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The subject, as defined in the title, can be attacked from several different directions. We can treat it as referring to the monasteries extra muros, outside the city wall of Byzantine Jerusalem but in the near vicinity of the city, for which we have an ample choice of literary and epigraphic testimonies. In the early sixth century the Latin pilgrim Theodosius (De situ terrae sanctae 6, ed. Geyer 1965: 117) counted 24 churches on the Mount of Olives, several of which are known from other sources as monastic churches, or churches with an attached monastery for the crew of spoudaioi, the monks that attended to the liturgy (e.g., the church and monastery of Saint Julian Martyr, founded by Flavia ca. 454/5: Cyril of Scythopolis, Vita Theognii 1, ed. Schwartz 1939: 241). Other monastic foundations – some of them archaeologically identified – are attested all around Jerusalem: among the most famous, St. Stephen’s church and monastery to the north and the Cathisma church and monastery on the south. The most comprehensive source for those foundations is the eighth-century Georgian Calendar of the Jerusalem Church (Garitte 1960), which lists the liturgies to be conducted in each site day by day, in occasion of the anniversary of its foundation, or of the memorial day of one of the saints whose relics had been deposed there. The list of religious foundations in the Georgian Calendar has been thoroughly studied by Milik (1960; 1960-61), and more recently by Verhelst (2004).1

Adopting a different approach, we might focus our attention on the monasteries of the desert of Jerusalem, or at least those among them that were located in the vicinity of the Holy City. The monasteries of the Judean Desert have been the subject of numerous articles and books by several scholars. The most prolific writer on the subject was Yizhar Hirschfeld, who summarized the results of his research in two books, one in English (1992), one in Hebrew, the latter under the very title The Desert of the Holy City (2002). Some of the monasteries shown in the map that accompanies this book (Hirschfeld 2002: 5) were located in the vicinity of villages belonging to the diocese of Jerusalem, and should be considered rather as village monasteries than as ‘monasteries of the desert’ in a proper sense. In fact, they were not included in the list of monasteries of the Judean Desert published by Hirschfeld in 1990, nor were they treated within the pages of his books, though they were mentioned in passing, and references were given to the relevant sources. We might, therefore, aim our attention to the monastery of Marcianus near Bethlehem, those of Marinus

Monasteries in the Jerusalem Area in Light of the Literary Sources

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and Lucas near Metopa and of Romanus near Teqoa. But frankly, all anyone may want to learn about those monasteries can be found in Cyril of Scythopolis’ hagiographies, except for the monastery of Romanus for which one is required to read also a chapter of John Rufus’ Plerophoriae in order to complete the file. I would rather draw attention on some less well-known monasteries in the territory of Jerusalem, whose attraction lies not only in their relative obscurity but also in the fact that the sources provide some topographical hints that may one day lead to their identification.

The monastery of Abba Anastasius is known from two sources of the early seventh century. Antiochus, a monk of St. Sabas, in an epistle written a few years after the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614, tells how, under the threat of bands of Saracens allied with the Persians, who had massacred some of the Sabaite monks, the survivors found refuge in the abandoned coenobium of Abba Anastasius, at 20 stades (about 3.7 km) from the Holy City. Later the community split, some going back to the Great Laura, the rest remaining in the coenobium, under the leadership of Abbott Justin (Antiochus, Epistula ad Eustathium, PG 89: 1424). The monastery is mentioned again in the Acts of Anastasius, a Persian soldier who converted to Christianity in Jerusalem in 620 and became a monk in the coenobium of Abba Anastasius, where he stayed for seven years before leaving it to find martyrdom in Persia. The abbot who received him, and later sent monks to collect his relics, was the same Justin. In the Vita Anastasii written by Georgius Pisida in the seventh century the monastery is said to be ‘three or four miles’ (between 4.5 and 6 km) from Jerusalem (PG 92: 1689; cf. Flusin 1992, I: 186–187, 196–202; II: 40 n. 1, 52–53).

In his ‘Repertoire des monastères de Palestine’, Vailhé (1899: 515–516, no. 5) states that the monastery – whose foundation he mistakenly ascribes to Anastasius, Patriarch of Jerusalem between 458 and 478 – was located on the road to Bethlehem, and he suggests identifying it with today’s Mar Elias, near the site of the Cathisma church. This would indeed fit the distance given by Pisida, as the Cathisma was ‘at the third mile’ from Jerusalem; but there is nothing in the sources to indicate that the coenobium of Abba Anastasius was situated on the Jerusalem-Bethlehem road; nothing in fact to postulate that it was to the south of Jerusalem rather than in any other direction. Furthermore, one may well ask why the ‘three or four miles’ given by Pisida, who wrote in Byzantium, should be preferred to the ‘twenty stades’ of Antiochus, a more precise datum given by a source with personal knowledge of the area, and which better answered the need for security of the Sabaite monks, for the nearer the site was to the city, the less was it exposed to attack by plundering Saracens.

Another obscure monastery in that dedicated to Saint Sergius, also known as Xeropotamos, ‘Dry river’, which is mentioned in John Moschus’ Leimonarium (ch. 182, PG 87: 3053). It was situated near Bethlehem, about two miles away (ca. 3 km); John Moschus visited it with his friend Sophronius in the late sixth or early seventh century, and met the hegumen, Eugenius. Vailhé (1900: 279, no. 113) refers to this monastery two other sources:
the Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 536, and Procopius of Caesarea’s Buildings. The council of Constantinople was attended by representatives of the most important monasteries of Palestine, among them Theodore, ‘deacon and monk of the monastery of the Blessed Sergius in the Plain (pedias), representing also all the monks of the Plain’ (ACO III, ed. Schwartz 1940: 37, 51). But the term pedias refers to the coastal plain, and the name ‘of the Blessed (makarios) Sergius’ seems to refer to a deceased founder rather than to the saint who had the title of the place; therefore this cannot be the same as Saint Sergius near Bethlehem. As to Procopius, he mentions ‘Saint Sergius on the mountain called Kisserôn’ in a list of six monasteries where Justinian built a well or a cistern. Only one of this group, Saint John on the Jordan, is identified, and it is impossible to say whether any of the others was even located in the Jerusalem area. Vailhé translated oros Kisserôn ‘mountain of the chickpeas’ – apparently based on the similarity of the Greek term with the Latin cicer (genitive plural cicerum), although the only Greek word similar to Kisserôn, kisseris, means pumice, and oros Kissereôn would mean ‘Mount of the pumices’. Vailhé further states – again, on no clear authority – that between Bethlehem and Mar Elias there is a field called ‘Field of the chickpeas’, near the hillock of Tantur: this would be the ‘Mountain of chickpeas’ and the Byzantine monastery of Saint Sergius would have stood on the site of the modern one (though why a monastery on this hill would be known as ‘Dry River’, Vailhé does not explain). The distance of Tantur from Bethlehem corresponds more or less to two Roman miles, but since John Moschus does not specify in which direction, and the identification of Mount Kisserôn remains obscure, it is by no means clear that the two sources, Moschus and Procopius, refer to the same monastery and can help each other in locating the site.

Another unknown monastery is that of Hypatius, mentioned in only one source, a report on the persecution and death of the Monophysite monk Theodosius, who usurped the See of Jerusalem in 452–454. According to this story, which is ascribed to John Rufus and preserved in Syriac, Timotheus, hegumen of the monastery of Hypatius, about 7 miles distant from Jerusalem, declared himself against the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, and Theodosius appointed him bishop (of which city is not stated). When Theodosius was deposed and sent into exile, the same fate also befell Timotheus (Horn and Phenix 2008: 283). Again, we are not told whether the monastery was north, south, east or west of Jerusalem. However, a possible identification might perhaps be suggested with Khirbet Juhzum, a ruined coenobium about 2 km south of Deir Dosi, the monastery of Theodosius the Coenobiarch, which is described by Cyril of Scythopolis as being at a distance of six miles from Jerusalem (Hirschfeld 1990: 26, no. 14; 60–61, no. 54).

Let us proceed farther away from Jerusalem, though still within the boundaries of its territory. Bethel, where Jacob saw the ladder reaching up to heaven, was visited by Christian pilgrims already in the early fourth century, and from the pilgrim Egeria and Jerome we learn that a church was built there in the second half of the
same century (Wilkinson 1977: 151; 1981: 155, 202). There is no mention in these sources of a monastery attached to the church. However, a community of hermits, that is, a laura, at the site of Jacob’s Ladder is mentioned in a rather fanciful Greek composition entitled Vita Pauli episcopi et Joannis presbyteri, which tells, among the rest, of a pilgrimage from Edessa to Mount Sinai and Jerusalem during the episcopate of Rabbula of Edessa, 411-435 CE. In the course of their journey the protagonists, Paul bishop of Attaleia and John, a priest from Edessa, arrived at a place called ‘Stone of Jacob’, where Jacob had slept in his flight, and there were received by the hegumen of the laura, Stephanus (Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1891: 378-380). The story has little historical value, but the testimony about a monastic community near the church of Jacob’s Ladder cannot be dismissed out of hand. In fact, it may be confirmed by a chapter of John Rufus’ Plerophoriae, which tells how, at some time after the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Monophysite monk Zosimus came to Bethel looking for a place to settle down. The warden (paramonarios) of the church of Jacob’s Ladder received him and invited him to stay and join him in the care of the liturgy there. A vision of the Patriarch Jacob convinced Zosimus to reject the offer, for the paramonarios was a supporter of the Chalcedonian creed (Plerophoriae 30, 92, ed. Nau 1911: 73, 159-160). The situation described is that of spoudaioi in charge of the church, and as the paramonarios could hardly have been alone in this task, an attached monastery is probably implied. The complex can perhaps be identified with the church and monastery at el-Mukatir, about one km southeast of Beitin (Ovadiah 1970: 112-113, no. 110; Bagatti 2002: 32-34).

Bethel is described by Eusebius (Onomasticon, ed. Klostermann 1904: 40) as lying 12 miles north of Jerusalem. Let us proceed three more miles. According to the Plerophoriae (20, ed. Nau 1911: 39-43), 15 miles north of Jerusalem there was a village called Ganta, once belonging to the Empress Eudocia who had left it by testament to the Church of Jerusalem. A priest native of the village, Paul, founded a large coenobium there, which was visited by Juvenal, the archbishop of Jerusalem, on his way to the council of Chalcedon. Two different identifications were offered for Ganta: ‘Ein Jennata (map ref. 159/155) and Janieh (161/149), both located northwest of Jerusalem, off the road to Antipatris. Both toponyms sound somewhat similar to Ganta; however, both localities are much too far from Jerusalem, for travelling 15 miles north of the Holy City one comes upon Gophna (Eusebius, Onomasticon, ed. Klostermann 1904: 168), while in order to reach Janieh or ‘Ein Jennata one would have had to proceed several more miles to the west. So, if the distance given by John Rufus is correct, we should look for the coenobium of Paul in the vicinity of Jifna or Bir Zeit. This area was still within the territory of Jerusalem, for Patriarch Eustochius is mentioned in the building inscription of a church at Khirbet Samiyeh, northeast of Jifna (Abel 1907).

This survey does not exhaust the subject of ‘ghost monasteries’ in the territory of Jerusalem – more can be found in the Georgian Calendar – but hopefully it may provide food for thought to all who have excavated or will excavate unidentified monasteries.
Footnotes
1 The first who tried to locate the sanctuaries mentioned in the Georgian Calendar was Abel (1914; 1924). Milik studies the sacred foundations around Jerusalem in two articles, one (1960) based on the Georgian Calendar, the other (1960-1961) on the so-called list of the deacon Thomas, a report on the burial of the dead after the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614. In the latter only a few extramural foundations are mentioned, while the former lists no less than 36 sanctuaries in a radius of one mile from the city; farther away, but still included in the Jerusalem liturgy several times a year were the Lazarium, two miles from Jerusalem, and the Cathisma, at the third mile. Many of them must have had attached monasteries for the celebration of the daily liturgy and the service of pilgrims. Milik used additional sources to help in the location of the various sanctuaries, among them the Commemoratorium de casis Dei, a list of churches and monasteries in existence at the beginning of the ninth century, which contains many topographical indications.

Bibliography
Primary sources

Studies