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Theoktistos, *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu and *prōtos* of Athos A Chalcedonian Armenian in Eleventh-Century Byzantium

with 1 figure

ABSTRACT: Whilst the presence of Chalcedonian Armenians on Mount Athos is not contested, they have nonetheless proven difficult to trace. This makes the case of Theoktistos, *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu and *prōtos* of Athos, all the more intriguing. In 1035 CE, Theoktistos appended his signature twice to a document now preserved in the collection of the Monastery of Great Lavra — signing in Greek and Armenian. This paper explores the life and career of Theoktistos, highlighting how this Chalcedonian Armenian participated in the life of Mount Athos as a prominent member of its monastic leadership. It ultimately argues that the case of Theoktistos serves as a useful device to renegotiate and reconsider scholarly approaches to the role of Chalcedonian Armenians in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium, providing a compelling case study in the context of recent scholarship which is increasingly engaged in questions of multilingualism and identity in the field of Byzantine Studies.

KEYWORDS: Chalcedonian Armenians; Mount Athos; Monastery of Esphigmenu; Multilingualism; Identity; Eleventh Century

INTRODUCTION

Whilst the presence of Chalcedonian Armenians on Mount Athos is not contested, their lives and roles have nonetheless proven difficult to trace. This is largely due to their propensity for writing in Greek, but also because the Armenians of Athos did not coalesce around a particular monastic foundation in the same manner as their Georgian colleagues at the Monastery of Iviron, leaving us no focal point or centre of textual production from which to begin a conversation¹. A further fundamental challenge to such an investigation also lies in the methodological approaches which have framed the study of Chalcedonian Armenians in the wider Byzantine Empire. Supposedly rejected by Miaphysite Armenians on one side and kept at arm's length by the Greek-speaking Chalcedonian norms of the Empire on the other, scholars have found them difficult to place, setting them aside as liminal characters in the historical landscape of Byzantium². This makes the case of Theoktistos, *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu and *prōtos* of Athos, all the more striking³.

When Paul Lemerle, André Guillou, and Nicolas Svoronos were preparing their edition and study of primary documents housed in the Athonite Monastery of Great Lavra, they found an indistinguishable signature⁴ appended to the Act of the *prōtos* Theoktistos (Lavra 29) composed in 1035 (AM 6543). The signature sits directly below that of the eponymous *prōtos*: + Θεοκτιστος μ(ονα)χ(ός)

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¹ S. NIKOLAISHVILI, Georgian Manuscript Production and Translation Activities in the Christian East and Byzantine Empire. *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 7 (2021) 41–75; S. NIKOLAISHVILI, The Georgian Milieu and the Metaphrastic Menologion: Three Accounts about Symeon Metaphrastes. *Interface* 9 (2022) 70–94; C. HÖGEL, Euthymios the Athonite, Greek-Georgian and Georgian-Greek translator – and Metaphrast? *TM* 23/1 (= *Mélanges Bernard Flusin*; 2019) 353–364. For the history of the monastery see: *Actes d'Iviron 1, Des Origines au Milieu du XIe Siècle, Texte, Introduction* 2–92 (ed. J. LEFORT – N. OIKONOMIDÈ – D. PAPACHRYSSANTHOU. Paris 1985).

² N. GARSOÏAN, The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire, in: *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. H. Ahrweiler – A. E. Laiou. Washington, DC 1998, 68. V. A. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, The Ethno-Confessional Self-Awareness of Armenian Chalcedonians. *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 21 (1988–1989), 345.

³ Theoktistos: <https://www.degruyter.com/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ30212/html> (accessed 16-12-2025).

⁴ *Actes de Lavra. 1, Des Origines à 1204, Texte, no. 29, 184–186* (ed. P. LEMERLE – A. GUILLOU – N. SVORONOS. Paris 1970). For all Greek cited directly from Athonite documents, I have chosen to maintain the editorial principles set forward by the authors of the collection, unless otherwise specified.

(πρωτος)⁵ + [Theoktistos, Monk, *prōtos*] and to the right of the signature of + Γεώργιο(ς) (μον)αχ(ός) ο Ιβηρ⁶ [George the Iberian] (Lavra plate XXIII). Unable to puzzle out this linguistic and palaeographical conundrum, Lemerle et al. relate their next move in the appendix of Actes de Lavra 1: Des origines à 1204: “Nous avons consulté, à Erivan, M. Hr. Bartikian sur les mots, pour nous incompréhensibles, qui suivent la signature grecque de Georges l’Ibère. Il s’agit, veut-il bien nous écrire le 4-IX-1970, de mots arméniens, qui ne sont point de date tardive mais contemporains du document.”⁷ Having contacted renowned Armenologist and Byzantinist Hrač’ Bart’ikyan, then based at the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (now the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia), Lemerle et al. were informed that the indistinguishable signature was in fact Armenian, and that Bart’ikyan’s decipherment of the text had some rather surprising implications. Bart’ikyan duly published an article about the matter in 1973, in which he elucidated on the discovery in more detail.

Fig. 1: The Bi-lingual Signature of Theoktistos, reproduced by Bart’ikyan (1973)⁸

Reproducing the manuscript image in his article, Bart’ikyan offered his interpretation that: “The leader (Theoktistos), it is clear, having first signed ΘΕΟΚΤΗΣΤΟΣ, found it appropriate to write in Armenian immediately under his Greek signature: Իմ ձերոքս գրեցի Թենլոխիսոնու [I wrote by my own hand, Theoktistos]”⁹. Theoktistos, the *prōtos* of Athos and *hēgumenos* of the monastery of Esphigmenu signed the document twice, in Greek and in Armenian.

The expanded reading offered by Bart’ikyan in his 1973 article appears to have developed from a shorter initial interpretation of the Armenian letterforms, which, based on Lemerle’s note, originally read: Իմ ձերոքս գրեցի Թենլոխ մի¹⁰. As the editors of the Actes de Lavra record, Bart’ikyan offered no interpretation of the letters which follow the name Թենլոխ (T’eokt), identified as the Armenian letters մի (mi), and any further discussion of this matter does not appear in Bart’ikyan’s 1973 article. Bart’ikyan himself admits the difficulty of deciphering the letters of the signature, noting “the poor writing of the last 3 letters of the name.”¹¹ It is still extremely difficult to produce a satisfactory interpretation of the final letters of the name which could equally read Թենլոխ (T’eokt), Թենլոխ (T’eok’kt), Թենլոխ (T’eok’ks), Թենլոխ (T’eoks), Թենլոխ (T’eok’ts), all of which seem to be an attempt at reproducing the Greek name above. When it comes to the final uninterpreted letters which read “մի (mi)”, I would argue that a possible explanation would be a shortening of the

⁵ Theoktistos uses a mixture of Greek majuscule and miniscule letters in the original document. I have chosen to diverge slightly from the transcription provided by the editors of the Actes de Lavra in this case. The abbreviation above the final cross appears to be a horizontal stroke, an abbreviation for α, indicating the meaning *protos*. In the Actes de Lavra, the editors interpreted this as a tau and so their transcription reads (πρω)τ(ος) rather than (πρω)τ(ος). My thanks to Christian Gastgeber for this observation.

⁶ This could be read as Ιβερ. It should also be noted that although the edited text appears this way in the Actes de Lavra, based on the original document, Georgios has no accent.

⁷ Actes de Lavra 1, no. 29, 374 (LEMERLE et al).

⁸ The Bi-lingual Signature of Theoktistos, H. BART’IKYAN, Mec Lavrayi Arajnord (Protos) T’eoktistos Hayeren Storagrut’yun [The Armenian Signature of Theoktistos, Protos of Great Lavra]. *Banber Matenadarani* 11 (1973) 70 (© Banber Matenadarani).

⁹ H. BART’IKYAN, Mec Lavrayi Arajnord (Protos) T’eoktistos Hayeren Storagrut’yun. *Banber Matenadarani* 11 (1973) 70. [Առաջնորդը, պարզ է, ստորագրել է առաջինը ΘΕΟΚΤΗΣΤΟΣ, բայց իր հունարեն ստորագրության անմիջապես տակը նպատակահարմար է գտել գրել հայերեն: Իմ ձերոքս գրեցի Թենլոխիսոնու]

¹⁰ Actes de Lavra 1, no. 29, 374 (LEMERLE et al).

¹¹ BART’IKYAN, Mec Lavrayi 70. [անվան վերջին 3 տառերի սոված գրությունը]

Armenian: Միսուծն (Mianjn), meaning monk, a calque on the Greek μοναχός. This would provide the solution that Theoktistos referred to himself as Θεοκτιστος μοναχός and Թեոկտիստոս Միսուծն in both Greek and Armenian. A fully expanded rendering of the Armenian signature reads:

Իմ ձեռքս գրեցի Թեոկտիստոս Միսուծն | I wrote by my own hand, Theoktistos, monk

On paleographical grounds alone this autograph provides unique and idiosyncratic, near cursive, Armenian letter forms, surviving far earlier than similar examples of autographs attached to chancery documents from the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in the thirteenth and fourteenth century¹². Certainly, the Armenian autograph of Theoktistos falls well outside the trend of using the magisterial, monastic Erkat'agir majuscule script, which we encounter as the standard form of scribal script in Armenian manuscripts during the eleventh century¹³. Beyond this notable aspect, the significance of the signature for the present study is that, as both Bart'ikyan and the editors of the *Actes de Lavra* point out, it clearly provides evidence of a prominent Chalcedonian Armenian on Mount Athos in the early eleventh century.

Finding an Armenian on Mount Athos is not necessarily surprising in and of itself. Indeed, we can locate rare traces of other Armenians amongst the monastic communities. An earlier example includes Joseph, described in the Life of St Euthymios the Younger as “ἀπὸ Ἀρμενίων τὸ γένος κατήγετο [descended from the race of the Armenians]”¹⁴. According to his hagiography, Joseph lived as an eremite on Mount Athos when Euthymios arrived in the mid ninth century¹⁵. The Monastery of Iviron also appears to have provided another focal point for Armenian activity on Athos; the monastery, founded in circa 980's, may have produced a Georgian translation of the Armenian Life of Saint Grigor the Illuminator in the late eleventh or early twelfth century¹⁶. Finding evidence of an Athonite signature in a language other than Greek is also not particularly novel. In the same document in question, four lines below the bi-lingual signature of Theoktistos, John Amalfitanus signed in Latin: Johannes humilis monachus Amalfitanus¹⁷. John, whose signature is found in a number of other documents in the tenth and early eleventh century, was likely *hēgumenos* of the Amalfinon Monastery¹⁸. It is perhaps no surprise that a number of witnesses to documents associated with the monastery of Iviron also provide signatures in Georgian in the late eleventh century¹⁹. However, as Bart'ikyan duly noted in his 1973 article, the significance of Theoktistos' signature lies in the fact that it is the *earliest* example of Armenian script found on Athos and remains so at the time of writing and the only case of a Chalcedonian Armenian *hēgumenos* and *prōtos* during the medieval period²⁰. Though first introducing the case of Theoktistos into scholarship, Bart'ikyan's study was primarily descriptive in form and did not offer any interpretation or analysis on the wider implications of this

¹² M. E. STONE – D. KOUYMIAN – H. LEHMANN, *Album of Armenian Palaeography*. Aarhus 2002, 74

¹³ See Yerevan, Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) ms. 2679 for early transmission of Bologir alongside Erkat'agir script during this period. For further discussion of M 2679 see: A. Matean Gitut'ean ew Hawatoy Dawt'i K'ahanayi [The Book of Knowledge and Faith by Davit the Priest], vols 1 and 2. Yerevan 1995.

¹⁴ Vie et Office de Saint Euthyme Le Jeune, 30 (ed. L. PETIT. Paris 1904), <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75525b>> (accessed: 16-12-2025).

¹⁵ J. PREISER-KAPPELLER, Aristocrats, Mercenaries, Clergymen and Refugees: Deliberate and Forced Mobility of Armenians in the Early Medieval Mediterranean (6th to 11th Century a.d.), in: *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone*, ed. J. Preiser-Kapeller – L. Reinfandt – Y. Stouraitis. Leiden 2020, 360.

¹⁶ Z. ALEKSIDZE, The Visions of Grigor and Sahak Part'ew: Old Georgian Versions and Their Reflection in Georgian Sources, in: *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. K. Bardakjian – S. La Porta. Leiden 2014, 326–40.

¹⁷ *Actes de Lavra* 1, no. 29, 186 (LEMERLE et al).

¹⁸ *Actes de Lavra* 1, no. 9, 122 (LEMERLE et al).

¹⁹ *Actes d'Iviron* I, no. 6, 140 (LEFORT et al.).

²⁰ It is also, to the best of the present author's knowledge, the only example of an Armenian signature on an Athonite document during the medieval period.

bi-lingual signature, other than stating that it has “the potential to enrich our knowledge concerning the role played by Chalcedonian Armenians on Mount Athos.”²¹

Surprisingly, then, despite the fascinating implications of this discovery, there have been, to my knowledge, no further studies fully dedicated to the life and career of Theoktistos and the question of his bi-lingual signature²². It therefore seems appropriate to return to the subject just over fifty years after Bart’ikyan published his original study and tackle the rich questions and issues which it raises. The present article will proceed in three parts. The first part will seek to provide a comprehensive overview of the life and activities of Theoktistos on Athos, piecing together evidence from an array of Athonite documents. It will highlight how this Chalcedonian Armenian *hēgumenos* and *prōtos* participated in the life of Mount Athos as a prominent member of its monastic leadership. The second part will then turn to consider the question of his dual signature in more detail, contemplating what implications this has for our understanding of Theoktistos as an individual and his mode of self-representation as a Chalcedonian Armenian. I argue that, whilst the signature reveals something of Theoktistos’ Armenian identity, we should caveat this point by stressing the fact that writing in Armenian did not necessarily represent a conscious effort to set himself apart or emphasise his Armenian-ness in the diverse linguistic environment of Mount Athos. The final part of this article asks why finding a Chalcedonian Armenian writing authoritatively in Armenian and holding high office amongst the Athonite community in the early eleventh century is, if at all, significant. Challenging a traditional scholarly framework that has placed Chalcedonian Armenians as liminal figures in the socio-cultural, political, and religious landscape of the Byzantine Empire, I argue that the significance of studying Theoktistos is his potential as a device to renegotiate and reconsider scholarly approaches to the role of Chalcedonian Armenians in tenth—and eleventh century—Byzantium, providing a compelling case study in the context of recent scholarship which is increasingly engaged in questions of multilingualism and identity in the field of Byzantine Studies. It is in this sense that the final part of this paper is deliberately conceived to raise more questions than it answers, by challenging us to re-consider certain scholarly paradigms in the fluid and diverse environment of Mount Athos.

LIFE AND CAREER

Paradoxically, the earliest evidence of Theoktistos’ life on Athos can be found in the last document in which he is attested²³. Composed on 23 December 1037, this document records arrangements made for the re-admittance of a certain Nikephoros to the Monastery of Esphigmenu²⁴. Having left the monastery at the start of the eleventh century, the document informs us that Nikephoros had returned to live out his final days there. We learn that Theoktistos, by then *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu, had decided to re-admit Nikephoros with great enthusiasm, at least in part, because of their long-standing fraternal relationship²⁵:

²¹ BART’IKYAN, *Mec Lavrayi*, 71 [որոնք պիտի հարստացնեն մեր գիտելիքները Աթոնում հազ քաղկեդոնիկների խաղած դերի մասին]

²² A notice concerning an act issued by Theoktistos in 1037 is the subject of a short two-page analysis by Alexander Kazhdan written in 1974, see: A. KAZHDAN, *Esfigmenskaja Gramota 1037 g. i dejatel'nost' Feoktista* [The Esphigmenu Charter of 1037 and the activities of Theoktistos]. *Vestnik Erevanskogo universiteta* 3 (1974) 236–238. Theoktistos also appears briefly in: N. GARSOĪAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 89, V. A. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, *The Ethno-Confessional Self-Awareness of Armenian Chalcedonians* 350, and V. A. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, *Armjane-chalkidomity na vostočnyh granicah Vizantijskoj imperii (XIC)* [Armenian-Chalcedonians on the Eastern Borders of the Byzantine Empire]. Yerevan 1980.

²³ *Actes d’Esphigmenou*, Texte, no. 2, 43–46 (ed. J. LEFORT. Paris 1973). The life of Theoktistos is discussed on 18–19.

²⁴ Nikephoros: <https://www.degruyter.com/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ27816/html> (accessed 16-12-2025).

²⁵ In ‘Esfigmenskaja gramota’, Kazhdan speculates that Nikephoros was also Armenian.

Τούτω τῷ νόμῳ πειθόμε(νος) καγὼ ὁ (μον)αχ(ός) Θεόκτιστο(ς) τὸ παρὸν χαρτίον ποιῶ προς σὲ τὸν (μον)αχ(όν) Νικηφό(ρον) (καὶ) πν(ευματ)ικόν μου ἀδε(λφόν) ἐν ὑποθέσει τοιαύτη. Ἐπειδή-περ ἀμφοτέροι ἠμφιεσάμεθα τὸ ἀγγελικὸν σχῆμα παρὰ τοῦ ἐν μακαρία τῇ λήξει πν(ευματ)ικοῦ π(ατ)ρ(ός) ἡμω(ν) κυ(ρ) Θεοδώρου, κ(αὶ) μετα τὴν αὐτοῦ προς Κ(ύριο)ν ἐκδημίαν ὑπεχώρησ(ας) σὺ ὁ ῥηθεις κυ(ρ) Νικηφό(ρος), ποιήσας ἐν τῷ θέματι τοῦ Χαρσιανοῦ χρόνου τριακοντ(α) προς τοῖς ἕξ, δειμάμε(νος) (καὶ) μοναστήριον ἐν αὐτῷ συνεργία [Θ(εο)]ῷ ...²⁶

In obedience to this law, I, the monk Theoktistos, draw up the present document for you, the monk Nikephoros, my spiritual brother, under the following arrangement: Since we both donned the angelic habit under our spiritual father, Theodoros, in blessed repose, and after his departure to the Lord, you, the aforementioned Nikephoros, withdrew and spent thirty-six years in the theme of Charsianon having also founded a monastery there with the assistance of God ...

We learn two crucial pieces of information from this passage: (i) that Nikephoros and Theoktistos had been admitted to the monastery of Esphigmenu before the death of the *hēgumenos* Theodoros and (ii) that the death of Theodoros occurred at the very latest thirty-six years before the date of the composition of the document in 1037²⁷. Working with the knowledge that Theoktistos had been admitted to the monastery prior to the death of Theodoros, which occurred, at the very latest, thirty-six years prior, in the year 1001, we can plot a *terminus ante quem* for Theoktistos' admittance to Esphigmenu. Theodoros is only mentioned in one prior document from 998, so a *terminus post quem* for the arrival of Theoktistos is rather-less certain²⁸. It may be tempting to infer something significant from Nikephoros' connection with Charsianon. The theme was near the Armenian kingdoms and principalities of the tenth and eleventh century and housed numerous Armenian populations; later in the eleventh century Charsianon would also host the resettlement of the Armenian King Gagik II²⁹. One might seek to trace the origins of Theoktistos and his spiritual brother Nikephoros to the Armenian populations of this area. Kazhdan and Wharton Epstein certainly suggest Nikephoros was what they describe as a "hellenized Armenian."³⁰ However, this is merely a supposition. What we can say with certainty is that, based on this excerpt of personal reminiscence, it is safe to assume that Theoktistos began his Athonite career at the end of the tenth century or the very beginning of the eleventh in the Monastery of Esphigmenu, having been admitted by the *hēgumenos* Theodoros before 1001 CE.

Though we do not know exactly when Theoktistos became *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu, we encounter him as a representative of the monastery in several early documents which witness the regulation and resolution of Athonite disputes throughout the 1010s and 1020s. On 19 April 1015, Theoktistos appended his signature to two documents pertaining to a donation of land from the *prōtos* Nikephoros to Euthymios the Iberian, with a compensatory payment of thirty-four nomismata for vines planted on the donation site³¹. The eventual sum rose to 100 following a disagreement among the *hēgumenoι*, to which a further 100 *nomismata* were added as a charitable donation to the collective community³². In both documents his signature reads: Θεοκτιστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαυμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu]. The following year, Theoktistos acted as a witness to a property dispute raised by Paul of Xeropotamou against Athanasios, *hēgumenos* of the Bouleuteria, at the Feast of the Dormition, signing the document as: Θεοκτιστος

²⁶ Actes d'Esphigménou, no. 2, 45 (LEFORT). Trans. L. Read.

²⁷ Theodoros: <https://www.degruyter.com/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ29933/html> (accessed 16-12-2025).

²⁸ Actes de Vatopédi I, Des Origines à 1329, Texte, no. 2, 69 (ed. J. BOMPAIRE – J. LEFORT – V. KRAVARI – C. GIROS. Paris 2001).

²⁹ G. A. LEBENIOTES, Politiki katarefsi tu Byzantiu stin Anatoli. To anatoliko synoro kai i kentriki Mikra Asia kata to b' imisy tu 11 lu ai., vol. II. Thessalonike 2007, 435–448 and 637–642

³⁰ A. KAZHDAN – A. WHARTON-EPSTEIN, Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. Berkeley: Los Angeles 1985. 172–173.

³¹ Actes d'Iviron I, no. 20, 213–215 (LEFORT et al.).

³² Actes d'Iviron I, no. 21, 218–221 (LEFORT et al.).

μ(ονα)χ(ός) ο του Εσφαυμενου [Theoktistos, monk of Esphigmenu]³³. In April 1018, after the Easter assembly, Theoktistos, Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαυμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu] signed the decision of the *prōtos* Nikephoros to grant land to the Zygos monastery³⁴. Later the same year, in December, we find Θεοκτηστ(ος) μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαυμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu] as the eighth signature on the Act of the *prōtos* Nikephoros concerning a deed of donation to the Monastery of Vatopedi³⁵. Two years later, following the Christmas gathering, and now under the oversight of the *prōtos* Leontios, Theoktistos, Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαυμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu], can be found as one of twenty-two signees witnessing and confirming a grant of a second team of oxen to carry out essential work at the Monastery of Iviron, fulfilling the prescription of a chrysobull issued by the Emperor Basil II³⁶. In February 1024, together with the *prōtos* Leontios and thirteen other representatives of the Athonite monasteries, Theoktistos, Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαυμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu], signed a document by which the monk Georgios sold the Pithara monastery to Tornikios Kontoleon³⁷. Up to this stage of his career, we are given a rather opaque picture of his activities. Theoktistos was certainly a prominent member of the community and acted as a representative of his monastery during numerous Athonite affairs over the span of ten years. However, he remains a distant figure in these documents, as a signee but with very little evidence of his role and agency in the disputes and regulations to which he was witness. It is not until the 1030s that we begin to get a clearer and more direct picture of his role as *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu and as *prōtos* of Athos.

In 1030, Theoktistos was appointed as the executor of the will of Demetrios Chalkeus. Along with his co-executor, the *hēgumenos* Symeon, Theoktistos proceeded to the sale of Demetrios' monastic cells to Theodoulos, *hēgumenos* of Theotokos Xylourgou, for twenty-two *nomismata*. This document is particularly significant in Theoktistos' chronology as the first attestation of him being named ἡγοῦμε(νος) τοῦ Εσφαυμένου [*hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu], and the first evidence of him taking a leading role in the arrangement of legal affairs, succession, and sale amongst the Athonite communities³⁸. Four years later, in 1034, we find Theoktistos orchestrating the purchase of land from the Monastery of Theotokos of the Katadaimonon to add to the estate of Esphigmenu at Mauros Kormos for twenty *nomismata*, in a bill of sale which is the oldest document preserved by the Monastery of Esphigmenu³⁹. Expanding the land-holdings of the monastery in his capacity as μοναχον (καὶ) καθηγούμε(νον) τῆς μονῆς του Ἐσφαυμένου [monk and *kathēgumenos* of the Monastery of Esphigmenu], Theoktistos ensured that Esphigmenu was now entitled to all the rights of this newly acquired land, with the exception that the Monastery of the Katadaimonon be permitted to remove flag stones from the property⁴⁰.

By 1035 Theoktistos appears in the first of two documents issued in his newly appointed capacity as *prōtos* of Athos. At the Easter gathering, Theoktistos, along with Niphon of the Zygos monastery, announced that he had been selected as *epitropos* of the monastery of Hagios Nikolaos of the Roudaba, following the death of the monk Nikolaos Larditzes. The *hēgumenoι* agreed to the appointment of the monk Basil as the new overseer of Hagios Nikolaos, and the monastery was subsequently placed under his protection. Along with the twenty-three other witnesses, we finally encounter his dual signature—the only example of Theoktistos signing in both Greek and Armenian⁴¹.

³³ Actes de Xéropotamou, Texte, no. 3, 48–50 (ed. by J. BOMPAIRE. Paris 1964).

³⁴ Actes de Vatopédi I, no. 4, 79–80 (BOMPAIRE et al.).

³⁵ Actes de Vatopédi I, no. 5, 84–86 (BOMPAIRE et al.).

³⁶ Actes d'Iviron I, no. 24, 231–232 (LEFORT et al.).

³⁷ Actes de Lavra I, no. 25, 175–176 (LEMERLE et al.).

³⁸ Actes de Saint-Pantéléemôn, Texte, no. 1, 30. (ed. P. LEMERLE – G. DAGRON – S. ČIRKOCIĆ. Paris 1982).

³⁹ Actes d'Esphigménou, no. 1, 41–42 (LEFORT).

⁴⁰ Actes d'Esphigménou, no. 1, 41 (LEFORT).

⁴¹ Actes de Lavra I, no. 29, 185–186 (LEMERLE et al.).

Κατὰ τὸν Ἀπρίλλιον μη(να) τῆς ἐνισταμένης τρίτης ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ἐνέτει τὸ ,σφμγ', καθολικῆς συνάξεως γενομ(ένης) τῆς τοῦ κ(υρίου) ἡμῶν Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστοῦ) ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστάσεως τὸ Πασχα(α) (καὶ) πάντων τῶν ἡγουμένων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συναθροισθέντων, ὑπέμνησεν ὁ πν(ευματ)ικὸς ἡμῶν π(ατ)ήρ (καὶ) πρῶτος κῦ(ρ) Θεόκτιστος (καὶ) ὁ κῦ(ρ) Νίφων ὁ τοῦ Ζυγοῦ ὡς ὅτι ἐπίτροποι κατελίφθη[μ]εν εἰστήν μον(ήν) τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου τῶν Ρουδάβων παρα Νικολάου μο(να)χ(οῦ) τοῦ Λαρδίτζι, ὃς (καὶ) παρήγγειλεν ἡμῖν διαζώσης φωνῆς ἵνα προνοηθῶμεν τὸ αὐτοῦ μοναστήριον. (Καὶ) δεῖ μετὰ Θε(ο)ν εὐρομεν τὸν μο(να)χ(όν) Βασίλειον τὸν πρε(σβύτερον) ἱκανὸν ὄντα, (καὶ) τῇ βουλῇ (καὶ) γνώμῃ παντῶν τῶν ἡγουμένων προβαλλόμεθά σε τὸν προρηθέντα μο(να)χ(όν) Βασίλειον (καὶ) πρε(σβύτερον) εἰστό τοιοῦτον μοναστήριον ἐπὶ φιλοκαλία καὶ ἀνακτῆση πρὸς μνημόσυνον τοῦ ἀπηχομένου μο(να)χ(οῦ) Νικολάου, τοῦ δεσπόμενον σε αὐτὸ κυρίως (καὶ) αὐθεντῶς εἰστους ἐξείς ἅπαντας (καὶ) διεινεκεῖς χρόνους· ὁ δὲ μο(να)χ(ός) Γεράσιμος (καὶ) ἀνεψιὸς αὐτοῦ εἶναι μετὰ σοῦ ἐν τῇ σῇ ὑποταγῇ ὑποτασσόμενος τῇ βουλῇ (καὶ) τῷ λόγῳ σου, καὶ ἔαν καλῶς δουλεύσει καὶ ἀναπαύσει σε μετὰ πάσης ὑπακοῆς μέχρι τέλους ζωῆς σου, (καὶ) γένηται //ἱκανός// τοῦ ἀναδεξασθαι τὴν ἡγουμενίαν, ἵνα καταλιμπάνης αὐτὸν ἡγούμενον εἰστήν τοιαύτην μονήν· εἰ δέ, ὅπερ ἀπευχόμεθα, οὐ γένηται χριστός, ἵνα ποιῆς ἡγούμενον ἕτερον ὃν ἂν θέλῃς (καὶ) βούλεσαι· ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ πάλιν ἐπιδείκνησθαι εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν μο(να)χ(όν) Γεράσιμον σπλάγγχα π(ατ)ρικά, (καὶ) μὴ καταπάθος ἢ ἄλλον τινὰ τρόπον κακόσης αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ δι' αὐτὴν τὴν τοῦ Θε(ο)ῦ ἐντολήν (καὶ) τὸ φύσει δίκαιον ἐπιμελεῖσθαι αὐτοῦ, ἐπεὶ καὶ λόγον μέλλομεν δοῦναι τῷ Θε(ο)ῦ κατὰ τὸν θεῖον Ἀπόστολον. Ταῦτα ἐκρίθη (καὶ) ἐβαιβεώθη παρ' ἡμῶν πάντων, διὸ (καὶ) πρὸς περισσοτέραν βεβαίωσίν σου (καὶ) ἀσφάλειαν ἐποιήσαμέν σοι τὸ παρὸν ὑπόμνημα, γραφὲν δια χειρὸς Ἰακώβου μο(να)χ(οῦ) (καὶ) πρε(σβυτέρου), μη(νι) (καὶ) ἰνδ(ικτιῶνι) τῇ προγεγραμμένη +

- + Θεοκτιστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) (πρῶτος) **Ἰὺ ἀτηρηυ φρεβη Ἰ-ἐνηλημηυηυηυ Ὑηωῦδῦ**
 + Κ[ό]νον μ(ονα)χ(ός) καὶ καθειγουμενος της μεγ(άλης) Λαυρας +
 + Γεώργιος(ς) (μον)αχ(ός) ο Ιβηρ
 + J(o)h(anne)s hum(ilis) mo(na)chus Amalfitanus
 + Δανιήλ μοναχο(ς) ὁ του Δοχ(ειαρίου) οικεία χειρὶ υπ(έ)γ(ραψα) +
 + Νικηφορος μ(ονα)χ(ός)
 + Νηφων μ(ονα)χ(ός) του Ζοιγου
 + Σισόης μ(ονα)χ(ός) προτραπ(εῖς) παρ(ὰ) του πρώτου μ(α)ρ(τυρῶν) υπ(έ)γ(ραψα) οικεία χειρὶ +
 + Γερασιμος [μοναχός καὶ] ηγουμενος μονης του Σικελου
 + Ἀθανάσιος(ς) μο(να)χ(ός) (καὶ) ἡγοῦμε(νος) τοῦ Βατοπεδιου +
 + Ἀντ(ώνιος) ὁ του [ἁγίου] Γεωργίου
 + Εὐθ(ύ)μιος (μον)αχ(ός) του αγιου Σαβα
 + Επιφ(ανιος) μο(να)χ(ός) κ(αὶ) πρ(εσβύτερος)
 + Παῦλο[ς μ](ονα)χ(ός) μονις του Μυλονα
 + Ἰλιας μο(να)χ(ός) μο(νῆς) του Ξεροποτάμου
 + Ἰλαρίων μο(να)χ(ός) μο(νῆς) του ἁγίου Νικηφό(ρου)
 + Ἰακωβος (μον)αχ(ός) μο(νῆς) του αγηου Ὑπατιου +
 + Θεοδορος μ(ονα)χ(ός) δουλος του αγιου Γεοργιου του Ξενοφοντος +
 + Θεοφιλος (μον)αχ(ός) (καὶ) ηγ[ού]μενος μονης του Ξειροκαστρου μ(α)ρ(τυρῶν) υπ(έ)γ(ραψα)
 + Ἰλιας μ(ονα)χ(ός) κ(αὶ) ηγουμενος
 + Γερασιμος μ(ονα)χ(ός) καὶ γουμενος μονης του αγηου Δημητρηου
 + Ησαΐας μ(ονα)χ(ός) κ(αὶ) ηγουμενος μονης τ(ῆς) αρχ(ον)τισης Χρομ(τίσσης) μ(α)ρ(τυρῶν) υπεγ(ραψα)
 + [Μι]χ(αήλ) [μοναχός καὶ ἡ]γουμ(ενο)ς μο(νῆς) τοῦ ἁγίου Πέτρου τὸν μὲν σ(αυ)ρὸν ἰδιοχ(εῖρω)ς τὸ (δὲ) ὕφος δια τοῦ γραφ(έω)ς +
 + Δ(αυί)δ μ(ονα)χ(ός) καὶ ἡγοῦμενος μονῆς τον Ρουδαβον μαρτοιρῶν υπ(έ)γ(ραψα) ιδιωχερω)ς +

In the month of April of the present third indiction in the year 6543, the universal synaxis took place, at Easter, on the occasion of the resurrection of our lord Jesus Christ from the dead and all of the *hēgumenoī* gathered together for this same purpose. Then, our spiritual father and *prōtos* Theoktistos and Niphon of the *Zygos* mentioned that: “we have been appointed *epitropoi* to the monastery of Hagios Nikolaos of the Roudaba by the monk Nikolaos Larditzes, who also ordered us verbally that we might provide for his monastery.” And indeed with God we found the Monk Basil the presbyter to be capable, and by the will and decision of all the *hēgumenoī* we designate you the aforementioned monk and presbyter Basil to this monastery for (its) care and recovery in memory of the late monk Nikolaos, for you to rule over it with legitimacy and authority from this point on for all the following years continuously, but his nephew the monk Gerasimos is to be with you in your subordination being subject to your advice and word, and if he serves well and relieves (makes your role easier for) you with total obedience until the end of your life, and becomes capable of the taking up of the position of *hēgumenos*, you are to leave him behind as *hēgumenos* in that monastery. But if—which we pray does not happen—he does not prove to be worthy, you are to nominate another *hēgumenos* according to your wish and will, but again you are to exhibit to him, the monk Gerasimos, paternal affection, and you are not to harm him either out of passion or in any other way, but through the command of God and what is right by nature you are to take care of him, since we will give an account to God according to the Holy Apostle. This was determined and confirmed by us all. Therefore, also, for your further confirmation, and security we composed the present document for you, which was written by the hand of Iakobos, monk and presbyter, in the aforementioned month and indiction + ⁴²

+ Theoktistos, monk, *prōtos* + (Armenian) I wrote by my own hand, Theoktistos, monk
 + Konon, monk and *kathēgumenos* of Great Lavra +
 + Georgios, monk of Iviron
 + John, humble monk of the Amalfinon (Latin)
 + Daniel, monk of Dochiariou, I signed by own hand +
 + Nikephoros, monk
 + Niphon, monk of the *Zygos*
 + Sisoēs monk, having been authorised by the *prōtos*, I signed by my own hand as a witness
 + Gerasimos, monk and *hēgumenos* of the Sikelou Monastery
 + Athanasios, monk and *hēgumenos* of Vatopedi +
 + Antonios, of Saint Georgios
 + Euthymios, monk of Saint Sabbas
 + Epiphanius, monk and presbyter
 + Paulos, monk of Mylona Monastery
 + Ilias, monk of Xeropotamou Monastery
 + Ilarion, monk of Saint Nikephoros Monastery
 + Iakobos, monk of Saint Hypatios Monastery +
 + Theodoros, monk and servant of Saint Georgios of Xenophontos +
 + Theophilos, monk and *hēgumenos* of the Xerokastrou Monastery, I signed, as a witness
 + Ilias, monk and *hēgumenos*
 + Gerasimos, monk and *hēgumenos* of Saint Demetrios Monastery
 + Isaias, monk and *hēgumenos* of Archontisses Chromitisses Monastery, I signed as a witness
 + Michael, monk and *hēgumenos* of Saint Peter Monastery, I signed the cross by my own hand, and the text through the scribe +
 + David, monk and *hēgumenos* of the Roudaba Monastery, I signed by my own hand, as a witness. +

⁴² Trans. L. READ.

Theoktistos' next and final recorded act as *prōtos* of Athos, Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) (πρῶτος) [Theoktistos, monk, *prōtos*] came in 1037. At the Easter gathering of *hēgumenoι*, Bartholomaios of Hagios Nikolaos of Raches brought forward a complaint against the monk Dionysios concerning a land grant in favour of the latter. As he had witnessed many times under the leadership of the *prōtos* Nikephoros, Theoktistos mediated the dispute, visited the land in question, and arranged a compensatory payment to Bartholomaios⁴³.

In the same year we return to our starting point and reach the end of Theoktistos' life on Athos. After re-admitting Nikephoros to the Monastery of Esphigmenu, Theoktistos, granted him the estate of the Selina:

Μετὰ δὲ τὴν [ἐ]μὴν ἀποβίωσιν θέλω (καὶ) βούλομαι ἵνα ἀναλαμβάνεσαι τὸν ἀγρὸν τῶν Σελίνων καθῶς ἔχει εὑρεθῆναι ἐν τῷ τότε καιρῷ, ἐν ᾧ (καὶ) ναὸς ἱδρύται τῆς Θ(εοτό)κου (καὶ) οἰκήματα διάφορα (καὶ) ἀμπελῶνες⁴⁴.

After my death, I wish and will that you shall receive the field of the Selina, as it is found at that time, in which a church of the Theotokos has been founded along with various dwellings and vineyards.

Though we do not know exactly when Theoktistos died, we can assume it must have occurred soon after this final act. By 1041 a new *prōtos* of Athos, Leontios, is attested and in 1045 we encounter a new *hēgumenos* of Esphigmenu⁴⁵.

By the time of his death, Theoktistos had dominated the first half of Esphigmenu's eleventh-century history. Under his leadership the monastery had expanded its land, consolidated its assets, and maintained good relations with its neighbours. The pinnacle of his rich and varied career on Athos came in the 1030s with his election as *prōtos*, overseeing the wider Athonite community, resolving disputes, and mediating transfers of property as was to be expected in his capacity as leader of the Iera Koinotita.

SIGNATURES AND AUTOGRAPHS: BY WHOSE OWN HAND?

Theoktistos is attested in twelve documents. Of these twelve occurrences we encounter ten examples of his signature. In the seven earlier examples his signature is formulated as: Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαιμενου or minor variations thereof, whilst the latter two signatures witness his transition to *prōtos* and the alteration of his signature to: Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) (πρῶτος).

- 1015 (Iviron 20 and Iviron 21): Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαιμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu]
- 1016 (Xeropotamou 3): Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) ο του Εσφαιμενου [Theoktistos, monk of Esphigmenu]
- April 1018 (Vatopedi 4): Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαιμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu]
- December 1018 (Vatopedi 5): Θεοκτηστ(ος) μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαιμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu]
- 1020 (Iviron 24): Θεοκτηστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαιμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu]

⁴³ Actes de Lavra 1, no. 30, 188 (LEMERLE et al.). See footnote 5 for alteration of transcription.

⁴⁴ Actes d'Esphigménou, no. 2, 45. Trans. L. READ.

⁴⁵ Actes d'Esphigménou 30 (LEFORT).

- 1024 (Lavra 25): Θεοκτιστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) μονης του Εσφαγμενου [Theoktistos, monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenu]
- 1030 (Panteleemon 1): Θεοκτίστου μ(ονα)χ(ού) [of the monk, Theoktistos]
- 1035 (Lavra 29): Θεοκτιστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) (πρῶτος) [Theoktistos, monk, *prōtos*]
- 1037 (Lavra 30): Θεοκτιστος μ(ονα)χ(ός) (πρῶτος) [Theoktistos, monk, *prōtos*]

Only once, in 1035, do we find his signature in Armenian: Իմ ձերքս գրեցի Թեոկտիստս Միսուծն (I wrote by my own hand, Theoktistos, monk). It is quite striking that, other than being the only example of his signature in Armenian, it is also the only signature which places any emphasis on it being “by his own hand”, his autograph. The question then arises: are the Greek signatures also by the hand of Theoktistos or not?

When it came to puzzling this out in the case of Theoktistos’ bilingual signature of 1035, Lemerle et al. appear to have drawn the distinction that: ‘Signatures autographes (l’une de la main du scribe) du prōtos Théoktistos et de vingt-quatre représentants des couvents’⁴⁶. Following the logic that rather than appending an autograph in Greek and Armenian, the editors suggest that a scribe signed on behalf of Theoktistos in Greek, whilst he himself wrote in Armenian. It is worth noting here that several other signees of the 1035 document in question made distinctions about their autograph in Greek. Amongst the list of signatures, we find David monk and *hēgumenos* of the Roudaba who “signed by my own hand [υπ(έγραψα) ιδιωχέρως]” and Sisoēs who also “signed by my own hand [υπ(έγραψα) οικεία χειρί]”⁴⁷. There is also Michael, *hēgumenos* of the Monastery of Hagios Petros, whose signature is distinguished by the fact that, whilst he himself marked the document with a cross, his name and title were appended by a scribe: τὸν μὲν στ(αυ)ρὸν ιδιοχ(είρως) τὸ (δὲ) ὕφος δια τοῦ γραφ(έως)⁴⁸. So, as is common amongst the corpus of Athonite documents, signees would often make the effort to distinguish between an autograph and a signature made on their behalf. In the case of Theoktistos, this distinction is particularly significant. Despite other individuals specifying their autograph in Greek on the same document, Theoktistos only decided to do so for his Armenian signature. We might then reasonably conclude that his Greek signature was appended by a scribe on his behalf.

Should we follow the logic that Theoktistos never signed his own name in Greek on any of the documents in question? It is tempting to think so. Other than the Armenian signature being the only example where he distinguished the presence of his own hand, further inspection of the letterforms of his various Greek signatures do point to a scribal variety which may suggest a different hand in each document. In the example from 1018 (Vatopedi 5), we find the final letters of his name added above the main signature, possibly suggestive of a scribal error and subsequent emendation. A final compelling argument comes from his signature in 1030 (Panteleemon 1), where we can clearly see that whilst Theoktistos marked his signature with a cross, his name and titles were added in Greek by the scribe responsible for the copying. Such an instance does tend to point towards his being unable to write in Greek⁴⁹, although it is worth noting that Panteleemon 1 is the only document amongst the corpus which is a later copy, so this argument would hinge on whether this was a faithful reproduction of his signature in the original. These inconsistencies may be enough to follow Lemerle et al.’s argument and apply it to all the documents, leading us to conclude that of the ten examples, only his Armenian signature is an autograph. Whilst Theoktistos could not, or chose not, to write in Greek, it seems reasonable to suggest that he came to Athos with some knowledge of written Armenian. We should be conscious of the fact that he was clearly not highly literate, and his written Armenian may not have extended much beyond his own name.

⁴⁶ Actes de Lavra 1, 374 (LEMERLE et al.).

⁴⁷ Actes de Lavra 1, no. 29, 186 (LEMERLE et al.).

⁴⁸ Actes de Lavra 1, no. 29, 186 (LEMERLE et al.).

⁴⁹ Actes de Saint-Pantéléemôn, no. 1, 30. (LEMERLE et al.)

Working on the assumption that Theoktistos already possessed a basic command of written Armenian before he arrived on Athos, what are we to make of the anomalous appearance of his Armenian autograph and how does it help or hinder us from understanding Theoktistos as an individual and the modes of self-representation available to him as a Chalcedonian Armenian on Athos? Should we view this as an effort on the part of Theoktistos to finally impart an ‘Armenian-ness’ to his signature after many years of a scribe signing in Greek on his behalf? Is it a clear and conscious statement of his Armenian identity? To take a temporally and spatially distant comparison, Guglielmo Cavallo has recently pursued this very argument in his analysis of multi-lingual subscriptions in early medieval Ravenna. Pointing to sixth-century documentary papyri in which Gothic members of the clergy signed in the Gothic language, whilst others signed in Greek, Cavallo has interpreted such instances as signs of ethnic consciousness and vitality⁵⁰. In her extensive study of eleventh-century Byzantine epigraphy, Ida Toth has argued that a wide variety of bi-lingual Byzantine donor inscriptions demonstrate that “the epigraphic custom of signing one’s work, which had dwindled since early Byzantium... was gradually reintroduced into the middle Byzantine inscriptional habit from contemporary scribal practices”, leading to “ever more assertive disclosure of identity”⁵¹. Bi-lingual epigraphic autographs, as Toth argues, acted to reveal “some sense of pride (and) their own diverse cultural background”⁵². Toth is right to point out that eleventh-century autographs, be they epigraphic or textual, offer us much regarding the identity and activities of an individual. Without the conscious action of appending his signature in Armenian, it would be impossible to infer anything Armenian about Theoktistos; through his use of the language, we can reasonably suggest that he was indeed Armenian, and that his position would have demanded that he be Chalcedonian.

However, to go as far as to argue that finding Theoktistos’ signature in Armenian is evidence of a conscious effort to stress his own cultural or ethnic identity, as Cavallo might suggest, may be an overstatement. In the multilingual environment of Mount Athos, a signature in a language other than Greek did not drastically set an individual apart, nor was it necessarily used as a conscious tool to do so. Neither did Theoktistos seek to define himself as τὸν Ἀρμενίῳν. Just as Lidova has concluded in her study of the late eleventh-century bi-lingual Georgian-Greek signature of Tohabi in the Monastery of St Catherine on the Sinai, whilst “it clearly indicates that the painter was himself Georgian, it is not an outstanding fact” to find such linguistic diversity in monastic environments⁵³. We should be conscious not to over-attribute instances of bi-lingual signatures, rare as Armenian examples may be, to clear and deliberate expressions of ethnic pride and identity and caveat our view of his signature by pointing out that writing in Armenian did not necessarily denote a conscious effort to emphasise his identity in the diverse environment of Athos.

Consciously or not, the autograph of Theoktistos does reveal something of his Armenian identity. Alongside the collected documents which bear a scribal signature of his name in Greek, we have evidence not just of an individual with a significant career on Athos in the first half of the eleventh century, but of a Chalcedonian Armenian holding high office amongst the Athonite community. Why does this matter? Or rather, should this matter? We now turn to this discussion.

⁵⁰ G. CAVALLO, *Scrivere e Leggere Nella Città Antica*. Rome 2019, 134–136.

⁵¹ I. TOTH, *Epigraphic Traditions in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: General Considerations*, in: *Inscriptions in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. A. Rhoby. Vienna 2015, 219.

⁵² TOTH, *Epigraphic Traditions* 219.

⁵³ M. LIDOVA, *The Artist’s Signature in Byzantium: Six Icons by Joannes Tohabi in Sinai Monastery (11th–12th century)*. *Opera Nomina. Historiae, Giornale di cultura artistica* 1 (2009) 87.

CHALCEDONIAN ARMENIANS IN THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE, 10TH AND 11TH CENTURY

The answer to why it is somehow striking to find evidence of a Chalcedonian Armenian holding prominent leadership positions on Mount Athos and expressing himself in Armenian is found in a long-established scholarly premise regarding the liminal role of Chalcedonian Armenians in the Byzantine Empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

During the Byzantine Empire's expansion of the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries, formerly independent Armenian kingdoms and polities in eastern Anatolia, the Caucasus, and northern Mesopotamia were gradually annexed, their Miaphysite secular and ecclesiastical elites relocated, and their lands subject to reconfiguration⁵⁴. The lived environment was reshaped and re-ordered into a structure of overlapping regional and local administrations in a qualitatively new imperial socio-administrative system⁵⁵. These changes were accompanied by the re-organisation of existing land patterns, the implementation of new fiscal policies, the establishment of new Chalcedonian sees, and the emergence of renewed cultural-intellectual ties between Armenians and Byzantium⁵⁶. Such alterations undoubtedly re-orientated Armenians towards the Empire and inextricably attached them to an imperial centre. It is this process of annexation and reconfiguration which has led to the assumption that the relationship between the Empire and its new Armenian populations was antagonistic during this historical juncture, particularly in matters of confessional identity.

Following the removal of much of the former Miaphysite Armenian ecclesiastical elite, a new Chalcedonian hierarchy was implemented. We must rely primarily on the *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* to examine the exact nature of these changes. Drawing on this valuable evidence, Arutjunova-Fidanjan identified the emergence of some twenty-one new Chalcedonian eparchies on the former lands of the principality of Taron and the Kingdom of Vaspurakan⁵⁷. In *Notitia* 10, we find the new dioceses of Hagios Nikolaos, Hagios Georgios, and Hagios Elissaios emerging alongside the new thematic system in the region of Vaspurakan⁵⁸. Another see of Hagios Nikolaos is specifically associated with the city of Arčēš, which itself had become a new thematic centre following its annexation. It is striking, as Greenwood notes, to observe that several of the new Chalcedonian dioceses established further east, in Vaspurakan following the departure of the Armenian King Yovhannes Senek'erim to Sebasteia in 1021CE, appear to bear the names of pre-existing religious institutions⁵⁹. Greenwood points to evidence reported by the Armenian historian Step'anos Tarōnec'i pertaining to Xlat'/Hilāt on the northern shore of Lake Van. Tarōnec'i recalls that there was an Armenian church outside the circuit wall which had become a bishop's residence and a monastery—previously it had been an Armenian community dedicated to Holy Cross and Saint Gamaliel⁶⁰. Emergent Chalcedonian eparchies in Bagrewand, Basean, and Tayk also suggest new jurisdictions were created over the lands which formerly comprised the Armeno-Georgian principality of Tao-Tayk⁶¹. The replacement of existing ecclesiastical structures with a new Chalcedonian

⁵⁴ For the reconfiguration of the Empire's eastern frontier see; C. HOLMES, *How the East Was Won in the Reign of Basil II*, in: *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. A. Eastmond. Aldershot 2001, 41–56. C. HOLMES, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire, 976–1025*. Oxford 2005; T. GREENWOOD, *Social Change in Eleventh-Century Armenia: The Evidence from Taron*, in: *Social Change in Town and Country in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston. Oxford 2020, 196–219.

⁵⁵ HOLMES, *Basil II* 299–391.

⁵⁶ For discussions regarding changes to fiscal systems, introduction of Chalcedonian sees, and cultural-intellectual practices see: N. S. M. MATHEOU, *Hegemony, Counterpower, and Global History: Medieval New Rome and Caucasia in a Critical Perspective*, in: *Global Byzantium: Papers from the Fiftieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. L. Brubaker – R. Darley – D. Reynolds. London 2022, 208–236, and GREENWOOD, *Social Change*.

⁵⁷ V. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, *Some aspects of the Military Administrative Districts and of Byzantine Administration in Armenia during the Eleventh-century*. *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 20 (1986–1987), 11.

⁵⁸ GREENWOOD, *Social Change* 217.

⁵⁹ GREENWOOD, *Social Change* 217.

⁶⁰ GREENWOOD, *Social Change* 217.

⁶¹ E. MCGEER – J. NESBITT – N. OIKONOMIDES, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, Volume 4: *The East*. Washington, D.C., 2001, 162.

hierarchy, often directly replacing former Armenian Miaphysite foundations, represented a considerable break from the norms of local ecclesiastical authority. It is hard to tell how much these changes chimed with the faithful in their day-to-day lives, but the evidence does point to the implementation of entirely new Chalcedonian sees that many Armenians now found regulating their local spiritual environments.

The presence of growing Miaphysite Armenian populations within the Empire's east and the "Chalcedonian-ising" of former Miaphysite Armenian sees as a consequence of the Byzantine expansion leads to the question of sectarian tension. As Garsoïan observes, the official split between the Miaphysite Armenian Church and the Church of Constantinople in the early seventh century required that those either side of the debate view the other as heretics⁶². Garsoïan not unreasonably argues that this fundamental separation promoted a hostile atmosphere, and the revival of such tension is detectable in tenth- and eleventh-century material. Step'anos Tarōnec'i recalls the hostilities directed by the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Sebasteia toward Miaphysite Armenian ecclesiasts in the tenth century:

The metropolitan of Sebasteia began to oppress the people of Armenia in matters of faith. He had recourse to violence and began to torture the priests concerning faith, and he conveyed the leading priests of the city of Sebasteia in iron chains to the court of the king. Having been ill-treated in prison, the senior one of the priests, Gabriēl, was killed; he was an old man and full of knowledge and steadfast in this divine faith. This occurred in 435 of the Era. Then others, unnamed priests and two bishops of Sebasteia and Larissa, Sion and Yovhannēs, through the same metropolitan, accepted the Council of Chalcedon and were excluded from the unanimity of Armenians. And from that time, they banned the Armenian call to prayer in the city of Sebasteia.⁶³

Hostility between Chalcedonians and Miaphysite Armenian populations can also be traced well into the eleventh century. One very clear example comes in the form of the treatment of the head of the Miaphysite Armenian Church, the Catholicos Petros I, who was forcibly relocated from his seat in Ani to the city of Karin before being held in Constantinople for an extended period⁶⁴. The same treatment was afforded to his nephew, the future Catholicos Xaçik II, who was imprisoned before being brought to the imperial capital⁶⁵. It seems that the Catholicos Petros reciprocated much of the sectarian animosity being levelled towards him by commissioning the Armenian Vardapet Anania Sanahnec'i to compose a text in "Opposition to those who believe in two natures", completed shortly after Petros' death in 1058⁶⁶. The ill-treatment of the head of the Miaphysite Armenian Church and the anti-Chalcedonian sentiment produced in return does lead to the assumption that there was hostility between the Miaphysite Armenians in the Empire and their Chalcedonian counterparts. Though Garsoïan highlights the fact that, despite moments of diatribe, the position of the Church of Constantinople toward Miaphysite Armenians "cannot be dismissed as monolithic" in its hostility, we are still led to assume that Armenians generally found themselves in opposition to the Chalcedonian norms of the Empire.⁶⁷ This is an argument by no means isolated in time. Hamada has very recently revisited the development of polemical literature between Miaphysite Armenians and Chalcedonians, pointing in particular to the anti-Armenian sentiment displayed in the treatise of Byzantine

⁶² N. GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire*, in: *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. H. Ahrweiler and A. E. Laiou. Washington, DC 1998, 68.

⁶³ Step'anos Tarōnec'i, 252 (ed. and trans. T. GREENWOOD, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford 2017).

⁶⁴ Aristakēs Lastivertc'i, 63–64 (ed. K. N. YUZBAŞYAN *Patmut' iwn Aristakisi Lastivertc'woy* [The History of Aristakes Lastivertc'i]. Erevan 1963).

⁶⁵ Aristakēs Lastivertc'i, 63–64 (K. N. YUZBAŞYAN)

⁶⁶ Hayeren Jer'agreri Hišatakaraner 5–12 dd, 101–102 (ed. A. MAT'EVOSYAN. Yerevan 1988).

⁶⁷ GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 71.

Theologian Niketas Stethatos and the heightened division and entrenchment in matters of religious identity⁶⁸. Wassiliou-Seibt and Boersema have recently reiterated what they describe as the “well-known Byzantine policy of repressing the Armenian church and attempting to move it under the auspices of the ecumenical patriarch”⁶⁹. Bromige has also recently described the period as one in which confessional “belligerence and intolerance” toward Armenians was on the rise⁷⁰.

Where, amongst this projected landscape of sectarian conflicts and diatribe, do the Chalcedonian Armenians like Theoktistos fit? Garsoïan sought to better conceptualise this very point in her seminal work on relations between Armenians and the Byzantine Empire during this period: “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire”. In this lengthy and nuanced discussion, Garsoïan established subdivisions of Armenian identity in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium: i) a small secular Chalcedonian elite; ii) the wider Chalcedonian Armenian population (Tzatoi); iii) the Armenian Miaphysite elite; iv) the wider Armenian Miaphysite population. Drawing her article to its conclusion, Garsoïan argues that the majority of Armenians within the Empire remained Miaphysite⁷¹. This, she suggests, represented an “imperial failure” to assimilate these elites through conversion, arguing that the Miaphysite Armenians ultimately “chose a path different from Byzantium” and maintained “a sullen antagonism” toward the Empire⁷². To this point, Garsoïan adds that apart from a small secular Chalcedonian Armenian elite, which was successfully absorbed, most of the Armenian-speaking Chalcedonian population, the Tzatoi, were kept at arm’s length primarily because of their continued use of their own language⁷³. If we were to read the correspondence between the Chalcedonian patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem, the monastic community of Saint Symeon the Wonderworker on the Black Mountain, and the monastic community of Mar Saba near Jerusalem in the late 1080’s, preserved by the eleventh-century *Taktikon* of Nikon of the Black Mountain, as Garsoïan did, we would find evidence to suggest that Chalcedonian Armenians did indeed face challenges from their co-confessionals:

Ἡκηκόημεν γάρ, ὅτι τῶν Τζάτων Ἀρμενίων τινῶν, ἦτοι τῶν ἀναχωρητῶν τῆς τῶν Ἀρμενίων θρησκείας, αὐτοῦ που ποιησαμένων τὴν κατοίκησιν καὶ ἡσυχάζειν αὐτόθι προελομένων, τινὲς πάντως τοῦ μισοκάλου ἐχθροῦ ἐπιτίθενται τούτοις, καὶ ὡς οὐκ ὀρθοδόξους διαβάλλουσιν καὶ παντοίῳ τρόπῳ λυποῦσιν αὐτούς⁷⁴.

We have heard that some of the Armenian *Tzatoi*⁷⁵ (Armenian Chalcedonians), namely those monks who follow the Armenian (Chalcedonian) rite⁷⁶, have settled in that place and have chosen

⁶⁸ K. HAMADA, Old Issues in the New Regime: The Revival of Religious Controversies Between Byzantines and Armenians after the Fall of the Bagratid Kingdom, in: *Armenia and Byzantium without Borders*, ed. E. Bonfiglio – C. Rapp. Leiden 2023, 241–42, 249.

⁶⁹ A. WASSILIOU-SEIBT – G. BOERSEMA, The Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin of Arayi: Evidence for Byzantine Ecclesiastical Policy in Greater Armenia (1045–1064), in: Bonfiglio – Rapp, *Armenia and Byzantium* 96.

⁷⁰ T. BROMIGE, *Armenians in the Byzantine Empire: Identity, Assimilation and Alienation from 867 to 1098*. London 2023, 90.

⁷¹ GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 111–115.

⁷² GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 116.

⁷³ GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 104–105.

⁷⁴ Nikon of the Black Mountain, 876 (ed. C. HANNICK, *Das Taktikon des Nikon vom Schwarzen Berge*. Griechischer Text und kirchenslawische Übersetzung des 14. Jahrhunderts. Weiher 2014).

⁷⁵ R. W. THOMSON, Tzatoi. *ODB* 3 (1991) 2136.

⁷⁶ This is a delicate passage. Traditionally, Garsoïan (*The Problem of Armenian Integration*, 106) translated this passage as “namely, those who withdrew from the Armenian religion”, assuming Ἀρμενίων θρησκείας referred to the Miaphysite Armenian Church and framing this as a qualifying passage describing the Armenian *Tzatoi* as those Armenians who had withdrawn from the Miaphysite Armenian Church and now confessed Chalcedonianism. However, elsewhere in the *Taktikon*, the term ἀναχωρητής is otherwise consistently used to refer specifically to monks (those who have withdrawn from the world), including in the following Logos 35β, 878, where the phrase ἀναχωρητῶν τῶν Τζάτων is used to refer to Chalcedonian Armenian monks. I would therefore prefer to interpret τῆς τῶν Ἀρμενίων θρησκείας as a qualifying passage, but one which refers to the fact that the Chalcedonian Armenians were those who celebrated the Chalcedonian Liturgy in Armenian “namely those monks who follow the Armenian (Chalcedonian) rite”. This would be consistent with later evidence in the

to live in quiet solitude. Yet some—undoubtedly belonging to the spiteful enemy—attack them, slander them as not orthodox, and harass them in all manner of ways⁷⁷.

As Garsoïan suggests, Chalcedonian Armenians found themselves in a liminal space; rejected by Miaphysite Armenians on account of their confessional identity and rejected by Greek-speaking Chalcedonians on account of their “Armenian-ness”. The seminal 1980 study of Arutjunova-Fidanjan: *Armjane-chalkidonity na vostočnyh granicah Vizantijskoj imperii*, advanced a series of similar arguments, coming to the conclusion that Chalcedonian Armenians, “whilst retaining their Armenian characteristics in the linguistic, every-day and cultural aspects, came to be remote from their countrymen by virtue of the blind wall of religious discrepancies, and their co-religionists (Georgians and Greeks) showed them distrust and discredit just because of their ethnic and cultural isolation.”⁷⁸ Continuing this conversation in her discussion of the confessional self-awareness of Chalcedonian Armenians in the Byzantine Empire, Arutjunova-Fidanjan argued that the “Armenian Chalcedonians not only avoided any identification with their co-religionists, but often rejected them outright.”⁷⁹ Cowe further suggests that, in turn, Chalcedonian Armenians were not welcomed “by their co-religionists and counterparts because of tensions against their ethnic identity”, arguing that at the same time, their “rejection of their ancestral creed often had the effect of fomenting enmity against them” from Armenian Miaphysites⁸⁰. As Garsoïan argues: “as a result of their double rejection, the Chalcedonian Armenians outside of a small group of ruling aristocracy, seem to have remained in a sort of limbo.”⁸¹ Though Garsoïan is at pains to stress the fact that these representations do not always reflect a lived reality, her conclusions express a basic underlying assumption delineating confessional and cultural difference. It maintains that Chalcedonian Armenians, the Tzatoi, no matter how willing, were unable to participate fully within the Empire during the tenth and eleventh century. Confession and language determined that they were prevented from integrating into the Empire or were met with hostility. Though this body of work may have crystallised certain approaches to the question of Chalcedonian Armenians in the Byzantine Empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries, it was by no means intended to offer the last word on the topic, but rather to provide a start-point for further investigation into the topic. As Garsoïan points out, in this type of conversation “no watertight cultural partitions should artificially be imposed.”⁸² Just as Garsoïan sought to bring further nuance with her four categories, the use of understudied, neglected, and exceptional evidence can help to move these scholarly conversations and their assumptions surrounding the liminality of Chalcedonian Armenians further along.

In Theoktistos we have a visible Chalcedonian Armenian, holding a key leadership position in one of the most prominent monasteries in one of the most significant monastic centres in the Byzantine world, authoritatively using Armenian in this capacity. Here we have evidence quite contrary to the aforementioned scholarly framework; a Chalcedonian Armenian, using Armenian, not just fully participating, but playing a leading role. Despite this, the enduring idea of the marginalisation of

Taktikon where, in Logos 36, 882–884, it is implicitly stated that the Chalcedonian Armenians celebrated the Chalcedonian liturgy in Armenian and maintained their own ecclesiastical hierarchy. My thanks to Cosimo Paravano for our many conversations about this intriguing passage.

⁷⁷ Trans, L. READ.

⁷⁸ V. A. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, *Armjane-chalkidonity na vostočnyh granicah Vizantijskoj imperii (XIC)* [Armenian-Chalcedonians on the Eastern Borders of the Byzantine Empire]. Yerevan 1980. 192–195.

⁷⁹ V. A. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, The Ethno-Confessional Self-Awareness of Armenian Chalcedonians. *Revue Des Études Arméniennes* 21 (1988–1989), 356., V. A. ARUTJUNOVA-FIDANJAN, Armiane-Khalkidonity. Terminologija [Armenian Chalcedonians: Terminology]. *Vestnik PSTGU. Serija III: Filologija* 5, 35 (2013), 9–20.

⁸⁰ S. P. COWE, Armenian Integration to the Sebastia Region, Tenth-Eleventh Centuries, in: *Armenian Sebastia/Sivas: Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces*, ed. R. Hovannisian. Costa Mesa 2004, 135.

⁸¹ GARSOÏAN, The Problem of Armenian Integration, 108. B. MARTIN-HISARD, L’Athos, l’Orient et le Caucase au xi^e siècle, in: *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, ed. A. Bryer – M. Cunningham. Aldershot 1996, 239–248.

⁸² GARSOÏAN, The Problem of Armenian Integration 92.

Chalcedonian Armenians within the Byzantine Empire during this historical juncture has reduced Theoktistos to no more than an inexplicable figure in the landscape, an exception to the established paradigm, an anomaly that does not quite fit into the bigger picture in the way that we might expect him to. This is how Garsoïan treated him in “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire”. Receiving only a cursory mention, Theoktistos appears amongst a list of individuals described as “patent contradictions” to the general rules; those individuals who, because of their bilingualism or their fluid *ethnikon*, were challenging to fit into clear boxes and in turn rationalise their participation in wider Byzantine society⁸³. I would argue, however, that it is individuals like Theoktistos who, when viewed and understood properly in their own context, alert us to the problems of our established paradigms, and who, when placed at the centre of these conversations, can be used as an effective device to rethink our understanding of the status of Chalcedonian Armenians and the Armenian language in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium.

If we read further into the evidence surrounding Chalcedonian Armenians, the *Tzatoi*, preserved in Nikon’s *Taktikon*, we find the abbots of the Monasteries of Saint Symeon the Wonderworker and Mar Saba, and Nikon himself engaged in robustly defending the orthodoxy of the Chalcedonian Armenians, their full participation in the Chalcedonian liturgy in Armenian, and the integrity of their dependent church hierarchy⁸⁴:

Τούτους δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ἡμῶν τοὺς λεγομένους Τζάτους, ὅπου ἄν εἰσιν καὶ εἰς οἶον κατοικοῦσιν τόπον, ἀπὸ πανταχόθεν ἐξερευνήσαντες εὕρομεν αὐτοὺς χάριτι Χριστοῦ ἀνεπιλήπτους εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα, εἷς τε τὰ περὶ πίστεως ὁμοίως καὶ εἰς τὰ σχίσματα καὶ τὰς παρασυναγωγάς. Καὶ γὰρ ὁ μητροπολίτης τῆς ἐνορίας αὐτῶν καὶ τῆς χώρας Μεσοποταμίας, ἐν ᾗ καὶ οἰκοῦσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ἄνωθεν χρόνων, οἱ καὶ διὰ τὰς ἐπιδρομὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐσκορπίσθησάν τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν εἰς διαφόρους χώρας, ἀλλ’ ὅμως, καθὼς καὶ εἵπαμεν, ὁ μητροπολίτης αὐτῶν ἐκ <τοῦ> τῆς Ἀντιοχείας πατριαρχοῦντος χειροτονεῖται, ὡς θρόνος ὑπάρχων πάσης Ἀνατολῆς. Καὶ ἔνθεσμον καὶ κανονικὸν αὐτῶν ἐστὶν τὸ ἱερατεῖον καὶ ὅλον αὐτῶν τὸ σύστημα καὶ ἔξω πάσης χάριτι Χριστοῦ ὑποψίας.

Καὶ ὅμως αὐτοῦ πάλιν τὸν βίον τοῦ μεγάλου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σάβα ἐντυχόντες, εὕρήσετε τούτους συνοικοῦντας τὸν μέγα, καὶ εἰς τὴν Θεόκτιστον ἐκκλησίαν ἐπιτραπῆναι παρὰ τοῦ ἀγίου ἐν τῇ Ἀρμενίῳ διαλέκτῳ ψάλλεσθαι τὴν ἀκολουθίαν, τοὺς δὲ Ἑλληνιστὰς παραμίαν πάλιν ψάλλειν, καθὼς καὶ οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἀδελφοὶ ἡμῶν ψάλλουσιν τῇ τῶν Ἀρμενίων διαλέκτῳ καὶ οἱ Ἑλληνισταὶ παραμίαν, εἰς διαφόρους δὲ χοροὺς, διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν δύο ἐκκλησίας, μόνον τὸν τρισάγιον ὕμνον ἑλληνιστὶ λέγουν, καθὼς καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ὁ ἐν ἀγίοις πατὴρ ἡμῶν Σάβας παρέδωκεν ...⁸⁵

Concerning our brothers called *Tzatoi*, wherever they might be and in whatever place they reside, after having inquired everywhere, we have found them, by the grace of Christ, blameless in this regard—both in matters of faith and likewise regarding schisms and unauthorised ecclesiastical assemblies. Indeed, the Metropolitan of their jurisdiction and of the region of Mesopotamia, where they have lived since ancient times—though some of them have been scattered to various regions due to the attacks of peoples—is, as we said, ordained by the Patriarch of the Antiochenes, as this is the seat of All the East. Their priesthood and their entire apparatus are lawful and canonical and, by the grace of Christ, beyond all suspicion.

And re-reading the life of our great father Sabas, you will find that they lived together with the great one (Sabas), and that in the God-created Church it was permitted by the saint that the liturgy be sung in the Armenian language, while the Greeks sang separately—just as our brothers here

⁸³ GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 88–90.

⁸⁴ Nikon, 876–897 (HANNICK). For more see: A. PIRTEA, *Manuscripts, Monastic Libraries, and the Arabic Patristic Legacy in Seljuk Antioch: The Activity of Peter, Abbot of St. Symeon (fl. ca. 1090)*, in: *Priests and their Manuscripts in the Holy Land and Sinai*, ed. G. Rossetto. Vienna 2026.

⁸⁵ Nikon 882–884 (HANNICK).

sing in the Armenian language, and the Greeks apart in a separate choir on account of not having two churches. They (Chalcedonian Armenians) only say the *Trisagion*⁸⁶ in Greek, as our holy father Sabas entrusted to us ...⁸⁷

Here we have clear evidence of the *Tzatoi* performing the liturgy and carrying out their daily spiritual practices according to Chalcedonian norms, participating fully, in Armenian, alongside those performing in Greek. This exceptionally valuable letter draws on both historical precedents set forth in the Life of Saint Sabas by Cyril of Scythopolis, whereby Chalcedonian Armenians were permitted to participate in the monastic community of Mar Saba in the sixth century, and the reality of the eleventh century Chalcedonian Armenian participation experienced by Nikon during his lifetime. Garsoïan argued that evidence for Chalcedonian Armenians being required to recite the Trisagion in Greek demonstrated an implicit linguistic mistrust, but taking this letter in context, I would suggest we take its contents in earnest⁸⁸. In eleventh-century Byzantium, Chalcedonian Armenians clearly could and did participate fully in their confessional environment, using their own language, and were supported by their Greek speaking co-confessionals in doing so. If we take this evidence into account and put it in conversation with the life and career of Theoktistos, we find that a Chalcedonian Armenian occupying a leading monastic role, participating in the wider Byzantine world, expressing himself authoritatively in Armenian was everything but exceptional.

We tend to think of the expansion of the Byzantine Empire in the tenth and eleventh century as a one-way process in which the centre, with all its linguistic, cultural, social, fiscal, and confessional norms came to shape the various peoples on its periphery. However, it is perhaps more prudent to understand this period in terms of the formation of shared, confessional, legal, fiscal, intellectual, and cultural environments. In the case of Armenians and the Byzantine Empire, Greenwood very aptly describes how it is “more appropriate to think of pulses of Byzantine influence being transmitted simultaneously from different foci, engendering a spectrum of receptions and reactions.”⁸⁹ Just as the centre could come to the periphery, so too could the periphery come to the centre. Whilst we often approach this conversation by asking how Chalcedonian Armenians were shaped by Byzantium and measuring their role by assessing how much they “fitted in”, we think far less about how the presence of Chalcedonian Armenians, like Theoktistos, actively shaped the fabric of the Empire during this historical juncture. In this regard we have a particularly relevant example in an Armenian colophon from 991 CE, attached to the Armenian translation of the *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* by Yovsēp‘, produced during Theoktistos’ lifetime:

Եւ ես անարժանս եւ տգէտս, եւ մեղաւոր թարգմանիչս Յովսէփի, ծնեալ եւ սնեալ, եւ ծերացեալ յաստուծապահ քաղաքիս Կոստանդինուպալիս, եւ զհայրենի լեզու եւ զգիր ի տեղիս ուսեալ, ի միոյ Հռոմ տաւնացոյցէ, թարգմանեցի զճառա[**]աւտի⁹⁰, ի

⁸⁶ This is a crucial detail, emphasising the fact Chalcedonian Armenians did not recite the Trisagion with the Miaphysite addition: ‘Ο σταυρωθεῖς δι’ ἡμᾶς [Who was crucified for our sake].

⁸⁷ Trans L. Read.

⁸⁸ GARSOÏAN, *The Problem of Armenian Integration* 107–108.

⁸⁹ GREENWOOD, *Social Change* 198.

⁹⁰ Damage to the manuscript renders this phrase challenging to transcribe. There is a lacuna comprising at least two letters, indicated in the transcription above by [**]. Mat’evosyan interpretively reproduced the phrase and its lacuna as զճառ ասաւաւտի (the morning/daily sermon) in Hayeren Jer’agreri Hišatakaraner, 73 (MAT’EVOSYAN). The full passage would then be rendered in English as: “... from one Roman book of feasts, I translated the morning/daily sermon ...”, in the sense that it is referring to the daily cycle of commemorations contained in the Constantinopolitan Synaxarion. Alternatively, the phrase could be interpreted as զճառ համասաւաւտի (short/abridged sermon), appearing in corrupted form (զճառամնաւաւտի) in the manuscript. In English, this would change the sense of the passage to “... from one Roman book of feasts, I translated the abridged sermon ...”, which either refers to the shortened nature of the entries in the Synaxarion or reflects the fact that, based on the manuscript’s content, Yovsēp‘ appears to have rendered shorter Armenian versions of the already abbreviated Greek entries during the translation process. In the case of the latter, Yovsēp‘ would be describing his working process.

թորգոմական բարբառ ի ն եւ Խ թուականիս Հայոց եւ էր յԱդամա ՉՌԾ անցեալ ամաց, եւ յուղարկեցի ի Հայոց եկեղեցիս, որ ընթեռնուին եւ գրեն զիւրաքանչիւր սրբոցն զճգնութիւնս, եւ յիշեն յանուանէ զմեղաւոր հոգիս եւ վարձս ի վարձատուէր⁹¹ առցեն: Ամէն:⁹²

And I unworthy, ignorant, and sinful translator, Yovsēp‘, born, raised, and grown old in this God-protected city of Constantinople, having studied the paternal language and script in this place, from one Roman book of feasts, I translated [****] into the T‘orgomean (Armenian) language in 440 of this Armenian era and it was from Adam 6500 years which had passed, and I despatched it to the Armenian churches, that they may read and copy the ascetic lives of each of the saints and remember by name this sinful soul and they shall receive a reward from the Rewarder. Amen⁹³.

Here we find evidence of the Armenian language being studied in the capital of the Byzantine Empire at the very end of the tenth century. Regrettably, Yovsēp‘ chose not to divulge any further details of his training or personal background, but given the liturgical context of the work, we can place him in an ecclesiastical setting and assume his Chalcedonian confession⁹⁴. As was the case with the mass translation of patristic and hagiographical works from Greek into Arabic and Syriac which swept through Antioch following the Byzantine reconquest in 969 CE⁹⁵, the renewed presence of Byzantine hegemony over linguistically diverse Chalcedonian communities in the late tenth and early eleventh century generated a necessity and demand to produce Chalcedonian liturgical tools in non-Greek languages through networks of textual production throughout the Empire. Armenian, Arabic, Syriac, Georgian, not just Greek, were the key languages of reciprocal communication and contact within the Byzantine Empire. Contrary to Kaldellis’ statement that “not a single native speaker of Greek is known who learnt how to speak Syriac”, or that “no Byzantine thought to learn Hebrew in order to access a more authentic original [than the Septuagint]”, the case of Yovsēp‘, a native of Constantinople, very clearly demonstrates how textual production, written culture, education, and liturgical practice were being shaped by the presence of Chalcedonian Armenians and the Armenian language in tenth-century Byzantium⁹⁶. At the same time as Yovsēp‘ was being influenced by the need to produce an Armenian version of the Synaxarion of the Church of Constantinople to support the performance of the Constantinopolitan liturgy in Armenian in the capital of the Empire, Chalcedonian Armenians like Theoktistos were responsible for shaping and building one of the most prominent monasteries in one of the most significant monastic centres in the Byzantine world. We might also easily point to other participating Chalcedonian Armenians holding eleventh-century Byzantine administrative and military offices who “made their Armenian linguistic background visible” as Johannes Preiser-Kapeller has illustrated in the case of the bilingual seal of Mxit‘ar and Philippos and in the case of Yovhannēs, *prōtopatharios* and *proximos* of the *dux* Theodorokanos, active in the year 1007 in the city of Adrianople⁹⁷.

Certainly, both are possible, and I have chosen not to favour a particular interpretation in the translation above, leaving a gap indicated by [****] in the English text.

⁹¹ Likely վարձատուէր [Rewarder], as reflected in the English translation.

⁹² Vienna, Mekhitarist Monastery, ms. 1048, f. 8r. I have reproduced the Armenian text diplomatically, only intervening in the text to expand abbreviations. Spelling and punctuation are otherwise maintained as found in the manuscript.

⁹³ Trans. L. Read.

⁹⁴ For more on Yovsēp‘ see N. AKINEAN, Yovsēp‘ Kostandnupolsec‘i T‘argmanič Haysmawurk‘i [Yovsēp‘ of Constantinople: Translator of the Synaxarion]. *Handes Amsorya* 1–2 (1957), 3., U. ZANETTI, Apothegmes et Histoires Édifiantes dans le Synaxarie Arménien. *AnBoll* 105 (1987) 171. L. READ, Commemorating Saint Eudoxios: Armenian Chalcedonian Translators and the Byzantine Empire in the Eleventh Century. PhD dissertation (unpublished). University of Vienna, 2025.

⁹⁵ J. MUGLER, Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā and the Translation Projects of Byzantine Antioch, in: *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translations*, ed. B. Roggema – A. Treiger. Leiden 2020, 182.

⁹⁶ A. KALDELLIS, Translations into Greek in the Byzantine Period, in: *Why Translate Science? Documents from Antiquity to the 16th Century in the Historical West (Bactria to the Atlantic)*, ed. D. Gutas. Leiden 2022, 398–399.

⁹⁷ J. PREISER-KAPPELLER, Aristocrats, Mercenaries, Clergymen and Refugees 357.

As Papaconstantinou has pointed out in two recent contributions to the conversation of multilingualism and identity in the field of Byzantine Studies, “like all Empires, the Byzantine Empire was anything but culturally or linguistically coherent.”⁹⁸ Reiterating how the field of Byzantine studies has all too often constructed the Byzantine Empire normatively as the “Greek middle ages”, Papaconstantinou has stressed the ways in which its subject populations have been framed by “their level of conformity and comparability with the yardstick of Hellenism.”⁹⁹ The hierarchical nature of language treatment within the wider field of Byzantine Studies accordingly perpetuates a singular and normative mode of “Greek Chalcedonianism” and places other languages and their speakers in isolation. Increasingly, this tri-partite view of Byzantium as Greek Speaking, Orthodox Christian, and Constantinopolitan is being re-negotiated by scholarship like Papaconstantinou’s which stresses the Empire’s linguistic, cultural, and geographical variety¹⁰⁰. To continue to characterise Chalcedonian Armenians like Theoktistos as no more than exceptions would be to continue to adhere to a model predicated on how Armenian Chalcedonians “fitted in” to a normative Greek-Chalcedonian Byzantium—a framework which accepts a Greek Chalcedonian logic, and which ultimately fails to take evidence for the contrary into account. It is not enough to simply highlight exceptions to our scholarly rules, but to use these cases to re-consider those rules. As Papaconstantinou stresses, “as in any empire, even a Byzantine one, circulation and multilingualism are the norm rather than the exception.”¹⁰¹ If we centre the case of Theoktistos within this type of framework, within ongoing conversations of multilingual diversity and identity which are currently shaping the field of Byzantine Studies, we can pursue a new approach to the presence of Chalcedonian Armenians in Byzantium during the tenth and eleventh centuries, one framed and defined by their ability to fully participate, freely using languages other than Greek, both actively shaped by and shaping the character of the wider Byzantine world in the process.

By piecing together evidence from an array of Athonite documents, the reader will now have a better impression of the activities of Theoktistos and the ways in which this Chalcedonian Armenian participated in the life of Mount Athos as a prominent member of its monastic leadership. Although the question of his dual signature remains in many ways enigmatic, it provides a useful example with which to consider Theoktistos as an individual and his mode of self-representation as a Chalcedonian Armenian in the Byzantine Empire. Whilst the signature reveals something of his identity, writing in Armenian did not necessarily represent a conscious effort to set himself apart. In fact, the wider significance of studying Theoktistos, as a Chalcedonian Armenian, signing authoritatively in Armenian and playing a leading role on Mount Athos, is not the fact that he is exceptional, but rather that he was everything but exceptional. Yes, he may be a rare visible example in the scheme of surviving evidence, but the life and career of Theoktistos, when placed in proper context, presents a useful device to inform new ways of thinking about the presence and role of Chalcedonian Armenians in the wider Byzantine Empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the context of such a conversation, Mount Athos, with its multilingual environment of diverse traditions and its centrality to the culture of the Orthodox Byzantine *oikumene*, proves an ideal point of departure to consider exactly these issues¹⁰².

⁹⁸ A. PAPACONSTANTINO, *Byzantine and Western Narratives: A Dialogue of Empires*, in: *Is Byzantine Studies a Colonialist Discipline? Toward a Critical Historiography*, ed. B. Anderson – M. Ivanova. Pennsylvania 2023, 111–112.

⁹⁹ PAPACONSTANTINO, *Byzantine and Western Narratives* 115.

¹⁰⁰ PAPACONSTANTINO, *Byzantine and Western Narratives* 119. See also: *Worlds of Byzantium: Religion, Culture, and Empire in the Medieval Near East*, ed. E. BOLMAN – J. TANNOS – S. FITZGERALD JOHNSON. Cambridge 2024.

¹⁰¹ A. PAPACONSTANTINO, *Byzantine Linguistic Pluralism Revisited: An Introductory Essay*. *Journal of Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies* 2.1–2 (2023) 182.

¹⁰² A final note of gratitude to Ugo Mondini and Alberto Ravani for posing the many profound questions which gave shape to the present article.

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FIGURE

- Figure 1: The Bi-lingual Signature of Theoktistos, H. BART'IKYAN, Mec Lavrayi Arajnord (Protos) T'coektistos Hayeren Storagrut'yun [The Armenian Signature of Theoktistos, Protos of Great Lavra]. *Banber Matenadarani* 11 (1973) 70 (© Banber Matenadarani).