *Notitiae* 17^{130} and 18^{153}: Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 240, 286, 305, 329, 364, 402, 409.

[567] Kuzulu has been only briefly described in previous survey reports. Ertuğrul, "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması," 1–2; Kurtuluş, "Trakya Bölgesi Kırklareli, Edirne, Tekirdağ, Çanakkale İllerinde 'Türk Dönemi Kaleleri,'" 34–35; *Kırklareli'nin Bilinmeyen Trak-Roma-Bizans Kaleleri*, 169–74; Külzer, "Neue Forschungen in Ostthrakien," 270; *Ostthrakien*, 474; Fildhuth, "Skopelos, Türkei. Surveyprojekt im byzantinisch-bulgarischen Grenzgebiet in Ostthrakien," 244.

practiced both solitary and communal traditions, living in well-connected yet dispersed places in the landscape. The rock-cut hermitage is approached from the south as one comes down from the hilltop settlement. It has a two-level arrangement (fig. A.33). The upper terrace contains the church and the burial chamber. The latter provides access to the lower level, which is somewhat isolated and reserved for living areas.

At the center of the upper terrace, the single-nave church is accessed from the south through a rectangular door preceded by a barrel-vaulted porch (fig. 5.19). A southern entrance is favored instead of a conventional approach from the west, as it usually happens in rupestrian environments to illuminate rather dark church interiors. To that end, a small circular window is also opened through the ceiling above the western naos wall (fig. A.33 sec.1). The open area before the church, partly surrounded by rock-cut vaults, displays a courtyard-like arrangement. A nicely carved cross vault springs from the overhanging rock southeast of the naos door. The traces of masonry on the back walls demonstrate a concern for regularizing the surrounding amorphous rock surfaces.

Figure 5.19: Kuzulu Hermitage, looking at the entrance to the church and the western corridor leading to the funerary chamber.

The hermitage is an active cave system in which hydrogeological processes are ongoing. Likewise, the church interior is flooded with water, and the walls have a melted-like appearance resulting from the water erosion and calcite depositions (fig. 5.20). Still, some traces of blue, red, yellow, and white color pigments of former wall paintings are preserved on the ceiling, albeit too fragmentarily to understand the decorative program. The church is a 6.5-m-long barrel-vaulted hall divided into two bays with a thick transverse arch (fig. A.33). This simple plan scheme is the most

common among rock-cut churches in the Strandzha region, but the articulation with a transverse arch is unique to Kuzulu. The naos is furnished with long benches set against the lateral walls. The western bay features a large rectangular niche, the exact function of which remains unclear. The church space terminates with a 2.7-m-wide apse in the east. The ceiling of the apse conch drops lower than the naos vault. The sanctuary extends outside the semicircular apse, marked by an elevated floor and a high wooden *templon*. The imprints of the former sanctuary barrier on the opposite sides indicate parapet walls and an *epistyle* placed 1.80 m above the floor (fig. A.33 sec.1).[568] The church altar is carved on the eastern back wall at a convenient height for the liturgy to be performed (fig. 5.20). A small niche is placed above the altar table on the central axis, where it is customary to have a window opening in a masonry church. This may have been used for a candle or a lamp. The *prothesis* niche is cut immediately outside the apse on the north wall of the sanctuary.

Figure 5.20: Rock-cut church in Kuzulu, looking towards the sanctuary.

The irregular corridor west of the church leads to the funerary chamber (fig. 5.19). The single burial place inside is carved on the ground at the southeastern corner. The eastern wall in front of the tomb has well-executed right-angled corners and three large niches (fig. 2.6). The rock surfaces are later covered with cave depositions formed by

[568] Rock-cut sanctuary barriers are more common in the Strandzha region. In Byzantine Cappadocia, beam holes above low parapets are generally interpreted as later modifications. Lemaigre Demesnil, *Architecture rupestre et décor sculpté*, 152; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 169–72.

the calcite-rich water, blending natural formations and human-made elements. The western half of the room retains a cave-like appearance with uneven surfaces and massive stalactites extending from floor to ceiling. The passage west of the room connects the two levels of the hermitage, placing the burial chamber in a central position (fig. A.33). The connection is not straightforward, but one needs to bend forward and climb down feet first from a broad yet low aperture in the rock (fig. 5.21).

Figure 5.21: The irregular opening in the funerary chamber connecting the two levels of the hermitage in Kuzulu, view from the lower terrace. (Copyright BRIA project archive)

The commemoration of the dead was an essential element in the foundation of Byzantine monasteries and hermitages, rupestrian or otherwise, where burial rooms were reserved for prominent members of the communities.[569] In particular, the tomb of the founder saint often assumed a formative role and affected the independence, economic prosperity, and survival of a monastic establishment.[570] The funerary chamber in Kuzulu was clearly at the heart of the life in the rock-cut hermitage, providing the link between the church and living cells of the hermits. The three eastern-looking niches before the tomb further demonstrate the ceremonial character of the

[569] For example, see Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 248–49; Ousterhout, "Remembering the Dead in Byzantine Cappadocia." For the relation between cemeteries and monasteries in Byzantine Cappadocia as elements of the same "landscapes of commemoration," see Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 371–480.
[570] Kotoula, "The Tomb of the Founder-Saint."

room. This privileged burial place must have contained the remains of an individual whose memory the monastic community wished to preserve, presumably the founder hermit.

On the lower level, a series of enlarged natural caves are found side by side behind a sheer rocky cliff (fig. A.33). Some are too narrow and compartmented to allow any apparent use. Others are preceded by rupestrian anterooms or now-lost timber structures and provide shelter from the elements. These can be identified as cells where hermits secluded themselves. Among them, the roughly rectangular room at the center has a rock-cut bed and some utilitarian niches. At the northern end, three interconnected cave cells, accessed via a narrow opening on the rock face, offer further isolation and privacy. This cluster is large enough to be used by multiple hermits, yet they must have arranged their own bedding.

On top of the same hill, around 200 m northeast, the fortified settlement covers an oblong area of ca 0.5 ha, comparable to the scale of the military garrisons in the vicinity of Skopelos, such as Keçi Kalesi and Yündalan Büyük Kale (fig. A.32). These other two fortresses, however, have solid defensive walls strengthened with massive towers; they overlook broad sections of the medieval road network south of the Strandzha Mountains.[571] In contrast, the construction technique and thickness of the walls in Kuzulu are not even comparable, displaying a much simpler structure built with rubble masonry without lime mortar. At an elevated location in the north, a square-planned cistern is preserved on the course of the wall, possibly the foundations of a now-lost tower structure. The settlement is not visually connected to other fortified centers and is apparently not part of the regional surveillance system.[572] It still commands a view over the narrow valley with well-irrigated lands in the south, bordered by the hilly topography (fig. 5.22). The existence of a nearby rupestrian hermitage, the isolated location at the end of a long and secure valley, and the architecture of the fortification system, distinct from the regional military bases of the same size, all point towards a monastic rather than a military or lay presence. The only identifiable *in-situ* structure within the walls is the apse of a church, exposed in an illegal excavation pit in the

[571] Fildhuth, "Skopelos, Türkei. Surveyprojekt im byzantinisch-bulgarischen Grenzgebiet in Ostthrakien," 242–44.
[572] Pastwa, "Analyse der antiken und byzantinischen Bebauung in der Region Kırklareli," 77.

central northeastern section. It is a sizable structure built with regular rectangular blocks laid in strong mortar beds, likely the catholicon of the monastic settlement.

Figure 5.22: The view from the settlement hill above the rock-cut hermitage in Kuzulu, looking towards the valley landscape in the south.

A hermitage in the open landscape close to a fortified monastery reflects the spatial realities of a hybrid monastic community. Two foundational stories are equally possible. The construction of the hilltop settlement may predate or be contemporary with the carving of the hermitage. In this case, the latter may have been established as a dependence for the experienced monks who chose to pursue a more solitary life.[573] The privileged burial place in the funerary chamber may have been intended for an influential solitary monk who secluded himself and died in the rock-cut hermitage. The hermits living in the cave cells on the lower level and possibly others in seclusion in other now-lost structures must have visited the core of the monastery on certain occasions and received necessary provisions. Alternatively, the monastic inhabitation in the valley may have started around a natural cave by the water, later enlarged and transformed into the hermitage by a small group of anchorites. The increasing number of monks may have necessitated the construction of a communal monastery on top of the hill, preserving, at the same time, the founder's memory engraved on the very landscape he transformed.[574]

[573] See the brief discussion on varieties of Byzantine monasticism at the beginning of this chapter.
[574] Many foundational stories in Byzantium similarly record monasteries developing around or near the cells of founder hermits, whether caves or simple, isolated structures that later become commemorative spaces important for the monastic communities. Popović, "The Byzantine Monastery," 175.

This remote mountainous landscape must have provided an ideal environment for isolation. Water is the protagonist in its formation. The creek emerging near the monastery runs along the valley bottom and passes by the present-day village in the south. On its way through the valley, it floods the rocky terraces, carves out the topography, and deposits calcites on the surfaces it runs over, rich enough in calcium carbonates even to make the branches touching the flowing water look petrified in a short while. Rock-cut hermitage, partaking in this ever-changing landscape, reveals multiple layers of collaboration among rocks, water, and people (fig. 2.6). The caves in Kuzulu resulted from hydrogeological processes in the carbonate rocks. They were then enhanced with artificial carvings and complemented with masonry and wooden additions according to the needs of the small group of hermits living there. Later on, the water has taken over the site once again. Now, it continues to erode the rock surfaces, whether human-altered or not, and cover them with calcite cave deposits.

The presence of water fundamentally affects the spatial experience in a landscape and its potential uses. During the survey campaign in 2017, it was fascinating to see how easily the municipal head of the village, Ceylan Çetin, arranged the diversion of the water away from the hermitage to facilitate the documentation of rock-cut spaces (fig. 1.6).[575] In fact, the present inhabitants of the village constantly interact with the landscape, mainly manipulating the flowing water. Although not that close to the village houses, the locals cultivate the lands around the settlement hill because of the presence of water. They dig temporary channels on the ground in front of or above the rock-cut hermitage to change the direction of the water, taking turns to irrigate their vegetable gardens in different sections of the landscape.

A crucial parameter in site selection for monasteries in Byzantium was optimizing the control, exploitation, and security of the surrounding landscapes. In this framework, the dependencies marking the sites of economic importance are essential in forming coherent monastic landscapes and managing their resources.[576] Moreover, fortified rural monasteries assumed a crucial role in the defense of the countryside and its

[575] Additionally, the interview with Oktay Çetin, forest keeper and resident of Kuzulu village, made on the 8th of December, 2018, testifies to the changing uses of the rupestrian site in the recent past. Accordingly, some forty years ago, the hermitage was dry enough to shelter animals. As such, it is documented in an earlier photograph in the archives of the Edirne Regional Board for Conservation of Cultural and Natural Assets.

[576] Kondyli and Craft, "The Making of a Byzantine Monastic Landscape."

natural resources, such as the Chortaites Monastery in central Macedonia, protecting a landscape that supplied water to Thessaloniki.[577] No other piece of monastic literature in Byzantium illustrates the concerns of a founder about the management of freshwater and its riches better than the 12th-century *typikon* of the monastery of Kosmosoteira in Feres. The imperial founder, *Sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos, claims ownership of and gives precise instructions to safeguard specific sections of the two rivers close to the monastery: Evros/Meriç/Maritza River and its tributary Samia. These are considered monastic properties in the *typikon*, where certain activities were reserved for the monastic community only.[578] The founder also describes a covered cistern he built in the inner enclosure, supplied by an aqueduct bringing water from its source. The monastery's rights over this source of water, which Isaac uncovered with much toil, were ensured by a deed of donation, signed by the hereditary owners and the metropolitan of Trainoupolis and ordered to be kept safe in the sacristy.[579]

Along these lines, the fortified core of the monastery in Kuzulu was the beacon of and a shelter for the monastic life in the mountainous landscape that offered valuable forest resources and great agricultural potential. Outside the walls, the dependencies must have expanded the monastery's area of control. In this framework, the location of the rock-cut hermitage is not coincidental. The present engagement of the locals to change the direction of the water and irrigate different sections of the land reflects the affordances that the rupestrian site provides. As such, the site of the hermitage stands out as the place to manipulate the flow of the water. I imagine this was such an important element, which probably affected the site selection for the monastic settlement. In such a landscape of transformation, perhaps the only constant is the agency of water. The control of its course means the control of the landscape.

Access to water and management of aquatic resources appear to be vital for the 14th-century monastic community in Paroria as well, which shares roughly the same landscape as Kuzulu. Despite the ceaseless efforts of scholars since the late 19th century, especially those of Bulgarian and Russian origin, the exact location of the holy mountain remains yet unknown. Numerous sites have been thus far promoted as

[577] Bakirtzis, "Locating Byzantine Monasteries," esp. 127–28.
[578] For example, only the monks were allowed to fish, not anyone who happened to be there. For the related passages in the *typikon*, see *BMFD*, 803, 827, 828.
[579] *BMFD*, 833.

Paroria, relying on topographical and spatial information in the related literature, nearly all featuring walled settlements identified as monasteries and nearby caves.[580] Curiously enough, the 14th-century monastic center has been almost exclusively sought in the north of the national border between Turkey and Bulgaria.[581]

As recorded in the *vita* of St. Gregory the Sinaite, the founder saint followed two different itineraries to the desolate lands of Paroria on two occasions. Gregory visited Paroria for the first time in 1327 with a small group of followers, having learned about the isolated nature of the place while in Sozopolis, where he had arrived by ship from Constantinople, initially to settle in one of the nearby monasteries.[582] In a later episode, following a Turkish invasion of Mount Athos in the first half of the 1330s, the saint traveled through the Evros/Meriç/Maritza River until Adrianople and reached Paroria by land, this time to stay permanently.[583] The life of St. Romylos of Vidin records relentless banditry activities and raids that culminated after the death of the founder saint in 1346, which eventually led to the burning of the monastic tower by the monks and the abandonment of the holy mountain circa 1360.[584] Around this period of unrest, a letter sent by the governor of Skopelos warns the monks living in the open landscape about the Hagarenes (Ἀγαρηνοὶ) wishing to hunt wild beasts in the area and advises them to retreat to the tower in the principal monastery or leave Paroria altogether for their safety.[585]

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[580] Angeliki Delikari summarizes and reevaluates the previous literature on the long-standing debate. The list of sites includes Sakar Mountains, the surroundings of Golyam Manastir and Malak Manastir, the hilly area of Bakadzhitsite, the region of Voden, the vicinity of Skopelos and Skopos (Üsküp) and the Bosna ridge on the Strandzha Mountains, the villages of Zabernovo and Malko Tarnovo, Stara Planina (Balkan) Mountains, and finally Hisar Mountain. Among these, based on the first journey of St. Gregory to Paroria, Delikari favors a location closer to Sozopolis in the vicinity of Erkesija, the fortification system that marked the Byzantine border with Bulgaria between the 8th and 10th centuries. "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 177–208; "Ein Beitrag zu historisch-geographischen Fragen auf dem Balkan," 73–75.

[581] As an exception to this model, Nikolay Tuleshkov argued for an alternative southern location in the area of Karabizye (Malık Samokov/ Demirköy), in particular, suggesting an identification with the now-lost monastery of St. Soter northeast of Skopos (Üsküp). "Култовата Архитектура На Странджа От Епохата На Османското Владичество," esp. 254-255.

[582] *Life of St. Gregory the Sinaite*, XVIII: Delikari, "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 347–48.

[583] *Ibid.*, XXI: Delikari, 351.

[584] Delikari, "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 161–63; Rigo, "Gregorio il Sinaita," 83. In a recent chronological study, Milen Nikolov argues for a date closer to 1355-1356. Nikolov, "Хронология На Исихастките Манастири в Парория През XIV в.," 106.

[585] *Life of St. Romylos of Vidin*, XI-XII: Halkin, "La vie grecque inédite de Saint Romylos," 129–31; Bartusis, Nasser, and Laiou, "Days and Deeds of a Hesychast Saint," 36–37; for a recent critical edition and Italian translation, see Rigo and Scarpa, *La vita di Romylos da Vidin*.

Consequently, the hagiographic evidence points to a place easily accessible from Sozopolis and Adrianople by land. The governor's letter indicates a location within the territory under the direct control of Skopelos, possibly the closest local administrative center to Paroria. Kuzulu is more or less at an equal distance from both Sozopolis and Adrianople and is located only 20 km northeast of Skopelos (fig. 5.23). I do not claim to have completed a mission almost as challenging as finding Neverland. Instead, I would like to highlight the similarities in how these monastic communities engaged with the same landscape and orchestrated its natural resources, as the material remains in Kuzulu and literature related to Paroria testify. In addition to the Great Lavra on Mount Katakekryomenon (τὸ Κατακεκρυωμένον ὄρος), the hidden mountain, at least three other *lavrai* were established in Paroria, among them, one was a rupestrian complex in a locality called the cave of Mesomilion (τὸ σπήλαιον τῶν Μεσομιλίων).[586] Similar to the landscape in Kuzulu, the textual evidence demonstrates different monastic traditions being practiced in Paroria. The monks lived alone in isolated cells, in monastic dependencies in small groups, or more communally in the main monastery dedicated to Theotokos.[587]

Figure 5.23: Satellite image showing Kuzulu and major settlements in the vicinity, with emphasis on the localities mentioned in the literature related to the 14th-century monastic center in Paroria: Sozopolis, Adrianople, and Skopelos.

[586] *Life of St. Gregory the Sinaite,* XXI: Delikari, "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 351.
[587] Rigo, "Gregorio il Sinaita," 79–80; Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace," 127–28, 140.

Security was an issue in 14th-century Thrace. In its relatively short existence, several episodes of life-threatening crises challenged the monastic community in Paroria, which managed to survive under the patronage and tutelage of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371). The Bulgarian ruler secured the area from brigandage, restored the solitary hermits to the open landscape on several occasions, and commissioned the construction of a solid tower in the principal monastery.[588] He also had new cells built, donated money, bestowed lands, a lake, and livestock, and gave other provisions to the monastic center. Recurring references to the lake granted by the Bulgarian Tsar and the pools of still water (βηροὶ) in which monks could catch all sorts of fish illustrate the importance of these aquatic resources and their management for the monastic life in Paroria.[589] In Kuzulu, somewhere in the same landscape, having access to water and control over its course affected the site selection of the rock-cut hermitage. The walled hilltop monastery in the vicinity also had a single tower at an elevated position, a solid structure with relatively high-quality construction, now only preserved at the foundational level.

The monastic foundations of St. Gregory the Sinaite gained the support of Ivan Alexander and transformed Paroria into a center from which the *hesychasm* channeled to the Balkan lands. The burning of the monastic tower and abandonment of the holy mountain portray well the insecurity in this part of the Strandzha region after the mid-14th century. The activities of the monks in Kuzulu, too, must have come to an end around this time, if not earlier, due to attacks by brigands and frequent raids. The toponym Paroria (Παρόρια) refers to a sparsely inhabited mountainous region near the Byzantine frontier with Bulgaria rather than a well-defined area.[590] States may have provided relatively safe enclaves in such a marginal environment, such as the local settlement centers and other hilltop fortifications, but what creates a populated landscape, either lay or monastic, is the ceaseless efforts of people. Seen this way, the

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[588] *Life of St. Gregory the Sinaite,* XXII and *Life of St. Romylos of Vidin,* IX: Delikari, "Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης," 351–53; Halkin, "La vie grecque inédite de Saint Romylos," 126. Also see Rigo, "Gregorio il Sinaita," 79–80; Makris, "Monks and Monasteries of Byzantine Thrace," 129–32; Speake, *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth,* 101.

[589] For example, St. Romylos of Vidin developed an innovative way of fishing in the frozen waters of Paroria to provide food to the ill-tempered, elderly monk he was accompanying. *Life of St. Romylos of Vidin,* VI: Halkin, "La vie grecque inédite de Saint Romylos," 121–23; Bartusis, Nasser, and Laiou, "Days and Deeds of a Hesychast Saint," 30–32; Rigo and Scarpa, *La vita di Romylos da Vidin*, 90–95.

[590] Rigo, "Gregorio il Sinaita," 77; Delikari, "Ein Beitrag zu historisch-geographischen Fragen auf dem Balkan," 74.

spatial narrative in Kuzulu presents a resilient monastic community that knew how to manipulate and control natural resources. The rock-cut hermitage enabled not only seclusion but also control over the flowing water, hence the landscape it reached—a function that the place still maintains. Whether or not directly related to Paroria, Kuzulu is part of the same geographic area that allowed the diversion of monastic waters, both literally and metaphorically.

5.4. Conclusion

Monastic communities' engagement with the rupestrian environment cannot be considered in isolation despite the unquestioned remoteness attributed to them in the related literature. Instead, the monastic landscapes examined in this chapter provide the final piece of the puzzle for reconstructing the rural life in the Strandzha region. Monks, founders, and patrons of monastic life manipulated these landscapes to create secluded spaces for both communal and solitary living, to control the sites of economic significance, and to exploit the natural resources better to guarantee the survival of their institutions.

The chapter opens with activities of a *lavriotic* community northeast of Bizye, a monastic style not traditionally associated with Byzantine Thrace. The monastic presence in the valley, easily accessible and visible from the city, partly depended on the support of the urban population. I argued that the local aristocracy in Bizye did not only provide victuals but also commissioned the carving and decoration of monastic spaces. The other two sites are relatively distant from the primary settlements and road network but by no means disconnected. The small monastery on top of a prominent rock outcrop near Soğucak is largely masonry-built on hewn-out foundations. Overlaying a former Thracian rock sanctuary, it dominates the immediate landscape bordered by the hilly topography at a junction of valleys. Lastly, in the northwestern section of the Strandzha Mountains, the fortified monastery and the nearby rock-cut hermitage in Kuzulu occupy strategic locations to manage the landscape. Close to the ever-changing medieval borders, this region roughly corresponds to the 14th-century foundation of St. Gregory the Sinaite in Paroria, which attracted the patronage of the Bulgarian ruler and became a center drawing people from all over the Balkan lands.

Monastic landscapes examined here differ significantly, as do the experiences they afforded. In each of them, monks negotiated their existence with lay inhabitants and

authorities, maintaining, at the same time, a degree of isolation and seclusion. They shaped and reshaped their living landscapes in collaboration with other-than-human beings according to the needs of the communities, the preferences of the founders and patrons, and the site-specific affordances and limitations. In this way, monastic settlements in the Strandzha region became embedded in the rocky terrain yet never to a degree to be hidden.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Rock formations in Byzantine landscapes were transformed to sustain life according to the needs and belief systems of the people inhabiting them and engaging in production. In this process, rock-cut spaces and human-altered rock formations acquired meanings and functions integral to daily life. They were cared for, restored, and eventually abandoned, sometimes to be reused in the future. In one way or another, they became repositories of the past embedded in present landscapes. This dissertation examined such spaces in the Strandzha region and the untold stories of their medieval users deposited therein. The archaeological interpretations of this group of previously overlooked and undocumented material, relying on a close and in-person examination, achieved a decentralized historical narrative from a region neighboring the epicenter of the Empire, Constantinople.

6.1. Rock-cut Architecture in the Strandzha Region: What is it for?

The first-rank settlements, such as Medeia, Bizye, Brysis, Skopelos, and Probaton, functioned as economic, administrative, and ecclesiastical centers in the region, as pointed out in the historiographic overview in the introductory chapter.[591] Numerous other hilltop fortifications marked the Strandzha Mountains, a volatile borderland between the Byzantine Empire and neighboring states in the Balkans.[592] These were military garrisons, watchtowers, or walled villages and monasteries. The massive defensive structures not only safeguarded what was behind the walls but also served as places of refuge for those living in the open landscape and gave them a sense of security. It is the study of rock-cut sites that informs us about rural life outside fortified centers, bearing conspicuous marks of the different ways people defined their environments.

Three rock-cut churches around the present-day village of Balkaya inscribe the boundaries of an otherwise unknown medieval village in the landscape between Medeia and Bizye. These structures demarcate the outlines of the settled area

[591] See chapter 1.1.
[592] See footnote 20.

surrounded by the forestland on which the livelihood of the present inhabitants relies, which was likely the case also for the communities populating the same landscape in the Middle Ages. Another church in a more remote location occupies a place that still holds importance for the locals, although it appears to be in the middle of nowhere. Direkli Mağara is at an intersection of seasonally wet valleys, facilitating movement across the undulating, wooded terrain that is otherwise difficult to cross. Besides, the same valley and the area around the church, which locals call by the name of the rock-cut complex, functions as a natural border with the neighboring village, Kömürköy. The locational overlap with the Byzantine church is not coincidental but indicative of continuity in the historical land use, reflecting an awareness of landscape affordances by present and past communities.

Similarly, in the Tundzha River valley northwest of the Strandzha region, three funerary churches were carved out on the outskirts of the fortified hill of Probaton. They drew a sacred boundary and a second line of defense in addition to the massive walls that physically protected those living in and around the settlement center. Often in prominent positions visible from afar, such religious structures provided divine protection for the rivers, roads, fields, production areas, pastures, woodlands, and other landscape elements. Marking the settlement margins or nearby sites that communities considered important, they defined the limits of inhabited land in the medieval mind. The outlying churches around small-scale unwalled villages like Balkaya and a first-rank settlement center like Probaton already imply a practice that may have been more widespread than the material now available to us suggests. The masonry-built outlying churches may have once existed and eventually shared the faith of many other now-lost Byzantine buildings in the region, whereas, being more resistant to natural and human-induced destructions, a handful of examples in the rock-cut medium still stand.

My survey of textual, epigraphic, archaeological, and ethnographic evidence revealed how the medieval inhabitants of the mountainous region made a living in the rocky landscapes. These included forestry, charcoal production, animal husbandry, freshwater aquaculture, crop cultivation, and quarrying. The large storage units carved into the bedrock and subterranean ceramic *pithoi* found in the settlement areas or among fields were to store agricultural produce in the broader Thrace. Moreover, I examined winemaking practices in some detail. Byzantine and Ottoman textual sources recorded a longstanding vinicultural tradition, still maintained by small-scale wineries

in the region. I have identified three rock-cut wine production areas connected to Byzantine settlements. These open-air treading floors must have been used with portable collecting vats. The initial fermentation may have taken place in the nearby storage areas, carved under the rocky ground to create a stable environment.

In the area known as Çalışkan Çiftliği, 2.5 km west of Medeia, a small group of winemaking installations is carved on the bedrock next to an outlying church in a forest clearing. The clearing may have been where the grapes were cultivated to be pressed in the nearby treading floors. Another wine production area covers the rocky ridge above the outlying church at the eastern end of the Balkaya village. The third one is on the slopes of a fortified hill in the Erenler village, where ceramic sherds record a Late Byzantine settlement activity. All three production areas are relatively small in scale, probably only meeting the local demand. In other settlements in the Strandzha region, the grapes may have been trodden in wooden barrels or processed in constructed wine presses that no longer exist.

Recent scholarship revisited the earlier monastic identification of Cappadocian courtyard complexes, which are now accepted to be residences of landowning aristocrats with reception halls, kitchens, and impressive carved façades, reflecting the wealth and status of their owners. Among the lay inhabitants of the Strandzha region, however, residing in a rock-cut house was not a preferred way of living. The only exception is the rupestrian complex in Kaynarca, a former walled settlement west of Brysis. Following a layout similar to the courtyard complexes in Cappadocia, the site features a longitudinal secular hall and a kitchen covered by a conical vault with a smoke hole. On an elevated platform close to a water stream, the site faces the settlement center opposite the valley and overlooks the arable lands in the south. The choice of living in the only rock-cut house within a predominantly built settlement must have set the inhabitants of the rupestrian complex apart. This can be considered a rather extraordinary self-representation for Byzantine Thrace, showing perhaps the broader connections of its residents to regions where living in a rock-cut house was a marker of elite status.

Monasteries were never fully detached from the secular world despite the rhetoric of remoteness popular in the related literature. Lay and monastic communities coexisted in Byzantine landscapes, whether rural or urban, and this was the case also for the Strandzha region. The spatial organizations of rupestrian monasteries examined in this

dissertation are all different, affording different ascetical practices. Regardless, the survival and prosperity of these foundations depended on the control and exploitation of their immediate landscapes and their relation to nonmonastic communities. In a rocky gorge north of Bizye, Asmakayalar demonstrates a *lavra*-type monastery. The core of the monastic settlement is developed around a natural cave, rearranged to function as the communal church where the monks gathered regularly. Adjacent to the cave, the South Church on a lower level is carved and decorated in exceptional quality. It is clearly a work of professional carvers, likely from the nearby settlement center, Bizye. The small church is connected to a hermit cell through a tower-like shaft, recreating a spatial arrangement narrated in the 6th-century life of St. Sabas the Great, a widely-circulated text among the monastic communities in Byzantium. This *hierotopical* project forms a commemorative space around a prominent figure within the monastic community, possibly the founder hermit.

Other living units in Asmakayalar are dispersed in the valley, each providing enough space for more than one dweller and, as a rule, equipped with private praying areas. One such hermitage high on the cliffside has a single-nave church with fragmentarily preserved wall paintings representing a Christological cycle. An experienced painter must have applied the wall paintings in this hardly accessible rock-cut room. Although not intended to be seen by crowds, once again, the painted program hints at an external patronage. The *lavriotic* community in Asmakayalar can be identified as the cave-dwelling monks to whom St. Mary the Younger gave provisions in the late 9th century. The philanthropy of the saintly woman recorded in her *vita*, who also happens to be the wife of the highest military commander in the region at the time, showcases the support of the local aristocracy for the monastic life at an arm's length distance from Bizye. Consequently, the urban elite seems to have commissioned the carving and painting of certain parts of the valley settlement, as confirmed by both textual and material evidence.

A much smaller monastery occupied the site of an ancient Thracian sanctuary on top of an outstanding rock formation known as Gemikaya near the village of Soğucak, former Kryonero. Monks reworked the artificial terraces of the former Iron Age site to use the rock as foundations for their constructions. This nucleated settlement is nothing like the *lavra*-type monastery, extending along the Asmakayalar valley. Compared to other rupestrian sites in the Strandzha region, Gemikaya is farther from the major

Byzantine roads and somewhat detached from the regional transportation network. A single-nave church dominating a view over the landscape, a rock-cut cistern, two carved seclusion cells, quarry areas, and rock foundations of now-lost masonry structures present the living area of a small group of recluses on top of the pillar-like rock, perhaps being inspired by the *stylites* as the Cappadocian hermits living on the upper levels of volcanic cones did. The ceramic sherds show an increased activity between the mid-12th and 14th centuries, the period in which the conversion of the ancient site into a Late Byzantine monastery can be placed.

Lastly, the northwestern section of the Strandzha Mountains provides an illustrative example of how monastic communities organized and controlled their landscapes. Near the village of Kuzulu, the hill at the end of a long and secure valley in the wooded, undulating terrain is crowned by a walled monastery, overlooking the arable lands that the locals continue to cultivate. A small hermitage is carved out from the bedrock on the southern slope of the settlement hill, arranged in two terraces connected by a funerary chamber. The tomb in this central burial room must have been reserved for a prominent person whose memory the monks wished to preserve, likely the founder hermit. This region roughly coincides with the location of the short-lived yet influential monastic center in Paroria, established by the hesychast monk St. Gregory the Sinaite in the 14th century. The topographic information from the related textual evidence suggests a place reachable from Adrianople and Sozopolis and in the area controlled by the governor of Skopelos, the closest primary center to Kuzulu. The monastic community in Paroria overcame several life-threatening challenges in its brief existence, thanks to the efficient use of local resources and the patronage of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander, who secured the area and donated money and properties.

As in Paroria, whose exact location remains unknown, the spatial setting in Kuzulu indicates a landscape in which both communal and eremitic traditions were practiced. The fortified settlement is the core area where monks lived together under the direction of a superior. The experienced members of the community who wished to pursue a more solitary life may have secluded themselves alone or in small groups in hermitages dispersed in the open landscape, one of which was the rupestrian complex on the southern hillside. The rock-cut hermitage is now flooded with water flowing down the valley towards the village. The villagers cultivating the lands around the settlement hill

make temporary diggings in front of the hermitage to change the course of the water periodically and irrigate different sections of the landscape. I propose that Byzantine monks were also aware of the central role of the place in managing the water, hence their carving of the hermitage at that site. Therefore, the rock-cut hermitage was not only a place for seclusion but also to control the landscape on which the monastery's very existence depended.

As an integral part of the landscapes inhabited by monastic and lay communities, some places existed mainly to be visited. In Byzantium, as in many other cultures throughout human history, people attributed sacredness to outstanding landscape elements and associated certain places with *hierophanies*, manifestations of the sacred. Although these sites were sometimes encased in monumental architecture, many others were maintained as they were or simply arranged for rituals with minimal interventions. The influx of faithful visitors was, at times, not enough for the spatial transformation. It was not the architecture that made a site attractive to pilgrims but the particular beliefs and stories attached to it. Consequently, the related pilgrimage activities in the past are not always visible in present landscapes, as I discussed using the cases of two cave sanctuaries on opposite sides of the modern state border between Bulgaria and Turkey: the caves of Sveta Marina and Şükrüpaşa. The situation is different in Yarımburgaz and Medeia, where past pilgrimage activities left permanent traces on the rocks. The karstic cave group in Yarımburgaz and the water emerging from the rock at Medeia are natural phenomena that received sacred associations. Moreover, their locations in the immediate hinterlands of major settlements and connections to riverways and wider transportation networks seem to have been instrumental in their processes of becoming extensive pilgrimage centers.

The rupestrian monument at Medeia, one of the finest examples of Byzantine rock-cut architecture, marks a source of holy water in a river landscape west of the city. I reevaluated the earlier arguments on chronology and function and provided a revised historical context for this unique complex. In the 19th century, a monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas was established at the long-abandoned site, affecting its scholarly interpretations. Neither the monastic identification nor the dedication to the saint can be traced further back than the restoration in the Late Ottoman period. Relying on careful consideration of architecture, sculpture, paintings, inscriptions, graffiti, and landscape relations, I maintain that the monument was established primarily to

accommodate the pilgrimage activity related to holy water rather than to house a group of monastics. A small monastery may have been eventually established there in the Middle Ages before the long period of abandonment, yet the available material evidence does not hint at such a change before the mid-19th century. Instead, the pilgrimage complex may have been controlled and maintained by the episcopal authority in Medeia, which can also be credited for the architecture. The elaborate design, skillful carving, and intricate *champlevé* sculpture indicate a professional involvement and possibly a patron with connections and considerable financial means.

Challenging the earlier Late Antique dating, I suggest a date around the 9th century for the initial carving. The pilgrimage to the rock and water with curative powers must have been at a scale matching the exceptionally high-quality sculptural decoration and the size of the complex, featuring the largest rock-cut church in the Strandzha Massif. The spatial layout instructed a circular movement within the bedrock, enabling controlled access to three points of veneration: the funerary chamber, *hagiasma*, and southeastern corner room in the sanctuary where precious relics were kept. A central cross in a *mandorla* represented the Transfiguration of Christ in the now-lost apse decoration. This painted cross was channeling the gaze towards the word "*hagiasma*" in the biblical inscription that was once at the skirts of the vaulting of the apse. The holy water was collected and made accessible to the pilgrims in the real space of the *hagiasma* at the southern end of the narthex. Its significance was further emphasized with references to the life-giving character of the water in architectural sculpture. In the Late Byzantine period, the *hagiasma* dome received a painted decoration following the fashion of the most renowned holy water shrine in Byzantium, the Monastery of Zoodochos Pege at Constantinople. This restoration shows, once again, the artistic connections of the Thracian coast of the Black Sea with the Byzantine capital.

6.2. Discussion of a Regional Style

As the above survey reveals once again, rock carving served as a tool for medieval rural communities to define their living spaces and production areas within and around monastic and lay settlements. Moreover, it was used to highlight the sites people ascribed sacredness to and visited with hopes for salvation, purification, and healing. This study of rock-cut spaces and place-making practices depicts the life of the Byzantine inhabitants of the Strandzha region, neighboring Constantinople and the

Empire's northwestern frontier. Many aspects of the complex, multilayered living landscapes examined here find parallels in both masonry-built and rock-cut environments in distant corners of the Eastern Mediterranean, as noted in the related chapters and summarized once again in the synthesis below. The resulting picture also invites us to re-evaluate the rock-cut monuments in other regions and the role of rock-cut space-making practices in Byzantine architecture.

A preliminary research question at the early stages of the dissertation project was whether certain characteristics of rupestrian sites in Byzantine Thrace would strike as common to identify a regional style. An expected result was, then, an organic connection to rupestrian landscapes across the Balkans, to which Thrace is geographically and historically connected. The three-year site survey and detailed in-person examination of the monuments uncovered a highly diversified image rather than a unified, homogeneous group. Only a couple of dozen km apart, each rock-cut site in the Strandzha region was formed according to the affordances of their particular landscapes and the specific needs of local communities. The material examined above exhibits multiple ways medieval inhabitants of the region transformed their living environments using rock carving, among other means. The functions attributed to human-altered rock formations are diverse, and so are their connectivity to wider regional and interregional networks. The economic resources available for their formation also seem to have varied, affecting the involvement of skilled professionals and the sophistication of design and execution.

Carved spaces in the Strandzha region are not limited to ecclesiastical structures, although these are typically the most easily recognizable in the rock-cut medium. An overwhelming majority of the rock-cut churches are single-nave, barrel-vaulted churches, following a simple design equally common in masonry architecture. The church at the center of the pilgrimage complex at Medeia is a three-aisle basilica, probably so was also Direkli Mağara. A few other plan types are represented with unique examples, such as the two-aisled church in Balkaya village or the triconch church in Asmakayalar near Bizye. The decorative carved elements are not equally distributed either, yet the relief decoration of each site stands out as unique in its own right. For instance, the quality and intricacy of carvings at Medeia are virtually unmatched in Byzantine rock-cut architecture. The above-mentioned triconch church near Bizye is replete with carved-out crosses, whereas the two-aisled funerary church

in Balkaya features a central relief cross in the northern apse. All the other rock-cut spaces are left rather plain, featuring almost no sculptural decoration. The same can be said for the wall paintings, for which the evidence is fragmentary and sporadic. Therefore, the material is not enough to argue for typological categories or a regional style. Besides, the typology and stylistic discussions alone hardly provide any insights into the history of a monument, its landscape relations, or the people who formed and used them. This dissertation proves that a dedicated and archaeology-oriented study of rock-cut sites and their surrounding landscapes can reveal much more about the past than typological or stylistic comparisons could ever achieve.

Medieval living environments carved on rocky landscapes are not limited to the Strandzha Mountains but exist in a much larger geographical area in the Balkans and beyond. For example, a rather dense concentration of extensive rock-cut monastic settlements is found along the Danube River; two particularly well-known among them are located near the village of Ivanovo in Northern Bulgaria and Murfatlar in Romanian Dobruja.[593] However, this alone does not necessarily indicate a self-contained group of rock-cut monuments in the Balkans that would be stylistically distinct from the broader Mediterranean. Moreover, the representation of medieval rock-cut architecture in the wider Balkan lands is dominated by its religious character and connection to monastic communities. Instead, the discussions in this dissertation demonstrate a more nuanced and diversified phenomenon for the Strandzha region, present in the lives of different groups of people, not only monastics.

Without falling into stylistic discussions, only two elements can be pointed out as consistent in human-altered rupestrian landscapes in the Balkans, of which Thrace is a part: rock outcrops and water streams. Neither is unique to this geography, though. Whether carving straight walls out of a solid mass, forming rock foundations for construction, or altering a natural cave, the availability of suitable rock formations is a prerequisite for rock-cut architecture to be applied. The rock to be carved for rock-cut architecture is not portable. It needs to be local; it needs to be there. The presence of water is likewise neither a coincidence nor a regional peculiarity. There is an obvious

[593] For Ivanovo, see Grabar, "Les fresques d'Ivanovo"; Velmans, "Les fresques d'Ivanovo et la peinture byzantine à la fin du moyen âge"; for Murfatlar, see Damian, Samson, and Vasile, "Complexul rupestru de la Murfatlar"; Atanasov, "Le monastère rupestre de Murfatlar."

practicality in establishing settlements near water sources, whether permanent or temporary, which humankind has taken advantage of since the Neolithic Revolution. The fact that bodies of flowing water are one of the main protagonists in karst topographies is yet another and no less important reason for rock-cut sites to be located in proximity to water streams. The water carves and re-carves carbonate rock formations and removes the calcareous material to deposit somewhere else. Sheer rock façades in rocky gorges and valleys, cave spaces, and other landscape elements formed by hydrogeological processes introduce suitable conditions for rock-cut architecture. The spatial outcome of rock-cut architecture is not an exclusive human creation; it is also shaped by the rock that provides the material to carve and water, acting both as a carver and a builder on a geological timescale. Rock formations transformed by water, among other natural forces, invite human engagement, resulting in numerous rock-cut sites in river landscapes not only in Thrace or the Balkans but almost everywhere if necessary geological conditions are available.

6.3. An Image of Connectivity, not Isolation

The sites surveyed, documented, and studied here do not reveal a distinctive regional style, nor do they signal a Balkan phenomenon, as initially anticipated. This is not to label them or rock-cut space-making practices in the region as eccentric. On the contrary, life in Byzantine Thrace was anything but isolated and peculiar. Indeed, the ways in which the Byzantine communities of the Strandzha region formed their particular spaces out of bedrock and transformed the landscapes they inhabited have parallels across the Empire. The comparison should not be limited to rupestrian examples either since rock-cut space-making was a primary architectural medium in Byzantium, never isolated from other space-making practices.

This connectivity has been explored throughout the dissertation in order to place rock-cut spaces in the Strandzha region within a wider historical and geographical context. For example, the rupestrian complex outside Medeia is a well-developed pilgrimage site with a sophisticated design. The elaborately carved decoration and *champlevé* technique, unique among rock-cut spaces of Byzantine Thrace, indicate a high level of patronage and broader artistic connections.[594] The architectural layout offers controlled

[594] See footnote 308.

access to the objects of pilgrimage, in many ways comparable to the arrangements in prominent pilgrimage centers around the Empire, such as Abu Mina in Lower Egypt, Hosios Loukas Monastery in Central Greece, pilgrimage sites at the city of Ephesus, and healing shrines in Constantinople, in particular the Monastery of Zoodochos Pege.[595] In the Late Byzantine period, the *hagiasma* of the latter also became the model for the redecoration of the rock-carved *hagiasma* at Medeia, further demonstrating the extent of the Constantinopolitan influence.

Rock-cut outlying churches in the Strandzha region inscribe the boundaries of settlements on inhabited landscapes, whether unwalled villages or larger fortified centers, and mark places of importance for Byzantine communities. The examples in Thrace are by no means unique, and the phenomenon is recorded in Byzantine settlements in Crete, Cyprus, Naxos, Lakonia, Cappadocia, and elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.[596] Agricultural production areas are essential for the life of medieval rural communities, among which the winemaking installations are shaped according to basic practical necessities for grape juice extraction. Wine presses similar to those in the Strandzha region exist all around the Mediterranean, where the land and climate are suitable for viniculture, including carved installations in Caria, Lycia, Isauria, Cilicia, Cappadocia, and others.[597] However, not all rock-cut elements presented above have that many comparable examples from distant regions of the Empire. The rock-cut house in Kaynarca is the only known example outside Cappadocia. Its elevated position overlooking a water stream and arable lands, opposite the fortified settlement center, suggests elite ownership similar to the Cappadocian courtyard complexes.[598]

Monastic sites in the Strandzha region also find close parallels from across the Empire. The *lavriotic* monastery north of Bizye is developed around a natural cave, confirming the literary pattern in numerous monastic foundational stories.[599] Moreover, a commemorative space at the monastic core is modeled on a spatial arrangement in the Mar Saba, described in some detail in the *vita* of its renowned, holy founder, St. Sabas

[595] For related discussions, see chapter 3.1.2.
[596] See footnotes 354–58.
[597] See footnote 450.
[598] See footnote 471.
[599] See “Non-biblical caves” in chapter 2.1.2.

the Great.[600] The small monastic settlement on top of a rock pillar near Soğucak village, Gemikaya, partakes in the Late Byzantine phenomenon of monasteries constructed above rock foundations on outstanding, massive outcrops. Other examples in Thrace include Glouhite Kamani in the Rhodope Mountains and Skaloti outside Ainos,[601] whereas the most representative examples are in Meteora, Thessaly, where the first communal monastery was built on the broad rock in the 14th century.[602] Gemikaya is much smaller in scale yet applies the same fundamental space-making idea as the monasteries in Meteora, which later became a major center of monastic life, with twenty-four such complexes in the 16th century. Lastly, the remains of a walled communal monastery and the nearby rock-cut hermitage near the village of Kuzulu define a landscape where different monastic traditions coexisted. As such, it replicates, in a way, on a much more modest scale, the spatial setting of the monasteries in Athos, Olympos, Ganos, and other Holy Mountains spread throughout the Byzantine heartlands from the 9th century onward.[603]

6.4. A Theory for Byzantine Rock-cut Architecture

In the last few decades, archaeology-oriented research projects relying on detailed documentation demonstrated the previously underutilized potential of Byzantine rock-cut spaces in reconstructing the past and expanding our understanding of lesser-known phenomena that built environments and textual evidence fail to capture alone. The discussions of rock-cut sites in the Strandzha region and the living conditions of medieval communities that altered and inhabited the rupestrian landscapes partake in this growing body of literature. Another yet no less important contribution of the dissertation is the formulation of a theory for Byzantine rock-cut architecture, which so far lagged behind.

Rock-cut architecture was traditionally associated with an inferior quality. Regardless of the complexity of most rock-cut spaces, they were often dismissed as the products of a lack of construction materials, technical knowledge, or other means to build "real" architecture. In response to earlier literature, the general scholarly tendency in the

[600] See footnote 521.
[601] See footnotes 558–59.
[602] See footnote 562.
[603] See footnotes 499–500.

study of Byzantine rock-cut architecture, still struggling to find a rightful place in general narrations of art and architecture history, is to identify and magnify the "human-made elements" in otherwise inert rocky landscapes. This dominant perspective imposes a hierarchy on rock-cut architecture based on how visible the human interventions are, how faithfully the masonry elements and typologies are imitated, and how well the material properties of natural rock are concealed behind "man-made" carvings. Here, I distance myself from such exclusively anthropocentric views and engage with recent object-oriented approaches in archaeological theory to bring the long-neglected material agency into the discussion.

Any architectural production exists somewhere, real or imagined. Architecture inevitably communicates with its environment and holds a local component, as it is contained in a space larger than it defines. In the case of rock-cut architecture, more than other space-making practices, the spatial outcome has a stronger and unbreakable connection to its surroundings. For example, the journey of a wooden beam starts as a tree in a forest, either close to or far away from the job site. The tree needs to be felled, carved into the desired form, and carried away from the soil and water it was made of and away from inanimate matter and living beings it coexisted with until then. Similarly, the story of a stone wall starts in the quarry. The constructional blocks need to be extracted from the land and detached from the geological layers to which they belonged and the life they supported on the surface. The previous assemblages of things need to be interrupted in favor of new relations that the spatial design imposes. Whether they served the intended function or were converted for another one, the buildings are eventually abandoned, destroyed, or left to decay. The same timber elements, constructional blocks, and other materials assembled to achieve a certain spatial result are sometimes dismantled and repurposed. These processes of decontextualization are almost inevitable in building practices.

On the contrary, it is impractical, if not impossible or unimaginable, to dissociate a rock outcrop from its environment or to transport a rock-cut room from one place to another. A space created within a living rock cannot be fully decontextualized yet remains connected to its native landscape. This very characteristic of rock-cut spaces enriches our archaeological interpretations, especially from a landscape point of view. It also allows for a greater appreciation of material agency in their making. Along these lines, this dissertation promotes a definition of rock-cut space-making practices as a

collaboration between humans and other beings, in particular, rocks and water. The human-altered rupestrian landscapes are, accordingly, products of nonhuman entanglements as much as human intentionality.

Primary textual sources display a distorted image of Byzantine rock-cut architecture, limited to religious space-making, which is far from representative of the diverse functions and meanings it assumed in monastic and lay settlements. The sacredness attributed to the caves and, by association, rock-cut spaces derive either from the biblical stories they staged or their interactions with holy persons. More relevant to the discussions of nonhuman agency is the definition of rupestrian landscape elements as spaces created by God. Time and again, caves were described as structures erected by God (Θεόκτιστοι), found already in a desired form in the wilderness. They were then consecrated as "cave" churches or adjusted with minimal interventions to function as monastic cells, burial places, etc. Byzantine perception of natural caves as God-made architecture demonstrates their appreciation of more-than-human involvement in rock-cut space-making.

In reality, rock-cut architecture was rarely exclusively rock-cut, but carved spaces coexisted with and were often completed by masonry and wooden structures, even though these elements have now largely disappeared. Rock outcrops in distant regions of Byzantium were transformed through artificial carvings and constructions as long as the geological conditions were appropriate for it. Benefitting from what a particular landscape afforded to the fullest, Byzantine communities adopted three main rock-cut space-making strategies: They either carved their spaces out of solid rocks, built their spaces on rock foundations, or altered preexisting cave spaces.

6.5. Back to the Strandzha Region

The space-making strategies in the rupestrian landscapes of Byzantine Thrace are not uniform. The Strandzha region, too, contains illustrative examples for each category in the threefold model, ranging from the smoothly carved interior of the South Church in Asmakayalar, covered with a complex vaulting system, to the main church complex in the cemetery southwest of Probaton, which combines cave-like, irregular elements with regularized carved surfaces. Not only the space-making strategies but also the workmanship and attention given to the carving processes are evidently different. To be sure, the carvers do not constitute a homogeneous group. Instead, they may vary

from skilled professionals who sculpted the intricate motifs on column capitals at Medeia to farmers who simply needed a shallow basin to tread the grapes they harvested to make wine. Whether to impress wealthy patrons, praise God, or deal with a practical necessity, these carvings enhanced, adapted, and transformed available rock formations, abiding by material limitations and affordances.

The turbulent history of Thrace, whose territories ended up being split among three modern nation-states, spared proportionately a very small number of Byzantine monuments from a once densely inhabited region.[604] The same applies to the Strandzha region, where only a tiny fraction of the medieval built environment still stands. The cathedral of Bizye (Vize), now known as Hagia Sophia, and the small, cross-in-square church in Gehenna (Kaynarca) are the only two masonry examples of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture in the region, now preserved as isolated monuments among modern structures detached from the medieval urban fabric once they belonged to.[605] More solidly built to withstand enemy assaults and the ravages of time, a large number of defensive structures encircle former medieval settlements, some still inhabited, or crown strategic hilltop locations within the thickly forested landscape.[606] The walls are significant as visual markers, and they showcase the efforts to protect the local communities, natural resources, transportation networks, and the region at large, a borderland neighboring Constantinople. In the broader picture, however, these walls are just empty shells without houses, churches, and production areas, as well as rivers, roads, fields, forests, quarries, and other sites of importance. Almost exclusively overlooked to date, rock-cut sites examined in this dissertation provide substantial information to populate the landscapes dotted with such empty shells of fortifications with Byzantine rural communities. They demonstrate how people organized, made sense of, and exploited the immediate surroundings of settlements and what lay beyond.

Nevertheless, neither the surveyed sites nor the available rock formations suitable for rock-cut space-making would suffice to accommodate enough people to populate the

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[604] Ousterhout, "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace," 499.
[605] See footnote 90.
[606] Külzer, "Byzantinische Festungen im Grenzgebiet der thrakischen Provinzen Eurōpē und Haimimontos"; Kurtuluş, *Kırklareli'nin Bilinmeyen Trak-Roma-Bizans Kaleleri*; "Edirne İl Sınırları İçindeki Kalelerin Tespit ve Değerlendirilmesi." Also see the introduction, chapter 1.

region. Most of the spaces in which Byzantine rural communities conducted their day-to-day activities must have been built structures. The cities, hamlets, villages, and monastic settlements in the Strandzha region were never entirely rock-cut. In fact, rock carving was a consistent yet rarely predominant mode of architecture. Still, the available rocky material was used in creative and adaptable ways, optimizing what a particular rupestrian landscape could afford. These included the formation of impressive monuments out of solid rock masses, as well as fine-tuning cave spaces naturally residing in the rock.

The Byzantine inhabitants of the Strandzha region employed rock-cut space-making to associate specific activities with and ascribe meanings to different sections of the landscapes in which they lived and produced. Some rupestrian spaces were there for people to visit with religious aspirations, fulfilling the basic human need for hope of recovery and salvation. Others marked passages, areas of economic activities, or important resources. They functioned as elements through which communities could position themselves and claim and control landscapes. Some reminded the living of death and the loved ones they had lost, while others were living areas themselves. Moreover, others surrounded settlements as thresholds to the wilderness. Visible from afar, outlying carved churches put landscapes under divine protection and provided a sense of security in a region whose history has no shortage of wars, raids, looting, and forced population movements.

Of the rock-cut sites in the Strandzha region, mainly those identified as churches were mentioned in the previous survey reports, only in passing, if at all. Drawing from an earlier tradition of associating anything rock-cut with religious aspirations and asceticism, these were exclusively related to monastic communities without any supporting evidence. Instead, the dissertation discussed the multiple roles that a rural church, whether rock-cut or masonry-built, may have played in the life of monastic and lay communities, confirming an image already established in the distant regions of the Empire.[607] This historiographic fallacy was not unique to Thrace yet had a considerably longer tradition in regions with higher concentrations of rock-cut sites, such as

[607] For example, see Gerstel, "The Byzantine Village Church"; Vionis, "The Spatiality of the Byzantine/ Medieval Rural Church."

Cappadocia and Southern Italy.[608] In recent scholarship, archeological surveys and systematic documentation projects reversed their flat representations as almost exclusively occupied by ascetics. The paradigm shift became transformative in the related scholarship; however, outside these two regions, rock-cut spaces are still rather intuitively considered in the domain of monastic place-making.

The present study demonstrates that there is definitely much more to Byzantine rock-cut architecture. This is not to deny monastic communities' engagement with rupestrian landscapes but rather to acknowledge nonmonastic groups' transformations of the rocky material to be used as houses, churches, funerary structures, production areas, storage facilities, and other elements of their living environments. The study of the Strandzha region points to the cohabitation of different communities, at times in competition to impose their control over landscape resources but more often in collaboration for a well-operating network of settlements.

The rock-cut sites examined here were sparsely distributed in the region, far from representative of its entire population. Still, each stored a different story of people entangled with rocks, revealing multiple aspects of life in the rocky landscapes of Byzantine Thrace. In archaeology, there is an obsession with mapping, yet leaving a mark on a map does not necessarily put things on the map. For a long time, off the map were both rock-cut space-making practices and the mountainous region stretching along the Black Sea coast between the immediate hinterland of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, and the Balkan frontier of the Empire. This study highlighted the intrinsic value of rock carving as a viable place- and landscape-making tool in Byzantium that is worth investigating both archaeologically and historically. It also put people back on the human-altered landscapes in a largely uncharted region for Byzantine scholarship despite being at the heartland of the Empire.

[608] Kalas, "Early Explorations of Cappadocia"; "Challenging the Sacred Landscape"; Fonseca, "Non Solo Chiese, Non Solo Grotte"; Martin, "Un problema storiografico e storico." Also, see chapter 2.2.2.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY MATERIAL

Technical Drawings, Aerial and Satellite Images, and Ceramic Finds

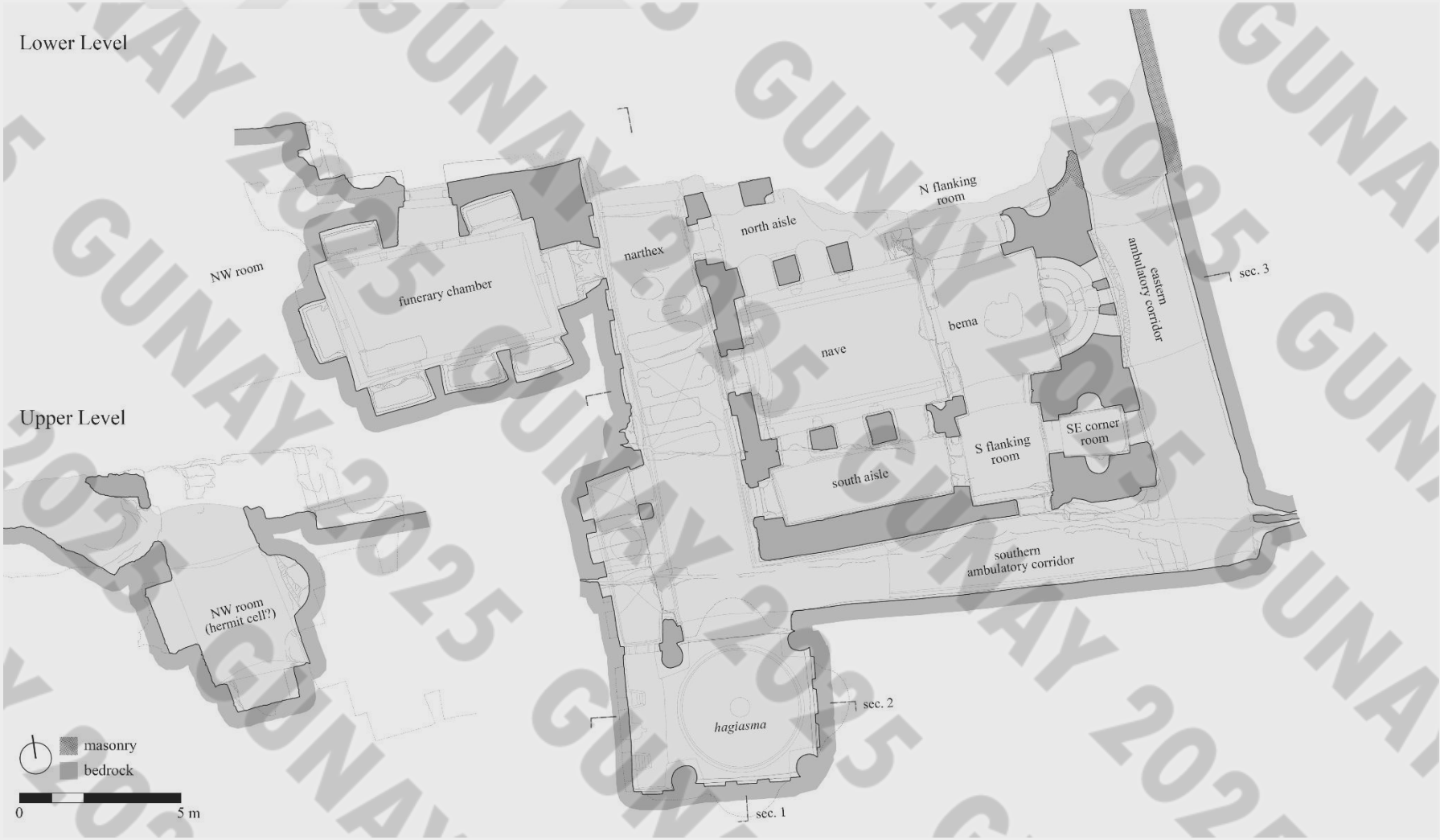

Figure A.1: Pilgrimage complex outside Medeia, plan drawing.

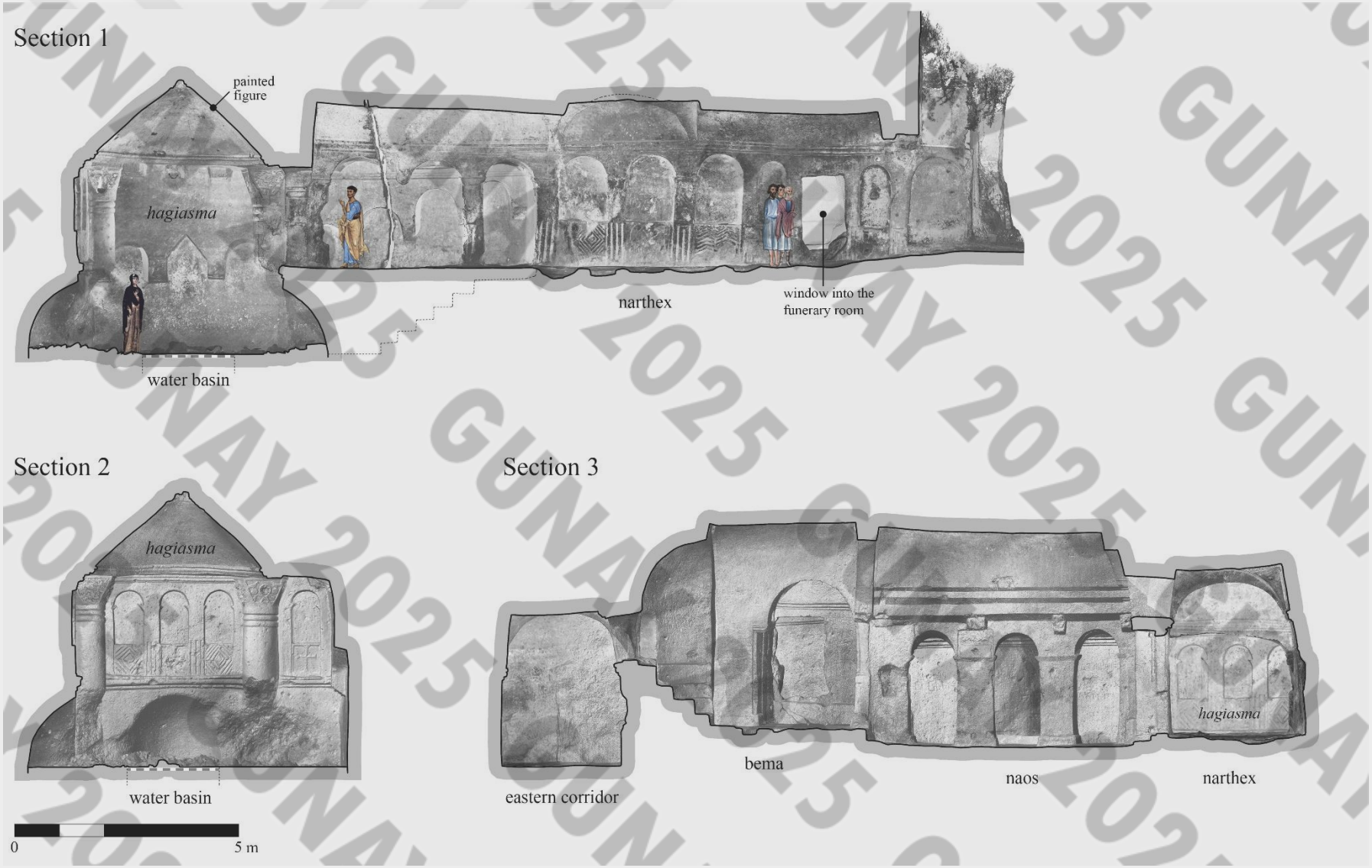

Figure A.2: Pilgrimage complex outside Medeia, section drawings.

Figure A.3: Balkaya village, cemetery area in the southwest, aerial photogrammetry.

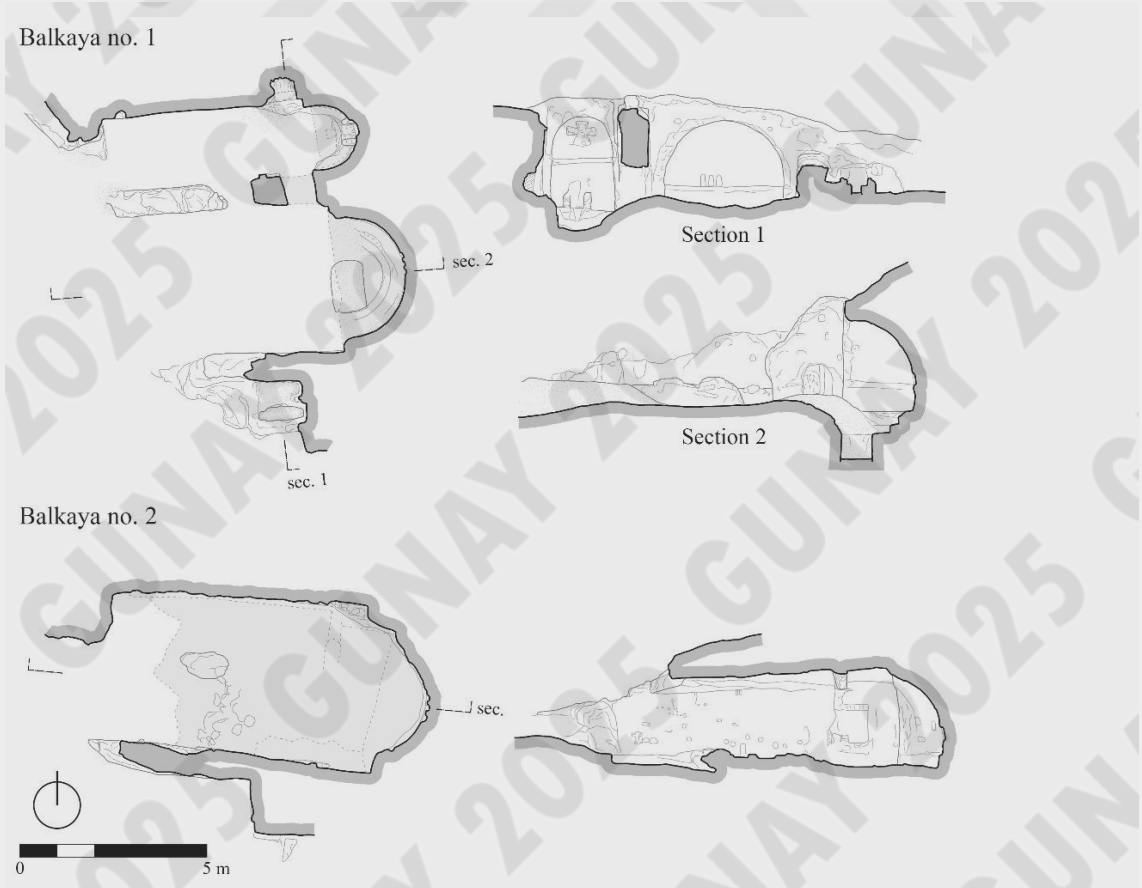

Figure A.4: Balkaya churches nos. 1 and 2, plan and section drawings.

Figure A.5: Balkaya village, production area in the southeast, aerial photogrammetry.

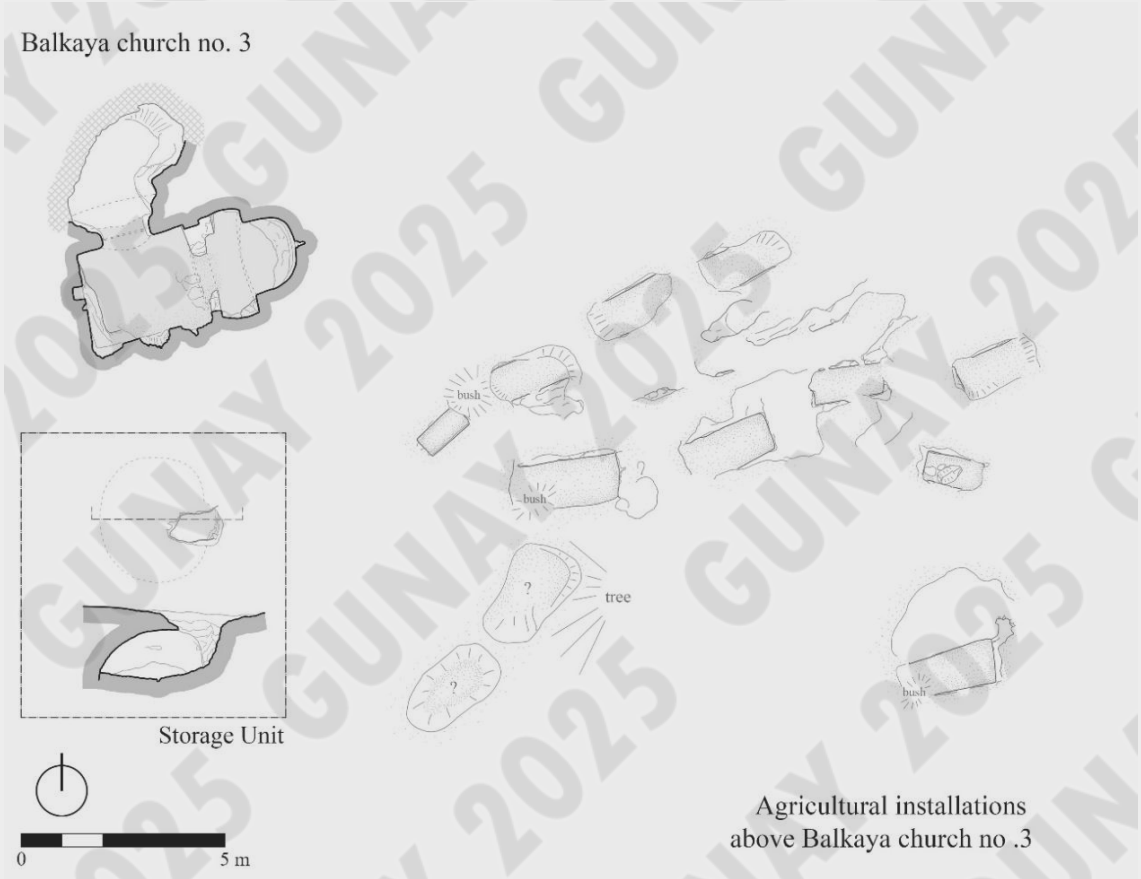

Figure A.6: Balkaya church no. 3 and nearby agricultural installations, technical drawings.

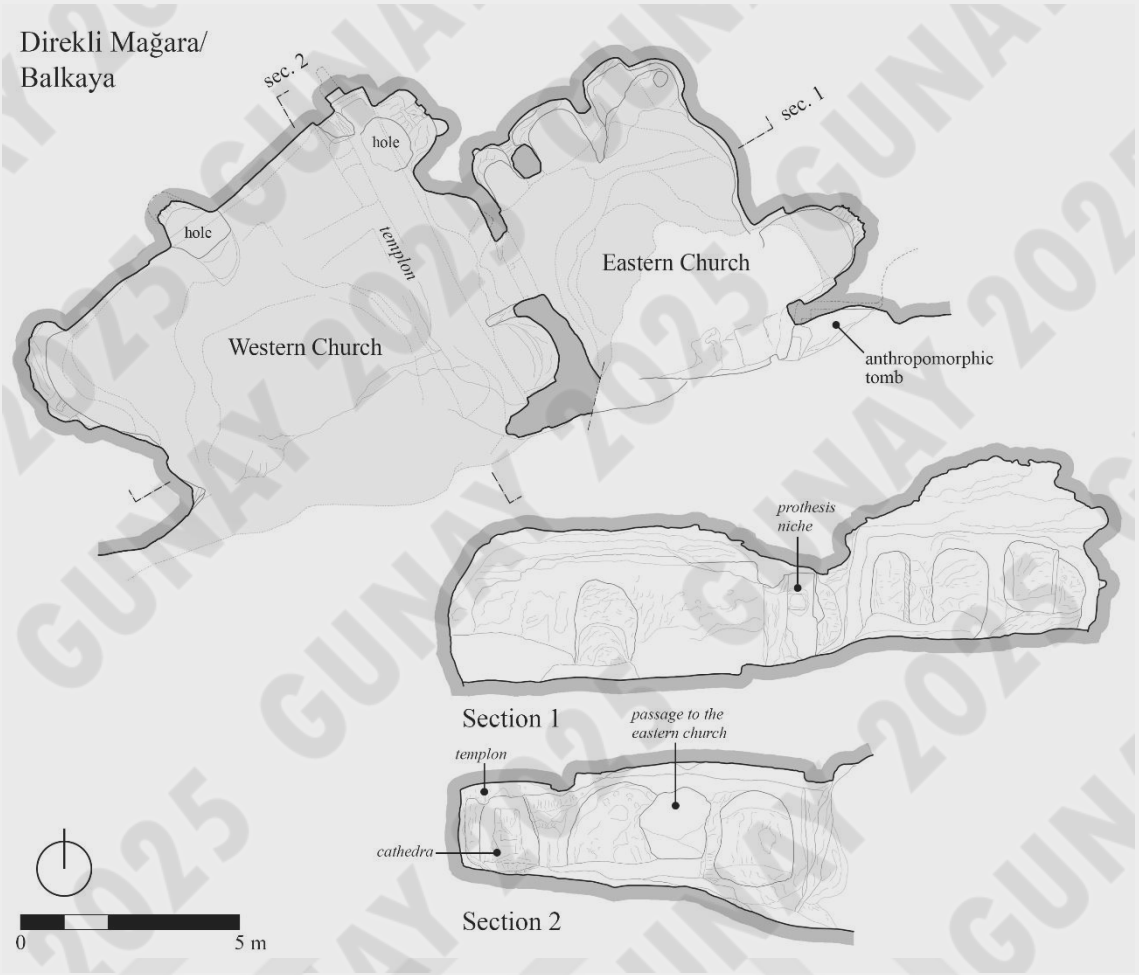

Figure A.7: Direkli Mağara near Balkaya village, plan and section drawings.

Figure A.8: Landscape around Balkaya and Kömürköy villages, satellite image.

Figure A.9: Pottery finds from the Balkaya church no. 1.

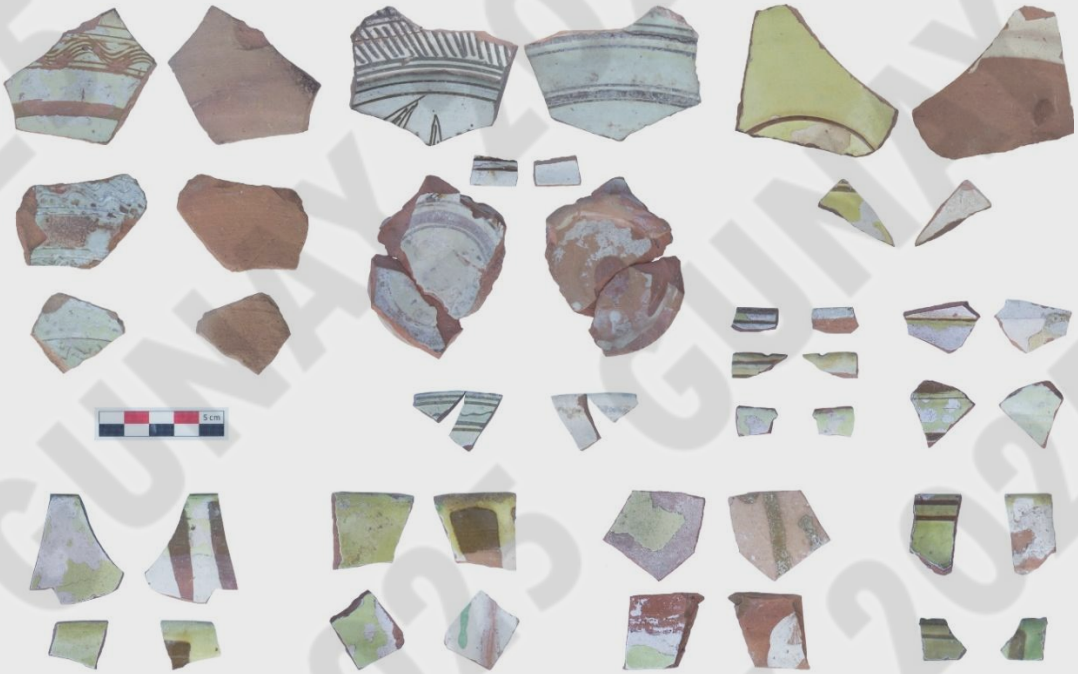

Figure A.10: Glazed ceramic sherds from Probaton (Sinanköy).

Figure A.11: Probaton (Sinanköy), aerial photogrammetry.

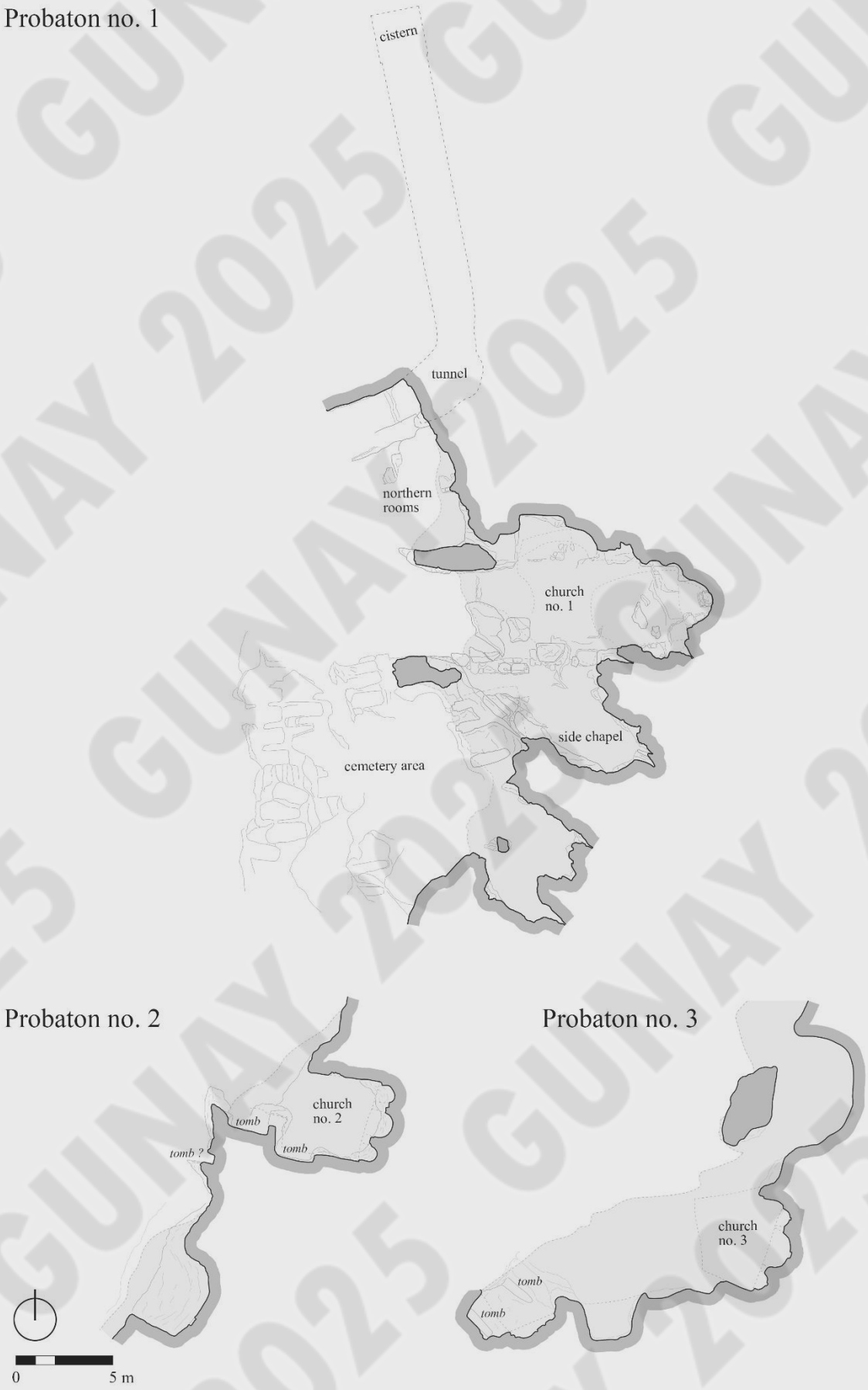

Figure A.12: Probaton, rock-cut churches around the settlement hill, plan drawings.

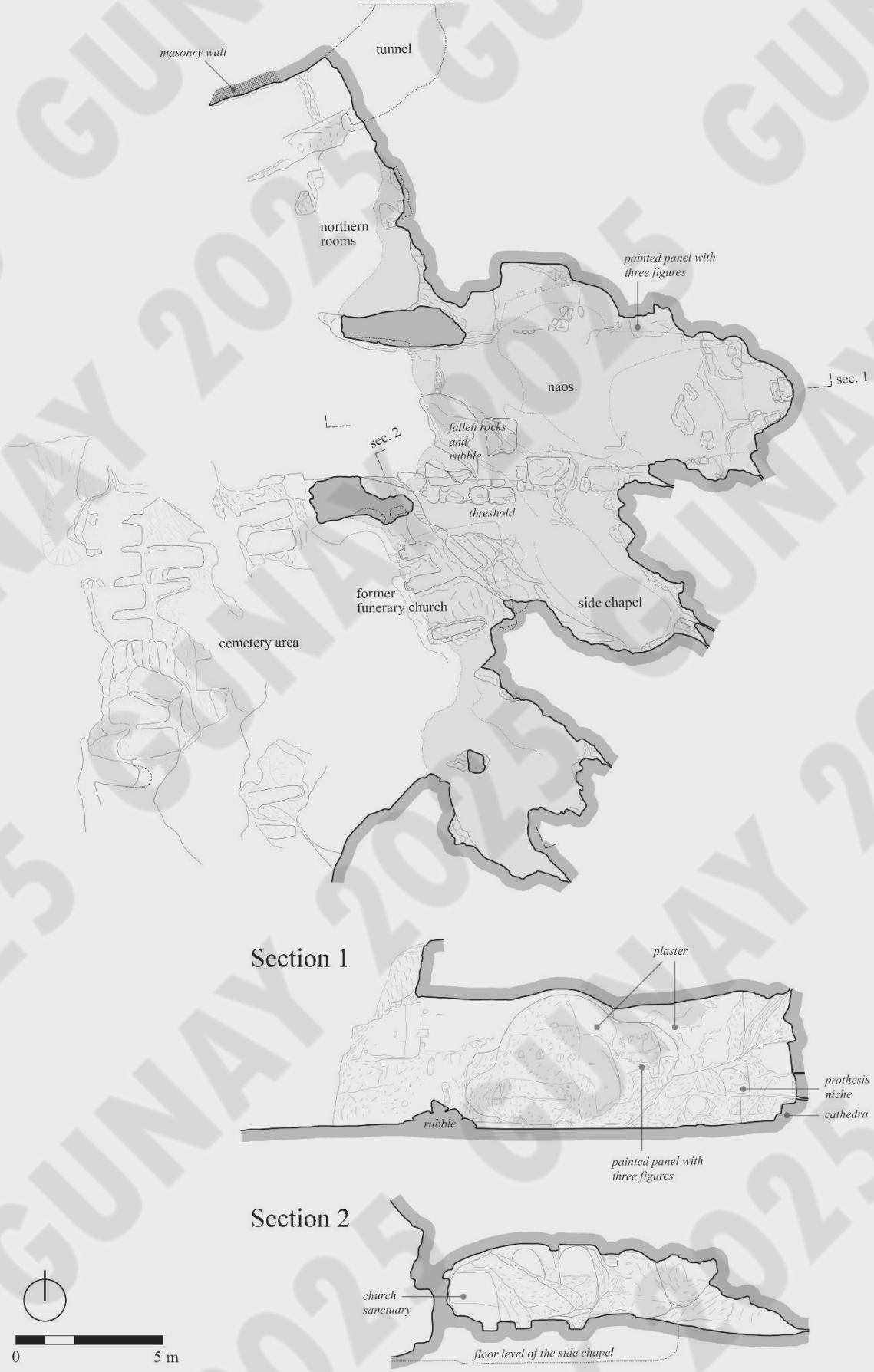

Figure A.13: Probaton church no. 1, plan and section drawings.

Figure A.14: Çalışkan Çiftliği near Medeia, aerial photogrammetry.

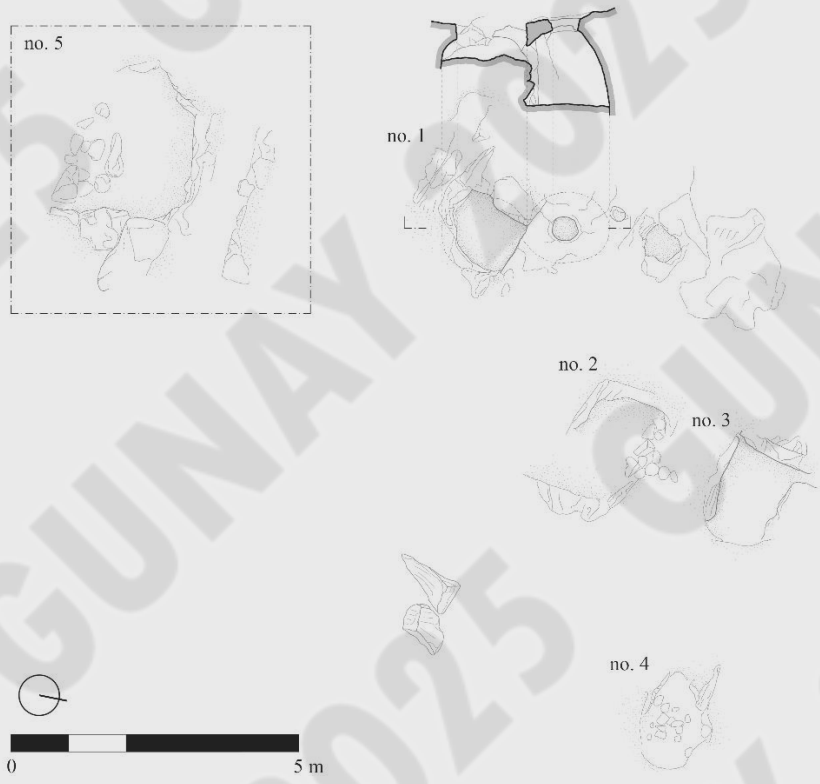

Figure A.15: Çalışkan Çiftliği near Medeia, winemaking installations.

Figure A.16: Çalışkan Çiftliği near Medeia, rock-cut church.

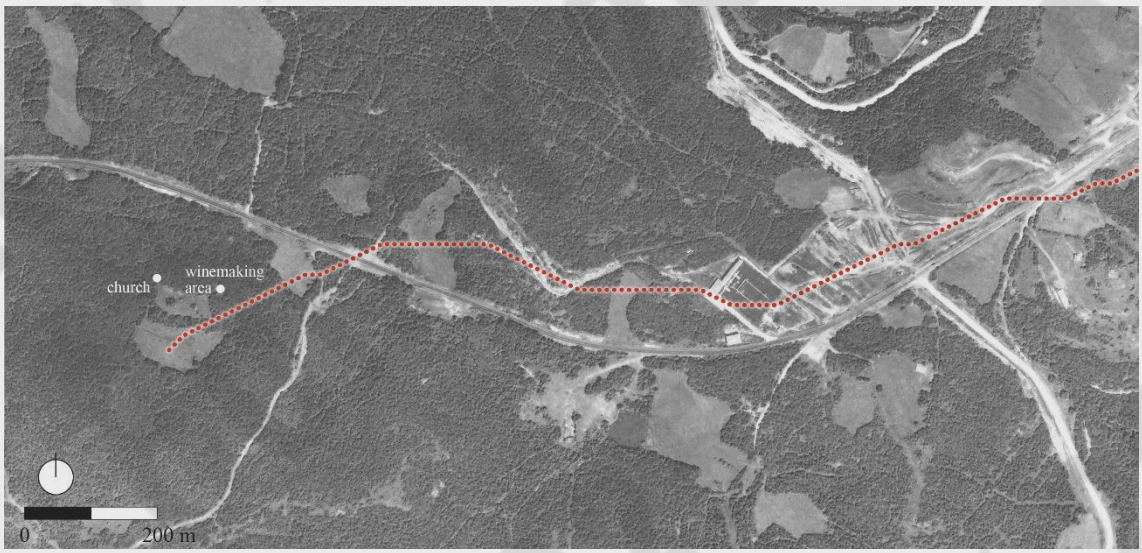

Figure A.17: GIS-based least-cost path (LCP) from Çalışkan Çiftliği to Medeia.

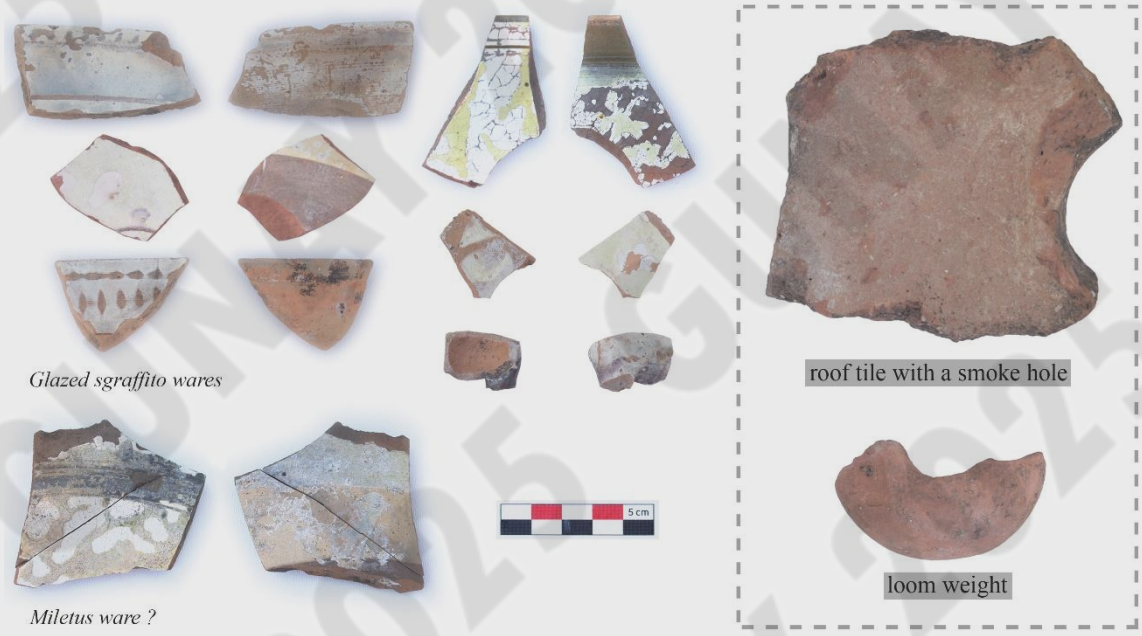

Figure A.18: Erenler village, ceramic sherds from the fortified site.

Figure A.19: Erenler village, landscape around the fortified settlement, aerial photogrammetry.

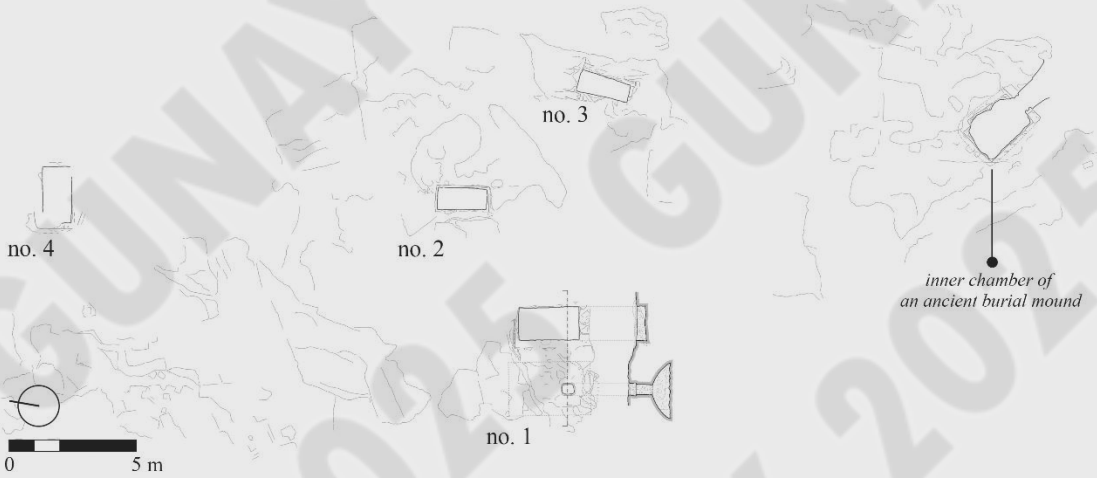

Figure A.20: Erenler village, agricultural production area east of the walled settlement.

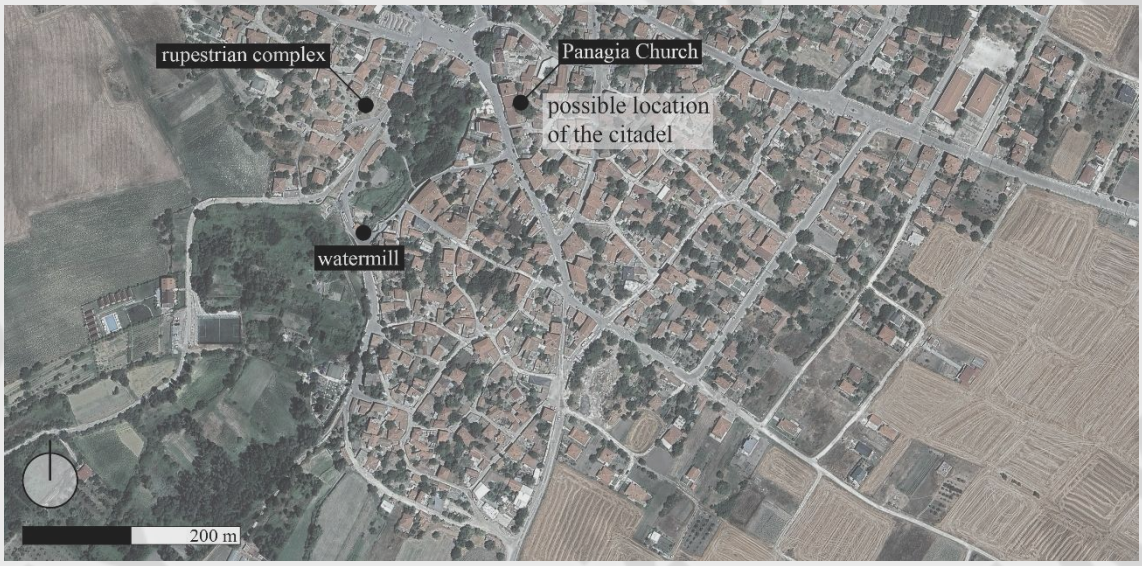

Figure A.21: Kaynarca (Gehenna), satellite image.

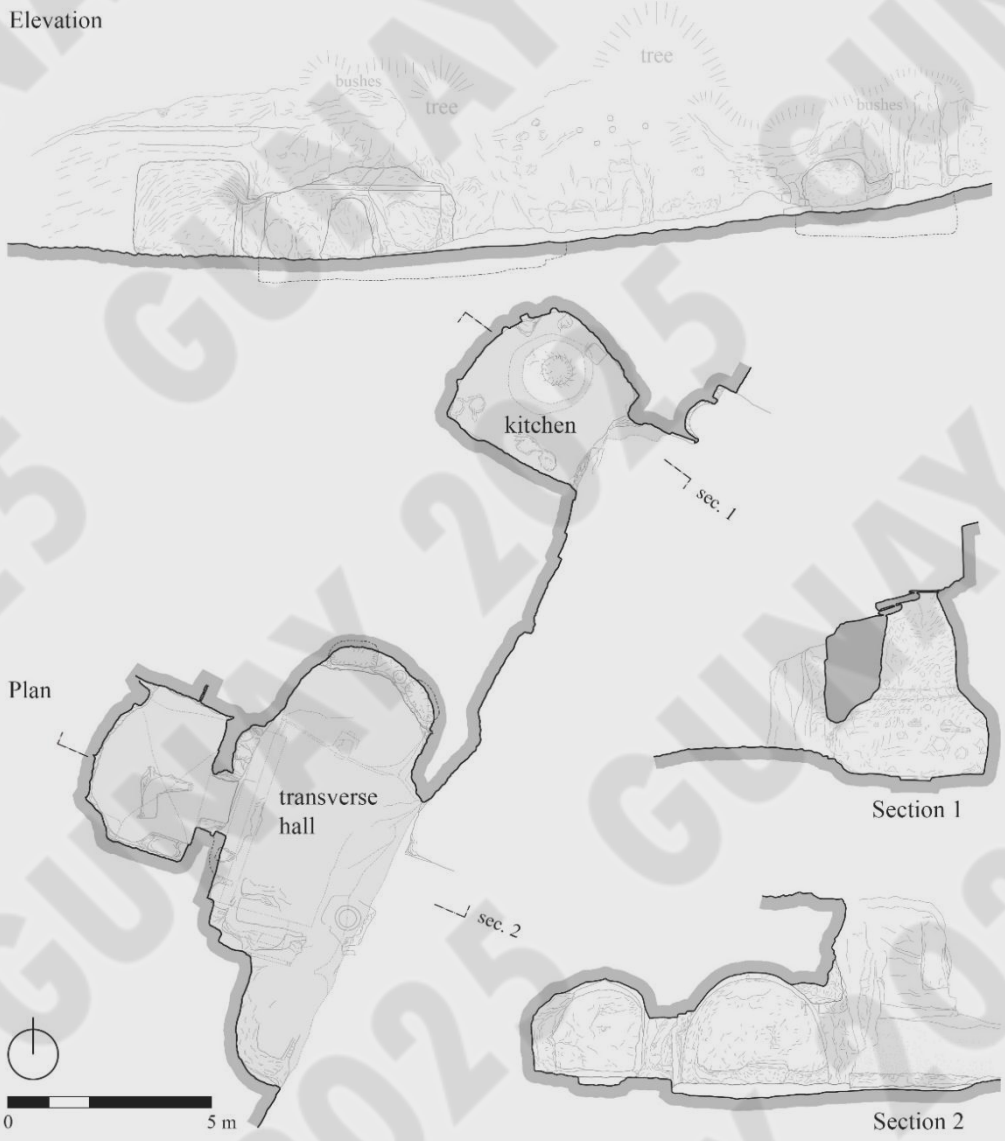

Figure A.22: Rupestrian complex in Kaynarca (Gehenna), technical drawings.

Figure A.23: Asmakayalar near Bizye, settlement core of the monastery, plan drawing.

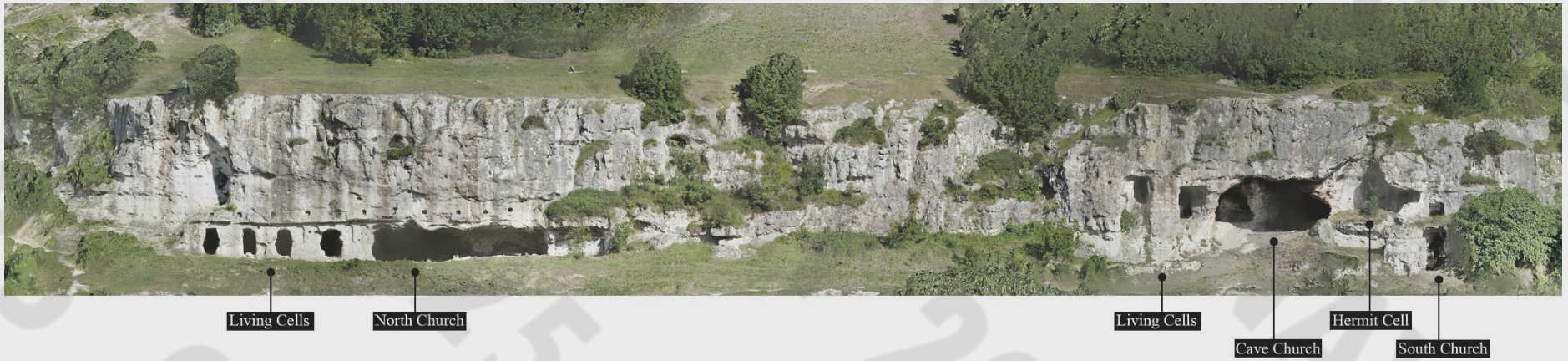

Figure A.24: Asmakayalar near Bizye, rock façade of the settlement core of the monastery, aerial photogrammetry.

Figure A.25: Plan drawings of Asmakayalar I and II.

Figure A.26: Asmakayalar, hermitage with the church with wall paintings northeast of the valley, plan and section drawings.

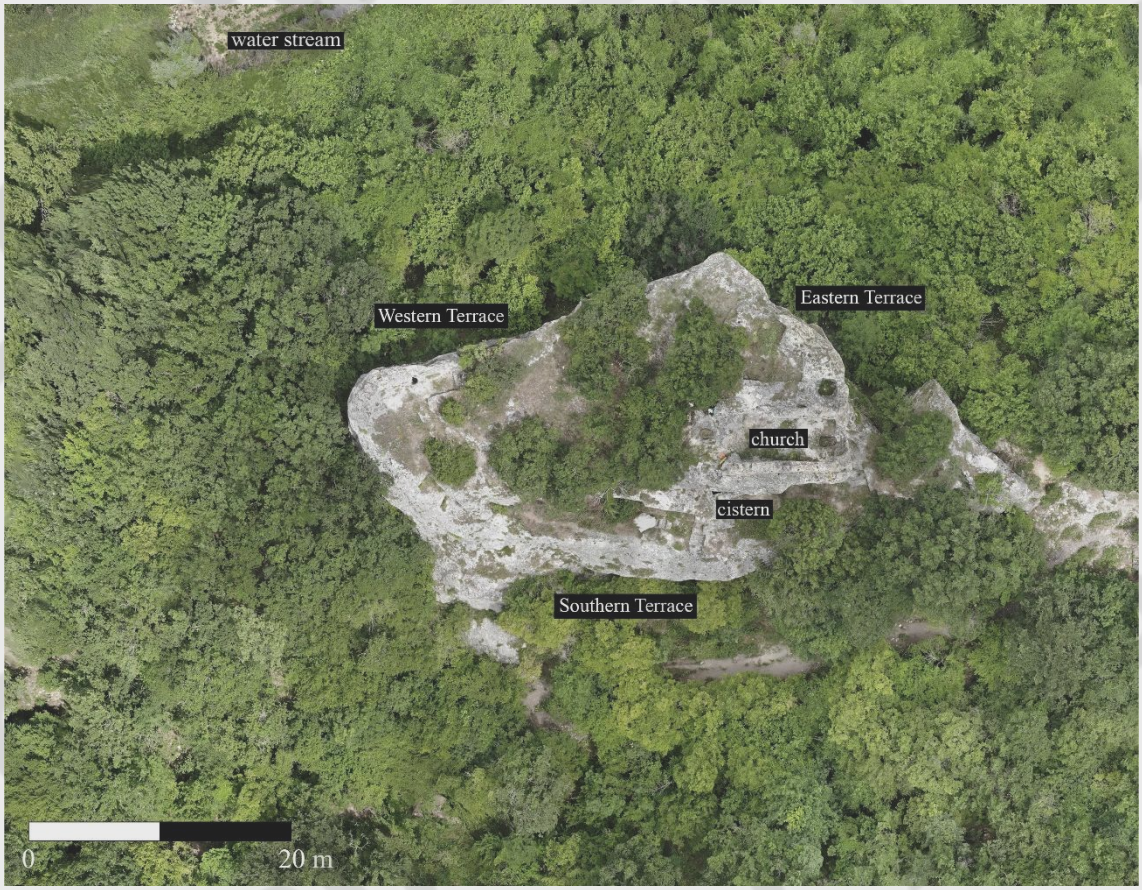

Figure A.27: Monastic settlement on Gemikaya near Soğucak, aerial photogrammetry.

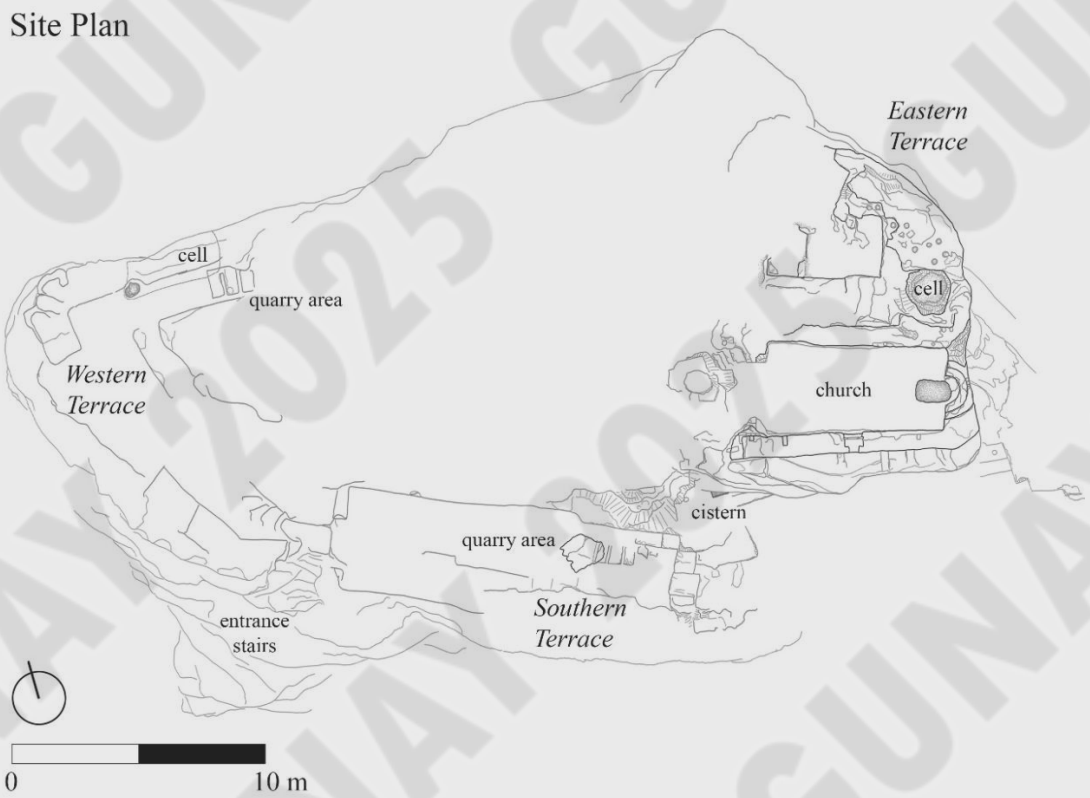

Figure A.28: Monastic settlement on Gemikaya near Soğucak, site plan.

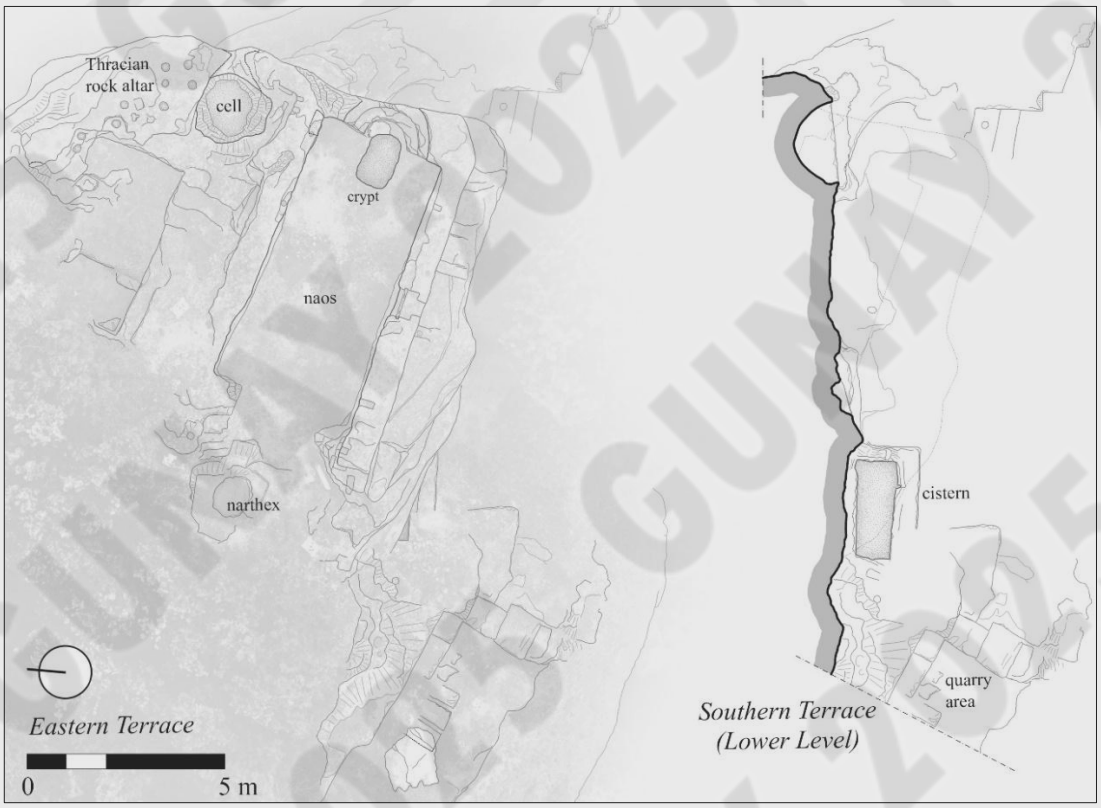

Figure A.29: Monastic settlement on Gemikaya near Soğucak, plan drawing of the eastern terrace.

Figure A.30: Pottery finds from the monastic settlement on Gemikaya.

Figure A.31: Sherds of polychrome sgraffito ware from the Skolati Monastery near Ainos (Enez).

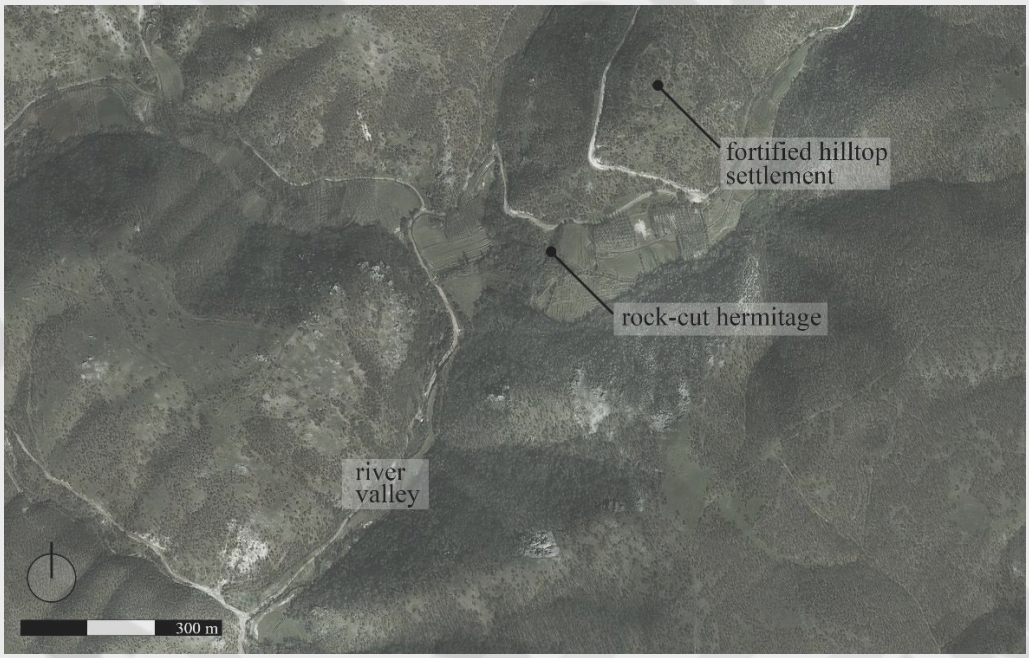

Figure A.32: Settlement area in Kuzulu, site plan based on the satellite image.

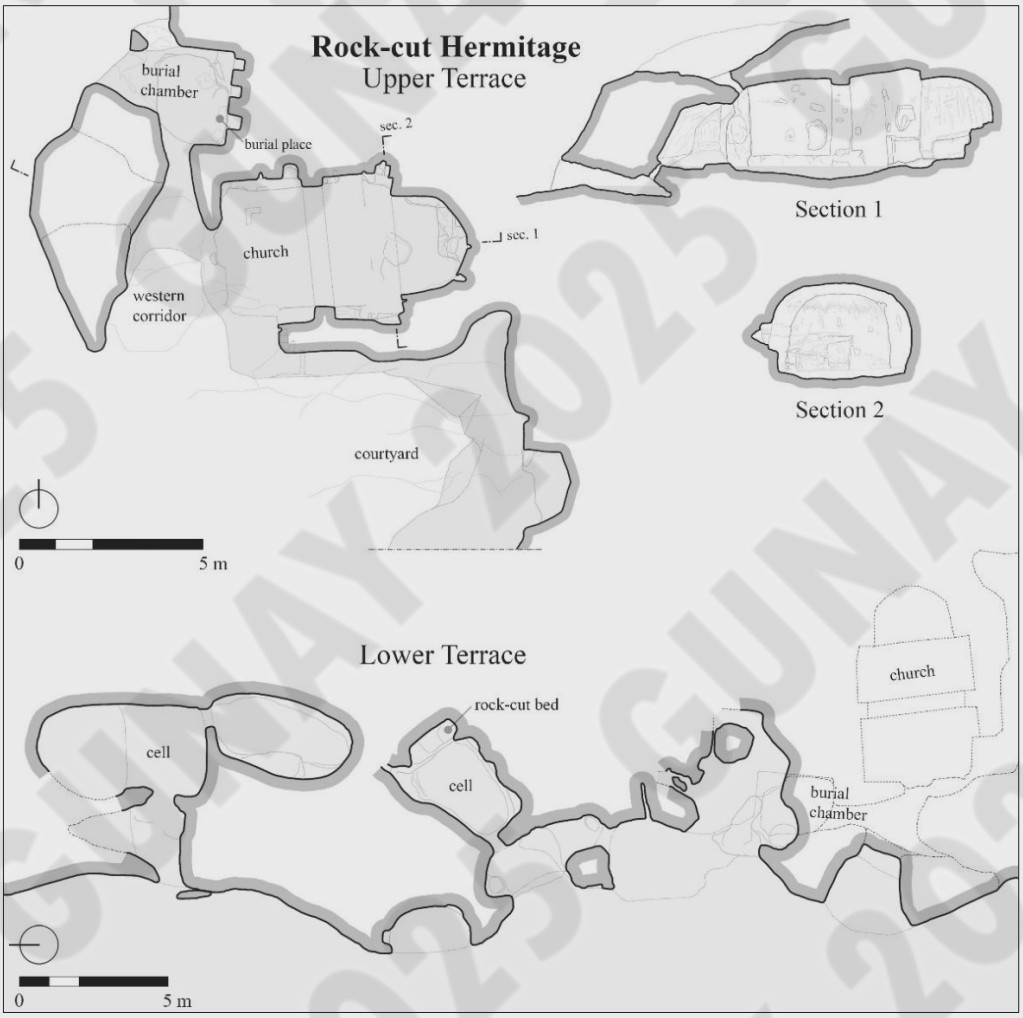

Figure A.33: Kuzulu rock-cut hermitage, plan and section drawings.

APPENDIX B: PILGRIMS' GRAFFITI AT MEDEIA

Catalog of Medieval Graffiti Invocations in the Rock-cut Pilgrimage Complex

INV no. 1[609] **(1440-1474):** Invocation of Agallianos, incised on the narthex's west wall, on the right-hand side above the window opening into the funerary chamber

ΚϒΒΟΗΘ ΤϏ	Κύ(ριε) βοήθ(ει) τοῦ
ΔϏΛΛϏ CϏ	δούλου σου
ΑΓΑΛΙΑΝΝϏ	Ἀγαλιαννοῦ

Oh Lord, help your servant Agallianos

Superscript backslash above the *upsilon* marking the *nomen sacrum*: ΚϒΒ (I.1)

Ligatures: Ϗ=ου (I.1, 2, 3); ΝΝ=νν (I.3)

The name mentioned in the invocation was identified with Theodore Agallianos, a patriarchal official and writer in the 15th century, born ca. 1400 in Constantinople. Around 1468, he became the metropolitan bishop of Medeia under the monk's name Theophanes, a position he held until his death before October 1474.[610] Catherine Asdracha promotes the period between 1440 and 1443 as a *terminus post quem* for the graffito when Theodore Agallianos was suspended from the office because of his anti-unionist views and went to a voluntary exile not far from Constantinople, perhaps in Medeia.[611]

INV no. 2 (around the 11th century?): Invocation on the narthex's eastern wall, incised above the impost block right of the main entrance to the nave

+ΚVΡΙϵ ΒΟΙΦ[ ]	+Κύριε βοήθ[ει τ]
ΟΝ ΔΟΥΛΟΝ COV [ ]	ὸν δοῦλον σου [ ]
CΗ·Ν ΑΜΑΡΤΟΛΟ	ση·ν ἁμαρτωλό(ν)

Oh Lord, help your servant … the sinner

The narrow *theta* with pointed ends and an extended horizontal stroke and the *kappa*

[609] Inscription no. 21: Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, I: 250–51.
[610] *PLP* 94.
[611] Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, I: 250.

with a widely detached vertical bar suggest a date in the 9th-10th centuries or later.[612] The use of accusative with the verb βοηθέω in formulaic invocations becomes more frequent after the 11th century.[613] The lack of ligatures and abbreviations indicates an early date in this large timespan.

INV no. 3[614] **(9th-11th centuries?):** Invocation of John, written in a single line on the narthex's eastern wall, right of the main entrance to the nave

[ ]ΤΟV ΔϏΛΟ[ ]ΙѠΑΝϮΗΝ [Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει)] τοῦ δούλου σου Ἰωάννην

Oh Lord, help your servant John

Ligatures: Ϗ=ου in δούλου but not in τοῦ; ϮΗ=ννη

The invocation uses the formula with the verb βοηθέω and the name in the genitive case; however, the proper name is in the accusative. Such confusion of cases is not rare in the period that signifies a transition from the dative to the genitive and then the accusative case, more common after the 11th century. Therefore, Catherine Asdracha places the graffito between the 9th and 11th centuries.

INV no. 4 (9th century?): Anonymous invocation in the naos, on the back wall of the south aisle

+ΚVΡΙЄ ····· ΑΓΙΑ [ ]	+Κύριε ····· Ἁγία [ ]
ΘЄΟΤΟΚΟΥ ΒΟΗΘΗ ΤΟΝ Δ	Θεοτόκου βοήθει τὸν δ(οῦλον)
[ ]	[ ]

Oh Lord, … Holy … of Theotokos, help [your] servant…

The horizontal stroke of the letter *alpha* makes a downward angle, a form that virtually disappears in Byzantine inscriptions after the 9th century.[615] The slightly slender forms of the round letters and extended cross strokes of the *theta* and the *epsilon* are indicative of a Middle Byzantine date. Therefore, a date in the 9th century seems the most probable.

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[612] Mango, "The Byzantine Church at Vize (Bizye)," 13: footnote 14; Mango, "Byzantine Epigraphy," 245–46.
[613] Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, II: 272.
[614] Inscription no. 104: *Ibid*., III: 317–18.
[615] Moutsopoulos, "La Morphologie des inscriptions byzantines et post-byzantines," 329, 332.

INV no. 5 (9th century?): Invocation of Joachim in the narthex, incised on the pilaster before the stairs leading to the *hagiasma*

[ ]ȣ ΔȣΛΟΥ Cȣ	[τ]οῦ δούλου σου
[ ]ΑΙΜ·ΙΠΡ[ ]	[Ἰωακ]αίμ [κ]ιπρ[ιακοῦ]

[Help] your servant Joachim the Cypriot(?)

Ligatures: ȣ=ου (I.1)

The form of the *alpha* with two diagonal bars intersecting in a downward angle rather than a horizontal stroke suggests an approximate *terminus ante quem* in the 9th century, as in the inv. no. 4. The use of genitive case in the formulaic invocation, together with paleographic evidence, encourages a date around the 9th century.

Many letters on the second line are missing. If my reading is correct, the graffito belongs to a visitor from Cyprus, implying the extensive network of pilgrims to Medeia and the site's probable connection to the wider Mediterranean world.

INV no. 6: Anonymous invocation on the landing of the staircase that leads to the *hagiasma*, on the upper level of the north wall

+ΚЄ ΒΟΗΘΗ CΟ	+Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει σο[υ]

Oh Lord, help your [servant]

Tilde above the *nomen sacrum*: ΚЄ

INV no. 7 (after the 10th and possibly around the 11th century): Invocation of Leo, incised on the landing of the staircase that leads to the *hagiasma*, on the lower level of the north wall

+ΚЄ ΒΟ	+Κ(ύρι)ε βο[ή]
ΘΗ ΤΟΝ Δȣ	θει τὸν δοῦ
ΛΟΝ C ΛЄΟΝ·Α	λον σ(ου) Λέον[τ]α

Oh Lord, help your servant Leo

Tilde above the *nomen sacrum*: ΚЄ (I.1)

Ligature: ȣ=ου (I.2)

The lettering is rather sketchy. The *theta* has a compressed form that hardly draws a

closed, oval body. The horizontal strokes of the *theta* and *epsilons* are extended and placed above the middle of the letters, a paleographic trend that is manifested more frequently after the 10th century.[616] The use of accusative with the verb βοηθέω indicates a later stage in the development of the formulaic invocations, as in the inv. no. 2.

INV no. 8[617] **(1092/1093) (fig. 3.22):** Invocation of Theodore on the landing of the staircase that leads to the *hagiasma*, covering the entire back wall of the blind arch in the west

+ΚЄ ΒΟΗΘΗ ΤΟΝ
ΔϬΛΛΟΝ C ΚVP ΘЄP
ΦΥΛΑΝΘΡ
+ CΑΓΟΠΟΥΛΟ +
ϚΧΑ+

+Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τὸν
δοῦλον σ(ου) κὺρ Θε(όδω)ρ(ον)
Φυλανθρ(ωπηνὸν) [τὸν]
+Σαγόπουλο[ν]+
ϛχα+

Oh Lord, help your servant kyr Theodore Philanthropenos Sagopoulos. 6601

Tilde above the *nomen sacrum*: ΚЄ (I.1)

Ligature: Ϭ=ου (I.2)

An incomplete draft of the invocation is visible above the first line of the inscription that reads: ΚЄ ΒΘ | ΘΟΡ.

Catherine Asdracha, who studied the graffito from a photograph taken by Cyril Mango, now in the Dumbarton Oaks Image Collection and Fieldwork Archives, reconstructed the abbreviated name as *kyr* Theodore Philanthropenos Sagopoulos. The Philanthropenoi, who came to be known around the mid-13th century, served in high military and administrative positions in the 14th and 15th centuries. Moreover, they formed marriage alliances with other prominent Byzantine families, such as Bryennios, Komnenos, Doukas, Kantakouzenos, Laskaris, Palaiologos, and Tarchaneiotes.[618] Geographically close to Medeia, an early member of the family, Alexios Doukas Philanthropenos, was the commander of Achridos (Kardzhali) in Eastern Rhodopes in

[616] Mango, "Byzantine Epigraphy," 245–46.
[617] Inscription no. 103: Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, III: 316–17.
[618] *ODB*, 1649.

1255; he later became *protostrator* and *megas dux*.[619] If the reading is correct, the graffito invocation would be one of the earliest mentions of the Philanthropenos family. Sagopoulos, a name otherwise unknown, can be a patronym rather than a family name. Finally, the title *kyr* indicates a high social standing, possibly that of a local landowning aristocrat or a civil official.[620]

INV no. 9 (later than the 11th century?): Invocation of John on the landing of the staircase that leads to the *hagiasma*, on the western side of the freestanding rock pier

KU BOHΘH	Κύ(ριε) βοήθει
TON CON Δ	τὸν σὸν δ(οῦλον)
[ ]NNHN	[Ἰωά]ννην

Oh Lord, help your servant John

Tilde above the *nomen sacrum*: KU (I.1)

Ligature: NNHN=ννην (I.3)

The lettering is cursory. The paleographic elements—such as the narrow *theta* with extended horizontal stroke moved upwards, the *kappa* with a detached vertical bar, and the ligature of possibly four letters (ννην)—point to a date later than the 11th century.[621] The use of accusative in the formulaic invocation confirms this chronological argument.

INV no. 10 (possibly 14th century or later?) (fig. 3.20): Invocation of Arsenios on the eastern conch of the *hagiasma*

†ΘЄOTOKЄ+	+Θεοτόκε+
ΒOHΘH TON CON	βοήθει τὸν σὸν
ΔΔΛON ΑPCЄ	δοῦλον Ἀρσέ
NHON ΑMΑPTO	νηον ἁμαρτω(λόν)

Oh Theotokos, help your servant Arsenios, the sinner

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[619] *PLP* 29751.
[620] Asdracha, *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines*, III: 317.
[621] The ligatures became the characteristics of the Byzantine inscriptions, especially after the end of the 11th century. In the later periods, the tendency was towards merging increasingly more letters. Moutsopoulos, "La Morphologie des inscriptions byzantines et post-byzantines," 333.

Ligature: ϐ=ου (I.3)

The *thetas* with extended and high horizontal bars, the *kappa* with a separate vertical stroke, the *delta* on a thin stretched base, and the *alpha* with a shorter and curvilinear left stroke point to a date later than the 10th century.[622] More significantly, the type of *beta* with a wide gap between the lobes is more common after the 14th century.[623] The use of the accusative case with the verb βοηθέω is also in line with the later dating.

[622] Oikonomides, *Dated Byzantine Lead Seals*, 159; Moutsopoulos, "La Morphologie des inscriptions byzantines et post-byzantines," 332.
[623] Moutsopoulos, "La Morphologie des inscriptions byzantines et post-byzantines," 332.