

Portals of the Montanist New Jerusalem: The Discovery of Pepouza and Tymion

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In the first decade of the third century C.E., a Christian writer named Apollonius wrote a tract denouncing an early Christian prophetic movement flourishing in Phrygia at the time. The movement later came to be known as Montanism, named after one of its three founders. According to Apollonius, Montanus was the movement's original organizer, establishing its rules of conduct and ecclesiastical structure (Apollon., ap. Eus., *H.E.* 5.18.2). Among other strategies, Montanus gave the name "Jerusalem" to Pepouza and Tymion, two settlements in Phrygia, wanting people to gather there from everywhere (5.18.2). In time Pepouza became both the administrative "headquarters" of Montanism and a pilgrimage site for Montanists living outside the region.

Despite the significance of Pepouza and Tymion for the history of Montanism and of early Christianity in Asia Minor, until now, neither the location of Pepouza nor that of Tymion has been identified. In the course of the past 125 years, scholarly investigations have narrowed the geographic parameters within which Pepouza and Tymion were presumed to have been located, and a number of reasonable suggestions as to their probable location have been made. Searching for Pepouza has been the archaeological equivalent of searching for the proverbial "needle in a haystack." In particular, two archaeological remnants of the past (an inscription and a rock-cut monastery) proved invaluable for identifying the holy city of the Montanists.

The Tymion Inscription

On August 7, 1998, Mr. Kazım Akbıyıkoglu, the director of the Uşak Archaeological Museum in Turkey, bought a marble slab containing a bilingual inscription.¹ The Greek text (*ll.* 1–5) proclaims that the Latin text (*ll.* 16–18) is an exact copy of the original on display in the colonnaded gallery surrounding

1. The inscription will be published by Mr. Akbıyıkoglu in William Tabbernee and Peter Lampe, *Pepouza and Tymion: The Archaeological Discovery of Two Lost Cities in Phrygia* (Münster/Hamburg: LIT, forthcoming).

the Baths of Trajan (in Rome) and that the copy had been officially checked and verified. Such copying and checking was the normal procedure by which inscriptions recording imperial responses to petitions by cities or other settlements in the provinces were authenticated and authorized. In due time, the inscribed monument containing the imperial rescript would be erected in a prominent location in the settlement or settlements which had made the petition. The Latin text reveals that the inhabitants (*coloni*) of Tymium (= Greek Τύμιον; i.e., Tymion) had complained about unjust taxes (*l.* 12).

The complete listing of Septimius Severus' titles on the Tymion inscription (*ll.* 7–9) shows that the emperors responded to the *coloni*'s petition some time after 195. Indeed, from the titles of Septimius' sons (*ll.* 6–7, 9–10), it is clear that the response was promulgated between April 200, when M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus received the title Pius, and 209 or 210, when Publius Septimius Geta officially became an Augustus.

The year in which the imperial response to the *coloni* of Tymion was formulated is recorded, as was the Roman custom, by naming the consuls then in office. While, because part of the left side of the stone is missing, it is impossible to be precise about the day and month of the official response to the *coloni*'s petition, there is little doubt about the year. The petition was answered “in the consulship of our lords Antoninus Pius and Geta Caesar” (*ll.* 6–7). Septimius Severus' sons were joint consuls only twice. The first time in 205, the second in 208. Theoretically, either year is possible, but the later date is almost certainly to be ruled out as the inscription does not (as would have been normal) record that this was their second joint consulship.

The words *coloniis* (*l.* 10) and *proc<urator> noster* (*l.* 11) clearly reveal that Tymion was a settlement situated on an imperial estate. By the end of the second century C.E., there were vast imperial estates in Phrygia, their arable land farmed by *coloni Caesaris* who were rent-paying freedmen. A specially appointed procurator was responsible for the administration of all imperial property in Phrygia—including imperial quarries. As elsewhere, there were also procurators of individual estates. On the basis of the newly discovered inscription mentioning the *coloni* of Tymion, we may now add another imperial estate to the imperial estates in Central Phrygia already identified by earlier scholars.

Tymion

According to the men who sold the inscription with the reference to Tymion to the Uşak Archaeological Museum, the slab containing the inscription had been used as a step leading to the entrance of their grandfather's house since c. 1975, when their grandfather had dug up the stone while ploughing in his field. On July 20, 2000, with the permission of Mr. Akbıyıköğlü, we visited the house, which is in the village of Susuzören, approximately twelve kilometers southeast of Uşak. We also visited the grandfather's field which lies 2.2 kilometers southeast of Susuzören in an area known locally as “Saraycık” (i.e., “Little Palace” or “Little Government House”)—perhaps alluding to the remains of the residence of the imperial administrator of the estate.

The find spot of the Tymion inscription is on the slope of a hill near a large

solitary tree, but not right at the top of the hill which is marked by a row of trees. While a number of shards and pieces of Roman and Byzantine bricks visible in the field and in the fields lower down the slope may have washed down from higher up the hill, the size and weight of the stone with the Tymion inscription probably means that it was found at least very near where it was originally set up. A hole in the bottom of the extant right fragment of the stone indicates that the stone was erected on top of a base, undoubtedly to raise the stone at least to eye level.

As an inscription intended to reinforce, by imperial fiat, the authority of the procurator and to prevent any further noncompliance with the procurator's commands, the inscription would have been erected in the most prominent, centrally-located public area of the settlement (e.g., the *agora*). However, until an extensive archaeological surface survey is undertaken, followed by archaeological digs at this and neighboring sites, it is impossible to do other than make educated guesses about the nature of this public space in particular and the size and shape of the settlement in general.

The "Church in a Cave"

Tymion can now be identified as having been situated near the modern village of Susuzören. Susuzören is eighteen kilometers south of Uşak. The provenance and text of the newly-discovered Tymion inscription confirm Apollonius' statement that Tymion was a relatively insignificant hamlet in Phrygia. From the text of the inscription, we now also know that, at the very time that Apollonius was writing his anti-Montanist polemic, Tymion belonged to an imperial estate. Exactly when this part of Central Phrygia became an imperial estate is not clear, but Tymion was probably already part of the estate when Montanus named it and Pepouza "Jerusalem."

Among the other helpful data about early Christianity in the province of Uşak Mr. Akbıyıköğlü told us that there was what he called a "church in a cave," in the Ulubey Canyon, west of a popular picnic spot in the district of Karahallı, thirty kilometers south of Uşak. On July 22, 2000, Mr. Akbıyıköğlü led us to this "church in a cave"—which turned out not only to be an extremely long way farther west along the canyon than we had originally assumed but also not to be what we had envisaged in our minds.

On the way to the "church in a cave," our team, at my suggestion, had first stopped at Hocalar, a village approximately thirteen kilometers southeast of Uşak and five kilometers north of Susuzören. Recent building activity in the village had unearthed some architectural pieces I wanted to see. Most of these newly discovered stones must have come from a Byzantine church. One large rectangular slab contains a huge Byzantine cross. The building site was close to the mosque. The mosque's garden also contains an elaborately carved Byzantine ecclesiastical decorative stone as well as some matching pillars and capitals—all, presumably, from the same church.

The Byzantine slabs gave me the opportunity to tell Mr. Akbıyıköğlü that Byzantine ecclesiastical material was by no means irrelevant to the search for Pepouza. I explained that although Montanism as a movement had been

destroyed at Pepouza by John of Ephesus in 550 c.e., there was indisputable evidence that both an orthodox bishop of Pepouza named Theophylactus and an abbot of a monastery at (or very near to) Pepouza, named Euthymius, had attended the second council of Nicaea in 787. I also told him that another bishop of Pepouza, named Nikolaos, is listed as having attended a church council in Constantinople in 879. Mr. Akbiyikoğlu then shared the astounding news that very near the “church in a cave,” which we were about to visit, was an extensive ancient site, the abundant shards of which indicated that the site is that of a significant (at that time yet unidentified) ancient city. As we made our way through this site (1.5 km south of the village of Karayakuplu) toward the “church in a cave,” we saw many rock-cut tomb chambers containing *loculi* and other evidence of an extensive necropolis at the eastern sector of the site. The fields to the west and northwest of the necropolis which, undoubtedly, encompass the city’s original center contain an abundance of various types of shards, bricks, and architectural blocks. The number of shards was by far the greatest amount we had seen at any site examined thus far. As far as we could tell from our initial brief inspection, the ancient site was at least 1.5 kilometers long and 1 kilometer wide, covering both sides of the Ulubey Canyon. This was, obviously, the site of an ancient city—but was it Pepouza?

Eager to show us the “church in a cave,” Mr. Akbiyikoğlu led us on a walk along the north side of the canyon. We walked approximately 1.2 kilometers west from the western edge of the site of the unidentified ancient city and, at a point where the river turns sharply south, scrambled up the north side of the canyon. Once through the forest of cultivated poplars, we gained our first glimpse of what Mr. Akbiyikoğlu had described as a “church in a cave.” What we saw was a spectacular, rock-cut monastery!

The Monastery

Reaching the base of the monastery’s massive rock walls and exploring some of its accessible rooms, it became clear that this was an extensive complex of monks’ cells, chapels, kitchens, refectory, and storage rooms. A large hall-shaped room, on the upper level, with a domed ceiling was undoubtedly the monastery’s main chapel. Two pieces of wood, attached to the top of the dome, are joined in the shape of a cross—accounting perhaps for the local description of the monastery as a “church in a cave,” although some Byzantine (as well as modern) crosses carved on the walls of some of the rooms (especially the refectory) may also have given rise to the designation. In any case, the wooden pieces in the shape of a cross (whatever its actual purpose) are unlikely to be very old.

We returned to the monastery on July 26, 2000, and again, after we obtained the official archaeological survey permit, on several occasions during 2001 and 2002. We have been able to confirm the following details. The monastic complex contains at least thirty individual rooms for monks and/or guests. The domed ceiling of the sanctuary is decorated with a large Latin cross, perhaps originally formed by natural cracks but enhanced artificially. There is a second, smaller chapel with an apse. The refectory has stone benches along the walls, carved out of the rock. The west wall of the refectory has three Byzantine crosses carved in

shapes similar to those carved next to a *graffito* still *in situ* near the bridge crossing the canyon near the picnic spot referred to above. There are two storage rooms at the rear of the refectory and at the eastern end of the monastery are further rooms as well as a chimney-like structure, suggesting that at least some of these rooms could have been kitchens. Ceramic water pipes are visible in various parts of the complex, indicating the presence of running water. Within the complex are also a number of stone-and-cement walls, showing that the monastery was comprised both of rock-cut chambers and artificially built rooms. Covered balconies or walkways existed along the outside of the upper levels of the monastery. Most of these have collapsed, and broken pieces of rock now litter the slope of the canyon below the main walls of the monastery—making the task of climbing up to the monastery from below difficult and treacherous. Down the slope, immediately below the monastery, are large sections of ancient walls. Some of these may have belonged to separate buildings. Others may be the remains of external security walls.

Pepouza

Seeing the visible remains of a Byzantine (or older) monastery near the site of an, at that time, extensive but unidentified ancient city due south of the newly discovered (but epigraphically confirmed) site of Tymion provided the key piece of the jigsaw puzzle we were trying to complete. If we were ecstatic about discovering the location of Tymion two days earlier, we were even more ecstatic (Montanist pun intended!) when we discovered the monastery. While there are many rock-cut monasteries in other parts of Turkey, especially in Cappadocia, the rock-cut monastery west of the ancient site south of Karayakuplu is the only one in this region. Indeed, according to Mr. Akbıyıkoglu, it is the only rock-cut construction of its kind in the whole province of Uşak.

Montanus' "Mountain" and the Site of the "New Jerusalem"

Approximately five kilometers south of the site which we, on July 20, 2000, tentatively identified as Pepouza, is a mountain (really a very high hill of 1141 m) called Ömerçalı. From its summit, we discovered that, looking north toward the area where the monastery is located, we not only had a magnificent view of the whole Pepouza site (5 km northeast) but could see all the way to the site of Tymion (12 km further due north).

I imagined Montanus and his prophetic associates standing, more than eighteen centuries ago, where I was standing with my scholarly associates. Suddenly, another piece of the puzzle fell into place. We could see clearly now why Montanus had named (*both*) Pepouza and Tymion "Jerusalem." It was not, as earlier scholars had assumed, because they were geographically adjacent settlements at either side of the foot of a mountain, but because they marked the northern and southern limits of the geographic area where he expected the "New Jerusalem" to descend out of heaven. As we looked more closely from the heights of Ömerçalı, across the elevated plateau stretching north from the Ulubey Canyon almost to Uşak, it was obvious why Montanus had believed this to be

the location of the “Jerusalem from above.” Topographically, this vast agricultural tableland, which in Montanus’ day was an imperial estate, was the ideal “landing place” for the New Jerusalem. It was flat enough, level enough, and large enough to accommodate the dimensions of the New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21.

Presumably, Montanus decided first that Pepouza, the far more prominent of the two ancient Phrygian settlements, was the intended southern boundary of the (in his view) soon-to-descend New Jerusalem before choosing Tymion as its northern boundary. His choice of the second settlement, also to be named “Jerusalem,” was apparently made because Tymion happened to be exactly due north of Pepouza.

Conclusion

Despite the absence, at this stage, of specific epigraphic or numismatic confirmation, there is overwhelming evidence to support the conclusion that the ancient site in the Ulubey Canyon near Karayakuplu is the site of Pepouza. The site is large enough to have been the site of a city rather than a smaller settlement. Its plentiful shards, coins, and architectural pieces prove it to have been occupied before, during, and after the time when Montanism was prevalent in that part of Phrygia.

Seven key elements make the identification of Pepouza with the site near Karayakuplu indisputable. The first of these is the discovery of the inscription in the Uşak Archaeological Museum which contains the name Tymion. The second is the location of Tymion near Susuzören. The third is the information, provided by Mr. Akbıyıkoglu, that there existed an ancient, hitherto unidentified, site near Karayakuplu. The fourth, and, in my view most significant, is the discovery of the unique Byzantine monastery only 1.2 kilometers from the ancient site near Karayakuplu. The fifth is the precise wording of Euthymius’ autograph: *hegemenus Pepuzentium*. The sixth is the now clear reason why Montanus named both Pepouza and Tymion “Jerusalem.” These settlements marked, for Montanus, the sites of the northern and southern portals of the “New Jerusalem.” The seventh is that the topography of the area between Pepouza and Tymion provides an ideal location for descent of the Montanist “New Jerusalem” out of heaven. Any one of these elements, taken by itself in isolation from the others, would be insufficient evidence to identify Pepouza. Taken together, however, they prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the ancient site near Karayakuplu is indeed Pepouza—the holy city of the Montanists in Phrygia.

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