

# The Monastery of Agaurwn at Mount Olympus in Bithynia Through the Life of Saint Eustratios (BHG 645)

 Evangelia Zaravela

University of Ioannina, Ioannina, Greece  
ezaravela@yahoo.gr

## Abstract

This presentation deals with the monastery of Agaurwn at Olympus of Bithynia as referenced in “the Life of saint Eustratios (BHG 645)”, who was the abbot (*hegoumenos*) of the Agaurwn monastery according to codex Sabbaiticus number 242. This codex can be found in the Patriarchal Library of Jerusalem. Mysian Olympus is considered one of the most imposing mountains in the region of Bithynia with steep points which during the Byzantine years was a place of settlement for the monks. Organized monastic movement was observed especially during the period of Iconoclasm (726-787 and 815-843), and thus the monastery of Agaurwn became an important monastic center during the Byzantine Empire. The spreading of monks at Olympus of Bithynia was due to its geographical location, the proximity to Constantinople and the formation of a network of roads that helped communication and accessibility. The monastery of Agaurwn was built in the beginning of the 8th century and was dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damianos. In the Life of Eustratios, the location of the monastery is precisely determined. The monastery was built in a place called Kalymnos, which was fifteen stadia (about 3 kilometers) from the small town of Prousa at the foot of Mount Trichalikos and near a river called Nilufer. The name of the monastery in the ancient references was in the singular, while later, because the monastery was inhabited by eunuchs, its name was changed to “the monastery of the Augarwn”, which with an anagram became Agaurwn. The monastery of Agaurwn developed great activity in the religious life of Bithynia during the eighth century. The monastery had many shares (*metochia*), engaged in the production of goods and their export around Constantinople. A lot of topographical information is provided in the Life of Eustratios which is a valuable source for the mapping of the region.

**Keywords:** Bithynia, Mount Olympus, Monastery of Agaurwn, saint Eustratios, hagiography, Byzantine period.

## 1. Introduction

This article presents the monastery of Agaurwn at mount Olympus of Bithynia as referenced in “the Life of saint Eustratios (BHG 645)”, who was the abbot (*hegoumenos*) of the Agaurwn monastery according to codex Sabbaiticus number 242. This codex can be found in the Patriarchal Library of Jerusalem. Saint Eustratios lived as a monk and then as an abbot (*hegoumenos*) in the monastery for about seventy years. Saint Eustratios's Life is very important because it provides valuable topographical information for the mapping of the region.

### 1.1. Mount Olympus in Bithynia

During ancient times, Asia Minor included three regions to the north: Pontus, Paphlagonia and Bithynia. In the west it included Mysia, Lydia and Caria. In the south it included four: Lycia, Pisidia, Pamphylia and Cilicia. Finally, the center included five regions: Phrygia, Cavalida (in Roman times), Isauria, Lycaonia, Galatia and Cappadocia<sup>1</sup>.

Bithynia is that part of Asia Minor that lies opposite Constantinople, extending southwards down to Mount Olympus and in the east reaching the river Sangarios. Geographical boundaries have varied over the years. The following are the generally accepted

ones: to the North of it lies the Black Sea. To the West the Bosphorus and the Propontida (Sea of Marmara) and the river Ryndakos (today Adranos Tsai). To the South the chain of hills below Olympus closes the valley of Ryndakos. To the east, lies the lowest part of Sangarios<sup>2</sup>. At the two ends of Bithynia there are two mountains that have the same name “Olympus”. One mountain is called “Bithynian Olympus” and rises in eastern Bithynia and north of Galatia. Today, it has received the name “Abbas-dag (or: Ala-dag)” from the Turks. The other mountain is “Mysian Olympus”, which rises above Bursa and is located on the borders of Bithynia, Mysia and Phrygia and is the highest mountain in western Asia Minor with an altitude of 2,550 meters (excluding Mount Timnos). Mysian Olympus is considered one of the most majestic and imposing mountains with dense forests and a wide variety of trees. The dense vegetation and its steep parts were a refuge for robbers during the Roman and later years, while during the Byzantine years it was a place for monks to settle down. For this reason, it was called by the Turks “Keşiş Dağ”, (i.e.) that is “mountain of the monks”<sup>3</sup> before it was simply called “Ulu Dağ”, (i.e.) that is “big mountain”<sup>4</sup>.

Strabo (first century AD) in his work *Geographika* gives valuable

<sup>1</sup> Κοντογιάννης, Π., *Γεωγραφία της Μικράς Ασίας*, Αθήνα 1921, ανατύπωση 1995, σελ. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Janin, R., *La Bithynie sous l'empire byzantine*, Échos d'Orient 20 (1921), σελ. 168.

<sup>3</sup> Κοντογιάννης, *Γεωγραφία της ...*, σελ. 13 και 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> Janin, R., *Les Églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins*, Paris 1975, σελ. 129.

and accurate information about the geography of Bithynia<sup>5</sup> and Mount Olympus, which due to the wild landscape, he considers a place where robbers found refuge (*«ἐν δὲ τοῖς ὕψει δρυμοὺς ἐξαισίους ἔχων, καὶ ληστήρια δυναμένους ἐκτρέφειν τόπους εὐεργεῖς»*). In fact, Strabo also mentions a bandit named "Cleon", who operated in this area<sup>6</sup>. In the archeological museum of Bursa there is a tomb inscription of an archon (*ἐπαρχος*), a victim of robbers of the same era, which certifies the testimony of Strabo<sup>7</sup>. During the Christian era there is not much information about departers at Olympus<sup>8</sup>. Janin gives the information that the martyr Neophytos from Nicaea (284-304 AD) was the first to depart, who found refuge in a cave in which a lion first lived, which he first had to evict<sup>9</sup>.

Also, in the years of Emperor Constantine I (306-337) there is evidence of a certain hermit named Eutychianos, who lived on Olympus with a youth (named Auxanon), whom he initiated into the monastic life. Crowds flocked to Eutychianos to find healing<sup>10</sup>. A first reference to the establishment of a monastery on Olympus is in the fifth century<sup>11</sup>.

Coordinated monastic movement is observed especially during the period of the Iconoclasm (726-87 and 815-843)<sup>12</sup>. According to Menthon, at that time the number of monks who lived on Olympus reached ten thousand. Later, due to the raids of the Arabs, the monks turn to Athos, to ensure safety and tranquility<sup>13</sup>.

In addition to the morphology of the area, as mentioned above, its geographical position also contributed to the spread of the monks in Olympus of Bithynia. The close distance to Constantinople as well as the formation in Bithynia itself of a network of roads helped communication and accessibility<sup>14</sup>. From the ninth to the eleventh century, Olympus was a model monastic center in the Byzantine Empire<sup>15</sup>, while it could be characterized as the direct spiritual ancestor of Athos<sup>16</sup>.

Menthon categorizes the monasteries of Olympus into monasteries of Triglia, monasteries of Prousa and Atroa, the complex of the high mountain and scattered monasteries<sup>17</sup>.

The monastic life in Olympus of Bithynia begins to take a downward course with the schism (1054) between the Eastern and Western Churches, when Michael Kyrularios was patriarch, and intensifies with the Turkish conquest, to be completed in 1326, when Prusa becomes the first capital of the Ottoman Empire<sup>18</sup>.

Today several Byzantine churches and monasteries survive on the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara in an area between Mudanya in the east and Panormo (Turkish: Bandirma) in the west<sup>19</sup>.

## 1.2. The Life of Saint Eustratios: the historical frame

Saint Eustratios lived in the Monastery of Agaurwn (at Mount Olympus of Bithynia) for about seventy years. A key source of

information about his Life is found in the Sabbaiticus codex (242) in the Patriarchal Library of Jerusalem. Additional evidence is drawn from other sources, such as the two Lives of Saint Ioannikios (*Life by the monk Sava*<sup>20</sup> (BHG 935) and *Life by the monk Petros*<sup>21</sup> (BHG 936). Eustratios was born in a town called Byztiniana (791), which is in Tarsia and belongs to the theme of the Optimatoi. His parents, George and Megetho raised him according to Christian principles and he stayed with his family until the age of twenty, when he decided to give up worldly things and devote himself to God. The date of birth of Eustratios is not mentioned in the Life. Then he decided to go to Olympus, where his uncles, Gregorios, abbot of the Agaurwn monastery, and Vasilius lived as monks. Eustratios expressed to Gregorios his desire to become a monk, but Gregorios tried to dissuade him, referring to the great difficulties of his decision. But when Gregorios realized the conscious decision of Eustratios, he included him in the monastery first as a cadet and then as a monk. During this time Eustratios gladly endured all the trials and cheerfully and humbly offered his services to the monastery, disdaining material possessions, owning just a garment which he wore and a woolen pallion, on which he rarely rested, wherever he went. This behavior made him especially dear to everyone, with the result that before the abbot Efstathios passed away, he chose Eustratios, without his own wish, as the new abbot (*hegoumenos*) of the Agaurwn monastery. Eustratios took over the leadership of the monastery when Leo V the Armenian came to power in 813. Leo brought up the issue of iconoclasm, during this time initiating exiles, beatings, imprisonments, and violent deaths of iconophiles. This resulted in the monks dispersing and Eustratios himself leaving the monastery and taking refuge with his friend Ioannikios. After the restoration of the icons (843) Eustratios returned to the monastery, having as his main concern to gather the monks who were scattered<sup>22</sup>. Over the course of his life, he performed a multitude of miracles and even his relic was as much miraculous.

## 1.3. The monastery of Agaurwn

The monastery of Agaurwn was built at the beginning of the eighth century and was dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damianos<sup>23</sup>. In the Life of Eustratios, the geographical location of the monastery is precisely determined. It is in a place called Kalymnos, which is fifteen stadia (about 3 kilometers) from the small town of Prousa at the foot of Mount Trihalix and near a river called Niloufer<sup>24</sup>. Later this place, according to Eustratios's biographer, changed its name and was called *Ἀγαυρος*, because eunuchs practiced there<sup>25</sup>. Mango suggests placing the monastery of Agaurwn to the west of Bursa, based on the argument, according to Life in paragraph 52, that the relic of Eustratios was transferred from the capital to the monastery of Agaurwn through the baths located in Bursa, implying that the people first passed through Bursa, carrying the saint's relic and that

<sup>5</sup> Κοραῖς, Α., *Στράβωνος Γεωγραφικὸν Βιβλίον* Επτακαίδεκα, Μέρος Δεύτερον, Παρίσι 1815, βιβλίο IB, κεφ. Δ § 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, βιβλίο IB, κεφ. Η § 8.

<sup>7</sup> Janin, *Les Églises et les monastères ...*, σελ. 127, Βλ. σημ. 2 Robert, L., *Études Anatoliennes*, σελ. 97-98.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, σελ. 127, Βλ. σημ. 3 Schultze, V., *Altchristliche städte und landschaften*, II Kleinasien I (Gütersloh 1922-1926), σελ. 255.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, σελ. 127, Βλ. σημ. 3 *Passion de Néophyte* (BHG 1326). Για περισσότερες πληροφορίες Βλ. Menthon, B., *Τα μοναστήρια και οι άγιοι του Ολύμπου της Βιθυνίας*, (μετάφραση από τα γαλλικά Βασίλειου Νταλίας) Θεσσαλονίκη 1980 σελ. 36-41.

<sup>10</sup> *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*, 161 vols in 166 pts., ed. J.-P. MIGNE (Paris, 1857-1866), 67, στ. 105.

<sup>11</sup> Janin, *Les Églises et les monastères...*, σελ. 127, Βλ. Bartelink, G., *Vie d'Hypatios* 46, (BHG 760), Sources Chretiennes 177, Paris 1971, σελ. 272.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, σελ. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Janin, *La Bithynie sous ...*, σελ. 169.

<sup>15</sup> Παπαχρυσάνθου, Δ., *Ο αθωνικός μοναχισμός, Αρχές και οργάνωση*, Αθήνα 2004, σελ. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Μπαρούση, Ν., *Ιερομονάχου, Ο μοναχισμός της Μ. Ασίας*, Αθήνα 1988, σελ. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 5-7.

<sup>18</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Mango, C., and Ševčenko, I., "Some churches and monasteries on the southern shore of the sea of Marmara", *DOP* 27 (1973), σελ. 235.

<sup>20</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ιωαννικίου (Σάβας)* (BHG 935) AASS, Nov. t. II.1, σελ. 332-383.

<sup>21</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ιωαννικίου (Πέτρος)* (BHG 936) AASS, Nov. t. II.1, σελ. 384-435.

<sup>22</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §§3-12.

<sup>23</sup> Menthon, B., *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Menthon, B., *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 28.

<sup>25</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §4.

the monastery is beyond the baths to the west<sup>26</sup>.

The name of the monastery in the ancient references is found in the singular *Ἀγαυρος*, τὰ *Ἀγαύρου*<sup>27</sup>. The singular number originally used to denote the location probably refers to a notable eunuch, who had the role of founder and gave his name, replacing the name of the location Kalymnos, where the monastery was built<sup>28</sup>. Menthon mentions that, because it was inhabited by eunuchs, it was called the monastery of the Agaurwn, which by an anagram became Agaurwn<sup>29</sup>. As evidenced in the Lives of Saint Eustratios and Saint Ioannikios, the hagiographers kept this name<sup>30</sup>. Hergès considers that the monastery of Agaurwn had developed a great activity in the religious life of Bithynia mainly during the eighth century<sup>31</sup>.

The monastery of Agaurwn had an important role, as evidenced by the many shares (*metochia*) it possessed. This importance is related to its location that is near Prusa and at the foot of Mount Olympus<sup>32</sup>.

A share (*metochi*) was located near the baths of Prousa and was above the monastery near the city with the name suburb of Saint Agapius. It is probably the share (*metochi*) from which Eustratios was leaving and heading for his monastery, when he met a man who was asking for alms and Eustratios, having nothing else to offer him, gave him his pallion. According to Menthon, remains of Saint Agapios exist east of the Turkish village of In Kaya<sup>33</sup>. Another share (*metochi*) was that of Lefkades, which was on the way to the monastery of Agaurwn<sup>34</sup> near the river Nilufer. References to the share (*metochi*) of Lefkadwn which was located near the monastery of Agaurwn are insignificant. Menthon places the share (*metochi*) of Lefkadwn near the river Nilufer on a hill above Dobroudja. In the Life of Ioannikios<sup>35</sup>, the information is also given that the specific metochi was 15 stadia from the monastery of Agaurwn.

The monastery also owned the share (*metochi*) of Saint Kosmas, which is in the plain and is visible from the road that goes from the share (*metochi*) of Lefkades to the monastery of Agaurwn<sup>36</sup> and is of course close to the monastery of Saint Eustratios. After all, according to Life, Eustratios, on his way to his monastery, sees the share (*metochi*) burning<sup>37</sup>.

There was also a share (*metochi*) where the church of Saint George is located, in which Ioannikios and the abbot of Agaurwn monastery, Gregorios, met<sup>38</sup>.

Finally, the monastery of Agaurwn also owned a suburb in the Katavolos area<sup>39</sup> where there was the monastery of Vomon (or: Eleovomon)<sup>40</sup>. Mango lists the names: *Ἡλίου Βωμῶν, τῶν Βωμῶν, τῶν Ἐλαιοβωμῶν, τῶν Ἐλαιοβωμητῶν ἢ τῶν Ἐλεγγῶν*. The name of the monastery has two translations: "Altars of the Sun" and "Altars of Elias". The second rendering seems to convey the correct meaning, since an attempt is made to Christianize its pagan name. In fact, the two monasteries had cooperation, because the abbot of the monastery of Vomi was the brother of Eustratios, Nikolaos, and Eustratios made frequent visits<sup>41</sup>. According to Menthon, its ruins

can be seen from the village of Kurşunlu<sup>42</sup>.

The monastery of Agaurwn seems to have been engaged in the production of goods and their export around Constantinople<sup>43</sup>. In the Agaurwn monastery, as in all monasteries, the system of deacons (*diakonies*) operated. That is, each monk was responsible for some work and offered his services to the rest of his brothers. According to the Life of saint Eustratios, one monk was responsible for the monastery's oxen<sup>44</sup>, another for the heifers<sup>45</sup>, but also for any emergency that arose, the monks were quick to help<sup>46</sup>. From the 14th century the monastery outside the city did not exist. An act of synod in October 1318 stipulated that the metropolitan of Prousa should have the monastery of Saint Eustratios with the name Agauroi under his supervision, but in no document does it clearly appear that it is the old monastery of Agaurwn or a new one inside the city<sup>47</sup>.

Already in the 19th century, nothing was saved from the place where the monastery of Agaurwn was built, because according to Menthon its stones were used for building materials<sup>48</sup>.

## 2. Conclusion

To conclude, the Life of saint Eustratios proves to be a valuable source of information for the mapping of the area of Mount Olympus in Bithynia. Unfortunately, today there is nothing left from the Monastery of Agaurwn but only ruins from the shares (*metochia*) that referred to the Life of Saint Eustratios.

**Résumé - Le monastère d'Agaurwn au mont Olympe en Bithynie à travers la vie de saint Eustratios (BHG 645) :** Cette présentation traite du monastère d'Agaurwn sur l'Olympe de Bithynie tel que référencé dans « la Vie de saint Eustratios (BHG 645) », qui était l'abbé (hegoumenos) du monastère d'Agaurwn selon le codex Sabbaiticus numéro 242. Ce codex peut être trouvé à la Bibliothèque patriarcale de Jérusalem. L'Olympe de Mysie est considéré comme l'une des montagnes les plus imposantes de la région de Bithynie avec des pointes abruptes qui, pendant les années byzantines, étaient un lieu d'établissement pour les moines. Un mouvement monastique organisé a été observé surtout pendant la période de l'iconoclasme (726-787 et 815-843), et ainsi le monastère d'Agaurwn est devenu un centre monastique important pendant l'Empire byzantin. La propagation des moines à l'Olympe de Bithynie était due à sa situation géographique, à la proximité de Constantinople et à la formation d'un réseau de routes facilitant la communication et l'accessibilité. Le monastère d'Agaurwn a été construit au début du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et était dédié aux saints Côme et Damianos. Dans la Vie d'Eustratios, l'emplacement du monastère est déterminé avec précision. Le monastère a été construit dans un endroit appelé Kalymnos, à quinze stades (environ 3 kilomètres) de la petite ville de Prousa, au pied du mont Trichalikos et près d'une rivière appelée Nilüfer. Le nom du monastère dans les références anciennes était au singulier, tandis que plus tard, parce que le monastère était habité par

<sup>26</sup> Mango, C., "The Monastery of St. Abercius at Kurşunlu (Elegmi) in Bithynia", *DOP* 22 (1968), σελ. 175.

<sup>27</sup> Janin, *Les Églises et les monastères...*, σελ. 132, βλ. σημ. 5. Mansi 13, 152<sup>E</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, σελ. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 78.

<sup>30</sup> Hergès, A., "Le monastère des Agaures", *EO* t. 2, no 5, (1899), σελ. 231.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, σελ. 230.

<sup>32</sup> Geyer - Lefort, *La Bithynie au ...*, σελ. 443.

<sup>33</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 79.

<sup>34</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §31.

<sup>35</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ιωαννικίου (BHG 936 Πέτρος)* §54.

<sup>36</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §31.

<sup>37</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §31.

<sup>38</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ιωαννικίου (BHG 936 Πέτρος)* §59.

<sup>39</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, §23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, §35 και §§51-52. και Mango, C., "The Monastery of St. Abercius at Kurşunlu (Elegmi) in Bithynia", *DOP* 22 (1968), σελ. 173-174.

<sup>42</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 79.

<sup>43</sup> *Βίος αγίου Ευστρατίου* §29.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem §13.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem §28.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, §20.

<sup>47</sup> Janin, *Les Églises et les monastères...*, σελ. 134, βλ. σημ. 4. M M 1, n° 44, p. 80-81.

<sup>48</sup> Menthon, *Τα μοναστήρια και ...*, σελ. 78.

des eunuques, son nom fut changé en « le monastère d'Augarwn », qui avec une anagramme devint Agaurwn. Le monastère d'Agaurwn développa une grande activité dans la vie religieuse de Bithynie au cours du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le monastère possédait de nombreuses actions (métochie), engagées dans la production de biens et leur exportation autour de Constantinople. De nombreuses informations topographiques sont fournies dans la Vie d'Eustratios qui constitue une source précieuse pour la cartographie de la région.

**Mots-clés :** *Bithynie, Mont Olympe, Monastère d'Agaurwn, saint Eustratios, hagiographie, période byzantine.*

#### References – Historical Sources

Βίος Ἰωαννικίου (Πέτρος) (BHG 936) AASS, Nov. t. II.1. σελ. 384-435.

Βίος Ἰωαννικίου (Σάβας) (BHG 935) AASS, Nov. t. II.1, σελ. 332-383.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ζαραβέλα, Ε., Ο Βίος του αγίου Ευστρατίου Αγαύρων (BHG 645) Εισαγωγή, Κριτική Έκδοση, Μετάφραση, Σχολιασμός [διδ. διατρ.], (Ιωάννινα 2018).

Geyer B., - Lefort J., La Bithynie au Moyen Âge, Réalités Byzantines 9, (Paris 2003).

Hergès, A., “Le monastère des Agaures”, EO t. 2, no 5, (1899), σελ. 230-238.

Janin, R., La Bithynie sous l' empire byzantine, Échos d'Orient 20 (1921).

Janin, R., Les Églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantines, (Paris 1975).

Κοντογιάννης, Π., Γεωγραφία της Μικράς Ασίας, ανατύπωση 1995 (Αθήνα 1921).

Κοραής, Α., Στράβωνος Γεωγραφικών Βιβλία Επτακαίδεκα, Μέρος Δεύτερον, (Παρίσι 1815).

Mango, C., and Ševčenko, Ih., “Some churches and monasteries on the southern shore of the sea of Marmara”, DOP 27 (1973), σελ. 235-277.

Mango, C., “The Monastery of St. Abercius at Kurşunlu (Elegmi) in Bithynia” DOP 22 (1968) sel. 169-176, 175 σημ.34.

Menthon, B., Τα μοναστήρια και οι άγιοι του Ολύμπου της Βιθυνίας, μετ. Βασιλοπούλου Ν. (Θεσσαλονίκη 1980).

Migne, J. - P., (ed), Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca, 161 vols in 166 pts., (Paris, 1857-1866).

Μπαρούσης, Ν., Ιερομονάχου, Ο μοναχισμός της Μ. Ασίας, (Αθήνα 1988).

1. Παπαχρυσάνθου, Δ., Ο αθωνικός μοναχισμός, Αρχές και οργάνωση, (Αθήνα 2004).