

PETER THE IBERIAN
Pilgrimage, Monasticism and Ecclesiastical Politics
in Byzantine Palestine

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Among the numerous Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land in the Late Roman and early Byzantine period, many came to stay, or ended up in Palestine for years, or even to the end of their lives. These one-way pilgrims constitute a significant sub-group in the mass movement of Holy Land pilgrimage from the fourth century to the Muslim conquest. These pilgrim-settlers included laymen, priests and monks, men and women from all parts of society. The significance of pilgrimage of the aristocracy to the holy places has been pointed out by E.D. Hunt in his study *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire*. Hunt demonstrated the continuity of this upper-class pilgrimage, its settlement in Jerusalem with its center around the establishments of Melania the elder and Rufinus on the Mount of Olives, and its ties with the imperial court in Constantinople. The holy places became a focus for imperial attention and for the ecclesiastical politics of early Byzantine times¹. With a masterful stroke, Robert Wilken (in his book *The Land Called Holy*) has traced the role of the Christians of Palestine in the transformation of Palestine into the Christian Holy Land in the Byzantine era as a result of a growing sense of Christian patriotism towards the Land of Israel². A central role in this process was played by pilgrims who decided to settle in the country. Similarly it may be of interest to examine the part played by pilgrim-settlers in the general Christian transformation of Palestine.

The council of Chalcedon in 451 aroused a monophysite opposition in parts of the Eastern Empire and an open revolt in Egypt and Palestine³.

1. E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460*, Oxford 1984.

2. R.L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy, Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven - London 1992.

3. On the monophysite revolt in Palestine see: E. Honigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem", *DOP* 5 (1950) 211-279; D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, Oxford 1966, 89-91; W.H.C. Friend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, Cambridge 1972, 149-153; L. Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina e le controversie cristologiche*, Brescia 1980, 89-103; F. Winkelmann, "Konzeptionen des Verhältnisses von Kirche und Staat im frühen Byzanz, untersucht am Beispiel der Apostasia Palästinas (452-453)", in V. Vavrinek (ed.), *From Late Antiquity to Early Byzantium*, Prague 1985, 73-85.

Following the suppression of the monophysite revolt in Palestine, the monophysites in Jerusalem, in other holy places and in Palestine at large seem to have faced a particular dilemma in light of the new domination of Jerusalem and the holy places by the Chalcedonians, and the persecution and expulsion of monophysite leaders. The predicament of the Palestinian monophysites seems to have created special problems among local monophysite circles with regard to the holy places and to pilgrimage to these sites. These issues are exemplified in the life and times of Peter the Iberian (c. 417-491)⁴ – prince, pilgrim, monk, miracle maker and visionary, bishop and charismatic monophysite master.

Peter was an Iberian (i.e., Georgian) prince whose original name was Nabarnugios⁵. At the age of twelve he was sent as a political hostage to the court of Theodosius II in Constantinople to ensure the allegiance of Iberia to the Byzantines against a possible pro-Persian political shift⁶. Nabarnugios grew up in the imperial court under the parental care of the emperor and his wife Eudocia⁷. He was given charge of the royal horses in the capital which he later abandoned⁸. He gradually became increasingly devout and developed ascetic inclinations which he cultivated together with his companion and religious guide John the Eunuch (originally named Mithradathes). His ascetic behavior and demands led to complaints by the palace staff, but he ignored them and converted his room into a small shrine where he cherished the relics of Persian martyrs⁹. Peter yearned to escape and make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He had not yet made up his mind, when his slaves tried to dissuade him and even to stop such a pilgrimage by force. The political implication of his escape may have prevented him from leaving earlier¹⁰. When he was about twenty years of age¹¹ Peter and

4. For the chronology of Peter the Iberian see: P. Devos, "Quand Pierre l'Ibère vint-il à Jérusalem?", *Anal. Bol.* 86 (1968) 337-350.

5. John of Beth Rufina (Rufus), *V. Petri Ib.*, ed. R. Raabe, Leipzig 1895 (Syriac text with a German translation), 4. For a French detailed epitome of the *Vita* see: J.B. Chabot, "Pierre l'Ibérien, Évêque monophysite de Mayouma [Gaza] à la fin du Ve Siècle", *Rev. de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895) 367-397.

6. *V. Petri Ib.* 15-16.

7. *V. Petri Ib.* 16.

8. Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist Eccl.* III, 4, ed. E.W. Brooks, *CSCO* 83 (1919).

9. *V. Petri Ib.* 17-18;21; Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist Eccl.* III, 4.

10. *V. Petri Ib.* 20.

11. *V. Petri Ib.* 20.

John (Nabarnugios and Mythradates) finally decided to embark on a pilgrimage to the holy places¹².

The author of Peter's *Vita*, John Rufus (John of Beth Rufina)¹³, disciple and companion of Peter in his old age and later his successor as bishop of Maiuma, does not tell us whether they intended to stay in the holy places or eventually to return to Constantinople. We are told that since Peter was a hostage they had to escape from the capital dressed as slaves¹⁴. However, it seems that even if they did escape no one actually pursued them, and once in Jerusalem no one bothered to escort them back to Constantinople, despite the fact that their presence in Jerusalem was common knowledge. Peter and John the Eunuch made their pilgrim route through Asia Minor and Syria. They carried with them the relics of the martyrs in a golden box and the Gospel of John in which Peter placed a fragment of the holy cross which he received from clerics who brought such fragments from Jerusalem to the emperor¹⁵. After some trouble en route where they were mistaken for fugitive slaves and arrested¹⁶, they arrived in Jerusalem¹⁷. Approaching Jerusalem and seeing, from the distance of five stadia, the glistening roofs of the churches of the holy cross, of the resurrection and of the ascension, they cried out loud the verse from Isaiah 33,20 (according to LXX): "Look upon Zion, the city of our salvation: thine eyes will see Jerusalem...". They fell on their faces and advanced on their knees until they entered the city and arrived at the church of the *Anastasis*, where they cried and gave praises as if they were with Jesus in heaven¹⁸. Melania the younger received Peter and John at her monastery for men on Mount of Olives and Gerontius (of Jerusalemite descent), the head of the monastery gave them the monas-

12. *V. Petri Ib.* 22.

13. On John Rufus and his identification as the author of the anonymous *Vita* of Peter see: E. Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus, ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller*, Heidelberg 1912. Zacharias Rhetor has also written a *Vita* of Peter which has not survived, see: Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi*, ed. M. A. Kugener, *PO* II (1903) fasc. I, 83. D.M. Lang attempted to connect the late Georgian *Vita* of Peter with Zacharia's lost *Vita*, see: D.M. Lang, "Peter the Iberian and his Biographers", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1951) 158-168. A short biographical sketch of Peter is also included in John of Beth Aphtonia, *V. Severi*, ed. M.A. Kugener, *PO* II (1904) fasc. 3, 219-223.

14. *V. Petri Ib.* 23.

15. *V. Petri Ib.* 23-24; 39.

16. *V. Petri Ib.* 25.

17. *V. Petri Ib.* 26.

18. *V. Petri Ib.* 26-27.

tic garb in a ceremony in the *Anastasis*, along with their new names, Peter and John¹⁹. Melania had met Peter previously in a visit to Constantinople where she was instrumental in the betrothal of the princess Eudoxia (daughter of Theodosius II and Eudocia) to the co-emperor Valentinian III. On that occasion she may have inspired Peter's desire to follow her example²⁰. Therefore, we can see the natural connection of Peter, the princely pilgrim with Melania and the monastic center on Mount of Olives in the initial stages of his career in Palestine. This early association was further cemented by the deposition of the relics of the Persian martyrs brought by Peter and John, together with relics of the forty martyrs of Sebaste (in Armenia) and a relic of Stephen in a *martyrion* built by Melania on the mountain. Cyril of Alexandria conducted this ceremony, as he had come to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the foundation of the church of Stephen initiated by Eudocia, which took place the day before, during the first pilgrimage of the empress to the holy places (438/439)²¹. The ties between Eudocia, Melania and Peter were renewed in Jerusalem.

Peter and John, however, did not limit themselves to the holy places in Jerusalem. We learn indirectly of at least one journey to Transjordan, with another monk, in order to visit holy sites, especially the tomb of Moses on Mount Nebo²². Perhaps John Rufus suppressed further information showing Peter and John as typical pilgrims on the conventional pilgrimage routes, in light of Peter's later attitude towards the holy places and pilgrimage. Another sign of their veneration of the holy places in this early stage was their special visit to the *Anastasis* in order to obtain a cure for John's skin ailment on his face²³.

Indeed, Peter decided not to become a king in Iberia, but a monk in Jerusalem. His *Vita* reflects a man of deep contradictions. On the one hand Rufus portrays him as someone motivated by extreme asceticism, who severed contacts with the secular world. On the other hand Peter apparently was constantly driven towards public activity. This inherent tension of the charismatic ascetic became a major characteristic of his whole life. He

19. *V. Petri Ib.* 30-32.

20. *V. Petri Ib.* 30. On Melania's visit to Constantinople see also *V. Melan.* 53-56, ed. D. Gorce, *SC* 90.

21. *V. Petri Ib.* 33-34.

22. *V. Petri Ib.* 85. For Transjordan and Mount Nebo as pilgrimage sites see: Egeria X-XVI, eds. A. Franceschini - R. Weber, *CCSL* 175.

23. *V. Petri Ib.* 40.

cherished his family and held an annual memorial day for his departed relatives²⁴, but, as a monk, he refused to receive correspondence from his family. And, when he heard that his mother intended to visit him he ran away to Cyprus²⁵. Peter maintained a rigid ascetic discipline in Jerusalem²⁶, but was unhappy with it and wished to emulate Pasarion and take care of the poor and build a house for the monks²⁷. Eventually he left the monastery on Mount of Olives and built his own monastery north of the Church of Zion near David's tower (later called the monastery of the Iberians). Apparently the plot of land was given to him free of charge, as part of the general policy to encourage building in Jerusalem, due to the relative paucity of buildings and population in the city²⁸. But Peter and John did not restrict their activity to their new monastery. Rufus had to admit that they left Constantinople with a considerable sum of money, which they distributed mostly to the monks and the poor, while the rest was apparently spent on the building newly converted to a pilgrims' hostel. They entertained pilgrims on their own expense²⁹. Thus Peter and John became considerably involved in the pilgrim activity in the city and somehow neglected the monastic way of life. The venerable monk Zeno, disciple of the famous Silvanus³⁰, recalled them to their monastic vocation. They entered one of the monasteries and later returned to their own house³¹. Bishop Juvenal wished to ordain Peter as priest while still in Jerusalem but Peter escaped³². When the empress Eudocia settled in Jerusalem (c. 441/442) and wished to meet her protegee, he avoided answering her call so she decided to come to him. When she wished to visit him again he took Zeno's advice and departed to a monastery located between Gaza and Maiuma³³. Apparently, Peter had become a celebrity, with a reputation for escaping ordination. He

24. *V. Petri Ib.* 6.

25. *V. Petri Ib.* 12.

26. *V. Petri Ib.* 34.

27. *V. Petri Ib.* 35.

28. *V. Petri Ib.* 44-45.

29. *V. Petri Ib.* 46.

30. On Silvanus and his disciple Zeno see: M. Van Parys, "Abba Silvain et ses disciples, une famille monastique entre Scété et la Palestine à la fin du IV^e et dans la première moitié du V^e siècles", *Irenikon* 61 (1988) 315-331; 451-480.

31. *V. Petri Ib.* 47-48.

32. *V. Petri Ib.* 50; John of Beth Rufina (Rufus), *Plerophoriae* 42, ed. F. Nau, *PO* 8 (1911).

33. *V. Petri Ib.* 49.

was ambushed and ordained by Juvenal's nephew, Paul, bishop of Maiuma³⁴. Peter's ordination may have been orchestrated by Juvenal himself with Paul's assistance. Peter, however, avoided serving as a priest for the next seven years until he became bishop of Maiuma during the monophysite revolt against Chalcedon.

When attempts to persuade Juvenal to retract his position in Chalcedon had failed, the monk Theodosius was elected as monophysite archbishop of Jerusalem. According to John Rufus, Peter reluctantly played an important role even in the early stage of the revolt, in trying to convince Juvenal to retract³⁵. In order to strengthen the monophysite hold on the communities, many new bishops were appointed with an eye towards popular support among their communities³⁶. The people of Maiuma forced their choice on Peter, or so Rufus would have us believe. Paraded to Jerusalem, to receive his appointment from the rebel archbishop Theodosius, Peter tried to escape by jumping off the roof at night, at a stop on the way, but a voice from heaven prevented him. While in Jerusalem he never tired of arguing that he was unworthy of the priestly office³⁷. Peter became the rebel bishop of Maiuma³⁸. Although he tried to avoid officiating at the mass, he was forced by the public³⁹.

Peter served as bishop for six months before the revolt was crushed and Juvenal was reinstated as archbishop of Jerusalem. The monophysite bishops appointed by Theodosius were banished by decree. Peter, however, was privileged and exempt from exile by Pulcheria, sister of the now late emperor Theodosius, and the wife of the Chalcedonian emperor Marcian⁴⁰. Apparently, Peter deliberated his situation for some time and eventually decided to share the fate of his brethren and left for Alexandria, where he lived in hiding⁴¹. After the monophysite riots in Alexandria against the new Chalcedonian bishop Proterius, Peter found refuge in

34. *V. Petri Ib.* 51.

35. *Pler.* 56.

36. *V. Petri Ib.* 52-53; *Pler.* 25.

37. *V. Petri Ib.* 54.

38. For the monophysite revolt and the forced ordination of Peter by Theodosius, see also Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* III, 3-4.

39. *V. Petri Ib.* 55.

40. *V. Petri Ib.* 57; Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* III,5; John Rufus, *De Obitu Theodosii* 21, ed. E.W. Brooks, *CSCO* Scrip. Syri ser. 3, t. 25 (1907); John of Beth Aphtonia, *V. Severi* 222.

41. Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* III,7; *V. Petri Ib.* 58.

Oxyrynchos in the Thebaid⁴². At this point the author of the *Vita* discloses, for the first time, that Peter was engaged in semi-underground monophysite activity on his own initiative⁴³. Peter emerges as an active monophysite leader fighting for the cause. After the death of the emperor Marcian (457), Peter returned to Alexandria and played a role in the ordination of Timothy as archbishop by the Alexandrian crowd of monks and laymen. According to John Rufus, he was called to the task since all monophysite bishops were still in hiding and were unavailable⁴⁴. Peter remained in Egypt where he was important in reorganizing and encouraging the monophysites during the difficult years of a new anti-monophysite wave, under emperor Leo (457-474)⁴⁵.

Peter finally returned to Palestine – this time as an accomplished, charismatic and experienced leader, and a great combatant for the faith. He did not return to his old monastery near Gaza but remained in the southern coastal area, near Ascalon⁴⁶, no longer as an ascetic hermit but as a public figure, a monophysite holy man performing miracles, healing, exorcising demons, receiving visions, hearing heavenly voices, and entering into mystical trances. He attracted monophysites from all the surrounding regions. A core of monophysite resistance formed around him in the southern coastal region of Palestine. Peter engaged in monophysite missionary activity all over the country. He often traveled, visiting Gaza, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and even Arabia, and later enjoyed outstanding success in attracting a circle of law students from Berytus, including Severus of Antioch and Zacharias Rhetor⁴⁷. He initiated the building of monophysite monasteries and churches⁴⁸. When Timothy, the exiled monophysite patriarch of Alexandria, finally returned from his second exile, he invited Peter to join him in Alexandria. Peter declined but continued to maintain contact with Timothy through letters and messengers⁴⁹. Peter's stature was appreciated by emperor Zeno who summoned Peter and his great friend and mentor Abba Isaiah to Constantinople, probably to endorse his christological compro-

42. *V. Petri Ib.* 60.

43. *V. Petri Ib.* 61.

44. *V. Petri Ib.* 65.

45. *V. Petri Ib.* 70-71.

46. *V. Petri Ib.* 77.

47. *V. Petri Ib.* 114 ff.; Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi* 85-88.

48. *V. Petri Ib.* 78.

49. *V. Petri Ib.* 80.

mise, the *henoticon* (482)⁵⁰. Peter evaded Zeno's order by escaping to Phoenicia⁵¹.

John Rufus strives to portray Peter as a staunch, uncompromising combatant for the monophysite cause. This tendency is somewhat modified by Zacharias Rhetor, (also originally from the Gaza area⁵²), who presents Peter as a more moderate monophysite, at least from the standpoint of theology (namely, regarding the question of the essence of the body of Christ)⁵³. For his own reasons, Ernest Honigmann wished to moderate Rufus' depiction of Peter and portray him a middle-of-the-road monophysite⁵⁴.

Peter was over seventy years old when he died surrounded by his disciples in the coastal suburb of Iamnia (491)⁵⁵ and was buried in his old monastery between Gaza and Maiuma⁵⁶. So much for Peter's biographical sketch.

John Rufus, the author of Peter's *Vita* also composed a collection of anti-Chalcedonian propaganda, the *Plerophoriae*, which has been studied extensively by Lorenzo Perrone⁵⁷. In this work, based primarily on material from Palestinian sources and especially on Peter the Iberian himself, John Rufus testifies as to the nascent problematic attitude to the holy places among the defensive radical monophysite faction in Palestine, following the suppression of the monophysite revolt and the later reconciliatory policy, rejected by the radicals. Rufus presents the monophysite dilemma in a somewhat polarized, perhaps even simplistic fashion, in a number of anecdotes, probably reflecting his own radical position. This position held that the attachment of monophysites to holy places, under Chalcedonian domination, actually implied collaboration and communion with the arch-enemy of the true faith – monophysitism.

50. *V. Petri Ib.* 103. On Abba Isaiah see: D. Hermann Keller, "L'abbé Isaïe-le-jeune", *Irenikon* 16 (1939) 113-126 and D.J. Chitty, "Abba Isaiah", *JTS* 22 (1971) 47-72.

51. *V. Petri Ib.* 104; Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Isaiaie* 14, ed. E.W. Brooks, *CSCO* Scrip. Syri ser. 3, t. 25 (1907). According to Honigmann's interpretation Peter did not escape but was actually en route to Constantinople when Zeno's cancellation found him in Tripoli. See: E. Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite*, Brussels 1952, 13.

52. Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi* 88.

53. Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Isaiaie* 11.

54. Honigmann, *Ibid.* Honigmann wished to identify Peter as the author of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings which may have been written by a moderate monophysite.

55. *V. Petri Ib.* 137.

56. *V. Petri Ib.* 142.

57. See: L. Perrone, "Dissenso dottrinale e propaganda visionaria: le *Pleroforie* di Giovanni di Maiuma", *Augustinianum* 29 (1989) 451-495.

This dilemma posited a collision between loyalty to the holy places, and fidelity to the true faith. The sincere monophysite living in the holy places must make his bitter choice either to abandon his attachment to and veneration of the holy places thereby remaining true to his faith and brethren or to retain communion with the “heretical” Chalcedonians. This dilemma is expressed in several anecdotes.

The priest and monk Constantine, a guardian of the tomb of John the Baptist in Sebaste during the time of the council of Chalcedon, often had visions of the Baptist. When the repression of the monophysites after Chalcedon took place and the priests of the party of the patriarch Theodosius were banished by the emperor Marcian, Constantine had to decide either to flee the communion of the apostates and thus deprive himself of the presence of St. John the Baptist; or to remain in Sebaste and become an apostate himself. Constantine implored the Baptist, in his wisdom, to disclose God’s will. He had a vision of the saint who said: Priest, do not lose your soul because of me and do not deny your faith. But go and guard your soul untarnished. For wherever you go, I shall be with you. And Constantine left his beloved saint and his tomb, and escaped Sebaste⁵⁸.

A similar story relates that after spending time with the monks in Sinai, the monophysite monk Zosimus, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and later came to Bethel in search of a place of quiet retreat. The guardian of the holy site of Jacob’s dream asked him to stay there with him. Zosimus admitted that this was impossible since he was escaping the apostates of Chalcedon, but the guardian assured him that there was no problem. Zosimus was inclined to accept this generous offer, but one night the patriarch Jacob appeared to him, demanding: How can you stay here, when you are an orthodox (i.e., monophysite) and are in communion with the orthodoxes? Do not betray your faith because of me. But hurry and flee from the company of the renegades and you shall not be deprived of anything. And Zosimus escaped⁵⁹.

Another story tells of a monophysite woman, a devotee of Saint Stephen and John the Baptist in Jerusalem who, after Chalcedon, was hesitant to make her customary visits to their churches and pray with the oppressors. She was tormented by anxiety of separation from the saints, until Stephen came to her saying: Go, abide in your cell and you shall not lose

58. *Pler.* 29.

59. *Pler.* 30.

your heritage. Do not torture yourself thinking that you are separated from us. Wherever you are we are with you and abide with you⁶⁰.

Whether authentic or anachronistic, such tales reflect the nascent sensitivity among certain radical monophysite circles in Palestine towards the holy places and pilgrimage to the holy places, in mid-late fifth and early sixth centuries. Such new attitudes must be viewed in the larger perspective of the growing hostility between the rival camps. Statements denouncing Chalcedon as the work of the devil, the supporters of Chalcedon as the worshipers of the devil, and Juvenal as the Antichrist and similar vituperations, appear throughout Rufus' works⁶¹ to the extent that the entire empire is depicted as the root of all evil. The Barbarian conquests are a punishment for the Tome of Leo and the council of Chalcedon and are the fulfillment of the destruction prophecies of Jeremiah⁶². The council of Chalcedon heralded the coming of the Antichrist⁶³.

Hunt has noted that "the universal veneration in which the biblical sites were held, as the visible nucleus of the faith, was potentially a uniquely influential weapon in ecclesiastical politics"⁶⁴. Writing to Juvenal, Pope Leo referred to them. The holy places are the "unassailable proofs of the Catholic faith"⁶⁵. In this vein, Leo also wrote to Eudocia that she could not ignore the truths of the faith "where the signs of his miracles and the proofs of his sufferings proclaim that Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one person"⁶⁶. In other words, the holy places had acquired theological importance as proofs for the two-natures doctrine of Chalcedon.

Against this background, we can better understand the radical pronouncement, that with the expulsion of the monophysites from the churches, the holy ghost was departing with them and the Antichrist had entered together with the heretics⁶⁷! In his *Church History*, Zacharias Rhetor stated that when monophysites were expelled from Palestine, Peter the Iberian stayed because of his exemption by the emperor and his wife.

60. *Pler.* 79.

61. E.g. *Pler.* 9; 17; 26.

62. *Pler.* 89, pp. 150-151.

63. *Pler.* 89, p. 154.

64. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 246.

65. *Ep.* 139, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II,4,91ff., ed. E. Schwartz, Berlin 1914-74.

66. *Ep.* 123, *Ibid.* 77; Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 246 and Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 169.

67. *Pler.* 93, appendix.

Jesus appeared to him in a vision saying: "How now Peter! Am I being expelled in My believing servants, and you are remaining quiet and at rest?" Then Peter repented and joined those who were expelled⁶⁸.

Apparently, with regard to the holy places, the Chalcedonians themselves had contributed to the situation. John Rufus tells us the story of the monophysites Urbicia, a diaconess and daughter of a bishop from Crete, and her brother Euphrasius, who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and bought a monastery near the Church of the Ascension. There they received the pilgrim priest Epiphanius from Pamphilia (after the antiencyclical of Basiliscus in 476). But since they refused to take communion with the patriarch they were expelled from Jerusalem⁶⁹. John Moschus tells us similar stories of a later period (sixth and early seventh centuries) about monophysites who were refused access to the Church of the *Anastasis* and the holy sepulcher⁷⁰. These incidents may reflect a tendency to forbid avowed monophysites from entering holy sites. On the other hand, it seems that radical monophysites disapproved of their peers who worshipped with Chalcedonians at the holy places. On a visit to the Church of the Ascension, a pilgrim nun staying on Mount of Olives is reported to have found herself in the closed church during a meeting of Chalcedonians. Later on she was accused by her fellow monophysites of collaboration with sinners⁷¹.

The bitter reaction against Chalcedon in Palestine may have also aroused a tendency to denigrate the holy places, especially those in Jerusalem which became identified with the hateful figure of Juvenal. It is Juvenal who turned Jerusalem into a den of thieves and filled it with fornicators⁷². To illustrate the deterioration of the holy places under Juvenal and the Chalcedonians, it was related that during Juvenal's tenure, though prior to Chalcedon, a priest of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (*Martyrion*) had fornicated with a woman after prayers, in a room above the church, where they were discovered the following morning. This event caused the famous Gerontius to fast for two days in advance whenever he

68. Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* III,7; English translation by F.J. Hamilton - E.W. Brooks, *The Syriac Chronicle known as that of Zachariah of Mitylene*, London 1899.

69. *Pler.* 44.

70. John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, PG 87, 2904-2905. See also H. Chadwick, "John Moschus and his Friend Sophronius the Sophist", *JTS* n.s. 25 (1974) 70.

71. *Pler.* 80.

72. *Pler.* 18.

had to officiate at vespers at the Church of the *Martyrion*. This story was attributed to Peter⁷³.

Let us now return to Peter the Iberian. The *Vita* tells us that in his old age, his body weakened from his rigorous ascetic regime and he went to Arabia to be cured in the hot springs of Livias. This trip, however, was not merely a private matter. Peter always plays the role of the monophysite holy man. However, the water proved to be insufficiently hot and Peter and his companions continued to the hot springs of Ba'ar. On the way, the journey became a pilgrimage tour of Transjordan. They visited the church and monasteries at the site of Mount Nebo where Moses died and offered prayers of thanksgiving. They listened to the story about the discovery of the tomb of Moses and the building of the church on top of it. John Rufus himself accompanied Peter on this journey and attested to the many miracles and healings which proved the holiness of the site. He affirmed that Mount Nebo is a holy place for pilgrimage for the cure of body and soul⁷⁴. Here, we encounter Peter and his circle participating in an act of pilgrimage with all its paraphernalia, without any signs of reservation. This may be explained by the fact that the area was not specifically identified as being under heterodox Chalcedonians, and it may further indicate that the new sensitivity towards the holy places and pilgrimage, focused on the Chalcedonian domination and had not become opposition to pilgrimage as a principle.

On his way back to the coast, Peter and his companions were invited by the tribune Elias, a long time admirer of Peter who had been in the service of Eudocia and lived in Jerusalem, to spend the hot summer in his village (Beit Thafsha), five miles north of Jerusalem. Peter accepted his invitation⁷⁵. After the summer, the group headed back to the coast. On the way, an argument developed among some of the disciples: How is it that during the whole summer Peter did not care to visit Jerusalem, the holy places and particularly Calvary and the Tomb, be it even by night, when he was so close to the city?

One of the monks answered: on the night before the departure, he had a terrible vision. Peter appeared to him and took him by the hand to the holy city. They came to the city from the north (the village was situated north of the city), visited the Church of Stephen and its crypt and prayed

73. *Pler.* 41.

74. *V. Petri Ib.* 83-89.

75. *V. Petri Ib.* 97-98.

there. Thence they hurried to the Church of Calvary and to the Tomb. Then to the Church of Pilate, to the Paralytic (the Probatike) and on to Gethsemane. After visiting the sites nearby they climbed to the room of the Last Supper and then to the Church of the Ascension and the house of Lazaros. From there they took the road to Bethlehem. After prayers, Peter also prayed at the tomb of Rachel, as well as other churches along the way back to Jerusalem and climbed down to the Church of Siloam. From there, he climbed up to the Church of Zion and thus he completed the holy round tour. Throughout the journey, Peter was supported by this brother. They returned to the village and on the following morning started back.

The account of this vision convinced the critical disciples that their master indeed prayed to the Lord in all of the holy places in his spirit, every day and even every hour. In support of their persuasion, John Rufus adduces Pauline verses emphasizing the nearness to Christ in spirit wherever one is⁷⁶.

This story reflects the monopysite dilemma regarding the holy places under Chalcedonian domination. Peter avoided a visit to Jerusalem and the holy sites and his avoidance is subject to criticism on the part of some of his disciples which expressed the actual dilemma or served as a means to highlight Peter's conduct and the extraordinary vision. The significance of the vision lies in the spiritual transformation of the idea of pilgrimage to the holy places. What is notable here is that the holy places do not ultimately lose their inherent theological value. The visionary tour of the holy sites follows a typical route of a Byzantine pilgrim to Jerusalem. Symbolically, the holy places continued to serve as foci of spiritual pilgrimage. Their practical and physical significance, however, had been suppressed.

This story seems to conform to John Rufus' description of Peter's last years. Here, Rufus presents his hero as realizing the monastic ideal of *Xeniteia* in a larger context⁷⁷. The life of separation and detachment not only from holy places, but from any place of sedentary life, which constitutes a mode of attachment to the life of this world, be it even a monastery. According to John Rufus, in light of this ideal Peter refused to return to his old monastery between Gaza and Maiuma to spend his last days peacefully.

76. V. *Petri Ib.* 98-100.

77. On the monastic ideal of *Xeniteia* with its Syrian and Egyptian variants, see: A. Guillaumont, "Le dépassement comme forme d'ascèse dans le monachisme ancien", in idem, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien: Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme* (Spiritualité Orientale 30), Paris 1979, 89-116.

He hoped to end his life as a “stranger” to this world and to receive the crown of *Xeniteia*⁷⁸.

Peter the Iberian had come a long way. His personal circumstances and historical events had transformed him from the young enthusiastic pilgrim, devotee of holy relics and places into a model advocate of the ideal of *Xeniteia*, the holy man constantly on the road and stranger to the world, beyond attachment to the physical, transitory world, even of relics and holy places. His life story, as related by his devoted disciple, John Rufus, also exemplifies the plight of the monophysites in the Holy Land, in the wake of the council of Chalcedon.

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78. *V. Petri Ib.* 122.