

STEFANOS P. TANIMANIDIS

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE HOLY ICON



AND THE MONASTERY OF PANAGIA SUMELA

Dedicated

*to the Christians and the Muslims who have resorted to the grace of Virgin Mary the Soumeliotissa. *¹ Resorting to it for their pleas and their hopes.*

Stefanos Tanimanidis
Honorary President
of the Panhellenic Confederation of Pontic Associations

**«As long as the memory and the history
There are no lost homelands.
There are no lost civilizations».**

* ¹ Virgin Mary Soumeliotissa = Virgin Mary of Soumela

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE HOLY ICON AND THE MONASTERY OF PANAGIA SUMELA



Young men and women dressed in traditional Pontic costumes, from the Pontic dancing group of Drama “Pirichia”, attendants of the sacred and miracle-working icon of Sumela, at the Metropolitan cathedral of Drama where it was taken for a pilgrimage by Pontic and Pontic-friendly residents on 03-04/12/2013.

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**LETTER OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH CONSTANTINOPLE
mr. BARTHOLOMEW TO mr. STEFANOS P. TANIMANIDIS**

To the honourable mr. Stefanos P. Tanimanidis, our modest child that is loved by our Lord, with God's grace and peace.

We all know well that since the apostle era there has been a strong connection between Hellenism and Christianity. This fruitful collaboration becomes evident in the historical truth and is kept intact by the historical and the Orthodox ecclesiastic memory.

The universal nature of them both has transmitted the light of our faith to many nations in deep respect for the idiosyncrasy, the language and the culture of each nation.

The Holy Universal throne has never acted in this way through its enlightened representatives, and that is why the Church of Constantinople is the Mother Church that enlightens the nations that surround it.



The author and the editor of this book, Stefanos and Kassiani Tanimanidi, in 2011, at the throne room of the Patriarchate, while getting the blessing and the love of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople mr. Bartholomew, for their book about the Icon and the Monastery of Sumela.

Throughout the centuries divine providence has supported those who believe and particularly in areas where great hardships arose for the Orthodox Christian populations, while it blessed the icons with the ability to perform miracles, with sacred remnants and holy waters, and, thus, the holy monuments of our nation arose.

They marked the life of our ancestors in such a way that even when the lights of the churches of those areas moved, and the monuments were destroyed, they were kept dearly and respectfully in the hearts of the people who left their homeland, even to the present day.

One of the great monuments and sacred pilgrimages was the Sumela monastery in Pontus, where the historical icon of our Holy Mother was kept as it was created by the hands of Evangelist Luke, and whose relentless ocean of miracles has become evident.

The God Bearer has protected these respectful people, she has blessed mount Mela of Vermio so as to place her throne there with all Her grace in order to commemorate the history of the first monastery in the new holy monastery. The institution bearing the same name worked with immense zeal for Virgin Mary's grace, it offered and it continues to offer a lot and that is why the praise addressed to it is great.

The restoration of the monastery of Pontus as a monument and the possibility to visit it is the connecting ring among bordering nations, that is why we should always keep in mind the peaceful suggestion of Apostle Paul "when we learn from the mistakes of the past we go on and we expand..." (Philip 3,14). History records the events of the past but under the contemporary conditions we should cultivate love, friendship, collaboration and mutual respect, from which we can only benefit.

Our writing of the history of the old and the new Sumela Monastery in a two-volume work is a worthy effort which contributes to the historical memory and revives the respect for our Holy Mother of all the people of Pontic origin and of all the Orthodox Christians.

We joyfully bless this present work, we congratulate you for the effort, we wish through our fathers and our Patriarch that you have the eternal protection of our Holy Mother's blessing.

November 14th, 2008
Fiery Besecher to God

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH mr. BARTHOLOMEW

LETTER OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF AMERIKA mr. ELPIDOFOROS



Dear Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis,

Throughout the arduous course of people's lives, moments of spiritual renewal are greatly needed. One such moment of spiritual renewal is the publication of the present work, which deals with the renowned icon of the Holy Stavropegial and Patriarchal Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos, “Panagia Soumela” of Pontus.

In the person of the Theotokos, nature and time are redefined — she united time with eternity, the created with the uncreated, the past with the present — making everything relevant, regardless of time and place. We fix our gaze upon her who's embrace is Wider than the Heavens, selflessly offering her abundant affection to all. Through God's love she reveals true humanity; she reveals God, His ineffable wisdom, and His immeasurable love for humankind. She gave birth to the body of Christ, a body which we are all members of. She gave birth to unblemished life, and after her dormition she was translated unto life.

Christians know the Theotokos intimately, not only from didactic and historical information but more importantly from personal experience. St. Silouan the Athonite, expressing the experience of the Church in the person of the Theotokos, writes:

“Without her compassion, my soul would have been lost long ago. In her good favor, however, she visited me and cautioned me not to sin. Her words were pleasant, calm, meek, and they touched my soul. Over forty years have passed and it is impossible for my soul to forget her sweet voice. I do not know how to thank the pure and merciful Mother of God; she is our helper before Him, her name alone makes one’s soul leap for joy. Heaven and earth rejoice in her love, a truly marvelous and incomprehensible event. She dwells in the heavens and ceaselessly beholds the glory of God, while at the same time not abandoning us, continually embracing all nations.”

Deep respect and affectionate intimacy are words which characterize our relationship with the person of the Theotokos. This relationship is forged even stronger through the prominent position which she holds in the liturgical life of the Church. The love and honor which we exhibit toward her is the measure by which we attain righteous and just solutions to the problems that society faces. The sacred mystery of the Theotokos, which spans throughout the centuries, is one that we reverently accept and offer praise and doxology for. Thus, we honor her unique person with odes of hymns and most importantly by living a life which is pleasing to God.

In the case of “Panagia Soumela,” her most revered and historic icon represents the trials and the tragic events endured by the Greeks of Pontus. This icon, therefore, stands as a firm support and foundation not only for the Greeks of Pontus, but for all people who face oppression by individuals who vehemently oppose and persecute peace.

It is our ardent hope and prayer that every person who reads this publication is granted of every good and perfect gift. We invoke up them the abundant mercy of God and the protection of “Panagia Soumela” the guardian and protectress of the Pontian people.

6 October 2020
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
With the blessings and wishes of the
ARCHBISHOP OF AMERIKA mr. ELPIDOFOROS

PANAGIA SUMELA" (What does it mean?)

Similarly to any other historical city that prides about its excellent, mostly religious, monuments and is considered both an emblem and a symbol of the city and of the whole nation, the capital city of the Komnenians, Trepizond, possessed , besides all others, its religious monuments, like the temple of Saint Eugenios, of the Golden Head and that of Saint Sophia. Being proud of its historical heritage the city also boasts about its historical monasteries; namely the monastery of Panagia Sumela, the monastery of Saint John of Vazelon and that of Saint George the Peristereote.

Among the afore mentioned monasteries the one that became the true symbol of the Greek people of Pontus, and a symbol of Pontus as a whole, is the Monastery of Panagia Sumela due to the wonder-working Icon that it hosts in its premises and the tremendous power that stemmed from it, leading to the salvation from national devastation.

When the words "Panagia Sumela" were or still are uttered by a person of Pontic origin the reference is not made solely to an Icon, or to a Monastery or even to a Church in a similar manner in which in hearing the word "Parthenon" we not only refer to the temple of Athena, or to a simple monument of Greek art but to a whole Hellenistic era and to a Greek miracle. The words "Panagia Sumela" embraces the whole history of the Greek Christians of the periphery. Its glories and its joys. Its creations, its religious elations, its National achievements, its songs, its legends, its spirit, its soul and its heart.

Only the complex notion of the name of the holy Trinity which is included in the name of "Saint Sophia" of Constantinople can be compared to the Multifaceted Idea that Panagia Sumela stands for in the eyes of the people of PONTUS. The words "Panagia Sumela" include the history and the existence of PONTUS. The icon of Panagia Sumela is the visible, the substantial, the tangible symbol and the emblem of PONTUS's history and existence.

As Saint Sophia of Constantinople and the Parthenon of Athens will never cease to stand as a multifaceted symbol, in the same manner "Panagia Sumela" will never vanish from the firmament of Hellenism.

Filon Ktenidis
Medical Doctor, owner of the New Monastery of Sumela
Greece. Pontiaki Estia Magazine, 1950.



Filon Ktenidis, medical doctor
From Kromni of Pontus
(1889-1963)



INTRODUCTION

Stories, legends and thousands of original testimonies related to the Icon of Virgin Mary and the Monastery of Sumela have been passed onto from one generation to the next for many centuries, composing their history.

Religious chants that glorify Her name and hundreds of poems, couplets, are heard with the accompaniment of the bitter sweet sound of the lyre, bringing us closer to the legends and the beliefs about “Virgin Mary” and highlighting the close relationship between Her and the Greek people of Pontic origin.

Many historians, scientists and researchers have written about the icon’s history and its traditions, wanting to present in the best possible way the long course of the “Holy Icon” and the “Monastery of Sumela” in Pontus, and what their presence there meant for the Greek people.

According to data and testimonies from the 18th and the 19th century by historians Kausokalivitis and Kiriakidis we had initially concluded that the Savaite monk Akakius is the one who first wrote the history of monks Barnabus and Sofronius from Athens in 680 A.D. in relation to the foundation of the monastery on mount Mela in Pontus.

More recent research, however, that places Akakius’s life in the 11th or the 13th century, since saint Athanasios the Athonite is mentioned in his writings. Provided it is validated, it gives prominence to the work of Ioannis Xifilinos from Trepizond, who became Patriarch of Constantinople, as the first writing known to us. In 1064 he wrote “About the basilica of the Sumela Monastery in Trepizond and the kings of Trepizond”.

The Patriarch of Jerusalem Dositheus, according to Satha, narrates the story that the tradition carries in relation to Selim Sultan, while he also describes the location of the Monastery of Sumela.

In 1600 Athanasios, metropolite of Trepizond, also called “Demon – dissolver”, wrote in relation to the Monastery of Sumela the “History of the Monastery of Sumela”. This manuscript, which had been kept in the monastery until 1775, was among the ones that were sent to Kausokalivitis, it was never returned and it is still missing.

In 1760 the archbishop Chaldia, Dionysus, wrote a historical account of the monastery along with the procession of saint Barnabus and saint Sofronius.

In the years that followed and particularly in 1770 the archimandrite Parthenios Metaxopoulos, who served in the Monastery of Sumela, an educated and spiritual man included the history of the monastery of Sumela entitled “About the Honourable Basilical Patriarchal Monastery of Sumela, a

pleasant narration”, in a book that was published in 1768 entitled “Christian teaching of the orthodox faith”.

Later on he appointed the task of writing the story about the ownership of the monastery and the procession of the monks Barnabus and Sofronius, who built the monastery on mount Mela, to the preacher and historian Neofitos Kausokalivitis, who lived in Stefanoupoli, Transylvania.



Epaminondas Kiriakidis journalist- author (1861-1939). Trifon Evaggelidis historian- author (1863-1941)

In order to achieve a more complete presentation of the ownership of the monastery, the fathers sent him codes and ancient manuscripts of the monastery, which unfortunately Kausokalivitis never returned and, thus, they are still missing.

The book was printed in 1775 in Leipzig and it was entitled. “The Divine and Sacred procession of our Holy and the God bearing fathers Barnabus and Sofronius from Athens and Saint Christopher, who served on mount Mela”.

Metaxopoulos mentions that the history of the monastery of Sumela has also appeared in the works of Sevastos Kiminitis and Georgios Trapezountios, on whose notes Lazaros Skrivias was based while writing the history of the Sumela monastery. Σεβαστός In 1760, the archbishop of Chaldia, Dionysus Kouzanos, wrote the history of the monastery and the procession of the holy fathers that was printed in 1769 in Bucharest.

In 1770 the hieromonk Nikodimos, who came from Fasida of Kolhida, also wrote about the history of the monastery. Ioannis Poutpoutas or Domninos and Nikolaos Velaras in 1768, who served as a secretary of the hegemonies of Hungary - Vlachia, namely Nikolaos and Konstantinos Mavrokordatos, have also written about the history of the monastery.

The works that followed by historians Fallmerayer in 1827, Ep. Kiriakidis under the order of the fathers of the holy monastery and was published in 1898 in Trepizond by Euklidis Georgiadis, Trifon Evaggelidis in 1899, Dim. Kabouroglou along with more recent works in relation to the history of the icon of Virgin Mary and of the monastery on mount Mela, due to the lack of additional data, they practically repeat what Kausokalivitis wrote in 1775 with some small alterations, mainly in relation to the exact date of the building of the monastery.

Apostolos Papadopoulos, in the catalogue of Greek manuscripts that he compiled in 1884 and it was published as an appendix in Ep. Kiriakidis's work in 1898, also testifies the lack of reliable data about the monastery, were destroyed due to weather conditions, poor maintenance and thefts of their greatest part.

Moreover, in 1898 Ep. Kiriakidis, in his work "The history of the Holy Basilica Patriarchal Monastery of her Holiness the God Bearer, Sumela", particularly states that "although much data related to the foundation of the monastery had been kept in codes in the monastery until 1850, this data has been lost or destroyed".

The case of Minas Minoidis (konastantinos Minas or Minou), a philologist from Edessa, who studied hundreds of manuscripts of the Monastery and Mount Athos during the 18th century is characteristic.

Instead of returning these documents to their place of origin, he handed them over to the French National library. Similar is the case of the Moschovit philosopher and author, Fedor Ivanovic Uspenskij, who carried manuscripts taken from the Monastery to Russia.

In his work "Biography" he mentions that when the historical account of the monastery was published by Kausokalivitis in 1775, there was a handwritten code from which the researcher could draw much information about its history.

There was also a second code of an anonymous author along with the code of hieromonk Nikodimos, who could surely offer more clues about the monastery. Unfortunately, all these historical documents that were among the ones that were sent to Kausokalivitis were never returned in their initial place and they are still missing. That is how monumental historical resources relevant to the history and the role of the Holy Monastery were lost.



Hieromonk Neofitos Kausokalivitis (1689-19884). Fedor I. Uspenskij (1845-1928). Russian historian Academic. Photo of 1927 from the book “The History of the monastery of Vazelon”. (publ. 2007 Thessaloniki, Kyriakidis bros).

Undoubtedly many others have written about the history of the monastery throughout the centuries like the metropolite of Trepizond and later archbishop of Athens in 1933 in his work “The church of Trepizond”, historians, researchers, novelists and many worshippers. In my opinion, however, although none of these works is of a particular interest, they all include descriptions of the history of the Icon and the Monastery or various incidents related to the periods examined.

Presumably, if the data that existed four -five centuries ago was saved until the present day, they could substantiate and enlighten the history of the Icon and the Monastery, the legends and its traditions.

Consequently, now that all of the above is lost, it is extremely difficult to put together the pieces of the broken chain of history without the proper “tools” and the necessary “guides”, and hope that he or she will present a fully substantiated and complete piece of work.

I tried to cover this gap with my works “Sumela, the Refugee Pontic Holy Mother”, volume A and B (988 pages) that I presented in 2010 and “The echo of Pontus’s Bell” (465 pages) in 2012. Due to the volume of these works and after many requests expressed by my compatriots, I attempt with this present work to present the 17 century long history (386-2020) of the icon and the Sumela monastery.

Regardless of all of the adversities already mentioned it is certain that the course of the historical icon of Virgin Mary from Greece to mount Mela in Pontus and its return as a refugee in metropolitan Greece 17 centuries, is tightly connected to the history of the Greek people of Pontus throughout the centuries.



From a litany of the holy icon of Sumela. August 15th at the new monastery, which is located on mount Vermio, at the village of Kastania in the prefecture of Imathia. (Archive: Michael Pappous).

Thus, a universal symbol acquired a National dimension. It became a symbol of the cultural diversity of a population. It rebaptized the historical memory and it became a lively monument of pontic history.

The Greek people of Pontus, after they embraced it on its relocation in 386 A.D. on mount Mela, and bestowed it with regal honours, they worshipped her more than any other orthodox saint.

And, in Her turn, she gave back that love as she stood by their side as an assistant, a comforter and a protector through their difficulties and a guide in their creative presence and their struggles.

It became their point of reference and their symbol, it became the bright beacon through the dark years of slavery. It contributed in the spread of the Greek culture, the civilization and the spirit of orthodoxy in thousands of young Pontic people.

After the Lausanne treaty after the exchange of population in 1923, the relocation of the Greek people of Pontus in Greece, their descendants, people that had been expatriated from their homes with their families and their children, felt the need to narrate the history of the monastery of Virgin Mary and to place there their protecting “Pontic Virgin Mary”, along with their daily struggle for survival in the areas where the refugees found shelter in Greece.

Through all these years the nostalgia for their historical homeland, Pontus, remained alive in the hearts of the first generation refugees, it grew stronger after the creation of the Panagia Sumela Association in Thessaloniki in 1950 by the visionary Kromnean doctor Filonas Ktenidis.

Later on, through the initiatives of the Administrative Councils of the Panhellenic Confederation of Pontic Associations and the Holy Institution “Panagia Sumela”, accompanied by pontic institutions and other representatives from all over the world, numerous attempts were made for the concession of the relevant permission by the Turkish governments for the reopening of the monastery

These initiatives resulted in the concession of the relevant permission by the Turkish government of Mr. Tayyip Erdogan to the Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew which enabled the realization of a religious service in the historical monastery of Panagia Sumela in Pontus in August 2010.

Stefanos P. Tanimanidis
Honorary President of P.C.P.A.

PONTUS

According to Greek mythology, PONTUS impersonates the liquid element of nature and appears as the son of Mother Earth and the father of Nireas. While for Homer it represents the sea, the open ocean, the wide, restless sea, for poets and novelists it represents the wide and open sea that alludes to certain seas.

The definition of North Turkey and the sea that embraces it with the term "PONTUS" was and continues to be more of a political rather than a geographical characterization of the region. It brings, to say the least, to the descendants of millions of Greek people who lived in these areas not only memories of the glorious history that was written by them and the culture that was created through the works of art for three thousand years by their predecessors, but also thousands of tragic days and nights that they had to experience.

The "Black Sea" is a deep sea of 466.200 square kilometres. One third of PONTUS is about 1840 metres deep, while its biggest known depth has been estimated to 2.210 metres. From its north and northeast it washes upon Ukraine and from its northwest upon Russia and Georgia.



Apart from the numerous rivers of PONTUS, the rivers that open into it are Danube, Dnieper, Dniestr, as well as the river of Don from Europe.

The Greek people migrated in its region in the 8th century carrying along a civilization of centuries, which was kept intact in the beginning, along with their social and political organisation.

During this period of time they came into contact with disputatious and horse feeding nomads, plain stockbreeders, vicious woodlanders, peaceful farmers, who had no cities, no dwellings, did not know how to write, had no relationship with the sea or the trade or the laws of the market, and contributed in a peaceful manner in their civilizing, their organisation into communities and cities that they had created themselves, but also to their development.

Thanks to their creative presence they transformed the Inhospitable, Black , with its inaccessible beaches, and without any islands "PONTUS" to a "hospitable" region. While it was unknown to them it became a friendly sea, a "Greek lake". They connected its history to the political, economical as well as the cultural history of Eastern Europe.

Today, in the region of the historical PONTUS, wherever the sight may drift or the steps may lead, one will surely notice abandoned buildings, schools and monuments, creations of tantalizing cultural struggles of Hellenistic, Byzantine and post-Byzantine times, during the years of obscurantism and barbarity, destroyed and abandoned monasteries and churches that were built by our ancestors in honor of the saints and martyrs of our religion.

But wherever the foot may step it will always stand on land molded with the blood that was shed by the people who suffered in defense of their origin and their religion while one may lavish through his own two eyes what his ancestors had created for three thousand years in this region.

Shiver and weird memories overwhelm the pilgrim who visits the cities and the villages of PONTUS, upon which profuse Christian blood was shed and transmitted in the surrounding area.



PONTUS OF THE LEGENDS AND THE HISTORICAL REALITY

There are numerous opinions regarding the exact date that the Greek people settled in PONTUS:

According to the historian Fallmerayer the existence of proto-Greeks in PONTUS has been detected as early as 2.000 B.C. when various hindoeuropean tribes from Caucasus flooded the European region and part of them settled in the northeastern part of PONTUS.

There are also those who claim that the Greek navigators, having previously conquered the coast of the Aegean Sea, moved to PONTUS in the 8th century B.C. (during the second biggest migration wave of Greek people) from Miletus.

In Greek mythology one may encounter a series of elements that form serious evidence of Greek presence through the centuries. The story of the Titan Prometheus who offers fire to humans and finds himself tied up in the mountains of Caucasus until his salvation from Hercules, who was of Pontic origin, along with the presence and the story of the famous Amazons, unfold in the region of the Thermodonta river west of Inoe.



The legends of Frixos and Elli, Jason's Argonautic expedition from Iolkos to Kolhida in order to get hold of the Fleece, examples of the restless Greek spirit which seeks wealth, glory and adventure take place northeast of PONTUS in the land of the Colchians;

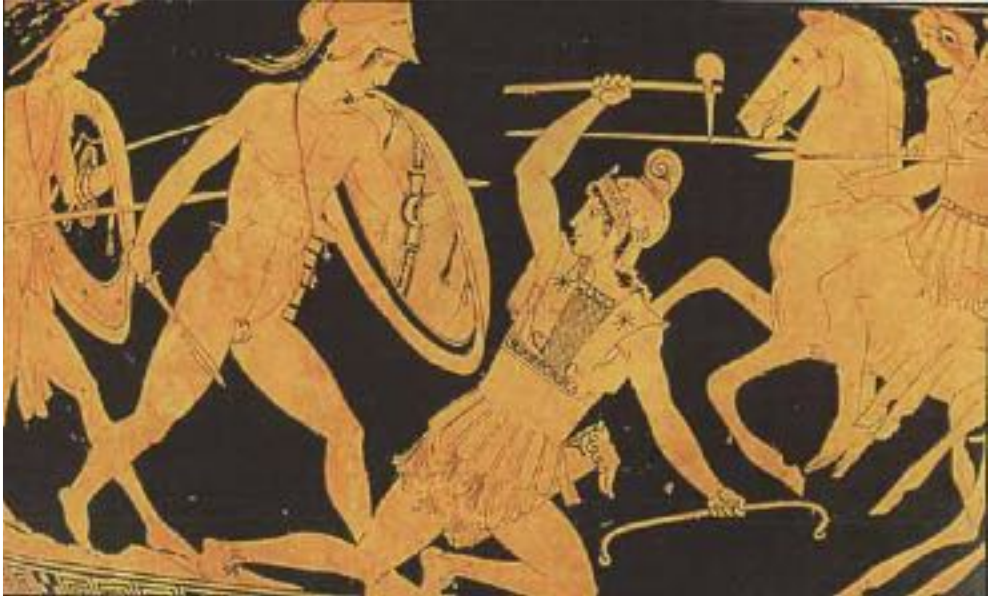
The wanderings of Ulysses who reaches the land of the Cimmerians; Orestis and Pyladis's arrival in the land of PONTUS after their attempt to steal the statue of Artemis from its own temple in the peninsula of Tavrida, hiding themselves away from the king of Tavrida, Theoantas;

The assistance they receive from the king's daughter , Igifeneia; all of these are legends of Greek popular conviction and , therefore, it is needless to say that they take place in the Greek region. They confirm the expansion of these trading routes by the Greek people while they also confirm the hellenicity of the region of PONTUS.



The archaeological findings on the coastal cities of North and South Black Sea PONTUS, despite the limited time and space of the excavations that have taken place so far in these regions, provide the primary sources of information that place the presence of Greek people in PONTUS as far back in time as 1000 B.C.

The migration of the Greek people of metropolitan Greece in the Black Sea was assisted by the idiosyncratic nature of the financial and political development of the Greek cities of the archaic era, since the possession of vast areas of land by the noblemen did not leave any room for a luxurious life on the part of small farmers.



Scene from an amazon battle on red-figured pottery, 450 B.C. Theseus attacks against Amazon Andromache. On the right side the queen of the Amazons Ippoliti with her companions. (British Museum).



Prometheus bound

This is why they leave their land and "migrate" in these regions in order to create a new homeland.

One may also assume that their settlement in the aforementioned regions was based on the merchant-marine properties of these areas under the guidance of the navigators merchants who occasionally visited them in quest of fishing, grain products and ores of gold, silver and iron that could be found in abundance in PONTUS, along with the control of the roads that led from the coasts to the inland of Minor Asia.

Regardless of the exact era in which the Greek people migrated to Pontus, they are called mice*¹, they meet other peoples in the areas they settle and they communicate their culture.

Since their early presence in Pontus they develop shipping and trade, they create a series of cities and communities and they transform the inhospitable Pontus into a hospitable area, into a Greek lake.

They develop rich cultural, educational and financial action. On the north, the south, the east and the west of Pontus these settlers and the cities they founded developed into vital trading and cultural centres, they became the umbilical cord and the connecting ring between Metropolitan Greece and their new homeland for many centuries.

They first built Sinope which is located in an advantageous position due to its natural port, and then , with the help of the new settlers from Athens, Megara, Arcadia maybe even from many other areas of Greece, they built Ermonasa, Amisos and Trepizond in 756 B.C. Two centuries after their initial settlement, the temporary trading stations become permanent residential centres.

The settlements - cities that were created maintained the characteristics of their metropolitan origin in the early centuries. The inhabitants preserved the customs and the traditions, they worshipped the twelve Gods, they followed the structural identity and the institutions of their metropolis. Basic element for their survival and their prosperity was the mutual provision of assistance and the good relationships that these cities developed among themselves.

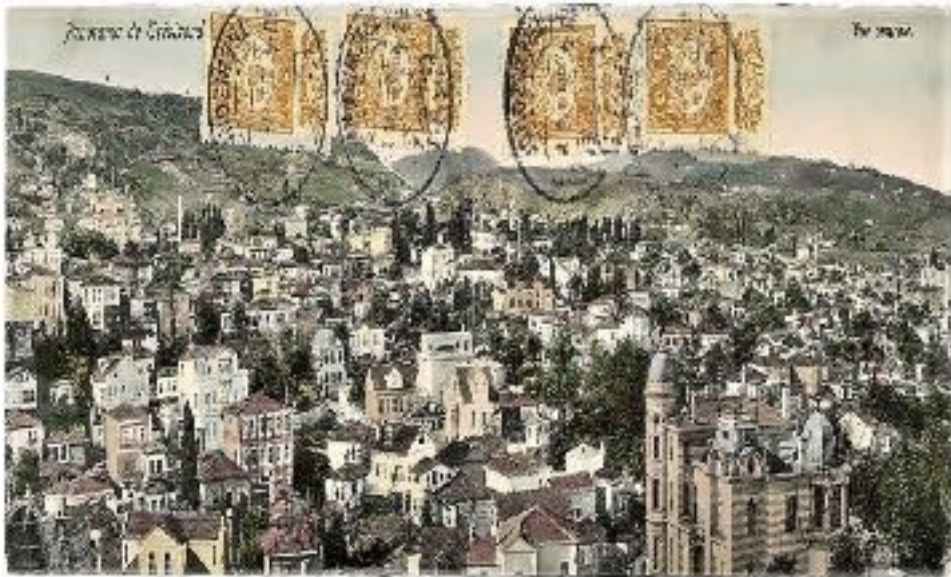
* ¹ The Greek equivalent of the English word "mice" is "pontikia"



View of Sinope. Epochal gravure. (Archive P.C.P.A.)



View of Trepizond from an old French Epochal gravure. (Archive P.C.P.A.)



View of Trepizonde's port. Epochal Foto..



Cerasonte. Epochal gravure. (Archive: Thalassa Karadeniz, Lena Savvidou).

Diogene from Pontus, born in Sinope. The greatest cynical philosopher of antiquity. The cynical, refusing Socrates's mild endoscopic method of "knowing oneself", believed in a revolutionary reconstruction of society and people. The statue represents the philosopher with the hubcap of beggary in his hands and with a dog by his side. Height 0,54 m., along with the adobe pedestal, restored (Villa Albani, Rome)



The Metropolitane of Nikaia Vissarion and later Cardinal of Rome, who contributed greatly to the Revival of the West.



4th century B.C. silver coin from Sinope. 16 centuries afterwards the one-headed eagle depicted on the coin that was included in the flag of the Empire of Trebizond. (Archive: P.C.P.A.) On the bottom, coin from the Mitridates era. (Archive: Stefanos Tanimanidis)





The School “Frontistirion” of Trepizond and the last Metropolitan Cathedral of Saint Gregorios Nissis, 1911. The cathedral has been demolished by the Turkish authorities. (Postcard, archive: Pontic Youth of Greece).



The semi-high school of Kerasounta, adorned with classical features of Greek architecture, at the district that presently hosts a Turkish school.



The last graduates of the “Frontistirion” with their teachers. From the right side: Risar Teramen (French), fil. Chimonidis, Il. Nikolaidis, Dim. Chrisoulidis, Isr. Vasiliadis (principle), George Strouthopoulos, Ag. Fostiropoulos, Dim. Charalambidis. The graduates are standing (from the left side): Efth. Simeonidis, Alk. Papazov, I. Zachariadis, K. Simeonidis, G. Kofidis, E. Chimonidis, G. Chatzopoulos).



Alkis Kapagiannidis among executives of the Kapagiannidis’s bank in Trepizond during the early years of the 20th century. (Archive: P.C.P.A.)



The football team of Pontus College "ANATOLIA" of Merzifounta. (Archive: P.C.P.A.)



Sports team of young people at the School "Frontistirion" of Trepizond (Archive: P.C.P.A.)



The cathedral of Saint Sofia in Trepizond. Built in 1238 -1263by emperor Manuel I Komnenos the Great with hagiographies of special technique inside. Today it is a museum but attempts are made for its transformation into a mosque. On the bottom, the female monastery of Saint John in 1893, at the village of Imera (present name: Olucak) of Pontus. (Post Card –Benevolent brotherhood of Imereos).



ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΩΑΝΝΗ, 1893

Village Imera (Olucak). The Woman Monastery of Saint John, 1893



Festivities in Trepizond for the voting of the constitution of the neoturks 1908. (Archive P.C.P.A.)



The philharmonic of Trepizond in dark costumes and hats and the philharmonic of Amisos in white costumes and fez in an official visit at the district of Trepizond, Soouk Sou. (Archive P.C.P.A.).



Women costumes of Trepizond. (Archive: Committee of Pontic Studies).



The family of Papagiorgis Tanimanidis's brothers from village Imera of Pontus.



Ms. Marianthi Mellidou , dressed in a western – like manner at the beginning of the century. (Photography “Black Sea”, Kakoulis’ brothers. (Archive: Stef. Tanimanidis).



A Pontic family dressed in a western – like manner.



Family of George Akritidis. His son Alexander (sitting 1st from the left), was convicted by the Turkish independence tribunals and hanged in Amasya, Turkey in September 1921



Architect, Dimitrios Fillizis



A young lady of Trepizond

THE ICON OF VIRGIN MARY BY EVANGELIST LUKE

« Next to the same altar, (In the temple of Parthenon of Athens) in some chapel, there lies on the right side of the altar, an icon with the figure of Virgin Mary of our Lord, which has been painted by the hand of Evangelist Luke. This icon is adorned with small bags filled with jewelry and many other valuable stones and is kept safely with a key".

*In relation to the icon of Virgin Mary, painted by the hands of Evangelist Luke
Nicola Martoni*

Many views have been expressed as to the person and the exact date in which this icon was painted, the story, the adventures, the fame and the miracles of the icon of Virgin Mary the "Guide" , who was later called "Athenian" or "Athiniotissa" *² , "Gorgoepikoos" *³ , "Pantanassa" *⁴ and "Sumela" .

The Savaite Monk Akakius, during the 7th or 13th century, the patriarch of Constantinople Xifilinos (1065), deacon Neofitos Kausokalivitis (1775), historian Jakob Fallmerayer (1827), historian Epaminondas Kiriakidis (1898) and many others.

Unfortunately the sources upon which these writers of the story of the icon presumably based their views have been lost due to numerous reasons.

Thus, today the story of N. Kausokalivitis about the ownership of the Monastery is the one that provides the greatest amount of information in relation to the monks Barnabas and Sofronius.

In accordance to tradition , and to Kausokalivitis as well, the wonder working icon of Virgin Mary of the Monastery of the Mountain of Mela, in historical Pontus, is one of the three or , according to some, one of the five icons that was painted on wood by Evangelist Luke, watching with his own two eyes Virgin Mary with little Jesus in her arms . As tradition states he kept this icon on him until the last days of his life due to the immense respect he felt towards it.

*² Athinotissa = from Athens

* ³Gorgoepikoos = quick helper/assistant

* ⁴ Pantanassa = queen of all

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ICON OF “PANAGIA SOUMELA” AS IT IS TODAY

The director of the Byzantine museum of Athens, Professor Georgios Sotiriou, gives the following characteristics regarding the icon of Virgin Mary, which he studied during the time it was kept in the museum among other heirlooms: the Gospel of Saint Christopher and the Cross of Manuel Komninos.

Later on he published his findings. More recent research conducted by the AUTH professor, the late C. Moutsopoulos, and the advance of digital scanning, the characteristics of the icon are described in the following way:

The Icon of the Godbearer is of the Hodegetria type (0,3 X 0,25m.). It is divided in two parts. It has suffered so much damage that there is no sign of the figures of the faces depicted on it (Virgin Mary and baby Jesus). The outlines of the Godbearer and Jesus are discernible. These outlines are emphasized by the silver and golden plated case that surrounds them.

There one can see additional the inscriptions IC. XC. MP. ΘΥ. Η COYMEΛΗΘΗCA (Jesus Christ Mother of God the Soumeliotissa). There are also some spiral decorations, similar to the ones found in the manuscripts of codes of the 12th and 14th century (codices e Vaticanis selecti Yol. I. ROMA. Λ/v. 85, 87, 91 etc).

Linings similar to the ones used in Soumeliotissa can be found in two icons of the Hodegetria type that are kept in Moscow (Kondakov Konografia Bogomaten vol. 2nd Petroupoli Ag 15 pg. 202).

The icon is surrounded by a silver golden plated case, with icons, inscriptions and valuable stones, dating back to the 1700, with a crown that is independent from the icon. Its dimensions are:

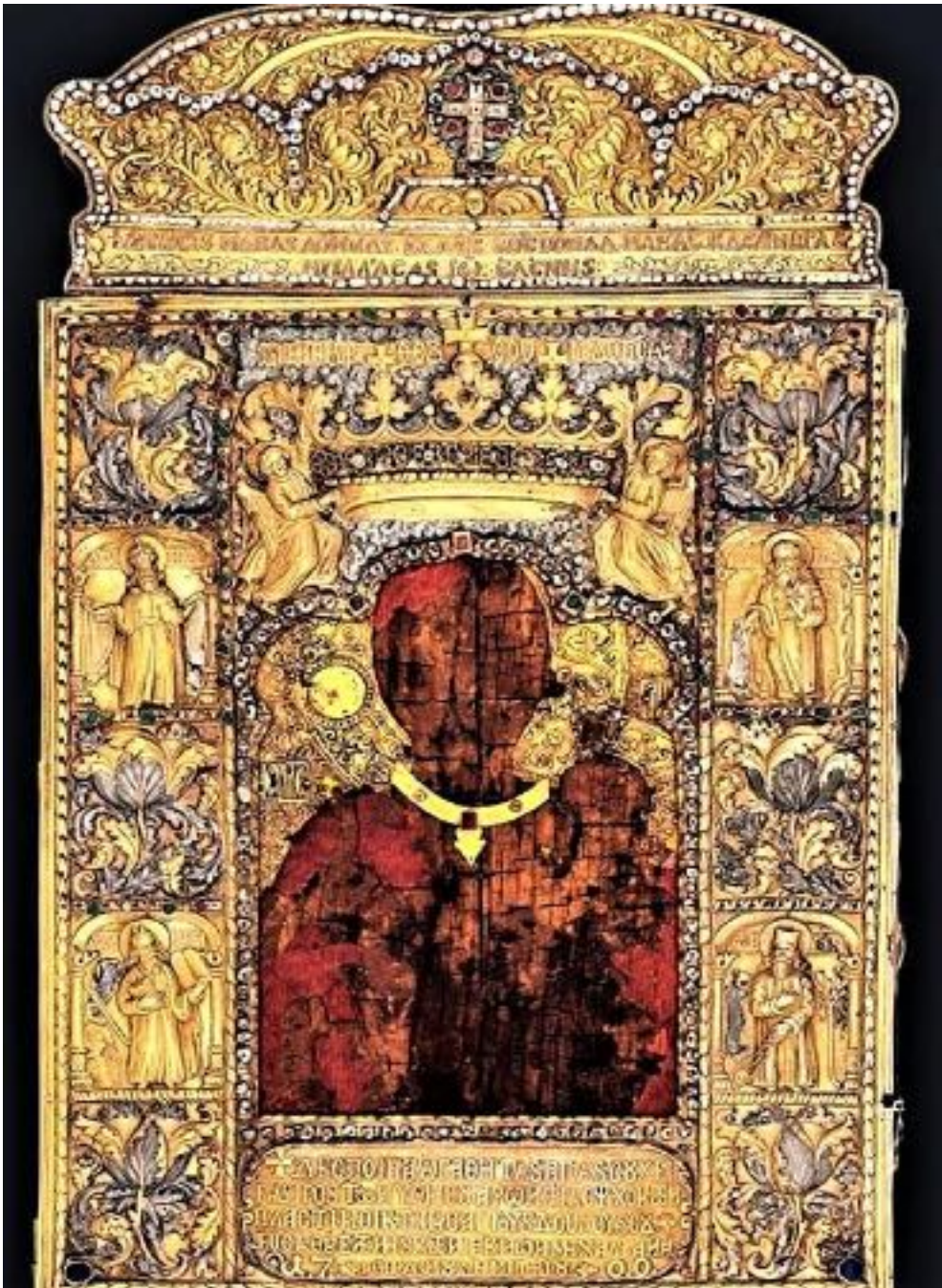
Height 0,40, width 0,32, thickness 0,055 and the dimensions of the crown are,

Height 0,12, width 0,32, the same thickness.

There are four representations printed on its side; namely the ones of David, Hisaia, Moeses and Aaron. The crown is held by two angels, while on the right and left side of the rest of the case there printed flower decorations. On the upper part there is the inscription:



The historical icon of Sumela without the second protective layer, as it is temporarily kept in the new monastery in Greece. (Photo Archive: Panagia Sumela Association).



The historical icon of Sumela with the second protective layer, as it is contemporarily kept in the new monastery in Greece. (Photo Archive: Panagia Sumela Association).

“MOTHER OF GOD SOUMELIOTISSA” and on the lower part «BENEVOLENT MOTHER OF GOD RAISE YOUR HANDS TO YOUR SON IN PRAYER TO BLESS YOUR SERVANTS EFSTATHIOS, ELENI AND THEIR CHILDREN MICHAEL, ANASTASIOS AND DIMITRIOS 1700.

On the three angles there three big blue valuable stones while the fourth one is missing. A strand of valuable stones surround the representations, from which only six red and twenty eight green stones are saved today. Additionally there are seven (7) daisies on the crown, forty seven (47) on the frames and a hundred (100) around the opening of the icon. The thickness of the case is adorned with golden flower decorations.

The crown has imprinted flower decorations and there is also the inscription:

“PLEA OF MARIA DOMNA, GEORGIOS VOEVONDAS, MARIA KASSANDRA BALASSAS IOANNOU ELENI”.

In the middle there is a cross with six (6) white stones and four smaller red stones on the extremes. The Cross has four smaller red stones on the extremes. The Cross had four radius made of four red valuable stones and enamel decorations. It also has a strand of pearls: the bigger ones are a hundred and fifty one (151) and the smaller ones are a hundred and seventy one (171).

The icon and its silver golden plated case , its “shirt”, have been surrounded by a wooden case where they have been placed for greater safety.

“Mount Mela hosts the grace of the Holy Icon
Of the God Bearer Virgin Mary
Which has been narrated by the hands of Luke.
And the sacred remnants purified,
Of Sofronius, Barnabus, Christofer
Who pray to our Lord on our behalf. ” ⁵

5. Excerpt from Parthenios Metaxopoulos’s verses ,
“The Divine and Holy Procession of Saint Barnabus and Sofronius”, pg. 22,
Kirakidis Bros S.A. publications “ *throughout the centuries*”

THE COURSE OF THE ICON OF VIRGIN MARY BY EVANGELIST LUKE

After the death of Evangelist Luke in the town of Thebes where he was found, the icon was taken by his pupil Ananias along with some of his belongings. Driven by his respect and his love for it he started talking about the miracles and the grace that it revealed to the people and he placed in a community pilgrimage in Thebes.

According to tradition, this is where the miracles of Virgin Mary began. Ill people, handicapped, blind, invalids who came from the surrounding areas to visit the icon bearing faith to her grace they were cured. The people related the miracles of the holy icon to the grace of the Son of God and the blessing of Virgin Mary. When Evangelist Luke, according to tradition, gave the first two icons he had painted to her while he was in Jerusalem and asked her if she liked them, Virgin Mary said:

“From now on I will be blessed by the generations to come” and turning her head solemnly towards the icons with her authority as the mother of God’s son she said to them: **“May the grace that flows within me follow you”**. When she was given the third icon, she took it in her hands and looked at it carefully saying: **«May my grace be with you»**.

For unknown reasons the icon was transferred to Athens later on. This is the icon that has been referred to by the historian and academic Dimitrios Kabourogloy as “Athiniotissa”. Wanting to honor the holy icon, also called “Great Virgin Mary” the people of Athens built a temple of refined beauty where it was placed. It is most likely that this temple was near the arcade of Andrianos, a building dating back to the 4th century, which was demolished after the great fire of 1855. According to another version, the Christians of Athens placed it in the temple of Virgin Mary close to the Ancient Parthenon, in order to honor it:

“The aborigines built a unique temple away from the city where they restored the holy icon and they named it Athenian” (Kafsokalivitis, Metaxopoulos, Kabouroglou)

The icon that was especially honoured by the people was given the name “Pantanassa” and “Loukiani” by the queens who took off their crown in order to pay their respects.¹

The name “Soumela” which was given to it later on and is still used today is a combination of the name of mountain Melas (black) and the term of

⁶ From the narration of the great Grammarian of the 16th century Kafsokalivitis about the Eastern route of the icon through land and sea. “The beauty and the attractiveness of Panagia Soumela” by Christos Koulaouzides.

Pontian origin “Sou” which means “on the” leading to the phrase “To the Mela” which was soon replaced by Soumela.

Regardless of the various names that the people gave to the icon, it is true that no other icon or monastery has ever been honored so much by emperors, sultans, tsars, hegemones, kings and governors of various countries.

No other icon had such allure and radiance all over the world nor had it become a symbol of reference for a whole nation. The icon and the monastery of Sumelain Pontus and in Greece have been studied by historians, byzantinologists and archeologists.



The historical icon of Sumela with the second protective layer.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE MONASTERY OF PANAGIA SUMELA IN PONTUS



Trebzon 1960-65. Yillar Silmele Monastir

Trebzonde - Kuleler Alundaki Şehir

“Wandering around the deserts, the mountains, the caves and the holes of land“ . Pr. Evr.11,38

The patriarchal Holy Monastery of Panagia Sumela is located in the geographical premises of contemporary Turkey, about 46 kilometres south the coastal city of Trepizond, near the Matsuka district in Pontus, and the villages of Skalita and Larahani.

According to tradition, in the year 380 B.C. - during the reign of Theodosius the Great in Byzantine- the icon mysteriously "flew" away from the place it was kept in Athens towards the East and was placed northeast of Pontus. Later, while the pilgrims were looking for it, it appeared "in the form of a dream" before the eyes of the unmarried priest Vasilios from Athens, who was the son of two religious and respectful people, Contantine and Anna and his nephew, who he was staying with, deacon Sotirichos.

Tradition states that Vasilios dreamt of a beautiful woman standing on the right side of the altar, surrounded by thousands of young people dressed up in white, saying to him:



The Monastir of Sumela . Xylography of the French painter Francois Canedi.19th century. «Pontus, engravings, maps, coins», Tasos Kyriakidis . publ. Kyriakidis Bros, Thessaloniki 2008.

"Vasilios, wake up quickly, with your nephew Sotirichos, and when you abandon your possessions, you should become Monks. And you should be named Barnabas, while your nephew should be named Sofronius", and when she explained him that she was Virgin Mary, she promised to be by his side throughout his life.

The next day, when the two men visited the place in which the holy icon of Virgin Mary was kept in Athens, in order to pay their respects and pray, they heard a voice that called them to follow the route to Pontus.



Saint Barnabus and Saint Sofronius. (Copperplate). Representation of the inauguration of the temple of Panagia Sumela, made by monk Par. Metaxopoulos in 1775.

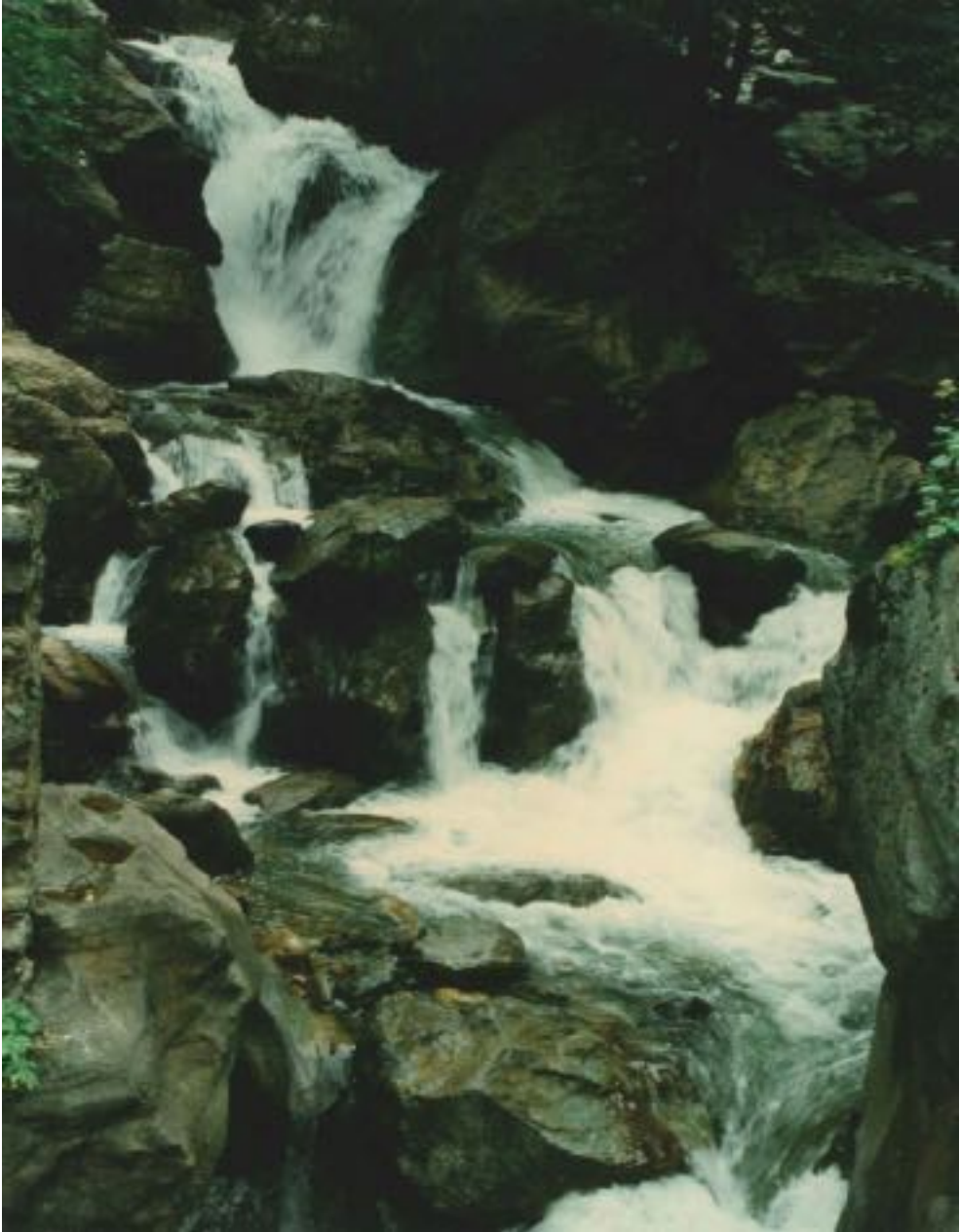


The waters of Pixitis river that cross the valley of mount Melas.

“I precede, my children, as I said earlier, and wherever I see you from mount Mela, I will always be with you”

Upon hearing the words of Virgin Mary they watched Her heavenly ascendance, looking at the Icon that was held by two Angels, taken out of the church premises and , “walking to the East”, drifting away into the clouds.





Raging torrents in mount Melas, The forested areas filled with black pines, fir trees, Where the monastery of Panagia Soumela was built. beechtrees, planes, dogwood and azaleas on mount Mela, where the Sumela monastery was built.

Based solely on their faith in God and their love for Virgin Mary the two monks travelled for three years facing trials and hardships.

They came in touch with other monks in Athens, in Corinthus, in Meteora, in Larisa, in Thessaloniki. They paid their respects to Saint Dimitrios's cathedral, they visited Chalkidiki, Mount Athos, where they stayed for a few months until their departure for Maronia in Thrace.

Walking from Maronia through Redestos they arrived in Efessos, in Smyrne, they went to Mytilene and from there, after they boarded a ship, they reached Constantinople. After they had stayed there for a few days, they set off for Pontus and after walking for 13 days, they arrived in Trepizond.

They found a warm home in the houses of the Greek people who had been living for centuries in the coasts of the Black Sea, they paid their respects to Virgin Mary the Golden Head and the head of the protector of Trepizond Saint Eugene and then they walked towards the inland of Pontus.

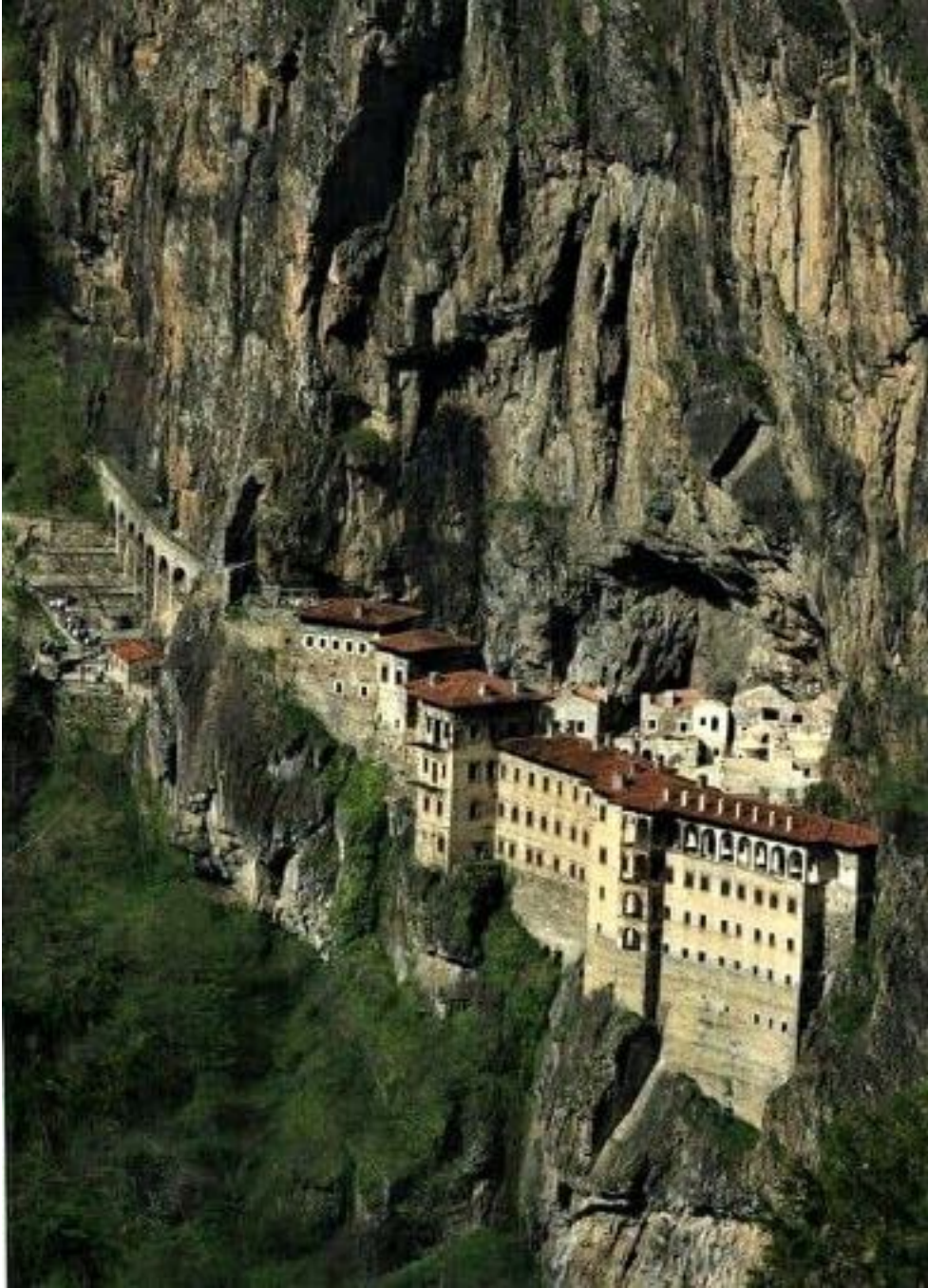
As soon as they passed Karias, namely the modern "Tzevisluk" of Turkey and they reached the point where three mountain ranges converge and two rivers merge their waters they, according to tradition, found shelter in the home of a friendly peasant who offered them fish. He also explained to them that he had caught the fish himself that same morning in the river of Pixitis, whose sources begin their journey from the mountain of Mela.

Upon hearing the name of the mountain, the two monks left their food and begged the peasant to show them the way to the mountain of Mela. The hospitable peasant explained that they had to follow the flowing direction of Pixitis in order to reach the mountain of Mela. Thus, the next day they went to the foothills of the vertical and imposing mountain of Mela.

After a long and exhausting effort in a forest that no one had ever stepped foot on until that moment, without any paths to cross, they managed to climb to the peak of the mountain. Suddenly they saw a cave. Tradition mentions that although they had found the cave, it was impossible to access it, since they had difficulty climbing from the point they were and were already left without any strength.

Being left without any other alternative the prayed once again to the Holy Mother, asking her to give them the strength to overcome this last difficulty. That moment a big fir tree that was between the cave and the point the two men were standing, leaned gently on their side, connecting them with the peak of the mountain.

Getting closer to the peak of the mountain 1.063 metres high, they discovered the entrance of the great alcove. When they tried to get into it, hundreds of swallows, startled by the presence of human beings, flew over their heads leaving the warmth of the cave forever.



The monastery of Virgin Mary on mountain Mela.
(Photo archive: P.C.P.A.).



The monastery of Ioannis Vazelonas as it used to be. (Archive: P.C.P.A.).

At that same time, as traditions states, the monks received a golden glow on their faces. Entering the depth of the cave they saw in ecstasy the icon of Madonna upon a rock.

There upon the mountain's alcove, feeding themselves on wild grass that could be found in the area, the two monks cleaned the place for 17 days and nights in order to make it accessible and inhabitable.

Tradition also mentions that while the monks were striving to find ways to build the Monastery, divine providence appears in the form of a dream before the eyes of Prester John the Vazelon, the abbot of the monastery (which is located near the villages of Sahnoi and Thersa) and commands him:

“Don’t say that you have heard the voices on the mount. Come to our rescue and don’t go back on your word”.

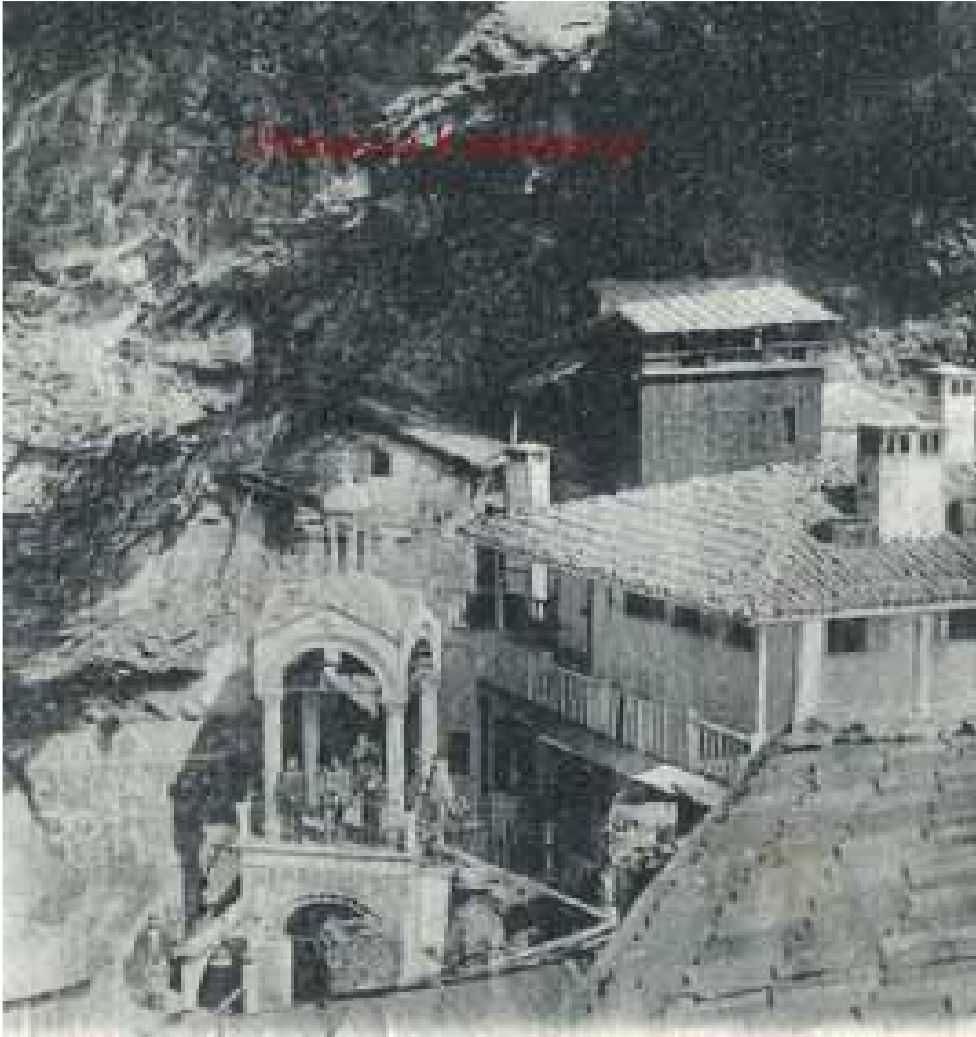
The abbot then orders monks Barnabas, Ioustinos and Nikitas to load two donkeys with food and to set off on their quest for the two monks. Walking under strenuous conditions the monks managed to reach the cave where the icon of Holy Mary lay. They paid their respects to Her grace, they handed the food to the monks and then they returned to Vazelonas Monastery where they informed their abbot.



The holy water of the Sumela monastery. (Digital photo archive: Gilmaz Turan).

Prior to that and after many days of praying while struggling to find water, the two monks saw water running from the stones that used to be anhydrous in the very same location where the icon of Holy Mary was found. In the meantime, the voice of Virgin Mary the Mother of God was heard as if it was coming out of the Icon:

"Here, you are offered water by a dry stone, which is not only for your own needs but it will also cure and cover any passion of the people who will be coming to this stone in deep faith ".



The Sumela monastery pinned on mount Mela of the internal part of the Sumela monastery. Epochal historical Pontus. (Photo St. Tanimanidis Photo, 1908. Archive: Pontic Youth of Greece).

From that moment on and for 16 centuries these holy 5 drops of clean water have never ceased to drop every single day, within a natural basin that had been formed, from a height of about 60 metres.



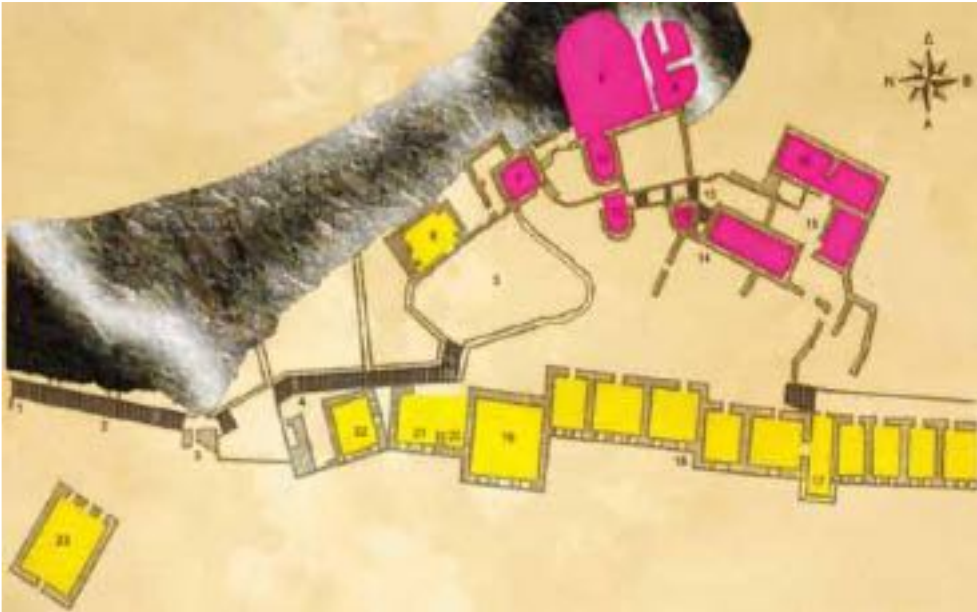
Visit at the Sumela monastery by the metropolitane of Trepizond Chrysanthos, 1916. (Archive: P.C.P.A.).

The healing powers of this holy water have made the Monastery world famous, not only to the Christians of the region, but to the muslims as well who continue to visit it and ask for Holy Mary's blessing. It is during those times that the word was spread to the villages that surrounded the mountain of Mela where the two monks had found shelter in its peaks and, thus, the peasants run instinctively to their rescue.

Thus, with the additional help of the monks of the Monastery of Vazelon, the two monks built the first cell on the left side of the staircase that is located in the Monastery.

This first temple that was dedicated to Archangel Michael, was renovated from time to time and it was preserved until the early 20th century (1930). As the icon of the Holy Mother acquired an impeccable fame and thousands of worshippers started to visit the place in honor of Her grace, many monks created the commune of the monastery. In their effort to provide accommodation to the numerous worshippers the monks built a guest room in the valley bellow the Monastery.

FLOOR PLAN OF THE SUMELA MONASTERY COMPLEX



1. The Aqueduct of the monastery. It was built thanks to the subsidy of a respectable Christian from Trepizond. It carried water from a mountainous source to the internal of the monastery. The works were completed in 1840, under the order of about Dionysus, when the adjacent tank that is still present today was built.
2. The stairs at the entrance. 67 stairs lead to the entrance of the monastery.
3. The entrance of the monastery.
4. The descending stairs of the monastery.
5. The courtyard of the monastery.
6. The kitchen of the monastery.
7. The holy water of the monastery.
8. The cavernous cathedral carved on the rock's alcove.
9. The catechumens' area.
10. The underground of the Holy temple. Subsequent extension. It was created with the extension of the cathedral, while it has been decorated with three times, from the 15th until the 19th century.
11. The Archangels Temple. The first temple, according to tradition, that was built by the owners of the monastery, Barnabus and Sofronius, prior to the construction of the Temple of Virgin Mary.
12. The campanile. It was built in the 19th century with the sponsorship of a Christian.

13. The Chapel of the Holy Cross, which is located under the campanile and it includes some hagiographies of exquisite beauty.

14. The Altar of the monastery.

15. The confessional of the monastery.

16. Inside the monastery, besides the central cathedral, there 9 chapels built in a climax of an upward direction on the rock.

17. The porch of the monastery with an exquisite view.

18. The four-storey building on the rock that hangs from the vertical precipice. It was built in 1864 and it consists of 72 cells. The view from the internal part is a unique experience for the visitors and the pilgrims.

19. On the higher level there is the Hostel of the monastery. On the lower level, the reception hall for the official pilgrims and guests.

20. Heirloom Treasury. Here is where the Cross , present of emperor Manuel Komninos was kept and it is composed of a piece from the Holy Wood, along with icons, gospels, surplices and other valuable crosses. All of these are presents offered to Virgin Mary's grace by emperors, patriarchs, sultans, hegemonies, wealthy sponsors and plain pilgrims.

21. the library of the monastery that included, apart from rare book collection, chrysobuls, diktats of emperors, patriarchs, sultans and hegemones.

22. The keeper's room.

23. Animal housing area*7.

**7 see the corresponding plan "Panagia Sumela of Pontus", pg 232 , "Palimpsestion" publications, Barbara Charalambidou.*

SAINT CHRISTOPHER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE SUPPORT OF THE MONASTERY



Thanks to the love of the worshippers, the Monastery managed to accumulate a lot of wealth throughout the years. This was the main reason why bandits started raiding the monastery in order to steal it from its great fortune.

According to tradition, the bandits ruined the monastery in one of their raids, they killed many monks and while they were sharing their loot, the icon was claimed by 3 bandits. While they were trying to cut it up by hitting it with an axe in order to get the jewelry with which it was adorned, a roaring voice came out of the icon and fire spread all around it.

Soon the forest was on fire and the two sacrilegious men were burned up while the third bandit, who had been gazing in awe at what had just happened, returned and remained isolated in the cave. Following this destruction, the monastery remained deserted for many years. In 644, a peasant who became the abbot of the monastery, Saint Christopher, who came from the village of Hozaris in Pontus, renovated the monastery and it opened up again.

On the day of the inauguration of the renovated monastery, the bishopric of Trepizond offered a four-gospel, whose bindings are kept in the new monastery of Sumela in Veroia. Since then and until 1922 the monastery managed to stay open. Thanks to God's blessing and the continuous support of the Holy Mother, Saint Christopher worked with a lot of love and patience, restoring the grandeur of the monastery.

THE FOUR - GOSPEL OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER



The four-gospel of Saint Christopher, 7th century.
(Archive: Panagia Sumela Association).

Throughout all these years a great number of trainee monks visited and stayed in the monastery. Thus, the monastery was staffed with new monks who succeeded in giving back to the monastery the grandeur it cherished in the past, through their education and their actions on both a Christian and a national level.

The binding of the four gospel of Saint Christopher, of the 7th century, as it is saved today after the destruction of its internal pages. (Archive: Association of Panagia Soumela).

The covers of the evangel that are the only parts saved until today at the monastery of Sumela have the following dimensions : 0,225x - 0.175 centimetres.

Two wooden templates dressed in velvet. On the front side of the evangel there is a silver lining that carries handmade decoration. In the middle of the lining there is an isosceles cross in Niello technique that has five vademecums made of enamel.

In the center of the cross there is archangel Gabriel, on the left Virgin Mary and on the right John the Baptist, Jesus's forerunner in prayer. On the upper side there is Jesus Christ giving his blessing and on the bottom of the cross there is archangel Michael. It is most probable that the initial position of the vade-mecum has been altered. In other words the figure of Jesus Christ must have been moved from the centre to the top of the Cross and the opposite must have happened to the figure of archangel Gabriel.

This is because the figure of Jesus Christ was in the centre of the cross among the archangels, Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, in order to form the representation of praying or of the triform.

The technique and the number of the decorations of the lining and the enameled vade-mecums belong to the same time period during which the icon of Panagia Sumelawas made.⁸

As far as the velvet lining of the initial wooden cover of this evangel is concerned, it is similar to the evangel of Saint Marcus's treasury of the 12th century², along with the elements of its decoration and the cross placed in the middle.



⁸ Dalton, *Byzantine art and archaeology*, Oxford 1911.

THE EMPERORS AND THE SULTANS ON THEIR WAY TO PANAGIA SUMELA



Emperor of Trepizond Alexios III Komnenos the Great. (Archive: Association of Pontic Scientists) The Komninos Emperos of Trepizonde. From the left : Alexios A' (1204-1222) and Manouel A' (1238-1263) on a manuscript of the 12th century. (Vatican Library).

1204 was the year when the Empire of Trepizond was founded and the dynasty of the Komnenos the Great reigned in Pontus for almost three hundred years. In these centuries the monastery blossomed and gained spiritual and political prestige since the emperors made a lot of donations to the monastery of Sumela.

The monastery became strongly attached to the imperial family when the emperors of Trepizond Ioannis II (1280-1297) and Vasilios (1332-1340) offered chrysobuls and mementos.

Of all the Komnenos, Alexios III (1349-1390), was the one who showed the greatest interest, generosity and charity towards this and many other monasteries. That is why he was the one who always prayed to the Holy Mother, begging for support and assistance.



Left, replica of the chrysobul of Alexios III Komnenos the Great. It was published under the authority of Patriarch Jacob 1679-1688. (Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens. Code. B.X.M. 19948). Right, replica of the chrysobul of Alexios III Komnenos the Great, that specifies the privileges of the Sumela monastery.

Emperor Michael, in his effort to help the facing In one of his journeys Alexios from Constantinople, who had been exiled by his uncle, from the Agarenes, his ship was caught in rough seas. He prayed, asking for the intervention of the Holy Mother, to save his ship with the crew. As tradition says, he had a vision of a young lady surrounded by angels saying to him: **"Alexios, here, I have saved you from the sea, you have reached a safe harbour. You should renovate my palace on the mountain of Mela, you should expand the Cave, and you should entrench the monastery"**.

When Alexios regained his senses he realized that his ship was in a safe and serene harbour, in the port of Trepizond. Following the guidelines of the vision he had had, having already visited the icon of Panagia Sumela, he ordered the renovation and the restoration of the monastery.



Patriarch and synodical letter written by Patriarch Serafeim in reference to the Sumela monastery. (1733 A.D.). Patriarch and synodical letter of 1670 written by the Ecumenical Patriarch Jacob in reference to the Sumela monastery.



Then, emperor Alexios III entrenched the monastery with walls and towers and he built several cells for the monks while he also established the privileges that had been granted to them by their ancestors with a corresponding chrysobul.

Additionally he brought under the jurisdiction of the monastery 48 villages that were in the surrounding area and he formed the hexarchy of the monastery.

He offered so much to the monastery that he could behave as its rightful owner. Until 1650 in the metope of the entrance of the temple the following inscription had been preserved:

“Alexios Komnenos emperor of All East and Iberia, became owner of the monastery at a young age”.

Even after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the fall of Trepizond in 1461 by the Ottomans, despite the eventual hardships encountered by the monasteries, the common attitude towards them changed.

The eventual sultans realized that the Greek christians of Pontus were very sensitive to the issue of respect towards their holy pilgrimages, along with

their faith and the love that they felt for Panagia Sumela, and that is why they followed the policy of the Komnenos as far as the monastery was concerned.

Through diktats and chrysobuls that they published they sustained the privileged status of the monastery along with the rights of unaccountability and immunity, turning it practically into a "state within a state", hoping that even if they wouldn't win the empathy of the Christians of Pontus, at least they would ensure their tolerance.

Thus, after the conquest of the empire of Trepizond in 1461 by the Ottomans, the monastery continued to be a centre not only of Christians but also of muslims who respected it and went to «Merye- mana manastir»(as they used to call it), to its grace and its wonder working holy water.



Emperor of Trepizonde Alexios C' the Great Komninos and his wife Theodora Kadakouzini, are blessed by Saint John the Forerunner. (Photo of the edict of the monastery of Dionysios in mount Athos).

THE SULTANS ABOUT THE MONASTERY OF SUMELA



Following the orders of Sultan Mohammed the siege of Trepizond (in 1461) was directed by Mahmud Pasha, a man of Greek origin on the part of his mother and cousin of the prime minister of the Empire of Trepizond, namely George Amiroutzis.

He played a very important role in Mohammed's expedition against Trepizond and he was the reason for the city's enslavement. In 1465, despite the initial treaty and agreement that was signed between Mahmud and the emperor David Komnenos, the emperor's family is killed under the orders of the Sultan.

The sole survivor of the family is the emperor's youngest son, Nikiforos, who had abandoned the Empire on his mother's or possibly his own will.

All the sultans realized that the Greek Christians of PONTUS were very sensitive when it came to the respect towards their sacred pilgrimages and their institutions. They also knew how deep the faith of the Christians was in Panagia Sumela. Believing that the Komnenos drew their strength from her, seeing the abundant provisions made to the monastery of Soumeliotissa, wanting to court and flatter the enslaved Christians, they followed the Komnenians' policy in regards to the monastery.

They even preferred to concede the monastery and especially Panagia Sumela with more privileges and rights, rather than deprive it from them, so as not to give rise to the animosity and the armed resistance of the Christians.

Using diktats and chrysobuls, they turned the monastery into a «State within a state», hoping that even if they wouldn't gain the empathy of the Christian people of PONTUS they would at least ensure their tolerance.

For this reason the privileged establishment, the big fortune, the dismissal of all taxes and the inclusion of the monastery in "royal mastery", was respectfully maintained by the Ottoman conquerors after 1461.

As Fallmerayer mentions in his book about the history of Trepizond, the Muslim director of Trepizond Selim I, son of Sultan Vayazit and father of Suleiman the Magnificent, is a characteristic example of a man who while hunting in the forests of Sumela he saw the building of the monastery and he decided to destroy it, feeling that the presence of such a splendid monastery was an insult. Suddenly he started shivering and he suffered from partial paralysis.

He recovered when he nullified his order about the destruction of the monastery, having previously visited the monastery, prayed and drunk its holy water. Later on, he promised great privileges to Virgin Mary in return for her help in his ascendance in his father's throne, as he was the 4th son in the succession order.

A few years later, in (1512-1520), when he became Sultan, he did not forget his promise. He published a "hatti sheriff" through which he validated all the previous chrysobuls of the Komnenos and he gave away two silver candelabras to the monastic sacristy.

Diktats about the protection of the monastery were also published by Sultans Vayazit II, Murat III, Ibrahim I, Mehmed I, Suleiman II, Mustafa II, Mehmed III. All of these diktats, as Ep. Kiriakidis and K. Papamihalopoulos confirm, until 1896 were kept in metallic cases and iron boxes in the reliquary of the monastery and granted the monastery relief from the various taxes imposed to the Romans.

Following the orders of Moameth the Sultan, the operations that lead to the conquer of Trepizond in 1461 were run by Mahmut the Pasha, a man of Greek origin from his mother's side and cousin of the Prime minister of the empire of Trepizond, Georgios Amoiroutzis.

He played a special role in Moameth's expedition against Trepizond and became the reason for the city's surrender. In 1465 and despite the initial treaty and agreement that was signed between Mahmut and the Emperor David Komninos, the emperor's family was murdered under the orders of the Sultan. The only person that was saved from the family was the youngest son of the empire, Nikiforos, who had left the Empire either following his mother's advice or on his own will.

All the sultans had realized that the Greek Christians of Pontus were very sensitive regarding the respect towards their holy pilgrimages and their institutions. They also knew the deep religious faith of the Christians to Panagia Soumela. Since they believed that the Komninos drew their power from her and made great offers to the Monastery of Soumela, the Sultans themselves followed the same policy towards the monastery in order to flatter the subservient Christians .

They also chose to provide more benefits and rights to the monasteries, especially to Panagia Soumela, in order to avoid the animosity and the armed resistance of the Christians against the Sultans. Thus they turned the monastery into a constitutional state through dictates and edicts, hoping that even though they might not win the sympathy of the Christian people of Pontus , they could at least reassure their tolerance.

This privileged status, the great wealth, the deduction of taxes and the inclusion of the Monastery in the "royal expert", were maintained respectfully by the Ottoman conquerors after 1461.

Dictates for the protection of the monastery were issued by the Sultans Vayatzit B' (1481 – 1512), Selim A' (1512- 1520), Selim B' (1566 – 1574), Murat Γ' 1574, Ibraem A' (1640 – 1648), Mehmet A' (1648 – 1687), Souleiman B' (1681 – 1691), Moustafa B (1693), Mehmet C' (1703 – 1730).

All these dictates were treasured until 1896 in metal cases and iron boxes in the vestry of the monastery and provided to the monastery the exemption from taxes, as testified by Epameinondas Kyriakidis and Konstantinos Papamihalopoulos.

Through the passage of years, the power of the habit of the Sultans and the authorities to respect and provide additional rights and protection to "Meryemana" (Mother Mary), as they used to name Virgin Mary, they came to believe that Sumelais the protector of the Turkish people as well as a harsh castigator of the abusers.

Turkish people also attended the great feast on the fifteenth of August and many people continue to visit the monastery until today in order to pay their respects³.

After the conquest of the empire of Trepizond in 1461, the monastery continued to be the centre not only for the Christian people of the region but also for the Muslims who went to «Meryemana manastir» for its miraculous holy water.

In his book about the history of Trepizond, Fallmerayer mentions that the Muslim local governor of Trepizond, son of Sultan Vayatzit, Selim A' (1489 - 1512), is a characteristic example of the times.

While he was hunting in the forests of Soumela, he saw the buildings of the monastery and thought that the existence of a monastery of such grandeur was an offense he decided to destroy it. Soon he started suffering from spasms and partial paralysis and he recovered only after he annulled his order about the destruction of the monastery, he paid his respects to the monastery, drank from its holy water and promised great benefits to Virgin Mary if she helped her take over his father's throne, since he was fourth in the order of succession to the throne.

Some time later, in 1512 – 1520, when he became Sultan, he did not forget his promise and he issued “Hati Sherif”, through which he validated all the previous edicts of the Komninos and gave to the monastery vestry 2 silver chandeliers.

«He himself built a roof for the temple with bronze and he dedicated five huge candles to the Mother of God, which were saved until today», as Filon Ktenidis, the owner of the monastery in Greece wrote in 1960.

³ Late Leftheris Eleftheriadis reports the dialogue that he had during one of his visits in Pontus with a Turkish muslim woman: “*Turkish men and women light candles to her grace and attended the holy mass with deep respect within the temple of the cathedral.*”

When some people who were returning from the mass an old Christian lady asked a Turkish woman named Naile about the relationship of the Muslims with Virgin Mary, she said: “Aunt Kereki, when our sultans light candles to the grace of Panagia Soumela and show such deep respect to their saintity, what should the ordinary Turkish people do?

Should we criticize the actions of the Sultans or should we imitate them?

They know better and they are strong and happy. We ask for her grace and we beg her with all our heart to protect us from all evil. Were we not born by a first mother? You Christians have your Holy mother, Panagia Soumela, Meriemana.

We don't have a Turkish saint woman and we worship yours. We Turkish women are not allowed to enter a mosque. And since Panagia Soumela accepts us, we will worship her and beg her to offer us her protection....”

These candles were kept by the monks of the monastery in air-tight glass cases which stood in the right entrance of the temple along with the “**Hati Sherif**”

According to tradition Selim had expressed his intention to cover this part with leaves of gold but the monks discouraged him for fear that the valuable metal might attract eventual thieves to the monastery. Later on , he replaced the bronze of the roof with clear silver in order to show his gratitude for the valuable advice that the abbot of the monastery had given him.

Moreover, Sultan Selim B'(1566 – 1574) was a great benefactor to Panagia Soumela. He issued dicates that acknowledged her possessions as unaccountable, while he donated to the monastery a copy of a manuscript of Moameth the prophet to the monastery at mount Sina, which bore the “**tougran**¹⁰” of the prophet with his palm.

This important document, “**ahit-name**” , was transferred by Selim from the sacred mount of Sina and it was placed in the emperor’s treasury in Consnantinopole. A copy of it was left in the monastery of the mountain of Sina, where it originally belonged.

Another incident of a Sultan with Panagia Sumelais the one of the «**prohoou**»⁴ (Impriki⁵) which is mentioned by many authors. However, not all of them agree on the name of the Sultan who was involved in the incident. Konstantinos Papamihalopoulos, in his book “**A tour around Pontus**”, based on his research around the matter he claims that the incident refers to Sultan Murat C’, who issued a dictate with new privileges to the monastery in 1586. He also clarifies with historical evidence that this time it was about Selim A’.

The Sultan was the head of a great army procession going from Trepizond to Bagdate to start war against Persia. The big distance that they had to cover necessitated an overnight stay at the monastery of Panagia Soumela. There the Sultan admired the order in the operations of the monastery and when he asked the abbot how they manage to make time for everything, he received the following answer:

«Because we don’t leave for tomorrow morning what we can do tonight».

This ancient saying made such a great impression to the Sultan that he ordered for it to be engraved on the silver “**Imbriki**” of his basin, so that he could see it every time he went to wash his face and pray. When he reached Bagdate, the headquarters of the Persian forces, he was visited by ambassadors from Bagdate in front of the powerful fort he wanted to conquer.

⁴ prohoou: small vessel

⁵ Imbriki: small metal vessel for the prepration of coffee (see Tegopoulos – Fitrakis dictionary, Pg. 486

Respectfully they stated that the city had decided to surrender the next day and he begged him to stop his procession and wait until the next morning so that he could enter the city triumphantly, after its surrender had been properly prepared.

While he was thinking about the pleasant announcement of the ambassadors and the blood-free surrender of the city, upon the moment he rose to wash his face and pray, his eyes fell upon the saying that was engraved on the imbriki of his basin. As soon as he read it he remembered the words of the abbot of the Sumelamonastery. Without wasting any more time he followed the saying's advice.

He ordered the continuation of the procession for the conquest of the city and its fort. In the morning he found out that the people of Bagdate had been waiting the whole night for reinforcements. This is when he realized that the saying had saved him from a great trap since he didn't postpone his attack. Otherwise, not only would his initial goal have failed but his life and his army might also have been destroyed.

All of these dictates, as testified by Ep. Kyriakides and Konstantinos Papamihalopoulos, were kept in metal cases and silver boxes in the treasury of the monastery until 1896 and they granted the monastery permanent exemption from the taxes imposed on the Greeks.

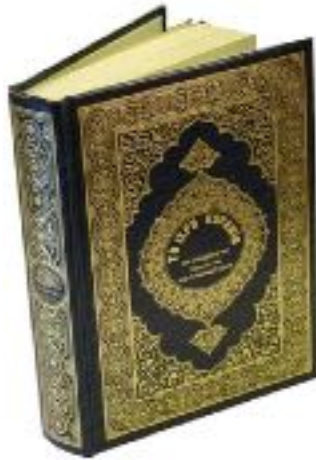


Mohamed II the Conqueror (1432-1481), who took over Firmane*⁷ about the impunity of the old Sumela Constantinople and the Komnenos' empire, August 1461 monastery in historical Pontus. ("Pontiaki Estia". (Centile Bellini magazine, 1951).

*⁷ Firmane = decree, diktat

¹⁰ Tougran: imprint

THE HOLY KORAN ABOUT MARY JESUS'S MOTHER.



“And when the angels said Oh Myriam! Allah chose and purified you, and you are the chosen among all the women in the world”

*Extract from the holy Koran of the Islam. The Imran family – 42,
(Soura Al. Imran- 42)*

THE KORAN ABOUT THE HOLY MOTHER

The holy mother is greatly honored by Islam. Apart from a whole Soura (chapter) that has the name of the holy mother "Mariam" as a title, the Koran includes another chapter that refers to the details of the life of Jesus Christ's mother. She is the only woman whose name is mentioned next to the names of twenty five prophets in the sacred Koran of the Muslims. She is the fourth person that is most commonly mentioned - thirty-six times - in various chapters of the sacred text.

Prophet Mohamed said: " **Mary, daughter of Imran, was the nicest woman of her time. Hatize (prophet Mohamed's first wife) is the nicest woman among all contemporary believers. Fatma (prophet Mohamed's daughter) is the lady of all the women of paradise, with the exception of Virgin Mary.**

With these words prophet Mohamed brings Virgin Mary in the same position with the most respectable women of Islam, while according to certain sources, he states that Virgin Mary is superior to all of these women. It is through this approach that Islam accepts Virgin Mary as a respectable woman, on the borderline of the eastern and the western civilization, that has been created by Islam and Christianity.

“An exemplary woman for all those who believe. Our Madonna”.
Evren Dede

...and Mariam, daughter of Imran, who kept her virginity. We instilled in her body apart of Our Spirit and she fulfilled with her essence the truth of the words of her Lord and his Writings. She was an honourable woman.

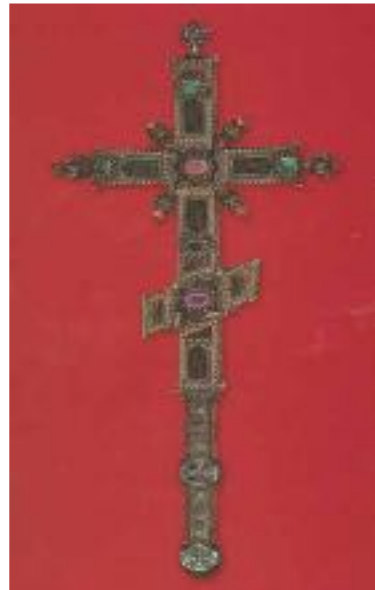
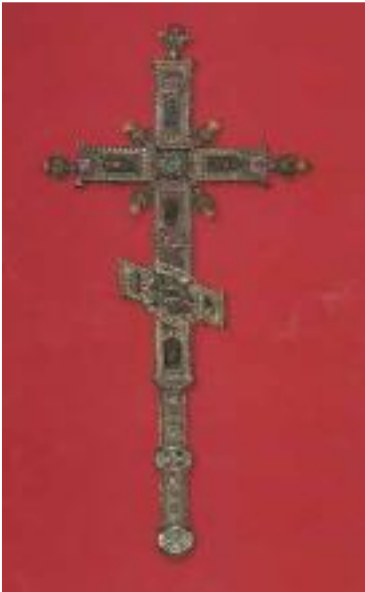
*From the Holy Koran
66 Soura Al Tahrin. (The Prohibition) – 12*



Panagia the babysitter of the 14th century, located in the church of Sun Dimitrios in the village Afitos Halkidikis.

THE CROSS OF EMPEROR MANUEL III

The monks of the monastery kept a series of valuable religious and other heirloom. Besides the icon and the 7th century four-gospel of Saint Christopher, a third, unique and invaluable heirloom that had been kept for many centuries, was a cross that had been offered by Emperor Manuel III. In 1930 according to Tr. Evangelidis, emperor's Alexios son, Manuel III (1390-1417), offered to the monastery a cross that had been kept in the imperial treasury in a precious shrine up until that moment. On the arms of the cross, on the left and the right side, there are sacred relics, while inside it there is the second biggest piece of holy wood taken from the life-giving Cross of Jesus Christ.

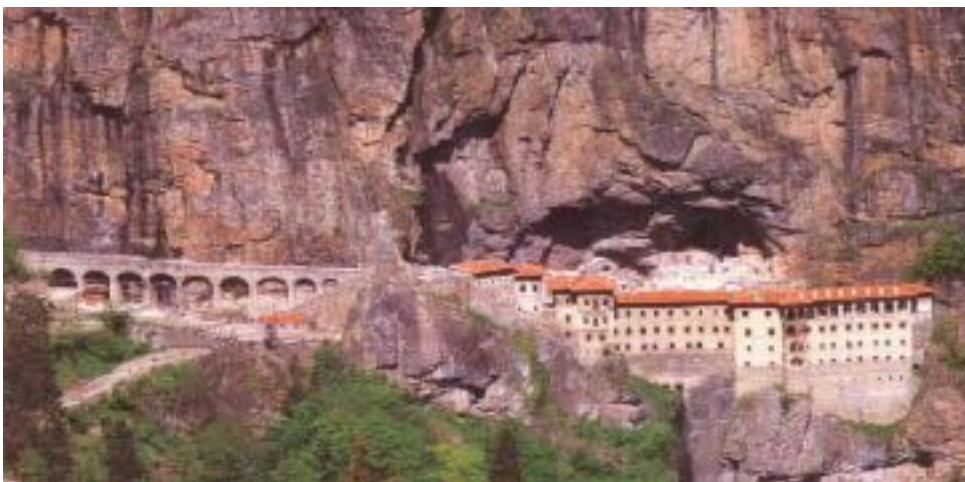


Cross of Emperor Manuel III that is kept in the new Sumela monastery in Greece. (Archive: Panagia Sumela Association)

The monks wanted to honour the offers and the gifts made by the emperors and that is why they adorning the northern wall of the monastery's cave with a mural depicting three figures of men dressed in royal attire. On the centre there is Alexios C', on the right Manouel C' and on the left Andronikos.



From the left: The Emperors of Trepizond, Alexios C of the Great Komninos (1349-1390). Photo of th Byzantine manuscript of the 14th century of the Greek Institute of Byzantine and Post Byzantine studies in Venice and Manuel C of the Great Komninos. (See Tasos Kiriakidis, “Pontus: Engraving, Maps, Coins”,Page. 149, Kiriakidis Bros publications 2008).



The building complex of the Sumela monastery as it is today, after its restoration. (Archive: P.C.P.A.)

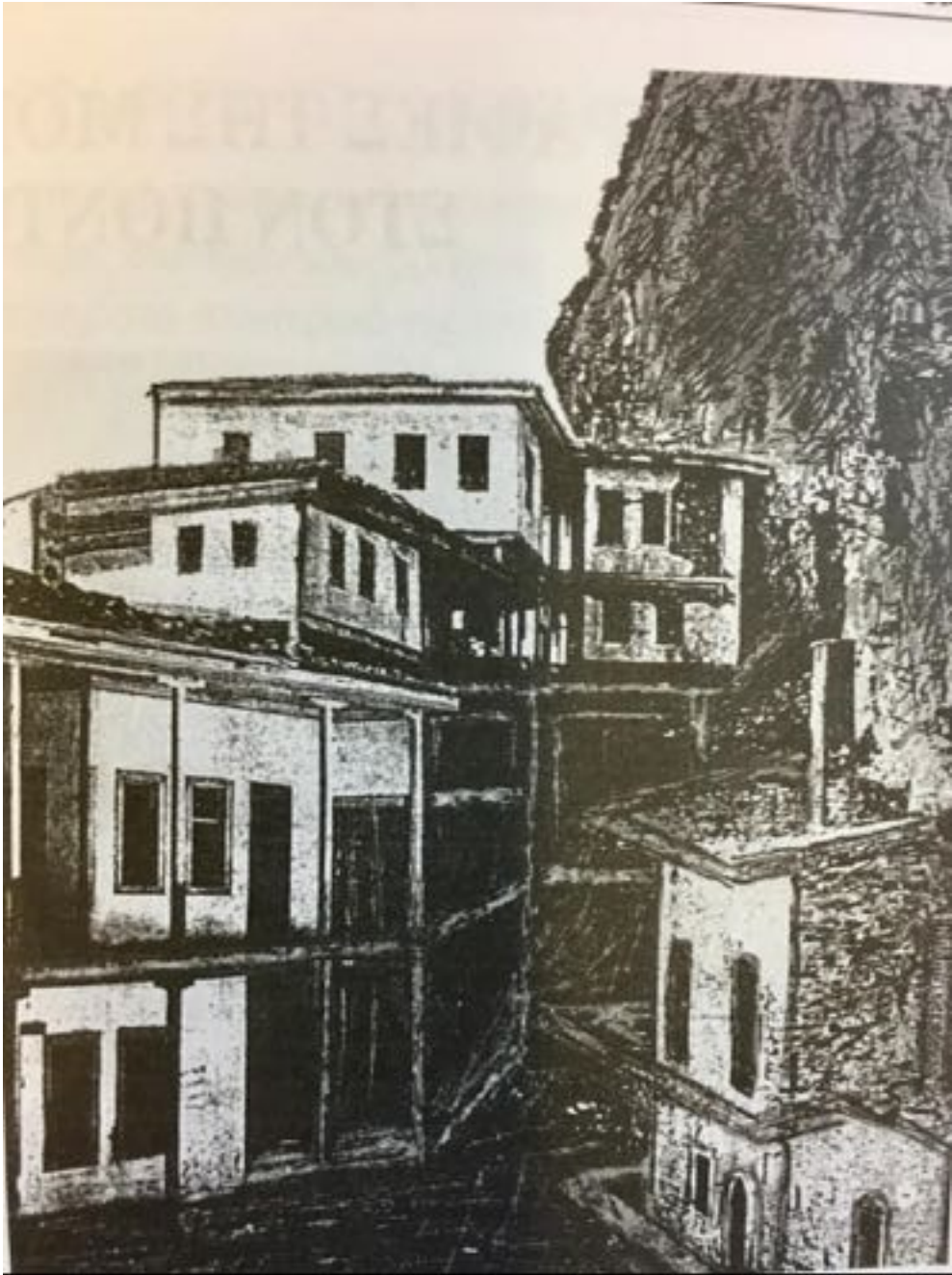
THE BUILDING COMPLEX OF THE MONASTERY



The building complex of Virgin Mary's monastery on mount Mela in the area of Matsouka of historical Pontus. (Photo Archive: P.C.P.A.).

The temple of the monastery in its current form, prior to its destruction, and until 1980, remained the same, apart from the Altar that was renovated by emperor Alexios III. It is square, carved within the rock, while the arcade that was additionally built stands out and it has a small tower-like dome. Many donators adorned the monastery, they built walls, towers, cells, reservoirs, chapels and they expanded the temple.

Throughout the years that followed the monastery acquired a four storey building that was founded in 1860 under the authority of the seneschal monk Nikodimos Miridis, from the village of Livera. This immense project was completed during the order of abbot of Parthenios Spinthropoulos, Gerasimos Moisiadis and Ignatios and it had 72 cells, where the monks and the guests stayed. When the project was completed, the narrow entrance of the Monastery was obstructed by a heavy wooden door.



Unpublished collection of photos, professor Rice Talbot. The guest houses of the monastery of Panagia Soumela after the destruction. (Photo archive: Pontaiki Estia magazine, 1951).



According to the testimonies of visitors, the cells of the monastery were adorned with Persian carpets, ecclesiastic pieces of art, bookcases and are pieces of wooden furniture, while the building had balconies enriched with iron.

The wooden columns that supported the terrace of the temple had chapters of fine local 17th century art. The roof of the monastery was covered with bronze, while in front of the church there rose a wide gong, a wooden invitation board for the visitors.

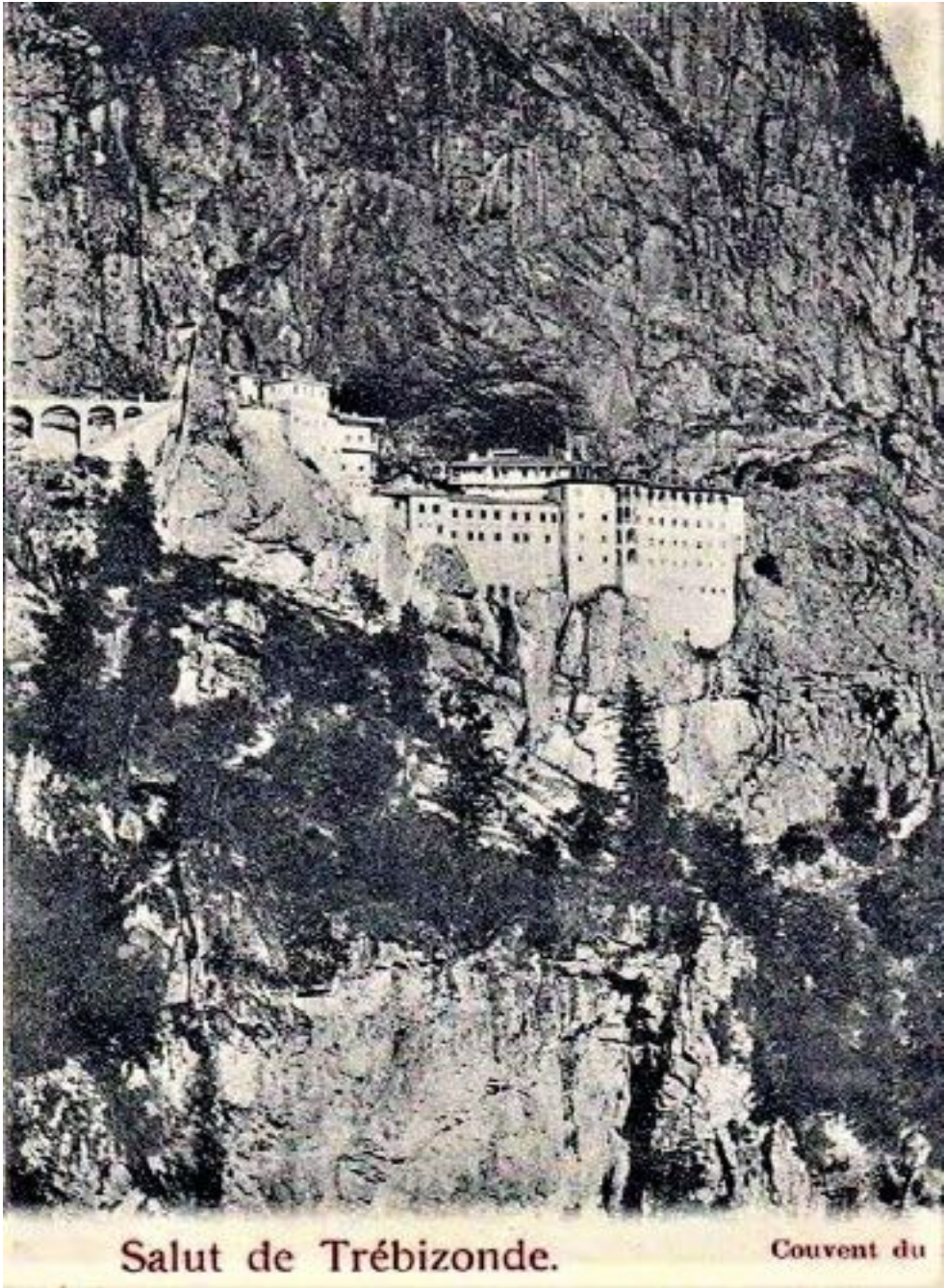


Painted copperplate of the Monastery of Ranagia Soumela in Trabzon.

In the middle of the yard there was a beltry with hagiographies of the 18th century. It had a dome, with four bells produced in Moscow. The sound of their metal broke the silence every day all over the woods of the mountain of Melas.

Saint Barnabas and Sofronios initially and other monks later on built chapels on the interior and close to the monastery with the help of people from the surrounding areas.

These were the chapel of the Holy Cross, of the Metamorphosis, of John the Baptist, of Saint Anna, of Archangels Michael and Gabriel, of Saint Barbara, of Saint George, of John the Theologist, of Konstantinos the Great and his mother Saint Helen, and of the early Christian martyr, Stefanos.



Epochal Postcard, (1903), of the Sumela monastery.
(Photo Archive: "Pontiaki Estia" magazine, 1951).

According to the testimonies of many pilgrims and monks the accommodation facilities were decorated with Persian carpets, ecclesiastical works of art, bookcases and rare pieces of wooden furniture, while the building had balconies that were iron bound.

The wooden columns that supported the cathedral's porch had capitals of fine 17th century local art. The roof of the monastery was covered in copper, while a wide wooden board filled with pilgrims' requests stood in front of the monastery. In the middle of the courtyard there was an 18th century campanile filled with hagiographies. It had a dome with four bells made in Moscow, whose metal sounds disrupted the silence that prevailed all over the Mela mountain.

Initially Barnabus and Sofronius and later on other monks and worshippers from the surrounding region built chapels both in the internal and also close to the monastery; namely the chapels of the Holy Cross, the Metamorphosis, of Prester John, of Saint Anna, of Archangels Michael and Gabriel, of Saint Barbara, of Saint George, of Ioannis the Theologian, of Great Konstantine and his mother Saint Eleni, and of the first martyr Stefanos.



The Sumela monastery

THE HAGIOGRAPHIES OF THE MONASTERY



Our Lady of the Sign. Restored hagiography found in the internal dome of the historical monastery. (Photo Archive: Pontic Youth of Greece).

The monks wanted to create the necessary religious atmosphere in the building complex of the monastery and , thus, they covered the rocks and the caves with hagiographies.

The murals in the internal part of the church are of impeccable beauty, even though the ones that are still preserved have suffered serious damages by the vandalisms of people who surely never realized that they could not harm the saints depicted but only the history and the culture of many centuries.

On the internal and the external walls of the monasteries there are murals of four different eras, made one over the other on consecutive layers. As Mary Hatzipetrou specifically mentions in *Pontiaki Estia* magazine of 1983, issue 52, page 377, the first one begins in the 9th century. Mixed with sand and lime, it hosts hagiographies, where the dominant colour is the shade of deep green.

On the second layer the hagiographers added hay to make it more solid. The dominant colours here are light brown and pink. The third and fourth layers are very different from the previous ones, as even though the raw material is again sand, lime and hay, there is the addition of linseed peel and egg.

The murals depict topics from the New Testament.



The all mighty in the cathedral of the Sumela monastery. 18th century hagiography, after its maintenance and its restoration. (Digital Photo Archive: Gilmaz Turan)





17th and 18th century hagiographies in the cathedral of the Sumela monastery after the attempts for its restoration following the vandalisms it suffered throughout the years.





17th and 18th century hagiographies in the cathedral of the Sumela monastery after the attempts for its restoration following the vandalisms it suffered throughout the years.



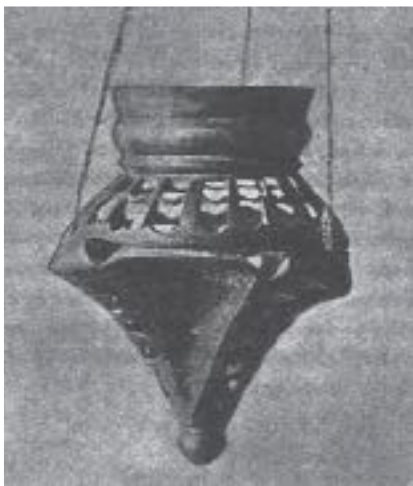


17th and 18th century hagiographies in the cathedral of the Sumela monastery after the attempts for its restoration following the vandalisms it suffered throughout the years. (Photo archive Trabzon PHOTOGRAPHY).



Trebizonde 1890 Panagi Simele Simgesi Trebizonde - Kaleler Alindaki Şehir

The shrine where the icon of Virgin Mary was the Sumela kept in the Sumela monastery in Pontus in 1890. monastery. (“Pontiaki Estia” magazine 1951).



Brass candle from (“Pontiaki Estia” magazine, 1951).

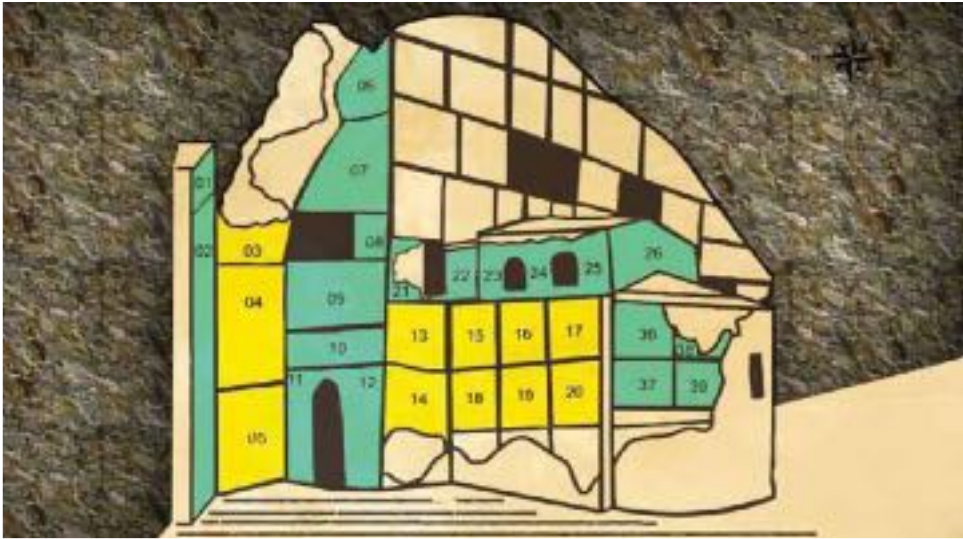
The external hagiographies of the monastery belong to the post byzantine era with a profound western influence by the hagiographer Savvas from Inoe (1710). Researchers have also informed us that there are two other layers of hagiographies under the initial ones, which date back to the 14th and the 15th century.



The painted external canopy of the Sumela monastery that is carved in the internal rock mount Mela. (Photo Archive: W.C.P.H.) The interior of the Monastery of Panagia Soumela in the area of Matsouka in Pontus.



The external hagiographies of the monastery are samples of post Byzantine art with a western influence, by the hands of hagiographer Savvas and Inoe (1710). Furthermore, researchers of the monument inform us that there are two other layers of hagiographies underneath the ones mentioned, dating back to the 14th and the 15th century.



A. THE WALL OF THE HOLY TEMPLE OPPOSITE THE SOUTHERN ENTRANCE

1. Saint George
2. Saint Pahomios

B. THE ADJACENT WALL OF THE SOUTHERN ENTRANCE OF THE TEMPLE

3. The abduction of the Holy Apostles from the clouds
4. The burning and inflammable bush
5. The first owners of the monastery, Saint Barnabus and Sofronius

F. THE FAÇADE OF THE SOUTHERN DOOR OF THE HOLY TEMPLE

6. Saint Efstathios
7. The metastasis of the Holy Mother
8. Virgin Mary's cenotaph
9. The Assumption of Mary
10. Owners' inscription
11. Saint Simeon
12. The second owner of the monastery, Saint Christopher

A. THE ADJACENT WALL OF THE SOUTHERN PROJECTION OF THE TEMPLE

13. Saint Anna's arrest
14. Partly destroyed hagiography

E. THE SOUTHERN PROJECTION OF THE TEMPLE

15. Mary's birth
16. The God Bearer's apparition

17. Mary's annunciation
18. The basin
19. Jesus Christ praying the Mount of Olives
20. Jesus Christ's arrest and his surrender to His crucifiers

Z. THE ROOF OF THE PROJECTION OF THE TEMPLE

On the Southern Side

- 21-23 Poor Lazarus
24. David the prophet
25. Solomon the prophet

On the Eastern Side

26. The God – bearer – Archangels On Northern Side
27. Daniel the prophet
28. Iezekil the prophet

H. THE NORTHERN PROJECTION OF THE TEMPLE

29. Η Βαΐοφόρος
30. The Epitaph
31. The cathode to Hades
32. Jesus's mockery by the soldiers
33. Christ's crucifixion
34. The deposition of Jesus Christ's body
35. Royal lions*

**See relevant plan "Panagia Sumelaof Pontus"
pg. 262 "Palimpsiston" publications, Barbara Haralampidou*





Θ. THE ALCOVE OF THE TEMPLE

Paradise and the escape from Paradise On the Southern Side of the Alcove

- 36. Jesus Christ's Birth
- 37. Christ appears in front of the Priests

On the Eastern side of the Alcove

- 38. Hagiography of an unknown topic
- 39. Peter's refusal of Christ
- 40. Jesus Christ's baptism
- 41. Jesus's Flagellation On the northern side of the Alcove
- 42. Lazarus's Resurrection
- 43. Christ in front of Pontius Pilatus and his surrender

I. THE TEMPLE'S FACADE

- 44. The creation of the stars
- 45. The creation of the Sky and the Earth
- 46. The separation between the Sea and the Land
- 47. The creation of the flora
- 48. Adam's creation
- 49. Eve's creation

50. The tree that represents the knowledge of the good and the evil,
the fall and the temptation of the first human beings
51. The disobedience of the first human beings
52. The expel of the first human beings from Paradise
53. The Cherubs guarding Christ's resurrection
54. Jesus
55. Thomas's palpation
56. Sunday of the chrisem bearing women
57. Sunday of the paralyzed
58. Midst – Pentecost
59. A Prophet's hagiography
60. The Cross's hagiography
61. A Prophet's hagiography
62. Sunday of the Samaritan woman
63. Jesu's miracle in Siloam's font
64. 1st Ecumenical Synod, the 318 Fathers
65. Abel and Kaen's murder
66. Jesus's miracle in the land of Gergesinon
67. The fair and patient Job
68. The Holy Pentecoste
69. The transfiguration of the Lord
70. Lord's assumption to the sky
71. Door inscription (on the Holy Cross)
72. Scenes from the life of Ilias the prophet
73. Saint Dimitrios
74. Decoration on the wall filled with hagiographies
75. Saint George*

**See relevant plan "Panagia Sumelaof Pontus"
pg. 263 "Palimpsiston" publications, Barbara Haralampidou*



Here is how he described his visits to the Sumelamonastery in July 1869 in the magazine «STAR OF PONTUS» a visitor with the name C:

«Suddenly we found ourselves at the banks of the black mountain and we saw the outer buildings of the monastery, which looked like pigeon nests. On the inside there were the ballister ascend of Virgin Mary.

After half an hour we were in front of the wooden staircase, which meant that we had to climb 90 steps before we could reach the entrance. We went in after the porter gave our names and he received the necessary permit by the abbot, according to the traditions of the monastery.

Immediately we found another staircase of 70 steps which lead to the courtyard, our entrance was greeted by a huge bell ringing which echoed all over the cave, because I must not forget to tell you that in the middle of the black mountain on its horizontal surface there is a huge cave where the monastery was built.

When we went further inside, we found the heating burning, and we were greatly please by that and by the tea that had been prepared for us in the Russian way. In the evening we were offered a great dinner, which was composed of fish, which had been caught in the river a short while ago and they were delicious. We also had the pleasure of a sound sleep in new beds and gold woven mattresses. The next day we all went to the monastery and we visited all of its chambers along the monastery of Saint Barbara.

According to tradition, the monastery hosts one of the three icons of the Godbearer which have been painted by Apostle Luke, to which we paid our respect and whose reputation for its miraculous powers is widespread all over Pontus and worldwide.

Out of all the buildings of the monastery the one that is most important is the one where the monastery has been built with an attractive terrace at the edge of a vast gorge. The temple is within the cave while there is a natural crack on its dome from which drops of water fall incessantly throughout the years, which served the needs of the monastery and its residue was taken outside.

The monks are no more than 15 even though there are almost 100 rooms, which are filled with light as is with the whole of the cave, since the upper dome is not only high but it is deeply inside the ground.

But if the visitor of the monastery does not climb up the mountain he leaves his journey in half. That is why we decided to realize the two hour climb the next day when we reached “Kamena”.

I am over 8 thousand feet from the surface of the sea. About an hour ago we left the woods behind because the plantation there does not exceed 5 or 6 thousand feet. And in front of our eyes we have only a vast land. What a great sight! Looking at the north we see trees of immense width and height, leading to the sea, where we can discern the beach. Turning our eyes on the East, the West and the South, we see an infinite ground with no trees, flowers or bushes, covered with thick grass, which is filled with various colours and small flowers.

This land is commonly called Parharia, and they are inhabited only during the months of July and August, where the people from the surrounding villages bring their kettle here to graze and they stay in small caves. Many of the city people also take advantage of this situation since they like to visit these place to recover from a health problem and relax, making use of the benefits of the area of Parharia.

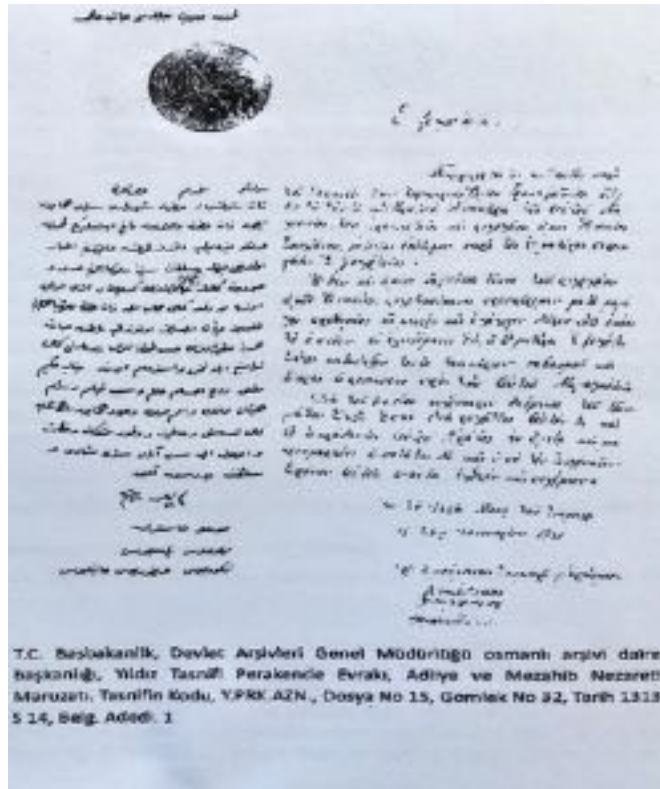
The people who have been suffering from chronic fever are cured with no exception and all other woods are similarly healed. What I have heard about the healing powers were of great importance for the people who study medicine.

They used to call these heights of 5-8 thousand feet “health stations”, where the summer heals those whose chests have suffered. I believe that the Parharia are more important than any other health stations as far as their healing powers are concerned. I substantiate my claim in the following way:

First of all, the air that comes from the sea and goes through the mountain, carries the odors of the resinuous fir which covers the mountain, bringing great amounts of oxygen. Secondly, the clear and cold waters of the infinite springs have great digestive powers, because according to the people of the area who speak from their own experience, when someone drinks from this water after their meal they feel hungry faster, and they have to repeat their meals four or six times a day.

Thirdly, the serum of the milk, which is usually drunk by the visitors every morning, due to the grass that is eaten by the animals, possesses special laxative powers, and this applies for the milk and its by products.

Ψ.



Unpublished document of the Sumelamonastery in 1881, written in Greek and Turkish, that proves the contribution of nutrition in the establishment of social relationships of the holy community of the monastery with great figures of authority.

(Presentation T. Kyriakides. Amastris magazine Year 1st, issue 8).

Your highness

We have been informed by the archbishop of Saint Trepizond that in the powerful palace of his majesty, of our people loving king the Sultan, there is need for butter.

We, as genuine offsprings of our people loving king, we offer with great zeal 30 as a small token, which we hope that his majesty will accept as a token of respect and devotion for his highness.

For this we pray night and day to God so that he protects the State with health and welfare and prevent any enemy from the throne.

In Sumela Monastery
28th January 1881
Abbot of Sumela Gerasimos
Monks Nikodimos, Gregorios, Ioannikios

THE MONASTERY THROUGH THE EYES OF STAVROS KANONIDIS IN 1911

Stavros Kanonidis, a Pontian patriot of First Generation, who visited the monastery on August 22nd 1911, during the nine day celebration, narrates the love they nurtured and the need that they Greek people of Pontus felt to visit the monastery of Sumela, even on foot and despite the obstacles they met on their way.

«This is a story of disobedience. And any kind of disobedience carries the seed of punishment. The reason why the punishment was mild in this case, is explained by the essence of the disobedience.

To tell you the truth, I would never have tried this myself. Nor would I ever have thought about it. The idea belongs to Gerikas Papanastasis and my sin is that I didn't have the strength to resist the temptation, which was big. On the other hand he would not have done it on his own.

Let's organize our narration. It was a few days before the celebration of the Holy Mother. My mother and Gerika's mother along with many people from our neighborhood agreed to attend the celebration. And they started the journey four days in advance. They would have all the time to fast, to confess and to receive the sacrament. It was the end of the summer and the hard work was becoming easier. This is why a housewife could get away from the household chores.

Rest for the body and the soul. It was wise of them not to bring their children with them. My mother explained everything clearly before she left. She had even taken me to the monastery the previous year where they had prayed for my recovery from a very serious illness. She gave me money which was a great thing for me. So there was no excuse for what happened. But it was not the same for Giorikas who was laughed at and he did not know where his parents were going. And he found out all about it after they had left.

Gerikas was two years older than me. But we did all our mischievings together, we went to school and we grew up together. There were no secrets between us. And our friendship became stronger and stronger.

However, we were separated by death, that found him in Idomeni in 1946 at the beginning of the war triggered by Slavia.

He kept talking to me for a whole day until I agreed. I would be honest if I said I didn't want it myself. When someone visits Sumela, he feels as if he visits the Sacred Tomb. And I had done it only once. But I was scared at the thought and the risks. Our monks, without the company of elderly people, feared that we wouldn't make it through.

But we started our journey either way and we followed the path we already knew. I had done the same journey the previous year with excellent weather. I tried to imprint the way on my head and I preserve it clearly in my memory until today. And I was confident that I would find the right path if there was no fog. But this was God's will.

And I kept reminding Gerikas that the two of us went past Alviadia without realizing it and we would have followed the wrong way without even knowing it. This is how easy it is to get lost in our mountains when there is thick fog and the whole place goes dark in midday.

Almost two thousand metres high and not a living soul around. And snow in the middle of August – it was not strange. This is what logic told to Gerikas, but he insisted. He was weird and determined. I can see him now tall and skinny like a beak. With light brown clothes that were tight and made him look even thinner.

But they suited his sun burnt face . Long face, strong grey eyes with a piece of hair on his forehead, that could not stand still not even with water or a comb. He was clumsy , because he could not fins proper use for his feet and his hands. But his mouth was always ready and he was always determined. He had a heart of gold. But he was stubborn and spirited. He did not know what compromise meant. And he knew no fear in his life.

Finally we agreed. We would set off at the middle of the night. However, when we were saying goodbye we came across his younger brother, Menelaos, who had been overhearing our conversation for a while. And this encounter was the beginning of the episode, like in tragedies, that will be presented hereby.

We did not set off in the middle of the night because we both loved sleeping. Still the sun had not risen when we begun our journey. Menelaos was with us as well.

He had managed to catch up with us and we saw him walking in front lively. If he was going to meet my sister at “Koustenia” he should have turned.

But he didn't. He headed straight to “Kenia” and we lost sight of him after the hill.

It was obvious that he knew what we were going to do and he wanted to come to the Monastery. Now we had another concern. He was a responsibility for us. (Gerikas was 13, I was 11 and he was 9. The sum of our years did not make up a grown up).

When we reached the waterfall the sun was up. As always, in these parts the colours and the hues are infinite and liquid and you need strong eyes to perceive them in their fasts alternations.

The sun must be up so that the colours are stabilized by the light. The weather was good but on the mountain tops of Giaourdag there was a lot of smoke. That was a bad sign.

- *Do you have money? Gerikas asked. I told him about my money. He had some money himself. It was enough. We would only need to pay a Turkish shepherd to show us the way, if necessary.*

We went up Aen Zacharean to get away from indiscrete questions. Menelaos got lost somewhere at the shops.

On our way to Metzit, there was not a soul. The tops of Taurus were clean. Not a speck of smog. But at the forest of Lacharani, the fog was like a grey-blue sea sleeping. We did not eat anything. We only read our fears in each other's eyes. He may not even get there. Rarely have I seen Taurus covered all over with ice. To see fog prevailing in Alogostaria and covering the village while Galanomitis is full of sun light. But if fog arrives we will have already reached Hatzouka, said Giorikas.

- *If we are ready to go, there is no time for thinking, I said. To the name of God.*

All of a sudden Menelaos appeared running. He was holding huge branches of pear trees that had been given to him by our uncle Bairachtaris. In his other hand he had raisins and his mouth was full.

- Who said that treats have no value? We became friends with the food he offered us. We set off on our way through Mavrozougoudo. When we at Kalamara Gerikas started talking again slowly. He made his last attempt to convince Menelaos to go back to the village. But he did not succeed.

He kept answering with laughter and jumps to Gerikas advice. He did not realize the risks but he also trusted grown ups because he considered them stronger.

Above all, his heart knew how to get rid of useless concerns. This is how he lived all his short life; happy without any kind of evil in him.

Because joy is not a good that can be found out of us. It is either within us thanks to God or it does not even exist. And each one of us reaches the end of his path with the luggage of his first trip.

The weather at Metziti was rather windy. Not a flower can be found at this time of year. But the heavy breath of grass is enriched by the smell of thyme coming from the rocky mountain peaks. The scenery is so heart warming. It is as if nature, after having spent all its roughness on merridian side of Taurus, wanted to laugh. Everything here is mild, as if the Creator's back passed through it mildly.

Everything is covered by a thin layer, from the time the snow melts in spring until they fall again in autumn.

In this vast mountain zone you can walk for hours and not find a single rock. Only on the mountain tops can you find a rock.

The huts at Metziti were empty. On the 6th of August, summer ends and this is when the mountain people come down with their cows. I ran to see my grandfather's hut and we met again by the tap to quench our thirst, because we would not be able to find water from that point on. Now the path split like a never ending eyebrow in two. We passed through Milokopio, where they cut the big stones and rocks. We even passed by Aistoforo.

Here is where fog made its appearance. At the beginning it rose high splinters which melted by daylight. Then it began knitting hats in strange shapes and placing them on air. It sent pieces that took their evening stroll, pushed by wind.

- *Menelaos, do you know that fog was a girl whose fiancé left her and that is why she got sick of men and decided to sprinkle their moustache?*
- *Yes I know,*
- *Wait! In a while she will do that to you!*
- *I don't have a moustache. Be careful of your own.*

Gerikas teased Menelaos and the fog threw its first blows, as if it had gone mad

-Here it is! Menelaos shouted.

To be honest we saw a solid aggressive grey front, as described in military language, heading towards us and we breathed chill and water.

It would not take long before it reaches us: the element of nature with people.

A herd, approximately of two hundred sheep, came towards us. They must have began their journey early in the morning and now they were returning to their barn. On the front there was a young boy walking in slow pace, leaning to his stick, with a big bag on this shoulder. The sheep followed with their faces in the grass, eating with great speed. Fog followed the herd. It brought a strong breeze, almost chill. This favoured their appetite. Without the breeze, they would have suffered from the heat during this time of day.

Fortunately we did not meet any dogs on our way. They might have made us the favour of not paying attention to us. Behind the herd there was a shepherd, probably the eldest brother of the young child. A tall, thin, 18 year old boy with a black cap on his head with a white scarf, that stressed his Muslim descent. A small stick with a silver handle shone on his clothes.

They were the first living souls that we saw from Aen Zaharean. They were also the last ones. This thought made decide quickly to ask for the right way. Gerikas went on and opened a conversation. Conversation is rather a figure of speech.

We had talked about what we were going to ask many times during our journey. We practiced the few words we knew. And we tried to make some sentences. Exactly like babies do.

*- Mariam ana, yolou**

We would ask for the way to Panagia and he would understand. And he did understand. I saw him open his big eyes. There was wonder and awe in his eyes along with friendship. A friendly childish response.

For the Monastery? We don't have to walk much further. He said with his heavy accent. "Yakun". Feeling that our Turkish vocabulary was poor, he struggled to remember his Greek words. But he did not know more than our Turkish. He tried to explain making lines with his stick. He made a straight line, on the left, which lead to the cliffs. Not from there. "Sakoun". Then he made another one that turned right. This would lead us to Hatzouka.

The image of the road came back to my mind as I had memorized it. And I was certain that he was not fooling us. And I trusted him. I pulled out a silver coin that we had saved for such an occasion and I gave it to him.

I saw him puzzled like the first time and he hesitated. In the end he decided to take the coin. We had nothing else. We went on different roads. He followed his herd. We had moved on to our path.

But fear followed close by. With such a clear sky I was sure that we would find our way. But what about fog? The ship roads are narrow in these places that are visited by people only once or twice a year. And the earth struggles to cut them in half or completely erase them by seeds of grass all over them.

It is as if nature is mad with these coward animals that open such narrow soil wounds on her green skin and spoil her beauty. When the fog gets thicker to the point that it is impossible to discern a person within one step distance, the image of the land is so much altered that is very easy to go on the wrong way and get lost.

We did not make more than two hundred steps. The fog grew thicker. It reached the height of my knees. We heard a voice behind us. I turned. The shepherd came running towards us waving his high stick.

- Ousaklar!... on the way our mind was we were not hoping for anything good. However we decided to wait for him. When he arrived he was out of breath. He forgot to ask us, we had left in such a hurry. We must be neighbors from Kromni. Beautiful place.

- Nice people. He had come with his uncle in spring. He stayed at the village for a night. And now he thought that it was wrong of him to let us go on our own. Mild places! You have no fear of people or animals.

- *With clear weather. But when the fog gets thick you cannot be sure that you will not lose your way. We were overwhelmed and we decided to run with him so as not to stall him, to them point were the path was divided in two. I recognized it as soon as he showed it to us. However I cannot say that I would have found it easily without him.*

He went back running and we lost sight of him within the fog. We took our own way and now our path looked wider. It was entwined at some points with double or triple lines and then it became straight again. And as many the entwining so were the startles.

The fog grew thicker and thicker. Soon it surrounded us. Thick, humid, greasy. We felt it go through our nostrils, burden our eyebrows and our eyelashes. There were millions of tiny grey spots on the grass, on our clothes and on our hair. Gerikas hair became slightly silver as if he had grown old. And a think layer of pearls were stuck on the corners of his lips.

The fog grew thicker and then it started raining. Sometimes the fog would lose its power. That was the good thing about the rain. It came so unexpectedly and fast as if a strong hand entered and tore its veils and opened the way. This is where we saw a wide wooden basin with a wooden pipe. It was the tap of Hatzouka. That was not mere happiness.

It was triumph. We started shouting all together. We rolled on the wet grass. Then we approached the tap and we started drinking water. We remembered that we had some bread in our pockets and we started eating. It was wet too. A child's heart is like a day of spring. It is surrounded by the most black clouds, it starts rumble, and it calms down soon afterwards. The opening grew bigger as the rain grew heavier and soon we saw the tops of the firs and all the gorges one by one. Menelaos got lost in the firs. He saw them for the first time. We followed him.

We went up the big rocky stair, with the sixty steps, and we reached the gate. In Sumelaif you don't go through this door you cannot see or guess anything. And when you enter you will go down another hundred wooden steps. Only then will you be able to see the great cave, where many generations worked hard with patience and love for many centuries and turned it into a place where souls could retreat and people could pay their respects. They filled it with churches and chapesl and study rooms. They painted it and beautified it and placed it all at the service of the most intellectual human need, the worship of God.

Sumelais a vast settlement, where the imprints of all times, from the time it was originally built, are still discernible. Founded on a cliff that goes down to the valley that you guess, you do not see...you have the impression that you are flying above a world of old times.

The building of the central guest house has four levels.

Similar is the height of its rock foundations with its warehouses of the monastery and this immense building does not reach half of the height of the huge gate that leads to a semi-dome, like the ones found in the Holy step of our Byzantine churches. Under this semi-dome, one can find cells, guest houses, churches and yards in a harmonious anarchy, where thousands of people used to buzz during the festivities of the 15h of August.

At the centre of the semi-dome, slightly higher than the level of the last floor of the guest houses, there is a deeper opening in the rock that forms the Catholic of the Assumption that only the prosopsis and the corner of the meridian nave represents a human building.

The entire roof of this second cave is engraved from one side to the other. So are the walls inside and outside, along with the external surface of the cubicle of Holy step, that goes slightly on the side to the left of the prosopsis, like a small jewel, with its small dome and the finesse of the lines and the grace of the Gorgoepikoi in Athens.

Time, fog and smoke have ruined the rich paintings. When I went there as a child, I was sad because I was unable to understand these dark square paintings on the wall. I felt the same weakness and curiosity that one feels in front of a book, where the letters are familiar but the words are unknown. I did not have the luck to see them again as I grew older...

The monastery in Pontus, that forms a whole building block, cannot be seen from the outside since its bigger part is occupied by the most hollow indent of the cave. The external walls were painted with oil paintings with religious themes.

Stavros Kanonidis
Pontiaki Estia magazine.
Year 1951, issue 5th, Pg.415-421 and 484 – 488.

HOW THE FEAST OF AUGUST FIFTEENTH WAS ORGANIZED IN PONTUS



A group of Pontic people having fun on their way back from the feast of Sumela in Pontus. ("Pontiaki Estia" magazine, 1951).

Feasts were of great importance not only for the financial but also for the social, spiritual and artistic development of the region and they took place all over Pontus. It was a chance for social interaction, matchmaking, as well as places for entertainment and exchange of ideas and information.

Builders, craftsmen and their helpers, initially flattened the porch beneath the foothills of the monastery, then they built temporary sheds and tents that would be used not only for the accommodation of the thousands of visitors, since the dorms of the monastery were too small to accommodate all those people, but also for the retailers, the cheap peddlers and the people who sold ouzo treats: hapsia, stipa, kinteata etc ^{*8}

Thanks to the valuable help of the peasants, the curators of the monastery managed to get their food and any other provisions so that there would be no shortage of goods during the twenty days that the feast lasted. More than fifteen thousand (15.000) worshippers, organised in small or big groups, after walking for several days, others on their horses or with their carts, they

^{*8} hapsia, stipa, kinteata=Pontic traditional delicacies

swarmed for three days to worship and honor their Madonna, in an obligatory annual meeting on the same day, the same place, at the same time" At the annual convention of the Greek people of Pontus, as it had been defined by Filon Ktenidis.



Pontic dancers in a characteristic photo. (Archive: P.C.P.A.)

The person who had realized seven voyages - pilgrimages to Panagia Sumela acquired the title of "hatzis", namely the title of the pilgrim similar to the one acquired by the people who visit the Holy Land.

The young men set off in big companies from all over Pontus, the cities and the villages, dressed up in their best attire, carrying their most modern and more polished weapons, and choosing the best lyrist of the region for their company.

Guided by its leader during the long voyage, every group sang, danced, had fun and united with other companies in order to get to the court of the monastery.

Beginning on the eve of August fifteenth and until the Madonna's novena, the litanies and the prayers of the pilgrims mingled with their songs, their dances and their festive and triumphant gunshots. During these days all young men preferred to wear their honored "zipkas" *⁹ even though they received great influence on their clothing from Trepizond, Constantinople and Athens.

When they were near the court of the monastery they began to shoot in the air and the monks welcomed them returning the signals and the shots, ringing the bells joyfully and rapidly.

The moments of the massive gunshots that echoed in the forest were considered sacred and symbolic by the thousands of pilgrims.

The great feast began upon the completion of the ceremony. The pilgrims,

under the sounds of the “kementze”^{*10}, the pontic lyre, the zurna and the tabor played by excellent bandees who flocked from all the regions of Pontus and under the innumerable raffle, became one solid body with one soul and they danced until dawn: tik, trigona, omal, dipat, kotsari, seranitsa^{*11} and others.

The pilgrims waited with extreme interest to see the young men in “zipkas” and the young girls in “zoupounas”^{*12} dancing in groups according to their region. They were also anxious to see the young lads dancing the ancient dance of “Serra”, the Pyrichian dance.

On the bright but determined faces, on the masculine and flexible bodies, where hands and torso were loose as if there were no bones, while feet and shoulders worked relentlessly through the snapping movements, they discovered the intelligence and the speed of those young lads. In the tight fists of the dancers they mirrored the baldness and the unity of the Pontic people to continue preserving their history, their culture, their Greek orthodox education, their customs, their ancient greek dialect.

Their shiny bandoliers, their knives and their revolvers represented their determination to defend the land of Pontus, their own land that had been inhabited for thousands of years by their ancestors, and now they themselves strived to continue to court it and create on it! Upon this sacred and historical place, a source of religious rash and national elation, faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy mother mingled with the Greek idea and the three-thousand-year history of the Greek people of Pontus.



*⁹ zipkas=traditional Pontic costumes

*¹⁰ kementze = lyre

*¹¹ tik, trigona, omal, dipat, kotsari, seranitsa = traditional Pontic dances

*¹² zoupounas = traditional Pontic costumes



The dance of the knives performed by young men while many Christian and Muslims visitors attend the celebration at the beginning of the century. (Collection A. S. Mailli).



“Pirichios” the ancient Greek dance. Later on it was renamed to “sera” by the Greek people of Pontus, since it was danced mainly in the areas of Platana of Pontus, where the mouth of the Sera river is also found. Postcard from the early years of the 20th century. (A.S.Mailli Collection).

THE ROLE AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MONASTERY IN THE DIFFICULT YEARS OF THE OTTOMAN DOMINATION OF PONTUS



During the difficult years that the Sumela monastery: went through for three centuries, despite the eventual financial, administrative or internal hardships, it managed to rise up as the religious, national and educational centre of the Greek people of Pontus.

The premises of the monastery turned into nurseries of Greek education but also of the wider Eastern education and that of the Ottoman Empire, seeing that after the fall of Trepizond, any spiritual activity ceased, caring for the foundation and the maintenance of school building for the provision of education to the inhabitants.

The leaders of the nation's liberation race, taking advantage of the status and the immunity of the monastery, trained priests and teachers there, and they swore the patriots of Filiki Eteria*¹³ (1819), who brought the notion of national independence and religious freedom to Pontus.

All these people revived the spirits of the Greek people of Pontus and they contributed to the preservation of the Greek identity and of the national conscience of the Greek people. This is the place where all the money offered by Greek patriots all over Pontus was gathered for the support of the liberation race that was secretly being prepared.

Under the protection of the monastery the enslaved Greek people of Pontus found the strength to resist persecutions, tortures, slaughters and the Islamification that was violently attempted on the them by the Ottoman muslims.

*¹³ Filiki Eteria or Society of Friends was a secret 19th-century organization whose purpose was to overthrow the Ottoman rule of Greece and establish an independent Greek state.

This is where hundreds of patriots found shelter when they were being chased by the Turks. They came to the monastery and they avoided arrest under the order of the monk.

“In 1461 the Empire of the Komnenos was abolished by David, the last of the kings of Trepizond, who surrenders the city to Mohamed II while the whole country falls into the hands of the Ottomans. The consequences of this important event were bound to highlight the great gratitude towards the Sumela Monastery, since it provided valuable services along with the surrounding monasteries. It has also been noted that where there were no monasteries in the country Christianity vanished while in the area near the Sumela monastery and the other surrounding monasteries Christianity was left intact and robust. As long as the Christians found comfort in it, they were encouraged to preserve the memory of their former life, they nurtured hope and they were armed with patience”.

“The history of the Sumela Monastery”, pg. 78, Epaminondas Kiriakidis, (Euklidis Georgiadis publications, 1898, rev. P. Pournara, Thessaloniki, 1985)

“But the Sumela monastery during that period was an important educational centre, a true light in that long and dreadful night. At that time the educational activities of the monasteries were performed steadily without any danger. Relieved from any fear and finding hospitable ground there, the monastery bore precious fruit. The clergy of the church were guides and shepherd of the illiterate flock, while their basements were turned into education nurseries. Many scholars prevailed in them and especially in the Sumela monastery”

“The history of the Sumela Monastery”, pg. 78, Epaminondas Kiriakidis, (Euklidis Georgiadis publications, 1898, rev. P. Pournara, Thessaloniki, 1985).

THE SUMELA MONASTERY AND ITS PRESENCE IN CRYPTOCHRISTIANITY



The Sumela monastery (Photo Archive: P.C.P.A.)

Due to the pressure and the persecutions that many Christians of Pontus suffered not only individuals but also whole families and entire villages were forced to embrace Islam, in order to avoid the eventual consequences of their insistence to remain Christians, keeping their Christian creed hidden.

During those rough years the monks of the Sumela monastery supported many crypto-christians, helping them to perform their religious duties. They enforced their creed; they encouraged them to keep the sparkle of hope alive so that when better times would come they would be able to return to their patrimonial creed.

Thus, crypto-christians from the surrounding areas, and not only them, often visited the Sumela monastery along with the monasteries of Vazelon, Peristereote and many others as they were great religious pilgrimages not only for the christians but also for the muslims, who felt great respect for the Holy Mother.

This is where "those who secretly worshipped Jesus Christ got baptized, received communion and performed all their religious ceremonies."

For the ones that lived in areas far away from the monastery and particularly among big populations of people of other creed, the monastery sent priests, who, dressed up in the clothes of a dervish so as not to attract attention, they visited the houses of the crypto-christians in risk of their lives. They performed their ceremonies within specially modified areas of these houses or in caves, providing the chance to the people to fulfill their religious duties.

Throughout these tough times the monks preserved all the names of the crypto-christians encoded in the monastery. In February of 1856 when the sultan decree Hatti Humaun ensured religious and political freedom, these codes became the evidence , as the law stated, for many crypto-christians who decided to return to their ancestors' creed officially.

"Then the monasteries achieved numerous and remarkable goals, transforming themselves into centres of salvation and comfort, where those who secretly worshipped Jesus Christ got baptized, received communion and they performed all their religious ceremonies. The priests of those monasteries who visited the villages, blessed them, provided comfort to the ones who suffered and instilled hope in their hearts.

The Monastery of Sumela undertook beneficial activities without it the current situation of the surrounding villages would be different as it is in the areas where there were no monasteries, and in particular in Ofi and Tonia. This is what Divine Providence had in store for this Holy Monastery.

Its religious and national spirit remained alive until recently when in the midst of this century the majority of the crypto-christians decided to reveal the codes of this monastery and of all the surrounding ones. These codes were very useful since they found Christian names in them that the crypto-christians took through their baptism”.

**“The History of the Sumela Monastery”, pg. 267
Epaminondas Kiriakidis
(Euklidis Georgiadis publications, 1898
rev. P. Pournara, Thessaloniki, 1985)**



Left, crypto-Cristiasn priest, right and down, George Kioupidis, crypto-Christian from Ak Dag Maden . He was hunged in Amasya, Turkey in 1921.



The words of this popular poem are characteristic of the times that relate to cryptochristianity.

*“Siona don’t torture yourself and don’t have a heavy heart
you will change your golden name and you will get a Turkish one
you will get a golden husband, a Christian child
Mahmud agha for everybody and Nicholas in secre
You will get married in the monastery in the middle of the night”*



Above is the abbot and monks of the monastery of Agios George, Below the monastery of Saint George of Peristereotas . Photo from the beginning of the 20th century



THE MONKS AND THE MONASTERY OF SUMELA IN PONTUS IN THE DAYS OF DESTRUCTION

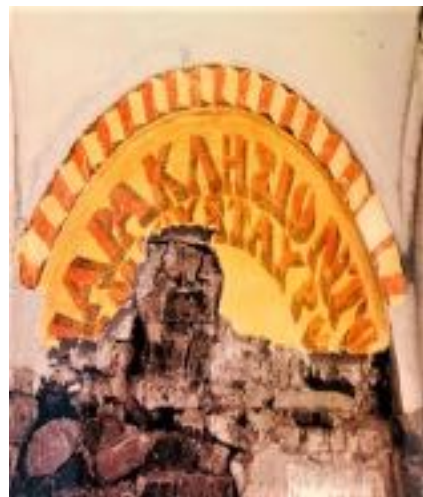


From the left: elder Panaretos Topalidis, the abbot of the Sumela monastery, Athanasios Soumelidis, or possibly the elder Gerasimos, representative of the Constantinople patriarchate, with the vice abbot Ignatios Sumeliotis (3rd from the right) and monks at the cathedral's courtyard . Photography of the year 1912. (Archive : P.C.P.A.)

“The violence of the feudal lords influenced the financial status of the monastery in two ways, they looted it often, and because fear prevailed in the surrounding area, people were afraid to visit the Monastery, and thus it lacked substantial income that came from the offers of the worshippers. The violators threatened abbot Damiane in person along with Chariton, the curator, they increased the annual arbitrary taxes and thus they received candle, butter and money from the monastery. Tzanalitzas is particularly referred to as a person who caused a lot of damage to the monastery. Entering the monastery in violence the feudal lords ordered for the treasury to be brought to them and they stole the most precious items. There came a point when they received the income of the monastery, whose financial status deteriorated day by day...”



The relics of the Sumela monastery prior to its restoration , the chapel and the damaged library of the monastery which hosted 84 manuscript codes, part of which are found in the musum of Ancara in Turkey.



Excerpt from the code of the Sumela monastery in Pontus, 1788 from 1908 until 1922, due to the geopolitical alterations of the debilitating Ottoman Empire, was a difficult period for the monks who left the monastery and looked for other ways of maintaining their monastic duties in other areas, since it was difficult for them to find the necessary means for their survival.

The few monks who stayed at the monastery, due to the attacks from thieves, apart from the harassment they underwent they were also threatened with death.

Characteristic are the reports of G. Kandilaptis, who presented a research (pages 103-105 of this present document) and an article on the newspaper of "ARGONAUTIS" in 1916 which was published in Vatoum of Russia, the works of Miltiadis Nymphopoulos who refers to the monks of the Panagia Sumelamonastery in his paper "The history of Santa of Pontus", the works of Mrs. Theodora Ioannidou in her book, «The ones who never laughed», which refers to monk Ieremias (Georgios Tsarides).

Monk Ieremias was hung three times over the rocks for intimidation, so that he would give away the tokens and the money of the monastery. Despite the pressure and the threats, he remained sturdy and he revealed nothing. During the tumultuous and hard period for native peoples, namely Armenians, Assyrians and Greek people who lived in the areas of Pontus and Asia Minor, he hid and protected numerous victims among the monks.

During World War I, as Mrs. Theodora Ioannidou mentions in her book, not a blanket was left in the monastery. Everything, including the animals and the food supplies, were taken to cover the needs in the Turkish hospitals.

On Easter eve in April 1916, while the Russian troops had entered Trepizond, Turkish soldiers attacked the monastery, where approximately 300 people had gone to celebrate Easter, and they tried to enter. Monk Athanasios Soumelidis who was serving as abbot at the time, a former vicar of the Metropolis of Haldia, in collaboration with the former abbot Anthemos Masmanidis and the escort of the monastery, decided to defy any danger and not allow them to enter. Instead they continued the rituals of the Easter ceremony along with the people present.

A few days later and while the monks performed the mass with the people at the chapel of Saint Barbara singing the necessary chimes, Turkish soldiers came back to the monastery, watched the mass, became furious and they tried to attack against the people gathered.

However, while they were waiting they ate from the "crazy honey", a type of honey which had been eaten by the men of Xenofon almost 2500 years earlier, as he mentions in his book "Kyros's ascend", and this is why they came in a state of euphoria and did not go on with their attack.

The people of the monastery tried to protect themselves going through the war zone and resorted to the neighboring metropolis of Livera which was under Russian occupation, seeking for help that they did not find.

When, despite all the dangers, they returned to the monastery, they found the corpse of the muleteer of the monastery lying in the woods. They picked it up and they buried it. Then they met the 42 patriots who had remained hostages in the interior of the monastery where they had sought shelter.

The soldiers who returned to the monastery threatened to bring τηλεβόλα to open its entrance. On April 19th 1916, facing these threats the monks decided to evacuate the monastery temporarily in order to be saved.

The next day the soldiers found the monastery empty and they turned it into the headquarters of their guard. Despite the soldiers' unquenched desire for the destruction of the monastery, as written in the newspaper of "ARGONAUTIS", the Arab διοικητής did not allow them to make any excavation and thus many of the heirlooms that the monks had hidden were saved.



The monastery was once again plundered. The hagiographies and the cells were destroyed by fanatic soldiers and greedy thieves. Golden and silver holy items, invaluable manuscripts, pectoral matrixes, even the crystals from the lamps of the monastery became ornaments in cow necks, while the sacred epitaph was turned into a saddle for animals; evidence of the intellectual and cultural level of the gangs of thieves who often attacked the monastery.

This period of terrorism and looting of the monasteries lasted almost three months. During this period the monastery of Saint John Vazelon was

destroyed, murdering, according to the archbishop of Rodopolis Kurillos, 487 Christian souls and raping and then killing numerous women and girls. They also destroyed two more female monasteries: the monastery of Panagia Kremasti and the monastery of Saint John Kouspidis.



The monks of the first one wandered around the surrounding woods and found shelter in the villages of Ardasa and Livera. Even though the monks returned to the monastery in 1918 after the signing of the necessary truce, the fighting among the people of Trepizond and Rodopolis continued for about two years since there was the eminent question of “who does the monastery belong to?”

With the initiative of monk Dositheos and the contribution of the lawyer Isaak Pelagidis they were able to get the necessary order from the Turkish government, which guaranteed that the monastery belongs to the Metropolis of Rodopolis. It was at that time that the abbot of Trepizond , Athanasios

Soumelidis, was discharged and the monastery began to operate again under the guidance of Polykarpos Adaktyloy - Parmaxous,(1918-1921). It was obvious from the various events that were still going on, that the situation for the monasteries and for all the Christian populations of the areas of historical Pontus was in turmoil.

In March 1922, under the abbotship of Dositheos Stefanidis from Santa a strange something strange happened at the monastery. Miltiades Nymphopoulos refers to this event in his book about Santa. The monks realized once again that their animals had been stolen and this was of prime importance for their subsistence and their survival.

After some investigation they found the murders who were the siblings Aristeides and Crhistos from the village of Gourgeni, who often stole the animals of the Greek people of the periphery of Panagia Soumela. In their attempt to get their cows back, their relative Dositheou Panagiotis, waited for them in the dark and under unknown circumstances he got into a gun fight with them in the winter of 1922. This is how Aristeidis was killed and his excellent armor was taken from him.

Christos, the other brother, wanting to get revenge for his brother's death he set a trap for Panagiotis, who hid in the monastery for quite a long time to avoid any further conflict. His brother and abbot Dositheos, after completing his morning obligations at the monastery, he used to leave the monastery in the afternoon in order to deal with the chores of the monastic community.

Then, in order to avoid the tiring journey of return, he used to stay at the metochion of Saint Constantine in the village of Skalita, along with his relatives. In one such day and while Alexandros thought that he was monk Panagiotis, who he considered responsible for his brother's death, he shot monk Dositheos and killed him. People believed that the moral instigator of Dositheos's murder was archbishop of Rodopolis Kyrillos, who tried to have power and rights in the earnings of the monastery. This is how the monastery was left with only three monks.

The three monks of the monastery of Soumela, during the next months of 1922, foreseeing the tragedy that was about to happen, in their attempt to save the sacred heirlooms that were kept in the monastery, they decided to hide the most precious ones.

On the 20th of September 1922, at 18.00 in the afternoon, monk Ieremias Tsaridis,(1875-1932) monk Panagiotis Stefanidis and monk Polykarpos Parmaxous, (1887-1957), put the Holy Icon of Soumeliotissa of Evangelist Luke, the manuscript of the four-gospel of Saint Christopher and the Cross of the emperor of Trepizond Manouel C' of the Komnenos in a chest and they buried it in the yard of the chapel of Saint Barbara.

Then they left and they returned to the monastery or they might have stayed overnight at the birth city of Ieremias, in the neighboring village of Kouspidi.

After the tragic events against the Greek people of Pontus and a short while before the signing of the Lozane Treaty on the 30th of July 1923, which sealed the end of the Greek Christian civilization in the area of Pontus, what ensued afterwards was the uprooting for the monks of Panagia Soumela.



Two of the three last monks of the monastery of Panagia Soumela, Polykarpos - Triantafyllos Adaktylos Parmaxous and Ieremias - Georgios Tsaridis. (Archive. George Charalambidis) and the bearer of the monastery's heirlooms, monk Amvrosios.

In February 1923 the monks were brutally attacked by people who were after the monastery's treasures. Initially they were hit with the crosses they had on their heads and then they were made to leave the monastery half naked, with torn clothes, leaving all of their belongings behind.

They were walking for three days and three nights through rough paths so that they wouldn't be seen and they covered a distance of 80 km that separates the monastery from Trepizond. They finally managed to reach their destination. The monks, who were forced to leave by the soldiers, according to narrations, were taken care of by an Armenian Catholic priest Cirillo Giovanni Zohrabian, (1881-1972) providing accommodation to the half naked monks in one of the rooms of the College of Saint Joseph's brothers.

Later on and before their transfer to Greece they found shelter in the house of monk Polykarpos Parmaxous's brother, while some of them stayed at Halki Seminary in Constantinople, met with monk Amvrosios who was there for the affairs of the monastery and in 1924 they left for Greece.

The monk was wanted and that is why, after a while, he left by boat for the neighboring Russian city of Sohumi, where he stayed for five months and then he moved to Greece. Initially he stayed in Chrysoupoli of Kavala, then to Mystras, to Mount Athos and finally in Drama where he died in 1957.

Monk Ieremias, after performing his services for almost forty years at the monastery of Soumela, he was moved to Greece where he served as a priest at the village of Lefkouda, at the suburbs of Thessaloniki, where he provided his services to the people of the village with love and elevated religious spirit.

Having a weak nature as he did, due to the haematuria that he had been suffering from as a result of the consecutive tortures, he left his last breath in 1932 in a tent. After the uprooting, the conquerors burned the monasteries of Soumela, Vazelona and Peristereota to steal their treasures. Similar attacks were made against all the churches of Pontus, which were damaged or turned into mosques.

More recently (2018), the professor of the technical university of Trepizond Ismail Kose referred to the uniqueness of the monastery and claimed that a part of its heirlooms were stolen by Americans of NATO, Russians and English, who went to the monastery while it was left unprotected for fifty years, from 1923 to 1972, and they transferred them to the museums of their country of origin.



In the area of the monastery of Soumelathere is nothing but ruins, piles of rocks, destroyed floors and hagiographies, smoked and wet walls. The monastery was turned into a shelter for illegal dealers of tobacco.

In August of 1923 the Holy Mother felt once again as if her heart was being penetrated by the sword of racism, hatred, religious fanaticism, bigotry and fascism. Thus, the Holy Mother painfully closed her burning eyes and took the road to refuge.

Until 1972 the monastery, due to the undeniable indifference of the local authorities, remained in the hands of the vandals who first desecrated it, they destroyed its hagiographies, they even pulled out the stones that they believed to be of some value and they gave it away to the flames.



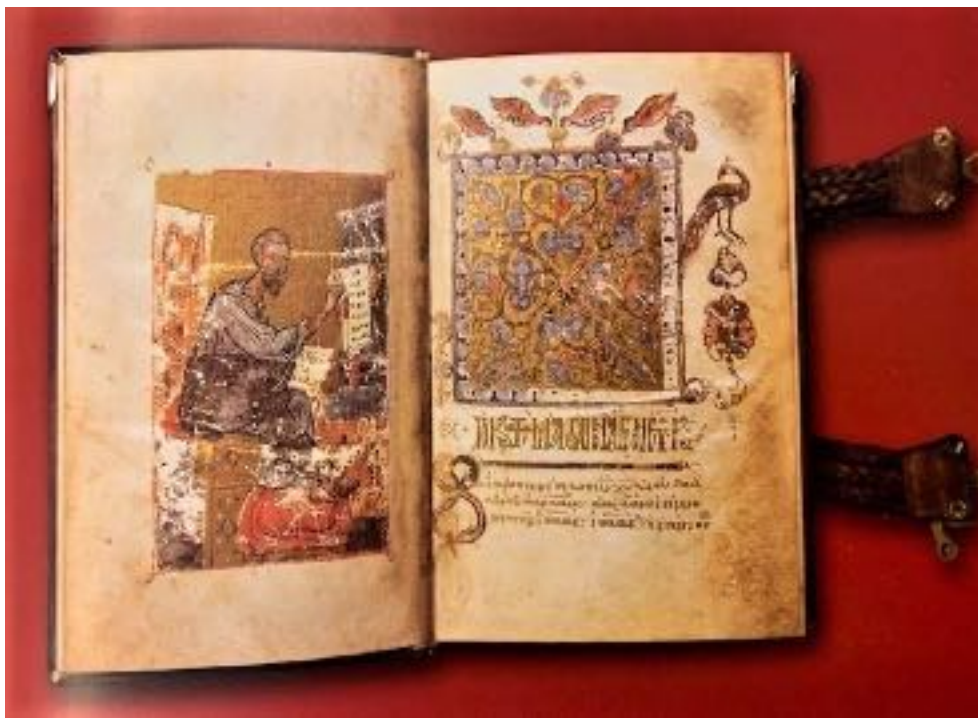
The external staircase after its restoration with the 67 steps that lead to the entrance of the monastery. (Archive: St. P. Tanimanidis)

After 1972, when the Turkish authorities realized that the monastery attracted thousands of tourists and was a profitable enterprise for them, they appointed the first curator of the antiquities, which remained alive although severely wounded.

Despite its destruction, thousands of Pontic speaking muslims who live in Turkey along with many pilgrims from Greece and from all over the world they have been swarming to the monastery on a daily basis for almost four decades. They have climbed the 67 external stairs that led to the entrance of the relics to light a candle, to pay their humble but symbolic respect. When the pilgrim of today watches the relics of the monastery, he immediately remembers , through the mind and the lips of the archbishop of Trepizond, Chrysanthos:

"But through its relics, the monastery of Sumela told the whole world of the deep respect, the religious enthusiasm and the grandeur of its owners".

ABOUT THE HEIRLOOMS OF THE MONASTERY OF PANAGIA SOUMELA



*Code , coloured mansuscript painted four gospel of the monastery of Sumela of the 17th century. One of the many heirlooms of the monastery that are kept in Saint Sophia in Konstantinople and Ancara after they were stolen from its original place.
(Photo from the book “The sacred heirlooms of the people of Pontus” Menandros publications).*

«If all the heirlooms of the monastery of Sumelawere saved intact through the years, a few of the ones found in museum of Christian archeology would be able to resemble their wealth. Unfortunately the repeated stealing that the monastery suffered, the financial and weather conditions, lead to the destruction of most of its treasures. And even though some of them are kept in its treasury and inside the temple, these are not the most valuable ones, namely crosses, icons, gospels, vestments and others, among which there is the piece of the Holy Cross offered by Manouel Komninos».

«History of the monastery of Soumela», Pg.267, Epameinondas Kyriakidis, (publ. Eucleidis Georgiadis, 1898, repr. P. Pournara, Thessaloniki, 1985).

In August of 1923 after the end of the war conflicts, Virgin Mary felt once again her heart wounded by the power of serving the purposes of the great military forces, racism, hatred, religious fanaticism and fascism.

Thus Virgin Mary, after the treaty of Lausanne, painfully closed her burned eyes and set off on her way to immigration. Until 1972 the monastery, due to the indifference of the local authorities of the times, remained a victim in the hands of vandals, who ruined its hagiographies, broke the foundations and even rocks that they believed to be valuable and then they put it on fire. After 1972, when the Turkish authorities realized that the monastery attracted many tourists, and thus it was a profitable business for them, they appointed the first guard of antiquities, who remained alive even though heavily injured.

But since then, despite the damage it suffered, thousands of Pontic speaking muslims who live in Turkey along with pilgrims from Greece and other parts of the worlds, have been flocking to visit the monastery for about six decades on a daily basis. They went up the 67 external steps that lead to the entrance of the renovated ruins, in order to pay their respects in a symbolic way.

When the visitor of today looks at the monastery's ruins , his mind and his mouth are filled with the words of the archbishop of Trepizond Chrysanthos:

«But through it ruins, the monastery of Sumelaspreads the deep respect, the religious enthusiasm and the glory of its owners».



The stamp 1896, of the monastery of Panagia Soumela, which is composed of four pieces and in order for it to be used its owners should meet, get informed about the purpose of its use and agree among them.

Turkey claims the heirlooms of “Panagia Soumela”

Apart from the statements of the mayor of the are of Matsoukas , Mr. Erdogul Genz, that were presented in the newspaper of SABAH in August of 2019 , with which he asked for the return of the Historical Icon of Panagia Sumelaclaiming that “ Here is its home”, on 23-8-2019 the Turkish newspaper Milliyet mentions with a characteristic title that “The Ministry of Toursim claims the treasures of the Monastery of Soumela”. Particularly the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Turkey, announced that they have traced almost 100 religious heirlooms of the monastery of Panagia Soumela, that are spread all over the world.



The screenshot shows a news article from the Turkish newspaper Milliyet. The main headline is "Bakanlık Sümela hazinesinin peşinde" (Ministry chasing Soumela treasures). The sub-headline reads: "İtalya ve Taroni'deki Sümela Manastırına ait 100'e yakın diniği sünen paha biçilmez değerli birer tüm dünyada keşif. Pazarlar arasında, 100 farklı çarşıya gendiği bir kaç ile 'türkleri sonra tükendiği bulduğu yapı' gibi evlere de yer alıyor". The article features a large photograph of the Soumela Monastery, a large stone building with a red roof built into a cliffside. To the right of the main image is a smaller photo of a man in a suit speaking at a podium. Below the main image are social media sharing icons (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Print) and a list of related news items with small thumbnail images.

More particularly, the article informs that Turkish academics who visited museums, collectors and universities, starting from Trepizond and heading to Constantinople, Greece, Ireland, England and the USA, compared the information and the documents that they had, which described the treasures of the monastery, from metallic vessels and artefacts to manuscripts and religious vestments.

The Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mehmet Nouri Ersoy, in his answer that was sent to the parliament, after a relevant answer of a Turkish member of the parliament, said that after relevant research, "77 pieces were defined as ecclesiastic heirlooms of the monastery of Panagia Soumela, one of the most important, as he described it, monasteries of Anatolia" and the Government had initiated the procedures for their return in Turkey.

Among these pieces of work, he claimed that there is one whose value cannot be measured with millions. When in 1364, the son of emperor Alexios C of Komninos the Great, Manouel C' Komninos the Great, offered a cross with Jesus Christ.

This cross, along with other pieces of work like the "gate with the vine", (we have known for decades that it is kept in the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford), were taken by a group of American soldiers, who were part of the NATO mission in Turkey in 1950.

«The claiming of objects by Ankara lack any substantial historical evidence», says professor İsm. Köse on newsbreak.gr



Professor of Political History at the department of Public Relations at the Polytechnic School of Karadeniz, İsmail Köse.

A discovery about the sacred heirlooms of Panagia Sumelain Trepizond was made by the Professor of Political History at the department of Public Relations at the Polytechnic School of Karadeniz, İsmail Köse. This finding comes only a few days after the headlines that state intention of the ministry of Culture in Turkey to claim the historical heirlooms.

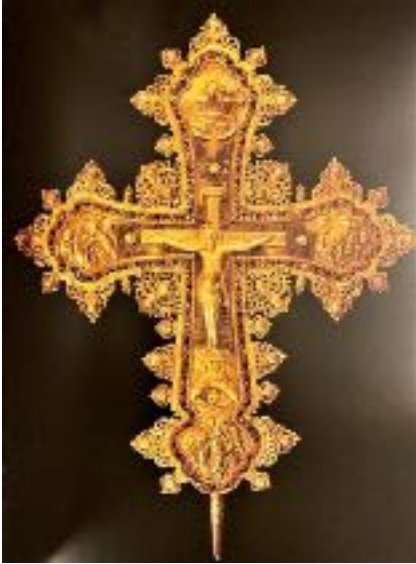
According to what the professor stated on newsbreak.gr, the heirlooms were not stolen nor where they sent illegally abroad. Referring to the missing heirlooms, Köse said that in 1931 the government of İsmet İnönü had

granted permission to Greece's plea for the reception of the heirlooms that had been buried by the monks at the chapel of Saint Barbara, after the evacuation of the monastery of Panagia Soumelain 1923.

As a consequence they cannot be claimed back since they were given with legal concession by the government. The three great pieces of work that are being referred to are the miraculous icon of Panagia Soumela, which is linked to Evangelist Luke, the gospel of Saint Christopher written in parchment and a Cross from the Holy Wood that had been offered to the monastery by Emperor Manouel C' of the Komnenos' dynasty.

The professor also makes reference to the great fire that broke out in 1937 and completely ruined the monastery. As a result there was no official record of the heirlooms until 1970. There are only testimonies of the people of the area who say that "during the period of 1956-1960 American NATO soldiers took some of them in big crates and brought them to the U.S.A.". "They took six crates filled with valuable items from the monastery of Panagia Soumela", said the professor on the 17th of January 2018.





Procession Cross of 1862. Height 90 cm., weight 3.344gram. Reliquary of 1812 of Saint Prokopios. Height 11,5 cm. length 21,5 cm., width 15,5cm. (Photo archive Collection: The sacred heirlooms of the people of Pontus. Publ.Menandros.)

The professor of history Mr. Ismail Kiose, in his interview to the Turkish newspaper “Millet” referred to the numerous attacks that the monastery of Panagia Sumelain Trepizond had suffered in the past.

“We know that NATO soldiers who were in Turkey in 1950 took away many of the Soumela’s monastery treasures. Today the engraved door of the monastery is kept in a museum in the USA, while other items are found in British museums”, said Ismail Kiose, according to the reporter of Antenna in Turkey, Maria Zaharaki.

According to the professor the monastery of Panagia Sumelain 1923, a year after the exchange of populations until 1973 it was left unguarded and all the stealing took place during that period.

“NATO soldiers took six creates and filled with various items of the monastery. This was testified by the elderly people who live in the area during that period. Some manuscripts of the monastery are found in the museum of Culture in Ancara and this is how they have been saved to this present day”, he underlines.

WHERE ARE ALL THE HEIRLOOMS OF THE MONASTERY



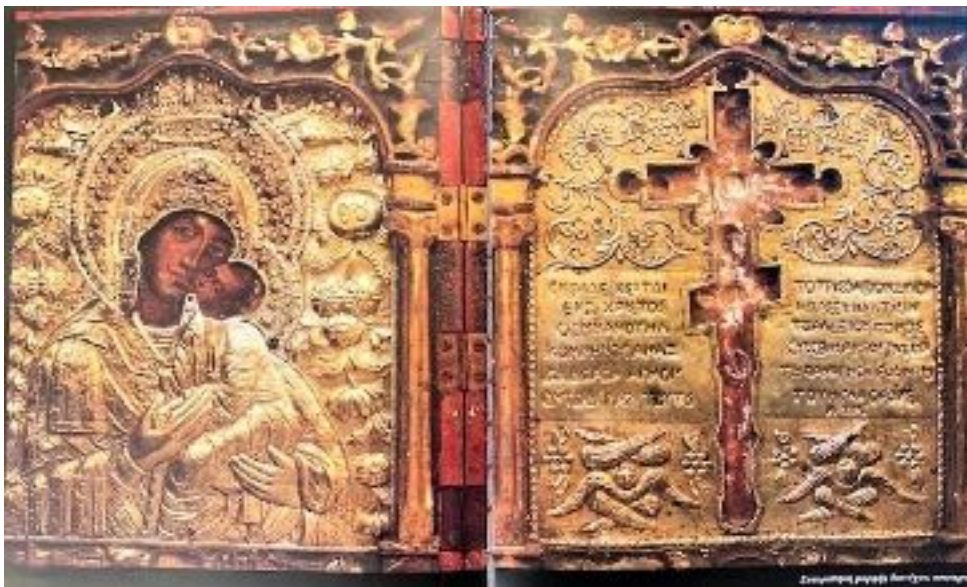
Photo of 15-8-1997. The minister of Culture, Evangelos Venizelos, accompanied by priests and visitors, transfers a gilded Epitaph of 1790 of the historical monastery of Panagia Sumelaof Pontus, from the Benaki Museum of Athens to the Board of Directors of the “Panagia Soumela” Association.



The gilded Epitaph of 1790 of the historical monastery of Panagia Sumelawhich is kept in the new monastery of Soumeliotissa in Greece. (Photo archive: Panagia Sumela Association) .

The Board of Directors of the new monastery of Panagia Sumela, having the information that the Turkish governments keep in the basement of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, 77 heirlooms of the monastery, sacred vessels, vestments, manuscripts and gospels of the monastery, in cooperation with conscientious Turkish archaeologists who recorded, photographed and provided the relevant material, they published a volume referring to the heirlooms, asking for their placement in special window cases in the renovated monastery, which has been turned into a museum by the Turks.

The same issue was presented by scientists from Greece, Turkey, the USA and Europe in special conferences organized by “PASPE” and the “Euxeian Association of European Citizens” in the halls of the European Parliament in 2014, in 2015 and in 2019, within the presence of members of the European parliament of all political parties, Pontian, Armenian, Assyrian and refugee associations among media representatives and was adopted as a natural demand in the meeting they had with the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Martin Schulz.



The original case of the Holy Wood of Manuel III Komnenos the Great that is kept in Constantinople.

Unfortunately, while the Turkish authorities have not responded to this logical demand, they ask for the return of the heirlooms that are found in other countries, even though they have not shown until today their intention to honour the existing heirlooms.



Photo: the German member of the European parliament, Mr. George Chatzimarkakis, gives to the president of the E.P. Mr. Schulz the volume that refers to the heirlooms and the petition that the PASPE submitted in April 2014 for the promotion and the relocation of the aforementioned items in the renovated monastery of Panagia Sumela, after the scientific conference that took place within the premises of the E.P., in the presence of Greek and foreign members of the E.P., who adopted the relevant proposition made by the General secretary of the Association of Panagia Sumela, lawyer Mr. Charalambos Apostolidis. On the bottom: members of the E.P. – Kimon Arsenis, Marilena Koppa, Marieta Yiannakoy, George Koumoutsakos, minister Panagiotis Kouroubliis and other attendees.



They must also believe, based on the number of visitors (about 700.000 – 1.000.000 a year) of the renovated but traumatized structures with its wounds evident until today, that they attract many tourists and they can increase the number of tourists and visitors for the financial benefit of the area.

Since the Turkish Minister suggests the return of the three heirlooms that are found in the new monastery in Greece, I believe that it is our duty to provide the relevant information to the people involved that the issue has four different points of view:

Political, Legal , Theological and Ethical.

a) According to International Law it is common knowledge that the Court of Human Rights has concluded about a relevant matter that “the conquest and the looting do not lead to the ownership of the invader”.

b) The order for the transfer of the three heirlooms from Turkey to Greece took place after the meeting of 1930 of the prime ministers of Greece and Turkey, Eleftherios Venizelos and Ismet Inonou , with the common decision and concession of all.

c) The transfer of the three heirlooms took place in 1931 with the concession by the Turkish Government of the relevant permission and the signing of the necessary protocol between Greece and Turkey.

d) The monastery of Panagia Sumela is stauropegial and it belongs to the cultural influence of the Ecumenical Archbishop of Constantinople, who gave his blessing and approval for the transfer of the Icon and the other two heirlooms in Greece in the next years.

After Patriarch Fotios who paid his respects to it and blessed its relocation in Greece in 1931 during its transportation from Turkey, two other Patriarchs, his holiness Athinagoras and his holiness Mr. Bartolomew have visited the new monastery, performed their services and paid their respect to Her grace.

e) The hagiographies of an icon and it’s inclusion in an ecclesiastic community is on its own a confession of faith for the orthodox Christians. However the sole role of the icon is the mass in the presence of faithful Christians.

The icon and the symbolization of the face depicted on it alludes to the Christians and , thus. It cannot exist independent of the people. Therefore it has substantial role in the mass and in all the religious events.

In this particular case, the people to whom the holy icon of Panagia Sumela allude to along with the other heirlooms, are found in Greece for the reasons we mentioned earlier. Consequently the icon of Panagia Sumela and the other two heirlooms that are kept in the new monastery at the mountain of Vermion in Kastania of Veroia cannot be considered museum exhibits and remained locked up in a museum.

f) After the obligatory exchange of populations the Greek people of Pontus lost their historical hometown and tried to keep their historical memory, their customs and their identity alive through the holy symbols that they carried as refugees to Greece.

Monk Amvrosios Soumeliotis wrote to Filon Ktenidis in 1950 about the heirlooms:

“I felt an unexplainable joy for the efforts made, having served at the historical monastery of Sumela for many years and as a visitor for the last time in 1931, where I went under the order of the government and took the sacred heirlooms of the monastery that were buried underground, it is with deep sorrow that I found them locked up in a museum and I sympathized for the sorrow of our Pontic brothers who envisioned Virgin Mary saying to them in the day of judgment:

“I was imprisoned and you didn’t come to see me...”.

According to our research and the information we have collected about the heirlooms of the monastery of Panagia Soumela, we have come to know that in the storage rooms of the museum of Saint Sophia in Constantinople there are two copies of the edict of Emperor Alexios C, with the number I2902, dating back to I365 (I364?), when Galaktion was abbot.

A copy of this edict is also found in the Byzantine Museum of Athens and in the monastery of Dionysios in Mount Athos. On the one side there is the text in its original dialect and on the other side it is translated in common language by Sevastoss Kiminitis from Trepizonde.

According to archeologist Nilai Yilmaz and the researcher-author Akylla – Mila, and the board of directors of the Panagia Sumela Association who have relevant photographs, sixty seven (67) manuscript codes and tenths of books from the monastery are found at the Archeological Museum of Ancara today.

Furthermore, on the floor of catechumens of Saint Sophia there are archieratic matrixes, ecclesiastic brocades, vade mecums, a holy Gospel written in Russian and Greek. Copies of Patriarchal Siggilions have been transferred to the library of Saint Sophia.

The 14th century gospel of the monastery of Sumela includes the gospels of three evangelists and the fourth one is in a chart. Many of the valuable icons of the Holy Monastery in Pontus were stolen and transferred to Oxford and Dublin.

The National Gallery of Dublin hosts an icon of exquisite technique of the old monastery (see photo pg. 142) , presumably of the 13th or 14th century, that depicts Virgin Mary with Christ and bears the title: “Rosechicned Mother of Christ”.

According to narrations, this icon was fled in mules by the monks of the monastery of Sumela during the evacuation of the monastery. Due to its poor condition it was not given the proper attention initially. But when it was maintained and the figure of Virgin Mary and Christ appeared, the exquisite technique of the hagiography of the icon became apparent.

At the Asmolian museum of Oxford there is a wooden canopy of Virgin Mary (Dumbarton), the wooden Gate of the Sumela Monastery, an icon of the Godbearer, the head of Saint Barnabas, and the unique manuscript of Vasileios Digenis Akritas.



The unique manuscript of Vasileios Digenis Akritas



The God Bearer. “The guiding Holy Mother”. An icon of exquisite 13th century Byzantine art originally found in the old Monastery in Pontus (Today it has been transferred and kept in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin)

On the right Shrine royaldoors at the Cathedral of the Sumela monastery in Pontus (Today it is kept in the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford, after the destruction of the monastery).

Until the 18th century that is where the candelabra of Selim the Sultan were kept but they were stolen and have been missing since then. Many icons and heirlooms were probably burnt by barbarians who ruined, stolen and finally closed down the monastery.

For all these valuable items, the boards of directors of the Association and the Foundation of Panagia Sumelaha have been struggling to trace them, maintain them and make them accessible to scientists and to the visitors of the monastery.

I want to believe that the initiative of the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, aims at the gathering of all the heirlooms that are spread outside the monastery, most of which are kept for centuries in the storage rooms of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, in museum and private collections, and their relocation in their natural place, the historical monastery of Panagia Sumelain the area of Matsoukas in Turkey.

I hope that the recent interest of the Turkish government for these heirlooms will give the opportunity to the ministry of culture, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Association of Panagia Soumela, relevant services and specialized scientists from Greece and Turkey to cooperate in order to record, codify and relocate them in their natural place. Naturally this suggestion alludes and refers to the modern politicians of Greece and Turkey, following the steps of Eleftherios Venizelos and Ismet Inonou, at least on this issue, so as to set free all these historical items.





Left banner of 1678. The assumption of the Godbearer is depicted on red satin . Height 0,94cm , width 0,50cm. One of the heirlooms of the monastery that were stolen after the looting of the monastery and are kept in Saint Sophia of Constantinople and Ancara.

Right 17th century Byzantine icon transported by the Greek from the village of Kromni to the new monastery of Panagia Soumela in Greece.
(Photo from the book “The sacred heirlooms of the people of Pontus”, Publ, Menandros)

They should leave the dark basements where they have been kept idle for decades and they should be accessible to study by new historians and researchers, thus emphasizing their origin along with new evidence about the sixteen century history of the monastery of Soumela. This is how the thousands of visitors who visit the historical monastery of Sumelain Matsoukas in Trepizonde and the new monastery in Kastania in Veroia in Greece, will be able to study, learn, admire, pay their respects to the items of invaluable artistry and historical and intellectual value.

Because I think that the heirlooms of this historical monastery of Panagia Sumelathat are spread in various places, should not be some pieces of art included in museums and private collections, since the monastery of

Sumelain Pontus, although it has been presently converted into a museum, it remains a vivid ecclesiastic place that carries within the history of centuries for the Greek people of Pontian origin.

Because all of them compose the history of the monastery of Panagia Sumelain Pontus while at the same time they are vivid proof of the Greek presence for sixteen centuries in this area which molded the culture that was developed there with the co-existence of Christians and Muslims for many centuries.



Photo: the two sides of the gospel, height 37,5 cm and width 27 cm, which was given by Ioannis Ipomenas from Trepizonde to the monastery of Panagia Sumela in 1736. It is found among the other heirlooms of the monastery that are kept in the premises of Saint Sophia.

It is certain that the Greek people of Pontian descend along with many other faithful Christians who have been visiting the monastery for more than seventy years, as they consider it a source of religious alleviation, a symbol of the history of the Greek people of Pontus and of national pride which are blended together harmoniously with faith in Jesus and the Godbearer Panagia Sumela, will want to visit the historical monastery in order to see the heirlooms, take a trip in history and time with them and pay their respects to her grace.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE RETURN OF THE HOLY ICON



The minister of N. Greece, Leonidas Iasonidis, passionate Pontic patriot

The unconfined love that these uprooted people felt towards Soumeliotissa, the incurable nostalgia for their unforgettable homelands, nurtured the hope of liberation that emerged from the first moment of their uprooting like an imperative duty in the mind and the consciousness of all the Greek refugees in Pontus.

On the day of the remembrance of the fall of Constantinople 29th of May 1930, the archbishop of Xanthium, Polycarpos Psoriasis, former bishop of Kotiora, officiates in the Great Cave of Kalavryta in Peloponnese where the “sister” icon of the Madonna is kept which, according to tradition, was also painted by Luke and he meets El. Venizelos. Upon this unexpected meeting with the prime minister he asks him:

- How come so many Pontic people attend the festivities today?

The bishop explains to him that the love of the Christians and especially of the refugees of Pontus, to the face of the Madonna that has been painted by Evangelist Luke is immense.

- So this icon was created by the Evangelist? The prime minister wonders - That’s right, the bishop answers, and this is only one icon. The Evangelist painted three icons. The second one is in Cyprus, in the monastery of Kykkos and the third, our Madonna remains enslaved in Trepizond of Pontus.



Eleftherios Venizelos, prime minister.



The metropolite of Xanthi, Polikarpos Psomiadis

- And is it still there? Venizelos asks with great interest.
- Yes, the bishop answers.
- Then we should send for it, the Greek prime minister answers in a spontaneous manner.
- Bishop Polikarpos agrees and goes on to pose a reasonable question for that period of time.
- But how Mr. president? Not even a Greek bird is allowed to reach Pontus
- And who told you that? Venizelos responds. And he goes on puzzled.
- Listen, my bishop, when we return to Athens you should remind me to bring this icon back. And he concluded saying that: it is a great heirloom for all the Greek people!

During that same year the prime minister of Turkey, Ismet Inonu, visits Athens in return of Eleftherios Venizelos's visit in Ancara. At the official reception held in his honor minister Leonidas Iasonidis assumes the duty of addressing Inonu in Turkish.

After Iasonidis's speech, feeling excited because of what he had just heard Inonu asks him if he has any wishes for the land he was born in Pontus. Without any hesitation, he asks for the transportation of the icon and other precious heirlooms in Greece. Venizelos is touched by the request that Iasonidis addresses to Inonu, after the requests of Polikarpos and Chrysanthos.

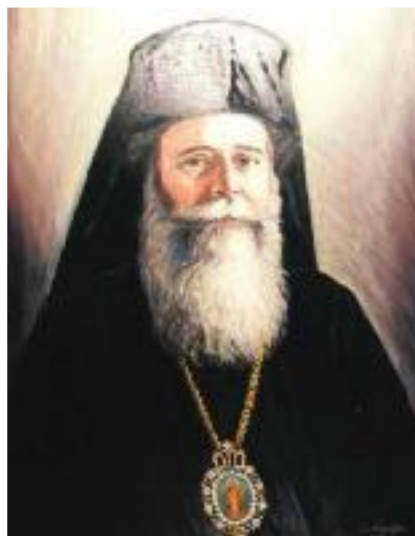
Thus, he rushes to contribute to the satisfaction of the request of the Pontic people and he adds his own request to the Turkish prime minister, Ismet Inonu.



The prime minister of Turkey , Ismet Inonu, and the prime minister of Greece, Eleftherios,Venizelos. (Photo Archive: Association of Pontic Scientist)



Ο πρώτος Αββάς Σουμελιώτης που βρήκε και μετέφερε την εικόνα της Παναγίας από την Σούμλα στην Ελλάδα.



The Abbot on the left, Amvrosios Soumeliotis who found Carried the icon of Sumela from Pontus to Greece. On the, right, the Archbishop of Athens, Chrysanthos Filipidis.

Initially the prime minister himself and then the Turkish Government, thanks to the relationships that are established between the two countries at that time under the dogma of the “Greek Turkish friendship”, are convinced to issue the necessary permission for the liberation of the icon of “Panagia Soumeliotisa”.

It is at that time that the first problem appears and it has to be solved before the research for the detection of the icon can begin. Who knew his way round the monastery and could take up the difficult and dangerous task of returning to Turkey for the quest and the detection of the Holy Icon?

Archbishop Chrysanthos, president of the Treasury of Exchangeable Property at that time, which dealt with this issue, invited from Lagadas where he served the archimadrite Ieremias, who was a monk at the monastery of Sumela. Upon their departure along with the abbot of the monastery in 1922, they had hidden the icon of the Holy Mother among the other heirlooms in order to save them from the rage of the Turks, bearing the hope it wouldn't be long before they could return to the monastery and restore them in their initial position.

Seeing that the weather conditions at that time were very bad (December of 1930) and the monk's health was not good, or because he did not want to remember or relive the atrocities of the Turks that he had suffered as a person but as a member of the monastery as well, he announced his inability to travel to Pontus.

Thus, one of the last monks of the monastery, the lively and bold Amvrosios Soumeliotis was called to substitute him. After visiting the elderly monk of the Monastery Ieremias at Filiro of Lagadas he confirmed the exact spot where the icon and other heirlooms were buried and he initiated his Holy mission in Pontus. In the month of October 1931 monk Amvrosios Soumeliotis reaches historical Pontus in his quest for the holy heirlooms.

He finds the Holy Icon, the Holy Cross with the Holy wood, along with the handwritten gospel of Saint Christopher. He takes them to Athens and hands them to the archbishop of Trepizond and later archbishop of Athens, Chrysanthos Filippidis. He places them temporarily in the Byzantine Museum of Athens.

Without any hesitation, he asks for permission to the transfer the icon and other valuable heirlooms to Greece. Venizelos is touched by this plea, after the ones of bishop Polykarpos and Chrysanthos.

That was the plea that was addressed by minister of Pontic origin Iasonidis to Inonou. Thus he contributes to the satisfaction of this plea of the Pontic people and he immediately added his plea to the Turkish prime minister, Ismet Inonou.

At a later stage the Turkish government, thanks to the grace and the relationships that are cultivated at that time between the two countries in the framework of the "Greek – Turkish Friendship", is convinced and thus grants the necessary permission for the liberation of the icon of "Panagia Soumela".

It is then that the first obstacle appears and it has to be overcome so that the research for the icon may initiate. Who knows his way around the monastery and could go through this difficult and dangerous journey of return to Turkey for the quest of the Holy Icon?

The metropolitan Chrysanthos, president of the Trust of Exchangeable Cultural Treasures at that time, who was dealing with this issue, called, from Lagadas where he was performing his duties, archbishop Ieremias, who was a monk of the Sumelamonastery.

He along with the abbot of the monastery, Polykarpos, had hidden the icon of Virgin Mary together with two other heirlooms in order to save them from the Turkish animosity during the evacuation of the monastery in 1922. They had hoped that soon they would be able to return to the monastery and place them in their original position.

Because of the bad weather conditions at that time of year (December of 1930) and the poor condition of the fifty year old monk and his probable refusal to recall the atrocities of the Turkish people that he himself had suffered, he claimed that he was unable to go to Pontus.

Thus, his place was taken by one of the last monks of the monastery, who was alive and bolder. Amvrosios Soumeliotis (Anastasiadis 1883-1970) came from the village of Assos in Sourmena, and he served as vicar at the church of Saint Marina in Toumba of Thessaloniki. Monk Amvrosios together with the archimandrite and former abbot of the monastery Anthemos and monk Dositheos asked for protection by the Holy Office of Russia when the monastery was attacked, after the accusations made by Metropolitans of Amaseia Germanos and of Trepizond Chrysanthos.

That is why this attitude, according to the writings of Anthemos, “was considered an act of treason by the Holy Office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, who called as traitors” and they had been deleted by the list of monks of the monastery and exiled to Mount Athos together with monks Ierotheos, Theoklitos and Barnabas.

Nevertheless, Amvrosios was not exiled but shortly after the destruction of Asia Minor in 1922, together with archimandrite Anthemos were running the monastery's chores in Constantinople and did not know where the other monks had hidden the heirlooms.

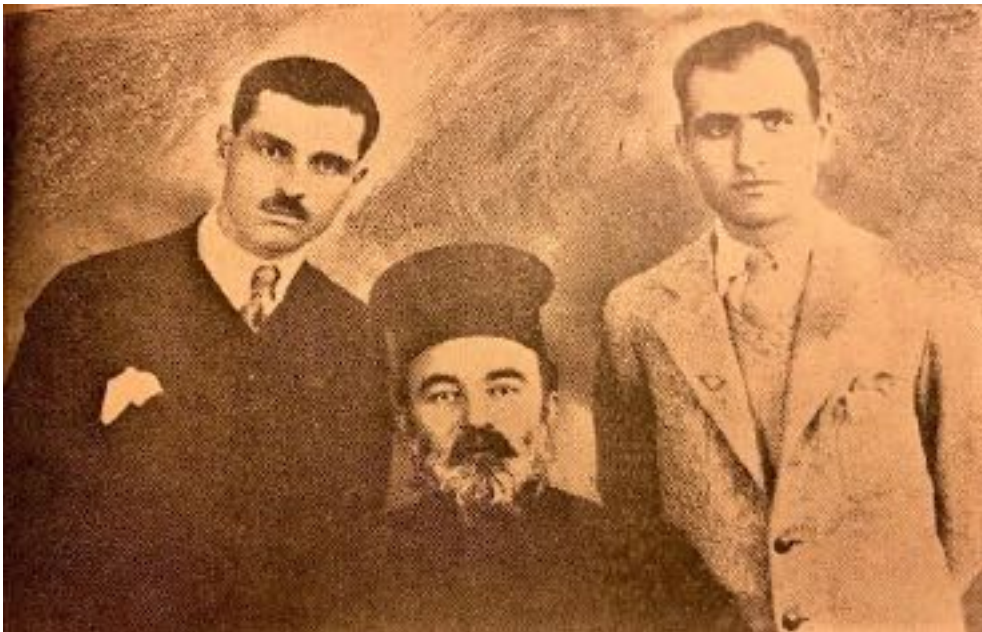
After visiting in Fillyro of Lagadas the monk of the monastery, father Ieremias, who was one of the monks who had hidden the heirlooms but due to the poor condition of his physical and mental health from the tortures he has gone through by the Turks at the monastery for many decades, he could not and he did not wish to return to the monastery but he confirmed the exact point where they were hidden.

Thus, monk Amvrosios Soumeliotis set off for his holy and hard mission to Pontus.

Monk Amvrosios Soumeliotis, who had a diplomat's passport and a warm letter of introduction from the Turkish ambassador Enis Bein, on October 22nd 1931 , he travelled together with the head of the Democratic party, Alexandros Papanastasiou, went by ship from Piraeus to Constantinople and they visited the Greek ambassador. .

Later on, accompanied by the Turkish speaking Alekos Vasileiou, clerk of the mixed committee, they begin their journey on the "Tzouhmouriet" ship on their way to Trepizond on October 27th. After a five day hard trip, they reach the port of Dafnouda on November 2nd 1931 at 11.00 p.m.

They visited the Διοικητή of the police of Trepizond and then the local Νομάρχη, who read the letter of the Turkish ambassador and he paid his respects standing, showing deep interest for the mission, he wishes the good luck and he offers them a tsantarma.



The monk of the monastery of "Panagia Soumela" , Amvrosios Soumeliotis, photographed in the month of October of 1931 with the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Alekos Vasileiou, and with the Turkish police officer, Nessiat Efendi, who accompanied him on his journey to the monastery of Panagia Sumela for the excavation of the three heirlooms.

With the company of the Turkish police officer Nessiat Efendi by the prefecturer they continue their journey and about a kilometer before they enter Trepizond, in Deimendere, the local police who saw a priest in their car, stops them and after the necessary control he lets them pass.

While they were on their way and they were supposed to reach Tsevizlouk an hour ago they meet hundreds of Kurdish people from the periphery of mountain Ararat and the surrounding areas, with their families, their animals and their home appliances, that the Turkish government, due to the rebellion against it, had deported to other regions of Asia and they had to travel for five hours to cover the distance.

When they finally arrive, the people of Tsevislouk offer them a warm welcome. In the warm meeting that Amvrosios had with the local authorities he asked and he was given five soldiers and five policemen as escort on their way to the monastery.

At seven o'clock in the morning, with the escort that was given to them by Kaimakamis for their safety, muleteers and 13 horses carrying their belongings, they begin their journey towards the monastery of Sumelafrom the rocky path next to Dafnopotamos.

As Amvrosios himself described in 1950 on the magazine of «Pontiaki Estia» on issue 5, pages 425-429, «I closed my eyes so I would not see. I closed my nose so that I could not smell. My ears and my spirit remained open. I heard the mass performed by other monks and I recalled the glory days of the feast. I crossed myself, I whipped my tears and I prayed. «Virgin Mary, forgive my sins, may your will be realized».

By noon they had arrived at the monastery, after they had left the animals and the *αγωγάτες* who followed him at the monastery's inn, and he saw the monastery far away on the glorious mountain of Melas. When he approached and he entered the sacred place of the temple that was filled with tones of ruins and damaged hagiographies, he realized the complete destruction and its abandonment.

He fell on his knees, he kissed the sacred ground of the monastery and he sang the introit of Virgin Mary. When he saw two Turkish muslims who were next to him praying at the same time at the monastery, he turned and asked them with a strick look on his face.

-What are you doing here? And the answer was “ziarete keltouk”.

First you destroy the monastery and then you come to pray in her grace?

-Then why did you burn it down?- “You are wrong” they said to him. “We are sick people who believe in the power of Meryemanas and we have come to ask for help, as many of your people often do.

We are not to blame for the damages”.

Then they headed for the metochion of Saint Barbara for the completion of their historical mission.

There they realized that during the years of its abandonment many trees and bushes had grown inside and the ruins from the walls of the monastery had covered the place where , presumably, the heirlooms were hidden.

It was difficult to carry all of these pieces in their hands and they had been trying for hours to move them, when muleteers who were worried about the delay, approached the chapel and they helped with their tools since each of them received twenty pounds.

After many hours of hard work and since everyone was feeling tired, Amvrosios had been praying to Virgin Mary through all this time in order to help them find the heirlooms, since any other efforts were not fruitful. This is I heard him say to my father and I stay to listen to him in awe.

He was disappointed and sad and that is why he initially thought of quitting the effort and returning back to Greece. But while he was immersed in his thoughts, as he said, mainly due to the tension he was experiencing, he envisioned Panagia Sumela“who ordered him” to continue his efforts and showed another spot where they should dig which was also of greater depth.

His spirit was elevated and reinforced after the vision of Virgin Mary, he showed the new spot to the laymen and he gave them further instructions. The laymen and the muleteers had been working for more that two hours when they suddenly hit the ground with their tools and they realized that it was void.

They were all very careful and their hearts were beating fast, as Amvrosios narrates, when they found the wooden box, cleaned it , opened it and realized that it was the sack that had secured for seven years the holy icon of Virgin Mary, the valuable cross from the Holy Wood of emperor Manuel C and the manuscript gospel of Saint Christopher. They were left intact apart from the pieces of cloth that were rotten.

Amvrosios took the holy and miraculous icon of Panagia Sumelain his hands, he kissed it and turning his crying eyes to the sky, he uttered thanking words to God.

Then they sat all together to eat and Amvrosios, due to the tension he was in and despite his hunger, he did not eat anything. Within an atmosphere of great commotion and joy, walking for about three hours they arrived at Tzevislouk, succeeding in connecting the broken chains of a history of 16 centuries with the present and the future of the Greek people of Pontus.

On the morning of the following day, after he had visited and informed the Head of the local police force about the completion of their mission, they all left for Trepizond carrying the heirlooms with them and the next day they took the boat to Constantinople.

When they reached Constantinople, he visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Fotios, who welcomed him and said to him kindly, “Sit down my child so we have say a few things”, asking from information about the completion of their mission. Then he kissed the holy Icon of Vifgin Mary , he blessed its relocation to Greece . Amvrosios kissed the Patriarch’s hand and he gave him his blessing in turn.

After a two day stay in Constantinople, Amvrosios started his journey back to Piraeus and with extreme caution carried the heirlooms to Athens on November 11th 1931 and he handed them to the Trust of Exchangeable Cultural Treasures ,whose president was the metropolite of Trepizonde and later Archbishop of Athens, Chrysanthos.

As mentioned in the relevant protocol: “An ancient icon of Virgin Mary with Jesus, completely ruined and torn horizontally in the middle ...The afore mentioned,(referring to the other two heirlooms of the monastery) , were given for preservation in the vault of the British –French bank...”, while later they were handed over to Mr. F. Metaxas, Chief of the relics storehouse and finally to the Byzantine Museum of Athens.



The Sumela monastery, and down Monastery Sun Varvara.

THE IDEA FOR THE CREATION OF THE NEW SUMELA MONASTERY



Medical doctor and member of parliament, Filon Ktenidis, on a speech about the idea of the foundation of the new Sumela monastery.

Thrilled about the adoption of the idea by all of his compatriots, Filon gives a speech in the crowded offices of “Euxine Club” on November 26th 1951, entitled “The history and the legend of Sumela”, which was also the official presentation of the historical account of the monastery of Sumela in Greece. He highlights in a prophetic manner for all the generations that would follow:

Whatever one may say, whatever one may write, it will be erased and lost almost along with us... Only if we raise the sacred Symbol of Sumela, the national and religious symbol of Pontus, upon an eternal mountain peak... all of the things we miss, all of the things we loved and don't want to lose, all of these things will take after the mountain's eternity, the Virgin Mary of Pontus... The legends and the whole history of the Empire of Komnenos and Pontus were created throughout sixteen centuries all around the monastery of Mela. Our legends, our dreams, our history, our Pontus will go on living for many centuries all around the new mountain of Mela.

Filon expressed the idea of the creation of the new Monastery of “Panagia Sumela”, because, as he said, he believed that that would be the place where all the Pontic people, apart from any personal ambitions, tenacities and egoism, will get rebaptized in the Greek-Pontic- Christian ideals in union on August 15th.

They will continue their creative path to Metropolitan Greece• the monastery of Panagia Sumela will be a perennial reminder of the immense duty of present and future generations to keep the candle of memory lit up, in the hope of returning to their historical homeland and the reopening of the Monastery of Sumela in Pontus.

“Pontiaki Estia” magazine, issue 12, Year 1951

Similarly to the past..

When upon a blessed day, the miracle of the monastery of Panagia Sumela will prevail on the picturesque hills of Kastania, with its schools and its cultivated gardens and orchards, an immortal monument of the respect, the patriotism and the generosity of all the Greek people in general and of the Pontic people in particular, a marble πλάκα will have to be placed on the entrance of the monastery, where it should be written that this miracle was realized mainly because of the farmers of Macedonia and Thrace.

Because we believe that this project will be completed and preserved with the scrupulous annual contribution of our farmers, of one small part of their production, which will have the Madonna's blessing. From a handful of wheat, corn, barley, ten tobacco leaves, a load of cotton, one oke of potatoes, one oke of fruit, provided by each house...

All these things for each one of them that form substantial amounts as a total offered to the Madonna, are and will continue to be the basic revenue for the establishment but –above all- the maintenance of the monastery and its annexes.

This is how the monasteries of Pontus were created. This is the way they stood alive throughout the centuries. This is what will happen now, here.

“Pontiaki Estia” magazine Year 1951



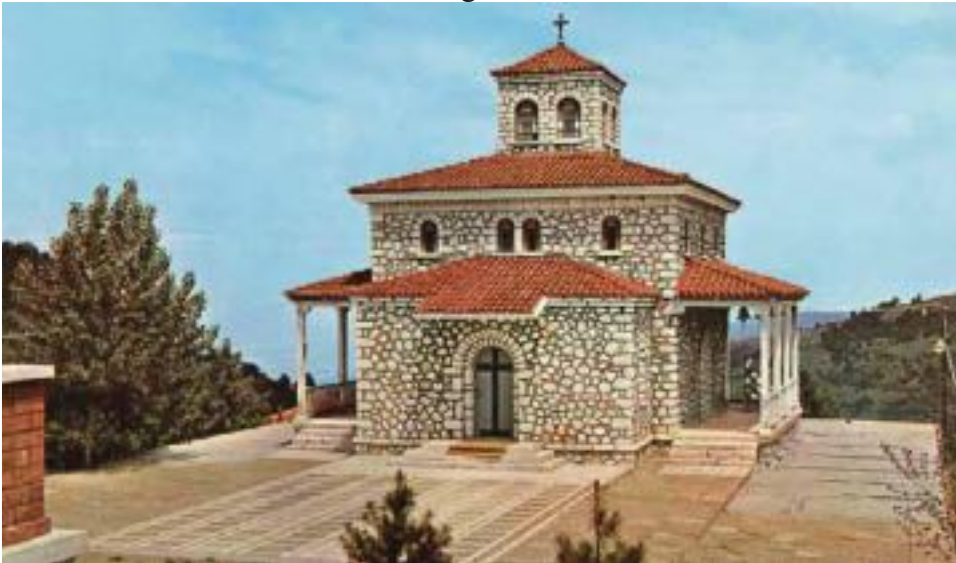
The collaborators of Filon Ktenidis and great benefactors of the new monastery of Panagia Sumela in Greece, architect Dimitris Fillizis, entrepreneurs Orfeas Kogalidis and Kostas Paraskevopoulos.

**THE PLACE WHERE THE NEW THRONE OF THE QUEEN OF PONTUS IS
FOUNDED**

The cornerstone of Virgin Mary on the hills of Vermio is placed by Filonas Ktenidis



“Now I have roots and I build a new nest,
The bells will be heard again”Filon Ktenidis 1951



The first cathedral of the Sumela monastery in Greece. It was built under the architectural guidance of D. Filizis from Trepizond.

THE HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE NEW SUMELA MONASTERY IN GREECE



The owner of the new Sumela monastery, medical doctor and member of parliament Filon Ktenidis.

The association of “Panagia Sumela” was founded in 1951 in Thessaloniki, under the leadership of the unappeased admirer of Pontus, medical doctor and member of parliament Filon Ktenidis, to whom the Holy Icon of the Madonna was conceded through a statutory regulation.

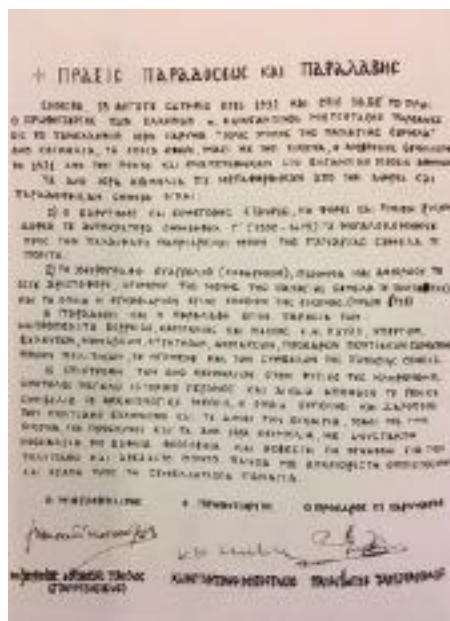
The other two heirlooms, the holy Gospel and the Holy Cross were conceded to the Association, under the presidency of professor Panagiotis Tanimanidis on the 15th of August 1993 by the Byzantine museum of Athens, with the decision of the Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis and Culture Minister Dora Bakogianni.

On the fifteenth of August 1997 the brocade epitaph of 1732 of the old monastery was relocated from the Benakis Museum where it was kept to the new Monastery following the decision of Culture Minister Evangelos Venizelos. In August of 1951, the icon of the refugee Madonna Soumeliotissa, leaves the Byzantine Museum after 20 years and crossing the Greek region by any viable means, it reaches the hills of Vermio in the village of Kastania in Veroia, prefecture of Imathia.

In August of 1952, the Icon of the Madonna is enthroned within the first small but particularly artistic cathedral which was built on Vermio of Veroia under the architectural supervision of Dimitrios Filizis.

The refugees of Pontus that lived in the area had to struggle through rough areas and cover their great financial needs, which were a prerequisite for the realization of the first projects, they created a proper place for the construction of the New Monastery, they told the story of Pontus as if in a miniature.

From the early years of the foundation of Panagia Sumela on Vermio, thousands of pilgrims, be it of Pontic origin or not, started visiting it and continue to do so in order to pay their respects to Her grace. Countless vows and dedications, prayers and memorials express the admiration and the worshipping love, the unreserved trust and the hope of the worshippers, who arrive from all parts of the world for a candle, for a sniveling bow, for a hardship and their inner hopes so that they may be heard by the miracle of Soumeliotissa!



The documents that granted the concession of the Holy icon on November 3rd 1952, of the manuscript gospel of Saint Christopher and the Cross of Emperor Manuel C' of the Great Komninos on August 15th 1993 by the monastery of Panagia Sumela to the Association of Panagia Sumela in Thessaloniki.

For 70 years, from 1950 to 2020, customs that have been preserved for 3000 years, stories and traditions that went from one generation to the next, building the myth and the history of Pontus and a Greek dialect that resists and stands still until today, are brought back to life every year on the hills of Vermio by thousands of pilgrims.

The sweet sound of the lyre with its musical breaks brings out a slow nostalgic sound that is transmitted to all the surrounding villages.

Bodies rise, hands are tied to one another, circles of hundreds of young men and women are formed, the daouli drum and the zurna clash to the beat of tik.

Memories travel, hearts swept, souls fly towards the summer pastures of Matsuka, they climb the hills of the Mela Mountain in Pontus, they meet the Pontic speaking people of the region historical Pontus, they go to Meryemana Madonna, their hearts are divided in two leaving one part there and the other half here.

In the desolate plateau of Vermio, on its steep slopes, with the love of the few inspired Pontic people who formed the first councils, the love and the support of millions of Pontic speaking and Pontic friendly people, the support provided by the state and a number of well-known and anonymous benefactors, the story of the new Monastery of Sumela in the area of Kastania in Veroia was told and Pontus was brought back to life.

Throughout all these years the Administrative Councils of the Association and of the Institution of “Panagia Sumela”, in an impeccable collaboration with the various Bishops and Priests of the Monastery, have developed religious and spiritual activities. An opulent publishing project, along with the organization of a variety of cultural – religious events all over Greece and a series of social and charity events.



The owner of the new Sumela monastery, President of the Panagia Sumela Association, professor Panagiotis Tanimanidis. 1914-1995. (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis).

THE RECEPTION OF THE HOLY ICON BY THE BYZANTINE MUSEUM OF ATHENS



People of Pontic origin carry the icon of Virgin Mary from the Byzantine Museum, where it had been preserved for many years, to the Metropole for a pilgrimage. (archive: Pontiaki Estia).

On the afternoon of Saturday 2nd of August 1952, the members of the committee responsible for the reception of the Icon, namely Chris Koulaouzidis and Konstantinos Panidis, along with the members of the branch in Athens, Eleftherios Pavlidis, Dimitrios Grigoriadis and Eleftherios Emmanouilidis visit to the Byzantine museum, and they receive the holy icon in order to bring it to the hill of Kastania in the presence of hundreds of pilgrims after the signature of the corresponding protocol.

After the solemn prayer that is performed by his Holiness Panaretos, author of “Pontus throughout the centuries”, and priests Amvrosios Sumeliotis and Panagiotis Athanasiadis (from the Evangelistria’s church in Thessaloniki), the icon is brought in procession to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens.

In the cathedral the holy icon decorated with flowers, with the accompaniment of the honour guard and the four young men and two young ladies dressed in their pontic costumes, and the care of the Pontic actor Nick Spanidis, in the presence of priests and chanters officiated by the metropolitan

and other official representatives, attribute glamour and grandeur to the whole ceremony.

The Te Deum is attended by members of parliament L. Labrianidis and Konstantinos Papadopoulos, Attica's prefect G. Georgiadis, army and police authorities, representatives of Pontic associations and thousands of people who had been gathering there until Monday in order to pay their respects to Her grace.

On Wednesday 5th of August the Icon is transported from Athens to Katerini by train. It is accompanied by Mr. Emmanuilidis and Panidis, monk Amvrosios, Papapanagiotidis and monk Peter Theofylaktos that has just been hired for the ministry of the new Monastery of Sumela.



The exodus of the Holy icon from the metropolitan cathedral of Athens and its transfer, accompanied by young Pontic men dressed in traditional costumes, to the new monastery in mount Vermio in Kastania of Veroia.

On August 9th 1952 the icon sets off for the town of Apostle Paul in Veroia through the town of Gidas, where it stayed for a two-hour pilgrimage. Upon its appearance in the beautiful village of Makrohori, motorcyclists of the 9th division accompany it to the central market of Veroia.

It is welcomed by the metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa and Kampania Alexander along with the city's clergy, prefect Tsuptsis, the general of the division Brigadier Sp. Vylas, mayor A. Karatzoglu, district attorney G. Yiannakopoulos, the president of Veroia's branch of "Panagia Sumela" Mr. Georgiadis, the city's council, representatives of the city's institutions and thousands of pilgrims.



Four priest of Pontic origin, who had paid their respects to the icon in their younger years in Pontus, accompany it as respectable elders in Macedonia starting off from the Byzantine Museum. Appearing on this photo: archbishops Panaretos Topalidis and Amvrosios Soumeliotis. "Pontiaki Estia" magazine. Year 2, Issues 21-22.

The elder hierarch, after kissing the icon of the Madonna, got down to his knees to thank God because he had been given the privilege to welcome the holy icon in his region, where it would remain forever as Macedonia, as a Divine Gift to Macedonia. A church service and Great Vesper was performed at the Metropolitan Cathedral, where the icon was transported,

The holy icon was welcomed at the entrance of the new cathedral's yard by monk Amvrosios Sumeliotis and the archbishop and subsequent abbot of the new monastery of Sumela, Peter Theofylaktos, who were accompanied by the president of the association Filon Ktenidis, along with thousands of pilgrims, while part of the army paid tribute to the Madonna with music

The head of the convoy were two respectable hierarchs. Veroia's metropolitane Mr. Alexander, as representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Athinagoras, along with Serres's metropolitane Mr. Konstantinos, a person of Pontic origin, surrounded by numerous priests and deacons, together with the mayor and the prefect of Veroia, as well as the president with the Community Council of Kastania.



The process of the icon to Kastania through Katerini. On the right: P. Tanimanidis, Ch. Koulaouzidis. On the left side: the abbot of the monastery Petris among many worshippers. (archive: St. Tanimanidis)

After the reception of the icon and its transportation to the cathedral it was placed on a throne of Byzantine order which had been specially built for this reason.

The evening service followed while on the night of August 14th, one day before the celebration of the Madonna, thousands of worshippers dedicated themselves in a vigil. The icon of Soumeliotissa, after the official deed of concession to the Association of “Panagia Sumela”, sits on its throne, attends and gives its blessing to the thousands of Pontic people who ask for Her grace.

The feast lasts for many days. Without electricity, through gravel roads and squares, with limited water, without any accommodation for the pilgrims, with the cold of the night pinching the body, but with abundant love from all the people present for the Madonna, and the faith that everything will be reborn soon, and go back to the way they were in their homeland.

Pontus was reborn along with hope. History goes on. The legend has been resurrected, tradition is brought back to life, the lyre and the daouli drum can sound again to sing for Pontus. The bells call the people to Her grace. They unite all the pontic and all the pontic-friendly people.



The Metropolitan of Veroia-Naousa and Kampania Alexandros blesses the first worshippers and the official representatives after the end of the litany. On the right side: Archbishop Amvrosios Soumeliotis, abbot Peter Theofylaktos, the clergy, Christos Koulaouzidis, president Filon Ktenidis and hundreds of people. On the left side: Simos Toboulidis, the First Master Chanter Chrisanthos. Theodosopoulos and Panagiotis Tanimanidis (archive: St. Tanimanidis).

According to the second protocol of the icon's reception by the Byzantine Museum, the icon should return to its place by September 15th 1952. The Administrative Council of the Association, seeing the love of the people for the Madonna and not wanting to let it go again, with the agreement of the metropolitan of Thessaloniki Theofylaktos, placed the icon in a treasury at Saint Dimitrios's cathedral while, at the same time, they stressed their attempts for its final concession to the Association.

Indeed the museum and all the authorities responsible on the part of the Holy Synod and the government agreed to the final concession of the icon to the Association of Panagia Sumela and through an official document the icon of the refugee Madonna became the most precious possession of the Association.

The icon, after it had stayed for a few more days at Saint Dimitrios's cathedral where it remained for five months, it was definitively transported to the new cathedral of Kastania in Veroia on September 14th 1952.



Former Metropolitite of Veroia and Kampania, Alexandros, between the abbot of the monastery of Sumela Peter , and father Athanasios Fotiadis, among hundreds of people in the procession of the holy icon towards the monastery of Panagia Sumela. (Photo Archive: Panagia Sumela)

In the spring of 1953 the Agriculture Ministry, after the decision of the parliament, issued the final concession document of five hundred acres to the Association of Panagia Sumela and the Administrative council undertook the afforestation of the whole region.

In May 1953 begins the construction of a big aqueduct and of two apartments in the extension of the monastery. Finally, in July and August of the same year the road is improved. More public spaces and piers are built around the cathedral. In 1955 the first three storey mud guest room of the monastery is built, designed by D. Filizis, dedicated to the Komnenian emperors of Trepizond and, thus, taking the name “KOMNINOS MELATHRON” (Palace of the Komnenian). The funds for its restoration came mainly from donations of Pontic people nostalgic of Pontus, while it was furnished thanks to the donations of the late Dimitriadis, Touridis and other families.

In 1957 the stony carved cross which had been placed for centuries in the Holy Water of the old monastery in Pontus is walled in the Holy Water of the monastery. It weighs up to 29 kilos, it is 33 wide and 30 tall. On the basis of the cross and on its left side there is another embossed cross. On its right side there is a pentacle within a circle.

The background of the circles is blue and white, the carved part of the central cross has two-coloured parts of blue and brick colour.



Eleftherios E. Eleftheriadis, member of parliament- Mathematician. Member of the Administrative Council of Panagia Sumela.



With the help of his Turkish friends late Eleftherios Eleftheriadis received this cross from the old Monastery on July 10th 1953, and risking his life he brought it to Greece and handed it to the Administrative Council of the “Panagia Sumela” association. (the source of this information is an autographic account by Eleftherios Eleftheriadis).

The following are mentioned on the walled inscription:

HERE IN THE SUMELA MONASTERY LIES THE HOLY STONE CROSS SINCE 383 THAT CAME FROM PONTUS IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1957 IN THE REIGN OF PAUL OF THE HELLENES.

The following inscription has been placed as a prayer:

HOLY WATER RAN FROM THE STONE ONCE AGAIN AND THAT SHALL BE KEPT A SECRET, WHICH HAS THE NEKTAR OF INDESTRUCTIBILITY CHRIST'S MOTHER ASKED HER SON FOR A SECOND STONE THAT GIVES THE WATER OF LIFE SO THAT EVERYONE WHO RUNS TO HER GRACE IS HEALED.



The stonemade Cross that was carried from the old to the new Monastery by Eleftherios Eleftheriadis in 1957 and is currently walled in the Holy Water of the new Monastery under the steeple (archive: St. Tanimanidis).

LITOURGIES AND CULTURAL ENENTSIN HE PANAGIA SOUMELA



Litany of the Holy Icon of Sumela. August 15th, 1956. (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis)



Litany of the Holy Icon of Sumela. August 15th, 2006. (Archive: Panagia Sumela).



The author present at the events of August 15, 1978, together with the Pontian patriot Jone Saoylidi, attendants of the Holy Icon Panagia Soumela.



Young people, Tzim Anthrakopoulos, Cristodoulos Mententzidis, Sakis and Panos Tanimanidis in traditional Pontic costumes, at the events of August 15, 1998 attendants of the Holy Icon of Sumela. (Photo by Michael Pappous).



Medical doctor Filon Ktenidis welcomes the King of Greece Pavlos in the new Sumela monastery in Greece in 1954. (Photo Archive: Irene Koulaoutzidis).



From left. Orfeas Kogalidis, Father Athanasios, Father Peter , Father George, Father Manolis and the president of society Panagia Soymela Filon Ktenidis. On the right Kostas Paraskeuopoulos, Peter Tanimanidis, Jon Saoulidis, .Down George and Stefanos Tanimanidis(author)) August 1957, in the new monasteryof Panagia Sumela.



The council of society Panagia Soymela on July 1963 , welcoming the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Athinagora in the new monastery Panagia Soymela, at the mouneten of VERMIO.



His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew welcomed at the Sumela monastery in 2000 by young men and women dressed in Pontic costumes and the president of the Association, medical doctor G. Tanimanidis. (photo G. Georgiadis).



Prime Minister A. Papandreou and his wife Margaret, head of the ministerial council, attend the Litany of the Holy Icon of Sumela (August 15th, 1982) (archive: S. Tanimanidis).



Prime Minister K. Mitsotakis and the minister of Culture N. Bakogianni inside the Sumela monastery receiving an award on the occasion of the reception of the cross of Komnenos the Great and the Gospel of Saint Christopher by the Panagia Sumela Association in 1992. (archive: M. Pappous).



From the visit and the participation of the president of Greek Democracy Mr. Christos Sartzetakis on August 15th 1985 at the festivities of Panagia Sumela (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis).



The president of Greek Democracy Mr. Kostas Stefanopoulos, on August 15th 1988, participates in the festivities of the new monastery in the company of future prime minister Kostas Karamanlis, former minister Akis Tsohatzopoulos and mayor of Thessaloniki, Vasilis Papageorgopoulos, mayor of Kalamaria, Thrasyvoulos Lazaridis and former prefecture of Thessaloniki, Panagiotis Psomiadis (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis).



The president of Greek Democracy Mr karolos Papoulias in August 2007 attended the festival at the new Monastery, Mitropolitis Verias Naousis Panteleimon, with Prezindent of Panagia Soumela George Tanimanidis



The president of Greek Democracy Mr Prokopis Pavlopoulos, Mitropolitis Verias Naousis Panteleimon, with Prezindent society of Panagia Soumela George Tanimanidis in August 2019 attended the festival at the new Monastery, of Sumela.

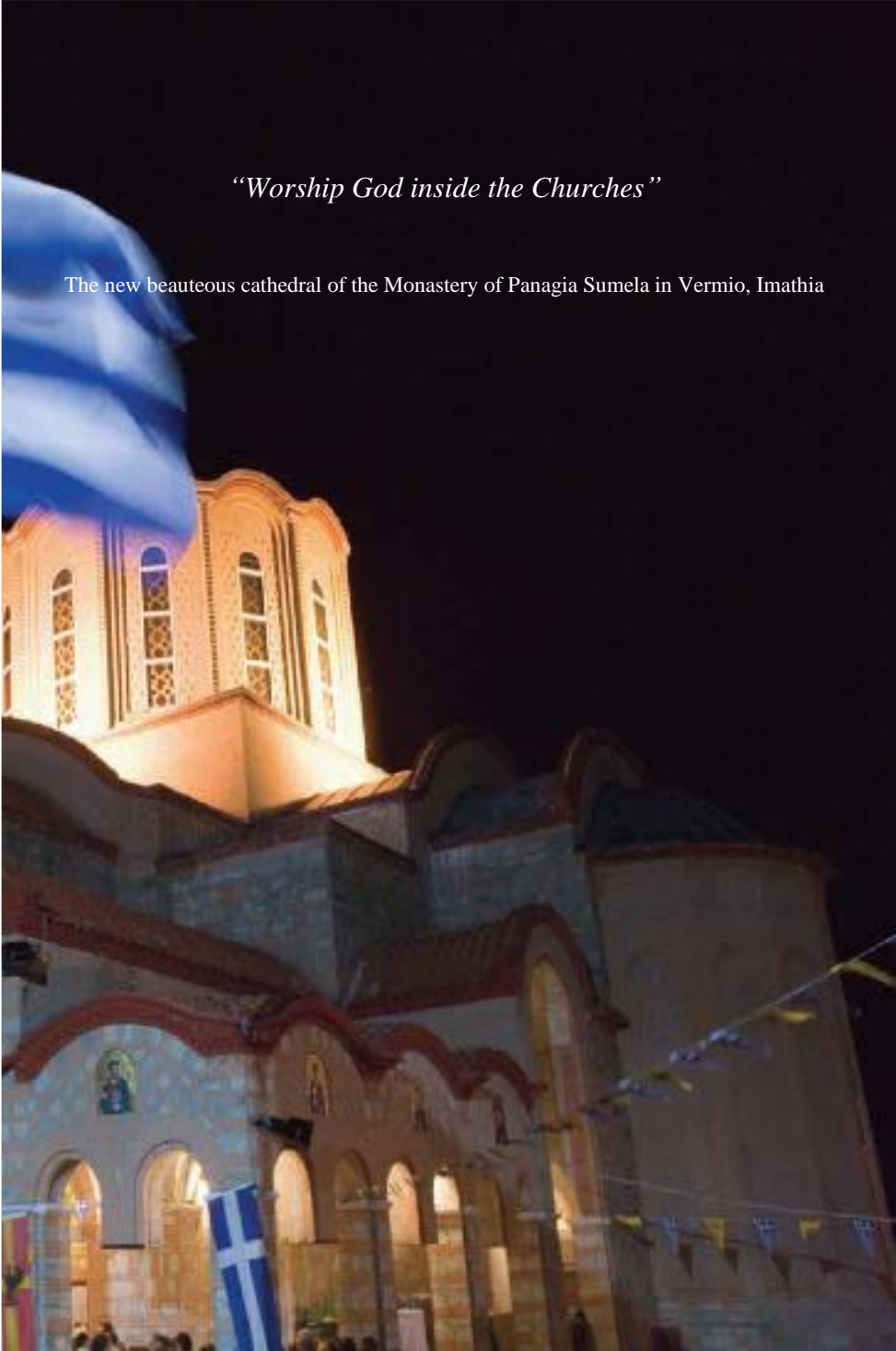


Havana 2004. The General Secretary of the Panagia Sumela Association Charalambos Apostolidis presents a replica of the Sumela icon in Cuba and explains to the historical leader of Cuba, Fidel Castro, the history of the icon while the latter examines it with great scrutiny



“Worship God inside the Churches”

The new beautiful cathedral of the Monastery of Panagia Sumela in Vermio, Imathia





Dance festivities on the hills of mount Vermio in Veroia, on August 15th, 1958 and 1978. (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis).





The dance group of Ptolemaida, in events of the 15th August 1956 in Panagia Soumela.



Three new boys from Thessaloniki, 15 August 1964 dancing, at the Panagia Soumela. (Photo Archive Jon Viopoulos).



The dance group of Panagia Soumela, in the events of 15th of August and below thousands of Pontias who attend.





Dance events of the 15th of August 1980 in Panagia Soumela. The lyre player is Kostas Konstantinidis. Below, thousands of Pontians attend the events.





New girls from Volos 15 August 1965 dancing, PIRIXIO. (Photo Archive Ntina Iliadou).
Below, the actor Nikos Xanthopoulos at the events of August 15, 1965 in Panagia Soumela with the president of the association Panagiotis Tanimanidis, the lyre player Kostikas Konstantinidis, the president of the Pontian Association of New Ionia Volos and Costas Iliadis.





Panagiotis Aslanidis in lyre, on the right singer Chrysanthos Theodoridis and lyre player Kostikas Konstantinidis, on the microphone Christoforos Christoforidis, the legendary “Stoforos” sing for the glory of Virgin Mary, on August 15th 1972 in Sumela. Below. The veteran dancers and choreographer of traditional Pontian Dances, Michalis Karavelas, Kyriakos Iosifidis, Michalis Korosidis, Grigoris Grigoriadis, who since the 1960s participate in the dance events of 15th of August in Panagia Soumela.





15-8-2020, in Panagia Soumela conducted by the traditional singer and Deputy Regional Governor of Central Macedonia kostas Karapanagiotidis who haw the musician Mathaios Tsachouridis on his right.



On the right, lyre makers and players rehearse the sounds of their instruments and on the left , the drum player Kostas Psathas, head of the local feast on August 15th on moun Vermio of Kastania Imathia at the new monastery of Panagia Sumela. (Photo Archive St. Tanimanidis).



August 15th, 1989 on the hills of Vermio in Panagia Sumela. From the right, P. Tanimanidis, N. Akritidis Minister of Commerce, K. Kotsidis General, G. Papandreou Minister of Education, K. Mitsotakis President of N.D., Isaak Lavrentidis Vice-president of Parliament, G. Kefalidis Undersecretary of Agriculture, K. Pavlidis Lieutenant General, H. Ermidis Member of Parliament, P. Prokopidis President of Euxine Club of Thessaloniki. (St. Tanimanidis)



Young men and women in traditional pontic costumes at an event in the premises of the Sumela monastery. (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis)

THE NATIONAL SPIRIT OF THE GREEK PEOPLE OF PONTUS SPREADS EVERYWHERE

D. Dimitriadis, lawyer from Thessaloniki
From the code of the new monastery, 1960

In 1978, under the initiative of the president of the Association of “Panagia Sumela”, a Pontic visionary, professor Panagiotis Tanimanidis, the inauguration of the new beautiful cathedral of the Monastery took place. The restructuring of the cathedral, like the hagiographies, the placement of murals, of a lead roof etc, went on for the next 35 years and are almost completed today.

Their completion took place mainly due to the spiritual and materialistic support provided by thousands of Pontic and Pontic friendly people, along with the assistance offered by the Greek state which funded the construction of the new cathedral.

From 1951 until today in the 500 acres’ land of the Monastery that was conceded to the Association of Panagia Sumela by the community of Kastania, new constructions have been set up like the Amvrosius Abbey, the Komnenos’ guest house , restrooms and a restaurant.

At the same time Pontic institutions and individuals have constructed the hostels which are able to accommodate up to 700 pilgrims. Moreover, with the construction of the new six storey abbey of the Monastery, (MELISANIDION MELATHRON), with the sponsorship of the family of Dimitrios and Jacob Melissanidis, the reconstruction of the buildings for the accommodation of the pilgrims has been completed.

Upon the completion of the construction and the creation of hagiographies of the new temple, the creation of the library and the museum of cleric memoirs, the realization of a series of cultural and religious events, the numerous publications, the support provided by the Confederation and the Institution of “Panagia Soumela” to Pontic and other institutions.

Scientists, professors, students, compatriots from the former U.S.S.R. who came as “neo-refugees” to Greece, destitute. Within the last 16 years the eventual administrative councils continue the tradition of Panagia Sumelain Pontus, as a religious, spiritual, cultural and national centre for the Greek world, through the introduction of the three-day meeting at the premises of the monastery, where 500 young men and women from Pontic associations all over the world take part, and the efforts for the foundation of a religious conventional centre and an open theatre.



The Youth of Pontic Associations gathers at Sumela, July 2013.
(Photo Archive: Panagia Sumela Association).



Young women and men dressed in traditional costumes in front of the courtyard of the new Sumela monastery.

The new monastery of Panagia Sumelain Greece turned into an Amphictyony of the Greek people of Pontus. On August 15th of every year thousands of Pontic and Pontic friendly people gather around in order to revive memories and to relive the history and the traditions of Pontus.

The aim of the Administrative Councils is to convince the Turkish authorities to transport and accommodate historical heirlooms (about 70) of the renovated Sumela monastery in Pontus that have been kept in the museums of Ankara and Agia Sofia since the destruction and the plunder of the monastery in 1923.



The building complex of the Sumela monastery on mount Vermio in Veroia. Melissanidios Palace, subsidy of brothers Dimitris and Jacob Melissanidis at the new Sumela monastery in Kastania, Imathia, that was inaugurated in 2011 by the Prime Minister Antonis Samaras. (Photo Archive: Association of Panagia Sumela).

STORIES – TRADITIONS – LEGENDS AND MIRACLES OF THE
ICON OF PANAGIA SUMELA



*Wonders in the sense of phenomena that
we cannot explain surround us everywhere:
Life itself is the outmost wonder of all.*

George Bernard Shaw (Irish author)

Throughout the lengthy historical road of the Sumela icon for over seventeen centuries, it has been followed by hundreds of stories, traditions, legends and miracles that are tied with the faith of millions of Christians who run to Her grace along with people who embrace other decrees.

Many of these stories have travelled through time and arrived in our time, while I have heard many of them by other people, or learned about them through various texts. I chose to cite some of them as a representative species of all the stories. Some of them had seen the light of publicity many decades ago and some of them are presented for the first time.

For all the stories I cite I thought it would be right to present, with their permission, the full data of the people who carried these special incidents that refer to themselves and their families, allowing each reader to draw his own conclusions.

Legends are stories that have been transformed by people through their love. It is for other people to examine which part of the legend is fictional and which is real. In Christianity, miracles – that are also found in other religions

– are the result of the faith, the determination and the power of those who resort to the “Divine”.

They refer to those who met and received their blessing. It is a personal affair whether we chose to believe in them or not, and a duty for all of us who have seen or witnessed them to transmit the facts in an authentic manner to other people so that they may draw their own conclusions.

There are always those who think that all the legends and the miracles are nothing more than fairy tales, fabrications, products of human imagination and of the fear, the need and the insecurity of their eventual existential issue, or of what came after that, and that is why they refuse to believe in them.

Although I face their views with skepticism, continuous internal quest and through the observation of scientific research regarding legends and miracles, I state, without any hesitation, that I prefer to listen to them and travel through my imagination with them. It may be because the authenticity of the truth they include is of an artistic nature.

It may be because as long as I may live I want to believe and hope that I am being spiritually reinforced, internally enhanced and I am brought closer to the divine element; they let me hope, they make me believe and love.



Hundreds of worshippers wait for the holy icon of Soumeliotissa to pass by or above them on August 15th every year; to touch it waiting for the “miracle”. (Photo: M. Pappous, Archive: Panagia Sumela).

LEGENDS, STORIES, TRADITIONS AND MIRACLES OF SOUMELIOTISA



The story of emperor Alexios III (1349-1390) has been recorded by previous authors who have been interested in the monastery's history and refers to a special incident that took place.

Alexios III the Komnenos, owner and great benefactor of the monastery, he encountered rough seas near Platanos in one of his voyages from Trepizond. When the captain of the ship advised him to get ready to fall into the sea to save himself, he preferred to pray to the Madonna's grace, offering his devotion and his undivided support to the project of the monastery.

The weather changed suddenly, the sea became calm, the shipwreck was avoided and the emperor was saved, keeping his promises of support to the monastery of Sumela.

IN PONTUS

I reproduce another incident that happened in 1855, inside the Sumela monastery in Pontus, and it was first introduced on the 52nd issue of “The star of Pontus” magazine in 1955.

Inside (the monastery) another rather strange and moving incident took place and it reminded us of the years our Lord walked on Earth. A great number of demon possessed people gathered at the courtyard of the monastery, and most of them were young people. They lay there as if they were dead, some of them were in spasms, others roared, held by their relatives, some of them could barely speak, and others lamented in a loud voice.

On the 15th day when the Holy symbols appeared during the service everyone got excited, and when those symbols disappeared they were all silent and calm as if nothing had happened. It is said that many of them were cured and that is the power of the faith in the holy icon that many people who believed in other religions brought their suffering relatives there to find a cure.

We only care to clarify to the eventual researchers that they may find plenty of information regarding the aforementioned insanity.

“The star of Pontus” magazine (issues 52). December 1855



FROM THE WONDERS OF THE HEALING SUMELA
“Virgin Mary has healed him...”

Sixty five years have gone by since then! I was a first grade student at the School of Trepizond. The exams were over and I was at our village, Kinonissa of Surmena. At a neighboring farm K. Kalantidou's eldest son, 30 years old, robust, healthy and a relentless hiker, became sick. He was in a state of aphasia, with an empty stare, with no vitality and will.

There was no doctor at the village and his mother Elego, a masculine type of a woman, decided to take him to Trepizond. He also took me with her because I knew my way around the city and I spoke the language.

We set off from Surmena very early in the morning and in the afternoon we were already at Trepizond. We went straight to Spatharo's drug store. The doctor examined the patient meticulously. Then he told us to sit and wait for a while. Not a long time had gone by until I noticed that all the doctors of Trepizond started gathering at the drug store in their big hats: Metaxas, Efremidis and others.

All those doctors examined the patient with great scrutiny and then Spatharos called me and told me in a very serious manner that I should inform the patient's mother that all the doctors agreed that her son would not live for much longer and that she should better return to her village. The old lady understood the doctor's words and he answered to him in rage: "I know another doctor. First I will go to him and then I will return to the village!" She was referring to the Madonna of Sumela.

The next day we set off on horses to reach the monastery where we arrived on the morning of the following day.

There the three services, the prayers, the fasts, the tears of the loving mother performed a miracle. On the morning of the fourth day the patient started asking his mother "Where are we? Where is Anthi (his wife)? Where are my two boys"? You can imagine this mother's joy, her warm tears of gratitude towards the Holy Mother.

The two accompanying monks were also crying from affection. The abbot was immediately informed about the miracle, the bells rang, a general gathering of all the monks and pilgrims took place and the hymns and chants of the Great Supplicator canon were heard.

After the end of the supplication, the patient asked for food, he ate by himself and he went into a deep sleep which lasted 14 hours. We stayed for three more days, while the patient's condition improved continuously and on the eighth day we left.

When they heard of the old lady's prayer, the donkeymen, who had heard of the miracle. went straight to Spatharo's drug store, where the doomed

patient stopped to greet the doctor! When Spatharos saw him he asked him in awe "Are you still alive? Didn't you die?" The mother responded instantly "The Holy Mother cured him, I worship the Holy Mother, you should believe in her". The doctor did the sign of the cross and said: "We must believe".

I remember all of these things as if it were yesterday!

I wonder how many miracles would we have seen all these years if the sufferers could pay their respects to our Holy Mother, as they did in the past..

N. Theiopoulos, Reproduction from the "Pontiaki Estia" magazine Year 1951

Memories from a pilgrimage, a debt to "SUMELA"

Two of my brothers had already died before I was born, and this is why when I was born my grandmother rushed to the neighborhood, found a scale and weighed me. I was about two kilos. "We will send a three-kilo candle to the Holy Mother" she shouted referring to the monastery of Sumela. When I happened to get sick in the years that followed she used to tell me: "Don't be afraid. Virgin Mary guards you..."

I don't know why they hadn't sent that candle they had promised until I was 10 years old. Then my grandmother told me that she would take me to Sumela, to give that candle she had promised with my own two hands.

She bought five okes of candles (two okes might be the interest because it had taken her so long to fulfill her promise), she gave it to me and on August 22nd we set off along with some others. We didn't go on August 15th because it was too crowded then and my grandmother wanted her peace and quiet, so that she could show me around and explain everything to me.

She was the most knowledgeable woman of our village even though she didn't know the alphabet itself. She knew everything else better than any other woman or man.

She knew which celebrations were serious and which were not. She knew how to weigh things. She knew when it was full moon. She knew when February had 28 days and when it had 29 days. She knew when the Pre-Lenten season begun and when it was Easter. She could sing most of the ecclesiastical chants.

We climbed up Kazuklu (2.200 metres high) and from there, as if from an observatory, we saw high mountains, thick forests, steep hills, beautiful valleys with sheep, green slopes with snakelike waters, herds with their shepherds, cows with their shepherds, horses with their breeders, an unparalleled nature with all its diversities, with all kinds of shadings, with all

its serenity and its ferocity, with all the rich vegetation, the colorful and multi-scented flowers and all of its grandeur.

We passed below Akritas, we saw the huge rock that Akritas threw from the drying floors to kill "the dragon" and we walked towards Sumela river. Here the scenery was totally different. The eternal fir trees blend their branches and create such a deep shade that when the weather is cloudy one might think that it is already night time. The black and dark colour of the opposite mountain (Mela), the roar of the river, the steep black rock where the monastery is nested; all of these elements create the feeling of awe to the pilgrim and vertigo to the children.

We arrived at Saint Barbara's metochion*¹⁴. My grandmother knew someone in Santa and she put him up. She also brought him a pair of woolen slippers. The monk did not let us go. "You are going to stay up here tonight. The monastery is too crowded and you won't find peace there". He put us up for the night. He gave me a big illustrated sheet that referred to the traditions following the monastery's foundation and its miracles.

On the next day we went to the monastery. People were dancing to the sound of the daouli drum and zurnas. Those endless, in the eyes of a small child, stairs were filled with people who went up and down.

We went in and I started to examine everything, the height of the monastery's rock, the number and the size of the rooms. The evening ceremony, the traditions about the monastery's foundation and the flight of the rock's icon (the icon was brought down three times and it managed to rise back to its initial place three times), the tradition about the cathedral's roof and the miracles and other impressive traditions, filled my soul with immense respect towards the monastery.

I went back once again as a pilgrim when I grew up but the impressions of that first day had been rooted deeply and pushed away any new images.

On the third day my grandmother took me to the rooms of the monks called "Askitaria", some of them were in ruins while others were ready to dilapidate. She explained their use to me. I asked her if there was an ascetic still there and she told that only one such person lived there.

Whether it was out of respect or pity I fixed the roof of one of the rooms, so that the poor ascetic wouldn't get wet.

The next day we returned to the village along with some other people (most pilgrims had already left). I went on for days narrating to my peers what I had seen and heard. I kept that illustrated piece of paper (about the traditions of the monastery) as a heirloom until Santa's pillage by the Turks.

E. Athanasiadis, Kastania Veroia,

Reproduction from the "Pontiaki Estia" magazine Year 1951

*¹⁴metochion = an ecclesiastical embassy church in Eastern Orthodoxy

THE HOLY MOTHER "PANAGIA SUMELA" ABOUT THE FAMILY OF AGGELOS PANIDIS

Many couples who had not been able to have a child resorted to the grace of the Madonna, due to her fame, in the hope of childbearing. One such story was narrated to me by the late Aggelos Panidis from Surmena: *My heart, he used to say, embraces Orthodoxy along with Pontus and Panagia Soumela.*

Married for nine years and despite their hopes and efforts to have a child his parents had had no luck. At that time they visited the elderly priest of their parish, who listened to them carefully before he said: "As far as I can see both of you have a deep faith in God and I would advise you to visit the monastery of Panagia Sumela and ask for her help". Aggelo's parents, after discussing the proposition that was made to them and despite their original hesitation, resorted to the Madonna's grace, and that is why they camped at the outskirts of the monastery.

They led a normal conjugal life there and they prayed for 25 days to the Madonna and then they went back home. The next month, in the year 1911, Mrs. Theofili Panidis, nee Efra Efremidis, joyfully informed her husband that after nine years of marriage and their warm prayers to Sumela she was expecting their first child. What struck me in this simple story of the unnoticed, humble but relentless labourer of Panagia Soumela, the late Aggelos Panidis, is the story of his daughter Filitsa Panidu - Rupa, 55 years later. Here is how she describes the events herself.

Despite her desire, after three years of marriage, she was unable to have a child. In one of her visits to the new monastery of Sumela, as my mother Kassiani tells me, she saw her sitting on the stairs of the monastery in tears.

When my mother asked her why she was crying, Filitsa told her that while she had been married for three years she hadn't had a child. Mrs. Kassiani, after she had comforted her, she told her a series of stories that she had heard throughout the years at the monastery about couples that had been facing the exact same problem and with the help of the Holy mother they had managed to have a child. Then she urged her to do the same, praying to the Holy Mother rocking the cradle found in the shroud where Virgin Mary's icon is kept.

After a month and a half Filitsa called her and, filled with happiness and enthusiasm, she told her that she was expecting a child. She also told her that at the night of their discussion, after paying her respect to Sumela's grace, she sat at the supplication area and she prayed all night asking for the Holy Mother's help, and when she was leaving in deep faith she shook the blessed cradle. "As I was leaving I had deep faith that Sumela would listen to me and perform a miracle as she had done with my grandmother in Pontus many years ago!"

THE CONTRIBUTION OF "SUMELA" TO THE HEALING OF A MUSLIM WOMAN

Those of us who were carrying guns (because it was allowed to carry a gun then), a group of Pontic people who visited the Monastery in Pontus say, stood in line and begun to shoot repeatedly. After the shots we heard the sweet sound of bells as the monks realized that pilgrims were approaching. We went through thick forest in fog. We reached the monastery at night, as spies.

We went up the steep path and we arrived at the stairs of the monastery, 90 in number, and then we reached the entrance. A monk who had been notified about our identity opened the gate and then we went down a great number of stairs.

We thought that we were in another world. One may feel a certain secretiveness when he looks at the archaic buildings, where Ilias the Prophet's prayer prevails, the scale of Archangel Michael with the demons on the one side and the sinner's soul ascending the sky while the demons want to get hold of it, the projection of the holy cave that is covered in golden plates instead of brick etc.

Under this kind of secretiveness we went into the cathedral which was dimly lit because it was already night. Our attention was drawn by a Turkish woman who was accompanied by 20 Turkish men and women on her way to the Sanctuary, sobbing and screaming like a dog.

Virgin Mary performed a miracle, because the next day we saw that exact same woman attending the church ceremony in peace and tranquility and the Turkish people kissing the icon of "Meyramana" thanking her for her miracle. The monks welcomed us in a very friendly manner and they provided us accommodation for the night. They brought us the classical "sinin", that is a big brass tray with movable feet and a big clay deep vessel with the "sourvan", in other words soup with corn batter.

After dinner they started joking around and laughing. No two hours of sleep had passed when he heard the gong sound by a monk with a light wooden stick, and then we heard the bells ring.

We rushed to the cathedral. The flood of light, the mellifluous psalmody of the monks, the cave of our church with its hagiographies, had alleviated us to ethereal worlds, where we thought we were.

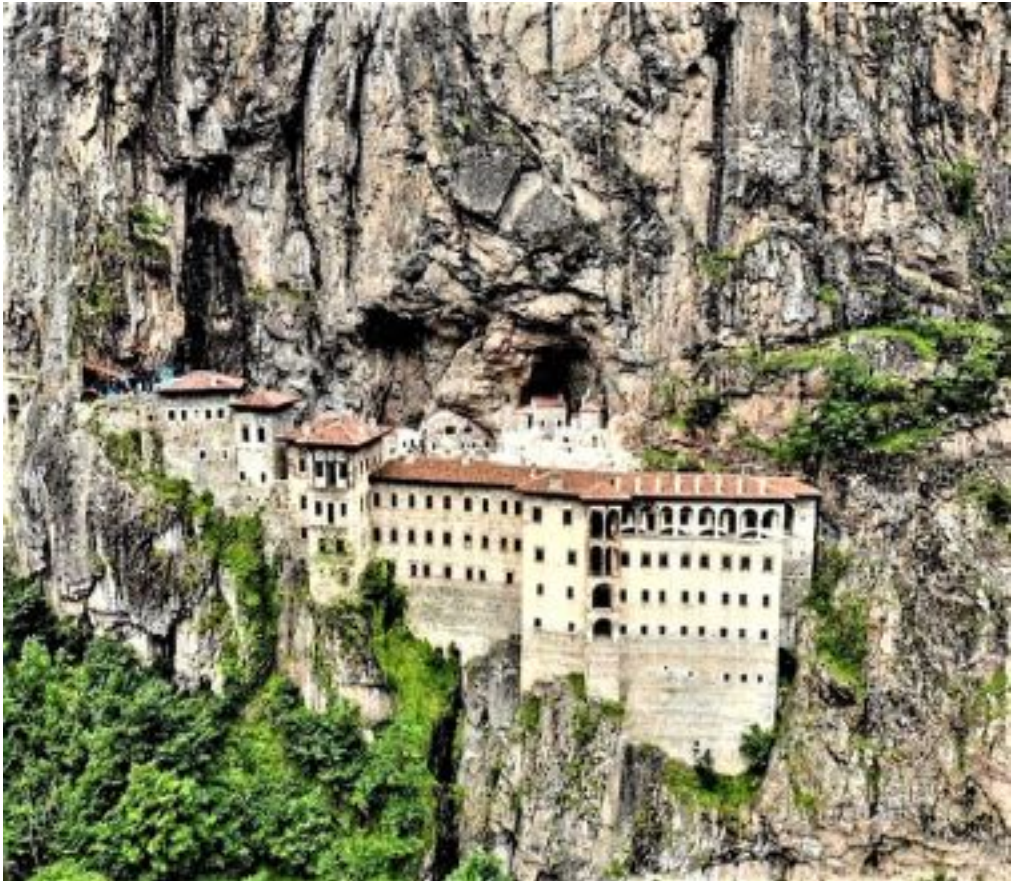
Our church stayed open until it was already morning when we stood in front of the icon of the Holy Mother, which had been narrated by Luke. We sang supplication and when we went out to the court we saw three drops of water running down the rock's crack upon the whole reservoir, which provided water to the Monastery itself.

We went back to our rooms where we had the same “sourva” for breakfast. We were getting ready to depart when we saw many pilgrims' names written on the walls. I wanted to add my name and so I got on my fellow's back to reach higher. I also felt my stomach heavy from the “sourva” and I wrote as high as my hands could reach:

“I came and I worshipped Virgin Mary
I ate the sourvas and my belly was swollen”.

Upon our departure all the monks stood in line to say goodbye to us and while we were going up a farewell chime in our honor was heard all the way to our return trip through Livera to Galianan. Will we ever be able to see those sacred places?

Reproduction from the “Pontiaki Estia” magazine Year 1953



**WHERE VIRGIN MARY "PANAGIA SUMELA" APPEARS IN THE DREAMS OF
A PERSON OF PONTIC ORIGIN IN AMERICA. Miracle?**

I will narrate a story that sounds like a fairy tale but it is the most authentic truth. Our compatriot Mr. Savvas Mafilios lives in Albany, United States. A year ago, on the day of the Assumption, August 15th, Mr. Mafilios, who holds his office under a Greek church of the city, he fell asleep in his armchair while daydreaming in the evening thinking about his homeland and all the turbulent past of an immigrant like himself...

At this point we should let Mr. Mafilios tell us his "dream story».
We cite extracts from the letter he wrote that same day:
...I fell asleep on my chair and in my dream I was in our church. There I saw the Icon of Virgin Mary alive. As it was filled with gold and it sparkled it spoke to me and told me "What a nice church you have!... And how many nice sacred icons!...



In 1929 the then Archbishop of America and then Patriarch of Constantinople mr. Athenagoras (1948- 1972) in the Greek parish of Albany, New York and met with the president of the community mr. Savva Mafilios, who sent us the letter, we publish to Archimandrite Diodoros Tsekouras and mr. Petros Gyftos.

Why, my dear compatriot, don't you bring me - Soumeliotissa - here, in our church so all christians and particularly our compatriots Pontic people may see and pay their respects to me, since everywhere they go they take along the heritage of their ancestors and their customs, that may also be lost in this boundless and blessed land? Take, my child, your stylus and write and do what you must do in order to bring my Icon here, place it on the right side....at the corner....and gather in the church so that I can look at you and rejoice, and don't forget of my celebration on August 15th.....

And while narrating his dream vision Mr. Mafilios adds:

...I hadn't been awake for more than ten - fifteen minutes and I was living in awe the same miraculous dream, when suddenly the head of our church, rev. Dimitiosr. Iliopoulos, who came from Arcadia, comes into my office and tells me: I read on a magazine entitled "Pontiaki Estia" about the story and the miracles of "Panagia Sumela".

Please do whatever is necessary, write to our compatriots to send us Her Icon, and I will help in any way I can ... Filled with sentiment I ask him: "But how can we bring it?" And he answered back to me "Write to that Filon Ktenidis ..." and the rest, that I was guided by her Grace in my sleep!

Mr. Mafilios immediately wrote. He himself and reverend Dimitrios had been undertaken by that blessed emotion of divine fear that is experienced by all those people who happen to communicate with the great beyond, and consider themselves fortunate to execute the order that has been given to them.

Their devotion, of course, could not leave the Administration of the "Panagia Sumela" association unmoved, not even Virgin Mary's order could be left without being executed. Our compatriot hagiographer Mr. Stavros Kalevras was sent to the cathedral of Panagia Sumela where he created a replica of the Holy Icon, which was properly decorated, framed and packaged before it was sent to Athens. From there it was sent to America where Soumeliotissa had already appeared in a miraculous way!

Mr. Mafilios's letter is kept in the monastery's archive as a specimen not only of Christian faith and devotion but also as a proof of the continuation of the miraculous appearances of Virgin Mary of Pontus.

Reproduction from the "Pontiaki Estia" magazine Year 1953

ANOTHER APPEARANCE OF THE QUEEN OF ALL - "PANAGIA SOUMELA"

Narration of Mrs. Panagiota Mexi, nee Vouka from Ioannina, resident of Peireus, 38 Pavlos Nirvanas street.

I have six children, one girl and five boys. I lost one of my children who was 24 years old, engineer cadet on the "Akrotiri" ship, possession of the Evgenidis- Vernikos company, during a shipwreck in Konstanza, Romania, on 1.2.1970.

Some people told me that my child froze and drown along with 21 sailors and others told me that he was in Russia in a state of recovery. At the night of the shipwreck I prayed and I said: "Holy Mother, reveal my child, if he is alive".

In my sleep I dreamt of wonderful scenery in the place of the shipwreck. But what is it here? I said. Then a voice replied to me: "It is Panagia Sumela" and then Panagia Sumela repeated three times:

"Your child is lost but within two days we will bring it back along with another child!

Indeed in a few days he was brought back with another child but they were drowned. When I called the corresponding office the next day, they avoided telling me the truth. But when I told them that I knew that he had been lost they asked me "who told you so?". I replied, Virgin Mary! And then they revealed the truth to me: "That's right, your child is lost".

After this dramatic message I came as a pilgrim to Panagia Sumela, where I found comfort and consolation. The captain and 21 members of the ship's crew froze in the shipwreck. Only four people survived.

Panagiota Mexi



**THE GRACE OF THE GLORIOUS “PANAGIA SOUMELA”
IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

A very special story is the one narrated to me in May 1994 by one of our compatriots who lives and works in Melbourne, Australia, Mr. Vasilis Sevastopoulos himself.

Vasilios, who had been president of the Brotherhood of Pontic people in Melbourne for many years, visited the Sumela monastery in one of his trips to Greece. When he met the president of the Institution, Panagiotis Tanimanidis, he was given a replica of the holy icon. That icon, after it was blessed in the Holy Altar, was brought to Australia and it was placed by his bed.

Within the years that followed his “big business”, as he used to call it, grew bigger and bigger to a point that he, among others, had bought an entire block of buildings and he drove around in a luxurious Mercedes, with the characteristic title TREPIZOND. Suddenly he fell seriously ill and he suffered a stroke.

After three months had gone by, as he narrates, and while I was in a state of coma, my hopes for life diminished every day, and the doctors responded to the anxious questions of my relatives that they had done whatever they could and that now I was left in the hands of God.

Drawn by desperation my relatives resorted to the last hope they had. They brought by my bed the replica of the icon of Panagia Sumela and they started praying for her help.

For three consecutive days, Vasilis told me, while I was still in a coma, I clearly remember my dead father entering the room and ordering me to follow him. During all of these days, a beautiful but silent, sad woman stood by my side.

My subconscious reaction to my dead father’s order was my repeated refusal to follow him. However, on the third day, as the doctors later told me, I was considered clinically dead, supported only by mechanical means. My father approached me, held my hand and violently insisted on taking me with him.

At that moment the stranger woman who had been standing in my room all of these days, held my other hand and, without saying anything, she pulled me upwards. I immediately rose from the bed, opened my eyes and saw my sister, the doctor and the stranger woman standing beside me and telling me with a smile: “Stand up Vasili! It is too early for you to travel with your father”.

It was impossible for me to understand what was going on at that moment, to distinguish vision from reality, the dream from the truth, but I felt the need to ask her who she was, or what her name was. And the stranger lady responded, as if she had read my thoughts “I am leaving but my icon will stand by your side”. She opened the door and slowly left the room!

Now that I am writing this story Vasilis Sevastopoulos, who confided that story in me himself (June 2007), is in good health, works as a taxi owner and has returned to the Pontic community of Melbourne.

THE PROTECTOR “PANAGIA SOUMELA” IN THE NEW CATHEDRAL IN VERMIO

In 1996 the administrative council of the Holy Institution that aimed to complete the renovation of the monastery, after the necessary competition, appointed the mosaic artist Athanasios Milkoudis, born in Eginio, Pieria in 1954, to the creation of a mosaic depict the Ascension of the Holy Mother, total diameter 42 s.m., which was placed in the inner nave of the main cathedral.

A year later, on July 26th 1997, the restoration project was being continued in intensity since the day of the big feast on August 15th was approaching.

On Friday morning and while Athanasios was out of the cathedral waiting for his associates to arrive in order to begin work on the temple , one of his partners was approached by a group of middle aged pilgrims.

– Are you responsible for the Monastery? They asked him kindly.

– Please, replied Athanasios, how can I help you?

– We come from Athens and this is our first time in Sumela. We know a few things about the people of Pontus, their history, the big annual feast. But we don’t know if your Holy Mother performs miracles.

– I understand your interest, Athanasios replied, in the Madonna. During my time here I have heard many pilgrims discussing or asking with great interest, even in agony, about Sumela’s miracle working.

Even though I am not familiar with what you already know about Sumela as far as I know many stories have been heard about her “miracles” in Pontus and in this region.

This unique relationship between the Holy Mother and a pilgrim, however, this private plea to the Holy Mother, the request for her support is of a very private nature, that can be experienced exclusively by the person who has faith. Only the person who has had a certain relationship with the Holy Mother knows and is able to tell us, if what happened to him is a miracle. Any other testimony, in my opinion, usually weakens this unique event.



The rightside nave of the glorious temple of the new monastery where there is a representation of Jesus's resurrection in an exquisite gilded mosaic. (Photo Archive St. Tanimanidis).

It seems as if my theoretical explanations did not satisfy the pilgrims, Athanasios continues, because they left without saying goodbye.

It also seems as if I exaggerated, as any human might have done, in giving them the proper explanations, apart from the history and the tradition that accompanies Sumela's fame.

After a while I went back to the cathedral and climbed the scaffold to get down to work. At 18.30 in the afternoon I ordered my partners to take a short break, to eat something and rest for a while after the intensity of their labour.

During this break, along with the curator of mosaic art from the Archaeological Department of Pella. Mr. Thomas Bovoitsis from Edessa, we stayed at a height of 12 metres from the marble floor of the cathedral, so as to avoid getting up and down the scaffold.

When the workers had rested, Athanasios ordered them to resume their work for the completion of the mosaic. Here is how he describes the facts himself: I stood up cautiously and I gave my assistant, Savvas, a person of Pontic origin from Georgia, a trough, to carry the necessary material for the continuation of my project.

While I was doing that I tripped and I stretched my arms in order to grab the scaffold. The gloves I was wearing slipped through my hands and they ended up hanging from the scaffold.

Athanasios stumbles, I can hear him breathing fast from the other end of the telephone line. I ask him if everything is ok. He replies, interrupting the description, that now that we are talking on the phone I am at Panagia Sumelaand I am working on a mosaic with a new theme. I think it is better to write to you what I am describing to you through the telephone.

I pretend not to have heard his request and I go on to ask him:

– Can't you hear me, Athanasios?

– You know, all the calls made to the number 03510-39606 are diverted to my mobile phone and the connection might be bad.

– Now I can hear you, go on, what happened next?

Athanasios continues his narration:

Within a few seconds I begin to feel that the solid ground, the rafter I had been standing on for so many months, disappears beneath my feet. Suddenly, I am hanging 12 metres above the ground. I begin to fall. I see Almighty looking at me in a strict manner, the saints of the temple opening their mouth to yell at me: “be careful, you are going to fall”, the marble ground of the cathedral approached me in threatening speed and my co-workers shout in desperation” Virgin Mary , help us!”

My head is trying to turn to the place where the Holy Mother is placed. But it is impossible for me to look her in the eye. But whatever I am not able to see and reach with my eyes, I can see it through my soul and heart. My mind brings me closer to Soumeliotissa and I find time to whisper, “Holy mother, my children”!

A pounding thud is heard and its echo in the dome fills the entire cathedral.

From the moment I slipped from 12 metres high until the moment I reached the ground, not even a second had passed. A small group of pilgrims was in the cathedral at that moment. Everyone ran around me immediately.

At that same time, I heard Anestis, the sexton that had been working with zeal in the monastery for 50 years saying,

“Athanasios, don't throw the ball into the church, it is crowded with people. You may hit someone”.

I was not unconscious. I heard a lady screaming over my head:” Jesus Christ, the man is killed”. I opened my eyes and I saw her standing before me. Then I realized that there was a female figure above my head. She touched me affectionately on the shoulder and told me: “Don't be scared, Athanasios.



There is nothing wrong with you. Stand up and continue your job”. I tried to see who she was. But the female figure, the moment everybody started gathering around me, went away towards the place where the icon of Virgin Mary is kept. I tried to follow her footsteps with my eyes but she disappeared quickly and I could not see her anymore.

Then the people of the monastery came to me. I stood still, thinking that although I am cut in pieces my mind continues to function properly and until they come to get me I should avoid any abrupt movement. I was taken to Veroia’s hospital. My entire body was in pain. I went through all the necessary medical examinations, CT scan, brain scan, X-rays, ultrasound. When the results came out I was visited by a group of doctors.

“You know, Mr. Milkoudis, falling from a height of 12 metres until reaching the ground is as if 700 kilos fell with a speed of 130 km/hour. Despite the serious fall, the medical examinations that you went through don’t show anything at all. You are completely healthy. We cannot explain it. You must have had a saint looking out for you, despite your bad luck. Tomorrow you can leave our hospital and return to your job. But be careful next time...»

THE POWER OF “PANAGIA SOUMELA” IN RIMINI, ITALY

I was at my cottage in Athitos and I was finishing up the book I was writing, when I received a pleasant visit from the Apostolidis family from Kilkis; namely Kostas Apostolidis, Eva Chatziadamidis-Apostolidis, retired educators and their daughter Ioanna, medical doctor. Kosta’s wife, seeing the project I was working on, urged him to tell me about his recent injury in a car accident in Italy.

“In February 2001 I had visited my daughter, Keti, in Italy where she was completing her studies in the medical school of Bologna.

After staying there for a few days, I boarded a modern bus and I began my return trip to Greece. An hour and a half after our departure, Keti contacted me and asked me how I was and she wished me, “Holy Mother may be with you”.

What struck me was not the interest that she displayed, because this is a usual phenomenon in our family, but the wish that accompanied her call. I was sitting on the second seat at the side of the isle and I had not decided yet if I should try to sleep or watch the road. The trip went on pleasantly and nothing could foretell what was about to happen fifteen minutes after my daughter’s phonecall.

Suddenly and while we were moving in the speed of 100 km / hour near the area of Ritsone close to Rimini, we crashed into the car that was in front of us in a terrible speed. Despite our driver’s efforts to stop so as to avoid the collision, the sounds from the consecutive crashes reached my ears while I felt a strong explosion at the back of our car. Here is what exactly happened.

A huge piece of styrofoam fell from a loaded truck that was ahead of us, in a distance of at least 20-30 from ours, and crashed onto the car that was in front of it. In order to avoid the huge mass of styrofoam the driver had to make some quick manoeuvres and slammed on the breaks.

The result of this action was tragic. One after the other all cars (140 cars) crashed onto one another, causing great damage and injuries to the passengers. Our car, as anyone could have expected, collided with the one in front of it, while a tank carrying gas rammed our car from the back. Many passengers were injured but they managed to smash the side windows and get out fast to save themselves.

Unfortunately the co-driver was trapped between the isle and the driver’s seat and it was impossible for me to move because my right foot was stuck in the front seat. I was in great pain on my chest, on my right lower leg and my left knee. Despite the pain and the shock I felt, I think that I did not lose my temper and I tried to release my leg.

Whatever movements I made, however I moved to the right or to the left side it was impossible to set myself free. The pressure and the burden I felt from the seat that was holding me hostage was immense. While I was trying to set my leg free, I heard the co-driver moaning in pain and calling me for help, while I saw the other passengers disappear before my eyes, looking for a way to save themselves.

I turned to look behind me, a cloud of smoke had covered the back of our car, and then a deafening explosion finished up the damages that had been caused at the back side of our car. At that exact moment I saw and I felt a power of thermal energy approaching me in a threatening manner and I was afraid that I was going to burn myself alive.

I stood up, looked at my trapped leg and I raised my eyes to the sky, in panic, in pain and agony, I armed myself with faith and I resorted to my only hope “Virgin Mary help me”, “Virgin Mary help me”, “Virgin Mary help me”, I repeated three times. I lowered my eyes to my injured leg and then I raised my eyes filled with tears to the sky. “Panagia Sumela, help me”, I shouted twice again for my children, my family!!!

I felt something going through my body and an elusive force grabbing my leg and gently moving it to the isle of the vehicle. I turned around to look for the person who had helped me. I saw no one but I felt that someone was standing by my side. I did the sign of the cross, and I shouted amidst the turmoil: “Miracle, Miracle, my Virgin Mary, thank you for saving me!”

I took one step to approach the co-driver who was still seriously injured trapped between the seats and the ironwork of the bus. I tried to pull him out but it was impossible. As I leaned I felt a very severe pain on my chest. Thoracic fracture was the diagnosis provided by the hospitable clinic of the city where I was nursed for 15 days by conscientious medical doctors.

The pain I felt on my fractured lower leg did not allow me to go on. The flames had approached my face. I quit my efforts and I got out of the car. Thanks to the help provided by Virgin Mary I was saved, but the unfortunate co-driver lost his life in this tragic incident along with many other passengers.

A FATHER'S VOW TO “PANAGIA SOUMELA”

In March 2007 I had to visit the headquarters of the District of Western Macedonia in Kozani in order to meet some executives about a cooperation that we had established.

I travelled with my nephew and my partner George Fouskas, enjoying my trip through the part of the new Egnatia road, Thessaloniki – Veroia – Kozani. While we were admiring the quality of the construction of the road along with the high technology, the tunnels, the bridges etc that contributed to the completion of the project, I heard my nephew noting when we reached the new road to Kozani after Veroia.

The alignment of the new road, George commented, does not go through the village of Kastania, where the monastery of Panagia Sumelais located, but it directs the drivers parallelly to the monastery through a safer and faster route.

Indeed, I replied, many travellers who had been visiting Kozani until recently had to pass by the monastery and that it why they usually entered the church premises to light a candle, to pray, to drink a glass of cold water and continue their journey after they had had some rest.



From now on this won't happen so often. However, I am sure that when the drivers who travel on this new road, with greater safety and comfort, pass by the monastery, they will still pray or let their thoughts travel close to Virgin Mary, making their own personal wish.

We continued our trip and soon we reached the building of the District. Prior to the conclusion of our bureaucratic obligations, we entered the administrative officer's office for the final signature. The open door and a cup of hot coffee that was still steaming waiting for someone convinced me that the person I was supposed to meet was not there at the moment but he would be back soon. Indeed, a 45-year old well-built man entered the office after a while.

– Hello, Mirotis Konstantinos, the administrative officer of the department. How can I help you?

Despite all of the negative comments made on Public Administration, we were able to conclude our task in a small amount of time thanks to the extreme nobility of this person.

I stretched my hand to thank him and greet him and I heard Kostas showing me out in my last name.

– Mr. Tanimanidis, I am familiar with your activities in the Pontic field, your written testimonials, the TV presentations, but mainly from Panagia Soumela. At that time my eye caught an icon of Panagia Sumelahanging on his office walls. I asked him:

– Are you a person of Pontic origin?

– No, he replied, but I love Pontic people and I watch your activities with great interest.

– And the icon of Panagia Soumela? Why do you keep this icon in your office and not another icon, we asked him in a rather rude manner.

– Well me and my wife Ioanna hadn't been able to have a child for fourteen years. We had heard of the miracles performed by Soumeliotissa. After discussing it with my wife, we decided to resort to Her grace. In July 1997 we visited the monastery, we prayed, we kissed the holy icon of Virgin Mary, we rocked the small cradle on its basis and we asked for her help in our efforts to have a child. After a while we left the monastery and about a month later we found out that my wife was pregnant.

On May 29th 1998 our son Panagiotis was born, ten months after our prayers to Virgin Mary. That is why, although the new road has been constructed, I continue to follow this route until Veroia through the old road so that I can have the chance to light a candle in Panagia Sumelaand thank her for everything that has happened in our life.

That is why I have made a vow. I always carry this icon with me throughout my life as a guard and a protector of my family. I wished him for his child's welfare and his and his family health. We took pictures together and before I set off on my way back to Thessaloniki, I asked for his permission to include his story in the project I was working on.

HOW THE GRACE OF “PANAGIA SOUMELA” APPEARS THROUGH THE DREAMS OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE

I had already concluded my project and before its publication I was working on the plentiful photographic material I had in my hands, when on a day in March. I contacted one of the first supporters of the historical account of the new Sumela monastery, namely Diogene Amiridis, Secretary of the Community of Kastania in Imathia from 1980 until 1986.

During our conversation I asked my dear friend, who continues to live in Kastania and serves Panagia Sumelawith the same fervor, despite his 83 years of age, if he could share with me a special incident during his sixty-year ministry in the monastery.

Diogene hesitated for a while and then suddenly, as if a flash of light had lit upon him, he told me:

– I have seen and I have heard of thousands of compatriots who have visited Virgin Mary talking about Her grace in piety and admiration. Nevertheless there are two special events in my life that I haven't shared with anyone until today.

– What exactly do you mean Diogene? I asked him in curiosity.

– Stefanos the first incident is about a Greek couple from Germany who visited Virgin Mary in 1980 but I cannot recall their data at the moment. Call me some other time so we can talk again.

Sensing that Diogene had a great story to tell me about the couple he had mentioned and wanting to obtain as much information as I could, I suggested visiting him at his house in the village, despite my heavy schedule that I intentionally stressed during our conversation.

Diogene, polite as always, didn't want to put me through this small ordeal so he immediately replied:

– Hold the line for a minute and I will tell you all I can remember.

I heard him calling his wife to bring him his jacket.

– What are you looking for? I asked him

– A note, he replied, that I have kept in my pocket for about thirty years!

This is how Diogene begun his narration:

First Narration

In 1980 when a child was baptized in the Sumela monastery I met the couple of Eleftheria and Athena Dotsa. Lefteris, who was not a person of Pontic origin, was born in Kastoria and Athena was born in Serres. They met in 1965 in Frankfurt Germany where they were financial immigrants and then, in 1966, they got married.

When I asked him how they chose the Sumela monastery for their child's baptism they confided in me the following:

After our wedding and until 1979, for thirteen consecutive years, we hadn't been able to have a child despite our efforts and our desire. We had also visited two medical centres in Germany and received both medical and moral support by two gynecologists.

As the years went by and their efforts turned out fruitless, the chances of having a baby grew weaker and weaker. At that time Lefteris was trying to comfort his wife in any possible way. In 1979 he visited a Christian church in Frankfurt and prayed to the Holy Mother asking for her intervention in the realization of their hopes.

After this church visit he kept dreaming for two nights of a woman dressed in black visiting him, taking him by the hand and leading him to a stony church through a wonderful woody scenery. When he asked where they were and what they were doing there he clearly remembers the woman accompanying him say:

– We are at the Sumela monastery where soon you will come with your wife and you will baptize your daughter!

When he asked how this would be possible since they didn't have any children, the lady in black, who had appeared in a dream that he was experiencing as if it were real, told him:

– You will soon come to see me and we will talk again.

While the woman disappeared from his vision, he woke up in agony after what he had experienced in his sleep. Even though he hadn't said anything to his wife the first time so as not to upset her, the second time he had the same dream he felt the need to share it with her.

But the strange thing was that both of them, as Lefteris told Diogene, had heard of Panagia Sumela for the first time. They didn't recall having seen the woody scenery before and they surely didn't know where the monastery was located. In the next weeks they visited their doctor who informed them that, after thirteen years of marriage, Athena was two months pregnant, leaving them speechless but thrilled!

During her pregnancy they managed to get information about the exact location of the Sumela monastery in the village of Kastania in Veroia.

When their daughter was born on April 1st and she was about 3 months old, in the month of June of that same year, they travelled from Germany to Greece in order to organize their daughter's baptism. They arrived in Thessaloniki and they set off for Panagia Sumelathrough Edessa. Not knowing the itinerary, they passed Veroia and they arrived in Florina.

They asked how they could get to Sumela and they were told that they had to return to the road that led to Veroia through Zoodochos Pigi. Without further delay they started their way back following the instructions that they had been given.

As Lefteris says, they eventually reached the crossroad that connects the entrance of the monastery, through Zoodochos Pigi, where the Welfare camp facilities are located under the supervision of the late professor Elenidis. He pulled over at the right side of the road and got out of the car.

To his great surprise he saw the exact same scenery that he had been dreaming about for two successive nights. The camp was on the right side, the public road was in front of him, while thick forest was all around him and the small stony monastery could be discerned in the distance.

He sat on his knees for a while to get himself together. Without realizing it he started crying out of compassion. As he said with his eyes full of tears when he narrated to Diogene the special incident that had happened to him, it took him a lot of time before he could recover from what he had seen in front of him. But this time he was wide awake and his eyes were open!

After the first shock that left him speechless for a few minutes, he came round, he continued his way until he reached the monastery that was exactly as he had seen it in his dreams. Then he entered the cathedral respectfully and he found himself face-to-face with Holy Mother that was unknown to him until that moment.

Deeply moved, he and his wife paid their respects to the wonder working icon of Virgin Mary and they prayed, thanking Her for the miraculous way with which she revealed to them their daughter's birth and for this unique event they had been able to experience in their life. A week later, on June 25th 1980, they returned to the Monastery and they baptized their daughter.

They gave her the name Mary so that their daughter herself would remember that the strength of their parents' faith, as they confided in Diogene, along with the help of Soumeliotissa contributed to the realization of their dream that had seemed impossible for many years!

Second Narration (April 18th 2008)

A few weeks later Diogene narrated to me the second incident when I called him to read to him how I had captured the first story that he had shared with me. He had been a witness of this second incident, as he told me. In 1968 Efstratios Agaridis, a very religious man, served as the community doctor in Kastania.

His daughter was born in that same year. Unfortunately the child suffered from ocular abscess from the first weeks after her birth. Being a scientist himself her father went to the hospital and to very specialized medical doctors, looking for a cure for his young daughter.

For about a month all the medical care that had been offered did not succeed in healing the newborn baby. Almost desperate, her father asked me to arrange for the baptism of his little girl in Panagia Soumela, because he was expecting the worst.

The doctor approached me before the baptism and told me in very emotional words that he had been praying to Virgin Mary for many days asking for her help, bearing deep hope that his paternal prayers would be heard. This is exactly what happened. Five people attended the ceremony of the urgent baptism of the young girl – who was given the name Vasiliki – in the Sumela monastery.

When the baptism was over, the doctor with his wife and daughter thanked me and they returned to Georgiou, the village where the community medical centre is located.

The next day I received a telephone call from the doctor.

– Diogene, I heard him say enthusiastically, the pus has disappeared from the child's eyes. Sumela has heard my prayers and healed my little child!

Since then Vasiliki has been enjoying perfect health and today, forty years later, she works as a teacher in Veroia. Both she and her father never forgot the miraculous event that they had experienced. Neither did I.

Narration Diogene Amoiridis

OLD YAGOULIS AND THE SUMELA

During the novena of Virgin Mary, August 23rd 1903, Kostis Viopoulos and his wife Evmorfili, nee Lambrianidou, from Kromni, Trepizond, visited the monastery of Virgin Mary in the mountain of Mela.

Evmorfili was pregnant and she begun to experience pains of premature labour. Upon the same or the following day their first child was born at the Sumela monastery after seven months of pregnancy.

The child's life was in jeopardy and that is why a priest monk (possibly the abbot) baptized it in a big vessel where they used to cook beans. There was no font at the Sumela monastery as no baptisms had ever taken place there due to the cold climate of the mountain.

The child was given the name Ioannis (John), because that was the name of the priest and the day of August 29th was approaching when the Prester John's Decapitation is commemorated.

After the baptism, the parents took the baby and they returned to Trepizond where they lived. Eventually the little boy was out of danger and when he was two months old, Kostis Viopoulos, who was a goldsmith, sent a silver font to the Sumela monastery.

From then on Ioannis Viopoulos visited the monastery with his parents in order to pay his respects to Panagia Sumelarespecting the previous vow.

That is also why Yagoulis and his wife Oreozili used to climb Vermio every year after the replacement of Virgin Mary's icon in order to provide any necessary assistance to the efforts of the Administrative Councils and of its two presidents: Filon Ktenidis, who was a Kromnean compatriot of theirs and Panagiotis Tanimanidis, with whose family, and especially with Kassiani Tanimanidou, they cherished a close friendship.

*Narration Ioannis Viopoulos
Thessaloniki 2008*

THE ICON OF “PANAGIA SOUMELA” A LIFE-GIVING SOURCE OF POWER AND HEALTH

On February 2nd 2007 , on the day of the candlemas, and the beginning of the winter sales’ season, I visited COSMOS trading center with my family at the eastern part of Thessaloniki.

After a lengthy tour around the decorated windows of the numerous shops that are located there, and we ended up, at the Japanese sushi restaurant on the first floor that stands up to the Greek souvlaki*¹⁵ and pork gyros*¹⁶ exhausted by the shopping therapy we had just indulged into, the smell of the chinese noodles mingled with the odours coming out from the Italian pizzas and the german Würst, while a series of ethnic delicacies obliged us to go by them. One of my sons, Sakis, urged us to visit the “MORITZ” store, a store filled with casual clothes for young people.

While my children and wife were trying on clothes I sat alone in front of the store’s registry. At first I started to look around the store, curious for the well designed, modern clothes. But the only thought that came to my mind was the incident that my friend Thanos Venieris narrated to me, commenting on my extra pounds.

He was, I think, in Florence or Milan on business, and upon a break from the numerous obligations and appointments that he usually has, he visited some haute couture shops, since he is interested in that kind of business, and he found himself in Armani’s studio. Determined, as always, he went into the studio. There, a slim gentleman approached him and asked him in an extremely polite manner:

– How can I help you? My friend replied:

– Well I am looking for something to buy. And the salesman continued:

– Obviously you are looking for a present! Insinuating that the sizes of the clothes sold in the store would not fit my friend.

This is exactly how I felt while I was in the store I mentioned earlier, looking around the modern clothes in their slim lines.

Later my eye caught an icon of Panagia Sumela hanging over the head of the lady who was responsible for the store. I turned and I asked her instinctively:

– Does this icon belong to you?

– Of course, she replied, I have had it with me for about two years.

– And why, I continued, the icon of Panagia Sumela in particular?

– I don’t know why, sir, she responded, but since the day I was given this Icon of Virgin Mary and I held it close to me, my whole outlook on life has changed. I feel its positive energy surrounding the place I am. I draw strength from it and I do my job better.

*¹⁵ souvlaki = pieces of pork meat on a wooden stick

*¹⁶ gyros = tiny pieces of pork meat

Whatever happens to me while I am at work it helps me to keep a positive attitude. Even though I work ten hours a day, when my thought travels close to it, I feel relaxed and calm. I resort to her assistance when I want to ask something regarding the health of my loved ones, the difficulties and the hardships I encounter in the path of my life.... I feel that Panagia Sumela is my protector and my guide who won't abandon me through the rough and pleasant moments of my life.

Our conversation went on and it expanded to other topics as well until the time that my family had concluded their purchases. I said goodbye to Mrs. Sofia Samara, I thanked her for everything she had confided in me and I made a future appointment with her in order to continue our discussion.



THE FIRST DAY AFTER THE UPROOTING SERVICE IN THE HISTORICAL SUMELA MONASTERY

Throughout all of these years our people managed to build their roots and emerge, not always easily, in the social network of the communities they settled in thanks to their diligence, their willfulness, their passion, their persistence and their faith in God.

Their love for Pontus and the areas they lived in led them to the creation of numerous local associations and institutions that developed rich cultural and national activities in the hope of keeping the history and the memory of Pontus alive and communicate them to their children and their grandchildren. They kept a special place in their heart for their churches and their schools, which had been left desolate.

That is why all the efforts made by the organized Pontic people and many other compatriots who visited Pontus converged and contributed in replanting their favorite areas and in bringing back to life the “manousakia”^{*17} and the azaleas of Pontus, even though delayed for many decades.

The first organized pilgrimage and the realization of a Trisagion^{*18} in the sacred premises of the Sumela monastery, on the day of Virgin Mary’s celebration, took place on August 15th 1996, by the Panhellenic Confederacy of Pontic Associations with the participation of 250 representatives of Pontic Confederacies all over the world.

When the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Mr. Bartholomew, realized this love, after a series of meetings and initiatives that he undertook, from the early years of his service, he struggled to achieve the desired result: the Turkish ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a permission of the realization of a service at the Sumela Monastery on August 16th 2010.

^{*17} manousakia =type of flower

^{*18} Trisagion = “Thrice Holy”. It is a standard hymn of the Divine Liturgy in most of the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches.



On August 22, 1903, the Metropolitan of Trabzon, Chrysanthos, accompanied by a large entourage of Santians to the monastery of Panagia Soumela. The members of the mission of P.C.P.A. on 15-8-1996 going up the stairs of the monastery.





The orthodox priest from Georgia with the author of the book and president of P.C.P.A. St. Tanimanidis performs a Trisagion on the memory of the Pontic people inside the Sumela monastery on 15.8.1996. Trisagion for the souls of our ancestors, the Greek people of Pontus, on the rocks of mountain Mela.





Representatives from the delegation of the Panhellenic Confederation of Pontic Associations (P.C.P.A) with the minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus George Iakovou in the middle and the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of Greece , Grigoris Niotis. (15.8.1996). (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis).

To his holiness father Elpidoforos

Thessaloniki, 1/12/2010

Your Holiness,

After the historical Service that we performed on August 15th in historical monastery of Sumela with thousands of worshippers , under the initiative and the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew , and after the suggestions of numerous worshippers that contacted me I felt the need to collect, register and publish a complete volume regarding this historical event.

For these reasons I turn to you and I ask you to send me the correspondence between the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Turkish authorities along with the permission that was granted for the realization of a service, a copy of his Holiness's speech on the day of the service, along with the corresponding photographic material that you may have.

Being aware of your sensitivity and your support for the publication of the two-volume work, "Sumela, the Refugee Pontic Virgin Mary" that I had the pleasure of handing it to you during my previous visit to the Patriarchate with my younger daughter Kassiani, I would feel obliged if you could , despite you heavy schedule , inform me about my request.

With cordial greetings and respect

Stefanos P. Tanimanidis

Honorary President of P.C.P.A.



The author of the book, in 2001, with the chief secretary of the Holy Synod at the time Elpidoforos, current metropolite of Prousa and now Archbishop of America. (Photo Archive: St. Tanimanidis).

THE PERMISSION FOR THE REALIZATION OF SERVICE AT THE SUMELA MONASTERY

Turkish Republic Ministry of Culture and Tourism
General Secretariat of Museums and Cultural monuments
No: Urgent Topic: The Sumela monastery, 3/5/2010

In relation to:

- a) Document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11/12/2009
- b) Document to the Prefecture of Trepizond, 16/12/2009
- c) Document to the Prefecture of Trepizond, 9/2/2010
- d) Document to the Prefecture of Trepizond, 15/3/2010
- e) Document to the Special Secretariat of our Ministry on 26/4/2010 with the attachment of our request from 16/4/2010 to the Patriarchate of Romans in Constantinople.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs with document (a) asked for the opinion of the Prefecture of Trepizond in order to take the necessary course of action for the launching of a permission for the realization of a service at the Sumela monastery of Trepizond, that is not included among the monuments that have been granted this permission.

With document (c) that was sent by the prefecture of Trepizond we have come to know that, because the internal part of Panagia Sumelathat is a monument of the global heritage, it is limited and it cannot host similar events and because during the service various damages may be caused to the hagiographies of the historical monument, the proper place for a ceremony with the participation of small groups is the courtyard of the monastery.

Taking all of the above into consideration, with your document (d) that was sent to the Prefecture of Trepizond, it has become clear that the ministry still thinks that it is necessary to concede the permission for the realization of a service in the courtyard of the Sumela monastery with the participation of a small group of visitors and provided that the service will not inhibit the other visitors of the monastery. This permission is valid for one service per year on the second week of September, on a day, time and duration set by the prefecture of Trepizond.

With an application of the Patriarch of the Romans of Constantinople (e) we have the request for permission for the realization of a service on August 15th 2010, where many visitors from all over the world will take part. On the behalf of our Ministry it is considered essential to grant the permission for the realization of a service on August 15th 2010, instead of the second week of September that is mentioned in document (d), at a time and with a duration set by the Prefecture of Trepizond, at the courtyard of the monastery, provided that the service will not interfere with the other visitors of the Monastery.

For your information
Signature. Ertugrul Gunay Minister
Distribution Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of the Interior Prefecture of Trepizond

İSTANBUL RUM PATRIKLİĞİ

Sacrazam Ali Paşa Cad. No: 35
Fener - Haliç - İSTANBUL
Tel: 0212 531 96 70 (7 hat)

Sayı:

16 Nisan 2010
Fener,

Sayın Ertuğrul Günay
Bakan
T. C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı
Atatürk Bulvarı No: 29
06050 Opera
ANKARA

Sayın Bakanımız,

Nevşehir Valisi Sayın Osman Aydın'ın 4 Mart 2010 tarihli, Patrikhanemizde icra edilecek ayinlerde kullanılan malzemelerin ve eşyaların Ürgüp İlçesi, Mustafapaşa Beldesinde bulunan Aya Konstantin ve Eleni Kilisesi'nde depolanması hususunun, Bakanlığımızca uygun bulunduğunu bildiren yazısı elimize ulaşmıştır. Konuya gösterdiğiniz hassasiyete ve derin anlayışınıza can-ı gönülden teşekkür ederiz.

Basından öğrendiğimiz Trabzon Sumela Manastırı ve Ahtamar Kilisesi'nde dini ayinlere belli bazı günlerde izin verilebileceği yönündeki cesur ve çağdaş yaklaşımınızı kutlarız.

Bizler içinde bulunduğumuz yıl, Sumela Manastırı'nın adına inşa edildiği Meryem Ana'yı andığımız 15 Ağustos günü manastırda, yurtdışından gelecek müminlerin katılımıyla bir ayin icra etmek arzusundayız. Sayısız Ortodoks müminin beklediği bu ayin için gerekli izinler konusunda anlayış ve yardımlarınızı rica etmekteyiz.

Bu vesileyle, sizlere bir kez daha teşekkür eder, Yüce Tanrı'nın zat-ı âlinizi çalışmalarında muzaffer kılmasını dileriz.

Hayır dualarımızla,

İstanbul Rum Patriği

I. Bartholomeos

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Sadrazam Ali Pasa Cad.35 Fener Halic CONSTANTINOPLE
Tel 0212 531 96 70 / illegible/

April 16th 2010

Mr. Ertugrul Gunay Minister Turkish Republic -
Ministry of Civilization and Tourism
Ataturk Bulvari No 29
06050 Opera ANKARA

Honourable Mr. Minister,

The commander of Nevsehir , Mr. Osman Aydin, with his letter on March 4th 2010, informed us that your Ministry has granted the permission for the storage of supplies and objects that are used by our Patriarchate for the services that will take place in the Church of Saint Constantine and Helen that is located in the Municipality of Mustafapasa in the Urgup district. We thank you for the sensitivity and the deep understanding that you have shown in relation to our issue.

We greet the courageous steps that are taken towards the granting of permissions for the opening of the Sumela Monastery in Trepizond and the Holy Temple in Ahtamar on specific dates, as we have been informed by the press.

This year we would like to officiate in the service in the Sumela monastery with the participation of many worshippers who will come from all over the world on the occasion of the celebration of the memory of Virgin Mary on August 15th, as the Monastery is dedicated to Her.

We ask for your help and your understanding as far as the necessary permissions are concerned so that the realization of the service, that so many worshippers have been waiting for so long, becomes feasible.

We thank you and we wish that our Lord bless you with success.

With our blessings

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

Bartholomew

INITIATIVES FOR THE REOPENING OF THE MONASTERY



In the centre, the president of the Greek Communities of Russia and the district of S.A.E. in the Black Sea Mr. Ivan Savvidis, holding a replica of the icon of Panagia Sumela, accompanied by the president of P.C.P.A. Mr. Charalambos Apostolidis, priests and thousands of Christians on their way to the Historical Monastery of Sumela.

It is true that the Turkish authorities, sensing the interest not only of the Greek orthodox people of the former USSR , but presumably the interest of the Patriarchate in Moscow for the reopening of the Monastery, rushed to express their intention through the Prefect of the region of Trepizond to grant the necessary permission to the Russian Church for the opening of the monastery, aiming at the massive presence of Russian tourists in Turkey.

This announcement was immediately answered by the Association and the Institution of Panagia Sumelain Greece, where the historical icon of Virgin Mary is kept by the Panhellenic Confederation of Pontic Associations, W.C.P.H, and other institutions that clarified that both administratively and spiritually the Sumela monastery is governed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate which has the right to reopen the Monastery, after the necessary permission has been granted.

The initiatives that Ivan Savvidis took, a Greek man of Pontic origin, member of the Russian Duma and president of the Greek communities in Russia, have provided a different perspective to this issue within the last three years, the massive annual presence, that is, of mainly Greek people from the countries of the former USSR on August 15th at the Sumela monastery and the realization of a trisagion in commemoration of the victims of the Pontic Genocide at the court premises of the historical monastery.

From 2007 to 2009 Ivan Savvidis organized and realized three pilgrim expeditions at the Sumela monastery on the day of its feast with the participation of hundreds of pilgrims, mainly from countries of the former USSR and Greece.

The people who participated in these expeditions were, apart from the representatives of the organized Pontic world, priests of the Russian church and politicians from Greece. All the initiatives undertaken by the Russian Duma, president of S.A.E of the Black Sea region and the Greek communities of Russia, Mr. Ivan Savvidis, contributed determinatively to the Turkish government's adoption of the request for permission for the reopening of the Sumela monastery.



Members of the delegation headed by mr. Ivan Savvidis, the president of W.C.P.H. (first from the right) Mr. I. Moisiadis and the president of P.C.P.A. mr. Charis Apostolidis, the former president of the Pontic Confederation of Australia P. Demourtzidis, representatives of Pontic and religious entities with the replica of the icon of Panagia Sumela on the basis of the Sumela Monastery in Pontus. (Photo Archive: J. Karipidis).

THE SUMELA MONASTERY REOPENED AFTER 88 YEARS



In 2010, eighty eight years after the abandonment of the monastery by its monks and the faithful Christians who migrated to Greece, the renovation of both the internal and the external part of the monastery was completed under the supervision of Unesco, following an architectural plan that was different from its initial physiognomy.

In September 2013, after the relevant comments made by the archaeologists and the Pontic associations, the Turkish government decided the complete restoration of the Sumela monastery granting the amount of 220,000 dollars, in view of the inclusion of the monument in the first grade of the world heritage monuments of Unesco.

The Turkish government responded to the request that had been posed for years by thousands of Pontic people and granted the necessary permission for the opening of the monastery to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, mr. Bartholomew, on the day of its celebration.

Thus, on August 15th 2010, in the presence of 7000 pilgrims and thousands of emotionally charged worshippers who watched on T.V. the holy mass performed by Patriarch Bartholomew, assisted by the metropolitane of Drama mr. Paul and the bishop mr. Tihonas, representative of the Russian Patriarchate.

The bells of Pontus were heard again, echoing the history of Pontus and its Monastery over the five continents, bringing joy to the Greek people of Pontic origin all over the world.

This echo was heard by the people of Pontus for many centuries inviting them to a Christian and a national meeting. That exact same echo urged the Pontic people to climb the Mela Mountain in a gathering of faith and memory in August 2010, 2011, 2012 , 2013, 2014 and 2015. How many generations can you count at once?



The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew, accompanied by pilgrims on their way to the final meters of the renovated path, getting in touch with the roots of the history of their race, on the feast of August 15th 2010, as humble pilgrims at the holy mass. (Photo Archive: Nick Magginas).



The Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew greets a pontic-speaking Turkish lyrist who welcomes him at the entrance of the monastery.



The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Mr. Bartholomew, walks down the stairs of the monastery that lead to its internal part and to the cathedral of Virgin Mary, accompanied by entrepreneur Mr. Dimitris Melissanidis.



His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew, officiates, accompanied by the noble hierarch, Metropolite of Drama Mr. Pavlos on 15.8.2010 at the Sumela monastery on mount Mela on historical Pontus.



Snapshot from the ceremony on 15.8.2010 inside the Sumela Monastery in Pontus.

How many generations can you count at once? The ones of our parents who are still alive. The ones who had been chased away from Pontus to Greece in order to survive, and they have come again as pilgrims, back to their homeland, praising Her grace. Us, the children who have built our roots in the villages and the cities that we were born in, along with a third and a fourth generation, their children's children and their grandchildren.

They all visit the historical monastery in Pontus to remember, to see, to learn...so as not to forget. Along with the generation that absorbs the love and the memory of Pontus through their mother's milk!

And they all pray and beg:

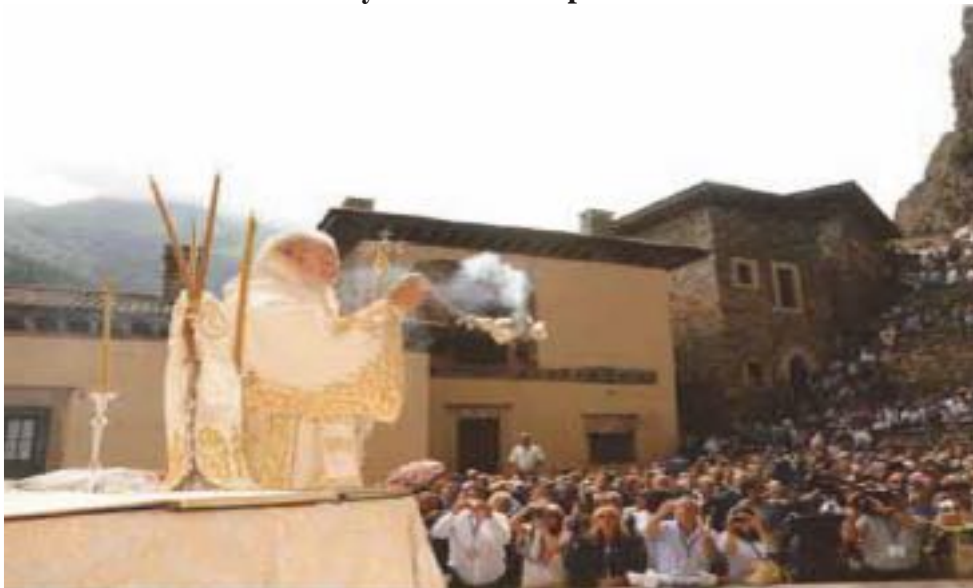
“My Holy Mother! Please help me!”

You, whose strength and love gathers all of us around you in union. Thanks to you there is only one Pontus, with one heart and with a common memory of the struggles fought for it .

“May we always be together , my Holy Mother, and may you always support us”.

This is a monumental historical incident, a legend is brought back to life. A tradition of many centuries continues. To the minds of all the Greek people who come from historical Pontus come the wishes of the Late Archbishop of Athens, Christodoulos, who in 1999 stated in honour of the miracle working icon of Sumela on the day of its feast, in the presence of thousands of people, over the hills of Vermio.

“Let the Sumela monastery in Pontus reopen liberated”!



As incense before you”



Thousands of people participate in the first holy ceremony after 88 years at the Sumela monastery on 15.8.2010, officiated by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Batholomew.



The bysnessman and ardent Pontian patriot mr. Dimitris Melissanidis (in the centre) on August 15th 2010, with the author of the book (on the right), attend the Holy Ceremony.



The metropolite of Drama Mr. Pavlos who shocked with his presence and his speech not only the Christians who were present at the Holy Ceremony on August 15th 2010 but thousands of Pontic and Pontic-friendly people who attended the ceremony through their televisions all over the world, accompanied by representatives of Pontic associations, the bishop of Stavroupoli-Neapoli Mr. Barnabas go down the staircase of the Sumela monastery after the completion of the Holy Ceremony singing for the grace of Virgin Mary and the history of the Greek people of Pontus *“An eagle was flying high up in the Sky”*. (Photo Archive: I. Athanasiadis).

HOW THE TURKISH PRESS REACTED ON THE NEXT DAY OF THE OPENING OF THE SUMELA MONASTERY



THE GREEK PRESS ABOUT THE MASS IN THE SUMELA MONASTERY...

ΓΙΟΡΤΗ Η ΑΓΙΟΘΕΣΑΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΣΤΗΝ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΜΟΝΗ

Πρώτη είδηση στον τουρκικό Τύπο η λειτουργία στην Παναγία Σουμελά

Αρκετώνες επίτροποι



Ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ο οποίος είναι ο επικεφαλής των Αρκετώνων, έφτασε στην Παναγία Σουμελά την Κυριακή (19 Σεπτεμβρίου) για να τελέσει την πρώτη λειτουργία στην ιστορική Μονή. Η είδηση αυτή, που δημοσιεύθηκε στον τουρκικό Τύπο, αποτελεί σημαντικό γεγονός, καθώς η Μονή της Παναγίας Σουμελά είναι η μοναδική ορθόδοξη Μονή που βρίσκεται στην Τουρκία. Η λειτουργία πραγματοποιήθηκε με την παρουσία του Αρχιεπισκόπου, του Πατριάρχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, και άλλων ιερέων. Η Μονή της Παναγίας Σουμελά είναι η μοναδική ορθόδοξη Μονή που βρίσκεται στην Τουρκία. Η λειτουργία πραγματοποιήθηκε με την παρουσία του Αρχιεπισκόπου, του Πατριάρχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, και άλλων ιερέων.

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ΟΙ ΒΑΝΔΑΛΙΣΜΟΙ που δεν έδειξαν οι κάμερες

1.000.000 ιεροί κειμήλια & Τουρκία από τη Ρωσσία

Στοιμώδης η επίθεση των Τούρκων στην Παναγία

Στοιμώδης η επίθεση των Τούρκων στην Παναγία



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**STATEMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF TURKEY TAYIP ERDOGAN
ABOUT THE REOPENING OF THE SUMELA MONASTERY**



“Today, many Christians came to the monastery of Sumela and they performed the Holy Mass according to their tradition.

“One or two groups, as is known, I do not need to explain who they are, say “Here! The desire for the creation of a state of Pontus is alive again!” What has happened my friends? They came, they performed the mass and they left. How many people were there? 1500 – 2000. What have we lost? In reality we have won.

What have we won? Let me tell you. He who is certain about his faith is not afraid of the freedom of faith. He who believes in his ideas and his thoughts is not afraid of the freedom of ideas and thoughts.

They, it is said, are “nationalists”. Take a look at the Ottoman history. Were the Ottomans ever afraid of them? On the contrary, during the Ottoman empire they were open, without facing any kind of difficulty. They used them in their relationship with the international community, in the best possible way, for the benefit of their power. Now, what is all this?

My God! A climate of fear making a country upset and bringing everything upside down.”

It should be noted that a few days ago prime minister Erdogan visited Trepizond on his way to his hometown, the town of Rize in the Black Sea. According to valid sources in one of his conversations with the local authorities of Trepizond he said

“Our hospitality towards the visitors who still attend the mass at the Sumela should be impeccable” .

Repost from fanarion.blogspot.com

STATEMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF GREECE GEORGIOS PAPANDREOU



The minister of Education Mr. George Papandreou, on August 15th 1988, accompanied by the president of Panagia Sumela Association, professor Panagiotis Tanimanidis, visits and participates at the festivities. On the bottom, he welcomes in his office as prime minister in 2010 the representatives of PCPA who sing the New Year's carols.

«This Holy Mass, at the historical monastery of Panagia Soumela, resonated peace and the spirit of cooperation between our nations». HURRIYET NEWSPAPER



OPERATIONS AT THE MONASTERY OF PANAGIA SOUMELA FROM 2010-2015



The Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew officiates in the internal part of the cathedral of Panagia Sumela on 15.8.2011, with the archbishop of America Mr. Dimitrios, the bishop of Neapoli-Stavroupoli Mr. Barnabas, praying with the metropolite of Dimitriada Ignatios, the metropolite of Drama, Pavlos, the archbishop of Yaroslavl and Rostov Panteleimon and the bishop of Fassiani, Antonios.



The Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew officiates inside the cathedral of Panagia Sumela on August 15th 2012, assisted by the Georgian Metropolitane Peter and the bishop of Alexandroupoli Mr. Anthimos.



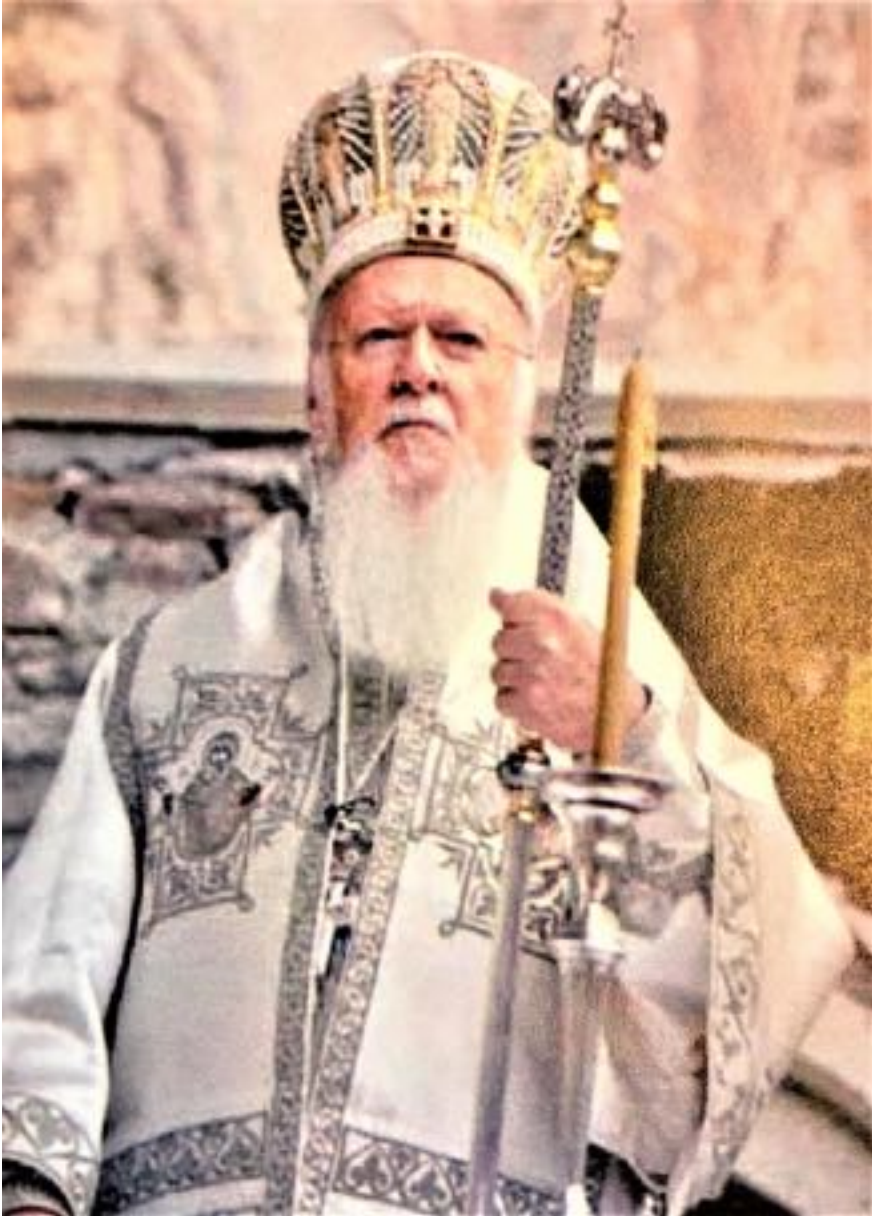
On August 15th 2013 at the Sumela monastery in Pontus, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew, officiates with the bishop of Apolloniada of Australia Serafim and the bishop of Privari Theodosios in Ukraine, in the presence of the archbishop of Armenia of the town of Arametasian and the Greek consul in Constantinople.



The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew , on August 15th 2013, in front of the Altarpiece of the monastery of Sumela , officiates with Abbots of Appolonia Australia Serafeim, Bovari Theodosios from Ukraine, in the presence of the archbishop of Armenia from the city of Aram Atezian. (Photo Archive:Nick Magginas).



August 15th 2015, his holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew , officiates for the sixth time at the historical monastery of Panagia Sumela in the area of Matsoukas in Trepizonde, with Metropolies of Talin and Estonia, Mr. Steven, of Italy and Meliti Mr. Yenadios and of Konstandia in Amochostos, Mr. Vasileios, among many priests and visitors. (Photo Archive:Nick Magginas).



His holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Mr. Bartholomew at the historical monastery of Panagia Sumela in Pontus. August 2013. (Photo Archive Nikos Magginas).

THE LITURGY THAT TOOK PLACE IN PANAGIA SOUMELA ON 15-8-2020



August 15th 2020, photo from the interior of the monastery. Five years after the completion of the restoration works of the historical monastery Panagia Soumela in the area of Matsouka in Trabzon, a hierarchical service was held again with the Metropolitans of Kallidoupolis and Madytos Stefanos, Zambias Ioannis and Silivrias Maximos, banking with the presence of a few believers due the pandemic of coroner.

DURING THE RESTORATION OF THE SUMELAMONASTERY SCIENTIST FOUND A SECRET PATH THAT LEADS TO CHAPPEL THAT HAD BEEN FORGOTTEN FOR 100 YEARS.

The refugees from Pontus used to say that the monastery of Panagia Sumelain Trepizond had crypts, which sometimes accommodated partisans from Pontus and warriors. More particularly, in the historical monastery the creators of the Filiki Etairia (association of friends), under the guidance of Alexandros Ipsilandis, swore new members.



The chapel of the Sumelamonastery, which was found 2019 by Turkish archeologists.

In the midst of December 2017, the Sabah newspaper stated that during the works for the prevention of the falling of the various material and the restoration of the historical monastery of the Panagia Sumelamonastery, an unknown tunnel of almost 40 metres was found on the northern part of the monastery that lead to a chapel built on a secret path.

An article published on Doğan mentions that the crews were working feverously in order to restore the chapel and reopen it for the public in 2018.

“We have been using the latest technology in order to avoid the mistakes of the past”, said the head of the Directorate of Tourism and Culture of the Prefecture of Trepizond, Ali Aivazoglou.

Some of the walls of the chapel have fallen but many of its mural that are considered authentic are preserved in a rather good condition. Their themes are about sky and hell, life and death. The head of the research team, Ali Aivazoglou, stated that this part of the monastery will soon be accessible.

According to the mayor of Matsouka, Korai Kochan, when the monastery of Sumelareopens in August of 2018 based on the schedule, the chapel will be accessible through the secret path while a wooden ladder will also be placed. Everything that the Turkish saw at the chapel that was found in the Sumelamonastery.

SOURCE IHA. PONTOS NEWS.



Hagiographies at the chapel of the monastery of Panagia Sumela, which had been recently found by Turkish archeologists in the area of Matsoukas in historical Pontus.

THE MIRACULOUS ICON OF PANAGIA SOUMELA IN SAINT PETERSBOURG OF RUSSIA



Two hundred thousand (200.000) Christian Orthodox Russian citizens, on September 12th 2017, welcomed the holy and wondrous icon of Panagia Sumela, which was transferred in the company of the Reverend metropolite of Veroia and Naousa Mr. Panteleimon, the president of Panagia Sumela Association Mr. George Tanimanidis and members of the board of directors, to receive its blessing at the feast of Saint Alexander in Nievski of Saint Petersburg, after the invitation of the governor of Saint Petersburg. Mr. George Serkeyenic

THE MIRACULOUS ICON OF PANAGIA SOUMELA IN NUREMBERG OF GERMANY



From the reception of the holy icon of Panagia Sumela by the board of directors and the members of the association of Pontic people of Nuremberg, “Euxinian Pontus” and the Greek community, on May 14th 2016. The icon is held by the president of the confederation of Germany, Mr. Anestis Osipidis and the general secretary, Mr. Tassos Sidiriopoulos, among the president of the Panagia Sumela association Mr George Tanimanidis, the president of PCPA Mrs. C. Sahinidou, educator Mr. Stathis Taxidis, former president of Panagia sumela, Mr. Vasileios Fotiadis, monks and children dressed in traditional Pontic costumes.

EPILOGUE



I believe that cultural monuments depict human dominance over the elements of nature. These monuments are another language that people use to define a special event, to honour a person, to symbolize an era, to praise God.

They are tightly connected to the Memory; they symbolize and remind us of something eternally. Likewise, the Monument of Sumela, for all the civilized world, even though desolate, with its wounds and scars, continues to live, continues to talk to us in its own language. It was, and it will eternally be, a symbol of Hellenism and that is why it cannot surrender to oblivion.

No damage can make it disappear. Maybe the consecutive damages that it has suffered through the years have taken away the burden of all the unnecessary elements that prevented its harmony and its perfection from showing.

Unfortunately this has been the destiny of the Greek monuments after the uprooting of the Greek people of Pontus. But it looks as if their relics confirm to the cities, the villages and the areas they created the presence of a unique culture whose history and radiance cannot be touched by any means of destruction, be it natural or human, shining for centuries not only in the region of Pontus but also all over the world.

They were created so that they be ecumenical; so that they have a diachronic value. That is why they continue to attract the interest of hundreds of visitors and pilgrims every year. Each and every one of us who will visit them in the future, until the democratization of Turkey, has to read about them first and ask for more information if that is possible.

Then he has to step on the grounds of the monastery in Pontus where glorious emperors, lordly sultans and rulers had previously set foot on. To pay his respect and pray to the cathedral and the chapels where patriarchs, bishops and respectable priests officiated. He has to try to listen to the hymns and the chants of the sweet-voiced chanters who had been praising its grace for many centuries.

He has to touch the walls of the monastery, which had been decorated by excellent hagiographers for many centuries. He has to lean in solemnly in front of the holy water and drink a few drops from the “water of life”. He has to walk in the area where thousands of people flooded for centuries in deep respect and faith, looking for the miracle.

He has to enter the “empty” cells of the monks which used to be full of life and creativity by people who kneeled to praise the grace of the Holy Mother praying for her intervention in the salvation of the world.

He has to enter the imaginary circle of thousands of dancers who had been dancing gloriously in honour of Her grace, uniting his hands with theirs. He has to listen to the sound of the lyre and the drum which continue to sing the glory of Pontus in iambic and byzantine order, to cry for the destruction and the uprooting, to toot along with Filon Ktenidis’s bell for the return and the Resurrection!

He has to try to find his roots, to learn his history.

The only certainty is that the attraction drawn by the stones, the grounds, the stranger Turks he will meet and talk to in his ancestors’ language, dance the dances that thousands of young people around the world dance, they will show him the way and they will tell him the truth for the places that he is visiting.

Only in this way will he be able to discover the historical truth about the Monastery and the values it symbolizes, for the fellow human being, for the neighbor, for the brothers of the heart, and then he will surely say:

“I WILL COME BACK”



The author of the book between Pontic speaking brothers of heart who welcome you in their villages and their homes from the first moment that you meet them so as to share with you flavors, music, dances and stories narrated in the Pontic dialect about the places they live in and the common Homeland, Pontus.

THE METROPOLITE OF VEROIA, NAOUSA AND KAMPANIA PANTELEIMON

The Honourable Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis Honorary, dear brother in Christ.

If Virgin Mary as the mother of God is and is considered to be the mother of all respectable Christians and based on her ability she has been tightly connected to the life, the history, the longings and the desires of our nation, Panagia Soumela, the Panagia of Pontus is strongly related to the Greek people of Pontus.

A loving mother and a strong protector, standing on the height of her sacred residence, she has provided shelter to those who believed in Her, she has blessed their works and their efforts and she has accompanied them in their historical path. And when the historical conditions changed, as an affectionate mother she accompanied Her people in their historical path away from the land of Pontus to reinforce them with her embassies and to protect them in their new routes through her grace.

This intertemporal co-existence of the Greek people of Pontus with Panagia Sumelais presented and depicted in the present esthetic publication, a product of the efforts and the love of Her children, which was created with the initiative and under the supervision of Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis, and is offered as a gift of gratitude to the Panagia of Pontus but also as an evidence of the path that the Greek people of Pontus went through under the protection of Virgin Mary.

Congratulating the authors of this publication I wish that Panagia Sumelables their respectable works and their noble initiatives and protect the Greek people of Pontus.

Veroia, October 18th 2008. **With humble wishes and love**
The metropolite of Veroia, Naousa and Kampania Panteleimon



Patriarch of Jerusalem Theofilos III

Prot. No. 1046

Jerusalem, 17-10-2012

To the Honourable Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis,
dear brother in Christ.

With paternal love we have received the work of your honesty entitled “The echo of Pontus’s bell”, and after reading it with great interest we placed it as a treasure in our Patriarchal library.

We thank you for this noble gesture, we congratulate you on the effort made for the collection of the necessary data, through which the bright history of the Greek people of Pontus prevails. We call for the grace and the blessing of the holy and life-giving tomb of our Christ the Saviour and we give our fathers’ wishes and Patriarchal blessings.



In the Holy City of Jerusalem, October 17th 2012
Fiery Beseecher to God
THEOFILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem

THE ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS AND THE WHOLE OF GREECE HIERONYMUS II

Prot. No. 1834 2009

Athens, June 2nd 2009

Honourable Mr. Tanimanidis,

I thank you for your noble gesture to offer me the two Volumes with such a motivating title “ **SOUMELA, THE REFUGEE PONTIC PANAGIA**”, fruit of long research and study but also of fervent prayers.

Through the pages of your work you have transmitted to us all the spirit of the Greek people of Pontus, the sacredness and the unconquerable morale, the love for our Holy Mother. I congratulate and I praise you for your efforts towards the preservation of the memory of our ancestral homes in Pontus and its history.

Pontus gives a lot of lessons and the new generations should enrich their soul with the holy water of our nation. I wish that Panagia Sumela be your eternal shelter and assistant that will support you and all of your Pontic brothers throughout your life. With cordial wishes. **ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS HIERONYMUS II**



The reverend archbishop of Athens, Mr. Ieronimos, among the youth of the meeting at the new monastery of Panagia Sumela on August 15th 2013

THE METROPOLITE OF DRAMA PAUL

Drama, March 11th 2009

Honourable Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis

We offer our paternal blessings to your work in relation to the palladium of the Greek people of Pontus , the Holy Monastery of Panagia Soumela, fruit of which is the two-volume project in which you included with a lot of effort the monastery's historical path in Greece and all of the things written about it by prevalent personalities of the Greek people of Pontus along with the ones who fought against the historical account undertaken by its late president Filonas Ktenidis, a Pontic diamond, and his successor Panagiotis Tanimanidis. May the grace and the blessing of our Holy Mother the Soumeliotissa be with you.

With wishes and blessings

THE METROPOLITE OF DRAMA PAUL



From the left: Mr. Mathaios Kaltsidis, Mr. Omiros Pachatouridis, Mr. Grigoris Grigoriadis, Mr. Panagiotis Aslanidis, Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis, the Metropolite of Drama Mr. Pavlos, Mr. Michalis Karavelas, Mr. Takis Zerzelidis, Mr. Kiriakos Iosifidis after the presentation of the Pyrichian dance of Sera in an event organized on 2-11-2013, for the sanctification of the last emperor of Trepizond David Komnenos and of all those slaughtered.

VATOPEDI

THE HOLY MONASTERY OF VATOPEDI MOUNT ATHOS

Prot. No 6111/1624

Mount Athos, July 14th 2012

To the honourable Mr. Stefanos Tanimanidis
Honorary President of P.C.P.A.

May you be blessed by the Lord!

With the present letter of our Monastery we inform you that we have received the book that you have sent us entitled “THE ECHO OF PONTUS’S BELL” and we wholeheartedly thank you for this honor. We have placed it in the library of our monastery so that everyone can read it and benefit from it.

The publication of this meticulous work enables the dissemination of the historical course of the Holy Monastery of Sumela in Trepizond of Pontus where the holy icon of our Holy Mother narrated by the hands of Evangelist Luke is also found, a fact that proves your special respect and the respect of the Orthodox people towards the face of the God bearer along with the high national ideals that characterize the souls of the orthodox immigrants all over the world.

In the contemporary difficult times, where darkness tends to be regarded as light and sin prevails everywhere, we consider essential the prayer and the appeal to Virgin Mary due to Her maternal and saving frankness. We wish that our Protector’s blessing may always be with you to guide you and Her grace may always be with your family for the completion of your spiritual efforts. We sent you our deepest gratitude and our love in Christ.



Hieromonk Ephraim Abbot of the Vatopedi Monastery. Guided by the Holy and Honourable Monastery of Vatopedi and our brothers in Christ.



INITIATIVES ABROAD FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF INSTITUTIONS AND TEMPLES IN THE NAME OF PANAGIA SOYMELA



Ιανουάριος 1984
Υπογραφή συμβολικών αγραφών οικιστικού του Ιερού Ίδρυματος «Παναγία Σουμελή Παντίουρ Αμερικής».
Αντίστοιχα διακρίνονται από αριστερά προς τα δεξιά: κ. κ. Τ. Ορφανίδης, Ιωάννης Διακόγιος, Σπύριδων Γεωργιάδης, Ιωάννης Πετρινίδης και Λεωνίδας Σουμελής. Καθήμενοι: Λεωνίδας Στάρας, Ιωάννης Βασιλείος Βασιλειάδης, Νικόλαος Στεφάνου και Νέλλη Σαββαΐδου.

The first Board of Directors with the President Vassilios Vassiliadis of the PANAGIA SOUMELA Goundation in New York, U.S.A. and below the Church of PANAGIA SOYMELA in the village Alektriko in Larnaka Cyprus.





Mr. Onoufrios Gorozidis who hands over to the Archbishop of Australia Makarios the Property of 1.600 acres in Melbourne, Australia for the construction of the church of Panagia Soumela and below the relevant model of the area.



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