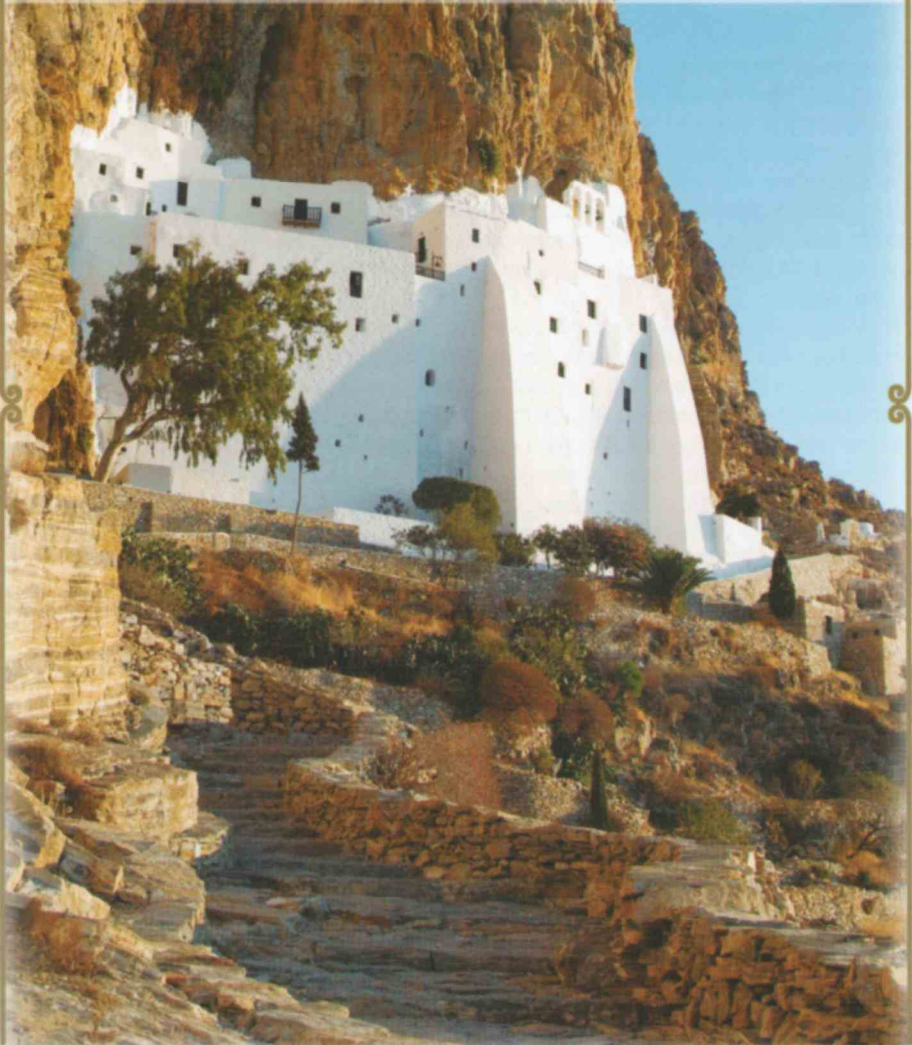




THE HOLY MONASTERY OF ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ ΗΟΖΟΒΙΟΤΙΣΣΑ



ON THE ISLAND OF ΑΜΟΡΓΟΣ

2022



The monastery of Panagia¹ Hozoviotissa on Amorgos in the Cyclades is one of the finest and most impressive monasteries in Christendom. It is perched high and nestled amongst the menacing and precipitous cliffs of Mount Prophet Elijah, on the harbourless south eastern coast of the town of Chora, at an altitude of approximately 300 meters above sea level.

It was originally constructed in the 9th century (812-813 AD) and was refurbished in the late 11th century (1088 AD) by the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus. The monastery was constructed upon the arrival of the holy icon around the mid to late 8th century from the Holy Monastery of Chozeba in the broader Palestine region, which had been plundered by the Arabs. In reality however, this holy icon was brought to the island by monks from that monastery.

Specifically, the monks were scattered here and there after the plundering. Each of them brought with them whatever they could salvage. Some had accordingly conveyed the icon of Panagia by sailing into the unknown. Thanks to Divine providence they arrived at the south eastern coast of Amorgos where they were surprised to find that the landscape bore a remarkable resemblance to their original monastery. And they accordingly decided to disembark at the gentle coast of Agia Anna. They left their boat and headed for the nearest town of Chora, which is now the capital of the island.

They were embraced by the piety and hospitality of the Amorgos residents. They deposited the icon of our Panagia for safe keeping in the picturesque, humble and holy chapel that is located at the feet of the Chora Fortress, which also bears the name of "Panagia I Kyra-Eleousa"². The icon remained there for safe keeping for thirty to fifty years.

In the early 9th century the Amorgos residents decided to humbly commence with the construction of the Holy Monastery that would be decorated and illuminated by the presence of this miraculous icon of Panagia Hozoviotissa.

However, due to the difficulties and adversities of the region – the island's legend and tradition had attributed the name "Daimonotopo"³ to this location – with its incomprehensible height and depth including continuous rock falls, which made it extremely dangerous and above all inaccessible. The landscape is littered with small and large caves of a mysterious significance. This location on the blessed mountain of Amorgos where the mother of God walked, the dwelling place of demons, which is very much so reminiscent of the corresponding site at Chozeba in Palestine, was selected by the Yperagia Theotokos⁴ to be adorned, sanctified and become her own throne, her own palladium.

The titanic construction efforts commenced in a natural hollow on the cliff and at approximately 250 metres from the Holy Monastery's current position. The transportation of materials, labor, and the overall building effort was indeed difficult, dangerous, and time-consuming. The rocks alone – in their crude form – were in great abundance. The driving force behind this sacred effort was the deep and fervent faith in the Lord and His mother Panagia; and thus they built and built.

Our Panagia however had desired upon something else entirely different, and lo and behold! After a few days of laborious work and as the workers were again arriving at the building site to continue their work, they were surprised to find the construction site in ruins. In response to their

1 Panagia = Most Venerable (one of the many titles attributed to the Virgin Mary)

2 Panagia I Kyra-Eleousa = Most Venerable and Merciful Lady

3 Daimonotopo = demon site or demon's lair

4 Yperagia Theotokos = Most Venerable Mother of God

reasonable queries of "How" and "Where", they saw the master craftsman's legendary chisel thrust into the most precipitous part of the cliff 250 metres higher, with a wicker basket containing his tools hanging from it. This spectacle was interpreted as proof as well as our Panagia's will and choice. They then abandoned their initial efforts, the ruined constructions that are still visible to this day, and commenced with a new and blessed effort for constructing the Holy Monastery. The painstaking and laborious work progressed at a slow pace; however, adversity combined with the difficulties and poverty in general, would not allow this sacred effort to be completed.

And so the years passed until the blessed time arrived when the most pious Alexius I Comnenus was crowned as the Byzantine emperor.

The Holy Basilica Stavropegian Monastery⁵ of Saint John the Theologian was constructed in 1088 AD at Patmos upon his orders. Discussions were then held with the emperor for the first time about the fact that a correspondingly pious effort had commenced on the neighbouring island of Amorgos many years before, which had unfortunately not been completed.

After the emperor had been informed by people at his court about the issue at Amorgos, he dispatched "sufficient" funds, i.e. the money that was needed. The already existing Holy Monastery building was fundamentally renovated upon his orders, and so it was completed taking on its present form. This God-loving emperor stipulated that the monasteries on Patmos and Amorgos would henceforth be considered as affiliated monasteries. He thereafter ensured that they were furnished with the corresponding foundation *chrysoboul* sigils (golden sealed documents), which secured their spiritual and administrative status, as well as their overall presence in the world. Unfortunately for our monastery, this priceless founding treasure was lost, "*a judgement that is only known to the Lord*".

While the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian on Patmos has remained under the full jurisdiction of our Ecumenical Patriarch as its Exarchate, the Holy Monastery of Panagia Hozoviotissa on Amorgos – following the proclamation of the autocephalous Church of Greece in 1833 and the issue of the corresponding Patriarchal Volume in 1850 – has devolved into the sole jurisdiction of the Greek Church and specifically comes under the jurisdiction of the Holy Metropolis of Thera, Amorgos & Islands.

Many pilgrims ask, "When is the monastery's major festival?" The major festival is celebrated upon the Holy Introit of the Theotokos on November 21st. Another frequently asked question is: "Why is the festival celebrated upon the Holy Introit, when this most sacred icon depicts the classical image of Panagia Glykophilousa / Vrephokratousa⁶?"

Two answers may be provided:

- 1) Since the holy icon was initially housed in the chapel of Panagia Kyra-Eleousa at Chora in Amorgos, which celebrates upon the Holy Introit of the Theotokos, it was considered that it was appropriate to continue celebrating her festival at her new home on the same date.
- 2) The more theological response is that we celebrate the Introit of the holy icon, which has essentially entered triumphantly into this region's life and beyond. Amorgos without the "Hozoviotissa Monastery" is inconceivable. The very exist-

⁵ Stavropegian Monastery = a monastery under the authority of the Patriarch

⁶ Glykophilousa = Sweet Kissing; Vrephokratousa = Infant Holder



tence of this island has for a long time been identified with the presence and the radiance of this spiritual beacon known as the Holy Monastery of Panagia Hozoviotissa. The monastery's contribution to this blessed land has indeed been significant and multi-dimensional, both spiritually and materially. We indicatively refer to the establishment of one of the first Greek schools at Chora just four years after the 1821 War of Independence and the remuneration for teachers over many years during that period, which is known as the "Rata".

Rare relics are held in safekeeping by the Monastery together with paper and parchment manuscripts, holy liturgical vessels, carved wooden and silver crosses for holy water – blessing – processional use and holy vestments of all three ranks in the priesthood. They are all works of art dating to the Byzantine and post-Byzantine period but they are above all works of faith. And as we all know, feats of faith are great and marvellous.

The Monastery has approximately seventy two distinct areas. There are fifteen cells for monks. The remaining areas serve as support areas. Although the monastery is eight stories high at one point, it is nevertheless defined by limited space with a maximum width of 5 meters. Its length reaches 40 meters.

One can never truly become familiar with the monastery in its entirety and appreciate it through books and photographs alone, unless one visits it as a humble pilgrim.

The monastery's small brotherhood now comprises three monks, who toil daily and offer in accordance with their abilities and conscience. Devotional life is the primary and main concern of monks, i.e. the holy services throughout the day and evening. Secondary importance is attributed to maintaining and caring for the Monastery's areas and its monastic dependencies. And finally, they receive, host and provide hospitality to pious pilgrims and visitors.

In closing this brief historical overview of the Monastery dedicated to our Panagia, we would like to wish upon all humanity – near and far, its pilgrims and visitors – God's peace, a healthy soul and body and the protection and comfort from above by the Yperagia Theotokos, who is also known as Hozoviotissa, the protector and curator of the island of Amorgos and the entire world.

*The Abbott of the Holy Monastery of Panagia Hozoviotissa
Archimandrite Spyridon I. Denaxas*

